Behold the monster: Mythical explanations of deviance and evil in news of the Amish school shooting

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Abstract

In October 2006, Charles Carl Roberts IV walked into a one-room Amish schoolhouse in West Nickel Mines, PA, USA, brandished a handgun, and killed five female students who were all under the age of 13. Through an analysis of 215 news articles published in 10 local, regional, and national newspapers in 2006 and 2007, this article examines news characterizations of Roberts that cast him as a 'Monster'. We explore interdisciplinary notions of pure evil to expand current literature of news myth to include a form of explanation that appears in news when no other current mythical archetype will suffice. This study complicates current perspectives on news myth by expanding the ideological tools to examine the nature of evil in loss through the example of the Amish shootings.

Keywords

Audience, evil, local news, monster, mythical archetype

On 2 October 2006, Charles Roberts IV entered a one-room schoolhouse in the Amish community of West Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. Waving a gun, Roberts ordered the adults and boys to leave. He forced the remaining 10 girls – aged 6–13 years – to their

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knees and shot them before turning the gun on himself (Umble and Weaver-Zercher, 2008). Five of the girls died. An investigation suggested that Roberts had entered the school with the intention of sexually assaulting and killing the girls, prompted in part by his self-proclaimed history of molesting young women (Kasdorf, 2007). Ten days after the attack, the local Amish community razed the school building and, 7 months later, opened a new one at another location.

The 'Amish school shootings' of West Nickel Mines quickly entered a growing list of mass violence within US media memory – at the time, the Amish shooting involved some of the youngest victims in the history of domestic school shootings. That the shootings occurred in an Amish community – mythologized in US culture as being simple, peaceful, and driven by Christian teachings (Umble, 2008) – added to the shooting's shocking details and immediate infamy (Umble and Weaver-Zercher, 2008). News reports from local, regional, and national outlets sought to report on what they treated as an equally bewildering aspect of the shooting – the West Nickel Mines Amish community's call for calm and forgiveness in light of what had been deemed a 'heinous' crime (Kasdorf, 2007; Kitch and Hume, 2008). As a means to examine the event through journalistic storytelling, we argue that Roberts was characterized in press coverage as a 'Monster', one who intentionally harmed others through an act of selfish violence against innocents – an archetype that opens avenues for future discussion on the role and appearance of 'evil' in news myth scholarship.

Through an analysis of 215 news articles published in 10 newspapers in 2006 and 2007, this article examines how mythical news archetypes – familiar characterizations of people and places in news storytelling that supply immediate ideological meanings to audiences (Gutsche and Salkin, 2016; Lule, 2001) – explained the causes for and meanings of Roberts' character and actions. This study, then, serves two purposes. First, it examines news characterizations of Roberts that cast him as a 'Monster', an archetype of intentional evil, to expand current literature of news myth to include a form of explanation that appears in news when no other current mythical archetype will suffice. Second, we build on previous work that suggests newsworkers adopt and adapt culturally relevant narrative devices such as mythical archetypes in times of crisis to deliver ideological meanings related to news events (i.e. Bird and Dardenne, 1997; Gutsche and Salkin, 2013).

The article begins with an examination of news as a form of cultural explanation, which employs mythical storytelling and literary devices to provide meaning in coverage of everyday life, disaster, and crisis. We begin the article by discussing major literature related to news myth and news audiences' interactions with the cultural meanings of news. Next, we describe our methodology and conduct an interpretive textual analysis of news coverage that identifies archetypal characteristics that depict Roberts as a 'Monster'. The article concludes with the study's theoretical contributions and proposed steps for future research, including the potential for expanding news myth work to include archetypes of evil.

News myth, archetypes, and audience needs

Journalism is a social and cultural construction that embeds dominant ideology into daily news (Darnton, 1975; Lule, 2001). As Tuchman (1978) writes, journalists 'make the

news' rather than merely 'report' what occurs as though news is a natural occurrence (Berkowitz, 2011). In this sense, media share social and cultural authority, influencing how journalists select sources and construct news items to maintain the public's social cohesion by actively engaging audiences through dominant cultural meanings in times of crisis (Gutsche and Salkin, 2016). In this way, news functions as a ritual of communication that extends beyond the performance of the media message and into the shared experiences of audiences (Carey, 2009; Cottle, 2006) through '*language* that help(s) structure and shape public discussion' (Lule, 1991: 76; emphasis in original).

It is within language that the press operates as an ideological actor within a 'symbolic arena' (Gans, 2004: 298) that delivers cultural messages through news storytelling. Here, news sources serve as characters, quotes act as dialogue, and the story's major plot and conflict lead audiences to moral lessons (Ettema, 2005; Riegert and Olsson, 2007). Cultural messages related to news events are embedded in 'news narratives', which are 'overarching cultural stories that guide both journalists and audiences to proper interpretations' of society's 'dominant values and norms' (Gutsche and Salkin, 2016: 457) and through the application of mythical archetypes – representations of people, places, and issues that are categorized and presented in familiar characters, scenes, and tales (Ettema, 2005; Lule, 2001).

Because we are interested in the mythical work of news explanation, we use this study to identify deeper cultural meanings in news rather than comment on the normative actions of journalists, the perpetrator, or the communities and audiences (Berkowitz and Eko, 2007; Pauly, 1991). In turn, this article applies textual analysis: 'a study of language and texts as forms of discourse, which help to create and reproduce systems of social meaning' (Tonkiss, 1998: 245). Our interest in journalistic language is rooted in the mythical and archetypal structures of news discourse. Relying in part on past research (Campbell, 1968; Eliade, 1998), Lule (2001) provides seven 'Master Myths' that he suggests are carried across centuries and continents to describe and explain everyday life in today's news. Among these dominant myths are 'The Good Mother', 'The Trickster', 'The Victim', 'The Other World', and 'The Hero'. Lule's list records dominant archetypes of people and places used in news during times of struggle and survival. However, such broad applications of dominant mythical archetypes to news have been criticized for marginalizing the role of local culture and values in the construction of those archetypes (Bird, 2005).

In a previous study, we argue for interpreting mythical archetypes in news through a lens of local culture and influences (Gutsche and Salkin, 2013). There, we identify perceived ideological needs and interpretations in media coverage of the suspicious deaths of 10 young men over 13 years in the Midwestern United States. That study suggests a 'secondary palette' of the master mythical archetypes that better addresses the archetypal explanations of news to local audiences. In a second study, we examine news related to the 2012 sexual assault of a young woman by high school football stars in Steubenville, Pennsylvania – a case that garnered local, regional, and national media attention as well as involvement by the Internet's anonymous (Gutsche and Salkin, 2016). We explore the challenges of identifying 'elements of invisible influences and actors – those that may not appear as tangible characters in a story' (p. 13) and construct the 'perceived dominant news audience', defined as 'the readers that the media outlet identifies as its main

priority or interest' (p. 4).[1] In effect, current applications of news myth align elements of deviousness with archetypes of 'The Trickster' and 'The Scapegoat', although neither of those archetypes adequately acknowledge notions of evil that can appear – and need to be explained – in everyday life.

Explanations and archetypes of deviance

While we argue that the 'Master Myths' approach requires a more overt archetype of evil – perhaps through the construct of a 'Monster' – meanings of deviousness, villainy, and evil function in the creation of explanations of other archetypes, which we examine here.

Deconstructing 'devious' archetypes

Of the 'Master Myths', 'The Trickster' and 'The Scapegoat' deal overtly with people who may embody elements of evil. In 'The Trickster', Lule recognizes one who is 'senseless and unreflective and [who] brings on himself and others all manners of suffering' but who is more of 'a subject of mockery, contempt, and ridicule' (p. 24) in ways that reduce the individual's personal, evil traits. That 'The Trickster' infrequently includes evidence of one's malice and of suggestions that 'he' is someone who wants to hurt someone else on purpose, with little explanation other than to do harm (Scheub, 2012; VanSlette and Boyd, 2011), the archetype represents the complexities inherent in archetypal explanation in the news. Research indicates that some 'criminals' are awarded a 'Trickster' or even 'Hero' status in the press. US popular culture, for example, casts famed Western outlaw Billy the Kid as both a 'Hero' and an 'Outlaw' (Quinney, 1970), one who is depicted as acting 'on behalf of his or her own community' (VanSlette and Boyd, 2011: 593) with limited selfish and intentional acts of true villains – those considered 'enemies of law and order', who may be 'villainous strangers', and who are viewed as 'disloyal and underhanded' that are 'feared, hated, and ridiculed' (Quinney, 1970: 287–288).

How these archetypes are applied by journalists toward a definition or characterization of an event, action, or actor depends, to a large degree, on the perceived needs of the audience. This application further elevates the need to examine ideological function of the press to communicate to audiences meanings of people and events in the news (Consalvo, 2003; Henson and Olson, 2010; Katz, 1988; Tithecott, 1997). 'The Scapegoat' archetype, therefore, also serves an explanatory function based upon the circumstances surrounding the act and actor's potential deviousness. As Lule (2001) describes it, 'The Scapegoat' is applied to '"make an example" of those who disagree too vigorously with the social order' (p. 63) by casting 'The Scapegoat' as *representing* evil and sin within society.

The evil, in this archetype, however, is shown as a character flaw, not as a force in of itself that one may use to harm another. For example, characterizations of US Blacks-as-villains (Stabile, 2006), though, assigned archetypes serve as a means to examine the *acts* of wrong rather than the *actor*'s intent to sin via an evil nature (Burke, 1973; Carter, 1997; Roessner and Broaddus, 2013). Stabile argues that US crime news that depicts Blacks as 'villains' and Whites as 'victims' rely as much upon dominant race stereotypes

and audiences' moral panics as they do upon 'facts' related to individuals' actions. Additionally, other scholars suggest that news coverage polarizes the virtues and values of acts and actors identified in the news in ways that address deviousness by telling stories of attacks upon 'goodness' (Katz, 1988).

Lule's (2001) 'The Victim', furthermore, casts individuals as subjects of another person's actions or as suffering a 'cruel fate', 'bizarre happenstance', or 'death' (p. 43). Notions of evil are presented as secondary to the form and function of the archetype, allowing audiences to examine threats to society as singular and uniform threats against 'good'. In fact, 'The Flood' archetype of destruction, devastation, and revival represents not just the effects and outcomes of natural disaster but the human emotions and meanings associated with loss that come from '(having) strayed from the right path' (Lule, 2001: 25). 'The Flood's' destruction, Lule writes, serves as punishment for 'those who have done wrong', while the act of flooding cleans away the foul for a fresh start (p. 25). Lule also recognizes 'The Flood' as an archetype of destruction and devastation that represents not just the effects of natural disaster but feelings of loss that come from '(having) strayed from the right path'. Such destruction, he writes, is a punishment for 'those who have done wrong' (p. 25).

Deviance and deviousness, as these 'Master Myths' exemplify, are identified through the acts' potential for suffering in the face of villainy and harm. Elements of vice as presented in 'The Trickster', 'The Scapegoat', and even 'The Good Mother' – that which present socially acceptable traits of 'goodness', despite gender and, in fact, motherhood, itself – appear as a counter to 'goodness' to the degree that the evil is all but assumed. As Picart (2003) writes, 'Angels teach us what we must love and emulate; monsters warn us who and what we need to fear. Both angels and demons have roles to play in teaching us what being good citizens requires' (p. 167). But what of evil?

Overt depictions of 'evil'

'Monsters' are multidisciplinary, having appeared across a broad spectrum of fields ranging from Psychology and Criminology to Literature and Religious Studies (Jung, 1964; Scott, 2007). While characters and influences depicting a monstrous nature appear in journalism scholarship as a lurking, ominous presence, more overt characterizations of evil acts and actions are identifiable (Griffiths, 2010; Testa and Armstrong, 2012). The 'Folk Devil' is applied by cultural criminologists seeking to explain public characterizations of a person upon whom 'the evil nature of [an] act is projected' during times of moral panic (Jewkes, 2011: 271). Youth are frequently assigned archetypes of threats to social order, their deviance, stamina, and exploration of the world seen as a threat to natural order that represents temptations of 'evil' (Cohen, 1980; Wayne et al., 2008). While youth themselves are cast as 'devils', the archetype comments on the *actions* of the individual and the 'devilish' influences thrust upon her.

'The Monster', on the other hand, holds 'evil' in ways that 'other' the individual, casting her as a certain threat to society whose core is rotten to the degree that she deserves to be destroyed (Chess and Newsom, 2015; Harle, 2000). 'Monsters' are cast 'as a mode of cultural discourse' (Cohen, 1996: viii) to examine a society's dominant fears, desires, acts of social marginalization, and justifications for punishment. In some

instances, 'The Monster' has been aligned with 'evil' and described through the lens of the 'other'. Winch (2005) writes that news coverage of Osama bin Laden represents an 'evil genius', a characterization that tapped into racialized 'otherness', 'dehumanization', an 'inflation' of the character's public reputation of brilliance, cunningness, intellect, and of being a physical threat. Yet, the 'evil genius' or 'evil villain' is still presented as a 'worthy opponent' in its 'seemingly irrational attack on a supposedly peace-loving people' (p. 295).

While 'The Monster' represents selfishness, cunning, and that which holds no human qualities upon which audiences can forgive (McIntosh and Leverette, 2008), the notion of pure evil continues to hold a unique challenge in terms of its 'limits of representation' (Friedlander, 1992: 2). Friedlander argues that people and events of pure evil are difficult for masses to accept and understand, as in the case of the Holocaust, the epitome of evil, because of 'the willful, systematic, industrially organized, largely successful attempt totally to exterminate an entire human group' (p. 3). The challenge of creating a 'master narrative' – or 'Master Myth' – of evil, Friedlander continues, may exist within the difficulty surrounding the 'uneasiness' of the event, the various 'sensitivities' to the events and historical interpretations from the groups most affected, and the lack of a prevalent ideological framework that can be applied to justify the 'good' of the Holocaust in order to supply narratives of the 'evil'. To explore the existence of an evil archetype, one has two options: either select a case study of 'true, deep evil', such as the Holocaust, or select a case study that involves archetypically 'innocent victims', such as the Amish.

Amish in the news

Amish communities in the United States serve as an epitome of grace, traditional values, and a simple way of life, separating from, in their terms, the 'English' world (Kraybill et al., 2007; Umble and Weaver-Zercher, 2008). Scholars identify dominant characteristics of how media describe US Amish communities. Muschert (2007) argues that news and entertainment media erroneously present the Amish as a single community, one of 'curiosity' and 'allure' based upon simple constructions of the Amish in 'simple' black and white clothing and living in a rural setting. Kasdorf (2007) writes about members of the Amish community as being 'racialized' 'others', in that they represent pure whiteness of US society and serve as a benchmark for measuring the nation's traditional values.[2]

The Amish community in West Nickel Mines, a village of about 3000, represents the Old Order Amish tradition. While they are an insular community, they do regularly interact with the 'English' (or non-Amish) in public markets. Old Order Amish largely believe in a vocational approach to education; they provide and staff their own schools, which end at the eighth grade, and then place children in apprenticeships to learn valuable adult skills (Kraybill and Bowman, 2001). This exception to state-specific compulsory education laws was upheld by the US Supreme Court in 1972 in *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, in which the Court noted the unique nature of Amish communities, their reputation for industriousness and sustainability, and their general rejection of government assistance programs like Medicare or Social Security and created a rare exception to the career-driven and democratic purposes behind compulsory education laws.

Media coverage of the Amish school shooting in 2006 drew local, national, and international attention. Overall news coverage suggested the nature of the crime acted against the traditional 'peaceful' representation of the Amish community. But as Kitch and Hume (2008) suggest, the Amish community and other communities of West Nickel Mines considered non-local mainstream media as invaders, prying into their private lives. Even the local mainstream press experienced restricted access to Amish families, forcing reporters to rely on a few representative voices who spoke on behalf of the greater Amish community.[3]

Because this article examines ideological meanings within news coverage in moments of journalistic confusion – the times when dominant narratives and archetypes are no longer enough to adequately describe and interpret the news (Gutsche and Salkin, 2016) – it is vital to understand how audiences may '*think about* cultural differences, or even how they *become aware* of those differences that capture their attention' (Umble and Weaver-Zercher, 2008: 5; emphasis in original). Therefore, our study is guided by the following questions: (1) 'What mythical archetypal characteristics did journalists apply to describe Roberts and his actions surrounding the Amish school shooting?' and (2) 'How does this analysis of the press coverage related to the Amish shooting and response expand how we discuss the ritual function of mythical archetypes and the cultural role of news in providing explanation based upon the perceived needs of its news audience?

Methodology: Exploring embedded meanings in news

Our arguments related to the construction of a 'Monster' archetype focus on key language and narratives in press coverage of Roberts' character, motives, and actions. Our construction of the 'Monster' is based upon scholarship that addresses how news media identify a person as an 'enemy' or as a 'villain'. While not overtly incorporated into news myth studies of today, previous work suggests that a 'Monster' archetype can be identified by (1) the level of intentionality of the actor and of the act to harm another individual or another community; (2) the ruthlessness of the act against an innocent, which can include an individual or a community and may be considered a 'Victim'; and (3) the degree to which the public is allowed to shame and punish one for operating against dominant, approved values (Arellano, 2015; Cohen, 1996; Jewkes, 2011; Kitch and Hume, 2008; Winch, 2005).

We identified three sets of newspapers that appeared to serve specific perceived dominant news audiences, as defined above, in three proximities to the news event (Figure 1). All 10 newspapers were searched using electronic databases. *The New York Times* articles were gathered through the Times' online archives.[4] *Washington Post* and *Reading Eagle* articles were gathered through LexisNexis. *Los Angeles Times* articles were collected through ProQuest. The remaining newspapers were accessed via Access World News. We included an additional local newspaper because of the scarcity of publicly accessible articles published by the *Reading Eagle*, which had the smallest archive available for public searching. *Reading Eagle* texts were not available through the Access World News database.

We conducted three searches of each newspaper, using a combination of terms, including (1) 'Amish', 'school', and 'shooting'; (2) 'West Nickel Mines', 'school', and

Newspaper	Circulation (Daily)[1]	Published Description of Dominant Audiences[2]	Article Totals
National Press			
Los Angeles Times	775,766	"The *Los Angeles Times* is everywhere. … with readers throughout the entire L.A. DMA (designated market area), its daily and Sunday circulation is greater than those of the nearest local newspaper competitors — combined!"[3]	3
The New York Times	1.08m	"… circulated in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia and worldwide. Approximately 48% of the weekday (Monday through Friday) circulation is sold in the 31 counties that make up the greater New York City area, which includes New York City, Westchester, Long Island, and parts of upstate New York, Connecticut, New Jersey and Pennsylvania; 52% is sold elsewhere."[4]	7
The Washington Post	656,297	"… primarily distributed by home delivery in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, including large portions of Maryland and northern Virginia."[5]	8
		National Total: 18	
Regional Press			
The Philadelphia Inquirer	330,622	"… reflect(s) our vision of the city, the region and the world – and yours."[6]	36
Philadelphia Daily News (The People Paper)	112,540	The newspaper "crackles with street-smart reporting and bold writing – news, sports and lifestyle coverage that taps into the heart and soul of your Philadelphia, your suburbs, your world."[7]	10
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette	212,075	"…Western Pennsylvania's largest newspaper …. unparalleled reporting and commentary on Pittsburgh's sports teams … plus award-winning local, national and international news coverage."[8]	18
		Regional Total: 64	
Local Press			
The Lancaster Intelligencer-Journal (morning newspaper)	45,527	"Local and national news, sports and weather"; "Lancaster County's leading source of news and information."[9]	52
The Lancaster New Era (evening newspaper)	41,306	"Local and national news, sports and weather"; "Lancaster County's leading source of news and information."[10]	45
The Harrisburg Patriot-News	95,188	"delivers in-depth news from five midstate counties"; "reaches business decision makers and consumers in Dauphin, Lebanon, northern Lancaster, Cumberland, Perry and northern York counties."[11]	34
Reading Eagle	59,550	"County, state and region."[12]	2
		Local Total: 133	
		Total Articles: 215	

1 2006 circulation data from *Editor and Publisher International Year Book*, 2007
2 Audience language related to national newspapers gathered from respective corporate reports from 2006; regional and local audience language gathered from 2014 marketing material; researchers confirmed with newspaper representatives that language was similar to that which was used in 2006
3 *Los Angeles Times* Media Kit 2006, http://extras.latimes.com/extras/ads/circ_01.html
4 *The New York Times* company annual report for 2006, http://investors.nytco.com/files/doc_financials/annual/2006NYTannual.pdf
5 *The Washington Post* company annual report for 2006, http://library.corporate-ir.net/library/62/624/62487/items/236847/TWPC2006AR.pdf
6 http://www.inquirer.com/about; *The Inquirer* and the *Daily News* are operated by Interstate General Media
7 http://www.phillydailynews.com/about; *The Inquirer* and the *Daily News* are operated by Interstate General Media
8 http://www.post-gazette.com/about
9 http://shop.lancasteronline.com/pages/about-us; *The Intelligencer-Journal* and *The Lancaster New Era* merged in 2009
10 http://shop.lancasteronline.com/pages/about-us; *The Intelligencer-Journal* and *The Lancaster New Era* merged in 2009
11 http://www.thepamediagroup.com/brands/patriot-news
12 http://readingeagle.com

Figure 1. Perceived Dominant News Audiences and Information on Newspapers Selected for this Study.

'shooting'; and (3) 'Anabaptist', 'West Nickel Mines', and 'school'. Initial searches for these terms between 2 October 2006 (the day of the shooting) and 2 May 2007 (the day the Amish school opened in a new building) yielded a total of 380 articles. To further

narrow our focus on the journalistic use of ritual communication tools in news storytelling, we selected news articles written by reporters with an explicit focus on the shooting and its aftermath.[5] Our final pool of data consisted of 215 articles. To identify the 'perceived dominant news audience', we examined language and statistics provided by the newspapers' marketing and advertising material. Below, we examine the archetypal characteristics journalists applied to describe Roberts and his actions surrounding the Amish school shooting to reveal the role of the 'Monster'.

A 'monster' for each audience

Each of the three levels of coverage focused on casting Roberts as a ruthless deviant who preyed on his victims, killed them in cold blood, and was deserving of public ridicule and punishment. From local to national news outlets, journalists focused on Roberts' purposeful and brutal acts, as well as his end plan to kill himself. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported, Roberts was a 'meticulous planner of violence' (Barry, 2006). The story described how Roberts had planned for the day's violence in a purposeful manner that suggested his determination to complete the act: 'In his pickup truck', the newspaper wrote,

> police found a list – in small, neat writing along the left-hand margin of a spiral-bound notebook – that gave a picture of what he was planning to do to the children. It read: 'Tape. I-bolts. Tools. Nails. Wrenches. Hose. KY. Bullets. Guns. Binoculars. Earplugs. Batteries. Black light. Candle. Wood. Tape'. (Barry, 2006)

A local newspaper, the (Lancaster) *Intelligencer Journal*, focused on similar traits that highlighted Roberts as a vicious murderer, one who was 'calm but determined when he entered a Bart Township school Monday, 45 minutes before he shot 10 Amish girls execution-style in front of a blackboard' (Hambright, 2006). Roberts was no longer an emotional human with control of his actions, but was a calculated figure, robotic, and detached.

Roberts' humanity was diminished in much of this coverage from all three levels of the press, focusing on his inhuman elements that allowed journalists to legitimize a shared narrative of Roberts as a non-human deviant. As the regional newspaper, the *Patriot-News*, wrote, 'It's difficult for many to imagine that the man who opened fire in a one-room Amish schoolhouse is the same man who took his sons to soccer practice and his daughter shopping' (Cassidy and Burger, 2006). By removing human traits in Roberts' characterizations, the journalistic storytelling opened an opportunity for an archetypal othering that cast him as functioning outside of the human realm. Roberts was transformed in the storytelling from a nondescript milk truck driver and father of three to what we characterize as a 'Monster'. For example, *The New York Times* wrote, 'A truck driver, he was paid to collect the milk of local dairy farmers. Instead, he took their children' (Urbina, 2006).

While scholarship on news myth does indicate the presence of deviance within several master mythical archetypes, current research fails to offer a singular archetype that embodies the opposite to the dominant archetype of a hero – even in the archetype of the

'anti-hero' (Shafer and Raney, 2012). In familiar archetypes in news myth studies, notions of evil or deviance are presented as character flaws, not as an intentional force that one may use to harm another. Such purposeful damage is better represented in a more forceful and well-defined archetype constructed around ferocious intent to harm. Notions of evil emerge on the periphery to represent and explain the evil and ruthlessness that 'The Hero' fights (Campbell, 1968), that causes some of the disastrous events of the world that can be explained through 'The Flood', which comes to wash away sin and replenish the Earth (Lule, 2001), and of the next level of slightly deviant archetype of 'The Trickster' who is 'senseless and unreflective and brings on himself and others all manners of suffering' (Lule, 2001: 24). Furthermore, Lule's 'The Victim' archetype casts individuals as subjects of another person's actions or as suffering 'cruel fate', bizarre happenstance', or 'death' and as on the receiving end of natural disaster and murder (p. 43).

In Roberts' case, the press portrayed his actions as operating far beyond that of a sinful man, of a person who made poor, thoughtless choices resulting in harm. Because Roberts attacked and killed children – the most innocent of all (Kitch and Hume, 2008) – he was cast in a way familiar to readers of literary theory, popular culture, or religious studies that resembled a 'Villain' or an 'Enemy', what Winch (2005) explains 'are the most extreme form of the Other' that are 'frequently portrayed as evil to make them easier to hate' (p. 288). The villain or enemy is often associated with an individual or tangible influence that is taken to another level of dehumanization and vilification in ways that lead to an ultimate evil, non-human force. Language used in news coverage to describe Roberts is best categorized as that which casts him as a 'Monster', which we identify as consisting of three main elements: intentionality, ruthlessness, and acts which run against dominant, approved values and thus are worthy of public shame and discipline. Below, we examine press coverage of Roberts and his acts at each level of press coverage to identify themes related to the construction of the 'Monster' archetype and to explore the degree to which proximity of the news outlet's audiences to the news event may have resulted in specific storytelling patterns.

Intentional acts of harm

Roberts' actions were reported at all levels of coverage as being intentional, well-planned, and focused on the murder of innocent children. The *Los Angeles Times*, for instance, described Roberts' acts as 'methodical, gruesome, and baffling' (Barry and Simon, 2006), while *The New York Times* focused on his calmness prior to the murders when journalists wrote that '[a]n hour after walking into a small Amish schoolhouse in Pennsylvania last week with a small arsenal of guns and hardware, Charles C. Roberts IV told a dispatcher in a calm, dispassionate voice just what his emergency was' (Hamill, 2006). From these and similar descriptions, Roberts was presented as single-minded in his intent to do harm. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported, for instance, that after Roberts released the male students and female teachers, one young girl also escaped, leaving 'exactly one girl for each of the eyebolts Roberts had painstakingly installed on the two-by-four' (Gammage, 2006), which police believed Roberts planned to use along with plastic cable zip ties to restrain the girls and sexually assault them.

News stories from the *Lancaster Intelligencer Journal* and the *Lancaster New Era* noted that Roberts 'did not seem emotional', according to the 911 operator who took Roberts' call (Lovelace, 2006b) before he 'unload[ed] his monstrous rage and hatred of God and of himself on a group of Amish girls in a yellow schoolhouse in Bart Township' (Stauffer et al., 2006). Still, Roberts' focus and intentionality were not enough to construct acceptable explanations of his character that could be used to rationalize what led him to attempt to kill 10 young girls, in part because of the presentation of his expressed ruthlessness in the selection of his 'Victims' and of his methods of murder. In turn, his archetype is left without a classification currently identified with news myth scholarship. Both Jewkes' (2011) 'evil monsters' and Cohen's (1996) 'folk devils' – archetypes that still fail to appear in today's news myth studies – focus on the individual's disorders or intentions for harm they cause. These archetypes, however, tend to focus on larger 'moral panics' of society (their impact) and do not adequately examine the construction of the archetypes themselves. In contrast, our 'Monster' archetype is focused on its composition, including an intentional ruthlessness.

Ruthlessness of acts

The 'Monster' archetype provides commentary on the humanity of the Monster's victims in that their actions 'bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place [but they] ask us how we perceive the world' (Cohen, 1996: 20). The ruthlessness of the Monster that attacks a collective's sense of order and security through acts against innocents, heroes, and icons forces attention on the viciousness of the acts it takes to destroy calm. *The Washington Post*, for instance, wrote that Roberts arrived at the Amish schoolhouse 'armed with three guns, two knives and 600 rounds of ammunition' and methodically 'lined at least 11 girls against a blackboard and shot them "execution style"' (McCaffrey and Duggan, 2006).[6] Roberts' ruthlessness was also described in press coverage in meticulous detail from inside the school: '(Roberts) bound the girls with wire and plastic ties and lined them up at the blackboard. He called his wife to say that he wouldn't be coming home, that he loved her. And then he began to shoot the girls' (Cattabiani et al., 2006).

The brief moments in which Roberts was described as a community and family man were overshadowed in coverage with reminders of his violence, such as in statements that 'first responders said they will never be able to erase the images' of the crime scene because of its gruesomeness and that the victims were so young (Todd, 2006). Where previous scholarship bases 'folk devils' and 'villains' upon their actions alone (Griffiths, 2010), it is the degree of the actor's (or action's) intentional harm (Arellano, 2015; Consalvo, 2003) that contributes to the construct of the 'Monster'. That degree of ruthlessness, then, contributes to a third element of the 'Monster' archetype: the audiences' characterizations of the degree to which the 'monstrous' actor or act operates against an individual's or collective's innocence or victim status. It is a fair assertion that the person who carries pure evil in his spirit or action must be identified as operating outside of the dominant values of his collective, and it is these measurements against the 'norm' that are used to communicate a collective's preferred behaviors and ideologies.

Unforgivable acts

Press presentations of the children's innocence and news descriptions of the crime's intentionality and gore were such that journalistic storytelling allowed for an expressed justification of public shaming and punishment of Roberts as a 'Monster', which appeared in language related to the degree of his attack against the victims. The *Intelligencer Journal* in Lancaster, for instance, reported that 'almost 20 bullet wounds' were found on one victim's body (Lovelace, 2006a). The paper quoted Deputy Coroner Janice Ballenger as saying the girl 'was a 7-year-old angel'. She added, 'Kneeling next to the body and counting all the bullet holes was the worst part'. The *Washington Post* also characterized Roberts' intentionality – that investigators note, Roberts 'clearly "planned to dig in for the long siege" and torment his young victims' (Jones and Partlow, 2006) – as being an additional characteristic of Roberts' inhumanity functioning far outside of the expectations for or acceptable actions of a member of society.

Even coverage of Roberts' own pain and emotional concerns, which might have contributed to his decision to commit the shooting, still presented such actions as inexcusable. As the *Patriot-News* wrote, 'Charles Carl Roberts IV was angry and armed to the teeth when he arrived at the West Nickel Mines Amish School yesterday morning, intent on avenging a wrong that state police said dated back 20 years'[7] (Courogen, 2006). Descriptions of Roberts' personal challenges and possible rationalizations for expressing his anger through violence were dismissed as inadequate by pairing them with detailed descriptions of the shooting itself: 'He took out that anger by shooting girls execution-style after binding their legs and lining them up in front of a chalkboard in the front of the one-room school in rural Lancaster County' (Courogen, 2006). Similar language reinforced the utter inexcusability of the crime is seen in the *Lancaster New Era*:

> In his final, crazy hour, Charles Carl Roberts IV confessed to his wife that he had molested younger family members, when he was just 12. Now he was having dreams about molesting other children. The 32-year-old milk-truck driver also was still distraught over the death of his premature infant daughter nine years ago. On Monday, he loaded himself down with weapons and supplies to molest and to kill: bullets, guns, lubricating jelly, eyebolts and tape, police said. (Stauffer et al., 2006)

And while the *Patriot-News* attempted to explain the shootings by comparing them to other mass shootings, stating that '[t]he Nickel Mines shootings are complicated, even by murder-suicide standards, because they involve a gunman who murdered strangers' (Patton, 2006), that newspaper and others from local, regional, and national levels presented Roberts as a 'Monster' because of the nature of his attack against such innocence. By focusing on Roberts' acts as intentional, ruthless, incomprehensible, and unforgivable, the 'Monster' becomes a person or a force that can be righteously publicly shamed, disciplined, and left unforgiven (Der Derian, 2009).

Discussion and opportunities for future research

This article begins a discussion of how 'evil' is depicted in mythical explanations of news. Coverage of the Amish school shootings of 2006 provides a rich opportunity to

explore how 'evil' was identified when it encountered the 'purest' of society. Three major outcomes from this analysis contribute to future study of news myth.

First, we present the archetype of the 'Monster' as one that can be applied to both an *actor* and an *act*. Our analysis reveals the 'Monster' in both Roberts 'the shooter' and the 'Roberts shooting' in terms of intentionality, ruthlessness, and the degree to which the act/actor cannot be forgiven. Across all levels of coverage, Roberts was presented by name with a sense of free-will to act. Newspapers at each level also focused on intangible elements of the acts, such as when the *Lancaster New Era* referred to the 'monstrous rage' of the shooting (Stauffer et al., 2006).

Second, this analysis reveals characteristics of the 'Monster' archetype that may be used to further explore 'evil' in media archetype scholarship. Three consistent elements – intentionality, ruthlessness, and the degree to which the act/actor is unforgivable – separate the idea of the 'Monster' from other 'Master Myths'. The example of Roberts allows us to explore a concept of 'pure evil' not only because of the ruthlessness of his actions but also because of the perceived purity of his victims.

Additionally, our analysis reveals a pattern that furthers research in situations involving 'evil'. While this example is more straightforward because of the innocent nature of the victim – Amish schoolgirls – future research should explore more complicated situations when the victims' innocence is not as automatically assumed by audiences. Future research may also explore relationships between the 'Monster' and gender. As Lule (2001) notes, the archetype of 'The Good Mother' is not always female; this study does not suggest the 'Monster' – or other archetypes of 'evil' – is always male.

Finally, this article builds upon previous scholarship related to the influence of proximity of the 'perceived dominant news audience'. When use of an archetype does not differ by proximity, as was the case in this study, it may be an indication of the overall impact of the story upon audiences' larger and recognized dominant cultural values. Previous research suggests that news media outlets use mythical archetype differently when covering the same stories because the needs of their audiences differed – an audience localized to the site of a news event has different ritual needs from its media than a national audience. In this case, however, the news outlets at each level were fairly uniform in their application of the 'Monster' to Roberts.

This consistent application suggests that the 'Monster' may pair with a sense of universal need that transcends geography. In other words, when the 'Monster' appears in media work in ways that attack dominant beliefs, it implies the harm created by a person with such intentional ruthlessness devoid of forgiveability is so encompassing, so sweeping, that the grief and need of audiences regardless of proximity are the same. Future research should examine the connection between the 'Monster' and its victims to explore how that unique relationship creates needs in audiences at different proximities. As a greater amount of mass communication transitions into the digital marketplace, this research shows newsworkers how they can embrace the human role behind their work and address the potential of their audiences to exist beyond the borders of their subscribers and targeted markets.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. In that study, we define 'community' as

    hold(ing) less to geographic groups of people than to more of an ideological *collective iden-tity*, a group of people who share an ideology that guides a coherent and consistent interpreta-tion of particular issues and events that may span multiple geographies.

    We also identify the 'collective identity' of the 'perceived dominant news audience' through a lens constructed by advertising and marketing material published by each news organization, which acknowledged specific geographic regions and audiences that were targeted as readers and as advertisers. This approach is discussed further in the article's methodology.

2. Readers should note that news events since the school shooting and recent popular culture have complicated mediated notions of Amish 'purity', beginning in 2011 when several men who were followers of an Amish sect in Ohio men attacked members of a rival Amish com-munity, cut the men's beards and women's hair. The men were charged and convicted of hate crimes (Eckholm, 2015). Also, reality television shows *Breaking Amish*, which began in 2012, and *Return to Amish* in 2014 on TLC and *Amish Mafia* (2012–2015) on Discovery also provided a counter-narrative to dominant Amish characterizations (Associated Press, 2014).

3. We recognize that local and national Amish communities operate their own news outlets; however, we are interested in how mainstream – in this case, 'English' press – operate as a cultural institution.

4. The *Times* archive provided a more comprehensive search result than did other online databases.

5. While newspaper editorials and letters to the editor may be valuable to measure the variety of perspectives in a given audience, we focused on news reports that were explicit about the characterizations of Roberts and descriptions of his actions. Similarly, we evaluated bylines and content to ensure that entirely duplicated articles from news services (such as *The New York Times* News Service) were only attributed to their original publications.

6. This news report was published with early and unverified information; later reports con-firmed that 10 girls were left in the schoolhouse with Roberts.

7. Roberts claimed that he had molested two younger female relatives when he was 12 years, but no evidence of such action was confirmed.

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