Twitter as Mythmaker in Storytelling: The Emergence of Hero Status by the Boston Police Department in the Aftermath of the 2013 Marathon Bombing

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Abstract

Twitter has stormed onto the social media scene not only as an individual communication device but also as an information dissemination platform in times of disaster. Since its founding in 2006, journalism seized on Twitter's ability to quickly and inexpensively distribute breaking news, cultivate sources and detect trends (Farhi, 2009). The short, headline-like messages that comprise individual "tweets" have been communicated by the news media to track the progress of numerous revolutions and weather disasters. In 2013, the news media and a local law enforcement agency distributed information in the aftermath of a terrorist bombing during the Boston Marathon. This study explicates, through a critical examination of tweets, how Boston police employed traditional storytelling, a common tool in journalism, to narrate the mythical archetype of "hero" following the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013.

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Twitter has stormed onto the social media scene not only as an individual communication device but also as an information dissemination platform in times of disaster. Early adopters of Twitter include traditional news media (Farhi, 2009) and government entities (Williams, 2009). Since its founding in 2006, journalism seized on Twitter's ability to quickly and inexpensively distribute breaking news, cultivate sources and detect trends (Farhi, 2009).

The short, headline-like messages that comprise individual "tweets" have been communicated by the news media to track the progress of numerous revolutions in the Middle East and a major hurricane that struck the Eastern seaboard in 2012. In 2013, the news media and a local law enforcement agency distributed information in the aftermath of a terrorist bombing during the Boston Marathon. What reporters and government entities have in common is that, over time, the information of individual disasters, crimes and other public events coalesce on Twitter as mini-stories for public consumption.

Storytelling is a fundamental element of a society. Traditional journalists are storytellers who inform, set news agendas, serve as watchdogs of the powerful and "enact social dramas" (Lule, 2001, p. 35). As these dramas unfold in the media, one outcome is the maintenance of social tranquility. One means of communicating this tranquility is through myth, which emerges as a powerful storytelling element in news reporting. In this sense myth is not a false or inflated story, but rather a better understanding of the world we inhabit that emerges through cultural archetypes. Among those archetypes is the *hero* (Lule, 2001). Contemporary mythical heroes are found in literature and film (e.g., *Harry Potter; The Lone Ranger*), but also emerge through storytelling in journalism (including reporter blogs).

These heroes range from sports figures, such as basketball legend LeBron James (Zillgitt, 2013), to flight attendants "lauded as heroes" who shuttled passengers out of a burning Boeing 777 airliner in San Francisco (Mutzabaugh, 2013). Reporters sometimes emerge as heroes, too. Walter Cronkite was glorified by the *New York Times* as "a one-man phenomenon in space coverage" (Garner, 1998, p. 70). Cronkite achieved heroic status on CBS when man landed on the moon for the first time in 1969. In the 1990s and 2000s, Christiane Amanpour has covered numerous breaking stories of war and conflict worldwide to ascend to the status of "brightest star of the genre" (Ferrari & Tobin, p. 207).

The purpose of this study is to explicate, through a critical examination of tweets, how Boston police employed traditional storytelling, a common tool in journalism, to narrate the mythical archetype of "hero" following the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013. The study has significant implications for journalism. First, Twitter is not only a gateway for reporters to quickly impart information; government entities, such as police departments, use Twitter too. Second, public access to law enforcement tweets, especially during "breaking news," bypasses media filters. Put another way, why bother to follow a secondary source on Twitter, such as CNN or local media, when a primary information source, the Boston Police Department (BPD), sends tweets in times of disaster? Third, the ability of police to serve as primary sources of information (without passing through the media) suggests that tweets may be sharply tailored in an attempt (purposely or not) to set the public agenda and fashion a favorable public relations image. We suggest that Twitter, despite its headline-like delivery, is a robust storyteller and that storytelling tweets have the potential to generate the hero archetype through the guise of a law enforcement agency.

The Emergence of Twitter

Founded in 2006, Twitter is a micro-blogging website, in which users post messages, or "tweets," containing up to 140 characters, as well as pictures and video (Twitter, n.d.). Twitter, like Facebook, maintains a high profile and continues to expand. Global Web Index, which studies digital media trends, named Twitter the "fastest growing social platform on the planet" (Global Web Index, 2013).

Despite its seemingly limited ability to communicate with individual messages that resemble little more than newspaper-like headlines, the service continues to cultivate impressive numbers. Twitter bills itself as "a true global town square – a public place to hear the latest news, exchange ideas and connect with people all in real time" (Twitter, 2013). In spring 2013, Twitter boasted "over 200 million active users creating over 400 million Tweets each day" (Twitter, 2013). The Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project found that Twitter use has grown dramatically in recent years. Twitter has logged twice as many users since May 2011 with a four-fold increase since late 2010. According to Pew, 15% of all Internet users access Twitter (Pew Internet, 2012). A more recent *Forbes* article stated "an

incredible" 21% of the global internet population now use Twitter actively on a monthly basis (McCue, 2013).

The simplicity of Twitter also makes it versatile for its growing base of users. As smartphones continue to take hold, it may mean Twitter's impressive growth will continue to spike. A fifth of smartphone users access Twitter with more than 10% tapping into the service on a typical day (Pew Internet, 2012). Not only have news operations reacted to this trend but also government agencies, such as local police, which are afforded unprecedented opportunities to bypass traditional print and electronic news media outlets with direct information dissemination. Not surprisingly, law enforcement uses Twitter to notify its "followers" of public safety and emergency notices in near real time (Williams, 2009). The new horizon of media access for law enforcement to transmit unfiltered messages directly to the public opens a mass media opportunity to, in effect, engage in traditional "news" dissemintation activities. News outlets regularly engage in storytelling; its narratives document modern-day heroes (Lule, 2001).

Myth in Storytelling

Myth is more than the retelling of ancient tales of heroic feats. In modern culture, the relevance of myth in storytelling is as prevalent today as it was in the time of Homer. Lule (2001) offers a critical assessment of myth and its strong connections to journalism. Myth is a "sacred, societal story that draws from archetypal figures and forms to offer exemplary models for human life" (p. 15). Storytelling through modern media is a ubiquitous transmission mode that seamlessly reinforces the functions of myth. O'Donnell (2013) notes the recurring nature of myth in the culture:

> Mythical themes occur and recur in narratives because they represent life experiences, beliefs, values and behaviors that organize social interaction…. Myths offer examples of right and wrong, explain baffling or frightening phenomena, and provide models of good and evil. (p. 81)

A close examination of cultural myths illuminates how a society describes itself (Silverblatt, Ferry, & Finan, 2009). Joseph Campbell, who studied myth for much of his scholarly life, states that two orders of mythology exist: the spiritual and the sociological. The latter links the individual to a society. Campbell further notes that suffering in

society is inevitable; however, myth communicates how to face that anguish and move beyond it (Campbell, 1988). Disorder, violence, justice and the efforts of heroes are communicated through recurring mythical themes (Lule, 2001). Those basic themes emerge as plots in storytelling: the triangle, an actual or metaphorical death and resurrection, the quest (i.e., frequently for an object or person), and the savior (Silverblatt, et al., 2009). These themes are applicable to storytelling in the media. For example, high profile crime stories in the media frequently focus on these plots. News reports set agendas with coverage of death in the wake of horrific violence and the search (i.e., quest) for evidence and suspects. The mythic triangle in crime stories is communicated through the sometimes complicated web of police, victims and perpetrators. Finally, police emerge as knights in shining armor for solving crimes quickly.

These themes emerged in a recent terror attack on the Eastern seaboard. Four days after the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013, after which police ordered residents to stay off the streets as law enforcement searched neighborhoods, the lone surviving suspect was captured. In response, the community celebrated and praised members of the BPD. In a newspaper account, the *Boston Globe* reported:

> Most of the crowd, which included many college students, lined up to shake hands and high-five Boston police officers on duty on the Common. Proud cries of 'B-P-D' were a show of gratitude for the law enforcement men and women who guarded the city this week (Sampson & Reiss, 2013).

A new mythical hero had emerged in Boston. A 25-year Boston resident called the celebration and response to police "unprecedented" (Sampson & Reiss, 2013). The next day, the *Boston Globe* published an editorial cartoon with four panels, each with a graphic figure and two words that when read together formed a sentence. The first three panels depicted three historic, mythical heroes: Samuel Adams, Paul Revere and Thomas Paine. In the fourth panel a police officer cradles a runner with smoke wafting in the background. The words in each panel, when read together, states: "These are the times that try men's souls." The cartoon title reads "Boston Heroes" (Ohman, 2013).

The Hero Archetype

The stories of cultural heroes appear in many forms and media. Through deeply held principles (e.g., the oppositions of right and wrong, good and evil), society yearns for what Campbell (1988) noted is one "who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself" (p. 151). The hero faces trials for others to experience, and the media certainly fulfills that need in fantasy and real life storytelling. The actor John Wayne emerged as the rugged individualist in dozens of westerns, war plots and police films through the 1970s. As the culture transforms, new heroes fulfill the needs of contemporary society. Clint Eastwood created a new type of hero in the guise of a maverick police officer in the 1970s and 1980s. Dirty Harry achieved heroic status by sidestepping the "system" and siding with victims in his haste to attain justice (Silverblatt et al., 2009). Bruce Willis fulfilled a similar heroic police archetype in his widely popular *Die Hard* (i.e., John McClane) cinematic releases over the past 25 years. Similar mythic archetypes are important among the living as well. The shift to would-be heroism typically begins with the world in stasis, a period of calm, which is disrupted. At this point, the hero may be physically thrust in difficult situations or may seek a journey that transforms the individual to mythical hero status. The hero begins the search in the quest for stasis and/or relief (Campbell, 1988). Campbell (1988) provided an example of a police officer who goes about his daily law enforcement routine (i.e., stasis) but is then transformed into something larger than himself after saving another person's life, stating "the hero is one who has given his physical life to some order of realization of … [a particular] truth. The concept of love your neighbor is to put you in tune with this fact" (p. 138).

The literature demonstrates that the human quest for mythical heroes in a chaotic world is strong within the culture. As such, storytelling of real life crimes triggers a re-examination of the creation of heroes because of the nearly instant access to media distribution by news organizations and government entities. At one time, a powerful, hegemonic media presence controlled much of the information agenda in the United States (Hardt, 2004). And while media powerhouses still command considerable attention from consumers, Lule (2001) points to a lessening of the information grip by traditional news organizations:

People have the ability to find others…bypassing the communi-
cation of the scribes [news organizations]…. What happens on-
line in all these different connections? *People share stories.* They
sustain each other with stories that draw from archetypal figures
and forms to offer exemplary models and meaning for human
life. (p. 200)

Twitter is one such online community that engages opportuni-
ties for an organization to communicate with its publics directly,
bypassing the more traditional forms of information delivery. For
example, Seattle police hyper-Tweet information on breaking crimes
tailored to individual neighborhoods (Peteritas, 2012). Undoubtedly
that information reaches news consumers without the initial filter of
traditional media. The literature demonstrates that myths exalt indi-
viduals and events, strengthen convictions, explain the abstractions of
life and death, and emphasize order in a tumultuous world of crime
and terrorism (Lule, 2001; O'Donnell, 2013; Silverblatt, et al., 2009).
A critical examination of tweets will demonstrate how the BPD used
Twitter in a time of crisis as a storytelling device that not only com-
municated a significant, original narrative but also communicates the
status of mythic hero.

Critical Method

This paper draws upon the work of Lule (2001), who closely
examined the mythical hero in effective media storytelling—through
the culture of sports. *Daily News, Eternal Stories, the Mythological
Role of Journalism* chronicles the heroic rise of Mark McGwire of
the St. Louis Cardinals, who emerged in the national spotlight in the
race to set a new home run record (Lule, 2001). In 1998 McGwire
slammed 70 homers, which surpassed 61 home runs in one season set
by Roger Maris ("Progressive Leaders and Records," 2013). Years later
McGwire, also known as "Big Mac," admitted to using performance-
enhancing steroids during his career, including the record-setting
year of 1998. In a statement released in 2010, McGwire stated that "I
wish I had never touched steroids. It was foolish and it was a mistake"
("McGwire Apologizes," 2010). Despite McGwire's status as a "fallen
hero" for some baseball fans and critics, Big Mac's rise to hero status
serves as a model for how a medium, a newspaper, amplifies the stat-
ure of an athlete.

The ubiquitous culture of sports, according to Lule (2001), is a

spectacle that provides the necessary ingredients of the mythic hero. Storytelling in sports promotes societal values and preserves order:

> They [sports] offer drama and conflict. They often are performed on a public stage. They evoke binary oppositions, which are found at the heart of myth, such as winning and losing, success and failure. They recur, often daily, allowing myths to be retold as myths must be. For these reasons, myths have celebrated sports heroes since the time of the ancient Greeks. (Lule, 2001, p. 83)

The mythic hero paradigm, according to Lule (2001), consists of principles embedded in media storytelling in which a powerful hero archetype undertakes a quest. In this example, the narrative traces the journey of a high-profile baseball player in search of a home run record.

Newspaper storytelling from the *New York Times* depicted Mark McGwire's rise to mythical hero status. First, a quest composed of trials tests the hero's mettle. Second, who is this hero? Where and how did the hero acquire the skills to ascend to mythic status? Third, the willingness to sacrifice toward a goal focuses on values that society cherishes. Next, the hero uses his acquired power and force. At some point, the hero realizes the quest and becomes a consummate societal model. Finally, the return of the hero, as portrayed in the modern media spotlight with its constant thirst of 24/7 coverage, may encourage a joyous homecoming or it may serve to drive the hero further from public celebration (Lule, 2001).

At the start of the 1998 Major League baseball season, the *Times* began to chronicle McGwire's potential quest for the home run record. Big Mac's journey to hero status had the elements of compelling storytelling: at least two other players in the Majors were in contention for the home run crown. McGwire had slammed 58 home runs the previous season and seemed to be poised for a record-setting year. The quest began on the first day of the 1998 baseball season when the *Times* reported that Big Mac scored a grand slam noting "one down, 60 to go" (Lule, 2001, p. 87). For St. Louis fans, McGwire's name was now uttered in the same breath as such iconic Cardinal heroes as Stan Musial and Red Schoendienst; McGwire was potentially the hero archetype for a new generation (Lule, 2001).

McGwire's struggles to surpass the season home run record were equally documented by the *Times*. McGwire, the emerging hero, was challenged at the plate to perform but potentially disastrous distrac-

tions off the field reported by the *Times* (and other national media) seemed more likely to sidetrack his trek to heroism. News accounts questioned other reports that Sammy Sosa of the Cubs had largely been ignored by the media as the Chicago slugger began to challenge Big Mac for the home run title in 1998. McGwire was pressured to confront what others claimed to be racial bias toward Sosa. The *Times*, however, quickly latched onto a new narrative: the friendly rivalry that McGwire and Sosa began to communicate publicly. Next, revelations of drug use served as another trial. McGwire admitted to using androstenedione. Better known as "andro," the muscle-building drug had not yet been banned by baseball (Lule, 2001). (McGwire admitted to serious charges of steroid use years later).

The reporting of strong social values that McGwire exhibited further exalted his rise to heroic status. The humble beginnings as a young man who loved baseball coupled with a strong desire to become a pitcher rather than a power hitter served as the template for additional coverage. The *Times* portrayed McGwire's willingness to sacrifice in his teenage years and overcome struggles through hard work. And once in the Majors, Big Mac's struggles were regularly documented by reporters for the *Times* whose storytelling focused on physical ailments (e.g., vision correction and heel pain) and emotional trauma (e.g., a father who struggled with polio) (Lule, 2001).

McGwire's physical tools, his massive body and large arms, which seemed to resemble the mythical hero Hercules, were amply reported as well. The *Times* utilized strong mental visuals in its claim that McGwire's strength is found in "his biceps and quadriceps straining the fabric of his uniform" (Lule, 2001, p. 93).

Despite numerous trials, the quest reached its peak in early September 1998 when the *Times* reported that McGwire had broken Babe Ruth's home run record. A few days later, Big Mac and Sosa tied the Maris record, which prompted coverage of the family-like, historical nature of the feat. McGwire's parents and son were in attendance as McGwire acknowledged the bygone ties to the Maris family. A few days later, McGwire surpassed the Maris record. *Times* news accounts noted the Paul Bunyan-like feat that transformed McGwire into a "modern baseball hero" (Lule, 2001, p. 95). McGwire emerged as a valued societal figure who typified the positive norms of a culture, which further cemented the hero archetype in *Times* coverage. In an op-ed piece, the value of a modern day role model was extolled, and

a *Times* reporter adorned McGwire as a "bona fide hero, one that has joined the towering figures of old" (Lule, 2001, p. 96).

But once the journey begins to reach completion, the hero may not reap lasting benefits from the fleeting victory of a record-setting 62 home runs. Drug allegations and personal matters continued to dog McGwire for the remainder of 1998. Only when he finished with 70 home runs for the season did coverage in the *Times* laud the "larger-than-life superstar," which provided closure to the hero's journey.

Analysis

The Boston Marathon is one of the largest sporting events in the U.S. in terms of spectators and media coverage. The annual event draws about 500,000 spectators and more than 1,100 media outlets receive credentials putting it behind only the Super Bowl in terms of news coverage for a single-day event (Boston Athletic Association, n.d.).

On Monday, April 15, 2013, as runners were finishing the race, two bombs exploded, killing three people and injuring at least 264 racers and spectators (CNN Library, 2013). Boston police and the FBI began an intensive investigation. Law enforcement sought the public's help through the submission of photographs and videos of the finish line, the site of the bombings. Two suspects were eventually identified. Twitter was one means of near real time, direct communication between authorities and the public.

On April 18 police tweeted the "sacrifice" of a fellow police officer. Massachusetts Institute of Technology officer Sean Collier had been shot and killed by the suspects (Boston Police Department, April 18, 2013). The death of a mythic hero is more than a metaphor in this narrative.

In the early hours of Friday, April 19, police reported that two suspects hijacked a car, led officers on a chase and exchanged gunfire. One of the suspects, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, was shot and transported to a Boston hospital where he died. With the other suspect, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, remained at-large. Police conducted extensive sweeps of neighborhoods and encouraged residents to stay inside. Later that evening, police found the second brother hiding inside a boat in a residential neighborhood, putting an end to the search (CNN Library, 2013).

This critical analysis examined nearly 150 Tweets by Boston

police in a timeframe of two weeks, from April 12 to April 24, 2013. The start date was chosen to demonstrate that the BPD, which regularly uses Twitter to inform Bean Town residents of important police matters, was engaged in routine daily duties. The narrative, therefore, begins in stasis, or a "normal" timeframe (Boston Police Department, April 12, 2013). The "hero's journey" is on the horizon for Boston police. Before the bombings, the BPD Twitter account had approximately 40,000 followers. The number of followers surpassed 300,000 by the end of the week, giving the department more "Twitter followers than most of the area's local media" (Bar-tur, 2013).

The Quest Begins

The focus of Boston police tweets transformed from ordinary messages of every day law enforcement activities to messages that helped build its hero status as events unfolded for four days in the aftermath of the marathon bombing. Prior to the annual 26.2-mile race, there were several informational tweets related to the marathon, including messages encouraging the use of public transportation, street closings and alcohol enforcement. One tweet the day prior to the race touched on the police presence during the marathon: "Good luck 2 our officers tasked w/responsibility of providing a safe, family-friendly atmosphere 4 #bostonmarathon" (Boston Police Department, April 14, 2013).

As runners approached the finish line, police were forced to begin a quest against evil as two bombs exploded 12 seconds apart: "Boston police confirming explosion at marathon finish line with injuries," BPD tweeted, "Updates to follow. Please clear area around marathon finish line." A third tweet from the BPD indicated the magnitude of the terror strike by simply stating: "22 injured. 2 dead" (Boston Police Department, April 15, 2013).

The bombings, as well as a later-to-be determined unrelated fire, set the BPD on a quest to ensure the safety of Boston residents, identify, then find and arrest suspects, which would allow the community to return to a sense of normalcy. The retaking of the social order in the next four days was now in the hands of local police.

Trials and Maintenance of Social Order Amid Chaos

The bombings, in a highly visible public location with thousands of onlookers and runners, proved challenging for the BPD. The *Bos-*

ton Globe* described a 12-block crime scene as one of most "vexing" in Boston history (Sacchetti, 2013). Weather was a factor as well. The investigation for clues needed to conclude quickly "before the wind or rain carries it [evidence] away" (Sacchetti, 2013). Weather as a formidable barrier for the hero archetype has been recounted in numerous narratives. For example, Billy Tyne, the real life heroic captain of the Andrea Gail, had to brace for a challenging Nor'easter in *The Perfect Storm*. Similarly, trials of police would begin to unfold on the BPD Twitter site.

Photographs and videos of the deadly crime scene were submitted to law enforcement for review, but authorities feared it would "take months to process" the visual evidence (Wallacki & Cramer, 2013). The effort involved an intense search through digital evidence submitted from bystanders near the crime scene involving more than 100 Boston police detectives working 12-hour shifts. In addition, detectives personally visited witnesses who submitted materials "to ensure that nothing is forgotten or overlooked" (Wallacki & Cramer, 2013). Such trials were recounted in BPD tweets. Police reassured the community it was sifting through information. "BPD asks for patience while [the] crime scene is processed" (Boston Police Department, April 16, 2013). An area of growing concern as the week progressed focused on the media and its coverage, which had erroneously reported a suspect was in custody two days after the bombing. In addition, live media coverage showed officers surrounding buildings and discussing possible tactics, which could have undermined police tactics. The BPD emerged as the caretaker of social order, sometimes reserved for traditional media. In response to media reports that a suspect was in custody two days after the bombing, the BPD clarified the miscommunication by tweeting: "Despite reports to the contrary there has not been an arrest in the Marathon attack" (Boston Police Department, April 17, 2013).

On Friday, April 19, as the police were tracking the lone surviving suspect, the BPD used its power to caution the media to avoid broadcasting important information on police tactics in real-time: "#MadiaAlert: WARNING: Do Not Compromise Officer Safety by Broadcasting Tactical Positions of Homes Being Searched" (Boston Police Department, April 19, 2013). Another tweet reinforced the BPD's visibility as caretaker of the social order with another shout-out tweet in capital letters. "#MediaAlert: WARNING – Do Not Com-

promise Officer Safety/Tactics by Broadcasting Live Video of Officers While Approaching Search Locations" (Boston Police Department, April 19, 2013). The tweet had an impact on the tone and speed of coverage by the media. Also, some websites that were broadcasting live police scanner transmissions stopped the practice (Keller, 2013; Welsh, 2013).

Later, police searched neighborhoods and ordered local residents to stay inside. As the search for the lone surviving suspect progressed Friday, BPD provided an update through Twitter. "#CommunityAlert: Per Mass State Police: '60 percent of the search is done but there is still more work to be done'" (Boston Police Department, April 19, 2013).

As a member of the community, the BPD not only actively tweeted unfiltered updates of the investigation to hundreds of thousands of followers; local police also continued to communicate the social order. A day after the bombing, the BPD tweeted "Airlines and hotels are waiving cancellation & trip change fees for people traveling to Boston (Boston Police Department, April 19, 2013). Other tweets informed area residents that various activities including the Bruins and Red Sox games had been postponed (Boston Police Department, April 19, 2013).

In addition to serving as a source of information that reported the status of the investigation and urgent community updates, the BPD used Twitter to exemplify social values of the hero archetype. "During a shift change, a BPD supervisor told officers, 'When u get home tonite hug your kids once & hug them again. That's an order'" (Boston Police Department, April 17, 2013). At least one message was also aimed to the public to support the officers as they proceeded with the intense quest to find the perpetrators. "Say a prayer 4 all our brother & sister officers as they work 2 bring this search to safe-n-successful conclusion" (Boston Police Department, April 19, 2013).

Power and Force

The storytelling of the hero archetype in the marathon bombing, via Twitter, is further demonstrated through the social might and physical force that the BPD exercised in its intense investigation. Boston police had demonstrated the social values of its officers, but there were also tweets reminding the citizenry that the crime would be solved through the grit and determination of law enforcement. A

day after the bombings, the BPD directly referenced the intensity of the hero's journey: "Commissioner Davis: 'Our officer's response to the danger was immediate & instinctive. Their selfless & heroic actions saved lives" (Boston Police Department, April 16, 2013). Twitter messages after the bombing depicted the dangers of hunting suspects. For example, the BPD alerted residents of an "active incident ongoing in Watertown" (Boston Police Department, April 19, 2013). Other tweets directed the media, business owners, commuters and homeowners to either perform or avoid specific functions and everyday activities. One of the most significant displays of authoritarian power is noted in the brief suspension of local transportation services:

> #MediaAdvisory – so as not to interfere with police actions in Watertown, media should proceed to 550 Arsenal Street in Watertown at once…. #CommunityAdvisory: Businesses in area of 480 Arsenal St in Watertown closed til further notice…. Employees instructed to remain home…. #CommunityAlert: Vehicle traffic in and out of Watertown…. #CommunityAlert: Door-to-door search 4 suspect in Watertown continues…. Uniformed officers searching. Community consent critical. All taxi service in the City of Boston has been suspended pending further notice. (Boston Police Department, April, 19, 2013)

Demonstrable physical might of the hero's journey reached its peak when officers killed one suspect, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, and soon after captured his brother, Dzhokhar.

The Triumph

In the early hours of Friday, April 19, the BPD reported that the Dzhokhar brothers had hijacked a car. As police gave chase the hero's journey turned deadly as a shootout ensued. One of the suspects, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, was shot and taken to the hospital, where he died; however, his brother Dzhokhar eluded immediate capture. The search intensified, as police searched door-to-door in a 20-block area. During this time, residents were ordered to stay inside. That evening, a man went out to check his boat and "saw a man covered with blood under a tarp," and tipped police to the bombing suspect's location (CNN Library, 2013). Throughout the day the BPD, for good reasons, revealed few of its tactics on Twitter, but instead used the medium to remind the citizenry of social values. Police tweeted words of encouragement from the governor of Massachusetts, State Police and Boston

mayor Tom Menino who reminded Bostonians "together we will get through this crisis" (Boston Police Department, April 19, 2013).

Closure to the quest began late in the evening of April 19. Boston police announced the end of the week-long hunt for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev with a tweet that proclaimed "CAPTURED!!!! The hunt is over. The search is done. This terror is over. And justice has won. Suspect in custody" (Boston Police Department, April 19, 2013). That proclamation was retweeted by several major news media outlets. National Public Radio referenced the tweet in the lead of an online story by noting "The Boston Police Department made the announcement in a twitter message late Friday night" (Memmot & Peralta, 2013). Even in a time of celebration, the impact of fallen brethren was also tweeted by the BPD: "In our time of rejoicing, let us not forget the families of Martin Richard, Lingzi Lu, Krystle Campbell and Officer Sean Collier" (Boston Police Department, April 19, 2013). As residents began to recognize the heroic efforts of local police, mayor Menino told Bostonians, in a BPD tweet, that he was "proud of all our first responders. Thanks to them – the people of Boston will sleep well tonight" (Boston Police Department, April 19, 2013). The hero archetype was further boosted with a photo of a Boston North Metro SWAT officer—also the police chief of a Boston suburb—not long after Dzhokhar Tsarnaev had been captured. Much like the hero of ancient tales atop his ship returning from the high seas to complete a dramatic quest, Joseph Caferelli, proclaimed a "hero" by a Boston-area newspaper website, was depicted atop the same boat in which Tsarnaev had sought refuge from police (Chaudhari 2013; Goldstein, 2013).

The day after Tsarnaev's arrest, Boston police (as well as other first responders and race participants) were honored at Fenway Park in a pre-game ceremony that the BPD acknowledged in an April 20 tweet (Boston Police Department, April 20, 2013). The hero's return and the maintenance of social order had manifested itself through visible heroic symbolism at Fenway Park. Police in full uniform stood before a large U.S. flag unfurled over a vast section of the field. Red Sox player David Ortiz shocked thousands of fans with a peculiar declaration as the city returned to a modicum of social stability. The clutch-hitter, speaking on a public address microphone, declared "this is our fucking city" (Greenberg, 2013). The marathon bombings garnered national and international attention during which the BPD acknowl-

edged it "appreciates the love and support of the USA. GOD BLESS AMERICA, BOSTON STRONG!" (Boston Police Department, April 19, 2013).

Conclusions

The examination of Twitter as a medium of direct communication between law enforcement, the public and traditional news media remains understudied. This critical assessment seeks to better understand this relationship through a lens that views Twitter as a storyteller in its own right and a nurturing agent of cultural myth. The literature demonstrates that traditional storytelling in mainstream media has the potential to illustrate the powerful imagery of heroes, who triumph over formidable odds in challenging quests (Lule, 2001). Likewise, a close reading of nearly 150 tweets by Boston police before, during and after the marathon bombings finds that a compelling story quickly unfolds over several days. The narrative begins with a period of stasis but rapidly escalates to the first stage of the hero's journey: the quest. Strong binaries emerge in this narrative: good versus evil and the assurance that right will triumph over wrong, much like the storytelling of mythical heroic journeys in ancient and modern narratives. Twitter is the vehicle by which hundreds of thousands of followers tracked the progression of the Boston police narrative through 140-character tweets. The rhetoric of the BPD tweets slowly cultivated the imagery of the mythic hero through the compelling storytelling elements of disorder, violence and justice—much like a mainstream media report.

Maintenance of social values is part of the hero archetype in modern storytelling (Lule, 2001). A significant finding in this study is that Boston police exercised not only its physical might, through pursuits, a shooting and a highly visible arrest, but also its influence to maintain social order during and after the crisis. BPD tweets reminded residents that law enforcement valued community input (e.g., video and still pictures) to end the evil and return to stasis. At the same, time police communicated proclamations of reassurance and cautionary reminders to news media and businesses, through Twitter, that safeguarding the social order was a high priority.

Although the BPD may not have actively sought "hero" status in the week-long pursuit of suspects, this study concludes that an analysis of police tweets helped fashion heroic imagery. For example,

police communicated its trials of locating the suspects through cautionary notices to "stay inside" as officers searched, at times, home-to-home as the hero archetype played out on Twitter. Interestingly, traditional news media may be a significant impediment in achieving the hero archetype. The proliferation of modern media that filters constant information, including the instant access to storytelling on the Internet, means that more people achieve "hero" status (warts and all), but few truly become iconic. One reader of newspaper coverage of Mark McGwire's race for the home run crown in 1998 noted a longing "for the time when heroes were heroes…because the public didn't have the chance to dwell on their flaws" (Lule, 2001, p. 91). Further study is warranted to determine if the "hero" status of Boston police will linger as the bombings fade into history.

Another conclusion of this study is that Twitter feeds provide the media setting for Boston police to directly tell its story to the public. A lack of third-party mediation opens the gateway for police to use headline-like feeds that document a quest to quash evil and maintain order, the ingredients of powerful storytelling in the "hero's journey." This new form of unfiltered storytelling, we contend, requires further study as well.

Twitter has praised the marathon bombing tweets of the *Boston Globe*, which Data Editor Simon Rogers labeled a "credible channel of news" (Beaujon, 2013). Rogers noted that on the day of the second suspect's arrest, the *Globe* had more than 129,000 follower mentions on Twitter (Beaujon, 2013). Ironically, a close examination of the *Globe's* coverage on Twitter might reveal retweets of Boston police tweets. We strongly suggest that while the study of traditional media manipulation of Twitter as news tool is warranted, it is equally as compelling to study how Twitter affords opportunities for non-traditional, primary "storytellers," such as Boston police, who compete for social media attention in times of crisis.

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