School Shootings and Mental Illness: A Moral Panic

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This research uses moral panic theory to investigate the ways in which print media coverage influences the association of mental illness with acts of mass violence in schools. I explore the relationship between the rhetoric of moral entrepreneurs (such as victims’ friends and family members, law enforcement agencies, criminal justice and mental health professionals, gun rights activists, mayors, members of Congress, and presidents), the construction of a moral panic, and the identification of a folk devil (a person or population deemed responsible for the evils of a society; to be feared and controlled in order to minimize threat). Perpetrators of school shootings are often discussed in terms of their consumption of violent media (such as movies, music, and video games), their access to firearms, their social standing among their peers (socially isolated, ostracized, or bullied at school), and their mental health status. I hypothesize that mental illness has become a common frame in which school shooters are discussed by the media, despite the fact that mentally ill persons are less likely than non-disordered individuals to commit acts of violence. Therefore, this characterization of the mentally ill as violent and dangerous is disproportionate to the actual level of threat. I conduct a quantitative frame analysis of print newspaper articles published in the New York Times and one local newspaper during the month following each mass school shooting between 1991 and 2015, coding for the type of moral entrepreneur (grassroots, interest-group, or elite), the folk devil identified (violent media, firearms, social alienation, and/or mental illness), and whether the folk devil was being affirmed or denied. Results reveal that guns are affirmed as the folk
devil more often than mental illness, but are also denied most often; whereas mental illness is affirmed nearly as often as guns, and is less frequently denied as the folk devil – leading to the conclusion that mental illness is the most frequently accepted folk devil associated with school shootings. This serves as a cautionary warning against the conflation of mental illness with mass shootings, because it intensifies the stigma attached to mental illness – a known deterrent to seeking treatment.
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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the ways in which school shootings are manipulated by the media to increase fear and incite panic among the general population. Currently, the level of perceived risk (or, fear) that a school shooting will occur is far greater than the actual likelihood that it will happen. For example, the chances that a high school student will be killed in an active-shooter scenario are one in one million. However, over half of all parents and teenagers worry that their community will experience a mass shooting at school. This disparity between perceived and actual threat is referred to as a moral panic. I utilize print newspaper articles to investigate the intricacies of this moral panic. Who is creating the hysteria? Is it political elites, such as the President and Vice President? Or is it interest groups, such as police officers, mental health professionals, and gun rights activists? Is it possible that this moral panic is being stirred by the general public in a grassroots movement? I also explore who, or what, is to blame for school shootings, using four categories of antagonists (referred to as “folk devils”): socially alienated youth who have been bullied or isolated by their peers; youth who consume violent media, such as video games, movies, and music; guns and gun culture; and those who suffer from mental illness. Results indicate that the moral panic about school shootings is largely due to the participation of grassroots and interest groups. Guns are identified as the root cause of school shootings most frequently, but there is an ongoing debate about the legitimacy of the threat posed by guns in society. Meanwhile, mental illness is identified as the cause of school shootings almost as often as guns, but is much less controversial. This means that there is more
agreement about mental illness as a threat to student safety while at school, compared to other folk devils. This is a troubling revelation, considering that 20 to 25 percent of Americans have a psychological disorder and a vast majority of them are not violent or dangerous individuals. Previous research has found that stigma is a significant barrier to seeking psychological treatment; therefore, we should be more cautious when associating mental illness with acts of mass violence. It is critical that we take steps to decrease the stigma of mental illness, rather than amplify it by exaggerating the relationship between mental illness and school shootings.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the victims, friends, families, and communities affected by mass shootings. May your loved ones rest in peace and may your lives be filled with reminders of the kindness, love, and support offered from around the world. Specifically, I would like to acknowledge those affected by the tragedy on April 16, 2007. Over the past four years, I grown to love Blacksburg and I am in awe of the strength, compassion, and resiliency demonstrated by the community every day. I am truly honored to be a Hokie.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Mass shootings are unarguably tragic, horrific, and devastating events. School shootings are even more shocking and traumatic because schools are supposed to be a safe haven where violence does not exist. School shootings in elementary, middle, and high schools – plus colleges and universities – have damaged the assumed trust that schools are safe places for children and young adults (Wike and Fraser 2009; Donohue, Schiraldi, Ziedenberg 1998; Burns and Crawford 1999; Schildkraut, Elsass, and Stafford 2015). The violation of shared beliefs about the sanctity of childhood and the destruction of faith in the social order stir public concern and instill fear in students, parents, and communities (Altheide 2009; Wike and Fraser 2009).

The “culture of fear” that consumes the public after a school shooting has been compared to that of a moral panic (Muschert and Ragnedda 2011; Burns and Crawford 1999; Schildkraut et al. 2015). Inflated data and exaggerated “eyewitness accounts” dominate the media, implying that there is a constant and imminent threat of danger and violence in American schools. Compared to other types of violence—and even other types of school violence—school shootings are rare events, but the media over-reports and manipulates information to incite and exacerbate fear by portraying the phenomenon as if it were an epidemic (Schildkraut et al. 2015). The result is that public fear becomes disproportionate to the actual risk of victimization. Burns and Crawford (1999) and Schildkraut et al. (2015) argue that school shootings meet the criteria of a moral panic. In the present study, I extend this line of research with an investigation of the media framing that demonizes the mentally ill as “folk devils” or evildoers (Cohen 1972/2002). I also add to previous research on school shootings by
exploring which of the three models of moral panics identified by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) most accurately describes the processes involved in creating this moral panic: elite-engineered (where political, economic, and/or cultural elites are driving the narrative), interest group (where action groups such as police officers, religious officials, or mental health professionals are driving the narrative), or grassroots (where the narrative is constructed and moved forward by the general public).

School Shootings in the Context of Overall School Violence

Many researchers report that school shootings have become more frequent in recent years (Bonanno and Levenson 2014; Rocque 2012), but a study conducted by Agnich (2015) found that, between 1990 and 2014, there was no upward (or downward) trend in the frequency of school shootings resulting in at least one fatality at American schools (elementary through college). Figure 1.1 illustrates these data, demonstrating that the frequency fluctuates between one and four per year over the past 25 years. For example, there was an average of three school shooting incidents (with at least one fatality) per year between 1990 and 1997; between 1998 and 2005, the average was two incidents per year, and this rate remained the same between 2006 and 2014. Thus, it is clear that school shootings have not increased recently. If anything, they have decreased.
Compared to other causes of death, school shootings are uncommon (Satterly 2014). In a study of K-12 schools between 1998 and 2012, Satterly (2014) found that the biggest threat to student safety is school transportation, accounting for 36 percent of all school-related fatalities. During that period, 267 pedestrians were killed by school transportation or on school property by cars or buses (an average of 24 per year), and an additional 118 died while riding school transportation (an average of 11 per year). Other school-related fatalities due to accidents, hate crimes, interpersonal disputes, robberies, bullying, and gang-related activities resulted in 236 deaths, accounting for over 16 percent of all school-related fatalities (an average of 16 per year). Students committing suicide on school property accounted for nine percent of school-related fatalities and resulted in 112 deaths (an average of 9 per year) between the 1998-1999 and 2010-2011 academic years. Comparatively, active-shooter incidents resulted in a total of 62 deaths (an average of four per year), accounting for less than five percent of school-related fatalities in K-12 schools between 1998 and 2012. Of those 62 fatalities, a majority (74 percent) were the result of only three active-shooter incidents: Columbine High School in 1999, Red Lake Senior High School in 2005, and Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012.
School-related fatalities as a whole are also not a common cause of childhood and adolescent deaths. For example, school-related deaths only account for one percent of all homicides in the U.S. (Wike and Fraser 2009). Only three percent of murders in the U.S. are between juvenile offenders and juvenile victims (Donohue et al. 1998). Ninety percent of children killed by age twelve and 75 percent of teenage homicide victims are murdered by an adult. Unintentional injury (such as auto accidents, drowning, and poisoning), suicides, and cancer are all more common causes of death among teenagers than active-shooter incidents in schools (Satterly 2014: Minino 2010). Accidents account for about half of all teenage fatalities outside of school, with a majority (73 percent) of those being motor vehicle accidents (Minino 2010; Satterly 2014). For teenagers, the likelihood of being killed in an auto accident, while riding the school bus, or in their own home is higher than the likelihood of dying as a result of a school shooting. Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, and Modzeleski (2002) estimate that the chances of a high school student dying because of a school-related homicide or suicide are less than one in a million (Wike and Fraser 2009). This claim is supported by Rocque (2012), who studied reports from the National Crime Victimization Survey, the Centers for Disease Control, the National School Safety and Security Services, and the Department of Education to conclude that overall, the odds of a student being killed while at school are extremely low (Lebrun 2009). Therefore, empirical data suggest that schools are still extremely safe places, despite recent shooting incidents (Donohue et al. 1998; Burns and Crawford 1999; Schildkraut et al. 2015; Satterly 2014).

Although there is a low probability of occurrence, school shootings are high-impact in terms of their effect on the public conscience (Altheide 2009; Satterly 2014). Due to the
shocking nature of rampage-type shootings in educational settings, they receive a lot of media attention, while other types of fatalities receive much less consideration (Muschert and Ragnedda 2011; Wike and Fraser 2009; Schildkraut et al. 2015). The lengthy media coverage can also be very graphic, which leads to a heightened awareness among students, teachers, and parents. The media sensationalizes school shootings by exaggerating the threat of danger and injecting fear to create mass hysteria among the public. The perceived risk of danger is magnified when the media describe these unusual events as “another in a recent trend” or an “all-too-familiar story” (Burns and Crawford 1999; Donohue et al. 1998). This disproportionate amount of media attention paints school shootings as a trend that is quickly gaining momentum (Burns and Crawford 1999; Fox and Burstein 2010; Luke 2008; Rocque 2012; Schildkraut et al. 2015). When the media fail to examine these events within the proper context, the problem is blown out of proportion and the public is given the impression that school shootings are common and present an immediate threat to school safety (Glassman 1998; Burns and Crawford 1999; Schildkraut et al. 2015; Hawdon et al. 2014a). As Rocque (2011: 306) states, “The vast media coverage given to these events creates the impression that there is a school shooting ‘epidemic’ that is still ongoing, creating something of a ‘moral panic,’ or a socially constructed crisis that may not reflect reality” (also see Hawdon et al. 2014a; Burns and Crawford 1999; Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas 2000).

School shootings may be very rare, but it is because of this socially constructed crisis that fear of school shootings is very common (Altheide 2009). By over-reporting these violent crimes, the media create a discrepancy between the perceived threat of a school shooting and the actual likelihood of occurrence. The media incorrectly generalize a few select events to
suggest a much larger problem (Burns and Crawford 1999) and to “solicit an emotional response that is divorced from its context” (Muschert and Ragnedda 2011: 346). Therefore, the \textit{perceived} threat far outweighs the \textit{objective} threat. This is evident when considering that less than five percent of school-related fatalities are due to active shooters, yet more than half of all parents with school-age children and 75 percent of students in high schools are worried that their community could experience an active-shooter incident (Satterly 2014; Juvonen 2001; Kiefer 2005; Wike and Fraser 2009).

From these broad statistics, we can conclude that there is a tendency for parents and educators, as well as the general public, to panic after mass shootings in schools. Relative to the threat these incidents actually pose, the ensuing panic appears to be exaggerated, and thus a classic example of a moral panic. As with other moral panics, the panic is fueled by speculation and suggestions concerning the fundamental cause of the threat. That is, politicians and the public want to know who—or what—is to blame for this crisis.

\textbf{Common Themes Concerning the Causes of School Shootings}

In the aftermath of a school shooting, conversations among the general public turn toward potential underlying causes. Politicians and television personalities usually build a discourse following such tragedies on hot-button topics like mental health and gun control, the consequences of violence in entertainment media (movies, music, and video games), and “classroom avengers” (retaliation by bullied or alienated youth) (Metzl and MacLeish 2015; Schildkraut et al. 2015; Rocque 2012; de Venanzi 2012; Muschert and Ragnedda 2011; Wike and Fraser 2009; Langman 2009; McGee and DeBernardo 2002). For example, the frames that appeared after the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999 highlighted issues of gun control,
bullying, violence in the media, poor social climate at school, ineffective parenting, and mental illness (Muschert and Ragnedda 2011). Newman and her associates (2002) synthesize these issues in their theory of individual and school-level dynamics that are necessary but not sufficient factors that lead to school shootings. The issues they identify include: (a) the perpetrator sees himself as a social outcast, (b) he has a psycho-social problem (not necessarily a mental illness), (c) there is a cultural climate and acceptability of violence, (d) there has been a lack of preventative measures taken by the school, and (e) there is easy access to firearms (Rocque 2012). These issues represent common influential forces that contribute to the decision to commit mass shootings at school institutions.

Gun availability has been a common frame in which mass shootings are discussed. Kleck (2009) reports that 42 percent of news stories published in newspapers or televised in the four months after Columbine focused on issues of gun control. Researchers like Lemieux (2014) argue that gun ownership is significantly and positively correlated with the frequency of mass shootings and the number of fatalities resulting from such attacks. His cross-national analysis demonstrated that gun ownership was the best predictor of gun-related deaths and mass shootings, and that stricter firearm legislation led to a reduction in gun-related fatalities and mass shootings. On the other hand, he reports that 71 percent of mass shooting incidents between 1983 and 2013 were perpetrated with firearms that were “legally and directly accessible to the killers,” meaning that legislation and enforcement of gun laws would not likely eliminate mass shootings (Lemieux 2014: 82; see also Kleck 2009 and Hall and Friedman 2013). For example, mass shootings have occurred in other countries with stronger firearms regulations, such as Canada, Norway, and Scotland (Hall and Friedman 2013; Preti 2008).
Between the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999 and the Virginia Tech shootings in 2007, Canada experienced three school shootings and four occurred in Europe (Hall and Friedman 2013). Several more have occurred in Europe since the Virginia Tech incident. These instances highlight the fact that “school and mass shootings are not just an American problem” and cannot be resolved with legislation alone (Hall and Friedman 2013: 1276).

Although the issue of gun availability is an obvious debate topic for news outlets, experts, and researchers after mass shootings, many also focus on the violence portrayed in movies, television shows, and video games (Rocque 2012; de Venanzi 2012; Vossekuil et al. 2002; Bonanno and Levenson 2014; Langman 2009; Larkin 2007; Cullen 2009; Newman 2002; Anderson and Murphy 2003). Some researchers argue that rampage shooters (59 percent of whom are consumers of violent media) experience changes in their psychological wellbeing due to the normalization of violence in mainstream media (Vossekuil et al. 2002; Bonanno and Levenson 2014). Those who consume violent media are theoretically desensitized to the effects of violence and become more likely to engage in violent acts that mirror those they experience through video games or movies. However, the relationship between violent video games and criminal violence is correlational at best (Friedman and Michaels 2013). Some argue that violent entertainment leads to impulses to commit violence, while others argue that violent individuals are more likely to consume violent media. An additional caveat is that millions of people consume violent media every day, yet only a few of them become rampage shooters. Therefore, it is likely that other factors are simultaneously influencing students to attack their classmates and teachers (Rocque 2012).
Bullying and social ostracism represent a third common frame or suspected cause of school shootings. The media often portray school shooters as shy, quiet students who are not accepted by their peers and fail to connect with their teachers (de Venanzi 2012; Wike and Fraser 2009). Not only are these students passively ignored or rejected by their peers, they are also victims of bullying (Vossekuil et al. 2002; Bonanno and Levenson 2014; de Venanzi 2012; Wike and Fraser 2009). Vossekuil et al. (2002) found that over 70 percent of school shooters had been teased, taunted, threatened, or injured by their peers (Bonanno and Levenson 2014). Social ostracism at school can lead to anxiety, depression, aggression, and antisocial behavior, some of which correlate with violent behavior (Wike and Fraser 2009). McGee and DeBernardo (2002) created a profile of the “classroom avenger” – school shooters who were described as loners with an interest in violence (but not necessarily a history of violent behavior). However, research has suggested that the relationship between school bullying and rampage shootings is not completely clear because some of the perpetrators were actually popular among their peers and some even seemed to be bullies themselves (Fast 2008; Langman 2009; Newman 2002; Rocque 2012). Similar to the argument about violent media, Langman (2009) notes that bullying and social ostracism are unfortunately very common, but school shootings are rare occurrences, creating doubt that social rejection alone is responsible for the attacks. For example, the common narrative adopted by the media after the Columbine shootings that the shooters had been bullied has been thoroughly refuted (Cullen 2009).

Recently, mental illness has been the keyword in speculations about mass shootings. Interestingly, both gun enthusiasts and gun control advocates point to mental illness as the reason for gun violence (Hall and Friedman 2013). Psychological theories developed to explain
school shootings typically include mentions of mental illnesses (Rocque 2012). Depression, autism, anti-social personality disorder, and schizophrenia are a few of the diagnoses that are commonly mentioned in the aftermath of a mass shooting (Langman 2009; Vossekuil et al. 2002; Bonanno and Levenson 2014; McGee and DeBernardo 2002). There is often an automatic assumption among the general public that rampage shooters are suffering from a mental illness, as illustrated in Bonanno and Levenson’s (2014: 5) observation, “inherent in the understanding of what makes... an active shooter surely must be a positive history of significant mental disorder...” (see also Appelbaum 2013 and McGinty Webster, and Barry 2013).

Muschert and Ragnedda (2011) argue that people are quick to blame mental illness because it places the responsibility on the individual (as opposed to society), suggesting that the best solution is to treat the individual rather than change the status quo. However, Lemieux (2014) states that although 56 percent of individuals who perpetrated mass shootings showed signs of mental illness prior to the event, they were no more destructive than non-diagnosed offenders in terms of fatalities, number of weapons used, or the perpetrator outcome (arrest, suicide, or killed by police). Newman (2002) disagrees with the claim that mental illness is a major predictor of school shootings because the rate of psychological diagnoses among youth populations is not reflected in the number of attacks (Rocque 2012; Newman 2002). Approximately one in five teenagers (ages 13 to 18) experience psychological problems every year, meaning that about 20 percent of all teenagers suffer from mental disorders or illnesses (Duckworth 2013). However, school shootings are statistically extremely rare events (Donohue et al. 1998; Burns and Crawford 1999; Schildkraut et al. 2015; Satterly 2014). Between 1991 and 2013, there were 55 incidents in which at least one person was killed
during a school shooting at an elementary, middle, or high school or college/university in the U.S. (Agnich 2015). These 55 incidents involved a total of 64 perpetrators and resulted in 213 fatalities. During this time, there were 60 to 80 million students enrolled in schools across the country every year (National Center for Education Statistics 2015). So, while one out of every five teenagers experience mental problems, one out of 13 to 18 million students committed a school shooting and one out of 4 to 5 million students died as a result of a school shooting. It is very likely that if mental illness was the primary or even a major cause of school shootings, the number of attacks would be much higher.

In sum, it has been determined that school shootings account for a small percentage of all school violence. However, there remains a disproportionality between the perceived threat of school shootings and the objective risk of victimization. As people grasp for logical reasons or identifiable and preventable causes for these tragedies, their attention is often directed toward social ostracism, violence in the mainstream media, poor parenting, or political hot topics such as gun control and mental illness. Of all the scapegoats targeted by politicians, media outlets, and field experts, I expect that mental illness has recently become a primary focus (Metzl and MacLeish 2015). One major issue follows the erroneous assumption that mental illness is so strongly related to violence: it promotes negative attitudes, stereotypes, and hostility toward the mentally ill (McGinty et al. 2013). The conflation of mental illness with violence, dangerousness, or unpredictable heinous attacks further stigmatizes psychologically disordered individuals and creates barriers to seeking professional treatment.
CHAPTER II: IS MENTAL ILLNESS THE ROOT CAUSE OF SCHOOL SHOOTINGS?

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health defines mental illness as an emotional, behavioral, or mental disorder that meets requirements set forth by the DSM-IV\(^1\) regarding the type, degree, and duration of symptoms (National Institute of Mental Health 2015). Mental illness and psychological disorders are common in the US. Approximately 25 percent of American adults and 20 percent of teenagers (ages 13 to 18) experience mental illness each year (Duckworth 2013). About 18 percent of people in the US have an anxiety disorder, such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and various phobias (Duckworth 2013). Between six and seven percent of Americans suffer from Major Depression, 2.6 percent are bipolar, and 1.1 percent of Americans have schizophrenia.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that mental illness affects roughly one-quarter of the population, only 40 percent of adults and 50 percent of children who have a mental illness receive treatment (Duckworth 2013). Mojtabai, Olfson, Sampson, Jin, Druss, Wang, Wells, Pincus, and Kessler (2011) list several factors that prevent people from seeking mental health treatment: attitudinal/evaluative barriers such as stigma, lack of perceived need for treatment, and skepticism about the effectiveness of treatment; and structural barriers including limited financial resources, lack of transportation, and inconvenience. They used data from the National Comorbidity Survey-Replication (NCS-R) to conduct a study of 1,350 respondents who met the criteria for a disorder according to the DSM-IV but did not seek any treatment. They

\(^{1}\) In 2013, the DSM-IV was updated to the DSM-V. However, the sources cited in this chapter (published in 2013 and 2011, respectively) refer to the DSM-IV. In an effort to maintain consistency, I continue to refer to the DSM-IV as well.
conclude that low perceived need is more commonly reported than structural barriers for not seeking treatment among individuals with mild (rather than moderate or severe) disorders, whereas “most attitudinal/evaluative barriers [are] reported by a higher proportion of respondents with ... severe or moderate [rather than] mild conditions” (Mojtabai et al. 2011: 5).

Therefore, attitudinal/evaluative obstacles (such as stigma and skepticism) are more destructive than structural factors (such as the lack of financial resources) in terms of utilization of mental health services among individuals who possess symptoms that fulfill the criteria of a disorder in the DSM-IV, but were not receiving treatment.

Mental Health and the Criminal Justice System

Within the criminal justice system, the rate of mental illness is higher than in the general population. The mentally ill are overrepresented among those incarcerated, with rates two to four times higher than in the general public (Howard 2013; Prins and Draper 2009). Data suggest 15 to 20 percent of state prisoners and inmates of local jails self-report having been previously diagnosed with mental health disorders (Rueve and Welton 2008). A 2006 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 56 percent of inmates of state prisons, 45 percent of federal prisoners, and 64 percent of inmates in local jails showed symptoms of mental health problems (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2006). For all three types of inmates, symptoms of mania were the most common (between 35 and 55 percent), followed by major depression (15 to 30 percent), and psychotic disorders (10 to 25 percent) (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2006). This overrepresentation of the mentally ill also extends to those who are on probation or parole (Prins and Draper 2009). For children, the disparity is even more evident, with a shocking 70 percent of youth in the juvenile justice system having a mental health
problem and 20 percent suffering from a severe mental illness (Duckworth 2013). Although mental illness is more prevalent in the criminal justice system than in the general population, mental health treatment is less common. Only sixteen percent of jail inmates, 33 percent of state prisoners, and 25 percent of federal prisoners receive treatment during incarceration (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2006).

Some argue that the mentally ill are more prevalent in the criminal justice system because their disorders cause them to be more prone to violence (Link, Andrews, and Cullen 1992; Howard 2013). Others argue that the mentally ill are overrepresented in the criminal justice system not because they are more violent than non-disordered people, but because their disorders are unrecognized and untreated. According to this point of view, the primary reason for mentally ill persons being put in prison or jail lies within the shortcomings of our mental healthcare system; people do not receive the treatment they deserve and their symptoms result in violent behaviors. Rueve and Welton (2008) state that criminal charges are often based on actions that are manifestations of untreated symptoms. Without being identified as a mental disorder, their symptoms are dismissed as socially deviant rather than suggestive of a psychological problem, and their deviant behavior is criminalized. Additionally, a 2006 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 75 percent of inmates with mental health problems were also dependent on drugs or alcohol, a factor that substantially increases the likelihood that a person commits violence, regardless of whether or not they are mentally ill (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2006; Metzl and MacLeish 2015; Rueve and Welton 2008; Stuart 2003). Since prisons and jails are neither suitable nor prepared to identify, treat,
and rehabilitate those with mental health or substance abuse problems, they fail to address the fundamental issues of mental illness and often make matters worse (Howard 2013).

**Mental Health and Violence**

There is an assumed association that connects mental illness with violence, suggesting that the mentally ill are dangerous and threatening to public safety (Link, Andrews, and Cullen 1992). Despite the higher frequency of mental illness diagnoses, increased access to mental health care and a broader definition of mental illness to include less severe disorders, the general public is even more likely to associate violence with mental illness today than they were 50 years ago (Phelan, Link, Stueve, and Pescosolido 2000; McGinty et al. 2013). While there has been research supporting the claim that mentally ill individuals are more likely to engage in violent behavior and violent crime (Link, Andrews, and Cullen 1992), most people who have mental health problems are not violent, and, more importantly, a majority of people who commit violence are not mentally ill (Appelbaum 2013; Friedman and Michaels 2013; Rueve and Welton 2008; Metzl and MacLeish 2015; Stuart 2003; Harvard Health Publications 2011). Friedman and Michaels (2013: 455) state, “Although mass murderers probably have more psychopathology than other killers, the mentally ill as a group pose little risk of violence.”

While some research draws a connection between mental illness and violence, it is not true of most mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety (Link, Monahan, Stueve, and Cullen 1999; Metzl and MacLeish 2015). Various reports suggest that less than five percent of violent crimes in the US are perpetrated by someone suffering from a mental illness (Metzl and MacLeish 2015; Stuart 2003; Rueve and Welton 2008; Appelbaum 2013; Friedman and Michaels 2013; Fazel and Grann 2006). Swanson (1994) used data from the Epidemiologic Catchment
Area study to determine that only 4.3 percent of physical violence in the community would be eliminated if serious mental disorders were not present (Stuart 2003). Appelbaum (2013) echoes this finding, stating that 90 to 97 percent of violence would continue to occur, even in the absence of all mental disorders.

In fact, substance abuse\(^2\) (now termed “substance use disorders” in the DSM-V), has a stronger association with violence than mental illness (Swanson 1994; Friedman and Michaels 2013). Substance use disorders are defined as the recurring use of drugs and/or alcohol causing functionally and clinically significant impairment, such as health problems, or failure to meet major responsibilities at work, school, or home (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2015). People who abuse drugs or alcohol are seven times as likely as those without substance abuse problems to commit acts of violence. Swanson (1994) found that the elimination of substance abuse would result in a 34 percent decrease in physical violence. This argument is supported elsewhere (Metzl and MacLeish 2015; Rueve and Welton 2008; Harvard Health Publications 2011). In addition, substance abuse increases the likelihood of violence in people with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder by factors of three and four, respectively (Rueve and Welton 2008). It is clear that mental illness alone is neither a sufficient nor necessary cause of violence (Stuart 2003). Yet, the stereotype remains.

In reality, mentally ill persons are more likely to be the victim of a violent attack than the perpetrator (Appelbaum 2013; Stuart 2003; Metzl and MacLeish 2015). Additionally, those

\(^2\) While substance abuse or substance use disorders are defined in the DSM-IV and DSM-V, respectively, these disorders are not uniformly included or excluded in the reported statistics on the prevalence of mental health problems. For the purposes of the present study, substance use disorders are not included when discussing mental illnesses or mental disorders.
with a mental illness are more likely than their mentally healthy counterparts to be victimized (Hiday, Swartz, and Swanson 1999). For example, people diagnosed with schizophrenia are victimized at rates 65 to 130 percent higher than non-mentally ill persons (Metzl and MacLeish 2015). The mentally ill are more likely to be attacked by others or shot by the police than they are to commit violent crimes (Metzl and MacLeish 2015). Therefore, while some psychological disorders are related to violence, the broad stereotype that all persons with mental illnesses are dangerous or violent criminals is misguided.

**Mental Health and Murder**

With regard to this specific type of violence, the vast majority of mentally ill persons never commit murder. Although roughly 25 percent of the American population suffers from psychological problems, only five percent of murderers who use firearms have a mental disorder (Duckworth 2013; Metzel and MacLeish 2015). For example, between 2001 and 2010, there were 120,000 gun-related murders in the U.S. and less than 5 percent of the perpetrators were diagnosed as mentally ill (Metzel and MacLeish 2015). A study of murders committed by people with psychotic disorders found that only one out of 140,000 persons with schizophrenia had committed murder (Appelbaum 2013). Mentally ill individuals do not usually commit gun violence and (according to the 2001 MacArthur Study of Mental Disorder and Violence) only two to three percent of violence committed by previously hospitalized psychiatric patients involved the use of a firearm (Appelbaum 2013). Therefore, individuals with mental health problems are *underrepresented* among firearm-using homicide offenders.
Mental Health and School Shootings

Recently, the common reflex following mass shootings in general, and school shootings in particular, is to assume that the perpetrator was suffering from a mental illness (Metzl and MacLeish 2015; Rocque 2012). Metzl and MacLeish (2015) argue that this viewpoint carries two main assumptions: (a) mental illness is the cause of gun violence and (b) mental health practitioners can predict and prevent gun violence through diagnoses; and from these assumptions, two conclusions can be reached: (1) mass shootings in the US lead people to associate mental illness with criminal violence and become fearful of the mentally ill, and (2) measures of gun control are unnecessary because mental illness is the real problem. Some researchers have argued that a majority (up to 60 percent) of school shooters exhibit symptoms of mental illness (such as depression, delusions, and acute paranoia) before perpetrating the attack (Metzl and MacLeish 2015; Lemieux 2014; see also Follman 2012 and Lankford 2013). According to these reports, there is a striking pattern of mental illness in rampage shooters (Rocque 2012).

Unsurprisingly, theories connecting school shootings to mental illness are the most common types of psychological theories developed to explain the phenomenon (Rocque 2012). For example, Langman (2009) developed a typology of school shooters that offered three classifications: psychopathic (unable to have emotional connections with others; incapable of feeling remorse or guilt), psychotic (suffering a break from reality), and traumatized (having been victimized by physical, emotional, or sexual abuse). He found that half (five out of ten) of the offenders included in his study could be classified as psychotic, due to exhibiting schizophrenic-spectrum symptoms such as paranoia, grandiose delusions, and hallucinations.
Only two were classified as psychopathic and three were traumatized by past abuse.

Other research has generated much different results. For example, a report created by the US Department of Education and the Secret Service found that mental illness was not as common among school shooters, with only 17 percent of perpetrators having been diagnosed with a mental or behavioral disorder prior to their attack (Vossekuil et al. 2002; Bonanno and Levenson 2014). As with the general population, most attackers were not receiving treatment for mental health problems (Newman 2002). Only one-third of the assailants had ever had a mental health assessment and only 10 percent were known to be medication non-compliant (Vossekuil et al. 2002). Newman (2002) points out that although few school shooters are diagnosed before committing their attack, many are discovered to be mentally ill afterward, with symptoms of depression and schizophrenia being the most common.

It has been noted that many perpetrators of school shootings are suicidal (Bonanno and Levenson 2014; Langman 2009; Rocque 2012; Vosskekuil et al. 2002). Most individuals who commit suicide are suffering from problems either psychologically or in their personal lives due to conflict, failure, and or social ostracism (Appelbaum 2013; Duckworth 2013). According to the report compiled by the Secret Service and the Department of Education, 78 percent of school shooters had a history of attempted suicide or suicidal thoughts and 61 percent had documented histories of feeling extremely depressed (Vossekuil et al. 2002). Thus, the data suggests that there is a higher rate of mental illness among mass shooters than in the general population, yet mental illness cannot be a primary cause of school shootings because not all school shooters are mentally ill and overwhelming majority of mentally ill persons never
commit any violent act – let alone a mass shooting (Appelbaum 2013; Newman et al. 2002). For example, approximately seven percent of adults and 8.3 percent of adolescents suffer from depression, and suicide is the third most-common cause of death among 15 to 24 year olds in the US; these trends dwarf the number of school shootings (Newman 2002; Duckworth 2013). There are many more people suffering from psychological disorders than are perpetrating school shootings. Therefore, “given the number of adolescents who are depressed and suicidal, mental illness cannot be viewed as a straightforward predictor of rampage school shootings” (Newman 2002: 60).

It is important to acknowledge that there is a non-zero correlation between mental illness and violence; in other words, there are certain psychological disorders (such as psychotic or bipolar disorders) that put people at a greater risk of engaging in violent behaviors (Link, Andrews, and Cullen 1992; Link et al. 1999). However, there is a disproportionality between the perceived dangerousness of all mentally ill individuals and the likelihood that a mentally ill person will commit acts of mass violence, particularly a school shooting, which leads to the hypothesis that there is a moral panic taking place. I propose that there is a socially-constructed crisis that has paired mental illness with unpredictable and heinous acts of violence, specifically with regard to school shooters – a misguided stereotype that only exacerbates the stigma attached to mental illness. In order to locate the context in which I can investigate this proposition, I now turn to a review of moral panic theory.
CHAPTER III: MORAL PANICS

Stanley Cohen created the theory of moral panics to recognize the socially constructed crisis whereby people or conditions are defined as a threat to the values and interests of society through methodical and exaggerated presentations of distorted facts distributed by the mass media, which generate fear and outrage directed toward the perceived threat (Cohen 1972/2002; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). The fundamental element of a moral panic is that a substantial number of people believe that the moral order of their society is under attack by a group of evildoers who pose a threat to their way of life. Politicians, community and religious leaders, law enforcement personnel, and news/television personalities act as guards put in place to protect the moral fabric of a society and warn people of the threat to their safety. When a deviant person or behavior challenges or breaches the moral code, these guards are called on to identify the root of the problem and call for a solution that eliminates further risk.

Elements of a Moral Panic

Cohen (1972/2002) lists seven characteristics of moral panics, the first of which is the press. Mass media act as a filter that determines which events are newsworthy, and use most of their time and energy over-reporting on stories that are scandalous, strange/bizarre, or sensational crimes. Any information received from the media is consumed second-hand, because the press has already set an agenda that ignores certain information or events while concentrating on others (Schildkraut and Muschert 2014). During this process, agents of the media not only transmit the images and claims made by public officials, professionals, or experts, but they often participate in the claims-making process as well. The media also exaggerate and distort the seriousness of events by overstating the number of people involved,
embellishing the nature or degree of violence that occurred, inflating the amount of damage, and amplifying the level of community impact (Cohen 1972/2002). By doing this, the public becomes hypersensitive to the risk of victimization, because the media propagate an exaggerated sense of threat that is disproportionate to and unwarranted by the actual level of threat. This increased level of concern in the general public is the second characteristic of moral panics (Cohen 1972/2002). The over-reporting of misleading facts awakens a frenzy or hysteria that breeds anxiety and fear.

A third characteristic of moral panics is the involvement of politicians/legislators, because they possess a great deal of influence over the public’s perception of the legitimacy and significance of the threat (Cohen 1972/2002). Law enforcement is a fourth characteristic because there is often an escalation in the strength of policies and an intensification of their practice or enforcement as mechanisms of social control. The fifth characteristic is the presence of action groups that emerge during a moral panic who write and promote swift solutions to the problem or threat. The sixth characteristic is that of the folk devil, which is the embodiment of stereotypes or personification evil that symbolizes the threat to public safety. Folk devils are deemed suspicious and threatening, exposed, and shunned by the community to communicate the message that their behavior will not be tolerated. It is through this process that the deviants not only become candidates for social control, but “these conceptions, images, and stereotypes affect how and at what point the deviant is fed into the social control apparatus” (Cohen 1972/2002: 79).

The seventh and final characteristic of moral panics is that of a disaster analogy, where the evolution of a moral panic follows a timeline or progression similar to that of a disaster
(Cohen 1972/2002). In the beginning, there is a Warning phase, which consists of identifying dangerous conditions or signs of impending doom. The second phase – Impact – is the point at which the disaster strikes, igniting an immediate, unorganized response to the destruction, death, or injury. Third, the Inventory phase represents a frantic period of gathering information in an effort to figure out what happened. It is during this phase that rumors and ambiguous interpretations are collected and publicized by the media, building the foundation for how a situation is perceived. Using unverified accounts or interpretations, people react by becoming angry or indignant, creating theories, formulating plans, and making claims. It is also during this phase that folk devils are created (or recalled and reinforced), from which assumptions are made about the motivations and causes of the deviant behavior in question (Cohen 1972/2002; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). During the fourth (Reaction) phase, there is a formal implementation of relief and prevention efforts and the community slowly returns to normal, having adapted to the new way of life. The false interpretations and unverified information gathered immediately after the event are carried into the Reaction phase and crystallize into a hysteria of attitudes and opinions, which inform the nature and purpose of policies designed to limit the threat of future disasters (Cohen 1972/2002).

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) build on Cohen’s (1972/2002) theory of moral panics by listing five criteria that must be met in order to qualify as a moral panic. The first criterion is that there is widespread concern or fear of the threat posed by a certain person or group of people. “Widespread” does not necessarily mean that all or even a majority of people believe that their way of life is under attack, but that a considerable portion of the population are in agreement that something must be done to eliminate the threat (Schildkraut et al. 2015). A
second criterion is *hostility* toward the deviant person or group (what Cohen referred to as folk devils) (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994; Cohen 1972/2002). Becker (1963) referred to these people as “outsiders” because they crossed the moral boundaries of a society. DeYoung (1998) argues that “outsiders” easily become folk devils because they may already be marginalized and lack the resources and credibility to defeat stigmatization (Burns and Crawford 1999). The third criterion is a general *consensus* that the threat is real and imminent (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). This is achieved through sensationalistic over-reporting by the media, who exploit the gory details of horrific incidents to stir up anxiety (Cohen 1972/2002; Burns and Crawford 1999). The oversimplification of evil is an easy sell to the public conscience, which accelerates the rate of consensus that the folk devils pose a real and immediate threat to society.

The fourth criterion is *disproportionality*, which refers to a disparity between subjective concern and objective threat; the level of fear amongst the general public far outweighs the actual likelihood that an event will occur (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). *This is the crux of moral panic theory.* Without disproportionality, there can be panic, but the panic is in proportion to the threat. There are four indicators of disproportionality: (a) figures or data are exaggerated; (b) figures or data are fabricated; (c) certain harmful conditions are brought to the forefront while other (equally, or more threatening) conditions are ignored; and (d) there are changes in the amount of attention given to a condition over time, even when there is no change in the seriousness of the condition or level of threat. The fifth criterion of a moral panic identified by Good and Ben-Yehuda (1994) is *volatility*, which refers to the sudden, abrupt, and rapid eruption of a moral panic, followed by an equally rapid subsidence. Depending on the
intensity of the panic and the actions of moral entrepreneurs, moral panics may become institutionalized or routinized by long-term results or it may disappear altogether.

**Moral Entrepreneurs**

Moral panics rest on the idea that someone or something has severely offended the moral conscience of a society and that protections (rules, laws, punishments) must be devised and employed immediately. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) describe this as a “strengthening [of] the control apparatus,” which includes new, stronger or revitalized rules, renewed enforcement of an existing rule, intensification of hostility and condemnation, and harsher punishments. Those who determine and implement the rules are referred to as moral entrepreneurs (Becker 1963). They are individuals who believe that certain people (the deviants, folk devils, or “outsiders”) are knowingly involved in immoral and destructive behavior and are not receiving sufficient punishment. They declare that something must be done to deter or abolish such behavior (Cohen 1972/2002; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994).

There are two types of moral entrepreneurs: rule creators and rule enforcers. Rule creators are described as self-righteous individuals who believe that evil should be eradicated by any means necessary (Becker 1963). The goal of a rule creator is to command others to do what he thinks is right because “it will be good for them” (p. 148). Rule enforcers, on the other hand, exist to carry out the implementation of rules, policies, and laws constructed by the rule creator. They have a much more pragmatic or detached view of the rules; they are less concerned with the content and focus instead on their execution. An interesting element of the job of rule enforcer is that they must justify their position. They must demonstrate that the
rules they enforce are legitimate, necessary, worthwhile, and effective; they must prove that, in their absence, evil would triumph.

In the context of moral panics, moral entrepreneurs are leading a crusade to influence public opinion by discussing the extent of a perceived threat in the media and building social movements and organizations that raise awareness and combat the evil or deviance in question (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). Often, the “outsiders” or folk devils are exploited by moral entrepreneurs who aim to defend a political ideology. They are often members of marginalized groups who are helpless, powerless, and vulnerable (Burns and Crawford 1999). Cohen (1972/2002) refers to this as ideological exploitation, in which “the deviant is being used for societally defined ends without any regard to the consequences of this on the deviant himself” (p. 157).

Models of Moral Panics: Who is the Moral Entrepreneur?

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) discuss three types of moral panics that are distinguished by the moral entrepreneurs driving the movement. There are two dimensions along which moral panics differ: *morality versus interests* and *elitism versus grassroots*. The former dimension questions the motive of the moral entrepreneur. Are they focused on promoting a particular ideology or issue of morality? Or, are they seeking to make gains in terms of power, respectability, wealth, or ownership of an area of expertise? The second dimension, *elitism versus grassroots*, questions the number and orientation of moral entrepreneurs. Is the moral panic being created and maintained by the general public, top political leaders, or institutions and organizations that fall somewhere in the middle? According to Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), moral panics are either driven by elites, interest groups, or grassroots efforts (the
general public). Elites can be either economic (those who possess endless wealth) or institutional (powerful government and military officials, leaders of large corporations, media executives, etc.). Interest groups are organizations, local institutions (municipalities, education systems, small businesses, media, law enforcement), lobbyists, and social movements who advocate for specific causes. Grassroots moral entrepreneurship consists of the general public; “the rest of us,” as described by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994: 125). These are everyday people who do not have infinite resources or influence/authority in institutional contexts. The three moral entrepreneurs listed here represent the three types of moral panics.

*Elite-Engineered Moral Panics*

The elite-engineered model “argues that an elite group deliberately and consciously undertakes a campaign to generate and sustain concern, fear, and panic on the part of the public over an issue that they recognize not to be terribly harmful to the society as a whole” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994: 135). Usually, when elites create a moral panic, it is an attempt to divert attention away from other problems facing society – particularly those that threaten to potentially undermine or weaken their power and interests. Irrelevant or inconsequential issues are raised to the forefront of public conscience and sensationalized to cover up other matters (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clark and Roberts 1978; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). Elites have the power and influence to orchestrate hegemony (Hall et al. 1978), which means that they have the ability to guide legislation and law enforcement, direct media attention, and sway the distribution of resources to the benefit of their cause to the extent that those things become part of the status quo. Most institutions take their cues from the elites, who can steer the conversation and inspire others to follow along.
For example, researchers have used the elite-engineered model to investigate the “war on terror” and the “war on drugs” as moral panics. In the days following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Bush administration declared the “war on terror,” the rhetoric of which created a moral panic that capitalized on fears of national security, increased suspicion toward foreigners, and criminalized immigrants (Hauptman 2013; Bonn 2010). Led by moral entrepreneurs in the top tiers of federal government, the war on terror established formal mechanisms of social control by passing the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) and creating the Department of Homeland Security. Terrorism, immigration, and threats to national security were identified as problematic by prominent politicians and continuously reported by the media, keeping these topics at the forefront of public concern and discourse (Rothe and Muzzatti 2004). The moral panic created by political elites after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks not only gave credibility and legitimacy to the war on terror, but also provided an opportunity to enhance State power. Elites therefore benefitted from the mass hysteria, which they manufactured. As Rothe and Muzzatti (2004) state, “The responses of the [Bush] administration were not solely about bringing anyone to justice for the terrorist attacks. It was also about expanding U.S. global power and conquest…” (p. 347).

The war on drugs is another example of an elite-engineered moral panic (Hawdon 2001). The policies and rhetoric of the Reagan administration identified drug use as a social problem of epidemic proportions, despite the fact that drug use was decreasing. The social control apparatus was expanded and strengthened with the creation of formal policies, educational programs, and aggressive punishments, such as the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, the Zero
Tolerance Policy, and the DARE program (Drug Abuse Resistance Education). These examples of moral panics were orchestrated by political elites, cultivated by presidential rhetoric, communicated by the media, and legitimated by the establishment of social control mechanisms. The implementation of policies and programs aimed at villifying and punishing drug users in the name of decreasing crime also benefitted political elites by providing an opportunity for elites to redefine the moral boundaries of American society in the wake of the social acceptability of drugs in the 1970s (Hawdon 2001).

Interest-Group Moral Panics

The interest-group model argues that moral panics are the consequence of interest or action groups that call attention to evils that threaten the moral order (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). While interest groups are necessary, yet secondary actors in elite-engineered moral panics, they are the primary actors in the interest-group model. In this case, interest groups are not taking cues from the elites; “they are the movers and shakers” responsible for creating and sustaining the moral panic without the guidance or direction of political or corporate giants (p. 139). When interest groups are driving the moral panic, they may be genuinely concerned about a moral cause, but their efforts almost always simultaneously advance their own status in the process. The morality versus interests dimension is not mutually exclusive here; action groups get to advocate for their ideological philosophy and make gains in terms of respectability, resources, and ownership of an area of expertise.

One example of an interest-group moral panic is found when examining the rejection of homosexuality beginning in the 1950s (Fejes 2008). During this time, homosexuals were deemed “sick,” “perverted,” and assumed to be sexual predators, child molesters, or even
murderers. Immorality in the form of homosexuality was identified as a major threat to the safety of society and interest groups responded with laws and policies designed to prohibit and punish the behavior. Same-sex activity led to individuals being arrested and institutionalized in mental hospitals, where they were diagnosed as mentally ill. Homosexuality was criminalized, pathologized, and demonized by interest groups and agents of social control such as the police, mental health practitioners, and religious groups who stood to benefit from the moral panic. Doctors and mental health professionals benefitted from the pathologization and medicalization of homosexuality through increased opportunities to “treat” the afflicted; law enforcement personnel benefitted from the criminalization of homosexuals who ended up in the criminal justice system; and religious groups/organizations benefitted from the condemnation of homosexuality by seizing the opportunity to uphold their religious moral boundaries and spread them outward into society through influencing public opinion and public policy.

Similarly, religious organizations ignited a moral panic in the 1980s in response to satanism, arguing that day care centers, kidnappings, and abortion clinics were pathways to obtaining sacrificial children for ritual slaughter (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). In these cases, interest groups identify the evil that exists in society and name the folk devil to be condemned and controlled. The legend of satanism and the ensuing moral panic benefitted religious fundamentalists because it provided a dramatic realization of “what happens when godless secularism is allowed to fester” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994: 63). This type of fear galvanizes outrage and renews support for religious fundamentalism.
Religious organizations, health practitioners, civil rights activists, political lobbyists, professionals and experts in various fields, and advocates from a range of agencies are often consulted after a tragedy or disaster. When they are given a platform and the opportunity to define the situation, interest groups construct a narrative that can dictate others’ perceptions of a group of people, a series of events, or the threat of reoccurrence.

**Grassroots Moral Panics**

The third type of moral panic is the grassroots model, which is created by the general public over a fear or concern that is widespread and genuinely felt among a broad segment of the population (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). A central tenet of the grassroots model is that a considerable number of people steadfastly believe that there is a legitimate and imminent threat to their safety, values, or existence. Even if the public’s fears are misguided or mistaken based on exaggerated information, the sentiment is nonetheless real. Ironically, interest group and elite-engineered moral panics hinge on the participation of the masses. In order for politicians and institutional leaders to stir up concern and anxiety, there must be a pre-existing, latent or underlying fear among the general public. “Politicians and the media cannot fabricate concern where none existed previously” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994: 127). According to proponents of the grassroots model, the kindling is in place long before elites or mid-level leaders use their influence and persuasion to ignite the movement into a full-blown panic.

The most well-known example of a grassroots moral panic is that of the European Renaissance witch craze and the Salem (Massachusetts) witchcraft trials in the 1600s (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994; Thompson 1998; Erikson 1966). During this time, arrangements of familial, economic, political, and religious institutions were changing. There was widespread
fear and concern among the public about “deviant” women who were colluding with Satan to commit demonic acts and threatening the moral order of society. In Europe, over 400,000 women were executed under suspicion of witchcraft (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). Other examples of grassroots moral panics include the sex slave abduction rumor in France during 1969, the fear among African Americans that corporate executives were poisoning their communities by planting and distributing crack cocaine and heroin during the early 1990s, and the strong opposition to the utilization of nuclear energy in America after accidents in the late 1970s and 1980s (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). These movements were not created by political elites, the media, or interest groups (such as police forces, medical communities, political lobbyists, or religious organizations). These movements were orchestrated by the public in an effort to eliminate the perceived threat to the moral fabric of society.

Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity

Jeffrey Alexander (2004) discusses tragedies and traumatic events in terms of collective identity and the ways in which a tragedy leaves a lasting imprint on the collective memory. As he states, “cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever...” (Alexander 2004: 1). According to cultural trauma theory, an event which has explosive qualities and radically disrupts social life – such as a school shooting – commands the attention of the public and triggers emotional responses as they search for an explanation. In order for a wider audience to experience and express their traumatization, there must be a new master narrative through which the event can be understood. This master narrative is similar to a moral panic in that it requires consensus and
concern from a considerable portion of the population, which is achieved through the participation of individuals who sway public opinion. In cultural trauma theory, these are called carrier groups. “Carrier groups are the collective agents of the trauma process” (Alexander 2004: 11). Much like moral entrepreneurs in moral panic theory, these individuals can have both genuine and self-serving interests in the construction of a master narrative. Carrier groups are similar to moral entrepreneurs in other ways, such as their location(s) in the social hierarchy and their various abilities to persuade and influence the public (Alexander 2004; Cohen 1972/2002; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994).

There are four elements that contribute to a master narrative: (1) the nature of the pain, (2) the nature of the victim, (3) relation of the victim to a wider audience, and (4) attribution of responsibility. The first element, nature of the pain, includes a consideration of how many people were affected, and to what degree. School shootings not only claim the lives of the victims, but oftentimes, the perceived motivation behind a school shooting adds another layer of pain to the experience. The second and third elements, nature of the victim and relation of the victim to a wider audience, ask whether certain groups were targeted, if the general public is meant to receive the brunt of the pain, or if the general public experiences secondary trauma because they identify with or relate to the victims. With regard to school shootings, the victims are most commonly students. While students in a particular school are usually the primary target, they are representative of students everywhere in the eyes of the public. School shootings in which the victims seem to be selected randomly therefore offend the public conscience more so than if the victims were less relatable. The fourth element, attribution of responsibility, establishes an antagonist or a perpetrator who can be identified as
the cause of the traumatizing event. Similar to moral panic theory, cultural trauma examines the need to locate and identify something to which the horrendous event can be attributed—whether real or imagined. Alexander (2004) states that “this issue is always a matter of symbolic and social construction” (p. 15). The antagonist in Alexander’s theory is similar to the folk devil in moral panic theory, because these are real or imagined perpetrators who are established as the cause of the tragedy through a process of social construction.

Moral panic theory and cultural trauma originate in different disciplines (sociology/criminology and psychology, respectively), but they are similar approaches to explaining the collective experience of and reaction to a traumatic event or tragedy and how society searches for answers that explain why it happened. Moral entrepreneurs and carrier groups are responsible for driving the narrative in the aftermath of a traumatic event or tragedy, while socially-constructed antagonists and folk devils are identified as the perpetrators responsible for the event (Alexander 2004; Cohen 1972/2002; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994).

Frame Analysis of a Moral Panic

Recall Cohen’s (1972/2002) argument that information broadcast by the media is consumed second-hand by the public because only stories that are decidedly newsworthy are reported and relayed from a political or commercial bias. Framing is a similar phenomenon, because it refers to the organization of ideas or principles “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” events in order to influence how they are interpreted by the public (Goffman 1974: 21; Hawdon, Oksanen, and Rasanen 2012). The frame dictates what people notice about a problem, how they come to understand it, and how they choose to react to it (Entman 1993; Schildkraut and Muschert 2014; Hawdon et al. 2012). The mass media is responsible for
selecting and cultivating frames by promoting certain aspects of the problem while concealing others. Therefore, frame analysis is the method of investigation used to understand the interaction between the media and their audience (Entman 1993; Seiff 2003).

Entman (1993) specifies that framing consists of two elements: selection and salience. Selection includes endorsing a particular definition of the problem, a moral evaluation of it, and the recognition of a need for a solution. Salience, on the other hand, refers to “making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences” (p. 53). By highlighting some features of an issue and obscuring others, the media can shift or inspire the audience’s reaction. There are four main functions of frames, according to Entman (1993). Frames (1) define the problem and (2) diagnose the causes, which include identifying the damage being done and those responsible for it. Next, frames (3) declare a moral judgment or evaluation of the actors and their effects. Finally, frames (4) suggest remedies that would solve the problem in question. In essence, the frames created by the media tell us how to make sense of a situation and give it meaning (Hawdon, Agnich, Wood, and Ryan 2014).

“After a disaster or mass tragedy, the media tends to operate in ‘media hype mode,’ providing extensive and amplified coverage of the event” (Hawdon, Agnich, and Ryan 2014: 1-2). This coverage can change the way that an event unfolds, what people perceive as being the cause of the event, how they give it meaning, who is seen as responsible, and the likelihood that it will happen again (Hawdon et al. 2014a; Hawdon et al. 2014b). Long-term coverage can also influence public opinion, call attention to the political significance of the issue, guide public policy developed in response to the tragedy, or accelerate the implementation of existing policies. Basically, the media portrayal of disasters or acts of mass violence impacts the way the
events are interpreted and understood in American society. “Sensationalized coverage of
violent events, such as ... heinous murders or [mass violence] can lead to exaggerated concerns
and fears” (Hawdon et al. 2014a: 2). It is through this orchestrated framing that the media
provoke fear and anxiety among the community.

In frame analysis, it is important to consider the people or organizations that are
constructing and supporting the frame (Altheide 2009; Burns and Crawford 1999). Who is
writing the narrative? Whose voices are being heard? Who benefits from the frame? Who is the
moral entrepreneur? Claims-makers often manipulate issues to fit their own self-serving
interests. Taking consideration for who is driving the discourse will not only point to a moral
entrepreneur; it will also lead investigators to the type of moral panic being used to showcase
and build support for a cause. For example, during the elite-engineered moral panics
surrounding the “war on terror” (Hauptman 2013) and the “war on drugs” (Hawdon 2001),
presidential administrations carefully crafted policies and delivered speeches using rhetoric
that convinced Americans that terrorism or drugs were legitimate causes for concern and
incited fear among the public. During interest-group moral panics about homosexuality (Fejes
2008) or satanic ritual (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994), institutions such as religion, medicine,
and law enforcement constructed the movements by bringing attention to certain issues and
publicly labeling certain people as problematic “folk devils.” Grassroots moral panics about
witchcraft or the harmful effects of nuclear energy appeared without prompt from political
elites or interest groups, but effectively consumed the public conscience.
Issue-Attention Cycle

The construction of frames occurs within a larger process referred to as the issue-attention cycle (Downs 1972). Previous research applies the issue-attention cycle to empirical analyses of moral panics (Schildkraut and Muschert 2014). The cycle represents a sequence of events that follows the distribution and consumption of sensational news stories through the media and into the public conscience. The pre-problem stage is the period of time in which the problem exists, but “has not yet captured much public attention” (Downs 1972: 39). The second stage, “alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm,” begins with a dramatic series of events that brings the problem to the forefront of the public conscience. The public suddenly becomes aware of the issue and there is a sense of urgency in searching for a solution to the problem. The third stage is when the public realizes the high cost of significant progress, meaning that it becomes clear to them that a speedy, effective, and sustainable solution will come at a cost – including not only financial investment, but sacrifices in other areas of life. This leads to the fourth stage, which is characterized by a decline in public interest. People either become discouraged, bored, or nervous and do not keep their attention focused on the matter. The fifth and final stage of the issue-attention cycle is a period of limbo, when interest is sporadic at best and new issues emerge. Ultimately, each problem or crisis will “rise into public view, capture center stage for a while, and then gradually fade away as it is replaced by more fashionable issues moving into their crisis phases” (p. 43).

The second stage – alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm – is where most of the framing takes place because it occurs immediately after the event or tragedy, when rumors are mistaken as facts and claims are made without verification. Media outlets take this opportunity
to define the problem, offer a moral evaluation of it, and look for a solution. This is the stage during which the meaning-making occurs and from which moral panics are born.

When applying the issue-attention cycle to a moral panic about school shootings, the period of alarmed discovery consists of urgent news reports and panicked searches for information. Who was the perpetrator? Who were the victims? How many people were injured or killed? How did this happen? Why did they do it? Also during this time, eyewitness accounts of the event paint a picture of what happened, when it happened, to whom it happened, and who is responsible. Others who were close to the action, those who represent the school or the community, law enforcement personnel, psychological and criminological experts, and politicians will publicly speculate on the motives, methods, planning and execution of the attack. Were there warning signs? Could the attack have been prevented? What safety measures failed? Is it going to happen again? What can be done in the future to mitigate the risk of future attacks? These discussions take place within a relatively short amount of time after the event, before it fades from public conscience and is replaced by a new major news story.

**Social Stage Model of Coping**

Previous research focusing on media response after mass tragedies have utilized Pennebaker and Harber’s (1993) social stage model of coping (Hawdon et al. 2014a; Hawdon et al. 2014b). Pennebaker and Harber originally developed this model by observing the discourse and media coverage after natural disasters. They found that there were three distinct phases of coping: emergency, inhibition, and adaptation. The emergency phase is the two to three weeks immediately following the event. During this time, people are openly sharing their
feelings and processing the information they are given. The second stage, the inhibition phase (three to six weeks after the event), is when people continue to think to themselves, but do not talk about it as often. In the adaptation phase (six weeks after the event and onward), thoughts and discussions taper off and almost completely disappear (Hawdon et al. 2014a; Hawdon et al. 2014b).

Recall that Cohen (1972/2002) argued that a moral panic followed a disaster analogy, which follows four developmental phases: warning, impact, inventory, and reaction. The emergency phase of the social stage model of coping corresponds with the “impact” and “inventory” phases of Cohen’s disaster analogy, because it begins when the disaster strikes and is followed by an immediate, unorganized response. This is similar to Pennebaker and Harber’s (1993) emergency phase because it represents the brief period of time following a tragedy and the frantic struggle to understand what happened. The inhibition and adaptation phases of the social stage model of coping correspond to Cohen’s (1972/2002) “reaction” phase in the disaster analogy, because this is when relief efforts and preventative measures are implemented in order to ease the worries of the public.

The first stage of Pennebaker and Harber’s (1993) social stage model of coping, the emergency phase, is most relevant to this analysis, because this is when people “are processing the events... trying to make sense of [it all]” (p. 3). Therefore, the first three weeks following a tragedy are the most crucial in terms of investigating the frames used to characterize and portray the event.

As Hawdon et al. (2014a) demonstrate in their frame analysis of print media after the Virginia Tech tragedy, 80 percent of the 854 articles analyzed were published during the
adaptation phase and an additional 10 percent of the articles were written during the inhibition phase, meaning ninety percent of national and local newspaper articles were published within the first six weeks after the shooting. Interestingly, national newspapers focused more on potential causes of the shooting during the adaptation phase, while the local newspaper focused more on the victims and facts of the story. During the inhibition phase, the local paper published more articles about the potential causes than did the national papers. This finding is important because it demonstrates that national newspapers write for a wider, more detached audience, who are more likely to search for meaning-making in the causes of the event (rather than the solidarity among the shaken community) in the weeks immediately following the event.

School Shootings as a Moral Panic

Much research has been published on the use of school shootings to create a discourse of fear (Altheide 2009; Muschert and Ragnedda 2011; Rocque 2012), but very few studies go so far as to classify the phenomenon as a moral panic (Donohue et al. 1998; Burns and Crawford 1999; Springhall 1999; Schildkraut et al. 2015). Burns and Crawford (1999) were among the first researchers to study school shootings in the context of a moral panic. They explored the role of the public, the media, and politicians in constructing and maintaining the crusade by demonstrating that four out of the five criteria – concern, consensus, hostility, and disproportionality – were satisfied (volatility was omitted from the study). Schildkraut et al. (2015) performed a quantitative analysis of all five elements of moral panics to school shootings by measuring the effects of various factors (such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, on-versus off-campus residency, and perceived risk of violent versus property victimization) on
individual vulnerability to being swept up in the panic. The results of these studies suggest that there is a moral panic about school shootings because there is widespread concern, consensus in the legitimacy of the threat, a disproportionality between subjective and objective threat, increased hostility toward the folk devil (which in this case, is school shooters in general, rather than the specific causes of the attack), and volatility in the appearance and disappearance of the issue in the media.

Burns and Crawford (1999) and Schildkraut et al. (2015) measured concern in terms of the volume and salience of media coverage. The number and length of newspaper articles published as well as the amount of airtime given to network and cable news broadcasts and radio programming after school shootings quantify concern. Salience was measured by observing how many viewers/listeners tune into television and radio broadcasts and how many people access internet news sites in a given period of time. For example, Schildkraut et al. (2015) found that Fox News and CNN had double and triple the number of viewers on the day of the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, respectively; and website access to MSNBC.com increased from an average of 400,000 views per day to 108.8 million views on April 16, 2007, the day of the Virginia Tech tragedy. Hostility was measured by observing the reactions to the folk devil. For example, after Columbine, hostility was directed toward youth who looked “Gothic” or were “loners.” After Virginia Tech, Asian and Asian-American members of the Blacksburg community were victims of resentment and intimidation (Roesch 2009). Hostility was also measured in terms of the formal, punitive responses to school shootings, such as installing metal detectors in schools, increasing the number of school resource officers, lockdown protocols and evacuation drills, surveillance systems, emergency alert systems, restricted
access to school buildings, and increased severity of punishment for engaging in school violence (Schildkraut et al. 2015; Burns and Crawford 1999; Bonanno and Levenson 2014; Altheide 2009).

National and local public opinion polls that estimate how many people consider school shootings to be a major threat to the safety of students and school personnel were also used to measure the element of consensus. This is an assessment of the level of agreement that school shootings pose a legitimate threat to safety and that the deviants in question are not only responsible, but should also be held accountable. Consensus is different from concern because it represents a collective agreement that the threat of being victimized in a school shooting is legitimate, omnipresent, and universal. For example, Schildkraut et al. (2015) point out that after Columbine, school shootings were no longer seen as isolated incidents but could happen anywhere, to anyone, at anytime. Disproportionality is demonstrated “when the scale of the response received exceeds the actual magnitude of the problem” (Schildkraut et al. 2015: 96). Referring back to the indicators outlined in Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s (1994) theory, disproportionality is the result of exaggerated or fabricated data about the frequency of school shootings, the number of people affected by them, or speculative claims regarding the shooter’s motive. Excessive attention given to certain aspects of school shootings in favor of obscuring other aspects (focusing more on the supposed maliciousness of gothic teenagers rather than the lack of effective gun control, for example) is also an indicator of disproportionality. Finally, volatility was measured by the amount of time an event remains in the public eye and the abrupt manner in which a school shooting erupts and subsides.
Schildkraut et al. (2015) used Downs’ (1972) issue-attention cycle to measure the media lifespans of Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook to find that each lasted about a month.

Who Are the Folk Devils and What Are the Frames?

Research has acknowledged a number of frames and “folk devils” associated with school shootings, even if they were not specifically labeling the issue as a moral panic. For example, Altheide (2009) argues that Columbine was followed by a discourse that framed it as an act of terrorism, a term that is guaranteed to provoke widespread fear of future attacks and frantic demands for prevention. Some of the most popular frames and folk devils discussed include: alienated youth/“Goths” (Frymer 2009; Verlinden et al. 2000) and juvenile deviants (Burns and Crawford 1999); students who had poor peer relationships, were loners, and/or were victims of bullying (Wike and Fraser 2009; Rocque 2012); violence in entertainment media (movies, video games, music, and television) (de Venanzi 2012; Muschert and Ragnedda 2011; Wike and Fraser 2009; Rocque 2012); hegemonic/violent masculinity (Rocque 2012; Muschert and Ragnedda 2011); access to firearms (Wike and Fraser 2009; Rocque 2012); and mental illness (Wike and Fraser 2009; Rocque 2012; Muschert and Ragnedda 2011, Vossekuil et al. 2002; Bonanno and Levenson 2014; Newman 2002).

Considering the conclusion that school shootings have become a moral panic in our society, the present study seeks to examine whether the mentally ill are the currently established folk devil. I start by investigating the media frame that contributes to disproportionality: the discourse that describes all mentally ill persons as violent, unpredictable, deranged killers, even though not all mental illnesses increase the risk of violent behavior, a vast majority of the mentally ill are not violent, and the mentally ill are more likely to be victims
than perpetrators of violent crimes (Link, Andrews, and Cullen 1992; Link et al. 1999; Metzl and MacLeish 2015; Appelbaum 2013; Stuart 2003). Other criteria of moral panics are also evident, such as volatility (improving access to mental health care is not a priority unless it is being discussed in the context of some heinous crime) and hostility (criminalization of the mentally ill). With the identification of the mentally ill as folk devils, I turn to the question of moral entrepreneurs. Which type of moral panic is being constructed? Who is driving the narrative? 

*Who Are the Moral Entrepreneurs?*

Burns and Crawford (1999) illustrated a triangular arrangement of moral entrepreneurs involved in the construction and maintenance of the school shooting moral panic, focusing on juvenile delinquents as the folk devils. Their model can be seen in Figure 3.1, below.

![Figure 3.1 Interactions in the School Shooting Moral Panic](Burns and Crawford 1999)

In this model, the media, the public, and politicians interact in a constant circular motion. The media feeds the public’s appetite for sensational news, the public becomes disturbed by the situation, and continues to consume media coverage of the event. The public then turns to politicians to demand a solution, the politicians pass legislation and use the media to announce
their efforts to crack down on the deviants. The media coverage of political reactions reiterates the legitimacy of the “problem” and perpetuates public concern. The media helps inform politicians which issues have been taken up by the public and then helps inform the public which issues have been recognized by politicians and how they plan to address them. The folk devils or “outsiders” (in the case above, “juveniles” refers to juvenile delinquents), who are the targets of condemnation, criminalization, and demonization, are located outside of the cycle. This placement is symbolic of the fact that folk devils are often members of marginalized groups who are helpless in their persecution, powerless to combat the punitive restrictions placed on them by politicians, and vulnerable to the hostility directed toward them by the public.

I borrow from Burns and Crawford’s (1999) illustration of school shootings as a moral panic and modify it to represent the three types of moral panics listed in Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s (1994) theory. This re-created model of moral panics can be seen in Figure 3.2, below. In this illustration, the media is located in the center of the action, because media coverage is utilized by all three types of moral entrepreneurs in their crusades. The direction of activity depends on who is driving the narrative: if the moral panic is elite-engineered, the crusade starts at the top with politicians who use the media to share their constructed crisis and identify folk devils; if the moral panic is being propelled by interest groups, the crusade starts from the bottom right of the triangle and reaches the public and politicians via the media; if it is a grassroots-driven crusade, the public initiates the framing and identifies the folk devils, using the media to reach interest groups and politicians. The groups listed in Figure 3.2 (i.e., politicians, school administrators, gun rights activists, and victims’ families) are only examples of potential moral entrepreneurs; they are not meant to be an exhaustive list of all moral
entrepreneurs included in this study.\textsuperscript{3} Within any moral panic model, the moral entrepreneurs leading the crusade choose the folk devil and utilize the media to promote and broadcast the stereotypes and identifiable characteristics used to label individuals as a threat to society and deserving of condemnation.

![Figure 3.2 Models of Moral Panics: Moral Entrepreneurs Interacting with the Media](image)

Figure 3.2 figure illustrates the flow of information during a socially constructed crisis of school shootings where the mentally ill – or any other folk devil – is identified as the folk devil responsible for the evils that threaten social order. An elite-engineered moral panic would

\textsuperscript{3} If an individual could be placed in multiple moral entrepreneur categories, they will be classified according to their primary role within the context of the statement. For example, if the victims’ families have formed a structured organization and someone is speaking to the media on behalf of that organization, they would be categorized as interest group rather than grassroots.
begin with politicians using the media to address the public and declare mental illness as the root cause of school shootings. If interest groups are constructing the moral panic, then the narrative will begin with organizations (gun rights activists, for example), institutions (school boards, law enforcement, etc.), experts (i.e., criminologists), and professionals in relevant fields (such as mental health care providers) pointing to mental illness as the evil that must be contained in order to protect the safety of children. If it is a grassroots movement to name mental illness as the main reason for school shootings, then the frame will be constructed by the members of a community who speculate on the identity, history, intentions, and motives of school shooters, describing them as disturbed or insane without official records to substantiate such claims (Appelbaum 2013). Often, this includes statements from concerned parents, community members, victims’ friends and families, or eyewitnesses. In this figure, it is important to point out that the lines directed toward the folk devil are not meant to represent moral entrepreneurs acting alone in the creation of a folk devil. Rather, it is the interaction of these moral entrepreneurs with and through the media that identifies a folk devil. No moral entrepreneur can successfully build or maintain a moral panic without utilizing the media (Cohen 1972/2002), and the media count on moral entrepreneurs to legitimize their socially-constructed fears. In other words, the moral entrepreneurs need the media to reach the public, and the media needs input and cooperation from moral entrepreneurs in order for the public to engage in the moral panic.
CHAPTER IV: METHODS

This study builds from the previous conclusions of Schildkraut et al. (2015) and Burns and Crawford (1999) that there is a moral panic in America in response to school shootings. I add to this research by investigating the type of moral entrepreneur(s) leading the narrative, the type of folk devil(s) identified in the moral panic, and how these two elements – moral entrepreneurs and folk devils – have changed in the past 25 years.

Research Questions

This research will address four central questions: (1) what folk devils have been linked to school shootings since 1991? (2) which moral panic models best account for the construction of the panic? (3) who are the moral entrepreneurs driving the moral panic? and (4) is there a relationship between the moral entrepreneurs leading the narrative and the folk devil named in the moral panic?

The first research question addresses the folk devil associated with the moral panic of school shootings. Specifically, how has the folk devil changed over time? Students who have been socially ostracized or bullied by their classmates, youth who consume an excessive amount of violent entertainment media (movies, music, and video games), students with an interest in and easy access to firearms, and those who exhibit symptoms of psychological disorders are examples of folk devils to whom school shootings have been attributed. Which folk devils have been identified in the media since 1990? Have some folk devils been more popular than others at different times? Does a folk devil become widely accepted and then fade from public conscience? Which folk devil is the currently accepted evildoer? I anticipate that the school shooting moral panic has recently shifted to the mentally ill as the primary
threat to safety in schools because the two largest school shootings in recent history – Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook – were high-profile cases that concentrated on the psychological state of the shooter. Therefore, I hypothesize that the most recent and currently accepted folk devil in this moral panic is the mentally ill; students who commit acts of mass violence are assumed to be psychologically disordered.

\( H_1: \text{The current folk devil associated with school shootings is the mentally ill.} \)

The second and third research questions focus on which moral panic model best accounts for how the moral panic was constructed and which moral entrepreneurs contributed to the moral panic. Has the moral panic been driven by a grassroots movement of concerned members of the community, interest groups who are using school shootings to their advantage in pushing an agenda, or political elites who capitalize on an opportunity to direct the public conscience to one issue (mental illness, for example) while obscuring or suppressing conversations about other issues (gun control, for instance)? How has this discourse changed over time? I anticipate that, throughout the past 25 years, the narrative of school shootings has been most often driven by elites and that it has shifted from a mostly interest group model to an elite-engineered model as the moral panic strengthened over time. I expect this shift in moral entrepreneur because interests groups and elites can – and often do – use the momentum of a moral panic for their own benefit. Interest groups such as gun control advocates, gun rights activists, and mental health professionals stand to gain or lose support for their respective fields through their involvement with the moral panic about school shootings. Elites are influenced by the opinions of the interest groups, and subsequently assume control of the narrative surrounding the moral panic. Elites have the power and influence to create
policies in their own favor, which is motivation for the continued command of the moral panic discourse. Therefore, elites could harness the momentum for gun control or increased access to mental health care as justification for creating policies that safeguard the process of purchasing a gun or allocate more funding to mental health services.

\[ H_2: \text{The elite-engineered model has been the most frequently used model in the construction of the moral panic about school shootings.} \]

\[ H_3: \text{The moral panic about school shootings started as an interest-group model and has recently shifted to elite-engineered.} \]

The fourth research question integrates the previous three hypotheses by exploring the relationship between moral entrepreneurs, model type, and folk devils associated with the moral panic. Are different moral entrepreneurs or models related to the establishment of different folk devils? I expect that grassroots and interest groups will be linked to the recognition of violent entertainment media and social alienation as causes of school shootings because these are details about the shooter that only classmates, friends, and family members would be able to identify. Bullying and consumption of violent media are largely grassroots problems, meaning they are best addressed at the individual level, where parents, teachers, and peers can intervene or regulate the behavior. For example, students who shared classes with the shooter are more likely to know whether the shooter was a victim of bullying or a “loner” than are elites. Likewise, parents and peers are more likely than elites to be familiar with kids’ taste in music, movies, or video games and whether that child will mimic or emulate the behavior. Additionally, I expect interest groups and elites to be linked with the naming of firearms and mental illness as the primary causes of school shootings because these are
broader social issues that extend beyond the specific circumstances of the individual shooter. In other words, gun legislation and mental health are issues that can be championed by interest groups or elites in an effort to maximize their own interests while simultaneously purporting to serve the interests of the people. Specifically, the mentally ill are ideal folk devils because they are already marginalized and susceptible to exploitation by moral entrepreneurs. If interest groups and elites point to mental illness as the cause of school shootings, they can be perceived by the public as making an effort to eliminate the threat of gun violence in schools while maintaining support from people on both sides of the gun control debate. Therefore, I anticipate mental illness being closely associated with the elite-engineered iteration of the moral panic about school shootings.

\(H_4: The \ creation \ of \ the \ mentally \ ill \ as \ a \ folk \ devil \ has \ been \ the \ result \ of \ interest \ group and \ elite \ moral \ entrepreneurs.\)

These research questions are answered through a thorough and systemic investigation of news coverage surrounding school shootings in American schools, colleges, and universities. The data collection process and analysis are described in the next section.

**Data Collection Methods**

Using Agnich’s (2015) dataset of school shootings, I identify mass school shootings that occurred in elementary, middle, and high schools and colleges/universities in the U.S. between 1991 and 2015. According to a Congressional Research Service report about public mass shootings, a mass shooting is defined as “incidents occurring in relatively public places, involving four or more deaths – not including the shooter(s) – and gunmen who select victims somewhat indiscriminately” in situations where the violence is not a means to an end, such as terrorism or
robbery (Bjelopera, Bagalman, Caldwell, Finklea, and McCallion 2013: 4). Limiting the dataset to mass school shootings resulting in at least four deaths over the past 25 years yields 16 incidents. Following others who have studied reporting after mass shootings (e.g. Hawdon et al. 2014), I conduct a content analysis of newspaper articles published in one nationally circulated publication (the New York Times) and one local, daily paper for each school shooting.

Data Collection

Using Pennebaker and Harber’s (1993) social stage model of coping and in conjunction with Downs’ (1972) issue-attention cycle, I conduct a frame analysis of print media coverage taking place in the month following each incident\(^4\). Table 4.1 lists, in chronological order, the school name and location for each incident, the title of the daily newspaper publication from the major city nearest to the incident\(^5\), and the range of dates for each article collection period (starting with the day of the attack and ending one month later) for both local papers and the national publication. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 list the search parameters, the search engine used, and the total number of articles yielded from local papers and the New York Times, respectively, for each school. Different search engines were used to collect articles from different publications based on accessibility and availability through the university library’s subscriptions to NewsBank and LexisNexis. In order to address the thoughts and feelings of the general public, I included letters to the editor or opinion pieces as well as traditional newspaper columns and

\(^4\) The analysis uses publicly-available print media coverage, and therefore this research was approved as “Exempt,” per the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board. The Approval Letter can be found in Appendix A.

\(^5\) The local newspapers used in this analysis were selected because of their proximity to the school shooting, but were also limited by availability within the search engines accessible by the Virginia Tech library.
news articles. An initial search yielded 528 *New York Times* articles and 1,160 local newspaper articles, for a total of 1,688 articles. During the coding process, 451 of these articles were found to be unrelated to the school shooting in question\(^6\). After removing the 451 unrelated articles, 896 local newspaper articles and 341 *New York Times* articles remained, for a total of 1,237 articles covering 16 school shootings over the past 25 years\(^7\).

\(^6\) In these cases, the newspaper article included the keywords used in the search parameters, but focused on issues external to the school shooting, such as basketball or football games/scores or other extracurricular activities related to the school.

\(^7\) For some of the schools listed here, the number of articles yeilded was very low. There are many possible explanations. Perhaps school shootings were not as heavily publicized in the earlier years as they are today, or articles published in the 1990s are not readily available online. Another possibility is that school shootings resulting in fewer fatalities receive less media coverage.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Local Newspaper Title</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>End Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Iowa</td>
<td>Iowa City</td>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Peoria Journal Star</td>
<td>11 1 1991</td>
<td>11 30 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindhurst High School</td>
<td>Olivehurst</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Sacramento Bee</td>
<td>5 1 1992</td>
<td>5 31 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westside Middle School</td>
<td>Jonesboro</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Arkansas Democrat-Gazette</td>
<td>3 24 1998</td>
<td>4 23 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurston Senior High School</td>
<td>Springfield</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>The Oregonian</td>
<td>5 21 1998</td>
<td>6 20 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbine High School</td>
<td>Columbine</td>
<td>CO</td>
<td>The Denver Post</td>
<td>4 20 1999</td>
<td>5 19 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Lake School</td>
<td>Red Lake</td>
<td>MN</td>
<td>Duluth News Tribune</td>
<td>3 21 2005</td>
<td>4 20 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Tech</td>
<td>Blacksburg</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>Roanoke Times</td>
<td>4 16 2007</td>
<td>5 15 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Illinois University</td>
<td>DeKalb</td>
<td>IL</td>
<td>Daily Chronicle</td>
<td>2 14 2008</td>
<td>3 13 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oikos University</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Oakland Tribune</td>
<td>4 2 2012</td>
<td>5 1 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Hook Elementary</td>
<td>Newtown</td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Hartford Courant</td>
<td>12 14 2012</td>
<td>1 13 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Monica College</td>
<td>Santa Monica</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Santa Monica Daily Press</td>
<td>6 7 2013</td>
<td>7 6 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of CA -Santa Barbara</td>
<td>Isla Vista</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Santa Maria Times</td>
<td>5 23 2014</td>
<td>6 22 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marysville High School</td>
<td>Marysville</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>The Seattle Times</td>
<td>10 24 2014</td>
<td>11 23 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umpqua Community College</td>
<td>Roseburg</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Register Guard</td>
<td>10 1 2015</td>
<td>10 31 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2  Local Newspaper Search Parameters and Yield

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Search Terms for Local Paper</th>
<th>Search Engine Used</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Iowa</td>
<td>&quot;University of Iowa&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindhurst High School</td>
<td>&quot;Lindhurst&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westside Middle School</td>
<td>&quot;Westside Middle School&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurston Senior High School</td>
<td>&quot;Thurston Senior High School&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbine High School</td>
<td>&quot;Columbine High School&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Arizona</td>
<td>&quot;University of Arizona&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Lake School</td>
<td>&quot;Red Lake School&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Nickel Mines School</td>
<td>&quot;West Nickel Mines School&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Tech</td>
<td>&quot;Virginia Tech&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Illinois University</td>
<td>&quot;Northern Illinois University&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oikos University</td>
<td>&quot;Oikos University&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Hook Elementary</td>
<td>&quot;Sandy Hook&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Monica College</td>
<td>&quot;Santa Monica College&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of CA - Santa Barbara</td>
<td>&quot;UC Santa Barbara&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marysville High School</td>
<td>&quot;Marysville High School&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umpqua Community College</td>
<td>&quot;Umpqua Community College&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>NewsBank</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL** 896
Table 4.3  National Newspaper Search Parameters and Yield

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Search Terms for New York Times</th>
<th>Search Engine Used</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Iowa</td>
<td>&quot;University of Iowa&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindhurst High School</td>
<td>&quot;Lindhurst&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westside Middle School</td>
<td>&quot;Westside Middle School&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurston Senior High School</td>
<td>&quot;Thurston&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbine High School</td>
<td>&quot;Columbine High School&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Arizona</td>
<td>&quot;University of Arizona&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Lake School</td>
<td>&quot;Red Lake School&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Nickel Mines School</td>
<td>&quot;West Nickel Mines School&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Tech</td>
<td>&quot;Virginia Tech&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Illinois University</td>
<td>&quot;Northern Illinois University&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oikos University</td>
<td>&quot;Oikos University&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Hook Elementary</td>
<td>&quot;Sandy Hook&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Monica College</td>
<td>&quot;Santa Monica College&quot; AND &quot;shooting&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of CA -Santa Barbara</td>
<td>&quot;University of California Santa Barbara&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marysville High School</td>
<td>&quot;Marysville&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umpqua Community College</td>
<td>&quot;Umpqua Community College&quot;</td>
<td>LexisNexis</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>341</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moral Entrepreneur Variables

For each newspaper article, I recorded information regarding the speaker(s) represented in the article, whether each speaker mentioned a folk devil, and if so, whether the folk devil was affirmed or denied. Speakers who claim that a folk devil was a cause of the school shooting are said to be affirming the folk devil, while speakers who defend the folk devil by stating that it is not the root cause of the school shooting are considered to be denying the folk devil. Each speaker was broadly categorized as either grassroots, interest group, or elite. Each speaker was also categorized according to their specific role within the context of the shooting or the newspaper interview/statement. For example, grassroots speakers include students or faculty of the school, friends or family of injured or murdered victims, friends or family of the shooter, friends or family of unharmed students and faculty, members of the local (or global) community, etc. Speakers who represented an interest group include gun control advocates, gun rights activists, school officials, religious leaders, criminologists, mental health professionals, lawyers/legal professionals, healthcare providers, local business owners, etc.. Elites include national or local lawmakers, the President or Vice President of the U.S., the governor of the state, the mayor or other politicians of the city/town (such as members of city councils and chambers of commerce) and cultural or economic leaders (such as celebrities or entertainers), etc. Each category or moral entrepreneur is mutually exclusive for each speaker in the article. That is, a grassroots speaker cannot also be interest group or elite; an interest group speaker cannot also be grassroots or elite; and an elite speaker cannot also be grassroots or interest group. In instances where a speaker occupied two types of moral entrepreneur simultaneously, they were coded according to the role most relevant to their reason for
speaking. For example, if a victim’s parent who was also a local pastor was being interviewed about the life and legacy of his or her child, this person was coded as grassroots, rather than interest group, because the parent role was more contextually relevant than the role as a religious official.

This process was completed for the first six speakers within each article using dichotomous dummy variables where “grassroots” 0 = no, 1 = yes; “interest group” 0 = no, 1 = yes; and “elite” 0 = no, 1 = yes. These speaker-specific measures were then aggregated into dichotomous dummy variables that indicate whether or not any of the six speakers in the article were grassroots, interest group, or elite. So, instead of having three moral entrepreneur variables for each of the six speakers (18 moral entrepreneur variables per article), there are only three variables per article asking, “Does a grassroots moral entrepreneur speak at all in this article?” “Does a representative from an interest group speak at all in this article?” and “Does an elite moral entrepreneur speak at all in this article?” where 0 = no and 1 = yes for each. Table 4.4, below, lists the number of articles in which at least one speaker is grassroots, interest group and/or elite. Both grassroots and interest group moral entrepreneurs were present in over half of the articles (56.7 percent and 53.9 percent, respectively), while elite moral entrepreneurs were present in only 22 percent of the articles.

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8 For a detailed account of the variable coding process and the creation of computed variables, refer to the Codebook located in Appendix B.

9 The percentages included in the summary statistics may not always total 100 percent because the moral entrepreneurs and folk devil variables are not mutually exclusive per article. Some articles may include multiple types of moral entrepreneurs or multiple folk devils, or none at all.
Table 4.4  Moral Entrepreneur Dummy Variable Frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of all articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least one speaker in the article is grassroots moral entrepreneur</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one speaker in the article represents an interest group</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one speaker in the article is an elite moral entrepreneur</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These dichotomous variables for whether grassroots, interest group, and elite moral entrepreneurs speak in each article were again aggregated and recoded into one final variable that indicates whether the article presents only grassroots, only interest groups, only elites, or any combination thereof. Table 4.5, below, lists the categories and frequencies for this aggregated variable.

Table 4.5  Moral Entrepreneur Aggregated Variable Frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Entrepreneur</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of all articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No moral entrepreneur speaks</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots only</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group only</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elites only</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Interest Group</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Elite</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots, and Interest Group, and Elite</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1,237</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Folk Devil Variables

The next step is to indicate whether or not each speaker mentions a folk devil. Using dummy variables where 0 = no and 1 = yes, I recorded whether the speaker talks about each of the four folk devils. This does not account for a positive or negative appraisal of the folk devil; it only measures whether or not the speaker brings up one of the following: social alienation, violent media, guns, and mental illness. These particular folk devils were chosen based on
previous research by Richardson (2014) who conducted a study of newspaper articles written after the three deadliest school shootings in recent American history (Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook). Her study found that most articles focusing on the root causes of school shootings could be organized into four sub-categories: social ostracism, violent entertainment media, access to firearms, and mental illness. These issues were also identified by Newman et al. (2002) to be necessary but not sufficient factors leading to school shootings. Other folk devils, such as poor parenting, school safety procedures, and masculinity are also common issues discussed in the wake of a school shooting. However, these topics are not as frequently invoked as social alienation, violent media, guns, and mental illness, and were therefore not included in this analysis. It should be noted that victims of school bullying or social ostracism, youth who consume violent media, and the mentally ill all represent groups of people, while guns are objects. While “folk devils” are typically conceptualized as people – rather than objects – guns have been a consistent frame through which school shootings are discussed. When moral entrepreneurs talk about guns as the cause of a school shooting, the argument is framed and communicated in a similar way to the discussions of bullying, violent media, and mental illness (Newman et al. 2002; Kleck 2009). It is for this reason that I include guns as a folk devil, which includes both the tangible object, as well as the corresponding culture and enthusiasm surrounding firearms. Unlike the broad categories of moral entrepreneur, folk devils are not mutually exclusive. Any speaker who mentions violent media can also mention guns, mental illness, and/or social alienation.

Articles mentioning social alienation include references to bullying victimization, social isolation, “loners,” social outcasts, or shooters who were described as quiet or shy and “kept to
themselves.” In these cases, the speaker brought up the social status of the shooter and recalled pieces of the shooter’s personality, friend group (or lackthereof), or demeanor. For example, a student at Columbine is quoted in an article from The Denver Post as saying,

“They [the shooters] were weird and not accepted by the other students. Last year, some of the jocks did a lot of putting them down because of their unusual dress, which identified them as the Trench Coat Mafia. They hated everyone, and hate will cause wrong choices” (Davant 1999: A-05).

Articles mentioning violent media include references to violence in entertainment media, such as video games, music, movies, and television. This includes instances in which the speaker mentions violence in the news, which speaks to another source of violence within the media. In these cases, the speaker discusses the shooter’s affinity for first-person shooter video games or their preference for certain types of music or gory movies. For example, President Clinton was quoted in The Denver Post, saying, “Video games like ‘Mortal Kombat,’ Killer Instinct,’ and ‘Doom,’ the very game played obsessively by the two young men who ended so many lives in Littleton, make our children more active participants in simulated violence” (Gerstenzang 1999: A-13). In another article published in The Denver Post after Columbine, Lt. Col. David Grossman discussed violent video games, saying,

“These are not games of fun. These are mass-murder simulators.... Nine-year-olds are practicing killing people in their homes and at a local arcade for hours and hours every day. Everyone knows computer flight simulators can teach you how to fly. These mass-murder simulators teach you how to kill. So when a few kids go out and execute what they’ve been practicing, we should not be surprised” (Gittrich 1999: AA-06).

Articles mentioning guns include references to how the shooter acquired the firearm(s) used in the attack, laws (or the enforcement of) regarding the sale and distribution of certain types of firearms or policies about background checks. In these cases, the speaker focuses on
the role of guns in American society. For example, a speech from Senator Richard Blumenthal was quoted in an article in the Hartford Courant after the Sandy Hook shooting,

“We need to do something to effectively ban assault weapons.... I’m talking about weapons that are not designed for self-defense or hunting, but rather for killing as many people as fast as possible. There is no reason that such weapons should be for sale in America today.... We need to do something to ban high-capacity magazines. Neither hunting nor self-defense requires 30-round clips” (Lender 2012: A10).

Finally, articles mentioning mental illness include references to psychological disorders such as autism, depression, and schizophrenia, or describe the shooter using words such as “troubled,” “madman,” “monster,” “deranged killer,” “nutcase,” “disturbed,” “psycho,” “crazy,” etc. In these cases, the speaker discusses the shooter’s psychological state, regardless of any confirmed diagnosis. For example, a student injured in the shooting at Umpqua Community College described the shooter, saying “he sounded really deranged, because he said he’d been waiting to do that for a really long time – and he laughed. He laughed after he shot the teacher” (Hubbard 2015: np). President Obama also spoke after the Umpqua Community College shooting, saying, “It’s fair to say anybody who does this has a sickness in their minds, regardless of what their motivations may be” (Dietz 2015: np).

Table 4.6 shows the percentage of articles mentioning each folk devil over time. Here, time is measured in five-year increments because there are some years during which no mass school shootings occurred, and therefore there are no articles collected for that year. Social alienation and violent media were most common during the 1996 to 2000 time period, whereas guns and mental illness were most common between 2011 and 2015. While guns were the most frequently mentioned folk devil overall, mental illness increased with each five-year increment. The discussion about guns increased from 9.1 percent in 1991-1995 to almost 23
percent in 1996-2000 and then decreased to 10-12 percent until 2011-2015, when it increased again to 29.5 percent. Comparatively, 9.1 percent of articles between 1991 and 1995 and 9.3 percent of articles between 1996 and 2000 mentioned mental illness, followed by an increase to 15.9 percent between 2001 and 2005, 17.6 percent between 2006 and 2010, and 24.2 percent between 2011 and 2015. This illustrates a debate occurring in the discourse of the moral panic regarding the threat posed by firearms, compared to a growing acceptance of mental illness as the folk devil. All associations between time (measured in five-year periods) and the popularity of each folk devil are statistically significant (social alienation $X^2 = 24.46, p < .001$; violent media $X^2 = 52.97, p < .001$; guns $X^2 = 41.2, p < .001$; mental illness $X^2 = 32.99, p < .001$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Years:</th>
<th>Percent of Articles Mentioning:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 - 1995</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 - 2000</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 - 2005</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 - 2010</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 - 2015</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi Square</td>
<td>24.457***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** $p < .001$

Finally, I recorded whether the speaker affirmed or denied each folk devil mentioned, meaning the speaker either argued that the folk devil was the root cause of the school shooting, or that it was not the root cause of the school shooting. A speaker can only affirm or deny that it is the root cause of the school shooting, meaning the affirmation or denial of each folk devil are mutually exclusive. If a speaker affirms that violent media led the shooter to commit the attack, the same speaker cannot also deny that violent media is to blame. However,
because a speaker can mention multiple folk devils, they can affirm one folk devil while denying another. For example, a gun rights activist could deny guns as the cause of the shooting, but affirm mental illness, as was the case in an article published in the *New York Times* after the Sandy Hook shooting. Describing an interview with the owner of a gun range, the author states,

“He said he was distraught at the school massacre but said guns should not be made the ‘scapegoat’.... ‘Guns are why we’re free in this country, and people lose sight of that when tragedies like this happen.... A gun didn’t kill all those children, a disturbed man killed all those children’” (Moss and Rivera 2012: 25).

Next, because there are often multiple speakers in each article, different speakers could disagree on the culpability of a folk devil. One moral entrepreneur could deny that guns caused the school shooting, while another declares the school shooting as the result of lax gun laws. For example, a collection of editorials published in the Register Guard following the Umpqua Community College shooting began with a submission from a community member stating “The trouble is... [gun-free] zones remain gun-free only until a determined criminal or a nutcase who should be committed carries a gun or guns into the zone,” and was followed by a submission from another community member asking, “Why are the rights of gun owners allowed to trump the rights of everyone else to go to college and to live in peace?” (*Register Guard* 2015: np).

Therefore, the affirmation and denial of each folk devil can exist simultaneously within the same article. Table 4.7 provides a summary of how frequently each folk devil was affirmed and denied, overall.
Table 4.7  Frequencies of Folk Devils Affirmed and Denied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folk Devil</th>
<th>Affirm</th>
<th>Deny</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Media</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.1, below, provides a visual map of the coding process for each speaker\textsuperscript{10}, beginning with the type of moral entrepreneur. This process allows each speaker to be identified as either grassroots, interest group, or elite, whether each speaker discusses (in a positive or negative light) any or all of the four folk devils, and whether they affirm or deny each of the folk devils that they mention.

In order to establish inter-coder reliability, I asked a colleague to code 100 of the 1,237 newspaper articles used in this study and used Krippendorff’s alpha (KALPHA) to measure the reliability of the variables and response categories. Because the same set of variables are recorded using the same categories and descriptions repeatedly for each of the first six speakers in an article, and because Krippendorff’s alpha measures the reliability of the variables (rather than the coders), I only asked her to code the variables as they apply to the first speaker. KALPHA scores for variables measuring the moral entrepreneur(s) speaking in the article were all acceptable above .60 (Grassroots = .678; Interest Group = .615; Elite = .794). The variables measuring whether the speaker mentioned guns (.618) and mental illness (.702) were also acceptable. Variables measuring whether the speaker mentioned social alienation (.393) and violent media (.421) were below the .60 threshold of acceptable KALPHA results.

\textsuperscript{10} This coding map takes into account the recoding of some variables so that it reflects the variable values used in the analysis.
However, these folk devils were mentioned in a very small percentage of the articles, so although there may be a high rate of agreement between the coders, the KALPHA may be low due to the rarity with which the folk devils were mentioned. Detailed information about inter-rater reliability can be found in Appendix C.
Figure 4.1 Map of Coding Processes
Analytic Strategy

In order to answer the hypotheses, I used a series of crosstabs with chi-square tests. This analytic strategy was chosen based on a need to examine the frequency with which different moral entrepreneurs and folk devils were implicated during given time periods. For Hypotheses 1 and 3, the independent variable was time, measured in individual years or in five-year increments. For Hypothesis 1, the dependent variables measured whether each of the folk devils was affirmed or denied as the cause of the school shooting. For Hypothesis 3, the dependent variables were the moral entrepreneurs, using two categorical methods. The first categorical method indicated whether any speaker in the newspaper article was grassroots, interest group, or elite, while the second categorical method examined the different combinations of moral entrepreneurs present in each article. The fourth hypothesis also uses crosstabs, with the moral entrepreneur as the independent variable and the folk devils affirmed as the dependent variable. The second hypothesis was addressed using frequencies, because it asks which moral entrepreneur was most commonly represented in the articles overall. Chi square tests were used to determine the goodness of fit by comparing the observed data with what would be expected, based on the hypothesis. Significance is indicated with p-values following each summary table. I also ran bivariate correlations to establish the relationship between mentioning a folk devil and affirming it, as well as investigate the relationship between mentioning one folk devil while affirming other folk devils. These correlations offer additional insight regarding the likelihood that a speaker who mentions a folk devil will also be affirming it as the cause of the school shooting, and the likelihood that they implicate additional folk devils. Crosstab and bivariate correlation results are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER V: RESULTS

I now turn to a discussion of the results from the crosstabs and bivariate correlations.

Before discussing the hypotheses and corresponding crosstabs, I provide a summary of the bivariate correlations, which are presented in Table 5.1, below. The results illustrate the strong, positive correlation between mentioning a folk devil and affirming it as the cause of the school shooting, as well as the relationship between mentioning one folk devil and affirming others as the cause of the school shooting. The correlations are an important piece of the puzzle when considering the results of the crosstabs addressing the hypotheses, and so they are presented first.

Most articles that mentioned a folk devil also affirmed that folk devil, and mentioning one folk devil was also usually positively correlated with affirming other folk devils. Mentioning social alienation has a strong, positive correlation with the affirmation of social alienation as the cause of school shootings ($r = .921; p < .01$). In other words, those who mentioned social alienation were also likely to affirm it as a cause of school shootings than they were to deny it as a cause. However, there are also weak, positive correlations between mentioning social alienation and affirming violent media ($r = .142; p < .01$), guns ($r = .075; p < .01$), and mental illness ($r = .180; p < .01$). Mentioning violent media has a strong, positive correlation with affirming violent media ($r = .885; p < .01$), but there are also weak, positive correlations with social alienation ($r = .182; p < .01$), and guns ($r = .166; p < .01$). Mentioning guns has a strong, positive correlation with the affirmation of guns ($r = .910; p < .01$), but there are also weak, positive correlations with social alienation ($r = .074; p < .01$), violent media ($r = .221; p < .01$), and mental illness ($r = .289; p < .01$). Mentioning mental illness has a strong, positive
correlation with affirming mental illness ($r = .967; p < .01$), but there are also positive correlations with social alienation ($r = .204; p < .01$) and guns ($r = .305; p < .01$). It is important to highlight this correlation between mentioning mental illness and affirming mental illness because it echoes the rarity with which mental illness was denied as the folk devil; if a speaker mentioned mental illness, they were almost always affirming it as the folk devil.

** Table 5.1 Correlations of Mentioning and Affirming Folk Devils**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folk Devils Mentioned</th>
<th>Social Alienation</th>
<th>Violent Media</th>
<th>Guns</th>
<th>Mental Illness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
<td>.921**</td>
<td>.142**</td>
<td>.075**</td>
<td>.180**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Media</td>
<td>.182**</td>
<td>.885**</td>
<td>.166**</td>
<td>0.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns</td>
<td>.074**</td>
<td>.221**</td>
<td>.910**</td>
<td>.289**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>.204**</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>.305**</td>
<td>.967**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** $p < .01$  

The hypotheses were tested using a series of crosstabs to determine the association of folk devils and moral entrepreneurs with the moral panic over time. The results of these tests are presented below.

The first research question centered on the folk devil associated with school shootings. What folk devils have been identified since 1991? How has this changed over time? What is the currently accepted folk devil in the moral panic? Because media coverage of the two most high-profile school shootings in recent history (Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook) focused on the psychological state of the shooter, I predicted that mental illness had become the most recently identified threat to safety in schools. Therefore, the first hypothesis stated,

$H_1$: The current folk devil associated with school shootings is the mentally ill.
To investigate this hypothesis, I used crosstabs to determine the frequencies with which each folk devil was affirmed and denied between 1991 and 2015. Chi square significance testing was used to establish a statistically significant relationship between time and the affirmation (or denial) of each folk devil. Table 5.2 illustrates the patterns of affirmation for each folk devil, using five-year time periods.\(^{11}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Years</th>
<th>Percent of Articles Affirming:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 – 1995</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 – 2000</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 – 2005</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 – 2010</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 – 2015</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chi square</strong></td>
<td><strong>24.679</strong>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** \(p < .001\)

Between 1991 and 1995, the most commonly affirmed folk devils were guns and mental illness. Guns and mental illness were both affirmed in 9.1 percent of all articles published in local and national papers after school shootings during this time, compared to violent media, which was affirmed as the folk devil in only 4.5 percent of articles during the same time period. Social alienation was not affirmed in any articles between 1991 and 1995. Between 1996 and

\(^{11}\) The percentages provided in the analyses do not total 100 percent because the affirmation and/or denial of different types of folk devils are not mutually exclusive. It is possible that some articles affirm or deny multiple folk devils, affirm some folk devils and deny others, or neither affirm nor deny any folk devils at all. So, for example, in Table 5.1, 59.5 percent of the articles published between 2011 and 2015 affirmed at least one of these four folk devils, and 40.5 percent of the articles affirmed none of the four folk devils listed here. Likewise, in Table 5.3, 14.5 percent of the articles denied at least one of the four folk devils, and 85.5 percent of the articles denied none of the four folk devils.
2000, guns were the most commonly affirmed folk devil, appearing in 18 percent of articles, whereas social alienation (affirmed in 9.8 percent of articles) and violent media (affirmed in 11.6 percent of articles) were more frequently mentioned as folk devils during this time period, compared to other time periods. During this time, mental illness was the least common folk devil to be affirmed, in only 8.7 percent of articles published after school shootings. Between 2001 and 2005, mental illness again became the most commonly affirmed folk devil, in 14.5 percent of articles, with guns affirmed in 8.7 percent of articles. The affirmation of violent media and social alienation as folk devils decreased during this time period, with violent media affirmed in 2.9 percent and social alienation affirmed in 5.8 percent of all articles published between 2001 and 2005. Between 2006 and 2010, mental illness continued to be the most commonly affirmed folk devil, in 16.8 percent of articles published after school shootings. Guns were also commonly affirmed, in 10.6 percent of articles. Social alienation and violent media nearly disappeared from the discourse, being affirmed as folk devils in only 1.7 and 1.4 percent of articles, respectively, during this time period. Most recently, between 2011 and 2015, guns were the most commonly affirmed folk devil, in 27.7 percent of articles published. Mental illness was affirmed in 23 percent of the articles, with social alienation and violent media trailing at 5.9 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively.

According to Table 5.2, guns were the most commonly affirmed folk devil in the most recent five-year group. Nearly 28 percent of articles published between 2011 and 2015 affirmed firearms as the folk devil, whereas only 23 percent of articles affirmed mental illness as the folk devil. Using these five-year increments, the data do not support the hypothesis. However, it is clear that mental illness has been affirmed as a folk devil increasingly more often
since 1996. In order to investigate this pattern at a closer level, I broke down these five-year increments to study the affirmation of mental illness as the folk devil on a yearly basis. The results are illustrated in Table 5.3, below.

Table 5.3  Affirmation of Folk Devils 1991 – 2015
(Years in which there was a Mass School Shooting)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Years:</th>
<th>Percent of Articles Affirming:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 5.2, guns and mental illness were affirmed equal amounts in 2015 alone, with each being affirmed in 29 percent of the articles published in 2015. Interestingly, this is the largest portion of articles affirming mental illness in any year in the dataset. Prior to 2015, mental illness was affirmed in less than 23 percent of the articles in any given year. Guns, on the other hand, have decreased in the past three years, from being affirmed in 36 percent of articles in 2013 and 30 percent of articles in 2014 to 29 percent in 2015. This illustrates a recent decrease in the affirmation and acceptance of guns as the folk devil, while mental illness has increased from 22 percent in 2013 to 29 percent in 2015. The data in Table 5.3 suggests
that mental illness has became a popular folk devil in the late 2000s, and, with the exception of 2008, it now rivals guns as the most commonly mentioned cause of mass school shootings.

Conversely, guns undergo a more varied pattern with regard to their acceptance as the folk devil when compared to the acceptance of mental illness. The support for guns as the folk devil has increased and decreased over the past 25 years, whereas mental illness has only increased since 1996. Guns were affirmed in 18 percent of articles published between 1996 and 2000, but were affirmed in only 8.7 percent of articles between 2001 and 2005 and 10.6 percent of articles between 2006 and 2010, before jumping back to 27.7 percent of articles between 2011 and 2015. By comparison, acceptance of mental illness has increased from 8.7 percent in 1996 – 2000 to 14.5 percent in 2001 – 2005, 16.8 percent in 2006 – 2010 and 23 percent in 2011 – 2015.

Even more, when examining the data for how often folk devils were denied, it is clear that, although guns were affirmed more often than mental illness, they were also denied as the folk devil more often than mental illness was. Between 2011 to 2015, guns were denied in 8.6 percent of articles, whereas mental illness was only denied in 3.2 percent of articles. These data are statistically significant across the various types of folk devils and are presented in Table 5.4, below.
### Table 5.4 Denial of Folk Devils 1991 – 2015, in 5-Year Increments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Years</th>
<th>Percent of Articles Denying:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 – 1995</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 – 2000</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 – 2005</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 – 2010</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 – 2015</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi square</td>
<td>2.395</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

This disparity becomes even more pronounced when the data is again broken down in a year-by-year analysis. Guns were denied as the folk devil in almost 16 percent of the articles published after school shootings in 2015, whereas mental illness was denied in only 5.8 percent of articles. These data are presented in Table 5.5, below.

### Table 5.5 Denial of Folk Devils 1991 – 2015 (Years in which there was a Mass School Shooting)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Years:</th>
<th>Percent of Articles Denying:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is also worth noting that guns are consistently the most commonly denied folk devil in response to school shootings for each year between 1991 and 2015. This represents a debate among moral entrepreneurs about the role of guns in school shootings and society as a whole. Given the intense political debate over Second Amendment rights, it may come as no surprise that there are moral entrepreneurs arguing against the identification of guns as the folk devil, it is important to take note of the differences between the denial of guns and the denial of other folk devils. Moral entrepreneurs are more likely to deny guns as the folk devil than mental illness, social alienation, and violent media combined. Particularly important is the discrepancy between guns and mental illness in comparison to their equal rates of affirmation as folk devils. While guns and mental illness were both affirmed in 29 percent of articles published in 2015, guns were denied in nearly 16 percent of those articles, whereas mental illness was denied as the folk devil in less than six percent of the articles. Guns were denied as the folk devil 2.7 times more often than mental illness. This means that there is less resistance to the claim that the mentally ill are dangerous than to the claim that guns are dangerous. Mentally ill persons are accepted as a major threat to school safety, while the threat posed by guns is debated.

The debate over the role guns play in school shootings is illustrated in the following quotes from the Register Guard, the local newspaper for the most recent mass school shooting at Umpqua Community College (in 2015, the year in which guns were denied as the folk devil most often).
The Umpqua Community College shooter’s father, Ian Mercer, is quoted as saying,

“‘We talk about gun laws. We talk about gun control. Every time something like this happens, they talk about it and nothing gets done. ... if [he] had not been able to get hold of 13 guns, this wouldn’t have happened.’” (Hill 2015: np).

Meanwhile, Kevin Starrett, executive director of the Oregon Firearms Federation, stated,

“‘When are we going to recognize that there are evil people in this world that will always find a way to do what they do?... This happened because of a rule. A rule against guns on campus that effectively disarmed all students on that campus, except for the killer.’” (Baker 2015: np).

As these stories demonstrate, while some argue fewer guns will make students safer, others argue that more guns are needed to protect students and faculty. By comparison, statements that mental illness is a fundamental cause of school shootings are not challenged or met with opposition.

Therefore, the data partially support the hypothesis that mental illness is the currently accepted folk devil in the moral panic about school shootings. While guns are affirmed at least equally as often as mental illness, mental illness is at its highest point during the most recent years. Additionally, guns were denied 2.7 times as often as mental illness in the articles published between 2011 and 2015 (8.6 percent versus 3.2 percent, respectively). This holds true when isolating the articles published in 2015 alone, where guns were denied in 15.9 percent of the articles, whereas mental illness was only denied in 5.8 percent of the articles published in that year. Additionally, the correlation between mentioning mental illness and affirming it as the cause of the school shooting is .967, whereas the correlation between mentioning guns and affirming them as the cause of the school shooting is .910. Speakers who mention mental illness are more likely to affirm it as the folk devil, compared to the likelihood
that speakers who mention guns will affirm them as the folk devil. Therefore, mental illness is the most frequently accepted folk devil that has been identified in recent years. More people agree that mental illness is to blame for school shootings than any other folk devil, including guns.

The second research question focused on which moral panic model has been most often used to construct the moral panic. Has the moral panic been driven by a grassroots movement, interest groups, or political elites? I predicted that the narrative of school shootings has been most often driven by elites throughout the past 25 years. Therefore, the second hypothesis stated,

\[ H_2: \text{The elite-engineered model has been the most frequently used model in the} \]

\[ \text{construction of the moral panic about school shootings.} \]

To investigate this hypothesis, I used crosstabs to explore which moral entrepreneurs were involved in the discourse around school shootings between 1991 and 2015. To begin, I used simple frequencies to demonstrate the percentage of all articles in which grassroots, interest groups, or elites speak. The results provided in Table 5.6, below, use the dummy variables that indicate whether any speaker in the articles is grassroots, interest group, or elite.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.6 Moral Entrepreneur Frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one speaker in the article is grassroots moral entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one speaker in the article represents an interest group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one speaker in the article is an elite moral entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 22 percent of all articles published about school shootings between 1991 and 2015 introduced an elite moral entrepreneur. By contrast, grassroots speakers were present in 56.7
percent of all articles and interest group representatives were present in 53.9 percent of all articles.

Most articles introduced a combination of grassroots, interest group, and/or elite moral entrepreneurs. There are seven possible combinations of speakers in each article: grassroots only, interest group only, elite only, grassroots and interest group, grassroots and elites, elites and interest group, and grassroots and interest group and elite. The frequencies with which each of these possible combinations were present in the articles are provided in Table 5.7, below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Entrepreneur</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent of all articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No moral entrepreneur speaks</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots only</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group only</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elites only</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Interest Group</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Elite</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots, and Interest Group, and Elite</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>1,237</td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this table, the 22 percent of articles in which an elite moral entrepreneur speaks is distributed according to the different combinations of speakers in the newspaper articles. Of that 22 percent, approximately one third (7.2 percent) of the articles introduced only elite moral entrepreneurs, whereas elites were paired with grassroots in 2.9 percent of all articles, paired with interest group speakers in 6.5 percent of all articles, and paired with both grassroots and interest group speakers in 5.3 percent of all articles. Therefore, when elite moral entrepreneurs engage in the discourse about school shootings, they are most often
speaking alone or with other elites, but when elites are showcased alongside other moral entrepreneurs, they are most commonly paired with interest groups instead of grassroots speakers. The most common combination of moral entrepreneurs represented in the data is the pairing of grassroots and interest group speakers, which comprises 24.5 percent of all articles. Articles that introduce only grassroots speakers were almost equally as common, comprising 23.9 percent of all articles.\(^{12}\)

Therefore, the data do not support the hypothesis that elites were the most common moral entrepreneurs. On the contrary, elites were the least common moral entrepreneur. This means that the elite-engineered model has not been the most frequently utilized model in the construction of the moral panic about school shootings. Grassroots and interest group representatives were significantly more common speakers, being present in 57 and 54 percent of the articles, respectively. The combination of grassroots paired with interest group moral entrepreneurs was the most common set of speakers, with nearly 25 percent of all articles published about school shootings between 1991 and 2015. Additionally, articles introducing only grassroots or only interest groups were also among the most common, comprising approximately 24 percent and 18 percent of all newspaper articles published between 1991 and 2015, meaning that approximately 66 percent of all articles included only grassroots and interest groups. Elites were not present in a majority of the articles, which means that the hypothesis is not supported. Although this is different from the predicted outcome, it is not very surprising because there are fewer elites in society and therefore make up a smaller

\(^{12}\) It is possible that this is because op-ed pieces and letters to the editor were included in my analysis. I did not code for this type of article, and therefore cannot control for the effect of these styles of grassroots-only articles.
percentage of potential moral entrepreneurs. However, it can be argued that elites’ voices carry more weight than that of a grassroots or interest group representative (see Beckett 1994; Oliver 2003), which potentially makes their contributions to the moral panic more influential than that of grassroots and interest group speakers.

Recall that Downs (1972) and Pennebaker and Harber (1993) argue that media response to mass tragedies follows a pattern of stages through which sensational news stories deliver and communicate information. Pennebaker and Harber’s (1993) social stage model of coping argues that first two weeks after a tragedy or disaster can be described as the “emergency phase,” during which people begin to process the information and share their reactions. Downs’ issue-attention cycle complements this theory by arguing that there is a period of “alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm,” which is when the framing begins to take shape; this is when the meaning-making occurs (Downs 1972: 39). Using these perspectives, I isolated the articles published within the first week following each school shooting in order to determine the frequencies with which the various combinations of moral entrepreneurs engage in the discourse. Table 5.8 provides a summary of these statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Entrepreneur</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent of all articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No moral entrepreneur speaks</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots only</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group only</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elites only</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Interest Group</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Elite</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots, and Interest Group, and Elite</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When analyzing the articles published during the first week following each school shooting, the moral entrepreneur frequencies show little change. Grassroots and grassroots paired with elite moral entrepreneurs continued to be the most common speakers, accounting for over half of all articles (26.5 percent and 26.3 percent, respectively). Elites were only present in a total of 21.3 percent of these articles, including when they were paired with grassroots and/or interest group representatives. Therefore, the second hypothesis continues to lack support.

The third research question focused on the evolution of the moral panic over time, with regard to the model being used to construct the moral panic. Specifically, have the moral entrepreneurs stayed the same throughout the years, or has the model shifted as the moral panic gained momentum? I hypothesized that the moral panic had shifted from an interest-group model to an elite-engineered model as it strengthened over time. Therefore, the third hypothesis stated,

\[ H_3: The \textit{moral panic about school shootings started as an interest-group model and has recently shifted to elite-engineered}. \]

To investigate this hypothesis, I explore the pattern of the moral entrepreneurs active in the discussion of school shootings and how their participation changed over time. Crosstabs were used to establish a relationship between time and the presence of each moral entrepreneur (and every combination thereof) within the articles published between 1991 and 2015. To begin, I tested the frequencies of the dichotomous dummy variables that indicate whether any speaker in the article is grassroots, interest group, or elite distributed over the five-year increments. Tables 5.9 and 5.10 provide summaries of these results.
Table 5.9  Moral Entrepreneurs Over Time 1991 – 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Years:</th>
<th>Percent of articles with at least one:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grassroots Speaker</td>
<td>Interest Group Speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 - 1995</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 - 2000</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 - 2005</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 - 2010</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 - 2015</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between 1991 and 1995, 68.2 percent of all articles had at least one grassroots speaker and 63.6 percent of all articles had at least one interest group speaker. There were no elite moral entrepreneurs represented in the newspaper articles about school shootings during this period. Between 1996 and 2000, 48.9 percent of all articles included at least one grassroots speaker and 51.3 percent included at least one interest group speaker. Unlike the previous period, more than 25 percent of the articles about school shootings included at least one elite moral entrepreneur. Between 2001 and 2005, 63.8 percent of all articles introduced at least one grassroots speaker and 63.6 percent introduced at least one interest group representative, whereas only 21.7 percent of the articles included an elite moral entrepreneur. Between 2006 and 2010, 61.3 percent of all articles included at least one grassroots speaker and 52.9 percent included at least one interest group speaker. Only 14 percent of all articles included an elite moral entrepreneur. Finally, between 2011 and 2015, 59.9 percent of all articles at least one grassroots speaker and 55.8 percent included at least one interest group representative. Elite moral entrepreneurs make up the largest portion yet, with 27.1 percent of all articles including at least one elite speaker. While elites were never the most common moral entrepreneur to contribute to the narrative, their participation increased over time from 0.0 percent in 1991 – 1995 to over 27 percent in 2011 - 2015. Comparatively, grassroots and interest group moral
entrepreneurs became slightly less active over time; grassroots participation decreased from 68.2 percent in 1991 – 1995 to 59.9 percent in 2011 – 2015 and interest group participation decreased from 63.6 percent to 55.8 percent during the most recent time period.

Overall, grassroots and interest group speakers were consistently more common than elite moral entrepreneurs in the discourse about school shootings. Approximately 50 to 70 percent of the articles introduced grassroots and/or interest group speakers throughout the 25 year period, whereas elites were consistently less common, ranging from zero to 27 percent. Although the data in Table 5.8 do not unequivocally support the hypothesis, it is important to note that elite moral entrepreneurs have become more active in the discussion of school shootings over time, while grassroots and interest group representatives became slightly less active. To further explore the third hypothesis, I now turn to the seven possible combinations of moral entrepreneurs present in each article. Table 5.10, below, provides a summary of how frequently these combinations were utilized in newspaper articles about school shootings between 1991 and 2015.
Table 5.10  Moral Entrepreneurs Over Time 1991 – 2015 (Combinations)\textsuperscript{13}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Years:</th>
<th>Grassroots Only</th>
<th>Interest Group Only</th>
<th>Elite Only</th>
<th>Grassroots and Interest Group</th>
<th>Grassroots and Elite</th>
<th>Interest Group and Elite</th>
<th>Grassroots, Interest Group and Elite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991 - 1995</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 - 2000</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 - 2005</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 - 2010</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 - 2015</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pairing of grassroots with interest group speakers was the most common combination of moral entrepreneurs for most of the 25 year history. Between 1991 and 1995, grassroots paired with interest group representatives was the most common combination of moral entrepreneurs speaking in the articles, with 54.5 percent of all articles. Elite moral entrepreneurs were not included in any of the articles during this period. During the next period, 1996 – 2000, grassroots and interest groups were again the dominant speakers. However, there was a more equitable distribution among grassroots-only (19.1 percent), interest group-only (18 percent), and grassroots paired with interest group speakers (21.3 percent). However, there were more elite speakers, with 10.4 percent of all articles including only elite moral entrepreneurs. Interest group paired with elites also comprised 6.7 percent of all articles between 1996 and 2000, whereas grassroots paired with elites only comprised 3.1 percent.

\textsuperscript{13} There were also articles in which no moral entrepreneurs were present. In 1991 – 1995, 22.7 percent of all articles were of this variety; 1996 – 2000 = 16 percent; 2001 – 2005 = 4.3 percent; 2006 – 2010 = 9.5 percent; and 2011 – 2015 = 10.3 percent.
percent and grassroots paired with interest group and elites comprised 5.3 percent of all articles. This trend continued into 2001 – 2005, where a majority of the articles about school shootings included grassroots and/or interest group speakers. The pairing of grassroots with interest group moral entrepreneurs was the most common combination, accounting for 27.5 percent of all articles. Articles including only grassroots speakers comprised 26.1 percent of all articles and interest group-only articles added another 20.3 percent. Articles with combinations of interest group speakers paired with elites (8.7 percent) and grassroots paired with interest groups and elites (7.2 percent) each increased slightly from the previous period.

Between 2006 and 2010, grassroots-only articles were the most common, accounting for 32.8 percent of all newspaper articles about school shootings. Interest group-only and grassroots paired with interest group speakers continued to be among the most common types of articles, accounting for 19.9 percent and 23.8 percent, respectively. Articles including elite moral entrepreneurs were less common than in the previous period, with 5.3 percent of all articles including interest group and elites and an additional 3.9 percent of the articles including all three types of moral entrepreneurs. Finally, between 2011 and 2015, grassroots paired with interest group representatives was again the most common, accounting for 26.8 percent of all articles. An additional 21.2 percent and 14.5 percent of articles were grassroots-only and interest group-only, respectively. Elites become more common than in the previous time frame. Articles including only elite speakers made up 7.7 percent of all articles during this time, and an additional 7.7 percent of articles was comprised of interest group representatives paired with elites. Another 6.8 percent of the articles published in the most recent five years included all three types of moral entrepreneurs.
Overall, the data provide partial support for the hypothesis that the moral panic about school shootings began as an interest-group model and shifted toward an elite-engineered model. Interest groups and grassroots speakers were the most common moral entrepreneurs, with the pairing of grassroots with interest group representatives being the most common combination of moral entrepreneurs to speak after a school shooting. While elites have never been the most prevalent, they have become more involved in the discussion of school shootings than they were in the early 1990s.

The fourth research question integrated previous hypotheses by focusing on the relationship between moral entrepreneurs, model type, and folk devils associated with the moral panic about school shootings. Are different moral entrepreneurs or models related to the establishment of different folk devils? I predicted that grassroots and interest group moral entrepreneurs would be linked with the establishment of social alienation and violent media as folk devils, whereas interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs would be linked with the establishment of guns and mental illness as folk devils. Specifically, the fourth hypothesis stated,

$$H_4: \text{The creation of the mentally ill as a folk devil has been the result of interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs.}$$

To investigate this hypothesis, I used crosstabs to establish a relationship between the type of moral entrepreneur (or combinations thereof) and the folk devils associated with the moral panic over time. Recall from the first hypothesis that, while guns were affirmed more often than mental illness in recent years, moral entrepreneurs have also denied guns as the folk devil more often than any other folk devil. Therefore, I not only tested the relationship
between moral entrepreneurs and folk devils affirmed, but also the relationship between moral entrepreneurs and folk devils denied. Table 5.11 provides a summary of how often each combination of moral entrepreneurs affirmed each folk devil, and Table 5.12 provides a summary of how often each combination of moral entrepreneur denied each folk devil.

### Table 5.11 Moral Entrepreneurs and Affirmation of Folk Devils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Entrepreneur</th>
<th>Percent of Articles Affirming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots Only</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group Only</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite Only</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Interest Group</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Elite</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots, Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi square</td>
<td>23.808***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p < .001

### Table 5.12 Moral Entrepreneurs and Denial of Folk Devils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Entrepreneur</th>
<th>Percent of Articles Denying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots Only</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group Only</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite Only</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Interest Group</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Elite</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots, Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi square</td>
<td>18.899**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Using the type or combination of moral entrepreneur as the independent, or predictor, variable, these tables reveal the folk devil appointed by each group of speakers. In articles where the speakers are all grassroots, the majority (22.3 percent) affirm guns as the folk devil,
16.6 percent affirm mental illness as the folk devil, 7.4 percent affirm social alienation as the folk devil, and 5.1 percent affirm violent media as the folk devil. These articles also deny guns as the folk devil more often than any other folk devil. Therefore, articles in which grassroots moral entrepreneurs are the only speakers affirm guns most often as the folk devil, and affirm social alienation and violent media the least often.

Regarding articles in which only interest group representatives are speaking, mental illness is the most commonly affirmed folk devil (14.7 percent), followed by guns (12.4 percent), violent media (6.5 percent), and social alienation (4.6 percent). These articles denied guns as the folk devil more often than any of the other folk devils, although by a smaller percentage. In articles with only elite speakers, guns are affirmed as the folk devil most often by a large percentage (38.2 percent), whereas violent media (15.7 percent), mental illness (12.4 percent) and social alienation (1.1 percent) were affirmed significantly less often. In these articles, guns were also denied as the folk devil most often (10.1 percent).

In articles introducing a combination of grassroots and interest group moral entrepreneurs, mental illness was affirmed as the folk devil most often (18.2 percent), followed by guns (11.9 percent), social alienation (10.2 percent) and violent media (4.6 percent). In these articles, all folk devils were denied in small proportions, but guns were denied most often. In articles where the speakers were a combination of grassroots and elite moral entrepreneurs, mental illness was again affirmed most often (19.4 percent), closely followed by guns (16.7 percent). Violent media was affirmed in 8.3 percent of the articles with grassroots and elite speakers, and social alienation was affirmed in 5.6 percent of the articles. In these articles, violent media was the only folk devil to be denied (5.6 percent). When the speakers
were a combination of interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs, guns were affirmed most often (40.7 percent), whereas mental illness was affirmed in 27.2 percent of articles, followed by violent media (7.4 percent) and social alienation (6.2 percent). This combination of moral entrepreneurs had the highest rate of affirmation of guns, but also had the highest rate of denial of guns as the folk devil (17.3 percent). Finally, articles including all three types of moral entrepreneur affirmed guns most often (27.3 percent), whereas mental illness was affirmed in 18.2 percent of the articles, followed by violent media (4.5 percent) and social alienation (three percent). For these articles, denial of folk devils was more evenly distributed; guns were denied in 7.6 percent of articles, social alienation in 4.5 percent, and violent media and mental illness were each denied in 1.5 percent of the articles.

Overall, grassroots-only, elite-only, combinations of interest group paired with elite moral entrepreneurs and grassroots paired with interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs were most likely to affirm guns as the folk devil, whereas interest group-only, grassroots paired with interest group, and grassroots paired with elite moral entrepreneurs were most likely to affirm mental illness as the folk devil. Looking at the data in this manner, the hypothesis that the interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs identified the mentally ill as the folk devil is not supported. Of the articles in which a combination of interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs are the speakers, guns were most likely to be affirmed (40.7 percent), whereas only 27.2 percent of those articles affirmed mental illness as the folk devil. Mental illness was identified most often in articles with speakers who were interest group-only, grassroots paired with interest group representatives, and grassroots paired with elites.
However, of the articles that affirm mental illness as the folk devil, interest group speakers paired with elite moral entrepreneurs were more likely than any other moral entrepreneur category or combination to identify mental illness as the cause of school shootings. More than 27 percent of articles with a combination of interest group and elite speakers affirmed mental illness as the folk devil, while less than 20 percent of articles including other combinations of moral entrepreneurs affirmed mental illness. So, when mental illness is affirmed, it is most often affirmed in articles with interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs. In other words, while articles including a combination of interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs affirm guns more often than they affirm mental illness, they are more likely than any other group of moral entrepreneurs to affirm mental illness. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is somewhat supported by the data.

In sum, the hypotheses 1, 3, and 4 were partially supported, whereas hypothesis 2 was not supported. The first hypothesis predicted that mental illness is the currently accepted folk devil in the moral panic about school shootings. Mental illness is the currently accepted folk devil in the sense that it was affirmed equally as often as guns as the folk devil in 2015, but was denied as the folk devil far less often than guns. Also recall from the bivariate correlations that there was a correlation of .967 between mentioning mental illness and affirming it as the folk devil, the highest correlation of all folk devils mentioned and affirmed as the cause of the school shooting (social alienation = .921; violent media = .885; and guns = .910). Thus, we can conclude that mental illness is the most frequently accepted folk devil in the moral panic about school shootings. The second hypothesis predicted that elite moral entrepreneurs were the most common contributors to the moral panic about school shootings, but the data revealed
that grassroots and interest group representatives were the most common moral entrepreneurs involved in the construction of the moral panic. The third hypothesis predicted that there had been a shift in the models used to create the panic; that the interest group model had been replaced by an elite-engineered model. The data revealed that grassroots and interest group moral entrepreneurs were consistently the most active in the creation of the moral panic. However elite moral entrepreneurs have become more active over time while grassroots and interest group speakers became less active, which partially supports the hypothesis. The fourth hypothesis predicted that interest group representatives and elite moral entrepreneurs were most likely to affirm mental illness as the folk devil. The data revealed that, although interest group speakers paired with elites were most likely to affirm guns as the folk devil, they were more likely than any other moral entrepreneur category to affirm mental illness. So, when mental illness is affirmed, it is most often affirmed in articles with interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs. These findings are valuable to the research on media portrayal of school shootings and the identification and support/acceptance of folk devils according the moral entrepreneurs involved in the creation of the moral panic.

Folk Devils and Moral Entrepreneurs in the Absence of Outlier School Shootings

Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook were the three deadliest school shootings within this time frame, which led to excessive media coverage. These three school shootings account for 702 (57 percent) of the 1,237 articles collected across 16 school shootings, meaning the remaining 13 school shootings combined only account for 535 (43 percent) of the 1,237 articles included in this analysis. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 show that there were 236 articles published in The Denver Post and 93 New York Times articles published between April 20 and May 19,
1999, for a total of 329 articles. The Roanoke Times published 147 articles and the New York Times published 76 articles about Virginia Tech within between April 16 and May 15, 2007, for a total of 223 articles. The Sandy Hook shooting was reported in 92 local articles and 58 New York Times articles between December 14, 2012 and January 13, 2013, for a total of 150. In comparison, the remaining 13 school shootings yeilded an average of 41.15 articles, including both local and national newspapers. Therefore, Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook are outliers in the data for school shootings since 1991.

The following is an analysis of the patterns of identification and affirmation of each folk devil by moral entrepreneurs in the absence of Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Sandy Hook. Tables 5.13, 5.14, and 5.15 showcase data for folk devils mentioned and affirmed, comparing data including the outlier schools against data excluding the outlier schools. Because the shooting at Columbine occurred in 1999, Virginia Tech in 2007, and Sandy Hook in 2012, the differences in folk devil identification and affirmation are isolated to their corresponding five-year time period. This means that removing Columbine-related articles from the 1996 – 2000 time period does not effect the data for 1991 – 1995 or 2001 – 2015; removing articles pertaining to Virginia Tech from the 2006 – 2010 time period does not effect the data for 1991 – 2005 or 2011 – 2015; and removing the articles pertaining to Sandy Hook from the 2011 – 2015 time period does not effect the data for 1991 – 2010. Therefore, these data are presented by isolating the five-year period in which each outlier school shooting occurred. Table 5.13 illustrates the frequency with which each folk devil was mentioned and affirmed between 1996 and 2000, comparing the data including Columbine-related articles with data excluding the Columbine-related articles. Table 5.14 provides a similar comparison of data.
including versus excluding articles related to Virginia Tech between 2005 and 2010. Table 5.15 illustrates a comparison of data including versus excluding articles related to Sandy Hook between 2011 and 2015.

Table 5.16 is similar to the table following the analysis of the fourth hypothesis regarding the relationship between the type of moral entrepreneur and the folk devils affirmed (Table 5.11), except the articles pertaining to Columbine have been removed from the analysis. Table 5.17 presents the same data, with the articles pertaining to Virginia Tech removed; and Table 5.18 presents the data with articles pertaining to Sandy Hook removed.
Table 5.13 Folk Devils Mentioned and Affirmed, 1996 – 2000, with and without Columbine-Related Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folk Devil</th>
<th>Folk Devils Mentioned</th>
<th>Folk Devils Affirmed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with Columbine</td>
<td>without Columbine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
<td>10.4%***</td>
<td>6.6%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Media</td>
<td>14.0%***</td>
<td>10.7%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns</td>
<td>22.9%***</td>
<td>25.6%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>9.3%***</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With Columbine, N = 1,237; Without Columbine, N = 908
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table 5.14 Folk Devils Mentioned and Affirmed, 2005 – 2010, with and without Virginia Tech-Related Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folk Devil</th>
<th>Folk Devils Mentioned</th>
<th>Folk Devils Affirmed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with Virginia Tech</td>
<td>without Virginia Tech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
<td>2.0%***</td>
<td>0.07%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Media</td>
<td>1.7%***</td>
<td>0.0%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns</td>
<td>12.0%***</td>
<td>2.2%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>17.6%***</td>
<td>10.4%***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With Virginia Tech, N = 1,237; Without Virginia Tech, N = 1,014
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table 5.15 Folk Devils Mentioned and Affirmed, 2010 – 2015, with and without Sandy Hook-Related Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folk Devil</th>
<th>Folk Devils Mentioned</th>
<th>Folk Devils Affirmed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with Sandy Hook</td>
<td>without Sandy Hook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
<td>7.4%***</td>
<td>11.1%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Media</td>
<td>4.4%***</td>
<td>3.7%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns</td>
<td>29.5%***</td>
<td>29.1%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>24.2%***</td>
<td>25.4%***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With Sandy Hook, N = 1,237; Without Sandy Hook, N = 1,087
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001
When articles pertaining to Columbine were removed from the data, social alienation and violent media were mentioned less often between 1996 and 2000. Social alienation was mentioned in 10.4 percent of articles when Columbine was included, but only 6.6 percent of articles when Columbine was removed. Violent media was mentioned in 14 percent of articles when Columbine was included, but only 10.7 percent of articles when Columbine was removed. Social alienation and violent media were also affirmed less often, with social alienation being affirmed in only 5 percent of the articles between 1996 and 2000 when Columbine was removed, compared to 9.8 percent of the articles including Columbine. Violent media was affirmed in 11.6 percent of the articles including Columbine between 1996 and 2000, but affirmed in 10.7% of the articles with Columbine removed. This means that Columbine prompted the media to discuss and affirm social alienation and violent media more often than what was “normal” for that time period.

Interestingly, guns and mental illness were mentioned and affirmed more frequently when Columbine-related articles were removed. Guns were mentioned in 22.9 percent of the articles between 1996 and 2000 when including Columbine, but mentioned in 25.6 percent of articles excluding Columbine. Guns were affirmed as the folk devil in 18 percent of articles between 1996 and 2000 including Columbine, but affirmed in 20.7 percent of articles excluding Columbine. Mental illness was only mentioned in 9.3 percent of articles including Columbine, but was mentioned in 15.7 percent of articles with Columbine removed. Mental illness was affirmed in 8.7 percent of articles between 1996 and 2000 including Columbine, but was affirmed in 14.9 percent of articles excluding Columbine. This means that, in the month following Columbine, the media discussed and affirmed guns and mental illness less frequently
than was normal for that time period. Instead, articles about Columbine discussed social alienation and violent media more often than guns and mental illness. Another way to understand this is that the Columbine killings were disproportionately blamed on social isolation and violent media. This commonly adopted narrative is ironic given the current understanding of what led to the Columbine killings. At least according to Cullen (2009), mental illness and an obsession with guns were the underlying factors that led to the killings, and violent media and bullying played very minimal, if any, role. Scholars have noted that this was not the story popularized by the media, and these findings confirm that interpretation.

When articles pertaining to Virginia Tech were removed from the data, all four folk devils were mentioned and affirmed less often. The biggest changes were in reference to guns and mental illness; guns were mentioned in 12 percent of the articles between 2006 and 2010 including Virginia Tech, but were only mentioned in 2.2 percent of the articles when Virginia Tech was removed. Guns were affirmed in 10.6 percent of the articles between 2006 and 2010 including Virginia Tech, but were only affirmed in 2.2 percent of the articles when Virginia Tech was removed. Mental illness was mentioned in 17.6 percent of articles between 2006 and 2010 including Virginia Tech, but was only mentioned in 10.4 percent of articles with Virginia Tech removed. Mental illness was affirmed in 16.8 percent of articles between 2006 and 2010 including Virginia Tech, but was only affirmed in 10.4 percent of articles when Virginia Tech was removed. This means that the school shooting at Virginia Tech led to an increase in the discussion and affirmation of guns and mental illness in response to school shootings between 2006 and 2010. Based on the investigation of this horrific incident (Virginia Tech Review Panel 2007), these factors were important. The shooter was suffering from mental illness and he did
obtain his firearms easily and legally despite his history of mental illness. At least compared to
the media coverage of the Columbine incident, the media appears to report about the Virginia
Tech case more accurately.

When articles pertaining to Sandy Hook were removed from the data, there were not
many changes in the mentioning and affirmation of each folk devil between 2011 and 2015.
Social alienation showed the most change; it was mentioned in 7.4 percent of the articles
including Sandy Hook and 11.1 percent of articles with Sandy Hook removed. Social alienation
was also affirmed more without the Sandy Hook articles (5.9 percent versus 8.5 percent). This
finding makes sense because bullying and being a “loner” is an unlikely narrative for the victims
in this case because of their young age. Violent media was mentioned less often without the
Sandy Hook articles (4.4 percent versus 3.7 percent) and affirmed slightly less often when
Sandy Hook articles were removed (2.9 percent versus 1.6 percent). Guns were mentioned and
affirmed almost equally as often in both scenarios. They were mentioned in 29.5 percent of
articles including Sandy Hook and 29.1 percent of articles with Sandy Hook removed; and were
affirmed in 27.7 of articles including Sandy Hook and 25.4 percent of articles with Sandy Hook
removed. Mental illness also did not show much change; it was mentioned and affirmed
slightly more often without the Sandy Hook articles (24.2 percent versus 25.4 percent and 23
percent versus 23.8 percent, respectively). This means that, surprisingly, the Sandy Hook
school shooting did not dramatically increase or decrease the discussion or affirmation of guns
and mental illness in response to school shootings 2010 and 2015.

Overall, the removal of articles pertaining to the three high-profile school shootings
revealed the effect of these outliers on the frequency with which two of the folk devils were
mentioed and affirmed. Columbine-related articles inflated the number of articles affirming social alienation and violent media, while affirming guns and mental illness less often. Virginia Tech-related articles drew more attention to guns and mental illness in particular, but also slightly increased the proportion of articles affirming social alienation and violent media. Sandy Hook-related articles did not drastically change the discourse surround school shootings between 2011 and 2015, but reflected the proportion of articles in which each folk devil was affirmed. In sum, removing the outlier school shootings from the data did not change the overall results; guns continued to be affirmed more often than mental illness.

### Table 5.16 Moral Entrepreneurs and the Affirmation of Folk Devils without Columbine (N = 908)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Entrepreneur</th>
<th>Percent of Articles Affirming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots Only</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group Only</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite Only</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Interest Group</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Elite</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots, Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi square</td>
<td>13.770</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

When articles pertaining to Columbine were removed from the data, each combination of moral entrepreneurs were more likely to affirm mental illness and guns as the folk devil, while becoming less likely to affirm social alienation and violent media as the folk devil. Although articles including both interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs are most likely to affirm guns as the folk devil, they are more likely than any other moral entrepreneur group to affirm mental illness. This combination of moral entrepreneurs affirms mental illness in 32.1
percent of the articles, whereas other moral entrepreneurs affirm mental illness in 17 to 24 percent of articles. So, while interest group representatives paired with elites affirm guns most often (41.1 percent), they affirm mental illness more than any other moral entrepreneur group (32.1 percent). As with the results above, of the articles in which mental illness is affirmed, they are affirmed most often in articles including both interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs. In other words, removing Columbine-related articles did not change the conclusion that the fourth hypothesis is somewhat supported.

Table 5.17 Moral Entrepreneurs and the Affirmation of Folk Devils, without Virginia Tech (N = 1,014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Entrepreneur</th>
<th>Percent of Articles Affirming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots Only</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group Only</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite Only</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Interest Group</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Elite</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots, Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi square</td>
<td>24.748***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

When articles pertaining to Virginia Tech were removed from the data, the biggest change occurred when examining whether interest groups paired with elites would affirm mental illness. The hypothesis predicted that interest group representatives and elite moral entrepreneurs would affirm mental illness the most. The data presented in Table 5.9 provided some support this hypothesis, because this combination of moral entrepreneurs affirmed guns as the folk devil more often than mental illness (40.7 percent versus 27.2 percent), but also affirmed mental illness more often than any other moral entrepreneur(s).
The data in Table 5.15 show that, when articles pertaining to Virginia Tech were removed from the analysis, interest group speakers paired with elites were still most likely to affirm guns as the folk devil (39.7 percent for guns, versus 7.4 percent for social alienation, 8.8 percent for violent media, and 20.6 percent for mental illness). Additionally, this combination of moral entrepreneurs was no longer more likely than all other types of moral entrepreneurs to affirm mental illness. This means that the Virginia Tech shooting led to an increase in the affirmation of mental illness as the folk devil, especially when being affirmed by a combination of interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs. Therefore, with the Virginia Tech-related articles removed from the data, there is less support for the fourth hypothesis.

Table 5.18 Moral Entrepreneurs and the Affirmation of Folk Devils, without Sandy Hook (N = 1,087)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Entrepreneur</th>
<th>Percent of Articles Affirming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots Only</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group Only</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite Only</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Interest Group</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots and Elite</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots, Interest Group and Elite</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi square</td>
<td>20.750**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

When articles pertaining to Sandy Hook were removed from the data, interest group representatives paired with elites were still most likely to affirm guns as the folk devil (41.8 percent of the articles). However, this combination of moral entrepreneurs was still more likely than any other moral entrepreneur(s) to affirm mental illness as the folk devil. They affirmed mental illness in nearly 27 percent of the articles excluding Sandy Hook, whereas other
moral entrepreneurs affirmed mental illness in 4.2 to 18.7 percent of articles. This means that, even without discussing Sandy Hook, interest group representatives paired with elites were still the most common moral entrepreneurs to affirm mental illness as the cause of school shootings.

Overall, removing articles pertaining to the three outlier school shootings from the data did not substantially change the results of the fourth hypothesis. While interest group representatives paired with elites were continuously most likely to affirm guns as the folk devil, they were more likely than other moral entrepreneurs to affirm mental illness as the folk devil. This was true for the analysis including all 1,237 articles, as well as the analyses excluding articles related to Columbine or Sandy Hook, but not when articles pertaining to Virginia Tech were removed.

When articles related to Virginia Tech were removed, the combination of grassroots paired with elites was more likely than interest group representatives paired with elites to affirm mental illness. This could be because, as Hawdon and Ryan (2008) point out, a master frame of mental illness emerged on campus immediately after the event. They argue that this frame was widely supported because it carried the assumption that the shooting could not have been reasonably foreseen or prevented, which meant the university could not be held responsible. It is possible that the immediate, widespread involvement of grassroots community members led to the observed difference between grassroots paired with elite moral entrepreneurs affirming mental illness, compared to that of interest group representatives paired with elites (21.2 percent versus 20.6 percent, respectively).
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS

School shootings are upsetting events because they offend the public conscience by highlighting rare instances where schools become scenes of unimaginable violence, rather than the safe havens they are assumed to be. They deviate substantially from typical activities and create an opportunity for the media to capitalize on the unusual and bizarre story. This is why school shootings have been described as “low-probability, high impact events” (Satterly 2014: 21). They are so rare that when they do occur, they command the attention of the entire country. The public craves information in the aftermath of a tragedy or disaster, and the media is the vehicle of information delivery (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). Media sensationalization leads to a heightened sense of awareness, which leads to an increased fear of victimization. This is what Cohen (1972/2002) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) refer to as a moral panic.

Previous research has suggested that there is a moral panic about school shootings (Donohue et al. 1998; Burns and Crawford 1999; Springhall 1999; Schildkraut et al. 2015). Burns and Crawford (1999) and Schildkraut et al. (2015) studied school shootings in the context of moral panics. Their results support the claim; they found widespread concern, consensus in the legitimacy of the threat, disproportionality between subjective and objective threat, increased hostility toward a folk devil, and volatility in the appearance and disappearance of the issue in the media. Most importantly, the criterion of disproportionality is met; the perceived threat of victimization is greater than the actual likelihood of being the victim in a school shooting. This is evident when considering that less than five percent of school-related fatalities are due to active shooter incidents, yet half of all parents with school-aged children and 75 percent of high school students worry that their community will experience a school
shooting (Satterly 2014; Juvonen 2001; Kiefer 2005; Wike and Fraser 2009). So, there is a tendency to panic after mass school shootings. This panic appears to be disproportionate to the objective level of threat and therefore a moral panic. Not only is there disproportionality regarding the risk of victimization in a school shooting, but there is also disproportionality regarding the folk devil, specifically when considering mental illness.

Mental illness affects about 25 percent of American adults and 20 percent of American teenagers every year (Duckworth 2013). Anxiety disorders (such as OCD and PTSD) are the most common, affecting about 18 percent of the population. Depression affects another six to seven percent, while bipolar disorder affects 2.6 percent and schizophrenia affects 1.1 percent. While certain types of mental illness (such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder) have been linked to an increased risk of violent behavior (Link, Andrews, and Cullen 1992; Metzl and MacLeish 2015), it would be inappropriate to apply this stereotype to all who suffer from mental illness (Link et al. 1999). However, there has been an increase in the perception of mental illness being associated with violence (Phelan et al. 2000). Therefore, the stereotype that links mental illness with heinous acts of violence, such as school shootings, is somewhat misguided (Link et al. 1999). Yet, people are quick to blame mental illness for acts of mass violence. Muschert and Ragnerda (2011) argue that this is because it is easier and more acceptable to place the responsibility on the individual, rather than society or larger social issues and institutions. This suggests that the best solution is to treat the individual rather than change the status quo.

I build on previous research that established the crisis of school shootings as a moral panic by exploring the folk devils identified and moral entrepreneurs participating in the panic.
Using data collected from national and local newspaper articles published in the month following mass school shootings (those claiming four or more victims) between 1991 and 2015, I set out to answer four research questions. First, what folk devils have been named in the moral panic about school shootings? I hypothesized that mental illness would be the currently accepted folk devil, because the diagnoses of recent high-profile school shooters became the focal point of the media coverage. Second, which moral panic model has been the most frequently utilized model in constructing the moral panic? I hypothesized that the elite-engineered model had been the most common, because political elites have become fixtures in the media coverage of school shootings. The public and interest groups tend to look to elites to make appraisals of the situation, and I expected that elites were driving the narrative because they could use these events to push their political ideologies.

Third, how has the moral panic changed over time? I hypothesized that the moral panic began as an interest group model and shifted to an elite engineered model as the panic gained strength and momentum, because this would give elites an opportunity to capitalize on their interests. Fourth, what is the relationship between moral entrepreneurs and folk devils? Are different moral entrepreneurs responsible for the establishment of different folk devils associated with school shootings? I hypothesized that mental illness would be linked with elite and interest group moral entrepreneurs, because mentally ill individuals are easy targets and are victims of the sweeping generalization that mental illness leads to inexplicable violence and criminal behavior. Using previous research (Richardson 2014), I pre-selected social alienation, violent media, guns, and mental illness as potential folk devils represented at different times throughout the moral panic.
Starting with the second and third hypotheses, the data suggested that a combination of grassroots and interest group moral panic models were behind the construction of the moral panic about school shootings. The results partially supported the third hypothesis, but did not support the second hypothesis. Elites were the least common moral entrepreneurs to participate in the moral panic, while grassroots and interest group moral entrepreneurs were consistently more active in their participation throughout the past 25 years. There was no definitive shift in the model used to perpetuate the moral panic; grassroots and interest groups lead the narrative from 1991 to 2015. However, elites became more active during that time while grassroots and interest group speakers became less active. Referring back to Figure 3.2, the results reveal that the moral panic follows the grassroots and interest group models, where the general public (including victims’ friends and families, survivors, and community members), along with interest groups (gun rights activists, gun control advocates, and mental health professionals) use the media to communicate with each other and to elites (political leaders) about their fears and opinions about school shootings and to establish a folk devil. In this figure, the folk devil is removed from the process to represent their position as “outliers” who are vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation and powerless against their vilification. The first and fourth hypotheses address the role of the folk devil(s) throughout the 25 years included in the analysis.

The first hypothesis was partially supported by the data. Guns were identified and affirmed as the folk devil more often than mental illness, but they were also denied as the folk devil more often. This means that, while guns are believed to pose a threat to safety, there is an ongoing debate about the legitimacy of that threat. Mental illness, on the other hand,
became more frequently affirmed over time and was rarely denied as the folk devil, signaling that people were not engaging in a debate about the legitimacy of the threat posed by mentally ill individuals. There was more widespread agreement – or, consensus – that mental illness was to blame for school shootings. This nuance leads to the conclusion that mental illness is more frequently accepted as the folk devil, even if it is not the most frequently affirmed folk devil. This makes sense, considering the stigma that mental illness already faces in society (Mojtabai et al. 2011; Phelan et al. 2000; McGinty et al. 2013; Metzl and MacLeish 2015). The mentally ill are already stigmatized, marginalized and vulnerable (in addition to being overrepresented in prison populations), meaning they are largely defenseless against their association with school shootings. Recall that disproportionality is a crucial element of moral panics, and that disproportionality can be determined by an overemphasis on one issue or problem, while obscuring or ignoring other problems facing society, especially when it is convenient to a moral entrepreneur (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). This is evident when considering the affirmation and denial of guns versus mental illness. Guns were denied as the folk devil 2.7 times as often as mental illness. This could represent a common ground among gun control advocates and gun rights activists; they can potentially agree on the argument that mentally ill people should not have access to guns. This agreement provides an avenue for the two opposing perspectives to join forces and move forward together. Mental health professionals (also an interest group) make gains in this agreement as well; demand for their expertise and services increase, and their field of work receives more notoriety, (and presumably) resources, or support.

Recall also that volatility is a characteristic of moral panics. It is determined via a comparison of the amount of attention devoted to an issue or problem as the moral panic
emerges and disappears (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). This means that society pays more
attention to the issue or problem only when it is related to a crisis or disaster, forgetting about
it or moving on to a different topic soon thereafter. Access to mental health care is prioritized
in the months following a mass shooting, but is it a priority when there is no disaster or tragedy
to thrust it into the spotlight?

The fourth hypothesis, which predicted interest groups and elites to be responsible for
the identification of mental illness as the folk devil, was somewhat supported. Elites and
interest group representatives were most likely to identify guns as the folk devil – not mental
illness. However, they were also most likely to deny guns as the folk devil. Interestingly, they
were more likely than any other moral entrepreneurs to affirm mental illness. Therefore, the
fourth hypothesis is supported in the sense that, when mental illness is affirmed, it is most
often affirmed in articles where the speakers are interest group and elite moral entrepreneurs.

**What School Shooting Research Contributes to Moral Panic Theory**

Moral panics are defined by five criteria: widespread concern or fear of the threat;
consensus or agreement that the threat is legitimate and imminent; exhibited hostility toward
the person or people deemed responsible for the threat; volatility in the rapid emergence and
disappearance of the panic; and disproportionality between the level of fear and the actual
likelihood of victimization (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). Disproportionality is the crux of
moral panic theory, and can be established via four conditions: exaggeration of figures or data;
fabrication of figures or data; focusing on one issue or problem while obscuring or ignoring
another; and/or changes in the amount of attention given to a certain issue over time, even
when there is no such change in the seriousness of the issue or problem. Moral panics are also
characterized by the presence and contributions of moral entrepreneurs – individuals who believe that certain groups of people or social facts pose a threat to society and should be dealt with accordingly, using swift and severe punishment. Those who are identified by moral entrepreneurs as responsible for the evils of society are what Cohen (1972/2002) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) refer to as folk devils. These are “outsiders” who are easily exploited by moral entrepreneurs due to their marginalization in society; they are helpless and vulnerable to the manipulations of moral entrepreneurs (Burns and Crawford 1999).

Usually, folk devils are easily vilified or criminalized by moral entrepreneurs who aim to defend a political ideology, without regard for the well-being of the deviant (Burns and Crawford 1999; Coehn 1972/2002). This research determined that mental illness is the most frequently accepted folk devil associated with school shootings. Even though moral entrepreneurs mentioned guns most often in response to school shootings, there is an ongoing debate about the legitimacy of the threat that guns pose to student safety. When guns are mentioned, they are not necessarily being affirmed as the cause of the school shooting – rather, they are often being discussed as a solution to the problem. Mental illness, on the other hand, is mentioned nearly as often and is rarely denied as the cause of mass school shootings, meaning there is less resistance to the identification and condemnation of mental illness compared to guns. This contributes to the moral panic literature by highlighting an important, defining element of folk devils: they cannot be created from something that society treasures or values as central mores. Guns are revered in American society and celebrated as a symbol of constitutional freedom. They are an integral part of personal identity for a significant segment of the population, and gun rights are a cherished American tradition. For many, claims that
guns are responsible for acts of mass violence are seen as reprehensible and described as an attack on American values. Because of this enduringly deep resistance to denouncing firearms, it is impossible to achieve the consensus and agreement necessary to the structure of a moral panic. To many, blaming guns for mass shootings is equivalent to blaming American values; it would mean conceding to the idea that we are the root cause of the violence. Instead, it is much more acceptable and tolerable to denounce a folk devil that is characterized by individual – rather than societal – failures. Mental illness and those that suffer from it are not valued by society. They are collectively pushed aside, avoided, and stigmatized, which makes them an easy target in the search for a folk devil. Their psychological conditions are often dismissed as personal inadequacies and shortcomings, rather than legitimate disorders that deserve medical attention. Therefore, mental illness is implicated as the folk devil instead of guns because it is something for which we, as a society, cannot take responsibility.

If guns were the agreed-upon folk devil, the American community would be forced to take responsibility for the lives lost due to gun violence. For this reason, calling attention to mental illness is a common ground for those on both sides of the gun debate; it offers the illusion of an effort to address the problem while also offering an alternative to the unpopular idea of blaming guns. This represents a significant stake in the mental illness narrative in the eyes of gun rights activists, who can use the noble cause of mental illness to obstruct and divert attention away from the need for increased gun control.

In recent years, there has been a shift toward the medicalization of mental illness, which means that conditions or troubles previously defined as moral, spiritual, or behavioral issues are now defined as medical issues and should be treated through medication (Horwitz 2010). It
could be argued that blaming mental illness for acts of mass violence would excuse the perpetrator, rather than vilify him or her, because they suffer from a medical condition and therefore cannot be held accountable for their behavior. However, in reading the newspaper articles included in this study, the medicalization perspective has not yet been adopted by the general public as it applies to school shooters. Unfortunately, most of the moral entrepreneurs who spoke of mental illness did so in negative terms (using derogatory language) rather than the compassionate and less-incriminating terms used in the medicalization perspective. Even if the public embraces the medicalization perspective in the future, mental illness will remain an individual-level problem. In other words, it will still be easier to medically treat those who have mental illnesses than to address problems within the larger society (Muschert and Ragnedda 2011). Therefore, mental illness will likely remain at the forefront of the discourse regarding school shootings.

Moral panics follow three general models that reflect the moral entrepreneurs active in the creation and perpetuation of the panic: grassroots, interest group, and elite-engineered (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). The grassroots model is driven by the general public over a fear or concern that is genuinely felt among a broad segment of the population. They steadfastly believe that there is a legitimate and imminent threat to their safety, values, or existence. The interest group model is driven by action groups (such as activists, advocates, “experts” in various fields), who stand to gain or lose something in the success or failure of the moral panic or in the identification and condemnation of a folk devil. While these groups may be genuinely concerned about the moral crusade they’ve undertaken, their efforts almost always simultaneously advance their own status in the process. Interest groups can advocate for their
preferred ideological philosophy and make gains in terms of respectability or resources. Elite-engineered moral panics are driven by political, cultural, or economic leaders who use their notoriety in participation with the moral panic, thus influencing public policy, distribution of resources, and public opinion. Elite moral entrepreneurs may not genuinely believe that there is a real or legitimate threat to society, but they capitalize on the opportunity to divert attention away from other problems facing society.

This research contributes to moral panic theory by highlighting an important constraint of elite-engineered models. I expected elites to be the major contributors to the discourse surrounding school shootings because, in previous moral panics (such as the war on drugs), elites have employed a fear narrative that capitalizes on the anxieties of constituents in order to promote issues or achieve legislation that is self-serving. In these instances, elites identified or affirmed folk devils that were on the periphery of mainstream American society and the victims were unrelatable and anonymous. The American public felt distant or detached from the perpetrators and the victims of drug abuse. In the case of school shootings, however, this type of fear narrative is not as effective because the victims are representative of all children. Schools are assumed to be a universal place of safety and sanctuary. People feel connected to their fellow students in neighboring schools, towns, or states. Therefore, the tragedy of school shootings often hits too close to home for people to continue feeling distant and disconnected from the event. There is the common expression after school shootings that “this could happen anywhere,” or “it could have easily happened here.” The victims of school shootings are usually middle-class (and typically white) children, which prompts feelings of familiarity and attachment from those who are reminded that “that could have been my
son/daughter.” Therefore, school shootings are not events or threats from which we can
distance ourselves. The connection or familiarity felt among Americans as they react to school
shootings prohibits elites from using a fear narrative to garner support for an elite-engineered
moral panic.

Conclusions

Mental illness is the most frequently accepted and least controversial folk devil
identified in the moral panic about school shootings since 1991. Grassroots moral
entrepreneurs and interest group representatives have been the most common participants in
building the moral panic and driving the narrative, meaning the overall moral panic was mostly
constructed by a combination of the grassroots and interest group models. Elites, although
account for the smallest proportion of speakers introduced in the articles, also play a big role in
building and maintaining the moral panic. Those who stand to gain or lose something in the
moral panic (interest group representatives) paired with those who have the power to
influence public policy and the distribution of resources (elite moral entrepreneurs) were most
likely to identify and affirm guns (rather than mental illness) as the folk devil in relation to the
moral panic about school shootings. However, they were also most likely to deny guns as the
folk devil and were more likely than any other moral entrepreneur to affirm mental illness. The
ongoing debate about the role of firearms in American society becomes a political hot topic in
the months after each school shooting, whereas mental illness is a less controversial folk devil
because there is less resistance when blaming them for the evils of the world. Mental health
care is a common ground for all parties involved, especially when they are divided on the issue
of gun legislation. Mentally ill individuals have been marginalized, pushed aside, condemned,
and criminalized, leaving them defenseless against the hostility directed toward them in the rush to blame someone or something for school shootings. The data revealed that affirmation of mental illness as the folk devil gained traction over time, whereas support for the claim that guns were to blame for school shootings was less consistent. If this continues, mental illness could become the most frequently affirmed folk devil in the near future, overpowering the support for guns as the folk devil because it represents a common ground for parties on both sides of the gun debate.

Implications

While it is true that some forms of mental illness have been found to increase one’s risk of violent behavior (Link, Andrews, and Cullen 1992), it would be inappropriate and incorrect to say that all persons with mental illness are violent or dangerous individuals (Link et al. 1999). Conflating mental illness with violence, and mass murder in particular, may have the opposite effect than the desired outcome. While drawing attention to insufficient funding, access, and opportunity for mental health services, moral entrepreneurs are also reinforcing the negative stigma associated with mental illness and psychological disorders. As McGinty et al. (2013) pointed out, the erroneous assumption that mental illness is so strongly related to violence promotes negative attitudes, stereotypes, and hostility toward the mentally ill.

Recall that Mojtabai et al. (2011) studied barriers to mental health treatment and found that most people who need treatment but do not seek help are more likely to cite attitudinal or evaluative obstacles (such as a lack of confidence, stigma, and the desire to handle it on their own) rather than structural factors (such as a lack of financial resources) as their reasoning. Attitudinal obstacles (i.e., stigma) are a more destructive hindrance to seeking mental health
treatment than structural obstacles (i.e., money or insurance) in terms of using mental health services among individuals who possess symptoms that fulfill the criteria of a disorder of the DSM-VI, but were not receiving treatment. Therefore, more attention should be paid to the evaluative aspects of mental health services in reducing psychological distress. Decreasing stigma and encouraging affected people to ask for help are likely worthy solutions to barriers to mental health treatment, compared to increased legislation that targets the integrity of mentally ill individuals, a vast majority of whom are not violent. Recall that mental illness is more prevalent in the criminal justice system than in the general population, with 64 percent of inmates in local jails, 56 percent of state prisoners, and 45 percent of federal prisoners show symptoms of mental health problems (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2006). Without significantly changing the way mental illness is viewed in society, those suffering from mental illness are going to continue to populate the criminal justice system rather than the health care system. By reducing stigma, treatment opportunities become more viable and those who need treatment may become more likely to seek help. This will alleviate some of the strain put on the criminal justice system, which is ill-equipped to diagnose and treat mental illness (Howard 2013).

Gun rights activists, gun control advocates, and mental health professionals may agree on restricting access to firearms for those who have mental illnesses. But, if the stigma surrounding mental illness is a strong deterrent to seeking mental health services, those who are affected by mental illness are less likely to be identified as unfit to own a gun and therefore will not be barred from purchasing firearms. Additionally, school shooters have been able to obtain firearms through friends or relatives, meaning that their mental health status was not an
obstacle in finding a weapon with which to commit the crime. Therefore, the condemnation of mental illness in reaction to school shootings is not the best course of action. Associating mental illness with criminality and violence further stigmatizes the label of “mentally ill,” which is a significant barrier to treatment. If the goal is to increase access to mental health treatment so that mentally ill persons no longer have the opportunity to cause harm to others, then there should be an effort to minimize the stigma associated with mental illness, not amplify it.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While the data collected and presented in this research represent valuable contributions to the literature on school shootings and moral panics, there were some limitations. First, this research is limited to school shootings that occurred between 1991 and 2015. This represents a very brief, although recent, history of school shootings in America. Expanding the data to include school shooting occurring prior to 1991 would perhaps put my research into perspective with regard to the overall course of the narrative about school shootings. Second, in an effort to maintain consistency with the definition of a “mass shooting,” this data includes articles published after school shootings that resulted in four or more deaths. According to Agnich (2015), there were more than 50 school shootings resulting in at least one death since 1990, whereas this analysis is limited to the 16 deadliest incidents. Expanding this research to include school shootings claiming any deaths would more than triple the number of incidents to be researched. Perhaps the folk devils identified by moral entrepreneurs vary depending on the severity of the event. In the current research, only the most severe events are included in the analysis, which could lead to biases in folk devil identification. Perhaps mental illness is more likely to be affirmed when there are more fatalities, or perhaps guns are more likely to be
affirmed when the firearm is an assault rifle with a high capacity magazine, rather than a handgun. Including incidents with less fatalities or controlling for the specific type of firearm may offer a clearer picture of why certain folk devils are invoked in response to certain tragedies depending on severity.

As mentioned previously, it is possible that elite moral entrepreneurs’ voices carry more weight than those of interest group or grassroots speakers. Perhaps the President or Vice President has greater influence over public opinion than that of a mental health professional, a law enforcement officer, or representatives of victim support groups. Future research could address this question by exploring the degree to which elite moral entrepreneurs are able to influence public opinion compared to interest group and grassroots moral entrepreneurs.

This research is also limited in terms of newspaper selections. The New York Times is the only national publication included in the analysis, along with one local publication for each incident. Including additional sources of national news coverage could provide more information about the biases of speakers introduced in the articles and the opinions they voice in response to school shootings. Additionally, in the results presented here, there was no control for the type of newspaper publication. Perhaps the local and national papers highlight different types of moral entrepreneurs or different folk devils. Previous researchers have investigated such a comparison using articles published in various national newspapers after the Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook shootings (Hawdon, Agnich, and Ryan 2014; Hawdon, et al. 2014). A similar study using articles from additional school shootings could offer a deeper understanding of media portrayals of school shootings.
On a similar note, this research could be further investigated by controlling for the geographic or regional location of school shootings and the local newspapers covering them. Do folk devils vary according to the geographic region of the shooting? Another limitation of this data is that data were recorded for four pre-selected folk devils (social alienation, violent media, guns, and mental illness). Other folk devils mentioned, although less common, included issues such as poor parenting, school safety measures, a lack of God/morality in society, and hegemonic masculinity that promotes aggression as a measure of power among males. This research could be strengthened by including a bigger variety of folk devils to be identified by moral entrepreneurs, rather than limiting the scope to the four folk devils included here.

Finally, there are two limitations related to the restriction to print newspaper coverage. First, as seen in Tables 4.2 and 4.3, there were some school shootings for which a search yielded extremely low numbers of newspaper articles. This could be because incidents with fewer fatalities did not receive as much media coverage, because newspaper coverage of incidents from the early 1990s is not fully available online at the current time, or simply because school shootings did not receive as much attention in the past. Future research could investigate the low yield in newspaper coverage in order to determine whether (and how) the volume of media coverage has changed over time. A second limitation related to the restriction to print newspaper coverage is the emergence of social media, which has become a common source of news for many people. How does news coverage delivered by social media differ from news coverage found in newspapers or on television? Social media provides an opportunity for people (journalists/reporters, politicians, celebrities, and grassroots individuals alike) to deliver breaking news express their opinions, and debate topics instantaneously and
immediately following a mass shooting. The moral panic about school shootings may be influenced by the chaotic and fast-paced responses via social media forums such as Twitter and Facebook. Social media represents a necessary field of research regarding media representations of school shooters before, during, and after the tragedy. Therefore, directions for future research include: accounting for additional folk devils; expanding the time frame beyond 1991; expanding the number of incidents studied by including events with lower fatality counts; analyses controlling for newspaper type and geographic region; and a new branch of research focusing on social media as a news source.

School shootings are horrific events that attract the attention of the media. While the media is meeting the demand for the distribution of pertinent information following these heartbreaking tragedies, the sensationalization of school shootings has created a moral panic. The hysteria that consumes America in the aftermath of a school shooting leads people to be fearful of students who are described as “loners” or have been bullied at school, adolescents who play violent video games or listen to certain types of music, and most recently, people who suffer from mental illness. This is problematic because moral panics, by definition, highlight certain issues (such as mental illness), while obscuring other important issues (such as gun control, school safety, or hegemonic masculinity). Social problems related to adolescence, failing school systems, poverty, food insecurity, and other forms of inequality are far more likely than school shooters to impact students in schools and communities across the United States. Mass school shootings are unarguably one of the most shockingly outrageous and horrendous things to happen in recent years, but further stigmatizing mental illness and criminalizing those who suffer from it is not the solution.
In conclusion, this study offers two significant contributions to moral panic theory. First, a folk devil cannot be successfully created out of something that represents aspects central to the culture of a society or something which society values. They must come from the margins of society – people who are pushed aside because they do not fit within the moral or behavioral boundaries. The second contribution to moral panic theory is that elite-engineered moral panics do not gain the necessary level of support when the public can relate to the victims and/or perpetrators. Recall that elite-engineered moral panics require the presence of an underlying fear among the general public (Cohen 1972/2002; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994). Because the students involved in a school shooting (whether they are the victim or the perpetrator) are representative of all students in schools across the U.S. The magnitude of the event often hits too close to home for the public to feel distanced or disconnected from those who were directly involved. This impedes the construction of a moral panic if it is driven by elites because the public resists or rejects the narrative.

This research is an important investigation about the perceived role of mental illness with regard to school shootings. The data show that mental illness has become the most frequently accepted – and least controversial – folk devil associated with school shootings. I argue that this is an unhealthy assumption that should be treated carefully, because it stands to increase the stigma associated with mental illness, which is a known barrier to treatment. If the ultimate goal is to increase access to and utilization of mental health treatment as a way to lower the risk of mass shootings in schools, we should be searching for ways to decrease this stigma, rather than amplify it.
REFERENCES


Baker, Mark. 2015. “Governor, Congressional Delegates Thank First Responders – Kate Brown and State Leaders Say It’s Too Soon to Start Debating Solutions.” Register Guard, October 3, no page.


Hill, Christopher. 2015. “Mayor Urges Fix for Gun Violence – I Just Despair at the Level of Shootings That We’re Having...” Kitty Piercy.” *Register Guard*, October 7, no page.


*American Behavioral Scientist* 52(10) 1447-1464.


MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 27, 2015
TO: James E Hawdon, Theodore Fuller, Kristin Lynn Richardson
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires July 29, 2020)

PROTOCOL TITLE: School Shootings and Mental Illness: A Moral Panic

IRB NUMBER: 15-1035

Effective October 27, 2015, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Administrator, Carmen T Papentuss, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 4
Protocol Approval Date: October 27, 2015
Protocol Expiration Date: N/A
Continuing Review Due Date*: N/A

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare any federally funded grant proposals to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.
# Article Variables

“School” – Name of School
1 = University of Iowa
2 = Lindhurst High School
3 = Westside Middle School
4 = Thurston Senior High School
5 = Columbine High School
6 = University of Arizona
7 = Red Lake School
8 = West Nickel Mines School
9 = Virginia Tech
10 = Northern Illinois University
11 = Oikos University
12 = Sandy Hook Elementary School
13 = Santa Monica College
14 = University of California – Santa Barbara
15 = Marysville High School
16 = Umpqua Community College

“ArticleFrame” – Focus of the Article
1 = victim(s)
2 = shooter(s)
3 = community
4 = root cause(s)
5 = news only
6 = other

# Newspaper Variables

“NewspaperType” – Type of Newspaper Publication
0 = National Paper
1 = Local Paper

NewspaperTitle” – Title of Newspaper
0 = New York Times
1 = Peoria Journal Star
2 = Sacramento Bee
3 = Arkansas Democrat-Gazette
4 = The Oregonian
5 = The Denver Post
6 = Arizona Daily Star
7 = Duluth News Tribune
8 = Intelligencer Journal
9 = Roanoke Times
10 = Daily Chronicle
11 = Oakland Tribune
12 = Hartford Courant
13 = Santa Monica Daily Press
14 = Santa Maria Times
15 = The Seattle Times
16 = Register Guard

Date Variables

“DateYear” – Year of Article Publication
1 = 1991
2 = 1992
3 = 1993
4 = 1994
5 = 1995
6 = 1996
7 = 1997
8 = 1998
9 = 1999
10 = 2000
11 = 2001
12 = 2002
13 = 2003
14 = 2004
15 = 2005
16 = 2006
17 = 2007
18 = 2008
19 = 2009
20 = 2010
21 = 2011
22 = 2012
23 = 2013
24 = 2014
25 = 2015

“DateMonth” – Month of Article Publication
1 = January
2 = February
3 = March
4 = April
5 = May
6 = June
7 = July
8 = August
9 = September
10 = October
11 = November
12 = December

“DateDay” – Date of Publication
1 through 31, accordingly

**Date Variables Recoded**

The “DateYear” variable was recoded to group articles into larger blocks of time, rather than 25 individual years.

“yeargroups” – DateYear recoded with reference to the high-profile cases of Columbine (1999), Virginia Tech (2007), and Sandy Hook (2012).

1 = 1991 thru 1998
2 = 1999 thru 2006
3 = 2007 thru 2015

“yearx5” – DateYear recoded into 5-year intervals
1 = 1991 thru 1995
2 = 1996 thru 2000
3 = 2001 thru 2005
4 = 2006 thru 2010
5 = 2011 thru 2015

**Speakers and Moral Entrepreneurs**

For each of the coding summaries
“SpeakerXGrassroots” – Prominence of Speaker X if Grassroots
0 = grassroots moral entrepreneur did not speak
1 = grassroots moral entrepreneur speaks, is not prominent
2 = grassroots moral entrepreneur is prominent speaker
3 = grassroots moral entrepreneur is the only speaker
“SXGrassrootsSpecific”- Specific Type of Grassroots Role

0 = not grassroots
1 = injured victim – student
2 = injured victim – faculty
3 = parent of deceased victim – student
4 = parent of deceased victim – faculty
5 = spouse of deceased victim – faculty
6 = friend/classmate of deceased victim – student
7 = friend/coworker of deceased victim – faculty
8 = parent of injured victim – student
9 = parent of injured victim – faculty
10 = spouse of injured victim – faculty
11 = friend/classmate of injured victim – student
12 = friend/coworker of injured victim – faculty
13 = other family member of deceased victim – student
14 = other family member of deceased victim – faculty
15 = other family member of injured victim – student
16 = other family member of injured victim – faculty
17 = eyewitness – student
18 = eyewitness – faculty
19 = non-eyewitness – student
20 = non-eyewitness – faculty
21 = parent of unharmed student
22 = parent of unharmed faculty
23 = spouse of unharmed faculty
24 = member of local community
25 = friend of shooter(s)
26 = family of shooter(s)
27 = member of global/non-local community
28 = shooter (if alive, speaks post-shooting)

“SpeakerXInterestGroup” – Prominence of Speaker X if Interest Group

0 = interest group did not speak
1 = interest group speaks, is not prominent
2 = interest group is prominent speaker
3 = interest group is the only speaker

“SXInterestGroupSpecific” – Specific Type of Interest Group

0 = not interest group
1 = gun rights activist
2 = gun control advocate
3 = gun manufacturer
4 = criminologist
5 = law enforcement officer
“SpeakerXInterestGroupSpecific,” continued...
6 = religious official
7 = support group for victims and their families
8 = mental health professional

“SXInterestGroupSpecific,” continued...
9 = anti-bullying awareness group
10 = school officials/spokespersons
11 = lawyer/legal professional
12 = healthcare provider
13 = news media/reporter/journalist
14 = medical/relief organization
15 = government agency
16 = local business owner
17 = academic/expert – other

“SpeakerXElite” – Prominence of Speaker if Elite
0 = elite moral entrepreneur does not speak
1 = elite moral entrepreneur speaks, is not prominent
2 = elite moral entrepreneur is prominent speaker
3 = elite moral entrepreneur is only speaker

“SXEliteSpecific” – Specific Type of Elite Role
0 = not elite
1 = President of U.S.
2 = Vice President of U.S.
3 = member of cabinet
4 = member of congress
5 = presidential candidate
6 = governor of state
7 = member of congress
8 = mayor of city/town
9 = town/city council
10 = economic elite/leader of large business
11 = cultural elite
12 = candidate for state/local office
13 = state/local government – other

Speaker and Moral Entrepreneur Recoding

The original variables for each moral entrepreneur category (Grassroots, Interest Group, and Elite) were coded according to the prominence of the speaker in the article (0 = does not speak; 1 = speaks, but is not prominent; 2 = is prominent speaker; and 3 = the only speaker). These variables were dichotomized to reflect whether each speaker was Grassroots, Interest Group,
or Elite using the binary no = 0 and yes = 1. For each Speaker (1 thru 6), the moral entrepreneur indicators were recoded as follows.

“SXGrassrootsDI” = SXGrassroots recoded into dichotomous (yes/no) variable.
- SXGrassroots = 0 → SXGrassrootsDI = 0
- SXGrassroots = 1 thru 3 → SXGrassrootsDI = 1
  0 = speaker X is not grassroots
  1 = speaker X is grassroots

“SXIntGrpDI” = SXInterestGroup recoded into dichotomous (yes/no) variable.
- SXInterestGroup = 0 → SXIntGrpDI = 0
- SXInterestGroup = 1 thru 3 → SXIntGrpDI = 1
  0 = speaker is not interest group
  1 = speaker is interest group

“SXEliteDI” = SXElite recoded into dichotomous (yes/no) variable.
- SXElite = 0 → SXEliteDI = 0
- SXElite = 1 thru 3 → SXEliteDI = 1
  0 = speaker is not elite
  1 = speaker is elite

These dichotomous variables were aggregated into new variables to indicate whether any speaker was Grassroots, Interest Group, or Elite, rather than which speakers were Grassroots, Interest Group or Elite. The following variables were computed using the existing variables specified in the equations.

“ANYGRASSROOTS” – Is any speaker in the article a grassroots moral entrepreneur?
- If ((S1GrassrootsDI = 1) or (S2GrassrootsDI = 1) or (S3GrassrootsDI = 1) or (S4GrassrootsDI = 1) or (S5GrassrootsDI = 1) or (S6GrassrootsDI = 1)) ANYGRASSROOTS = 1.
- If ((S1GrassrootsDI = 0) AND (S2GrassrootsDI = 0) AND (S3GrassrootsDI = 0) AND (S4GrassrootsDI = 0) AND (S5GrassrootsDI = 0) AND (S6GrassrootsDI = 0)) ANYGRASSROOTS = 0.

0 = no speakers are grassroots
1 = at least 1 speaker is grassroots

“ANYINTGRP” – Is any speaker in the article representing an interest group?
- If ((S1IntGrpDI = 1) or (S2IntGrpDI = 1) or (S3IntGrpDI = 1) or (S4IntGrpDI = 1) or (S5IntGrpDI = 1) or (S6IntGrpDI = 1)) ANYINTGRP = 1.
- If ((S1IntGrpDI = 0) AND (S2IntGrpDI = 0) AND (S3IntGrpDI = 0) AND (S4IntGrpDI = 0) AND (S5IntGrpDI = 0) AND (S6IntGrpDI = 0)) ANYINTGRP = 0.
0 = no speakers are interest group
1 = at least 1 speaker is interest group

“ANYELITE” – Is any speaker in the article an elite moral entrepreneur?
If ((S1EliteDI = 1) or (S2EliteDI = 1) or (S3EliteDI = 1) or (S4EliteDI = 1) or (S5EliteDI = 1) or (S6EliteDI = 1)) ANYELITE = 1.

If ((S1EliteDI = 0) AND (S2EliteDI = 0) AND (S3EliteDI = 0) AND (S4EliteDI = 0) AND (S5EliteDI = 0) AND (S6EliteDI = 0)) ANYELITE = 0.

0 = no speaker is elite
1 = at least 1 speaker is elite

The variables “ANYGRASSROOTS,” “ANYINTGRP,” and “ANYELITE” were aggregated into one variable indicating various types and combinations of moral entrepreneurs that speak in the articles. The variable “MORAL” was computed using the existing variables specified in the equation.

“MORAL” – Which moral entrepreneur(s) is/are speaking?
IF ((ANYGRASSROOTS = 0) AND (ANYINTGRP = 0) AND (ANYELITE = 0)) MORAL = 0.
IF ((ANYGRASSROOTS = 1) AND (ANYINTGRP = 0) AND (ANYELITE = 0)) MORAL = 1.
IF ((ANYGRASSROOTS = 0) AND (ANYINTGRP = 1) AND (ANYELITE = 0)) MORAL = 2.
IF ((ANYGRASSROOTS = 0) AND (ANYINTGRP = 0) AND (ANYELITE = 1)) MORAL = 3.
IF ((ANYGRASSROOTS = 1) AND (ANYINTGRP = 1) AND (ANYELITE = 0)) MORAL = 4.
IF ((ANYGRASSROOTS = 1) AND (ANYINTGRP = 0) AND (ANYELITE = 1)) MORAL = 5.
IF ((ANYGRASSROOTS = 0) AND (ANYINTGRP = 1) AND (ANYELITE = 1)) MORAL = 6.
IF ((ANYGRASSROOTS = 1) AND (ANYINTGRP = 1) AND (ANYELITE = 1)) MORAL = 7.

0 = no moral entrepreneur speaks
1 = only grassroots moral entrepreneurs speak
2 = only interest groups speak
3 = only elites speak
4 = grassroots and interest groups both speak
5 = grassroots and elites both speak
6 = interest groups and elites both speak
7 = grassroots, interest groups, and elites all speak

Folk Devil Variables

“SXMentionFolkDevils” – Does speaker X mention any folk devils?
0 = no
1 = yes
“SXMentionAlienation” – Does speaker X mention social alienation?
  0 = no
  1 = yes

“SXAffirmDenyAlienation” – Does speaker X affirm or deny social alienation as cause of school shooting?
  0 = neither affirm nor deny
  1 = deny
  2 = affirm

“SX Mention Violent Media” – Does speaker X mention violent media?
  0 = no
  1 = yes

“SX Affirm Deny Violent Media” – Does speaker X affirm or deny violent media as cause of school shooting?
  0 = neither affirm nor deny
  1 = deny
  2 = affirm

“SX Mention Guns” – Does speaker X mention guns?
  0 = no
  1 = yes

“SX Affirm Deny Guns” – Does speaker X affirm or deny guns as cause of school shooting?
  0 = neither affirm nor deny
  1 = deny
  2 = affirm

“SXMentionMentalIllness” – Does speaker X mention mental illness?
  0 = no
  1 = yes

“SX Affirm Deny Mental Illness” – Does speaker X affirm or deny mental illness as cause of school shooting?
  0 = neither affirm nor deny
  1 = deny
  2 = affirm

Folk Devil Variable Recoding

The variables “SXMentionAlienation,” “SX Mention Violent Media,” “SX Mention Guns,” and “SXMentionMentalIllness” exist for all six speakers. Therefore, there are six possible opportunities for a speaker in each article to mention any or all of these folk devils. New
variables were computed that indicate whether any speaker mentioned the folk devil in the article, rather than which speaker. The following variables were computed using the existing variables specified in the equations.

“anymentionalien” = S1MentionAlienation + S2MentionAlienation + S3MentionAlienation + S4MentionAlienation + S5MentionAlienation + S6MentionAlienation.
0 = no speakers mention social alienation
1 = 1 speaker mentions social alienation
2 = 2 speakers mention social alienation
3 = 3 speakers mention social alienation
4 = 4 speakers mention social alienation
5 = 5 speakers mention social alienation
6 = all 6 speakers mention social alienation

“anymentionviolentmedia” = S1MentionViolentMedia + S2MentionViolentMedia + S3MentionViolentMedia + S4MentionViolentMedia + S5MentionViolentMedia + S6MentionViolentMedia.
0 = no speakers mention violent media
1 = 1 speaker mentions violent media
2 = 2 speakers mention violent media
3 = 3 speakers mention violent media
4 = 4 speakers mention violent media
5 = 5 speakers mention violent media
6 = all 6 speakers mention violent media

“anymentionguns” = S1MentionGuns + S2MentionGuns + S3MentionGuns + S4MentionGuns + S5MentionGuns + S6MentionGuns.
0 = no speakers mention guns
1 = 1 speaker mentions guns
2 = 2 speakers mention guns
3 = 3 speakers mention guns
4 = 4 speakers mention guns
5 = 5 speakers mention guns
6 = all 6 speakers mention guns

“anymentionmentalillness” = S1MentionMentalIllness + S2MentionMentalIllness + S3MentionMentalIllness + S4MentionMentalIllness + S5MentionMentalIllness + S6MentionMentalIllness.
0 = no speakers mention mental illness
1 = 1 speaker mentions mental illness
2 = 2 speakers mention mental illness
3 = 3 speakers mention mental illness
4 = 4 speakers mention mental illness
5 = 5 speakers mention mental illness
6 = all 6 speakers mention mental illness

Next, these computed variables were again recoded into dichotomous (yes/no) variables for the mention of social alienation, violent media, guns, and mental illness, respectively. If one or more speakers mentioned the folk devil, the dichotomous variables = 1; if not = 0.

“anymentionalienDI” = anymentionalien recoded into dichotomous (yes/no) variable
(anymentionalien = 0 → anymentionalienDI = 0)
(anymentionalien = 1 thru 6 → anymentionalienDI = 1)
0 = no speaker mentions social alienation
1 = at least one speaker mentions social alienation

“anymentionvmDI” = anymentionviolentmedia recoded into dichotomous (yes/no) variable
anymentionviolentmedia = 0 → anymentionvmDI = 0
anymentionviolentmedia = 1 thru 6 → anymentionvmDI = 1
0 = no speaker mentions violent media
1 = at least 1 speaker mentions violent media

“anymentionGunsDI” = anymentionguns recoded into dichotomous (yes/no) variable
anymentionguns = 0 → anymentGunsDI = 0
anymentionguns = 1 thru 6 → anymentGunsDI = 1
0 = no speaker mentions guns
1 = at least 1 speaker mentions guns

“anyMImentionDI” = anymentionmentalillness recoded into dichotomous (yes/no) variable
anymentionmentalillness = 0 → anyMImentionDI = 0
anymentionmentalillness = 1 thru 6 → anyMImentionDI = 1
0 = no speaker mentions mental illness
1 = at least one speaker mentions mental illness

The variables “SXAffirmDenyAlienation,” “SXAffirmDenyViolentMedia,” “SXAffirmDenyGuns,” and “SXAffirmDenyMentalIllness” also exist for all six speakers. Therefore, there are six possible opportunities for a speaker in each article to affirm and/or deny any or all of these folk devils. New variables were computed that indicate whether any speaker affirmed or denied the folk devil in the article, rather than which speaker. The following dummy variables were computed using the existing variables specified in the equations.

“DENYALIEN” – Does any speaker deny social alienation as the cause of school shooting?
If ((S1AffirmDenyAlienation = 1) or (S2AffirmDenyAlienation = 1) or
(S3AffirmDenyAlienation = 1) or (S4AffirmDenyAlienation = 1) or
(S5AffirmDenyAlienation = 1) or (S6AffirmDenyAlienation = 1)) DENYALIEN = 1.
If ((S1AffirmDenyAlienation NE 1) AND (S2AffirmDenyAlienation NE 1) AND (S3AffirmDenyAlienation NE 1) AND (S4AffirmDenyAlienation NE 1) AND (S5AffirmDenyAlienation NE 1) AND (S6AffirmDenyAlienation NE 1)) DENYALIEN = 0.

0 = no speaker denies social alienation as cause of school shooting
1 = at least 1 speaker denies social alienation as cause of school shooting

“AFFIRMALIEN” = Does any speaker affirm social alienation as the cause of school shooting?
If ((S1AffirmDenyAlienation = 2) or (S2AffirmDenyAlienation = 2) or (S3AffirmDenyAlienation = 2) or (S4AffirmDenyAlienation = 2) or (S5AffirmDenyAlienation = 2) or (S6AffirmDenyAlienation = 2)) AFFIRMALIEN = 1.

If ((S1AffirmDenyAlienation NE 2) AND (S2AffirmDenyAlienation NE 2) AND (S3AffirmDenyAlienation NE 2) AND (S4AffirmDenyAlienation NE 2) AND (S5AffirmDenyAlienation NE 2) AND (S6AffirmDenyAlienation NE 2)) AFFIRMALIEN = 0.

0 = no speaker affirms social alienation as cause of school shooting
1 = at least 1 speaker affirms social alienation as cause of school shooting

“DENYMEDIA” – Does any speaker deny violent media as the cause of the school shooting?
If ((S1AffirmDenyViolentMedia = 1) or (S2AffirmDenyViolentMedia = 1) or (S3AffirmDenyViolentMedia = 1) or (S4AffirmDenyViolentMedia = 1) or (S5AffirmDenyViolentMedia = 1) or (S6AffirmDenyViolentMedia = 1)) DENYMEDIA = 1.

If ((S1AffirmDenyViolentMedia NE 1) AND (S2AffirmDenyViolentMedia NE 1) AND (S3AffirmDenyViolentMedia NE 1) AND (S4AffirmDenyViolentMedia NE 1) AND (S5AffirmDenyViolentMedia NE 1) AND (S6AffirmDenyViolentMedia NE 1)) DENYMEDIA = 0.

0 = no speaker denies violent media as the cause of school shooting
1 = at least 1 speaker denies violent media as cause of school shooting

“AFFIRMMEDIA” – Does any speaker affirm violent media as cause of school shooting?
If ((S1AffirmDenyViolentMedia = 2) or (S2AffirmDenyViolentMedia = 2) or (S3AffirmDenyViolentMedia = 2) or (S4AffirmDenyViolentMedia = 2) or (S5AffirmDenyViolentMedia = 2) or (S6AffirmDenyViolentMedia = 2)) AFFIRMMEDIA = 1.

If ((S1AffirmDenyViolentMedia NE 2) AND (S2AffirmDenyViolentMedia NE 2) AND (S3AffirmDenyViolentMedia NE 2) AND (S4AffirmDenyViolentMedia NE 2) AND (S5AffirmDenyViolentMedia NE 2) AND (S6AffirmDenyViolentMedia NE 2)) AFFIRMMEDIA = 0.
0 = no speaker affirms violent media as cause of school shooting
1 = at least 1 speaker affirms violent media as cause of school shooting

“DENYGUNS” – Does any speaker deny guns as the cause of school shooting?
If ((S1AffirmDenyGuns = 1) or (S2AffirmDenyGuns = 1) or (S3AffirmDenyGuns = 1) or (S4AffirmDenyGuns = 1) or (S5AffirmDenyGuns = 1) or (S6AffirmDenyGuns = 1)) DENYGUNS = 1.

If ((S1AffirmDenyGuns NE 1) AND (S2AffirmDenyGuns NE 1) AND (S3AffirmDenyGuns NE 1) AND (S4AffirmDenyGuns NE 1) AND (S5AffirmDenyGuns NE 1) AND (S6AffirmDenyGuns NE 1)) DENYGUNS = 0.

0 = no speaker denies guns as cause of school shooting
1 = at least 1 speaker denies guns as cause of school shooting

“AFFIRMGUNS” – Does any speaker affirm guns as the cause of school shooting?
If ((S1AffirmDenyGuns = 2) or (S2AffirmDenyGuns = 2) or (S3AffirmDenyGuns = 2) or (S4AffirmDenyGuns = 2) or (S5AffirmDenyGuns = 2) or (S6AffirmDenyGuns = 2)) AFFIRMGUNS = 1.

If ((S1AffirmDenyGuns NE 2) AND (S2AffirmDenyGuns NE 2) AND (S3AffirmDenyGuns NE 2) AND (S4AffirmDenyGuns NE 2) AND (S5AffirmDenyGuns NE 2) AND (S6AffirmDenyGuns NE 2)) AFFIRMGUNS = 0.

0 = no speaker affirms guns as cause of school shooting
1 = at least 1 speaker affirms guns as cause of school shooting

“DENYMENTAL” – Does any speaker deny mental illness as cause of school shooting?
If ((S1AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 1) or (S2AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 1) or (S3AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 1) or (S4AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 1) or (S5AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 1) or (S6AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 1)) DENYMENTAL = 1.

If ((S1AffirmDenyMentalIllness NE 1) AND (S2AffirmDenyMentalIllness NE 1) AND (S3AffirmDenyMentalIllness NE 1) AND (S4AffirmDenyMentalIllness NE 1) AND (S5AffirmDenyMentalIllness NE 1) AND (S6AffirmDenyMentalIllness NE 1)) DENYMENTAL = 0.

0 = no speaker denies mental illness as cause of school shooting
1 = at least 1 speaker denies mental illness as cause of school shooting

“AFFIRMMENTAL” – Does any speaker affirm mental illness as cause of school shooting?
If ((S1AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 2) or (S2AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 2) or (S3AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 2) or (S4AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 2) or (S5AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 2) or (S6AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 2)) AFFIRMMENTAL = 1.
(S5AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 2) or (S6AffirmDenyMentalIllness = 2) \text{ AFFIRMMENTAL} = 1.

If ((S1AffirmDenyMentalIllness NE 2) AND (S2AffirmDenyMentalIllness NE 2) AND (S3AffirmDenyMentalIllness NE 2) AND (S4AffirmDenyMentalIllness NE 2) AND (S5AffirmDenyMentalIllness NE 2) AND (S6AffirmDenyMentalIllness NE 2)) \text{ AFFIRMMENTAL} = 0.

0 = no speaker affirms mental illness as cause of school shooting
1 = at least 1 speaker affirms mental illness as cause of school shooting
APPENDIX C
Establishing Inter-Coder Reliability

To establish inter-coder reliability, I calculated Krippendorff’s Alpha (KALPHA) statistics for the main variables in this analysis: the type of moral entrepreneur speaking, whether each moral entrepreneur mentioned a folk devil, and if so, which folk devil was implicated by the speaker. KALPHA determines the reliability of individual variables (rather than the reliability of individual coders) because it encompasses the clarity of the variable description, differentiation among the categories, the details given in the codebook and instructions given to fellow coders. The KALPHA statistic is useful here because it measures an observed level of disagreement between two or more content analysis and compares it to the expected level of disagreement (De Swert 2012). Observed disagreement refers to the percentage of cases in which the coders did not agree on which value to record for the variable in question. The formula for determining this statistic is: 

\[
KALPHA = 1 - \frac{(\text{observed disagreement})}{(\text{expected disagreement})}
\]

Dividing by the expected disagreement allows KALPHA to correct for the possibility that coders recorded the same value by chance (since the variables I am testing for inter-coder reliability are dichotomous, there is a 50/50 chance that the coders recorded the same value for a variable just by coincidence). KALPHA statistics fall between 0 and 1, with higher scores reflecting effective or well-designed variable and category descriptions while lower scores reflect ineffective or poorly defined variable and category descriptions. The higher the score, the more reliable the variable is believed to be. A KALPHA statistic of .80 is a common threshold representing a good reliability score, but KALPHA returns of .60 can also be accepted in situations where the coding scheme is difficult or where the cases are harder to classify.
I asked a colleague, Jessica Herling, to code 100 of my 1,237 articles relating to school shootings, which is approximately eight percent of my cases. Consistent with the proportion of articles that were from local versus national newspapers, 28 of the 100 were from national publications and 72 were from local newspapers. Because KALPHA is a measure of the effectiveness and clarity of variable and category descriptions, and I use the same variable and category descriptions repetitively for each of the first six speakers represented in each article, I only asked Jessica to code the variables as they appear for the first speaker in each of the 100 articles. The variable descriptions do not change with subsequent speakers.

Below, I list the variables and the coding scheme communicated to Jessica. The categories reflect those that were created after transforming my original variables into dichotomous variables, which are the same dichotomous categories used in my analysis.

“Speaker X Grassroots” – Is Speaker X Grassroots?
0 = speaker X is not grassroots
1 = speaker X is grassroots

“Speaker X Interest Group” – Is Speaker X Interest Group
0 = speaker X is not interest group
1 = speaker X is interest group

“Speaker X Elite” – Is Speaker X Elite?
0 = speaker X is not elite
1 = speaker X is elite

“SX Mention Folk Devils” – Does speaker X mention any folk devils?
0 = no
1 = yes

“SX Mention Alienation” – Does speaker X mention social alienation?
0 = no
1 = yes
“SX Mention Violent Media” – Does speaker X mention violent media?
0 = no
1 = yes

“SX Mention Guns” – Does speaker X mention guns?
0 = no
1 = yes

“SX Mention Mental Illness” – Does speaker X mention mental illness?
0 = no
1 = yes

The KALPHA statistics for these variables measure how clearly I defined each variable and described the categories. For the moral entrepreneur variables, KALPHA statistics measure how clearly I communicated the definitions of grassroots, interest group, and elite moral entrepreneurs set by Cohen (1972/2002) and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) and how effectively I communicated the types of speakers whom I would classify as grassroots, interest group, and elite. For the folk devil variables, KALPHA statistics measure how effectively I instructed Jessica to identify the implication of a folk devil and the clarity with which I defined social alienation, violent media, guns, and mental illness.

Following the suggestion of De Swert (2012), I downloaded the macro SPSS syntax file developed by Hayes and Krippendorff (2007). For each of the variables, I created a new SPSS file and inserted my values and the values Jessica recorded for each of the 100 cases in order to run the KALPHA command. The KALPHA statistics for each of the above variables as they pertain to the first speaker in each of the 100 articles coded by both coders are listed in Table C1.
### Table C1. Krippendorff’s Alpha Reliability Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>KALPHA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Speaker X Grassroots”</td>
<td>.678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Speaker X Interest Group”</td>
<td>.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Speaker X Elite”</td>
<td>.794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Speaker X Mention Folk Devils”</td>
<td>.665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Speaker X Mention Social Alienation”</td>
<td>.393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Speaker X Mention Violent Media”</td>
<td>.421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Speaker X Mention Guns”</td>
<td>.618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Speaker X Mention Mental Illness”</td>
<td>.702</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

De Swert (2012) recommends that KALPHA statistics above .60 indicate acceptable reliability results in situations where the variables are relatively difficult to code. Following this recommendation, the variables measuring whether the speaker was grassroots (.678), interest group (.615), or elite (.794), as well as the variables measuring whether the speaker mentioned any folk devil (.665), mentioned guns (.618), or mentioned mental illness (.702) are acceptable reliability scores. The KALPHA statistics for mentioning social alienation (.393) and mentioning violent media (.421) are below this threshold. However, according to De Swert (2012), KALPHA statistics can be unsatisfactory even when there is a high level of agreement between coders, “especially [when dealing] with binary variables for which one of the values (1 or 0) is very rare” (p. 8). This means that a low KALPHA statistic could result from having too few cases in which the variable in question is coded as “1” and is therefore coded as “0” in most cases.

Recall from Table 4.7 that social alienation and violent media were the least commonly affirmed and denied folk devils in the dataset. These variables ask “does speaker X mention social alienation?” and “does speaker X mention violent media?” Because social alienation and
violent media were not frequently mentioned by speakers, these variables are mostly coded as “0” because the answer is “no” and rarely coded as “1” for “yes.” Data summarized in Table C2 support this claim, showing that social alienation was mentioned by any speaker in only 6.8 percent of the articles and violent media was mentioned by any speaker in only 7.1 percent of all 1,237 articles. Comparatively, guns were mentioned by any speaker in 20.6 percent and mental illness was mentioned by any speaker in 16.2 percent of the articles. Additionally, I isolated the frequency with which the first speaker in each of the 1,237 articles mentioned social alienation, violent media, guns, or mental illness. The first speaker mentioned social alienation in 3.6 percent of the articles and mentioned violent media in 4.6 percent of the articles. In contrast, guns were mentioned by the first speaker in 15 percent of the articles and mental illness was mentioned by the first speaker in 9.3 percent of the articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folk Devil</th>
<th>Mentioned by Any Speaker</th>
<th>Mentioned by First Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Alienation</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Media</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, social alienation and violent media were discussed less often than guns or mental illness. Thus, the low KALPHA statistics for social alienation and violent media can be explained by their rarity in the dataset. Overall, the variables pertaining to the type of moral entrepreneur (grassroots, interest group, and elite) and the variables measuring whether the speaker mentioned any folk devil, mentioned guns, or mentioned mental illness were found to be reliable with KALPHAs returning above .60. Variables measuring whether the speaker
mentioned social alienation or violent media received low KALPHA scores, most likely because they were extremely rare. Nevertheless, all findings regarding these two measures should be considered provisional.