News Media Coverage of Mass Shootings:
How the Political Stance of News Media Influences the Coverage of Mass Shooters

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ABSTRACT

Although mass shootings comprise a small percentage of the total gun violence in the United States, it has captured the attention news media. This affects the public's opinions and beliefs on gun and mental illness policies. The purpose of this research was to find to what extent the political bias of news media sources influence their portrayal of mental illness and violence when covering mass shootings? The study followed an exploratory design, combining qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. This study looked at 20 mass shootings listed in an open-sourced database from 2012-2016 and includes 108 news articles from 6 news media across the political spectrum. The relative frequency bar graphs showed that no news media outlets have a higher or more significant mention of "dangerousness" of mass shooters and the portrayal of mental illness in news articles. The Chi-Square test demonstrated that there was no substantial evidence to establish a link between the keyword use and median political leaning. Though the result does not support the hypothesis, the result does show news media, in general, does have a correlation with an increased stigma against mental illness. This knowledge can determine the roots of the misrepresentation of mental illness in relation to violence. It may subsequently lead to public education that, in turn, stems the stigma against people with mental illness and promotes more effective gun policies.

Introduction

The United States has one of the highest gun violence death rates in the world. In 2010, gun homicide rates in the USA were 25.2 times higher compared to other high-income countries (Grinshteyn & Hemenway, 2016). For example, in 2017, Canada had the second-highest firearm homicide rate for a high-income country with 0.50 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants compared to the United States, with 3.6 deaths per 100,000 people. The United States' gun violence death rates still greatly surpass those of poorer countries such as Bangladesh, which only saw 0.07 per 100,000 people (Aizenman & Silver, 2019). This shows that the United States has a unique and severe relationship to gun violence standing out from the rest of the world. Of the 36,383 gun violence deaths that occur every year, gun suicide makes up the majority at 61%, while gun homicide deaths follow at 35% (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). Despite mass shootings making up around 1% of gun violence (Rozel & Mulvey, 2017), they have garnered great attention from the news media, which affects the public's outlook on the matter.

From reporting politics to crimes to the weather, news media outlets are essential in the public's daily lives. The way news media shapes and represents events such as mass shootings have a significant effect on how society views people affected by mental illness. Certain news media outlets, depending on their political stances, have shown to emphasize the connection between violence and mental illness (Melici, 2018). This blame placed on mental health, in response, encourages policymakers to pass policies not focused on the root of gun violence in America (Schroeder et al., 2019).

When the Sandy Hook Shooting occurred in 2012 by a mass shooter with untreated mental illness, a polling survey conducted in 2013 highlighted that the mass majority of respondents blamed the mental health system rather than the easy access to guns for mass shootings (Swanson et al., 2015). In addition, a national public opinion survey completed in 2013 revealed that 46% of people with serious mental illness (SMI) were "far more dangerous than the general population" (Barry et al., 2013). This public view and belief that mental illness and gun violence are linked to one another strengthen the stigma concerning the mental illness community and the topic itself. Please note that the term mental illness is an umbrella term for more than 200 classified disorders of the mind (MHA, n.d). When the study mentions "mental illness", it includes all and of more of the 200 disorders, common and rare. Meanwhile, SMI is " a small subset of the 300 mental illnesses" and some examples include schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and serious depression ("What is", 2019). Contrastingly enough, a study published by The National Institute of Mental Health Epidemiologic Catchment Area found that an estimated 96% of violence that occurs in the general population would continue to happen even if the risk of violence in people with mental illness was the same as the average risk (those without mental illness) (Swanson et al., 2014). Thus, despite the fact that most people with mental illness are not violent towards others, the vivid case of mass shootings such as the Sandy Hook shooting have perpetuated this stigma surrounding mental illness. In addition, it has led to increased support for mental health screening and treatments for gun violence instead of equally focusing on the lax gun laws at a state and federal level.

Furthermore, the stereotype that mental illness, especially those with SMI, are a major cause of the gun violence rates can be disproven by the fact that they have committed less than 5% of 120,000 gun-related killings in the United States from the years 2001 to 2010 committed by the general public (Metzl et al., 2015). In addition, the percentage of those with SMI in 2011 and 2012 in the United States makes up around 3.97% of the public (SAMHSA, 2014). This implies that they also make up a small portion of the general population and shooters of the gun-related killings. After the respondents from the previously stated survey read the news about mental illness and gun violence, they displayed a "heightened negative attitude" to those diagnosed with mental illness (McGinty, 2014). There have been preventative measures placed so that it made the possession of guns harder for those with mental illness. However, in a nationally representative sample of adults, it showed no significant difference between examined rates of gun access, safe storage (which is an important aspect of gun safety), and gun-carrying between those with and without lifetime mental illness. For instance, 6.2% of those with lifetime mental illness stored their guns in an unsafe manner, compared to 7.3% of those without mental illness (Ilgen et al., 2008). This demonstrates that people with mental illness who own guns aren't the main problem in regards to gun violence in America since they are not as violent as the news media portrays them to be. This widespread and false impression of mentally ill people being inherently violent and a cause of gun violence leads to a host of problems such as lack of support, and increased stigma which would cause people with mental illness to be more reluctant to search for help, and lower treatment rates (McGinty et al., 2014). This is why it is imperative to dispel the stereotypes and stigma against those with mental illness, strive to improve lax federal and state gun laws, and a greater focus to be placed on how news media outlets cover mass shootings.

The purpose of this research was to find the pattern or tendencies for certain news media sources associated with different political ideologies to link (the portrayed) mental illness and interpersonal violence of mass shooters. The results of this study can be used to determine the roots of misrepresentation of the mentally ill and their association with interpersonal violence that leads to social stigma influence by coverages of mass shootings. The decrease of social stigma may alleviate the anxiety and discomfort that those with mental illness experience and allow them to stop living in fear of their condition and the fear that their privacy and rights will be infringed upon.

Literature Review

Many studies examine the coverage of mass shootings by the news media and how they could have implications for how society views them. The studies stated and further analyzed later in the literature review, generally show that news stories depict a greater association between mental illness and interpersonal violence than exist in law

enforcement records. Interpersonal violence is the intentional use of force/ violence against a person or a group with a high chance of injury, death, psychological damage, and more (Mercy, 2017). In addition, serious mental illness was more likely to be cited as a cause of gun violence rather than access to "dangerous weapons" (McGinty et al., 2014). Overall, studies have shown that news media does negatively affect the public's perception of those who are mentally in their coverage of mass shooters (McGinty et al., 2014). This negative social stigma and news coverage illustrated that mental illness was a common cause of gun violence meanwhile ignoring the fact that lax gun policies are a large factor in this problem, would backfire.

Studies published in 2014 and 2018 by Emma E. McGinty et al., from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, explored the media's role and coverage of mass shootings through the public discourse. The 2014 study titled *News Media Framing of Serious Mental Illness and Gun Violence in the United States, 1997-2012* concluded that the increased news coverage and public attention to mass shootings and SMI raised support for gun violence prevention policies (McGinty et al., 2014). On the other hand, it had intensified the public's negative perspective of people with SMI. It showed that news media covering the mentally ill tended to emphasize "interpersonal violence" and that "respondents who read a news story describing a mass shooter with SMI reported higher perceived dangerousness of and desire social distance from persons with SMI." (McGinty et al., 2014, para. 4.) The 2016 study titled *Trends In News Media Coverage Of Mental Illness In The United States: 1995–2014* discusses the ongoing dialogue in the United States around mental illness similar to the connection presented by news media between SMI and gun violence in mass shootings. The results of the study concluded that violence, including both interpersonal violence and suicide, and mental health treatment issues were the most frequently mentioned topics in news coverage about mental illness, more so than dangerous weapons (McGinty et al., 2016). As a result, the study concluded the public may view those with mental illness as the cause of gun violence. Both the 2014 and 2016 studies showcase the negative social stigma and attitudes that persisted with persons suffering from a mental illness. They also highlighted the news media's importance in enforcing the negative stereotypes of the mentally ill as a whole. This pushes the public and policymakers for laws focusing on the mentally ill in regard to gun violence due to the perceived "hostile" behavior they may have in general.

Examples of the misdirected attention and resources to lessen the gun violence rates would include existing federal laws such as The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act passed in 1993, the National Instant Criminal Background Check (NICS) in 1998, and the NICS improvement act in 2007. They were passed in hopes of using the gun-disqualifying mental health records to prevent gun rampages from "disturbed" individuals. However, these federal laws do not stop the person with the gun-disqualifying record reported to the NICS from possessing guns from a private party, online, or at a gun show. In some states, over 50% of Americans live in households with guns, which enables persons with or without mental illness to carry out a violent act if so inclined (Swanson et al., 2015). This shows that simply restricting access to firearms for the mentally ill because of gun-purchasing disqualifying mental health records further perpetuate the stigma against the community with mental illness as more violent than those without even as effective safety gains are not achieved.

More specifically epidemiological literature such as *The Link Between Mental Illness and Firearm Violence: Implications for Social Policy and Clinical Practice* written by John S. Rozel and Edward P. Mulvey in 2017, professors from the School of Medicine of the University of Pittsburgh, addressed the stigma driven policies and put forward more refined and evidence-driven policy recommendations. The study concluded that any intervention or policies focusing on the link between mental illness and violence, such as the federal gun laws stated above, will have a limited impact on the overall issues of gun violence, deeming them "inefficient" and "ineffective" (Rozel & Mulvey, 2017). Although these interventions may have a significant positive effect on suicide risk, focusing these policies on interpersonal violence seems misguided. The epidemiological literature emphasizes the importance of the active role of mental health professionals in care related to screening for firearm access and more refined determinations when it comes to accessing and owning firearms (Rozel & Mulvey, 2017). Without evidence-based clinical policies and evidence-based clinical practices, patients and communities in the United States will be vulnerable to ongoing gun violence due to the ineffective policies urged by the ill-informed public and politically inspired policymakers.

Much of the existing literature has focused on the narrative of the news media linking mental illness and gun violence, however, most publications have not addressed the political orientation of these news media. Researching further, one academic journal titled *Representations of Mental Illness on FOX and CNN: The Parkland Shooting* (Melici, 2018), looked at two popular and widespread news media platforms with different political stances and how they reflected and emphasized different parts of the mass shootings despite covering similar events. CNN and FOX News were chosen because of the different coverage styles influenced by the political orientation (liberal and conservative respectively). One specific case, such as the "Parkland Shooting" in 2018 was chosen, against twenty-two news transcripts from CNN and FOX news was analyzed. The result of the study showed that FOX News transcripts indicated a greater connection between mental illness and gun violence than CNN. 15 out of 22 news transcripts from FOX news (3.75 times more articles than CNN) had a negative slant (Melici, 2018). If this case is representative, then it would seem to suggest that right-leaning news media outlets have more news transcripts portraying mental illness in a way that increases stigmatization and the identification of mental illness as the cause of mass shootings. This would seem to be expected as framing causation as lying within the traits of an individual would exempt firearms policy and deregulation of firearms is more consistent with conservative rather than liberal ideology.

What was missing in the study stated above, nonetheless, as well as in previous studies from McGinty et al., Rozel, and Mulvey was the inclusion of various news outlets with *differing* political stances (liberal, moderate and conservative) covering more than one mass shooting to see how the political bias of news media sources can represent mental illness regarding gun violence. This prompts the research question: To what extent does the political stance of news sources label/cover mass shootings in relation to mental illness and violence? This paper hypothesizes that right-leaning news media platforms are more likely to portray mass shooters as mentally ill and emphasize mental illness and interpersonal violence in their narrative. If this hypothesis is supported, it would imply that conservative media disproportionality stigmatizes mentally ill populations.

Methodology

This research paper used an exploratory mixed-methods design, consisting of qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. It used the open-source database entitled "US Mass Shootings, 1982-2020: Data From Mother Jones' Investigation" established by Mother Jones, an American magazine that documented mass shootings in the United States subsequently confirmed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The database focused on shootings in public spaces where four or more victims were shot in a single event, which is the more "standard" definition of a mass shooting widely used in empirical literature (Follman et al.,2020b). The database narrowed "mass shootings in the United States" by excluding conventionally motivated crimes such as gang violence or armed robbery, as well as any mass shootings to which the perpetrator has not been identified. This study does exclude mass shootings because of the location (e.g. school, workplace, military, religious, and others) to make it a geographically diverse sample within the United States. The Mother Jones database has collected data about mass shootings from 1982 to 2020. However, this current study will revolve around mass shooting cases around the years 2013-2015 because, in this time period, there has been a rise of mental illness as the more assertive narrative for extreme mass shootings (Duxbury et al., 2018). In addition, this study will include mass shootings from 2012 to 2016 in order to expand the representative sample size.

To determine which news platforms to use, the study utilized AllSides Media Bias Ratings (**figure 1**) based on multi-partisan analysis and tens of thousands of ratings that identify the political bias of news platforms ("Media Bias ratings", 2019). Overall, 6 news platforms were chosen: one liberal, one moderately liberal, two center/moderate, one moderately conservative, and one conservative.

Figure 1: Snapshot of AllSides Media Bias Ratings Diagram. From "Media Bias Ratings." *Allsides*, AllSides, 2019, www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-ratings. Accessed 29 Mar. 2019.

For each mass shooting case, one news article from the selected news media outlets was collected. The news article was collected based on Google search and through the news platform archives. To narrow the search of the news articles especially with more widely covered mass shootings by popular news media outlets, one would put the terms such as "mental illness", "violent past", "difficult past" and "why" in the search bar along with the name of the mass shooter or shooting. In addition, the primary criteria of choosing the articles are based on the time frame of when it was published closest to the initial date of the mass shooting in the observation period. The secondary criteria for the articles are based on mentions of any keywords on the heading and the body of the article. An average of 2 keywords (seen in **table 3**) seen in the article will be considered as data to be analyzed. For mass shootings that are less covered by the news media outlets, the primary criteria will be strongly considered. This is because the few articles written by the news media outlet may not contain the keywords at all despite being written closest to the initial date of the mass shooting. Mass shooting cases that were not covered by most of the selected news media outlets will not be used in the study.

Then in an Excel spreadsheet for the qualitative data collection (see **figure 2** for an example, see **Appendix A** for more), news articles were assessed and articles that contained the keywords/themes were pasted into the spreadsheet. Which is then color-coded accordingly to the common themes determined from past literature and established what is shown in **table 1** (Duxbury et al., 2018). This experiment is not only including the official statements from

courts and doctors about mentions of mental illness but also how the news media include additional details portraying the mass shooter as mentally ill.

Yes- Titled: "Santa Monica gunman underwent mental evaluation".
A Santa Monica gunman who killed five people last week was hospitalized for psychiatric evaluation in 2006. John Zawahri lived with his father after the teen made repeated violent threats against students, teachers and campus security officers at Olympic High School. De la Torre, who was a neighbor of Zawahri, said the gunman's father told him he was having problems with his son eight months ago. "They didn't talk to a lot of people, they were very reserved," de la Torre said. "One time he did tell me he had problems with his younger son, knowing I work with youth. He never went into detail about anything." Mentions of spotty attendance at school. A teacher saw "disturbing behavior, conversations around weapons and violence," Wendy Parise, who had Zawahri in her preschool class, remembers the 4-year-old as a "sad little boy" who was "very timid, withdrawn and very sensitive." Mentions of family domestic violence because of his father.
8:30 pm ET Jun, 11, 2013

Figure 2: A Screenshot of an Example of the Qualitative Dataset.
Note: It is from an article from 2013 about the Santa Monica Shooting covered by USA. Today, a moderate news media platform.

red:2
green:3
purple:
orange: 1
yellow:
blue:
m:4
t: 8

Figure 3: Screenshot of an Example of the Quantitative Dataset
Note: It is from an article from 2013 about the Santa Monica Shooting covered by USA Today. It is a moderate news media platform. "loc" and "yellow" color-coded words are mentions of where the shooter lived and if the article included a picture(s) of the shooter, respectively. These two do not count towards the themes of violent character/" dangerousness" and Mass shooters portrayed as mentally ill. "M" represents the total tallies of the mentions of mentally ill themes/keywords. "T" represents the total tallies overall. **See appendix A** for more examples

Table 1: Measures/ Criteria

Themes of Interper-sonal Violence/ "Dangerousness"	Red- Danger to society/ Bad character → Fascination with guns, video games, and serial killers. → Part of a terrorist group. → Mentions of trouble with the law. → The shooter made threats to others before the shooting → Negative connotative descriptions such as "disturbed", "angry" etc.

Descriptions of Themes for Mass shooters Portrayed as Mentally Ill	→ Orange- Mentions of psychological problems and or depression
	    → The shooter went to receive treatment before and did or did not receive help.
	    → Interviewee saying that they "needed mental health" or "wasn't mentally stable."
	→ Green- Victim of society
	    → Abuse
	    → Family problems (i.e. parent divorce)
	    → Trouble with the law
	    → Social isolation thus being called "he was an outcast", "he was weird", "had no friends" and or" a loner".
	→ Blue- Good Character
	    → Positive adjectives- "nice", "outgoing."
	    → A good son, father, friend, etc.
	→ Purple- Unexpected/ out of character
	    → " I was shocked that he did this"
	    → "He was normal…"
	    → " No idea why this happened…"

Note: The descriptions of themes for mass shooters portrayed as mentally ill was derived from Duxbury, S. W., Frizzell, L. C., & Lindsay, S. L. (2018, July 11). Mental Illness, the Media, and The Moral Politics of Mass Violence: The Role of Race in Mass Shootings Coverage - Scott W. Duxbury, Laura C. Frizzell, Sadé L. Lindsay, 2018. Retrieved November 7, 2019.
 from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022427818787225?journalCode=jrca.

In the collected "quantitative" dataset (see **figure 3** for an example**, Appendix B** for more), the number of color-coded keywords/themes depended on the narrative of the article. For example, in the Cascade Mall Shooting in 2016, an article from USA Today mentioned that "Cetin has faced three assault charges related to domestic violence" and "Cetin also has an arrest on a drunken-driving charge." This would count as one tally for the themes/ keywords that depict the shooter as violent/danger to society. Meanwhile, in the Washington Navy Yard shooting in 2013, The Guardian mentioned Alexis' father stating that the shooter had "anger management problems" and it also referenced his past records/ troubles with guns, and so this would be two red tallies. Although it fits under the broader theme of danger to society/ bad character, it emphasizes and strengthens the audience's perspective of the shooter, so it is considered as two red tallies. This is the same for green and blue color-coded measures.

There is an exception for only the orange and purple color codes (mentions of psychological problems and or depression and unexpected/ out of character behavior). Despite how many examples or keywords attributed to, let's say, an orange code seen in the article, it would count as one tally mark for orange. This is because many of the keywords of the orange and purple color codes offer the same/ similar information to the audience and will not significantly shift the audience's perspective on the shooter than they had when the first keyword was seen in the article. For example, in the Sandy Hook Elementary Massacre, The Reuters, a moderate news organization, mentioned that Adam Lanza (the shooter) was "diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, a high-functioning form of autism, at 13" and "Lanza (the father of the shooter) said the Asperger's diagnosis may have been masking schizophrenia" two separate times, but it can only count as one orange tally. The tallies were used in the qualitative part of the research as data for frequency tables. They will show how often certain themes of mental illness were mentioned to see how the mass shooter was portrayed as mentally ill or a 'sympathetic character." Lastly, the red color codes (mentions of "dangerousness" or interpersonal violence keywords or themes) are used in the frequency table to show how often the news media platforms portrayed the offender as "violent" even before the incident in the article transcript. The language of the title and the subheadings of the articles was taken into consideration for the red color code tallies as well.

The collected "quantitative" data was then used in order to determine the relative frequencies. This tells us how frequent or popular a certain keyword/theme of "dangerousness" or mental illness occurred in news articles in different news media outlets. Then the quantitative data was used in a Chi-square test to test whether the mentioning of mental illness and "dangerousness" keywords/themes is independent of the political leaning of the news media which are categorical variables. The null hypothesis is H0: use of keywords is independent/unrelated to the political leaning of the news media. The alternative hypothesis is Ha: use of keyword is not independent of (is related to) the political leaning of the news media.
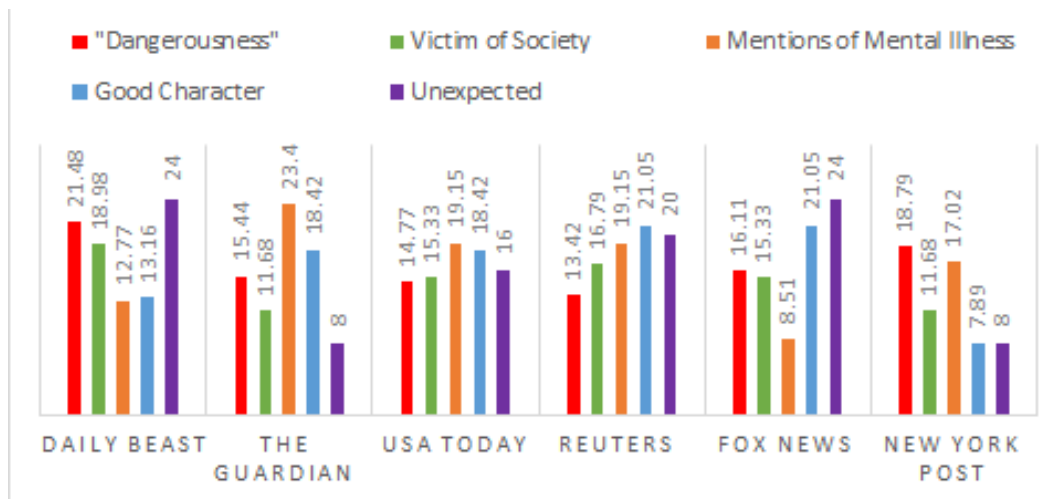
Results/ Data Analysis

Figure 4: Relative Frequency Bar Graph of the "Dangerousness" and Mental illness Themes/ Keywords for Each News Media Platform (%)

Figure 4 shows the six news media platforms showing the color-coded keywords/themes for "dangerousness" and mental illness. It compares how much of the news articles of one news platform compared to others covering the 20 mass shootings contained these keywords/themes. There is no significant difference in patterns seen, which shows

that there is a high chance that the relationships observed here between news source and depiction of offenders would not generalize to a larger population of articles. (**See Appendix C for Raw Data**)
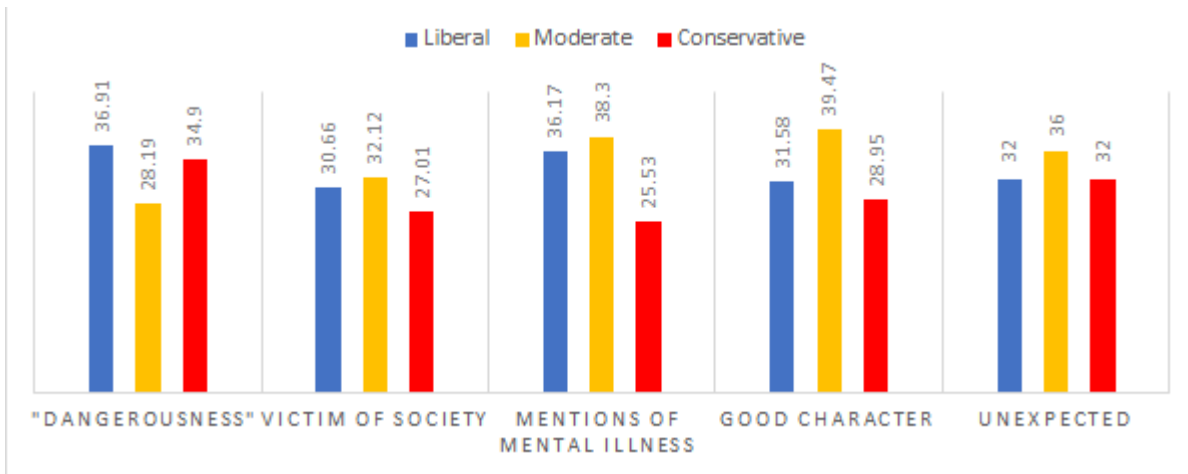

Figure 5: Relative Frequency Bar Graph of the "Dangerousness" and Mental illness Themes/ Keywords (%) of the Essentialized Political Spectrum.

Figure 5 shows the combined news media platforms based on their political stance/bias. So the data from left-wing news media platforms were combined under simply "liberal." The same idea goes for moderate and right-wing news media platforms. Similar to figure 4, there is no distinct pattern that emerges from this graph, which shows that the political bias of the news media has little to no effect on the mentions of "dangerousness" of mass shooters and the portrayal of mental illne**ss. (See Appendix D for Raw Data)**
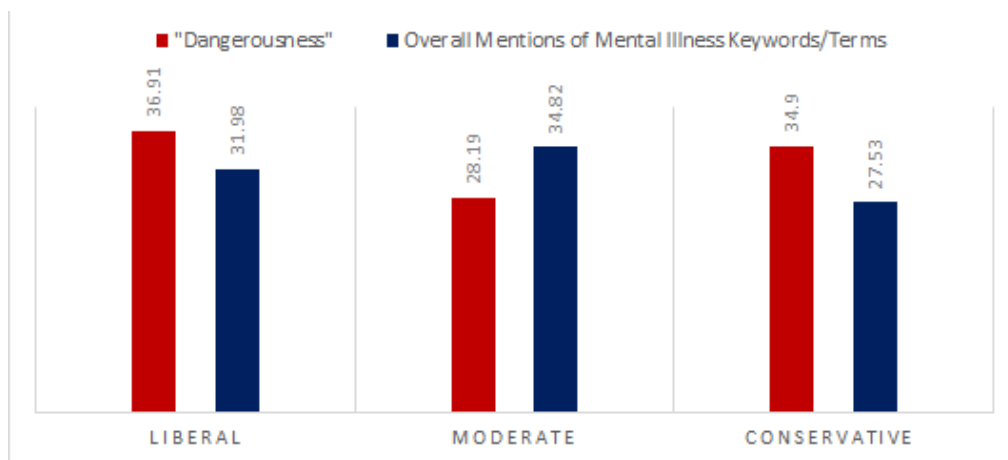

Figure 6: Relative Frequency Bar Graph of the "Dangerousness" and Overall Mental Illness Themes/Keywords (%)

Figure 6 combines both the news platform based on their political stance/bias and all the relative frequencies of the keywords/themes of mental illness into one. Although the graph showed how one part of the political spectrum (liberal) had the highest mentions of "dangerousness" of the mass shooter and that moderate news media platforms had the highest mentions of mental illness keywords/terms, the difference between these relative frequencies among the three essentialized political spectrum was not statistically significant. (**See Appendix D for Raw Data**)

Table 2: The results of the Chi-Square test.

	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	Row Totals
Overall Mentions of Mental Illness Keywords/Themes	55 (52.27) [0.14]	42 (49.93) [1.26]	52 (46.81) [0.58]	149
Mentions of "Dangerousness" Keywords/Theme	79 (81.73) [0.09]	86 (78.07) [0.80]	68 (73.19) [0.37]	233
Column Totals	134	128	120	382 (Grand Total)

Discussion

Interpretation of the Results and Implications

The results are inconsistent with other similar studies that find that more conservative-leaning news platforms have more mentions of mental illness and violence when covering mass shootings (Melici, 2018). This study's overall results showed that the political bias of the news media is independent or has a weak association with the mentions of "dangerousness" and mental illness keywords/themes in news articles covering mass shootings. Although there were some relative frequency bar graphs with the highest mentions of something, there is no statistically significant difference to support the hypothesis. However, the results from the relative frequencies bar graphs still show that the news media, no matter the political stance, still portray mass shooters as mentally ill and include mentions of dangerousness that may influence the public's perspective on the mentally ill. This would lead to an increase in negative social stigma in the public's view of those with mental illness, which would also lead to the increase of poorer treatment rates and less recovery (Wahl, 2012). This study, including others similar to this, could open new pathways to a more insightful analysis of news media outlets' political leanings and the coverage of mass shootings.

Limitations

It is important to address the limitations that this study faced. The first was that the news media platforms analyzed were not chosen/ sorted out by a form of measurement criteria such as viewership and or funds. If it had been implemented then the chosen news media could have been more "standardized" and given more accurate or different results concerning the frequency of keywords/themes with more data to include in the study. Second, for each mass shooting that occurred at a certain time, the articles chosen from each news platform may vary from a few days to a few months apart. Because the time in between different news articles means that the information about the shooter and the mentions of any keywords/themes will vary extensively and simplified the analyses of the data as well. Third, most studies such as those mentioned in the literature review that focused on how news media framed mental illness and gun violence in relation to one another used a large number of randomized news articles from news database sources and websites such as "News Bank" and "LexisNexis." Due to the author's inaccessibility of these news databases and the capacity to look at a large number of news articles to "convert" quantitative to qualitative data via codes/ programs, the study was not able to obtain an accurate amount of data needed. Lastly, the inclusion of the gathering of qualitative data is subjected to the evaluator's bias (their own political stance) in analysis and collection. There may have been

articles by certain news media platforms that have been more heavily read over and analyzed to be included as data in the study. Additionally, there due to the time constraint and the speed that the author read the 108 news articles, some of the keywords/themes may have not been included in the dataset. This also renders the database of this research to be relatively small and affects the ability to detect any patterns between keyword use and political leaning of news media with ample statistical significance. In addition, this study was based on mass shooting cases from 2012-2016, so the result would vary compared to if a study was based on the most recent mass shootings such as the years 2016 to 2020.

Conclusion

Although the results were not consistent with other studies such as *Representations of Mental Illness on FOX and CNN: The Parkland Shooting* and not consistent with the hypothesis stated in this paper, the result of this paper does show that news media regardless of political bias influence how they emphasize and include certain parts and information of the mass shooting. By collecting the keywords/terms determined in the measure from news transcripts varying 6 news media outlets as qualitative data, it was transformed into quantitative data to determine the frequency of these keywords/themes. It supports the findings of other studies that news media reinforce the narrative of mental illness as a common cause of gun violence. In addition, this may view cause many to think of mental illness as a common cause of gun violence which may, in turn, influence policymakers to pass laws such as restricting guns from those with a history of mental illness, providing a false sense of security while failing to bring gun violence rates down significantly (Swanson et al., 2015).

Further studies could examine the frequency and the relationship between mentions of mental illness and violence through more recent mass shootings to see if any progress had been made in how news media sources cover mass shootings as well as in a larger sample size/database. In addition, further studies should focus on the public responses to how the differing politically oriented news sources cover the mass shootings to see how the information spread by news media was interpreted by society. This would solidify the policies and recommendations for news media to be less "extreme" with the way they portray mass shootings. Doing this would lessen the stigma against the mentally ill, increasing treatment rates. Additionally, by reducing scapegoating of the mentally ill, it may drive more effective laws that target other and more common causes of gun violence. This would effectively decrease the gun violence rates in America, potentially in both homicide and suicide gun rates.

Acknowledgments

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