SCHOOL SHOOTINGS: HOW RACE, INCOME AND CLASS AFFECT MEDIA

COVERAGE

A thesis submitted to the
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by

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Finally, I want to thank my partner, friends and family who have never stopped supporting me and pushing me to keep going. This year was particularly tough. I lost my father, two friends attempted suicide and my emotional well-being hit some all-time lows. Through this, however, the people who love me have helped me maintain some semblance of clarity.

The genesis of this thesis largely came from a place of my own experience. My freshman year of high school, the shooting at Chardon High School happened. We were terrified in our classrooms, worried somebody might do the same at our school. The next year, my civics teacher turned on the television during our last period of the day and showed us the news of the Sandy Hook shooting. I have four nieces now. I worry every day for their safety in such a tough world. I wanted to explore why and where these things happen and how we've covered it in the media so that I can understand it better.

Ultimately, I hope this thesis serves as a place to begin for the journalism industry to take a look at how it has covered school shootings. Certainly, we can always do more.

Preview

School shootings have increased in quantity, consistency, and unfortunately,

lethality. As they continue to occur in the United States, media coverage has a role in

what happens after the shootings. This thesis seeks to explore the relationship between

media coverage of school shootings and how that coverage may be influenced by the

elements of race, income and population.

Putting this research into perspective requires context.

From 1999 to 2017, there was an increase in the number of school shooting

incidents.

Using data from the Gun Violence Archive, the New York Times reported there were 239

school shootings and 138 deaths since the Newtown, Connecticut attack in 2012.[1]

In April 2018, the Washington Post explored the scope of students exposed to gun

violence since Columbine and found the number exceeds 215,000 children. Black

students make up just less than 17 percent of school populations nationwide but

experience 33 percent of school shootings. That means black children face a

"disproportionate impact of school shootings."[2]

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[1] Patel, Jugal K. "After Sandy Hook, More Than 400 People Have Been Shot in Over 200 School Shootings." The New York Times, The New York Times, 15 Feb. 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/02/15/us/school-shootings-sandy-hook-parkland.html.

[2] Chiu, Allyson, John Woodrow Cox, John Muyskens, Steven Rich, Monica Ulmanu. "Analysis | More than 210,000 Students Have Experienced Gun Violence at School since Columbine." The Washington Post, WP Company, www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/local/school-shootings-database/?utm_term=.53e5ff7daa55.

The people who commit these acts tend to be white males. "Their family background varies, with some offenders living in effectively functioning, intact families and others living in dysfunctional families with a history of abuse."[3] What these individuals have in common, however, is both their decision to choose a school as a location to carry out their will and their (frequent) "lack of supervision, low emotional closeness and intimacy, and parents having little knowledge of their children's activities."[4]

To understand school shootings requires an understanding of school violence. Violence, not shootings, tends to occur at schools with a majority population of non-white students. Violence in this case would be incidents like fights and stabbings, and those acts of violence are usually based on interpersonal disputes with small numbers of students.[5] Moreover, violence occurs in schools with higher enrollments and higher student-teacher ratios. This is coupled with a perceived lack of responsibility on the part of the perpetrator (they don't feel responsible for their actions for a myriad of reasons) that accompanies less targeted education.[6]

Exploring how race affects news coverage is also critical. A media ethics phenomenon known as the "missing white girl syndrome" typically "involves round-the-clock coverage of disappeared young females who qualify as 'damsels in distress' by

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[3] F.J. Gerard, K. W. (2016). Offender and Offence Characteristics of School Shooting Incidents. Journal of Investigative Psychology & Offender Profiling, 22-38.
[4] ibid
[5] Abigail A. Baird, E. V. (2017). Alone and adrift: The association between mass school shootings, school size, and student support. The Social Science Journal, 261-270.
[6] ibid

race, class, and other relevant social variables." Its derivation is credited to "a particularly

glaring bias in favour of cases featuring young white females."[7] This research seeks to

explore, in one facet, if a similar relationship occurs amongst minority populations that

include victims in school shootings.

Another way race affects media coverage is a news media that focuses on larger

crimes and thus leaves out small property crimes that make up the large majority of

crimes[8]. Additionally, media coverage underrepresents or poorly portrays racial and

ethnic minorities[9].

Important, too, is understanding that media coverage plays a role in the events

following a school shooting by helping the public understand something outside its range

of experience.

> Of course, media personnel have direct and/or indirect contact with the
>
> participants of the events about which they report, and therefore serve the
>
> useful role of conveying information to audiences. However, in the case of
>
> exceedingly rare and catastrophic events (such as school shootings and
>
> airline crashes), the role of the media is particularly significant, because
>
> the public has very little experiential basis for processing the veracity of
>
> the mass mediated images and characterizations. In cases of more
>
> common tragic events (such as natural disasters like hurricanes,

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[7] Stillman, Sarah. "'The Missing White Girl Syndrome': Disappeared Women and Media Activism." *Gender & Development*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2007, pp. 491–502., doi:10.1080/13552070701630665.
[8] Wheeler, Emily. "Mass Shootings and the Media: How Race and Ethnicity Influence Media Coverage." San Jose State University, 11 May 2017.
[9] Ibid.

earthquakes and droughts) which may be experienced by broad segments
of the population of various regions of the world, the public is less reliant
on media messages to understand their meaning.[10]

Journalists also face challenges when covering these types of events. "When
school shooting events began to take place with some frequency, they appeared to be a
novel form, and therefore journalists were unable to describe them in terms of previous
events."[11] The first journalists— like James Brooke of the New York Times who
covered Columbine — established what might be ways for other media outlets to cover
the incidents following Columbine. Now there exists a "relatively routinized" way of
covering these events. For example, some publications have guidelines for how to cover
school shootings like the Education Writers Association[12]. The Columbine High School
shooting in 1999, where two teenagers killed 13 people and wounded 20 others[13], was of
one six school shootings that year[14]. The number of incidents increased exponentially in
number since then. The Everytown for Gun Safety website notes that 65 incidents of
gunfire on school grounds occurred during 2017[15]. Although that dataset contains
incidents that may have been accidental or resulted in no injuries, it is still comparable to

[10] Böckler, N. (2013). School shootings: international research, case studies, and concepts for prevention. New York: Springer.

[11] ibid

[12] Richmond, E. (2018, January 23). Covering School Shootings? First, 'Do No Harm.' Retrieved July 24, 2018, from https://www.ewa.org/blog-educated-reporter/covering-school-shootings-first-do-no-harm

[13] History.com Staff. "Columbine Shooting." History.com, A&E Television Networks, 2009, www.history.com/topics/columbine-high-school-shootings.

[14] "The Extraordinary Number of Kids Who Have Endured School Shootings since Columbine." The Washington Post, WP Company, www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/local/us-school-shootings-history/?utm_term=.031dfd755c5a.

[15] "The Long, Shameful List of School Shootings in America." EverytownResearch.org, 29 May 2018, everytownresearch.org/gunfire-in-school/.

the data available in the Gun Violence Archive, which is a non-profit that tracks gun violence in the United States and bills itself as an entity that is not meant to be an advocacy group[16].

As established previously, this thesis seeks to investigate the relationship between media coverage of school shootings and multiple demographic elements. Media coverage is analyzed for news values and how they fit a broader context in terms of race, population and income.

Methodology

Research for this paper required a list of school shootings, which came from the Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund database. It collects data related to school shootings, makes the information publicly available[17] and maintains that database of school shootings, with data from 2013 to present, on its website. To more effectively track school shootings, it provides a reporting form that can be used by the public to submit a shooting that may be added to the database and the interactive map on the group's website. It includes fields for a name and an email address of the person submitting, a field for a URL that links to a news story about the incident in question and a field for a brief summary of the incident.

When research began in January 2018, the dataset used referenced incidents between and including 2013 and 2017. This gave a finite dataset to begin exploring, which at that time yielded 273 incidents. Each incident was put into one of four

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[16] "About." Gun Violence Archive, www.gunviolencearchive.org/about.
[17] "About." EverytownResearch.org, everytownresearch.org/about/.

categories: attack on other person(s) resulting in injury or death; attempted or completed suicide, with no intent to injure other persons; gun fired but no one injured; and gun fired unintentionally resulting in injury or death.[18] The dataset referenced in this research includes only those shootings that were categorized as attacks on others, because that indicates an intention to harm either themselves or other people. It was then refined further to include only those in which two or more people were hurt or killed. This reduced the dataset to 54 incidents.

The data in the original Everytown list also included the date, location, school name and school type. This became the basis of the next step of the research—gathering data on what happened during the incidents and how many news stories were created related to each.

The information gathered only the number of news stories. The data was found by entering the name of the school and adding "shooting" to the end and searching Google News for results. Schools, here, refers to all age groups from preschool to colleges. For example, when looking for news stories related to the October 1 incident at Umpqua Community College in 2015, one would search for "Umpqua Community College shooting." The date range was then narrowed to show results for a week after the date of the incident, to sort by date, and to hide duplicate news results that might pop up through identical syndicated content. This incident also demonstrates some of the possible

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[18] "The Long, Shameful List of School Shootings in America." EverytownResearch.org, 29 May 2018, everytownresearch.org/gunfire-in-school/.

challenges in the data gathering, since the search yields more than 33 pages of news stories.

Google News sorts based on similar content and dates, using a computer algorithm[19]. Sorting factors include PageRank and keywords[20]. PageRank is an important element because it accounts for the quality and quantity of links to a webpage which determines a relative score of the page's importance and authority[21]. Therefore, the logical conclusion one could make is that as the results pages go on, articles are less relevant and authoritative to the original query. However, it is worth noting that what differentiates one person's results in the algorithm from another is unclear[22].

One example of diminishing "authority" is that the results pages eventually show irrelevant stories. When looking for "Sparks Middle School shooting," for example, there appear to be 18 stories that are tied directly to the events that happened. By the third page of the results, however, headlines that include language like "Fight the NRA" indicate biased or advocacy-driven coverage, rather than news accounts of the incident. Potentially, there may be additional results related directly to the events that happened, but they are not immediately apparent in the search results. Therefore, counts included in the data set typically capped out at or close to 50 stories.

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[19] "How Google News Results Are Selected." Google News Help, Google, support.google.com/news/answer/40213?hl=en.

[20] Davies, Dave. "How Google's Algorithms Work Now & Will Work in the Future." Search Engine Journal, Search Engine Journal, 21 Mar. 2018, www.searchenginejournal.com/google-algorithms-work-together/201226/.

[21] "Why Google PageRank Still Matters in 2018." Link-Assistant.Com, www.link-assistant.com/news/page-rank-2018.html.

[22] LaFrance, Adrienne, and Eryn Carlson. "All the News That's Fit For Me." Nieman Reports, 2017.

Some incidents yielded highly specific results. Searching for "Booker T. Washington High School shooting," where a 52-year-old man was shot in the chest in the school parking lot after an alumni basketball game[23], revealed only three stories related to the incident itself in the six pages of search results.

The gathered data required further evaluation that took into account more than the Google News algorithms. While Google News provides a quantitative approach, refining the data required a more qualitative approach that took into consideration stories that were not relevant, listicles, or originated from sources that included biased coverage (indicated in their language, as previously noted), among other factors. The articles considered were to be accurate and relevant to the incident.

With this refinement and search process, each story was counted and entered into a spreadsheet next to the name of each school and the date of the incident.

Each story was scanned and evaluated for relevant content; a brief synopsis of each was entered into a spreadsheet, along with the number of casualties from each incident.

Following this, average city income and average state income for each shooting event from the United States Census website was entered.

The census data also provided population demographics for city and state populations, including the numbers of white residents. From this, the percentage of people who are non-white was derived for each community. Because the population

[23] Harkins, Paighten. "Man Shot in Chest at Booker T. Washington High School." Tulsa World, TulsaWorld.com, 16 Apr. 2017, www.tulsaworld.com/homepagelatest/man-shot-in-chest-at-booker-t-washington-high-school/article_f6b588e9-926b-5c04-a9c5-aee4dc5c7ee8.html.

dataset was pulled from two different years — the population numbers came from the 2010 census and the demographics often came from a more recent estimate — some percent values exceed 100 percent. That is, if there were a given number of people in a location and 100 percent were white, then the more recent white population figures would account for growth and the calculations would return a population percentage that exceeded 100 percent.

The spreadsheet was imported into Tableau, a data visualization program, to both analyze and visualize the data.

Initially, the project sought to examine media coverage by categorizing stories based on medium and platform. Because the scope of the early research was unrealistically broad, the research deviated in some ways from the original proposal in order to achieve more finite and tangible results.

Explanation of Project's Purpose

This paper intends to serve as a preliminary examination of potential relationships between several variables as explored through data on school shootings. While the approach is data-driven and similar to some theses, it lacks a formal literature review and does not pose any formal research questions. Additionally, because of the variety of methods of gathering data and differing algorithms across search engines, the results could be difficult to replicate by a different researcher. This project is meant to be a data exploration of school shootings within a set time frame and should be considered a starting point for further research. It should not be viewed as a way to draw conclusions about media coverage of school shootings and how that coverage is influenced or not by

race, income and population. Instead, it should serve as an indicator that coverage of

school shootings could be skewed by racial and socioeconomic status, and that perhaps

the media industry should more deeply explore the possibility that those biases influence

their coverage in a negative manner.

The Project

A majority of U.S. teens are worried a shooting might happen at their school, according to The Pew Research Center's 2018 examination of how students felt about the possibility of school shootings happening at their school.[24] By race, 51 percent of white teens, 60 percent of black teens, and 73 percent of Hispanic teens are concerned.[25] Additionally, 82 percent of low-income parents surveyed by Pew indicated they were worried about school shootings.[26]

Understanding news values is a crucial element to an examination of how news values may affect the behavior of the news media. What is "newsworthy" encompasses the concepts that media gatekeepers use when considering which stories to pursue and publish. The values are, in no particular order of importance: impact, timeliness, prominence, proximity, bizarreness, conflict, and currency. Prominence relates to the public importance of the people involved, proximity relates to stories that are closer to home and bizarreness relates to how out-of-the-ordinary something may be in relation to other events.

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[24] Graf, Nikki. "A Majority of U.S. Teens Fear a Shooting Could Happen at Their School, and Most Parents Share Their Concern." Pew Research Center, Pew Research Center, 18 Apr. 2018, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/18/a-majority-of-u-s-teens-fear-a-shooting-could-happen-at-their-school-and-most-parents-share-their-concern/.

[25] Ibid

[26] ibid

Timeliness, which generally means recent events are of more value, is the main factor under which the school shooting data was analyzed because of the time-frame from which the data was gathered. The other news elements important to consider following a school shooting would be impact, which is how many people are affected, and conflict, which centers around elements of violence and strife — like in school shootings.[27] These are the means editors and producers use to determine what is fit to publish or broadcast and thus help define what consumers find available for their news consumption. Other news values were not necessarily excluded from consideration. When appropriate, the values are applied in the data analyses. However, the aforementioned primary news values are those that are found most consistently in these incidents.

Among the schools analyzed, the highest number of incidents were at colleges/universities or high schools (fig. 1).

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[27] Curtis, Anthony. "News Values." News Values, 2011, www.nccat.org/news/strategic-communications/values.
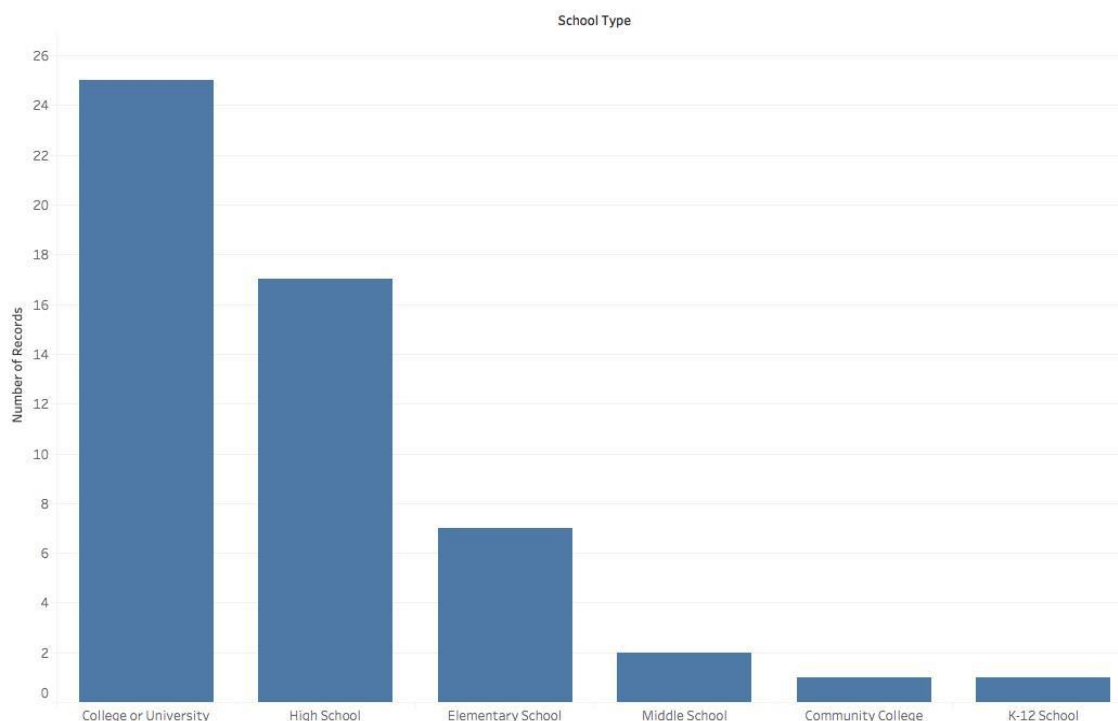
Figure 1. Incidents by School Type

More incidents correlated with more stories there were, though it was not a 1:1 relationship. While a logical conclusion would be that there is a relationship between the number of incidents and the number of stories, it should be noted that colleges and high schools have a more mature population of students who can speak more eloquently about their experiences to members of the media, which may increase the number of stories. Moreover, most colleges have some sort of media relations department that can share information as the institutions gather it. This is less common for high schools, but again, high school-age students can speak for themselves if there is no institutional voice.

Additionally, many school districts have a "feeder" system, where students attend smaller schools with smaller class sizes in elementary school, then feed into larger middle schools until, in some school districts, everybody goes to the same high school. This also

builds the case for higher impact news value. With more people affected, there is more news value.

The relationship between story count and race over time can be visualized to offer some insight into what school shootings look like over the years. Most of the school shootings that generated more stories than the average had white populations that also exceeded the average. In other words, if the community where the shooting took place was predominantly white, more stories were written about it than the average within the data set.
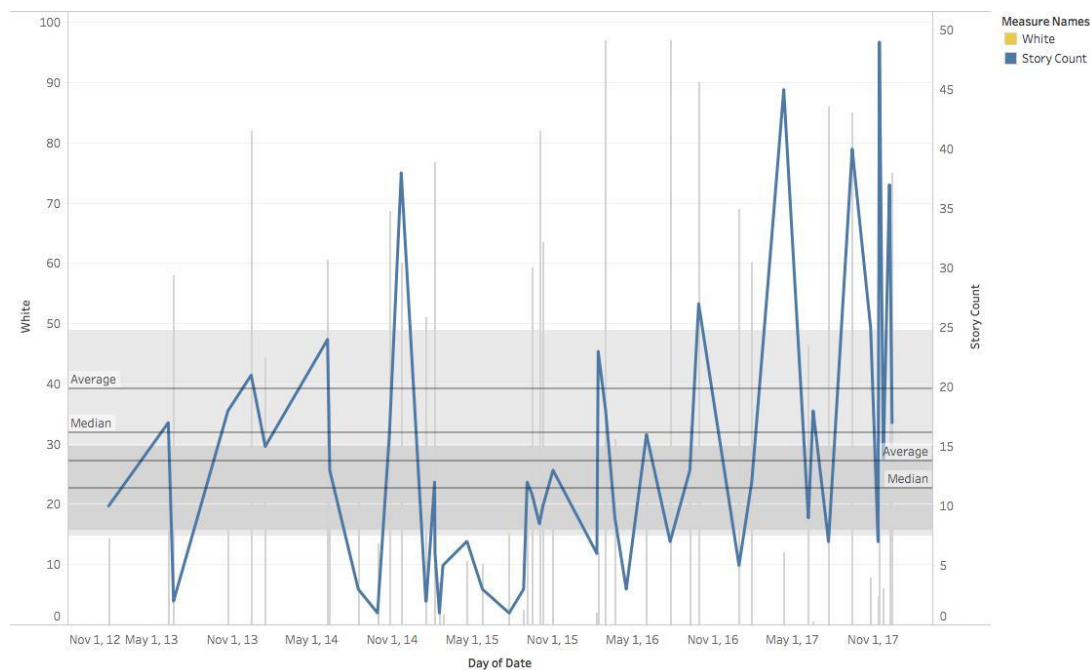
Figure 2. White Population and Story Count 2013-2017.

This appears to correlate with the idea of the "missing white girl syndrome" but there are some inconsistencies. There are multiple incidents that had a high population proportion of non-white people and a relatively large story count, and multiple incidents that had a large proportion of a white population and a low story count.

To establish a more relevant correlation, scatterplots were used to provide an r value that indicates the strength of two variables[28]. The r value falls between -1 and 1; if it is between 0 and 1 it is a positive relationship, if it falls between 0 and -1, it is a negative relationship. The closer the value is to 1 or -1, the stronger the relationship[29].

Between higher local populations and story count, there's a negative — albeit so small it is virtually nonexistent — relationship (fig. 3). The r value is -0.06.
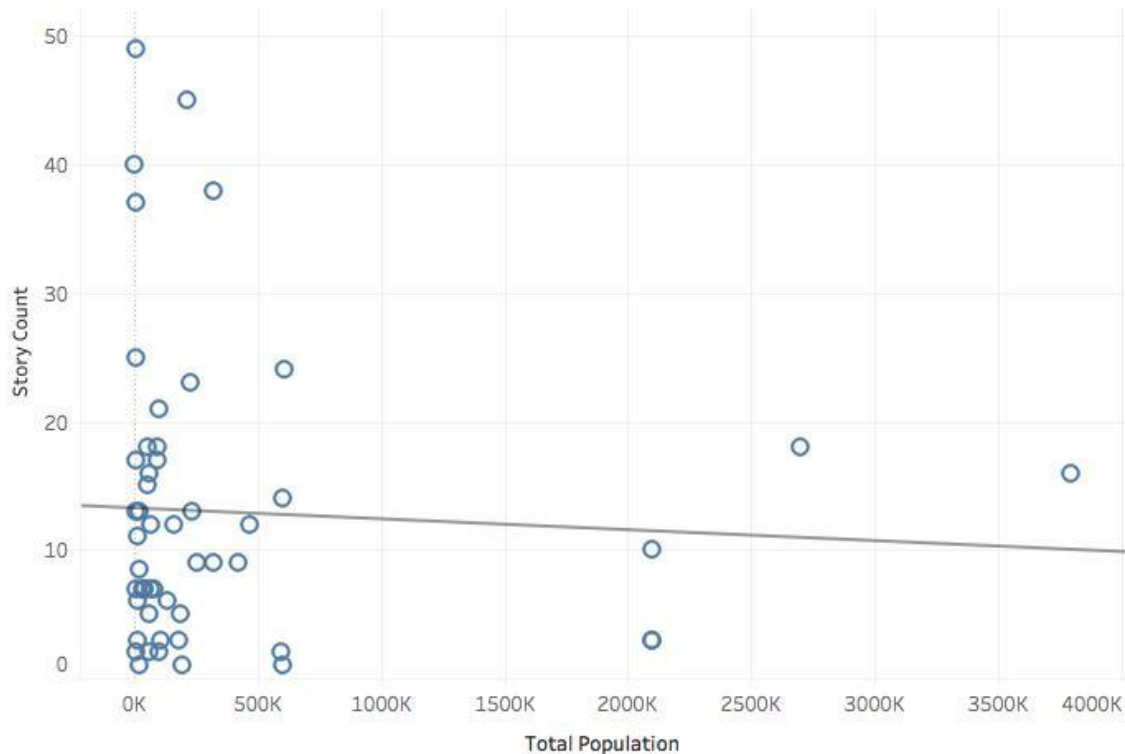
Figure 3. Scatterplot of Population and Story Count

This runs entirely counter to the idea of impact news value. If more people are affected — as in larger populations — it should prove true that there are more stories, not fewer.

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[28] "Scatterplots and Correlation Review." Khan Academy, Khan Academy, www.khanacademy.org/math/statistics-probability/describing-relationships-quantitative-data/introduction-to-scatterplots/a/scatterplots-and-correlation-review.
[29] Mindrila, Diana, and Phoebe Balentyne. "Scatterplots and Correlation."

This may point to a stronger correlation between story count and another variable, like the number of people hurt and killed, as discussed later in the research. But then again, the correlation is still negligibly small overall.

The relationship between white population and story count and non-white population and story count is weak, but it exists. The r values are 0.195 and -0.195, respectively (fig. 4,5).
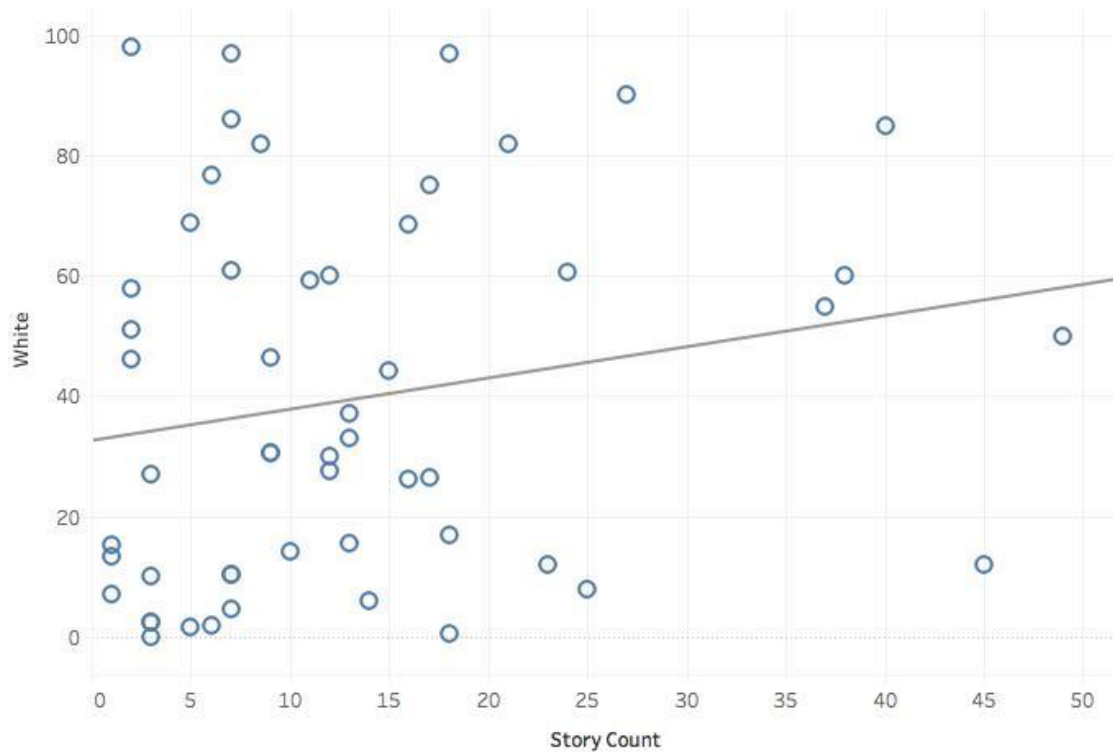
Figure 4. Scatterplot of White Population and Story Count
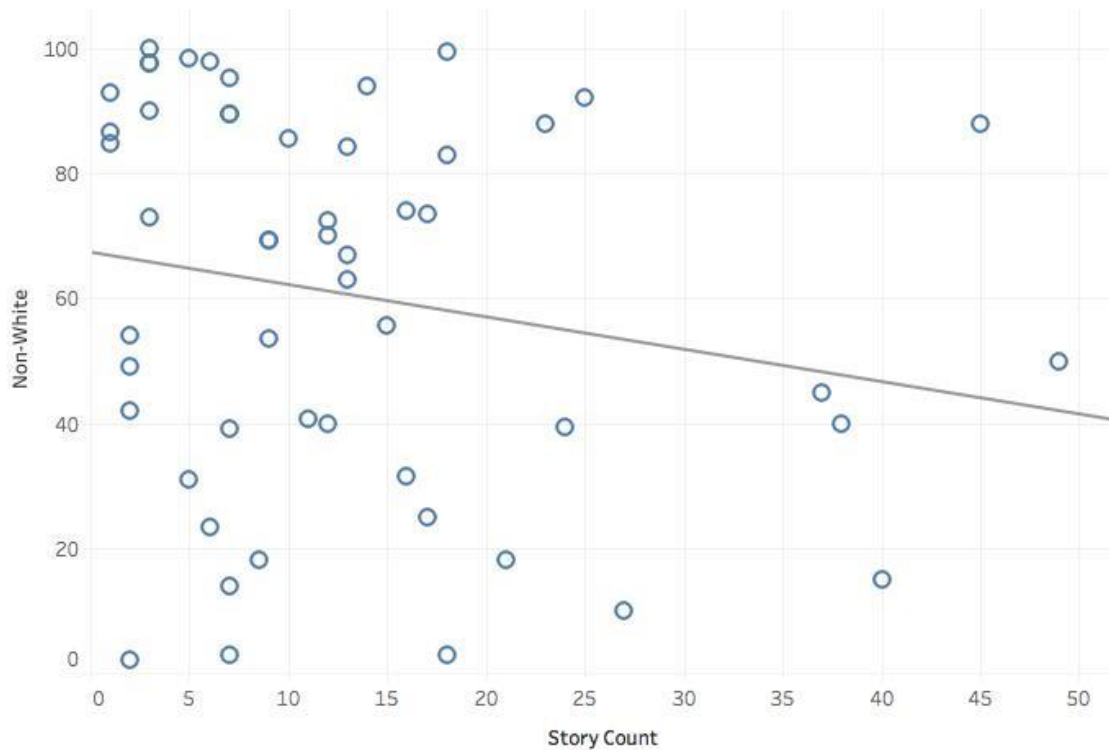
Figure 5. Scatterplot of Non-White Population and Story Count

The relationship established means that with a higher percentage of white students in a population, there are more stories. When considered in context with other research, this makes sense; again, the media has historically portrayed non-white populations in poor light[30]. Additionally, another study indicates that the media overrepresents the relationship between black people and criminality and often indicates that black families are more dependent on welfare programs than white families[31]. The media also has a tendency to distort the view of the crime, and in mass-murder incidents involving black

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[30] Wheeler, Emily. "Mass Shootings and the Media: How Race and Ethnicity Influence Media Coverage." San Jose State University, 11 May 2017.

[31] Dixon, Travis. "A Dangerous Distortion of Our Families." Color of Change, Jan. 2017, colorofchange.org/dangerousdistortion/.

offenders or victims in less-frequented locations like roads or alleys, the media provides

comparably less coverage[32]. However, "When black perpetrators are juxtaposed against

white victims, their crimes are more likely to be covered at least once and to receive more

continuous attention in the form of additional stories."[33] This, then, could translate to a

smaller volume of coverage in majority non-white populations.

A relationship exists between local average income and story counts (fig. 6).
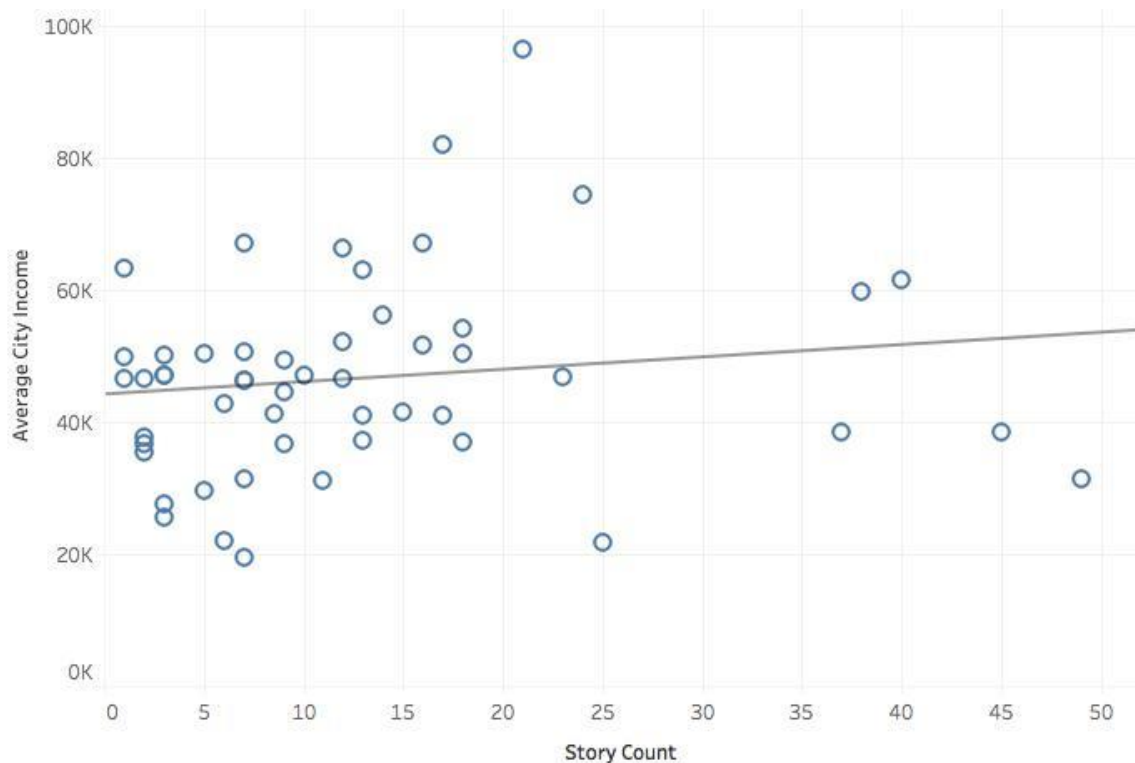
Figure 6. Scatterplot of Story Count and Average City Income

[32] Wheeler, Emily. "Mass Shootings and the Media: How Race and Ethnicity Influence Media Coverage." San Jose State University, 11 May 2017.

[33] Schildkraut, Jaclyn, et al. "Mass Shootings and the Media: Why All Events Are Not Created Equal." Journal of Crime and Justice, vol. 41, no. 3, 2017, pp. 223–243., doi:10.1080/0735648x.2017.1284689.

In this case, the r value is 0.143, which indicates a weak positive correlation. This could

be attributed to an attitude among the more affluent that the impoverished bring their

plight on themselves, including the bad things that happen to them. Ben Carson, the U.S.

Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, said being poor is a mindset, an idea

which some people in a larger demographic of the more affluent may share[34]. Poverty is

not caused by people being lazy or constantly screwing up but is a product of them facing

barriers relating to structural failures and a lack of jobs[35]. This connects media coverage

to the income element in that cities with higher incomes have higher story counts. If the

idea proves true that more affluent people think poor people bring about their own

problems, then it would mean that poor people get less coverage because people care less

or think they somehow deserve the hardships or tragedies that befall them: "One of the

most salient predictors of coverage of a homicide is whether or not it involved a 'worthy

victim'. Specifically, this refers to those who are 'White, in the youngest and oldest age

groups, women, of high socioeconomic status, killed by strangers.'"[36] This could

correlate to victims of school shootings: if they don't look the part of that "worthy

victim," they may get less coverage.

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[34] Mazelis, Joan Maya. "Analysis | Poverty Really Is the Result of a State of Mind - among Rich People." The Washington Post, WP Company, 20 June 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2017/06/20/poverty-really-is-the-result-of-a-state-of-mind-among-rich-people/?noredirect=on.
[35] Froomkin, Dan. "It Can't Happen Here." Nieman Reports, Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard, niemanreports.org/articles/it-cant-happen-here-2/.
[36] Schildkraut, Jaclyn, et al. "Mass Shootings and the Media: Why All Events Are Not Created Equal." Journal of Crime and Justice, vol. 41, no. 3, 2017, pp. 223–243., doi:10.1080/0735648x.2017.1284689.

In the stories analyzed for the data, breaking news appears to pervade media coverage. That might be because of the time frame this information was gathered from, and it could also be tied to the idea that breaking news drives digital page views. This relates to the financial realities of the industry: many newsrooms are shrinking. Ken Doctor, a media business analyst, paints a grim picture:

> Newsroom employment at the nation's 1,375 dailies could fall below 28,000, less than half of its high point in 1990. Further, current federal Bureau of Labor Statistics data projects continuing slides as long as the forecasting eye can see. Through 2024, newspaper reporter positions are projected to decline by 28% and editor jobs by 34%, from their 2014 level.[37]

Because news organizations gather revenue from sources like digital subscriptions and advertisements[38], the increase in pageviews generated by a breaking news story may be a source of income the organization cannot afford to miss. However, there is also a journalistic responsibility to cover news as it happens.

In some cases, because of the smaller populations and a corresponding smaller news organization, there may be less contextual reporting after the original incident. Smaller markets provide less coverage. The data did not account for the size of the news organizations, however, so this was outside the scope of the research.

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[37] Doctor, Ken. "Covering the Trump Era – with Shrinking Newsrooms." Politico, POLITICO, 28 Nov. 2016, www.politico.com/media/story/2016/11/covering-the-trump-era-with-shrinking-newsrooms-004866.
[38] Williams, Trey. "Digital Revenues Are Beginning to Benefit Traditional Newspaper Companies." MarketWatch, MarketWatch, 21 Feb. 2018, www.marketwatch.com/story/digital-revenues-are-beginning-to-benefit-traditional-newspaper-companies-2018-02-21.

A small negative relationship exists between people hurt and story count (fig. 7), which conflicts with the impact and conflict news values. The r value is -0.091, which indicates a small correlation.
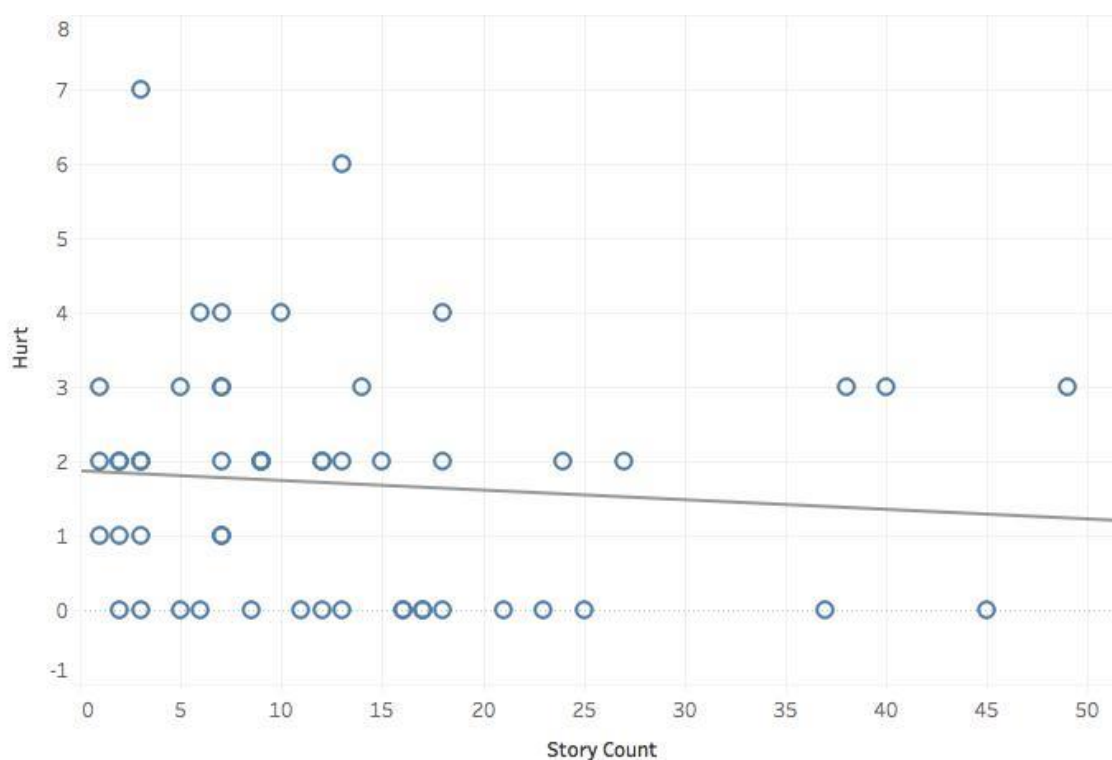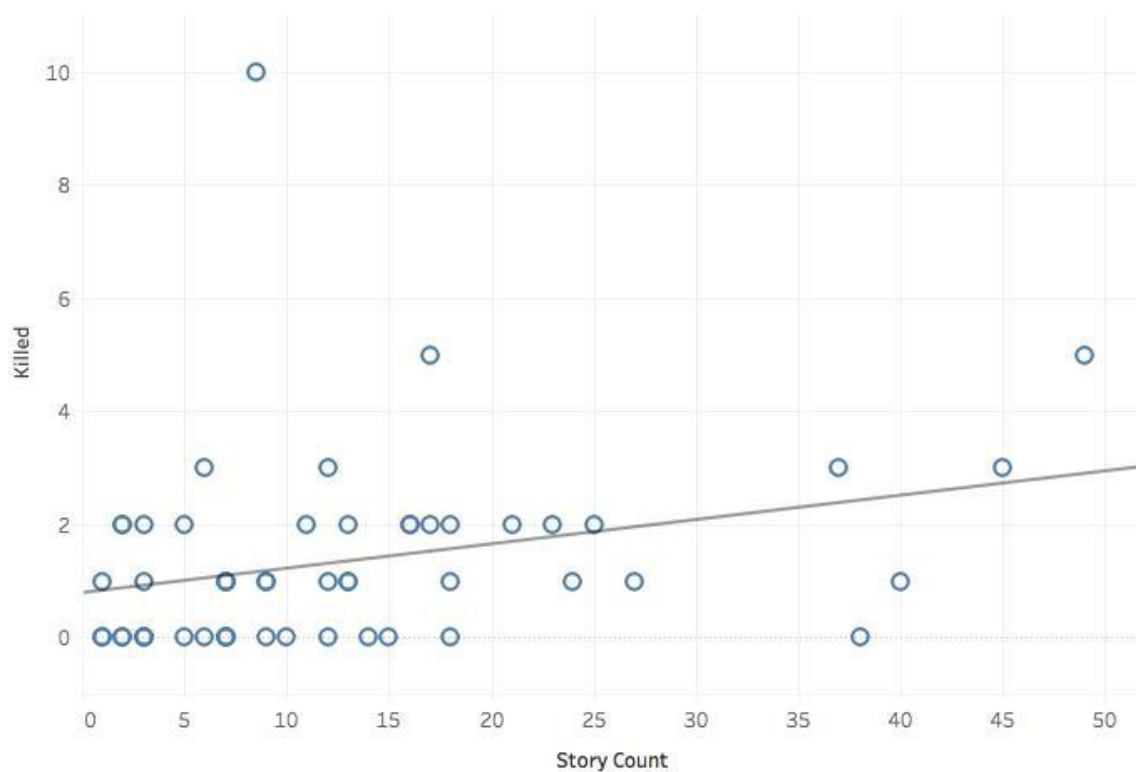

Figure 7. People Hurt and Story Count Scatterplot

In a conflict where people are hurt there should be more stories—that holds true for impact, too. Other research supports this assertion. In an assessment of what makes a mass shooting newsworthy, one of those elements includes how serious or violent the crimes are (e.g., how many people were hurt or killed)[39].

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[39] Schildkraut, Jaclyn, et al. "Mass Shootings and the Media: Why All Events Are Not Created Equal." Journal of Crime and Justice, vol. 41, no. 3, 2017, pp. 223–243., doi:10.1080/0735648x.2017.1284689.

The strongest relationship that exists in all the data is between the number of people killed and story count. The r value is 0.288, which indicates what is still a weak but notable relationship.

Figure 8. People Killed and Story Count Scatterplot

This relationship fits closest to the idea that impact and conflict influence news values. Mass shootings that occur at personal residences or multiple locations in a neighborhood would be less likely to receive coverage[40]. Because the data referenced falls outside those two categories, the conclusion could be that the more people killed in a school

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[40] Schildkraut, Jaclyn, et al. "Mass Shootings and the Media: Why All Events Are Not Created Equal." Journal of Crime and Justice, vol. 41, no. 3, 2017, pp. 223–243., doi:10.1080/0735648x.2017.1284689.

shooting—one public location in one specific spot in a neighborhood—the more stories there should be.

The conclusion holds true. With more conflict and more people affected (in this case killed), there were more stories. With more people killed, there is more of a journalistic responsibility to provide information about what happened and about those who died. "In many cases, an obit gives voice to a person who — by virtue of his or her age and vulnerabilities — may never have had a voice for him- or herself. Unlike adult subjects of many news obituaries, kids may never have risen to prominence or newsworthiness in their short lives. This may be the only story ever written about them."[41] Stories about children are inextricably tied to those of their families; reporting and writing these stories can give the families something to carry with them for the rest of their lives.

To understand what this information looks like when applied to an analyses of incidents, an examination of three individual school shooting incidents shows how each fit into different data comparisons, including the examination of the number of people hurt and killed versus the demographics of the locations where they occurred. Analyzing the stories relative to their news values will also help to put the stories into context. The incidents include the October 2017 shooting at Grambling State University in Louisiana, the November 2017 shooting at Rancho Tehama Elementary School in California and the September 2016 shooting at Alpine High School in Texas.

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[41] "How to Write an Obituary About a Child." When a Child Dies, Journalism Center on Children and Families, journalismcenter.org/when-a-child-dies/child-obituary.html.

In the Grambling State University incident, two men died in a courtyard on university grounds around midnight.[42] They were shot after an altercation, and the shooter fled the scene. This was the second incident at the school within that same semester.[43] Grambling's non-white population is around 90 percent. The average story count in the overall data was 14, but in this case, the number of stories exceeded 20. This incident runs counter to what the overview of the data show since majority non-white populations tend to get less coverage. The victims were part of a larger, young demographic at a school of about 5,000 students[44]. Incidents like these carry a shock value — the bizarreness news value previously mentioned — and are newsworthy. Universities are often anchors for a surrounding community, so the effects of an incident like this may carry through to the rest of the community outside of the school.

The Rancho Tehama Elementary School incident occurred on November 14, 2017 in Corning, California. A gunman committed a "crosstown massacre," killing several people before approaching the school[45]. A school employee heard gunshots nearby and

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[42] Smith, Tyler. "Fatal Shooting on Grambling State University Campus." KNOE - Content - News, www.knoe.com/content/news/Fatal-shooting-on-Grambling-State-University-campus-452965863.html.

[43] CBS/AP. "Grambling State University Shooting Leaves 2 Dead." CBS News, CBS Interactive, 25 Oct. 2017, www.cbsnews.com/news/grambling-state-university-shooting-louisiana-farmerville-2-dead-altercation/.

[44] "How Does Grambling State University Rank Among America's Best Colleges?" U.S. News & World Report, U.S. News & World Report, 2018, www.usnews.com/best-colleges/grambling-state-university-2006.

[45] Serna, Joseph. "Gunman in Northern California Rampage 'Didn't Pick the School Randomly,' D.A. Said." Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times, 18 Nov. 2017, www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-tehama-school-shooter-20171117-story.html.

put the school on lockdown, rushing the students inside to take cover. Only one student

was shot, and he survived[46].

The white population and story count for this incident exceeded both the mean

and the average. Despite that, white people were still the minority demographic. This

aligns with the relationships established in terms of race and people hurt and killed — the

smaller white population and fewer people hurt should indicate fewer stories. This may

be explained in what one author introduces as an additional news value: good news like

rescues[47].

Consider the Thailand cave incident: 12 members of a youth soccer team and their

coach were trapped by flood waters for more than two weeks about a mile inside a

complex cave system[48]. After rescuers found their location, the boys were brought out in

small groups over several days. The world was captivated by the averted tragedy, which

was darkened only slightly by the death of one diver prior to the rescues[49]. News stories

were abundant because of the good news. Similarly, in the case of Rancho Tehama

Elementary School, the event had the potential to be a tragedy: many children were

outside, and the shooter killed three people before he arrived at the school and killed one

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[46] Kohli, Sonali. "Why No Children Died during the Rancho Tehama School Shooting." Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times, 16 Nov. 2017, www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-tehama-shooting-school-response-20171116-htmlstory.html.

[47] Tony Harcup & Deirdre O'Neill (2017) What is News?, Journalism Studies, 18:12, 1470-1488, DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193

[48] Beech, Hannah, et al. "'Still Can't Believe It Worked': The Story of the Thailand Cave Rescue." The New York Times, The New York Times, 13 July 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/07/12/world/asia/thailand-cave-rescue-seals.html.

[49] Maresca, Thomas, and John Bacon. "4 Are out; 9 to Go: Captivated World Watches Thailand Cave Rescue." USA Today, Gannett Satellite Information Network, 9 July 2018, www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/07/08/operation-rescue-thai-boys-flooded-cave-starts/766091002/.

more after he left[50]. But because the children were saved by the people who taught them every day, it was, to many, good news. This elevated the level of interest in the incident.

The final shooting happened at Alpine High School in Alpine, Texas on September 8, 2016. A female student shot and injured another student before killing herself[51]. The 13 stories written about the event fall below the average story count but above the median, and the white population falls below both. In some ways, this makes sense in relation to the data: there is a smaller white population which correlates to fewer stories. Additionally, the low number of people hurt or killed during this incident should indicate that fewer stories would be produced.

One reason the incident may have garnered coverage was because a U.S. marshal responding to the incident accidentally shot a homeland security agent, which made the incident more bizarre. This is out of the ordinary because normally, officers don't shoot each other.

Conclusion

The research completed and set forth in this paper provides a starting place for further examination of how the media cover school shootings and how certain factors may or may not influence that coverage. This paper mainly provides varied analyses of correlations between data sets related to school shootings, so potential possibilities for future investigation may include attempts to explore why and how media outlets chose to

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[50] 50 Serna, Joseph. "Gunman in Northern California Rampage 'Didn't Pick the School Randomly,' D.A. Said." Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times, 18 Nov. 2017, www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-tehama-school-shooter-20171117-story.html.

[51] Sutton, Joe, et al. "Shooter Dead after Gunfire at Texas High School, Sheriff Says." CNN, Cable News Network, 9 Sept. 2016, www.cnn.com/2016/09/08/us/texas-high-school-shooting/index.html.

cover the incidents they did. Additionally, conducting this research to account for both a larger time frame and greater scope of coverage would be beneficial. Performing a more in-depth analysis of shootings across a broader range of time would allow for an examination of trends on a long-term scale. Scope of coverage could indicate how in-depth reporters went and whether or not the depth of a story was affected by the variables examined in this thesis. One level of scope to examine could be multimedia elements — were there infographics? Photo galleries? Did more multimedia content correlate with more stories? This could provide some insight into how the audience drives coverage, too. Analyzing story length might provide details as to who reporters talked to, what they had to say, and how story length correlated with the explored variables. This could highlight potential disparities in coverage. Story reach could provide insight more into how the audience reacts to a story.

Constructing case studies to examine the impact of individual incidents and the news stories about them could also be an effective way to examine which variables influenced coverage most strongly for those specific circumstances.

The interpretation of the data in this research indicates a relationship between race and story count related to media coverage of school shootings. With higher white population proportions came a larger story count, which indicates a positive relationship between the two variables. With higher non-white populations came lower story counts, which indicates a negative relationship between the two variables. In essence, the more the population was white, the more stories were written.

A positive correlation between story count and population exists, too. This means that generally, the more people who live in the area surrounding the incident, the more stories there were. Thus, larger cities and populations received more coverage.

A stronger relationship exists between average income and story counts. That is, the higher a location's average income, the more coverage they were likely to get.

The number of people hurt has an incrementally negative relationship. It's small enough that it could be considered not be a factor of coverage at all in these school shootings. The number of people killed and story count, however, has a definitive positive relationship that indicates that the more people killed, the more coverage the incidents received.

The number of people hurt and total population each have weak, almost non-existent influences on story count as suggested by the data. While weak, there are meaningful and definite relationships between story count and race, income and the number of people killed.

Again, this research is a place to begin. A Nieman article identifies that 42 percent of Americans are very worried about race[52]. Journalists have historically been mostly white[53]. This, as previously identified, poses problems for coverage. An NPR article describes modern newsrooms as being stuck behind a racial line[54]. Crossing racial lines

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[52] Kaleem, Jaweed. "The Race Beat, Revisited." Nieman Reports War Teaches Lessons About Fear and Courage Comments, niemanreports.org/articles/the-race-beat-revisited/.

[53] White, Gillian B. "Where Are All the Minority Journalists?" The Atlantic, Atlantic Media Company, 24 July 2015, www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/07/minorities-in-journalism/399461/.

[54] Abbady, Tal. "The Modern Newsroom Is Stuck Behind The Gender And Color Line." NPR, NPR, 1 May 2017, www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/05/01/492982066/the-modern-newsroom-is-stuck-behind-the-gender-and-color-line.

can be mired in misunderstanding between different groups. Consider the interview Steve

Wyche, an African-American reporter for NFL Network, did with football player Collin

Kaepernick about why the quarterback was kneeling during the national anthem. In an

article published by The Undefeated, Wyche said he was the only reporter who asked

Kaepernick about why he was kneeling because "being an African-American helped him

see layers of intersection" between them. Wyche said that sometimes when he goes into

locker rooms, players will say, "Man, there are some things we want to say. But we don't

know if we can say them honestly to people who might not be able to tell the story

through our prism."[55]

Belonging to the demographic one is interviewing can be advantageous as it

provides some level of background and inherent understanding, as experienced first-hand

by Wyche. One reason non-white communities get less coverage in school shootings

might be because of the racial makeup of the journalistic workforce. There is less

understanding between two people from different racial or ethnic groups than there would

be between two people from the same group, as Wyche indicated. A *Poynter* article

indicates a similar idea: "Greater diversity equals greater accuracy and fairness."[56]

Indeed, diverse newsrooms reflect diverse populations[57]. In the case of Trayvon Martin, a

black 17-year-old who was shot and killed by a white adult in Florida in 2012,

"journalists of color added insights and urgency to the case by sharing their own

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[55] O'Neal, Lonnae. "Kaepernick Saga Raises Questions about the Media." The Undefeated, The Undefeated, 3 Sept. 2016, theundefeated.com/features/kaepernick-saga-raises-questions-about-the-media-diversity/.
[56] Deggans, Eric. "Why Ethics and Diversity Matter: The Case of Trayvon Martin Coverage." Poynter, 23 Oct. 2012, www.poynter.org/news/why-ethics-and-diversity-matter-case-trayvon-martin-coverage.
[57] ibid

experiences."[58] This further highlights the idea that communication might not happen as quickly or effectively between people from two different racial or ethnic groups, which emphasizes the need for more diversity in newsrooms.

Lower-income, high-minority groups receive less coverage after school shootings according to this data exploration, even if the body counts are high. More research could further explore why and what lessons journalists can learn from those relationships.

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[58] Deggans, Eric. "Why Ethics and Diversity Matter: The Case of Trayvon Martin Coverage." Poynter, 23 Oct. 2012, www.poynter.org/news/why-ethics-and-diversity-matter-case-trayvon-martin-coverage.

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