

VISUALIZING #BOSTONSTRONG: COMMEMORATIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR A
RHETORICAL EPITHET OF CIVIC IDENTITY

by

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ABSTRACT

EMILY E. CRAWFORD. *Visualizing #BostonStrong: Commemorative implications for a rhetorical epithet of civic identity*
(Under the direction of DR. RACHEL PLOTNICK)

Following a tragic event such as a mass shooting, terrorist attack or natural disaster in the United States, it has become a ritual for audiences to establish particular hashtags pertaining to these events. Subsequent to the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, the hashtag #BostonStrong was widely circulated and used not only to describe the event itself, but to describe the city of Boston and its people as well. Although #BostonStrong is not the first of its kind, the hashtag in Boston has been among the most widely circulated and as of 2016, is still prominent in the discourse surrounding Boston. This case study of #BostonStrong is unique and allows for an innovative way of viewing hashtags as rhetorical tools with visual characteristics to communicate a particular cultural identity for a community. Thematic rhetorical analysis of visual and textual portrayals of Boston in newspapers, magazines, speeches and social media platforms was conducted in order to identify a particular ethos of strength in Boston. I argue that the combination of visual portrayals of Boston in public media along with the ethos or “spirit” of Boston that has become prevalent within the community, have ultimately influenced the communication about and the spatial commemoration practices of the Boston Marathon bombings. This study provides scholars with an innovative way of viewing hashtags pertaining to tragic events as tools for audiences to visualize and co-create meaning for an event such as the Boston Marathon bombings.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On April 15, 2013 at the finish line of one of the largest marathons in the United States, a bomb exploded. The ground shook, spectators disbursed in panic and runners who had just run over 26 miles fled to safety. Only 12 seconds later, a second bomb exploded. Three people were killed and at least 264 people were injured on that day in Boston, Massachusetts (“Boston Marathon Terror Attack Fast Facts”, 2014). Following this horrific event, Bostonians gathered around the bombing sites on Boylston Street to place their own memorabilia in tribute, including “running shoes, baseball caps, placards, chalkboards, and photographs” (Barlow, 2013). The people of Boston were not only in shock that something of this magnitude occurred in their city, but were also determined to catch the person(s) responsible. The phrase “Boston Strong” began to circulate throughout various media outlets and quickly gained national attention as Bostonians began to come to terms with what happened and attempted to reclaim the strength of the city that had been threatened.

The *Boston Globe* refers to the phrase “Boston Strong” as the “city’s post-disaster brand” and attributes its origin and virality to a combination of methods (Zimmer, 2013). The first known use of the phrase occurred on April 15, 2013 when a 46-year-old Cleveland man named Curtis Clough sent a tweet of support, reading, “Thoughts and prayers to Boston marathon victims. Hoping for the best. #bostonstrong” (Burgess, 2015). Two students at Emerson College contributed to the circulation of the

Boston Strong phenomenon by selling blue t-shirts with “Boston Strong” written in gold lettering and raising over one million dollars for the One Fund Boston, a fund dedicated to helping victims of the attack and their families (Burgess, 2015). The rhetoric of strength in the form of “(X) Strong” has been used in many contexts since Lance Armstrong’s “Livestrong” campaign (1997). These slogans have sprung up specifically following a tragedy, with the exception of the “Army Strong” (2006-present) campaign. Some examples of this rhetoric include, “Vermont Strong,” following Hurricane Irene (2011), “Newtown Strong,” following the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut (2012), “Jersey Strong,” following Hurricane Sandy (2012), “Charleston Strong”, following the mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina (2015), and others (Zimmer, 2013). Although some of these campaigns have been publicized before “Boston Strong,” there are contributing factors to Bostonians’ specific ability to identify with this concept of strength. This civic identification toward a particular ethos within Boston contributes to the campaign’s success and continued relevance across media platforms.

Boston, Massachusetts was first incorporated as a town in 1630 and as a city in 1822. Boston is one of America’s oldest cities and has a rich history and is home to some of the most prestigious universities and hospitals in the nation. The city has been the site of some of the most crucial events in the American Revolution such as the Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party, Paul Revere’s midnight ride, and the battles of Lexington and Concord. The city’s rich history also includes sports teams in the four major North American professional sports leagues plus Major League Soccer. The rich

history of Boston as a city at the “forefront” of America has enhanced Bostonian’s civic identity to a great extent. In June 2015, Boston was crowned “America’s most successful sports city” with Boston teams winning championships in “10 percent of the total seasons they’ve played since 1965, the most of any U.S. city with at least two pro sports teams” (Hartwell, 2015, para. 2). The Boston Red Sox, New England Patriots, Boston Celtics and Boston Bruins wore the “Boston Strong” phrase proudly on their uniforms following the Boston Marathon bombings. The sports teams in Boston have not only excelled at what they do, but are portrayed as tough and hyper masculine in the media as well, similar to sports rhetoric in cities throughout the United States. Each of these elements contributes not only to the depiction of Boston in public media, but also to the acceptance of this depiction of toughness within the city and beyond city limits. On the evening of April 15, 2013 President Barack Obama made a statement following the attacks on Boston and cited the “tough” nature of the city: “Boston is a tough and resilient town. So are its people. I’m supremely confident that Bostonians will pull together, take care of each other, and move forward as one proud city. And as they do, the American people will be with them every single step of the way” (Barack Obama as cited by Brady, 2013, para. 9). This particular “spirit,” “ethos,” or civic identity emphasizing strength within Boston and its citizens has transcended beyond city limits. Boston has come to be recognized as a tough, strong, and resilient city, on or off the field.

The term “patriotism” is one that characterizes national pride, however “the idea that residents of a city are proud of their way of life and struggle to promote its particular identity” has not been expanded on to the same extent as national pride (Bell

& de-Shalit, 2011, p. 4). Cities reflect the different social and cultural values of their inhabitants as well as shape their inhabitant's outlooks in many ways. Characteristics such as architecture design, public monuments, metropolitan sprawl and traffic, the state of deterioration or improvement of neighborhoods, the language on street signs, the presence or absence of hospitals, cafés, libraries and other establishments all represent something about the principal ethos of a city (Bell & de-Shalit, 2011). Despite what may be the dominant discourse about globalization or homogenization, there are often incredible differences between cities in these respects. The well-known phrase "I love New York" is an example of the way individuals make comparative decrees about the differences between cities, almost as though they were people with personalities, and these declarations are often more strongly held than judgments made about countries. The concept of civic identity is important in the field of Communication Studies and visual rhetoric because it greatly influences the way in which individuals within that city communicate with each other, communicate about themselves, make sense of events that occur within the city, and commemorate loss or tragedy as a collective.

This thesis will attempt to suture this concept of the ethos of a city with scholarship citing collective memory in a highly visual and media saturated culture. Not only can visual practices work to enhance a city's ethos, they can also act as commemorative and pedagogical tools following a historic and/or tragic event such as the Boston Marathon bombings. When a specific event becomes part of national life through the circulation of photojournalistic images and videos, the public may see itself in terms of the represented civic identity (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003). In the case of the Boston Marathon bombing, the hashtag representing this civic identity presents a

distinctive problem where there is a strong call to “move on” or “heal” after the bombing. In online discourse “traumatic visuals carefully controlled or erased in the name of national absolution” make it so that those responsible for the attack are no longer in the picture and are no longer being condemned (Grano & Zagacki, 2011, p. 218; Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). The #BostonStrong discourse continues to replace the horror of the moment on that day with a desire for a particular kind of history where Bostonians persevere and symbolically heal after the tragedy.

Visual images are particularly successful artifacts to organize a relationship among strangers that constitutes a public audience (Warner, 2002, pp. 74-76). Boston has been depicted as a “grey, inbred small town” in films such as *Spotlight* (2016), *Black Mass* (2015), *The Town* (2010), *The Departed* (2006), *Mystic River* (2003), and *Boondock Saints* (2000) (Queenan, 2015, para. 1). Citizens of Boston, along with other major cities such as Philadelphia and Chicago, acknowledge that they are one of the nation’s beloved cities and therefore accept and perpetuate a specific portrayal of their city in public media (Queenan, 2015). In order for a specific civic identity to become apparent, the mediated audience must accept the portrayal of a specific civicism circulated through visual artifacts and Boston has certainly done that. The combination of visual portrayals of Boston in film, sports, and other media platforms along with the ethos or “spirit” of Boston that has become prevalent within the community, have ultimately influenced the metaphysical commemoration practices of the Boston Marathon bombings. The sports teams and film representations in Boston “remain central in national fantasies about [Boston’s] recovery”, especially after the Red Sox won the 2013 World Series (Grano & Zagacki, 2011, p. 218). This is similar to the

symbolic healing that was present in the discourse after the New Orleans Saints won the 2010 Super Bowl following Hurricane Katrina (Grano & Zagacki, 2011).

Following the bombings, the 24-hour news cycle kicked into high gear as blurry images of unidentified, potential suspects were released in order to obtain assistance from the mediated public to identify those depicted. Visual images of the victims were released as well, however the images of potential suspects, confirmed suspects, and the manhunt and capture of the confirmed suspects seemed to occupy a majority of the news cycle. This thesis argues that the visual rhetoric that was considered newsworthy and circulated during and immediately after the attacks emphasized the ethos of strength in Boston. The #BostonStrong rhetoric that emerged acts not only in a classifying fashion as a traditional hashtag, but also as a visual tool with commemorative and pedagogical power as well. This power comes from the deep and lasting civic identification Bostonians have with strength and resilience and the deeply contextual nature of the visual artifacts. This identification gives the hashtag #BostonStrong a deeper meaning for the city of Boston. It may be common for Americans from many cities to invest in the image of the “rugged American,” who may exhibit this characteristic of strength. However, the civic identity and ethos in Boston has initiated a certain type of visual rhetoric to circulate to an audience and may influence the way that the Boston Marathon bombings are remembered. The hashtag has traditionally been analyzed as a tool used to categorize posts that contain similar content on social media. More recently, the hashtag has been seen in print media and broadcast media and many hashtags may carry richer meaning for a particular culture than a simply memetic device. In the case of #BostonStrong, the hashtag is now used as a perpetuating slogan

or branding device for Boston and carries deep contextual meaning for the city's identity and healing process following the Boston Marathon bombing.

Visual rhetoric, including the visual ideograph and the concept of image vernacular, are important to address in conjunction with civic identity for two reasons; to understand a particular civic identity in a city before a terrorist attack, and to understand the potential reasons for a certain reaction following that terrorist attack. People within a society form, maintain and revise their conception of themselves through seeing visual representations of that society in the public media (Hariman and Lucaites, 2007). Boston's hashtag is unique in comparison to other hashtags following natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and other tragic events. Hashtags such as #PrayforParis following the ISIS attacks in 2015, #Sandy following hurricane Sandy in New Jersey in 2012 and #SanBernadino following the shooting in San Bernardino, California in 2015 all exemplify hashtags that have a strong contextual connection to these attacks and have a deep meaning for communities, online or offline. These hashtags were used to communicate about facts pertaining to the event and for audience members to show support for those affected. Given the prevalence of hashtag movements today, it is a reliable assumption that a hashtag will be created following a national tragedy; however, the difference between other hashtags and #BostonStrong is that the hashtag has sustained in the minds of American's for a long period of time. Hashtags generally represent an emotion or event at a specific time and place but are ephemeral. #BostonStrong has come to represent more than just an emotional connection to an event or movement, but a rhetorical epithet of civic identity for

Bostonians and honorary Bostonians standing in solidarity with the city following the bombings.

#BostonStrong is a unique slogan, unlike similar event-based hashtags, in that it has been used consistently since the bombings as a representation of how Bostonians view themselves, rather than solely referencing the event itself. In addition to #BostonStrong being attached to a particular civic identity, the wide circulation of the hashtag may also be attributed to the fact that the Boston Marathon is an annual event, still held following the bombings. At the 2016 Boston Marathon bombing, the slogan was used to signify endurance and perseverance of the runners and to signify the “spirit of Boston”.

In April 2016, Boston Mayor Martin Walsh announced that April 15th would now be celebrated annually as “One Boston Day” stating:

April 15 is a date that has come to stand for our city’s deepest values, and last year we were amazed by the spirit of the day, in the city, and around the world, ... I hope everyone can mark this day in a way that is appropriate and inclusive for each of our experiences (Walsh as cited in Corpuz, 2016).

Walsh indicates that Boston will now understand April 15, not as the anniversary of an attack on the city, but an annual reminder of the civic identity that Boston has, and the display of that ethos following the attacks. At the 2016 Boston Marathon, runners and spectators proudly carried banners and wore t-shirts with *Boston Strong* written on them. A massive banner with the phrase was also unveiled at the Bowker Overpass to motivate runners and remind them of the strength of themselves and of the city. The annual reminder of the city’s ethos makes Boston a particularly interesting case study.

Annually, runners are reminded of the endurance that it takes to physically run the marathon, and spectators and audience members are reminded of the strength of the city. The discourse suggests that the memory of the bombings is now rooted in this ethos of strength, rather than the terror that may have been felt on April 15, 2013.

#BostonStrong is an important case study for two reasons; the hashtag is representative of a particular civic identity of strength in Boston, and the hashtag is a highly contextual phrase with commemorative potential for the Boston Marathon bombings. Because #BostonStrong has become a mantra at the annual Boston Marathon, the memory of the bombing as being representative of Boston's civic identity is realized every year.

The common phrase "a picture is worth a thousand words" is turned on its head with the introduction of a hashtag like #BostonStrong. The hashtag functions as a rhetorical tool where one phrase is worth a thousand pictures. Classifying #BostonStrong within visual rhetoric provides scholars with a new way of looking at the hashtag as an enthymeme with the power to evoke emotion. Like the common stream of photojournalistic imagery that accompanies news broadcasts, hashtags also have the ability to define "the public through an act of common spectatorship" (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003, p. 36). The hashtag also functions well in the realm of visual rhetoric as the hashtag represents "a part of national life, the public seems to see itself and to see itself in terms of a particular conception of civic identity" (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003, p. 36). To make this argument, I will integrate bodies of literature bringing evidence to #BostonStrong acting as a visual element, specifically exhibiting characteristics of image vernacular and visual ideograph (i.e. Finnegan, 2005; Cloud, 2004), the relationship between visual rhetoric and civic identity (i.e. Gallagher &

Zagacki, 2005; Hariman & Lucaites, 2003) and the potential for civic identity and visual rhetoric to influence commemoration (i.e. Blair, Jeppeson & Pucci, 1991; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CRITICAL STANCE

Visual rhetoric, civic identity and commemoration are bodies of literature that have specific relevance to the social and discursive construction of urban spaces and provide evidence for the ways in which individuals in these spaces adopt a particular civic identity. This review of scholarship will bring together two bodies of literature – one concerning the visual representation of civic identity and the other concerning the commemorative and pedagogical practices that may be influenced by this rhetoric. In doing so, this alignment will bring a greater level of understanding to the importance of civic identity in shaping the visual rhetoric that may be circulated within a culture following a culturally significant event and how that rhetoric may shape commemoration and pedagogy of that event.

The Hashtag: Beyond the Meme

In contemporary digital culture, memes can be “understood as pieces of cultural information that pass along from person to person, but gradually scale into a shared social phenomenon” (Shifman, p. 18). Hashtags can be associated with a specific type of meme that fit this description. Today, the hashtag is recognized as a topic marker or a categorizing method within social media platforms, however, it can also be used as a linguistic tool to build communities (Zappavigna, 2011). Hashtags can be used to promote brands or events, to spread updates about breaking news, or to bring about critical ideas (Caleffi, 2015). Not only has the use of hashtags spread throughout the

online world, it has also seeped into a variety of non-internet contexts such as billboards, advertisements, commercials, television spots, printed magazines and newspapers, political slogans and speeches and many more (Caleffi, 2015). Today, the hashtag may spread on a micro basis, but may have a larger impact on the behavior and actions of a collective. This characteristic of the hashtag directly influences the way that a particular cultural identity is formed in the digital age (Shifman, 2014). In the case of #BostonStrong, the hashtag became a type of branding strategy for the city after the bombings and also reinforced a particular pre-existing cultural ideal about Boston.

In order to understand the hashtag as a characteristically visual element working rhetorically to define a particular civic identity, it is important to note the similarities between the characteristics of certain hashtags and the characteristics of visual elements such as iconic photography and photojournalism. Hariman and Lucaites (2002) outline the requirements for a photograph to achieve the status of iconicity to be “(1) recognized by everyone within a public culture, (2) understood to be representations of historically significant events, (3) objects of strong emotional identification or response, and (4) regularly reproduced or copied across a range of media, genres, and topics” (p. 37). Hashtags produced following a traumatic event that evokes emotion, such as the “X-strong” hashtags, may be placed in nearly all of these categories depending on how expansive the circulation has been. In examining the hashtag as a specific form of meme exhibiting characteristics found in iconic photography, it is not far off to assert that the hashtag goes beyond its textual nature and exhibits characteristics of a visual nature as well, depending on its context. Examining visual works from a rhetorical perspective enables scholars to “demonstrate how visual images can work both to

articulate and to shape public knowledge through offering interpretive and evaluative versions of who does what to whom, when, and where” (Gallagher & Zagacki, 2005, p. 178). Characterizing the hashtag as a tool within visual rhetoric is not routinely done in scholarship. However my literature review references the hashtag in this way to allow for an effective analysis into how visual works can influence a particular civic identity and commemoration of an event.

Hashtag as Image Vernacular and Visual Ideograph

There is significant overlap in the scholarship between the concept of the “meme” and the rhetorical concept of the “visual ideograph” and this overlap has not yet been explored in depth. McGee (1980) first introduced the concept of the visual or verbal ideograph as “historically and culturally grounded commonplace rhetorical terms that sum up and invoke identification with key social commitments” (Cloud, 2004, p. 288). Today, there is a culturally specific understanding or bias to what a particular ideograph means. This refers to the fact that an ideograph’s meaning is dependent on the values of a collective at a particular time and place in history (Condit & Lucaites, 1993). Examples of ideographs include <freedom>, <equality> and <liberty>. Cloud (2004) goes on to describe that ideographs are what enable us to link ideology with rhetoric and allows an unconsciously shared idea system to become rhetorically effective in a social system. In order to be constituted as an ideograph, a word-phrase may mean different things to different groups of people. For example, “ideographs such as <freedom> or <the people> may freight particular ideological commitments for some people, [and] may be a vehicle for very different, even contrary commitments for others” (Bennett-Carpenter, McCallion & Maines, 2013, p. 2).

Memes and ideographs are constantly competing for audience selection and retention within a specific culture and are only successfully spread if they are well suited for their sociocultural environment. Oftentimes memes can be organized into a group of memes with similar meanings in order to strengthen the meaning of that meme; these groups are called “memeplexes” (Shifman, 2014, p. 10). Memeplexes are often abstract words or phrases that can be broken down into submemeplexes and further broken down into memes (Shifman, 2014). Similarly, an ideograph can also include an abstract word or phrase that portrays a sense of meaning for a particular group of people. For example, the concept *democracy* can be seen as a memeplex and an ideograph. “Democracy” is an abstract term that may be broken down into “submemeplexes such as human rights and free regular elections” (Shifman, 2014, p. 10). In the same vein, democracy can serve as an ideograph. The meaning of this term is abstract and may have particular meaning for a group of people based on which submemeplexes or memes within “democracy” have more meaning than others (Shifman, 2014, p. 10). Memes and ideographs also have a similarity in terms of political discourse. The meme is a “particularly suitable tool for analyzing the political effects of cultural currents” (Johnson, 2006, p. 29). Likewise, the ideograph has been refined as a tool for political discourses as well. The meme focuses primarily on “superficial” political discourses and offers a “bridge between form and content,” where the ideograph provides a deeper historical understanding of political concepts (Johnson, 2007, p. 29). The “X-strong” hashtags can serve as a case of this deeper understanding of political and cultural dealings, rather than a superficial label or tag, especially if these hashtags are observed as tools to perpetuate a particular form of visual rhetoric.

Iconic or enduring visual artifacts can be classified as ideographs because of their ability to be appropriated, contested, and to change in meaning over time. The ability of visual works to point to a particular societal abstraction allows them to serve as a potentially stronger indication of a particular collective identification or cultural perception than a textual ideograph (Cloud, 2004). In classifying #BostonStrong as a representation of the visual ideograph, the hashtag serves as a strong suggestion of a particular civic identity in Boston during the time of the bombings.

There are many similarities between the concepts of the visual ideograph and image vernacular, and this analysis will consider the hashtag #BostonStrong to encompass characteristics of both of these rhetorical models. In order to understand a visual artifact or image, the artifact's "period rhetoric" needs to be understood as well and the concept of the image vernacular addresses this rhetoric (Barthes, 1977, p. 18). Image vernacular refers to "enthymematic modes of reasoning" based on predominant visual reading practices at a particular time and place (Finnegan, 2005, p. 34). Enthymemes refer to arguments in which one or more of the major premises of an argument is not stated or is assumed. These arguments are highly contextual and tied to everyday experiences of a particular audience (Finnegan, 2005). A specific hashtag can be characterized in part as image vernacular because of its ability to portray an unstated principle or premise that is natural or evident to an audience. Moreover, because of the hashtag's ability to circulate and be appropriated across digital and traditional contexts, this allows the audience to utilize the hashtag as a sense-making tool and a resource for argument, rather than just a conception of a specific visual culture or ideology (Finnegan, 2005). When a hashtag is used following a tragic event, it may increase the

importance of using this image vernacular of a visual culture to make sense of a shifting or threatened civic identity.

Visual Rhetoric and Civic Identity

As stated previously, visual rhetoric, including the visual ideograph and the concept of image vernacular, are important to address in conjunction with civic identity to understand how a civic identity influences a particular visual rhetoric within a culture, and to understand the potential reasons a collective responds to an attack on their society. Because a civic identity is predominantly shaped by seeing that society represented visually, people within that culture depend on visual representations in public media to sustain and modify their impression of themselves (Hariman and Lucaites, 2007). Therefore, visual rhetoric and civic identity will be addressed jointly.

In order for a visual artifact to take on meaning in a public culture, it is important to understand how public culture and civic identity is formed. Individuals, groups and species are dependent on cities, which are considered to be fundamentally physical entities (Hogan, 2008). However introduction of social media, circulation and spatial communication has enhanced this identification and dependence on cities. Here, an important distinction needs to be made between place identification and civic identity. Place identification refers to attributes such as geographical coordinates, size and shape and is used to distinguish one city from the next. (Kalandides, 2011). By contrast, civic identity, which is what this paper addresses, refers to “a set of attributes capable of representing something similar to the personality of an individual” (Dematteis, 1994, pp. 430-431). Urban or civic identity represents a set of relations

between “image, meaning, memory, experience, sense of place, and placeness” (Cheshmehzangi, 2015, p. 396).

The composition and circulation of visual texts, disseminating through media outlets, is something that consistently interpellates audiences and is a contributing factor in the characterization of a public culture and identity (Hariman & Lucaites, 2002). A collective or civic identity is formed because a group of strangers only function as a particular collective, public body when they are “being addressed and paying attention” and see themselves in collective visual representations in public culture (Warner, 2002, p. 77). Not only can social media and the circulation of visual texts work to create a civic identity, it can also influence the renegotiation of civic identity that follows a terrorist attack as well as the public and collective memory of that attack. A visual artifact, especially one encompassing iconic characteristics, can be a “visual incarnation of the most explicit tensions of the historical period, not least the contradiction between collective security and individual happiness” (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007, p. 124). Often the tensions of citizenship can be channeled into one visual representation as well, such as a hashtag. As visual artifacts are used and altered on many platforms by different people, the creation of a specific public culture is traceable. People within that public culture are also able to draw on a common visual reference to confirm, contest, understand, and negotiate social practices within that culture (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). Following an attack such as the Boston Marathon bombings, visual rhetoric can act not only as a sense-making tool to enforce or renegotiate identity in a city, but may also be used in combination with that civic identity to influence the spatial memory practices of that historic and tragic event.

Visual texts have the power to initiate tensions between the value of the individual and collective identity, especially at a moment of crisis by “representing a common fear” and “acknowledge paralyzing fear at the same time that it triggers an impulse to do something about it” (Hariman & Lucaites, 2002, p. 38). Models of civic identity are often caught between the tensions of affirming the self, while catering to collective interests and Hariman and Lucaites (2002) hail visual images, especially those with iconic characteristics, as a mode to manage tensions in a liberal-democratic public culture. Continual reproduction and circulation of iconic visual texts “maintain the form of individual agency while habituating the public to institutional management of collective behavior” (p. 40). Especially in a time of crisis, such as a terrorist attack, photographs or visual texts can work to stimulate feelings of vulnerability as well as a sense of obligation toward the collective. With social media increasing the rate of photojournalistic practices, these visual texts function as a “performative ritual of civic identity in literate, liberal-democratic societies” (Hariman & Lucaites, 2002, p. 41).

These authors illustrate this argument stating:

Its freeing of a critical moment in time intensifies the journalistic experience, focusing the viewer’s attention on a particular enactment of the tensions that define the public culture. But more than this, it does so ritualistically, as it repetitively conjures images of what is unsayable (e.g., because emotional) in print discourses otherwise defining the public culture. This repetition, in newspapers, magazines, coffee table books, textbooks, political advertisements, and so forth, provides the public audience with the important assurances and other resources necessary for participation in modern democratic polity (p. 41).

In reading a hashtag as a visual work encompassing a multitude of visual texts at a particular historical time and place, the authors describe the impact that a circulated visual work can have on civic identity. With increased circulation of memes and content created by “non-traditional” or “citizen” journalists on social media platforms, this quote not only rings true, it is even more relevant today. Features of visual texts linked to grander ideological narratives continue to shape public understanding long after the event has passed and provide an audience with “‘equipment for living’ as a vital public culture” (Hariman & Lucaites, 2002, p. 368). The circulation of visual texts may not only help to invoke and emphasize a sense of civic identity, it may also contribute to the way that an event is remembered long after it has ended.

Visual Rhetoric, Civic Identity and Collective Memory

Although visual rhetoric produced during and after the Boston Marathon bombings may not be categorized as “iconic” as defined by Hariman and Lucaites (2002), the depictions may invoke a strong emotional response from an audience and are “topically and contextually bound,” and therefore carry a powerful commemorative potential (Gallagher & Zagacki, 2005, p. 195). This means that no matter what context these images are seen in, they provide some type of commemorative and pedagogical experience and message for the audience about the qualities and emotions that may have been present at the time of an event, and therefore are able to make parts of history visible, both emotionally and practically (Gallagher & Zagacki, 2005). Visual works have the ability to add “evaluations, interpretations and arguments” to situations often “in a language that is to be lived as an identity building and identity confirming experience” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 22).

The use of hashtags following a historic and/or tragic event has become almost expected for social media participants and it is important to understand why. People are not always aware of the ideas they may share with others, or even if ideas are shared at all and any type of commemorative ritual makes agreement clear and introduces a collective memory (Schwartz, 1996). A hashtag may serve as a ritual, or a “part of [society’s] systematic response to crisis,” assist in the visualization of public solidarity and define a sense of purpose for a particular audience (Shils, 1975, p. 158 as cited in Schwartz, 1996). The ritual of the hashtag, used in response to a crisis, is not only for the audience’s use in the here and now, but can then influence the spatial, collective memory of that event. Social networking sites (SNS) “are a symptom of a need: for identity, for memory, for stories and for connectedness” (Garde-Hansen, 2009, 148.). This need for connectedness and unity following a crisis is important in understanding the implications for collective memory following an event.

A hashtag has the ability not only to represent visual images, but to act in terms of visual rhetoric itself as well. When describing the hashtag as a tool that circulates and is appropriated across multiple platforms over time, this “ideological reconstitution” assists in the creation of a collective memory (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003, p. 38). A hashtag may not only have the ability to aggregate specific visual artifacts pertaining to an event or a dominant ideology surrounding an event, it may also be emotionally and contextually bound, therefore carrying commemorative potential for that event and assisting the mediated audience in creating a collective meaning for that event (Gallagher & Zagacki, 2005). When describing the relationship between visual artifacts and collective identity, Audley (1983) asserts,

“Our culture is expressed not just in works of art or entertainment, but in all forms of expression that reflect attitudes, opinions, values and ideas, and in information and analysis concerning the present as well as the past. Just as an awareness of our collective past is an essential component of cultural identity, so too is an awareness of what is happening now” (p. xxi).

The concept of culture is a complex amalgam of people, things, environments, entertainment and communicative activities. Amongst these entities, visual representations have become a primary segment of everyday life and therefore play an important role in the structure of a cultural identity. Because of the around-the-clock nature of news coverage and media message dissemination between traditional and social media platforms, there is an inseparable relationship between the way that visual artifacts are disseminated to construct and negotiate a particular collective identity, and therefore serve as commemorative resources for events that may occur within that collective.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS

The primary purpose of my analysis is to bring a greater level of understanding to the reasons why #BostonStrong has become such a prominent rhetorical tool following the Boston Marathon bombings as well as the relationship between the hashtag and civic identity in Boston. This analysis is also an avenue to illustrate how the audience used the visual rhetoric associated with #BostonStrong to commemorate the Boston Marathon bombings. To do this, I argue that the hashtag functions in a visual sense, rather than purely textual and therefore has the ability to shape the civic identity of the people of Boston, negotiate meaning and influence commemoration for that collective following the Boston Marathon bombings. Categorization is a simplified and dated way of viewing what the hashtag has the ability to represent and this analysis will look at the #BostonStrong hashtag as an example of this deeper meaning.

I support my argument by examining a documented and widely accepted civic identity in Boston, which places emphasis on strength, toughness and perseverance. This analysis examines this civic identity as it relates to the wide circulation of the visual discourse associated with #BostonStrong and what the hashtag means for Bostonians rhetorically, beyond categorizing tweets relating to the Boston Marathon bombings. I will also discuss the implications of Boston's civic identity as it relates to the way in which the bombings and the victims of the bombings are remembered. In a time when the circulation and appropriation of messages and visual artifacts on the

Internet functions as a new form of commemoration and pedagogy, it is important to analyze how a specific group of people can influence how an event is remembered and archived spatially. Again, these particular themes speak to the need to understand the hashtag as a device that is rhetorically complex. This is an important topic in the cultural moment, as commemoration no longer needs to be done physically at a specific time and place, and social issues continue to be addressed by citizens on social media. As I write this analysis, other examples of hashtags containing deeper rhetorical meanings and encompassing characteristics previously attributed to visual artifacts have become prominent on social media and traditional media including the #BlackLivesMatter and #ICantBreathe movements. These hashtags are representative of the deaths of African Americans by law enforcement officers and reflect broader issues of racial profiling, police brutality and racial inequality in the United States. The high circulation and cultural context and meaning behind these hashtags strengthen my argument that a hashtag functions as a rhetorical tool with visual characteristics, rather than exclusively as a meme. Although hashtags like these may be tied to a specific event and vernacular, the use of #BostonStrong is not only highly contextual for the bombings, but an attempt to remember the bombings as a day of triumph and perseverance, a day when Boston's civic identity was epitomized and is remembered annually at the Boston Marathon. I now turn my attention to furthering these arguments and building these connections in greater depth through an analysis of the #BostonStrong movement following the Boston Marathon bombings.

“City Of Champions”: Strength in Boston Before the Bombings

As mentioned earlier, Bostonians subscribe to a civic identity that is deeply rooted in visual depictions of the city and its citizens, as well as athletic heroes. A Boston based journalist described the relationship between civic identity and sports in Boston stating, “In Boston, perhaps more even than in other American cities, our sports teams provide the social glue that holds a diverse city together. Our admiration has become a crucial component of our civic identity” (Feldman, 2015, para. 9). Since Boston sports teams have recently become remarkably successful, the citizens have looked up to the teams to a greater extent, not only in terms of being supremely talented athletes, but also as leaders. This admiration and idolization of athletic heroes has been present in the city, not only during and after the bombings, but also throughout Boston’s history. Zezima (2011) of the *New York Times* conducted an interview with Brittany Shepard, age 19. In this interview, Shepard states, “Boston sports have had an amazing dominance and it’s always been that way to me. It’s kind of like a way of life” (para. 3). Yet for older generations, winning has not always been a part of Boston’s collective identity. Boston sports fans rallied around a collective identity of losing often attributed to a “curse” (lasting almost 100 years for Red Sox fans.) However, in the 21st century, with the Patriot’s Super Bowl victories in 2002, 2004 and 2005 and 2014; the Red Sox World Series championships in 2004, 2007 and 2013; the Bruins Stanley Cup Championship in 2011; and the Celtics history of winning and then repetition of that history in 2008, Boston went from a losing town, to a “City of Champions”. Although sport rhetoric in general often portrays images and messages of masculinity, strength

and toughness, Boston's recent championships have contributed even further to this hyper masculine portrayal of the city itself.

Following a terrorist attack or a malicious attack on American soil, as part of the nation's "healing" strategy after any tragic event, it is common for the President of the United States to make a statement about the nation's unity and solidarity for the families and loved ones of those affected by that attack. On April 16, 2013, the day following the bombings, President Barack Obama made a speech citing the attacks and the strength in Boston:

Because that's what the people of Boston are made of. Your resolve is the greatest rebuke to whoever committed this heinous act. If they sought to intimidate us, to terrorize us, to shake us from those values that [Governor] Deval [Patrick] described, the values that make us who we are, as Americans -- well, it should be pretty clear by now that they picked the wrong city to do it. Not here in Boston. Not here in Boston... And that's what you've taught us, Boston. That's what you've reminded us -- to push on. To persevere. To not grow weary. To not get faint. Even when it hurts. Even when our heart aches. We summon the strength that maybe we didn't even know we had, and we carry on. We finish the race. We finish the race. And we do that because of who we are. (Obama, 2013).

These excerpts describe not only a culture in Boston that displays perseverance, but also recognition that Bostonians are representative of an American culture that places value on tenacity and determination in the face of adversity. This cultural ideal that Obama describes is not solely indicative of the response Bostonians had to the attacks, but part

of a larger and longstanding cultural ideal that has existed in Boston as one of America's iconic cities.

In addition, the common genres of film set in Boston include sports films, almost always naming the success of a team or individual; mafia films, citing the strength or toughness of organized crime members and murderers; films depicting the hyper-intelligence of individuals attending schools such as Harvard or Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) portraying intelligence as a form of strength and films perpetuating the stereotype of the "typical" Bostonian. The dominant representation of a Bostonian portrayed in these films usually works in a 'hands on' type of profession including a pipefitter or a fisherman, which gives the character a sense of physical strength rather than intelligence. The prevalent sports discourse as well as the film genres set in Boston, work together not only to influence the perception, thought and emotion of Bostonians but also influence the attitude and conduct of Bostonians as well. These media representations only work to create a culture of strength in Boston if the conduct of Bostonians reflects that perception. As made evident by the consistent appropriation and circulation of the *Boston Strong* slogan, this perception of strength and perseverance has been generally accepted by Bostonians.

In relation to #BostonStrong, as stated previously this dyad of words can refer to the strength of Bostonians, Boston PD and/or the first responders on the scene of the bombing. Simultaneously, the phrase can also refer to the culture of strength that Boston represents as portrayed through media messages and sport media messages as well as through other avenues not referenced in this thesis. Although the hashtag serves as a convenient way for Bostonians and other Twitter users to categorize information

pertaining to the Boston Marathon bombings, it can also be used in reference to the culture of strength that Boston encompasses and values. This analysis provides evidence that Boston has been a city with a deep historical background and an ethos of strength that citizens already identified with prior to the *Boston Strong* slogan. Although the slogan has arguably assisted Bostonians in rallying together to heal after the bombings, it has also allowed citizens to express a civic identity that had already existed in Boston as has only been amplified since the attacks.

This hashtag not only served as a “community building linguistic activity”, but also as a convenient representation of previously held beliefs (Zappavigna, 2015, p. 2). The hashtag allowed Bostonians and those keeping up with the events of the bombings and the manhunt for the bombers to keep track of breaking news as and identify a sense of collectivity with other online citizens. From the media representations of Boston and Bostonians in film and sports in addition to the citizen acceptance and audience response to these representations, the hashtag #BostonStrong has a significant meaning for civic identity of Bostonians. Although many other cities and institutions have utilized the hashtag or the “X strong” rhetoric in their post-disaster messages or their institutional branding, the rhetoric of strength in Boston has had a lasting impact on the city. This paper argues that Bostonians have accepted and conducted behavior according to the represented culture of strength in the media and therefore the hashtag #BostonStrong has allowed citizens to conveniently represent this culture through a hashtag. Because of the deeply contextual and emotional meaning behind the hashtag for Bostonians, I argue that the hashtag represents characteristics often found in visual rhetoric.

#BostonStrong Visualized: The Bombings and the Aftermath

As stated previously, this analysis argues that a hashtag can function as more than a categorizing tool on social media, which was its original intention when it was created in 2007. Because the Boston Marathon is a widely televised, live event, the way that audiences learned about the events were from graphic videos and images captured from broadcast media as well as cellphone videos, photos and social media accounts of victims and witnesses. The visual images of missing limbs and a bloody display on Boylston Street were retweeted and shared tens of thousands of times and allowed audiences to watch the horror play out in real time. It was then the responsibility of public officials, such as the Boston Police Department, to respond to the public's reaction to the bombings just as much as the bombings themselves. #BostonStrong helped the audience co-create the meaning of the event. By utilizing this hashtag instead of a hashtag pertaining to prayers for the victims or fears in the city, the audience was able to establish a specific vernacular of perseverance and unity in Boston, rather than one of fear and uncertainty. Image vernaculars are not merely an inevitable product of ideology but a middle ground, preserving a "necessary space for agency by theorizing the ways that viewers mobilize images as intentional resources for argument" (Finnegan, 2005, p. 34). I have prefaced my analysis with examples of the visual culture in Boston being determined by an overwhelming force of a specific ideology of strength, however when categorizing #BostonStrong as image vernacular, it allows for expansion on this idea further to provide the audience with a way to negotiate meaning of the event for themselves through visual artifacts. Boston residents used the hashtag not only as evidence of messages pertaining to the bombings, but also to elaborate on a

civic identity at a time when citizens and the mediated audience were consumed by anxieties in the face of terror. Classifying #BostonStrong as image vernacular and visual ideograph allows the mediated audience to participate in the argument that Boston is strong.

The argument can be made that a hashtag does not function under the realm of photojournalism, photography, or visual rhetoric. However, because #BostonStrong is representative of a specific civic identity and represents a collection of visual artifacts perpetuated by public media, it carries many of the same qualities found in these visual texts. In addition, because the hashtag is representative of this civic identity, it portrays a performative model for citizenship in Boston and puts the city and its institutions on display, while valorizing this performance of power. As visual texts circulate they provide “resources [with] thought and feeling that are necessary for constituting people as citizens and [motivate] identification with and participation in specific forms of collective life” (Hariman & Lucaites, 2002, p. 366). #BostonStrong also has the ability to shape the audience’s cultural beliefs and historical narratives of the city of Boston (Hariman & Lucaites, 2002). Like iconic photographs, #BostonStrong is able to motivate action on behalf of public interest. The reaction following the attacks on social media and broadcast media indicate a specific emphasis on the identification, capture and sentencing of the brothers Tsarnaev, the bombers, which may be attributed partially to the civic identity of #BostonStrong.

An example of audience participation in creating a narrative of strength after the bombing was the “manhunt” for the bombing suspects depicted through traditional and social media outlets. Predominant narratives throughout social media, broadcast media

and print media arguably demonstrate that a 24-hour news cycle can contribute to the creation of a crisis atmosphere, misinformation and stereotyping. These narratives portrayed a constant reel of visual imagery of the attacks and many instances of misidentifying suspects and speculation from trusted news sources, which may have inflated the need for audiences to cling to this *Boston Strong* attitude. Throughout the manhunt for the suspects and until the BPD declared the bombers to be captured via Twitter, the audience was informed of the status of the manhunt primarily through visual imagery. News outlets have an obligation to appeal to their audience and therefore will search for the most powerful stories to report. However, if news organizations are attempting to appeal to their mediated audience, while competing with other news outlets to be the first to break a story, this type of coverage may lead to misinformation. A common subject occurring in reports to the mediated audience was the attempt to name and confirm apprehension of the suspects. The *New York Post* published a cover story titled “Bag Men” in which Salaheddin Barhoum and Tassine Zaimi were pictured next to the caption “Feds seek these two pictured at Boston Marathon.” The following day it became clear that these two men were not involved in the attacks at all and *The New York Post* published an article (not a sensationalized cover story) exonerating them of any responsibility (Margelli & Margolin, 2013). In addition, a “Saudi national” named Abdulrahman Alharbi was also claimed to have had a connection to the attacks. *CNN*, *The New York Post* and the Twitter account of the *Associated Press* all claimed that this man was under heavy guard at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and that he was in custody and being questioned by authorities. *The New York Post* also published graphic photos of the bombing along with this story for a

sensational angle to a false accusation. Following these reports, the Boston Police Department tweeted that there had been no arrests made, and no suspects were being questioned or in custody in connection with the attacks. With consistent disagreement between news coverage, tweets, retweets, and the like, all claiming different stories to be true, the audience was left with little information to make sense of these attacks and responded with a proclamation of strength rather than fear.

Prior to the positive identification of the Tsarnaev brothers as the bombers, the FBI released blurry photos from a surveillance camera to the mediated audience in order to enlist the help of the mediated audience in identifying the bombers. The men were photographed walking down Boylston Street near the finish line of the marathon. A statement from the FBI was released along with the photos stating, “Somebody out there knows these individuals as friends, neighbors, co-workers, or family members of the suspects, and though it may be difficult, the nation is counting on those with information to come forward and provide it to us” (DesLauriers as cited in Smith & Patterson, 2013, para. 7). Intelligence began pouring in, in the form of phone calls and social media posts and messages. As FBI officers were still making sense of the information, President Barack Obama brought a mixture of reassurance and defiance when he stated the bombers “picked the wrong city” to attack (Obama as cited in Smith & Patterson, 2013, para. 19). Obama goes on to state, “Every one of us stands with you, Boston may be your hometown—but we claim it too. . . . For millions of us, what happened on Monday is personal.” (Obama as cited in Smith & Patterson, 2013, para. 19). This statement of unity provided evidence that the #BostonStrong narrative was not only shared by Bostonians, but as a symbol of strength for the entire country as well.

National audiences were perpetuating the narrative of strength in Boston and feeling a sense of closeness to this cultural identity. Obama's statement portrays Boston as a quintessential depiction of a national identity of America as a "superpower".

President Barack Obama also first stated that the Boston Marathon attacks were an act of terror during his public address following the attacks (Obama, 2013). This point is important especially in attempting to understand the subsequent "lockdown" of residential neighborhoods during the manhunt for the Tsarnaev brothers after the bombings. The *Washington Post* reported on the magnitude of the police response to the Boston bombings in comparison to other attacks on the United States:

... We haven't seen a lockdown and an occupation of an American city on the scale of what happened in Boston after the marathon since the Watts riots — not in Oklahoma City after the Murrah Federal Building bombing in 1995, not in Atlanta after the 1996 bombing in Centennial Olympic Park, not in D.C. during the 2002 sniper attacks, not after a series of pipe bombs went off in federal courthouse in San Diego in 2008, not during the dozens of instances in which a mass killer or serial killer was still at large. In Boston, 19,000 National Guard troops moved into an American city, not to put down a civil uprising, quell riots or dispel an insurrection, but to search for a single man. Armored vehicles motored up and down residential neighborhoods. Innocent people were confronted in their homes at gunpoint or had guns pointed at them for merely peering through the curtains of their own windows (Balko, 2014, para. 4).

One factor that may have influenced these responses after the Boston bombings in comparison to the attacks listed above was the constant speculation and misinformation about the suspects, as well as the misinformation and speculation about the suspects' affiliation with larger radical terrorist organizations such as Al Qaida from mainstream and social media. The subsequent "lockdown" of residential neighborhoods to capture Dzhokhar Tsarnaev can be seen as an attempt to regain control and strength in Boston. Audiences were able to see visual images and news coverage of heightened SWAT and police presence on television and on social media. Although this was a relatively small terrorist attack (solely in terms of death toll) compared to other attacks in the United States, the response from government entities was extreme and the audience was exposed to the images and video of the lockdown in real-time.

According to Balko (2014) of the *Washington Post*, after the large and obtrusive police and SWAT presence in neighborhoods surrounding Boston, it was a Watertown resident who actually reported a sighting of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev hiding in a boat in his backyard. When snipers witnessed movement in the boat a "contagious fire" broke out where snipers peppered hundreds of rounds into the boat. Although the commander shouted for officers to cease fire, the shooting lasted for ten seconds. Flash grenades were thrown at the boat in an attempt to stun Tsarnaev and he was urged to surrender via bullhorn (Balko, 2014). It turned out that Tsarnaev was unarmed. The "lockdown" in Boston, where civil liberties were essentially taken away from citizens, was not ridiculed, but generally celebrated. A poll conducted by the MassInc Polling Group (2013) showed Boston resident's support for the lockdown at eighty-six percent. Social media users tweeted messages about Boston's ability to find anyone who threatens the

city and celebrated a “win” for the city against the terrorists. For example, “Boston is probably the only major city that if you [expletive] with them, they will shut down the whole city...stop everything... and find you” (@_Happy_Gilmore, 2013). Tweets with similar messages were shared and retweeted thousands of times, many including visual images of the quiet and “shut down” streets of Boston with police and SWAT depicted as the only people on the streets. After the capture of Tsarnaev was confirmed by the BPD Twitter account and then broadcast on televised news stations, citizens drunkenly (literally and figuratively) flooded the streets cheering for their city and country.

#BostonStrong has provided Boston with a concise definition of a civic identity that almost characterizes the city as if it were a human being. Similarly, the lockdown instructed the public to think of security solely in terms of personal safety. Since 9/11, audiences have been captivated by a culture that panics for personal safety especially with the connection made between the Muslim community and the Boston bombers, and the fact that information from trusted news sources featured graphic imagery and video of the attacks, but minimal or unclear information regarding the bombers. This may be one reason why residents were so accepting, or even willing, to give up their civil liberties for “security reasons” (Giardina, et al., 2016). What followed the lockdown can also be categorized as a method used to regain the #BostonStrong identity: the outcome of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev’s court case.

Naturally, Tsarnaev’s court case was highly televised, especially via local media outlets and social media accounts, such as the *Boston Globe* and *CBS Boston*. In an attempt to maintain a fair trial for Tsarnaev, the defense filed repeat motions to take the trial out of Massachusetts in order to ensure a fair and impartial jury. The defense cited

a similar case in Oklahoma City where Timothy McVeigh detonated a bomb that took the lives of innocent citizens and traumatized a city. In that 1995 case, the judge ruled that a fair trial could not be conducted in Oklahoma. The motions from Tsarnaev's defense team were denied (Rose, 2015). Tsarnaev's defense team also filed a motion to have more time to prepare for the case, as artificial time constraints were placed on the trial in order to give the public the justice they were vehemently requesting. However, this motion was denied as well. First Circuit Appeals Court Judge Juan R.

Torruella criticized his fellow judges for rushing to judgment, affectively denying Tsarnaev his right to due process and claimed that the case would be tainted if it were revealed that the court rushed to an execution. Subsequently, Tsarnaev has been sentenced to the death penalty in Massachusetts, a state where the majority does not support the death penalty (Rose, 2015). In January 2016, Tsarnaev's defense team filed an official appeal citing the gross negligence of Tsarnaev's right to due process and requested to examine the social media activity of the jurors and their friends (Manning, 2016). The inattention to Tsarnaev's right to due process and rush to conviction may be attributed to the around-the-clock, graphic media coverage of the attacks in Boston where visual imagery of the attacks and unidentified suspects were circulated prior to Tsarnaev's arrest and audiences and jurors were finally seeing the confirmed bomber in a courtroom. These narratives, including the manhunt, lockdown and sentencing Tsarnaev to death, were apparent not only because of an underlying civic identity of strength in Boston prior to the bombings, but because that identity was threatened to an even greater extent through misinformation and speculation in mainstream news and social media outlets.

If we seek to understand the artifacts of particular visual cultures, it makes sense to pay attention to how “rhetorical expression taps into, shapes and contests the norms of those visual cultures” (Finnegan, 2005, p. 35). A hashtag such as #BostonStrong may allow an audience to verbalize their relationships to people, issues, artifacts and beliefs. Hashtags, like image vernaculars, can be used to constitute a readily available medium reclaiming a history of visual verbalizations while also contesting a threat to that history (Finnegan, 2005). The hashtag has the ability to stand for visual artifacts and therefore invoke particular visualizations of culturally available narratives about Boston’s civic identity and ideologies in complex ways. The hashtag as a visual tool allows us to see #BostonStrong as a vehicle for the communication of beliefs about individual and collective moral character, while also serving as an important tool in the city’s healing process after the attacks (Finnegan, 2005). The hashtag allows the audience to construct a unique interpretation of the event and the identity of the city before and after the event.

Because #BostonStrong consists of “culturally-grounded, summarizing, and authoritative terms that enact their meaning by expressing an association of cultural ideals and experiences in ever-evolving and reifying form within the rhetorical environment,” it represents a collective commitment and unity within Boston and therefore provides citizens with a perceived power to guide behavior (Cloud, 2004, p. 288). Reading #BostonStrong as a visual tool, specifically an ideograph and image vernacular provides “a link between rhetoric and ideology” and allows a specific set of shared idea systems or cultural identifications to “become rhetorically effective” (Cloud, 2004, p. 288). Not only is #BostonStrong representative of a civic identity

present in Boston before the bombings, it has also been used as a sense making tool for citizens to “heal” following an event that was an “act of terror.” Not only that, but the hashtag allowed citizens to reclaim a sense of security that was lost or threatened subsequent to the attacks due to media narratives and law enforcement action. This hashtag is not only important in helping us understand civic identity in Boston in the moments before and directly relating to the attacks, but also the implications of that civic identity represented in the media for future commemoration of and pedagogy about the Boston Marathon bombings.

#BostonStrong and Commemoration of the Boston Bombings

An important and relevant point in the case of #BostonStrong is the ability of common audiences to recognize depictions of social experience in pictorial rhetoric, rather than an abstract or ideal classification (Gallagher & Zagacki, 2005). This assertion relates to #BostonStrong in that this particular audience was able to see exactly what Boston’s civic identity was referring to through visual images and artifacts not only during the attacks, but also through depictions of the city in public media prior to the attacks. As stated previously, the highly contextual and emotional nature of the hashtag along with the visual artifacts that the hashtag represents allow audiences to communicate a particular type of social knowledge about Boston’s civic identity and the bombings through a negotiation of collective memory (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). Mediated communication, especially visual communication, has the ability to influence the way in which an event is remembered and the way in which it is framed for pedagogy in the future. The commemorative structures and imagery following the bombings contributes to this image vernacular. Blair, Jeppeson and Pucci Jr. (1991)

assert, “commemorative monuments ‘instruct’ their visitors about what is to be valued in the future as well as in the past” (p. 264). This refers to the fact that a memorial represents a symbolic and communicative process of “seeking a collective understanding of the past” in order to understand the concerns of the present (Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti, 1998, p. 151). The #BostonStrong rhetoric has been shaped and negotiated by the audience to tell a specific story about the Boston Marathon bombings and therefore instructs the present audience to remember the bombings in this way. The civic identity of strength in Boston has influenced the types of information and visual artifacts that have been disseminated about the event and therefore have the ability to influence how the bombings are to be remembered.

An example of this renegotiation of meaning can be found in the way that #BostonStrong has been commodified as I mentioned earlier. Following a national tragedy, it is a reliable assumption that a hashtag will be developed pertaining to that tragedy and often times the location of that tragedy as well. Examples include #PrayforParis and #SanBernadino following the tragedies in those cities in 2015. Many of these hashtags are ephemeral, while #BostonStrong has been surprisingly durable following the bombings. The hashtag now appears on t-shirts, hats, key chains, other material items, television advertisements, in Boston sport discourse and has been exported to other American cities to represent strength and perseverance in sport. While this high visibility of the hashtag may be due to a strong civic identity in Boston, the highly commodified presentation helps the city to “brand” itself in a corporatized way. Psychologist and author Joseph Burgo attributes this “showy” aspect of #BostonStrong to a narcissistic culture placing emphasis on self-display and symbolic support (Burgo

as cited in Smith, 2014). One of the original *Boston Strong* shirt makers mentions that there may be a time to retire the slogan in the future stating “I think it’s sort of taken on an ‘I Heart New York’ sort of touristy ‘I went to Boston this weekend’ sort of thing” (Reynolds as cited in Smith, 2014). Not only are Bostonians creating a memory about the bombing, but also a memory that is now preserved in a commercialized way, which brings about an entirely different and more marketable meaning to the phrase.

While other hashtags often appear in one moment in time and then disappear once the audience is no longer paying attention, #BostonStrong has remained durable. So durable in fact that it has seeped beyond the city borders to represent strength and perseverance at local races around the nation. The ethos of strength and perseverance is something that Bostonians may identify with, but it is also an idea that is easy for individuals to identify with in any U.S. city. #BostonStrong has come to mean more than just remembering the Boston bombings, it also refers to the fact that people can participate in this ethos even if they are not physically present or do not identify as a Bostonian. On April 13, 2016, President Barack Obama recalled the #BostonStrong message and ethos when referring to national threats posed by the Islamic State. Obama states “I want to remind Americans again what Boston taught us: how to be strong, how to be resilient. We have to refuse to give in to fear. We have to stay true to our values of liberty and diversity and openness” (Obama as cited in Nakamura, 2016, para. 4). The fact that the #BostonStrong rhetoric has been so durable that it is still referenced three years later to describe an ethos that the United States as a whole can identify with is important for Boston as a case study.

By contrast, #CharlestonStrong and #NewtownStrong are examples of rhetoric that was apparent after tragedies in U.S. cities. However, the ethos of strength did not take hold to the same extent in these cities as in Boston and therefore the hashtags could not function as a larger message to represent a national ethos as #BostonStrong has. The ethos of strength in Boston is viewed as being authentic to the city, and therefore the phrase has a certain power to create meaning for citizens in other locations at different points in time. Because of Boston's rich history and reputation of being a city that does not cower in the face of adversity, the hashtag and slogan representing strength in the city is seen as being an authentic representation of Boston's ethos. The "X Strong" rhetoric has survived in Boston because Bostonians and Americans actually view Boston as being an authentically tough city.

The #BostonStrong slogan can also be found on social media and online memorials pertaining to the bombings. Facebook, the most widely used social media website (Lenhart, 2015) has over 100 individual pages dedicated to different ideas, memories, and stories about the Boston Marathon bombing and the events of that day. Because the spontaneous memorial that sprung up on Boylston Street following the attack was eventually dismantled to allow normal traffic patterns to continue, and recreated in the Boston Public Library to tell a new, curated story, individuals turned to social media to archive memories and commemorate what happened on that day. Graduate students from Northeastern University created a crowd-sourced website titled *Our Marathon* to recreate individual's stories and experiences of the bombings. The website allows individuals to type out their personal accounts of what happened that day in April, as well as post pictures or give support to those survivors, families of

survivors and families of victims. In addition to these materials, the website also features pictures of the spontaneous shrine created on Boylston Street and the secondary memorial in Copley Place. This new form of commemoration makes these instances of human suffering and physical commemoration available for consumption by a wider audience through a mass-mediated format (Bhattacharya, 2010). Not only are online memorials a source of commemoration for individuals, but archived visual images and videos that have been disseminated throughout news broadcasts and social media posts function as commemorative artifacts as well. Mediated communication provides a wide audience with “hypervisibility” of the destruction caused by the bombings and helps to convey the enormity of the disaster and the response to the disaster (Bhattacharya, 2010, p. 66). The narrative act of sharing stories and knowledge may enable visitors and contributors to realize the significance of the event in relationship to a particular identity (Bhattacharya, 2010).

Although memorials are a place where the event and the victims of the event are able to be remembered, the visual texts used to commemorate the Boston Marathon bombings continue to embody the #BostonStrong narrative. On the first page of the Boston City Archives found on the *Our Marathon* virtual memorial website a quote from former Boston Mayor Thomas Menino reads, “Nothing can defeat the heart of this city.” (“Our Marathon: Boston City Archives Collection”, 2016). The only other visual images on the page state, “Boston Strong,” sent from an individual from Canada, and “We are one, We are Strong, We are ‘B’” written in the Boston Red Sox font as a symbolic representation of the city of Boston (“Our Marathon: Boston City Archives Collection”, 2016). Those who post on the *Our Marathon* memorial site are able to

describe sadness and vulnerability that they may have felt on that day, and it allows them to mourn those who may have been injured or lost their lives. However, when scrolling through the archive, many of the visual images on the site portray a sense of unity and strength in Boston. Examples of this type of rhetoric include a picture of a sign on a Boston mailbox reading “nothing can break Boston” and a Sports Illustrated cover featuring Jonny Gomes from the 2013 Boston Red Sox with the caption “Strong: Triumph over Tragedy”. The online memorial also has a separate section dedicated to Boston Marathon Internet memes featuring images with messages such as, “We are Boston Strong” and references to popular Boston films such as *The Town* and *Boondock Saints* with messages such as “Clearly... someone forgot what happened the last time evil showed its face in Boston” (“Our Marathon: 2013 Boston Marathon Internet Memes”, 2013).

As stated previously, sport has been a cornerstone of Boston’s civic identity, and Bostonians looked to their athletic stars as symbolic leaders following the Boston bombing. This symbolic leadership can be found in the MLB’s 2013 Boston Red Sox victorious season and World Series Championship. The day after Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the youngest of the Boston bombers, was brought into custody, David Ortiz, a fan favorite from the Boston Red Sox, gave the following speech prior to the first game played at Fenway Park following the attack:

All right, all right Boston. This jersey that we wear today, it doesn’t say ‘Red Sox’, it says ‘Boston’. We’re gonna thank you Mayor Menino, Governor Patrick, the whole police department, for the great job that they did this past

week. This is our fuckin' city, and nobody is gonna dictate our freedom. Stay strong! (Ortiz, 2013 as cited in Giardina et al., 2016, p. 115).

In 2016 following the ISIS attack in Brussels, President Barack Obama was interviewed and asked why he chose to attend a baseball game in Cuba, rather than concern himself with the attack in Brussels. Obama cited Ortiz's speech in Boston as a primary reason why, stating,

One of my proudest moments as president was watching Boston respond after the marathon (attack) and when Ortiz went out and said, probably the only time that America didn't have a problem with cursing on live TV, when he talked about how strong Boston was and was not going to be intimidated. And that is the kind of resilience and the kind of strength that we have to continually show in the face of these terrorists. (Obama as cited in McDonough, 2016, para. 3).

Sage (1998) argues, "National loyalty and patriotism are fostered through sport rituals and ceremonies that link sport and nationalism" (p. 117). Obama's reaction to Ortiz's speech highlights a sense of national pride and loyalty in addition to the civic identity in Boston. Butterworth (2005) notes that sport is a dramatic enactment of patriotism and nationalism, and the ritual of sport, speeches and national anthems performed in sport produces and supports a mythology that is encompassing of a rich ideology. These practices "became transformative acts, where rituals of grief and tribute evolved into rituals of nationalism and support" for the city (Butterworth, 2005, p. 116). The Red Sox World Series Championship that year became all-too-easily attributed, at least partially, to the bombings and the strength that was displayed through the first responders, Boston Police Department and citizen participation in the communication,

identification of the bombers, shoot-out with the suspects and ultimate capture of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the only bomber to survive the manhunt. Bostonians looked to these athletes as civic leaders throughout this process. Ortiz's speech at Fenway Park, a sacred place in Boston's culture, demonstrated symbolic leadership, and public media depicted it as a healing ritual for Boston. The fact that Ortiz cursed on live television and was not criticized, but celebrated for doing so, is evident that Boston sports foster an almost "belligerent" civic loyalty. Butterworth (2005) notes,

[Su]ch a tendency constitutes a false and belligerent patriotism based on an absolute division of good and evil that became a ritualized public spectacle at baseball games beginning late in the 2001 season. In the long run, if the nation is to come to terms with terrorism in the full complexity of its causes and its very real consequences, Americans must learn to look past the rituals of their "national pastime" and begin to nurture the very democratic practices their war president purports to protect (Butterworth, 2005, p. 123).

When the Red Sox went on to win the World Series that year, the championship parade was paused while players symbolically positioned the trophy on the finish line of the Boston Marathon and social media posts referencing the parade, the championship, Ortiz and the bombings were punctuated with the hashtag #BostonStrong.

Ortiz's speech became a formative moment in the city's recovery process as it was portrayed as a symbolic message for the city's strength via the Red Sox organization and other local media outlets such as the New England Sports Network (NESN) (Giardina et al., 2016). In addition to the Boston Red Sox, the New England Patriots and the Boston Bruins both wore and sold jerseys portraying some type of

Boston Strong rhetoric, including the Boston area code, 617. The World Series championship and the showing of solidarity from other Boston sports teams are linked to a sense of citywide recovery and healing in the context of the team's deep-rooted attachment to Boston's culture and history. This "belligerent patriotism" or strong civic identity in Boston, contributed to the symbolic healing process for the city and the nation, but also shifted the meaning of the bombing away from focusing on the consequences of a very real terrorist attack, and places emphasis on the city's "amazing spirit" and perseverance (Butterworth, 2005).

One year later in 2014, a #WeWillRun commercial campaign was released on YouTube referencing the Boston Marathon, the bombings, and the city's strength and ability to recover and persevere following the bombings. The message disseminated through this viral video encompasses this civic identity emphasizing strength and perseverance that existed in Boston prior to the bombings, as well as the enhanced civic identity evident after the bombings. The voice in the advertisement states:

This is not a shoe commercial. It's not a clothing commercial either. It's a story about a city. A city that was built by rebels --- people not afraid to fight for their freedom. It's in our fabric, our founding. Around here, winning's expected.

When times get tough, we persevere. We don't slow down to catch our breath; we speed up. We keep moving no matter what life throws at us. This is our city.

We will run (Miller, 2014).

The viral video depicts touchdowns and homeruns in between slow motion footage of runners across Boston's most historic and iconic locations. The video not only cites perseverance and stamina following the bombings, but it also depicts the identity of

strength that Boston subscribed to prior to the bombings. This video importantly references the actual act of running the marathon as a form of strength and perseverance. Although runners travel internationally to participate in the Boston Marathon, the video describes the city of Boston in terms of a runner who will only “speed up” and proceed in the face of adversity. This connection reinforces the ideas that not only are the runners themselves portraying a type of strength; the entire city encompasses that image as well. This endurance that runners must have and their ability to prove their worth as healthy human beings through the act of running gives the hashtag a certain significance that is not apparent in any other instance, especially because the marathon is observed annually whereas an attack has not been conducted at an annual sporting event before. The runners are able to come back to the site of the attack annually to prove this perseverance exists in them and in the City of Boston.

The hashtag #BostonStrong has the ability to encompass an exceptional importance within Boston at a specific moment in history. The narrative of #BostonStrong is representative of visual artifacts that help to tell the story negotiated by the collective mediated audience within the specific cultural moment following the bombings. However, these visual artifacts also have the ability to represent a “tension between the performative embodiment of public interest and the ideological reconstitution of that interest” which is “played out in the process by which collective memory is created through the extended circulation and appropriation of images over time” (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003, p. 37). Like iconic images, this hashtag has the ability to represent a lasting, but shifting and changing civic identity in Boston and therefore may be described in the context of visual rhetoric. #BostonStrong, like a

visual practice, can be a site of struggle, triumph, negotiation and sense making after an event such as the Boston Marathon bombings, and therefore has powerful commemorative potential for the event. As made evident throughout my analysis, Boston exists in the American imagination as a city representing a certain hyper masculine toughness and East Coast ruggedness. The Boston Marathon bombings makes Boston a national memory site not only because the marathon is held annually, but because the phrase #BostonStrong and the images that are attached to that phrase became free floating national symbols representing perseverance following a tragedy.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

My analysis of the relationship between civic identity, visual rhetoric, and commemoration has sought to add a new level of understanding to the importance of identity in a community and how a hashtag can help construct and enhance that identity through visual rhetoric. Currently, scholarship has focused on the hashtag's ability to circulate across social media platforms and categorize posts featuring similar messages, however my analysis of the hashtag seeks to reflect the deeper meaning of online discourses that may be culturally grounded and contextually bound to an event. The deeper meaning of a hashtag within a community with a strong identity is important when negotiating the meaning of the event for that community. Collective identities are constantly being altered depending on historical context and citizen participation and social media provides a way for citizens of a particular online community to contribute to a collective identity and construct meaning behind an event or issue.

The hashtag #BostonStrong supports this argument in that it represents particular cultural and civic identifications of citizens in Boston and also allows participants to collectively negotiate how the Boston Marathon bombings will be remembered in the future. Many hashtags are simply used to categorize posts as scholarship to date suggests, however, understanding the cultural implications of certain hashtags is important in an age where social media is being utilized by “hashtag activists” to vocalize particular beliefs and commemorate tragic events such as the

#BlackLivesMatter and #BringBackOurGirls movements. This trend of developing hashtags that anchor a cultural context and eventfulness are evocative of mass shootings and other tragedies that have happened in other places. What makes Boston a unique case study is that people return to the site of the bombing annually, not to strictly mourn at a memorial site, but to perform a sport indicative of endurance and perseverance, furthering the identification with #BostonStrong. The lack of a physical memorial at the site of the Boston Marathon finish line on Boylston Street is not a cause for concern in Boston, as the pictorial rhetoric represented by the #BostonStrong hashtag allows for a constant commemoration of the attacks and an annual reminder of Boston's strength.

Below, I identify implications for scholarship, concentrating on the necessity and benefits of bringing a new understanding to the relationship between identity and the hashtag. Then, I identify implications for understanding how social media and media coverage can contribute to the commemoration and pedagogy of an event such as the Boston Marathon bombings.

Implications for Social Media and Collective Identity

This analysis observes the hashtag #BostonStrong in terms of visual rhetoric for a couple of reasons. First, #BostonStrong is a convenient representation of visual artifacts that have helped to shape a strong civic identity in Boston historically. Second, #BostonStrong has been circulated not only in terms of a hashtag representing a preexisting civic identity, but also as a message of perseverance after the Boston Marathon bombings. Scholars have discussed the potential for collective activism to be constructed and managed via social media platforms. In online activist movements, social media can allow a quick aggregation of publics around a specific issue of

contention and enables the potential for users to engage in a type of collective action that has been criticized for being “only ephemeral” (Kavada, p. 1). Conversely, authors have also discussed the ability for individuals to come together on individual terms to find a common ground that allows diverse understandings of common problems through social media platforms (Bennett, Segerberg & Walker, 2014).

On the other hand, scholars have studied what social media and electronic writing mean for identity construction. Social media has arguably emerged as a component of an individual’s identity (Poster, 1990). Without meeting face-to-face, people have the ability to invent and re-invent themselves through the process of exchanging signs electronically (Poster, 1990). Scholars have addressed this potential for identity construction on social media, as well as the potential for a collective community to form on social media based on common ideologies. However, little has been discussed about the potential for a specific civic identity to be *enhanced* on social media and for that identity to influence a response to an emotional event. In the case of #BostonStrong, the civic identity of strength and perseverance may have been renegotiated following the Boston Marathon bombings; however, my analysis points to the fact that this civic identity was already present in Boston. Social media allowed users to remind the mediated audience of this identity in order to create a narrative following the bombings that was indicative of that identity. Boston is a unique case study because the bombing can be connected to a material site at an event that occurs annually, which may “reinstate the traumatic visuals” of the attack at that time. The anniversary of the attack is also a day that Mayor Martin Walsh claims to be a day for Boston and the “amazing spirit” of the city and its people on that day. The problem here

is that it has become more “evident in various modes of national forgetting” for “image-based intensities of national trauma” to be limited after “an imagined healing has already begun” (Grano & Zagacki, 2011, p. 218). My analysis adds a greater level of understanding to the notion that the #BostonStrong narrative on social media functioned as a tool for citizens to “heal” after an attack; to remind themselves of the perseverance that has been a longstanding conviction in their city. The imagery of terror and healing following the attack are competing for air time and audience consumption and because of the ephemerality of the hashtag and the constant shifting of its meaning, how an audience remembers the attack is constantly changing. The #BostonStrong narrative allows for the audience to decide what is worth remembering about the event. It is important to understand that social media may be used to create a collective identity, but also that it allows audiences to co-create the narrative and meaning of an event such as the Boston Marathon bombings.

Implications for Social Media and Commemoration

Another element of this analysis draws a connection between the #BostonStrong narrative on social media and the influence that that narrative has on the commemoration of the Boston Marathon bombings. In Boston, there were instances of misinformation, speculation and stereotyping of potential suspects throughout the around-the-clock news cycle covering the bombings. This analysis contends that these elements heightened fear and anxiety in the audience that was already profound following the attacks. Because Bostonians have been actually “seeing themselves” as a resilient city through sports, film and other visual representations, the #BostonStrong narrative was also used to counteract this heightened vulnerability. I do not contend that

Bostonians remember the bombings in one specific and unchanging way, rather than this process of collective memory is constantly “in flux with the composition of the group, the entry of new forms of information, and the relative importance of particular types of remembering to the group over time” (Maltby, 2016, p. 644). Social media has the ability to present, re-present, construct and reconstruct a past in relation to the collective. “Hence it is in the collective act of people engaging in remembering together for a purpose—whatever that might be—that memories become formed” (Hawlbach as cited in Maltby 2016, p. 644). The purpose of my analysis is to bring a greater level of understanding to how and why social media, specifically the #BostonStrong rhetoric can constitute and reconstitute specific memories or narratives for the bombings. Maltby (2016) calls for additional attention to be paid to the intersection of media and collective remembrance, stating:

Precisely because media enter into the production of remembrance activities, they have the potential to generate recourse to dominant narratives that constrain identities at both a collective/individual and public/private level. In this way, the media can be seen to shape not only who we are and how we remember but also how we understand our selves politically, socially, and personally. This being the case, they also become the context for the participation and celebration of and in remembering and the negotiation and projection of identity as a result (p. 656).

In the case of the Boston Marathon bombings, the dominant narrative was that of strength in the city for “dealing with” the tragedy in a way that brought about immense force upon the bombers when bringing them to justice. This dominant identification was

then enhanced and restated continuously as a method for Boston to overcome feelings of vulnerability following the attack. In this sense, the dominant narrative when remembering the attack was to recall the force Boston placed upon the bombers, and Boston's ability to "bounce back" after the attack.

At the 2016 Boston Marathon, news articles were published not only citing the positivity in Boston but also the fact that the positive memories were able to "replace" the negative. Kellie Marshal of Danvers, MA, a survivor of the 2013 attacks, was interviewed after being proposed to at the 2016 Boston Marathon finish line. Marshal states,

I think that's most of the reason why I wanted to run in the first place, to replace the bad memories with something good and to have an accomplishment for that day instead of just something horrible that happened. So to add something else amazing to replace those memories is just the perfect way for [the proposal] to have happened (Marshall as cited in Toussaint, 2016, para. 5).

The discourse from the 2016 Boston Marathon suggests that the Marathon not only represents endurance and perseverance in the runners, but in the city and the survivors of the attacks. This type of commemoration of the bombings perpetuates the #BostonStrong narrative as a method for commemoration and healing after the bombings and as a message of perseverance throughout the United States.

Social media provides an archive for visual and textual artifacts to be continuously shared, long after the event has ended. Photos of the first responders, the bomber in custody, and the spontaneous memorials on Boylston Street continue to appear on social media timelines year-round, and especially close to the anniversary of

the attack. The types of texts that are shared are indicative of a collective identity, or an individual identity of the person who shares that text. Understanding the connection between a civic identity in Boston and the visual artifacts that represent that identity and the bombings is important in understanding why the event is remembered as a rousing “success” for the city of Boston in terms of the capture, sentencing of Tsarnaev and the rebuilding of a city following the bombings. The connection between identity, visual representations and commemoration are influential in the future pedagogy of an event such as the Boston Marathon bombings. This understanding will allow scholars to think critically as to why tragic events may present different narratives in the media and how those narratives influence how the event is remembered. Cities have the ability to create an identity that either stems from or is separate from a national identity. Boston’s unique situation in which people are brought together annually, not only to perform a sport of endurance, but as a show of solidarity for the city following the Boston Marathon bombings makes Boston a unique case study for the relationship between civic identity, visual rhetoric and commemoration of a terrorist attack.

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