

**Post-9/11 Counterterrorism Thriller Ideology: Framing Retributive Justice through  
Special Ops Superheroes**

BY

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THESIS

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## **DEDICATION**

My wife, Karyn, and our children, Matthew and Sarah, endured over 10 years of me working on this degree as a part-time student. I did this while trying to be a contributing family member and productive law enforcement professional. The many evenings in classes and mornings at the computer could have been spent with them, or doing things to help out around our home. The fact they accepted my partial absence with little complaint is worthy of dedication. Eventually, my main motivation to finish this dissertation became a hope to be an example to my kids– that is, of not giving up on something of educational value once you are well underway. But in the process– through their understanding, filling in when I was unavailable, and positive attitude– they became an example to me. Thank you and here's to you, family.

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## SUMMARY

This dissertation examines fictional media texts that increased in popularity after 9-11. The texts are a serialized spy-espionage genre thriller that is fact-based, realistic, and about the U.S. response to international Islamic terrorism. Called *post-9/11 counterterrorism thrillers* for this study, they are a form of “faction” historically situated in the post-9/11 U.S. and paralleling the Bush administration’s “war on terror.” The text’s centerpiece and narrative perspective is a Western, white, and male hero presented as an official solution to terrorism threats.

Studying these texts is important because these types of popular culture forms are known to influence and reflect perceptions of ideological positions. The historic moment in question (i.e., 2001-2008) signifies a symbolic era where fictional portrayals thrived. Because U.S. counterterrorism is an inherently covert state activity, these entertainment texts are particularly well situated to supplant the secretive enterprise and offer knowledge about it. Yet the texts have received limited academic attention. To help fill this void and reveal the discourse’s meanings, a qualitative and interpretive close reading of 11 subject thrillers is employed. Framing analysis techniques help interpret ideological messages pertinent to U.S. justice, security, and law.

The subject thrillers follow a formulaic framework that constructs an idealized version of the U.S. “homeland” vulnerable to imminent, repetitive, and massive terror plots. The perpetrators of the plots are conceived as Islamic, savage, and outside invaders. This framing—drawing on sources of 9/11-style fear, panic, and paranoia—necessitates and justifies a conflict-based, war-driven response acted-out by the heroes and supporting characters. The contemporary hero version is “all-American,” single-action, hyper-masculine, and enmeshed in a militaristic *special operations* character trope. Through devices like omnipotent narration, problem framing, intertextual references, fetishizing fact-based tools, mythic characterizations,

## SUMMARY (continued)

and accessing patriarchal themes, the texts construct a response made to appear “natural.” The framework offers a ritualistic solution to the recurring threat of terror doom, and a cathartic redemption of 9/11 failures. The framework, through outright omissions and framing the failures of alternative terrorism responses, delegitimizes democratic forms of justice. Instead, the narratives put forth an authoritative and retributive version of justice. The messaging justifies a violent and masculine executive level national security apparatus that combines U.S. military, policing, and intelligence authorities and is empowered to go anywhere in the world to execute its mission. This superpower uses any tool or method needed to combat an exceptional enemy, operates clandestinely, and is not accountable for its actions. In the process, justice is separated from law and— if necessary— falls outside of it. These findings converge with those critical of the Bush terror war, both revealing a common scheme where dominant ideological content thrives.

The conclusions are underpinned by established critical cultural media studies theories and corresponding research. The function of popular media, processes of ideological framing, convincing nature of myth, and influence of gender ordering, provide foundations about how the subject text’s discursive formation (i.e., as a signifying system) will influence the audience’s knowledge, worldviews, and opinions. The narratives reinforce an acceptance of dominant legal authorities and enhanced state enterprises. The reader will accept a retributive justice favoring the emotional over the rational, and gives discretion to a moralistic savior who sacrifices himself in the name of that justice. In theory, this equates to the transference of power to legal and security formations at odds with U.S. democratic ideals, such as rule of law, human rights, and executive transparency. The process ultimately helps normalize an exceptional, hegemonic, and expansive executive in an unending war during a significant discursive moment in U.S. history.

## **PART 1: INTRODUCTION, THEORY, LITERATURE REVIEW, AND METHODS**

### **I: INTRODUCTION**

The U.S. response to the *new global terrorism*—Islamic fundamentalists employing increasingly violent, adaptive, and creative tactics to achieve world domination (Clarke, 2004; Lippman, 2003; White, 2002)—became a prominent issue of social concern after September 11, 2001 (hereafter: 9/11). It involved significant changes to the national security apparatus and policies, shifting discourse about terrorism and how to address the threat. The U.S. response to the new global terrorism became an ideological struggle to balance aggressive military, police, and intelligence actions while preserving democratic protections and ideals. The result was a rise of a dominant state-led ideology during the first decade of the 2000s (Altheide, 2005; Crenshaw, Kruglanski, Post, & Victoroff, 2008). This ideology was encapsulated in President Bush’s *Global War on Terror* (the “GWOT”), the *Bush Doctrine*, and a U.S. “counterterrorism” strategy. Counterterrorism is arguably an arbitrary, narrowly defined, and contested idea (Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004). Terms like “antiterrorism” are more appropriate when pursuing a thoughtful and expansive U.S. terrorism response (White, 2014). Nevertheless, it is used here as an accepted term in the academic literature and an accurate representation of the combative U.S. policy and state action that materialized after 9/11 and was directed at Islamic extremism.

The emerging U.S. strategy resulted in significant changes, including fundamentally changing legal ideology through passage of the USA Patriot Act (Wong, 2006) and moving from internationally accepted and humane uses of interrogation and a prohibition on torture to “enhanced” techniques founded in ideological positions that claim certain forms of torture are effective and justified (Sonderegger, 2014). United States counterterrorism also involved a shift from self-defense approaches to war, established in multilateral international agreements, to a

preemptive war ideology (Cole & Lobel, 2007) and the proliferation of neo-conservatism emphasizing enhanced executive power and unilateral global authority (Halper & Clarke, 2004).

The dominant ideological context formalized directly after 9/11 as part of U.S. counterterrorism intensified related debates about how laws and police, intelligence, and military actors, tools, and techniques should be employed and how related institutions should be restructured. These debates address core issues of U.S. justice, including constitutional protections (e.g., privacy rights, rule of law, due process), the U.S. role in global security, and the U.S. interpretation of the Geneva Conventions. During this period, democratic ideals and cultural identity shifted towards increased nationalism, violent aggression, and imperialism—discourses proliferated mainly through popular media (Jackson, 2011). Some concluded the media became the lens through which the U.S. population derived nearly all of its understanding of counterterrorism (e.g., Altheide, 2005; Kellner, 2007).

Scholars from cultural, media, and communications fields conducted analyses of these dominant narratives, attempting a “critical dismantling” of the GWOT (Steuter & Wills, 2010) to address the shifting discourses and their implications. The demand for this research was based on the knowledge popular media fiction and non-fiction texts interact and intersect as reinforcing components of the public discourse (Hall, 1997). Media constructs an ideology of concepts and premises about *sociocultural enterprises*, which are specific practices a particular culture undertakes, such as an organized religion or a crime control approach, to influence social practices and are directed by empowered actors (Altheide, 2002; Kellner, 1995). Post-9/11 counterterrorism can be viewed as one such enterprise— the official U.S. response to terrorism as a “newly discovered social evil” (Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004, p. 178).

One significant way shifting discourses about terrorism and counterterrorism were dismantled is through *frame analysis*, which makes visible the messaging processes and imbedded meanings behind ideological content (Altheide, 2005; Gitlin, 1980). Post-9/11 terrorism news media represented an ideological reformation supporting the Bush GWOT (Clarke, 2004; Entman, 2003). For example, ideological claims were constructed through terror images on major news programs. “Breaking news” contributed to a terrorism narrative supporting the “rapid expansion of the punitive and military apparatuses of the state” (Burnett & Whyte, 2005, p. 2). The ideological shifts apparent in news media frames influenced the norms and values of justice institutions, including legal processes, laws, and ideals.

On a smaller scale, researchers developed an understanding of significant changes in mass-produced post-9/11 *fictive* texts responding to terrorism and counterterrorism (Chermak, Bailey, & Brown, 2003; Jenkins, 2003; Martin & Petro, 2006) as popular storytelling distinct from but interrelated with Bush GWOT messaging (Davis, 2006). Fictive narratives directly focusing on the counterterrorism enterprise include television hit *24* (Nikolaidis, 2011; Clucas, 2009; Semel, 2008), as well as several Hollywood movie blockbusters like *The Bourne Ultimatum* (Dodds, 2008), *Triple X* (Boggs & Pollard, 2006), and *Collateral Damage* (Dixon, 2004). These fictions have been called television “militainment” (Mirrlees, 2009) and “national security cinema” (Dixon, 2004), representing a post-9/11 popular appetite for conflict-based narratives and the cathartic effects of violence aimed at real and perceived threats (Boggs & Pollard, 2006; Kellner, 2010).

A subgenre of popular thriller print fiction also emerged within the fictionalized security milieu, given various labels including “war on terror,” “international spy,” “techno-,” “counterterrorism,” and “political” thrillers. Thriller industry sources proclaimed this product to

be *faction*— fictional stories using factual historic settings and fact-based plots (e.g., Levingston, 2010). During the Bush era, the “war on terror thriller evolved as a blending of conventional literary espionage forms with the techno-fetishism and ultra-machismo of the special forces action thriller— a hybrid aesthetic that mirrored the actual militarizing of intelligence gathering” (Holloway, 2009, p. 2). This subgenre was a revitalization of Cold War thriller themes, such as those in Tom Clancy bestsellers, latent in the U.S. since the end of its last significant martial period (i.e., roughly 1947 until 1991) (Britton, 2005; Lynds, 2006). This subgenre is called the *post-9/11 counterterrorism thriller* for the purposes— and as the subject texts— of this study.

These subject texts rose in popularity at a moment when popular media culture and its texts are expected to be highly influential (Hall, 1997). Rafter (2000) argues that during,

[Times] of paradigmatic cultural, political, and social change, it is the media that performs the work of redefining the cultural context within which the criminal justice system operates and, indeed redefining the very concepts, of crime, justice, and retribution, to fit the needs and norms of the changing social order. (p. 7)

Studying the thrillers is also relevant because they are not singular events, temporary successes, or one-time best sellers. These are serialized genre texts like *24*, which are expected to offer the audience a standardized, repetitive, and fact-based dialogue about terrorism and counterterrorism (Hall, 1997; Rapping, 2003). The texts were ongoing bestsellers by well-known authors in a rapidly emerging market between 2002 and 2009, which is the approximate historic focus of this study. The authors represented in this study have published a total of at least 25 post-9/11 bestsellers (<http://www.vinceflynn.com>; <http://www.bradthor.com>; <http://www.webgriffin.com>).

Like many of the national security films and television serials described above, the thrillers all appear to be situated in post-9/11 U.S., involve portrayals of terror threats to the U.S., and depict the application of official U.S. power to respond to radical terrorism. The most prominent and germane feature seems to be male action heroes presented as counterterrorism

*formal agents of social control* (hereafter: FASC) (Altheide, 2005) from the U.S. intelligence or police forces. The FASC feature is crucial because the portrayals represent the state's legitimate use of force and has become a prominent symbol of U.S. counterterrorism (Altheide, 2005).

The fact-based fantasy hero likely represents a re-envisioned hero myth variant— one prevalent in U.S. popular fiction that transcends genres, recurs at key cultural moments, and an effective device for ideological messaging (Gibson, 1994; Rapping, 2003). The U.S. popular culture's blind devotion to recurring Western male single-action heroes reborn in different manifestations in historic episodes is often a response to a major event (Asimov & Mader, 2004). Such heroes tend to reiterate the *American monomyth* (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002), which is an appropriation of the classic monomyth's (Campbell, 2008) symbolic journey of sacrificial redemption by a singular hero. These journeys influence and reflect certain ideological constructs in U.S. culture. The superhero obsession in U.S. culture is revealing because through ritualized plots they offer indicators about the anxieties, concerns, and expectations related to democratic justice within the contemporary U.S. consciousness (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002).

Jack Bauer, the masculinized hero of *24*, emerged immediately after 9/11 as a recognizable official (i.e., a FASC) superhero image resolving terror threats with aggressive and violent responses imitating and promoting the dominant terror war narrative (Van Veen, 2009). Although applying irregular, excessively violent, and illegal methods that should result in serving prison time (Yin, 2008), Bauer instead became a cultural icon embodying the idea of a swift and no-nonsense solution to terrorism (Mayer, 2007). The hero was voted in one audience poll as one of the “20 all time coolest pop culture heroes” (Entertainment Weekly Staff, 2009, n.p.). This connection normalizes the audience to violent and extralegal responses— a sense-making process influencing ideological formations of justice (Nikolaidis, 2011). This study



examines if the subject texts' heroes, as fantasized warriors like Bauer, represent "all-American heroes" that save "us" from newly imagined threats (Rapping, 2003) and embody ideological positions within the domain of U.S. justice, law, and national security.

#### **A. Purpose of Study**

This dissertation's purpose is to present findings from a qualitative investigation of the ways post-9/11 counterterrorism thrillers frame ideologies related to U.S. law, justice, and security. This study explores how a specific genre text constructs ideological positions that reflect and promote certain U.S. responses to terrorism, including legal reasoning, legislation, and related institutional practices. This research is accomplished in a discursive framing analysis of 11 post-9/11 counterterrorism thrillers written by 3 bestselling authors situated as beginning on 9/11 and continuing for about 8 years after 9/11. Ideological content is revealed to deconstruct claims about the ethics, morality, and legitimacy of contemporary U.S. national security, resulting in theoretical arguments describing the ideological framework and how it is positioned to empower state policies and apparatuses. This study's analysis includes comparisons to the Bush GWOT as an existing dominant ideology (e.g., Altheide, 2005; Deflem, 2004; Jackson, 2011) in an effort to understand the extent to which this entertainment narrative *promotes* or *subverts* the dominant, hegemonic ideology (Brooker, 2002).

Since this dissertation's underlying goal is to better understand a justice ideology at work in a specific text, the following characteristics help conceptualize "ideology" from the critical media and cultural studies paradigms: Socially constructed and gradually shifting (Oliver & Johnston, 2005), functions through particular sociocultural domains (Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004); is about preconceptions and assumptions regarding complex issues (Said, 1993); prevails at particular popular media locations and cultural moments (Hall, 1997), claims truth and

preserves dominance by privileging the texts of small empowered groups who control messaging while excluding alternate messages (Kellner, 1995), and formulated and functioning outside of the state but situated to be channeled in support of state power and authority (Mumby, 1989). This approach is a form of *ideological criticism* (Fiske, 1991), which helps explain how resulting ideological formations become the dominant lens through which certain sociocultural enterprises are constructed as “common sense” through discourse about ideals, morals, and principles.

Theories developed by Hall (1997) and Mumby (1989) provide an effective foundation in this area because they offer a critical, interpretivist, and postmodern view of popular media’s role in Western ideological power and politics. The ideas put forth by these established theorists are exemplars informing the subject texts’ format (i.e., genre, popular media), the period and location of the study (i.e., U.S. within decade after 9/11), and the potential of power transference (i.e., to justice-related enterprises). Works critical of media-based war on terror ideologies (e.g., Altheide, 2005; Entman, 2003) and interrelated theoretical approaches on the organization of ideological discourses (e.g., Benford & Snow, 2000; Brooker, 2002) provide the rationale for applying framing and frame analysis theories to this study. Such theories offer insight into interpreting ideological frameworks, as well as tools to deconstruct those formations. Several prominent researchers (e.g., Entman, 1993; Gamson, 2001) provide framing and frame analysis conceptions focused on contemporary media texts as distributors of ideology (Gitlin, 1980) and are useful in describing those processes. The following discussion of key contextual conditions will clarify the value of these approaches in helping to achieve this study’s goals.

## **B. Background and Context**

The events of 9/11 and the response to terrorism fundamentally changed the U.S. in radical, precipitous, and irrevocable ways (Wong, 2006) and became the foremost national issue

(Rapping, 2003). These changes resulted in momentous uncertainty and anxiety at all levels and in all facets of the U.S. culture, including in economic, social, legal, and political realms—invigorating debates about core issues of democracy and U.S. security. September 11<sup>th</sup> left a void of experience and knowledge wherein the U.S. public was starved for information about terrorism (Altheide, 2005). The following section explains how popular media culture is an influential location that fills in these types of voids and is particularly powerful in the post-9/11 context—a space ripe for mass culture to have a compelling impact. This section focuses attention on how the subject thrillers are positioned to be influential and their unique features as a newly emerging text. Because the texts are set within and interact with the dominant Bush ideology, a more detailed examination of the Bush Doctrine and GWOT concludes this section.

### **1. The Significance of Popular Media Culture in Communication Processes**

Over the past approximately 40 years, a body of social science and humanities research demonstrates how media texts reflect events within a culture and provide interpretive constructs that help readers make sense of the world (e.g., Chase, 1986; Weldes, 1999). This broad collection of works comes from many and varied academic areas (e.g., media studies [Altheide, 2002]; law and popular culture [Asimov & Mader, 2004]; sociology [Jenkins, 2003]; communications studies [Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2009]), but can generally be grouped as being from a discipline of critical media cultural studies. Media texts “are important sites for the production, reproduction, and transformation of ideologies [... and] produce representations of the social world, images, descriptions, explanations, frames for how the world is, and why it works as it is said and shown to work” (Hall, 1997, p. 90). Media must be viewed as cultural texts situated within historic moments and part of the struggle between social groups and political ideology (Kellner, 1995). Media culture needs to be critically examined to expose how

texts “encode relations of power and domination, serving to advance the interests of dominant groups at the expense of others” (Kellner, 1995, p. 56).

This study is concerned with mass-consumed fictional texts appearing to serve the dominant ideology as part of U.S. “popular culture” (e.g., Altheide, 2002; Rafter, 2000). For this dissertation, popular culture will be conceptualized as: 1) Producing texts that are “popular” because they are mass consumed; 2) consisting of products with economic value produced by specified industries; and 3) reproducing cultural expectations and attitudes through the popular consumption (Papke, 2007). While popular culture remains crucial for understanding the impact and features of media imagery and messaging, ideological messaging is first illuminated at the textual level (Dixon, 2004), such as in the subject texts.

Popular media texts construct dominant ideological positions and premises about various sociocultural enterprises, such as defining gang problems in poor black neighborhoods (Kellner, 1995) or the differences between the policing roles of men and women (Rapping, 2003). Mediated ideologies interpret how that enterprise is and should be done. Thus, certain fictional texts are contested locations where significant political issues are discussed (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2009). Law and popular culture researchers (e.g., Asimov & Mader, 2004; Chase, 1986) show how fictional portrayals become so pervasive they become the location where readers derive most of their information about law and justice—out of sync with actual legal systems and processes. Boundaries of fiction and “reality” become indistinguishable and interdependent (Newman, 1990; Sherwin, 2000). Fictive images can become more important than facts and, thus, should not be dismissed as “mere entertainment” (Chase, 1986).

Popular culture offers consumers an easy way to understand crime-and-justice institutions, especially inaccessible ones (Friedman, 1989). When the public lacks direct

experience with these realities (i.e., they often involve secretive or protected subcultures), U.S. popular culture frames debates, offers moral judgments, suggests policies, and even frames legal and military agents' actions to help fill the void (Altheide, 2002). The average person perceives they know a lot about law and justice, not realizing the knowledge comes from a constant array of sensationalized and misleading popular media forms (Freidman & Rozen-Zvi, 2001).

The public has constant exposure to concepts of law and such exposure interacts with the public fascination with, and entertainment value of, legal and justice stories (Asimov & Mader, 2004; Friedman & Rozen-Zvi, 2001). This intensely personal interaction can produce an experiential reality. Readers become surrogates through exciting characters, such as cops and lawyers, and locations, such as stately courtrooms and “mean” city streets. This symbolic process involves textual *subject positioning*, wherein the reader imagines themselves in the justice situations and submits to the powerful meaning conveyed in those scenarios—ruling in certain realities and ruling out alternatives (Hall, 1997).

Subject positioning— as a substitute for experiential knowledge— likely occurs when readers consume the texts examined in this study, such as experiencing terrorism through the point of view of a fantastical FASC superhero. This study focuses on mass-produced texts claiming to be about U.S. justice, law, and security, which are part of a popular discourse expected to serve the dominant ideology described by the media and culture researchers referenced herein. Discussed next is how popular media texts garner this authority.

## **2. Popular Culture Logic, Myth, and Intertextuality in Media Framing**

Popular culture consumers will often submit to images depicting mythological struggles between characters in symbolic locations, such as the courtroom becoming the stage for a battle between good and evil (Asimov & Mader, 2004) or struggles between lawyer characters

becoming complex explorations of legal ethics (Menkel-Meadow, 2001). Mythical knowledge is often out of sync with how actual justice actors actually perceive the way justice works (Asimov & Mader, 2004). The balance within the legal system, involving disparate forms of knowledge, discourses, and power previously separated from popular culture, can break down when popular culture is a constant source of knowledge (Sherwin, 2000).

When popular culture's "passive, self-gratification-enhancing, and image-based logic" (Sherwin, 2000, p. 5), or mass media logic, overruns active, lived legal meaning-making practices and experiences, the capacity for critical judgment by justice actors is undercut and there is an erosion of law's legitimacy. Lawyers, in an effort to sway jurors, embody the mythical characters of court television programs during jury trials (Friedman, 1989; Silbey, 2002). When legal meanings yield to the compelling mass media logic of fictional texts and the market forces driving their production, entertaining logic oversimplifies and condenses "reality" (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). Sherwin (2000) ultimately warns that as mass-marketed media images overpower realities, there may be an increase in the acceptance of dangerous activities like vigilantism and use of excessive force that legal actors act-out based on popular narratives.

Popular fiction media texts do not function in a vacuum. *Intertextuality* helps explain how the passing of knowledge is accomplished through a range of texts. An audience will experience a variety of texts as interrelated, allowing their knowledge of one or more to influence their understanding of another (Asimov & Mader, 2004; Berger, 1998). That popular texts interact and constitute a collection of textual knowledge used by consumers in thinking about an issue is unavoidable (Fiske, 1987). Popular texts have impact not just at the point of reading, but when they become a pervasive cultural product and their discourses and frames are replicated at various levels. For example, courtroom television dramas reference other television

shows, or other cultural icons or products, which act to enhance the show's "understanding" and believability (Asimov & Mader, 2004). News reporters, editors, or others with power in news media will also insert popular fictive references in their discourses (Martin & Petro, 2006).

Research into journalist and political commentator discourses about *24* in major print news and political websites is a relevant example of intertextuality (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2009). This researcher revealed how *24*'s messages were embedded into the U.S. political culture and dialogue; how those references were found in multiple media venues; and the way agents, such as bloggers and politicians, acted as a sublevel of audience to replicate the messages in that media environment, which are available and accepted as a viable reference for justice debates. This pervasiveness enhances the potency of entertainment discourse and their corresponding justice frames, promoting certain identities and ideologies. Because of the power of intertextuality in this context, the public does not even need to watch *24* to be impacted by its discourses. A similar phenomenon was observed in post-9/11 popular news and fiction media operating together— that is, frames and references become so embedded "they seem obvious, ubiquitous, and invisible— like popular culture itself" (Martin & Petro, 2006, p. 6).

If influential enough, media culture narratives about justice can become an audience's knowledge base. Beckett and Sasson's (2004) research into the impacts and interplay of news and entertainment media on audience perceptions of crime concluded crime narratives encourage ideologically-loaded notions that "offenders are professional criminals— clever, clear-headed, and motivated by unadulterated greed [and] the interests of public safety and justice are ill served by liberal judges and lawyers preoccupied with the rights of defendants" (p. 100). These notions are contrasted to the image of dedicated cops working hard each day to confront these challenges.

Initial research indicates this conservative crime discourse– or framework– influenced viewers, such as finding an increased acceptance of punitive police actions (Beckett & Sasson, 2004).

Popular media culture plays a role in shaping and reflecting justice issues and studying it allows researchers to analyze how political events and justice debates are framed. To arrive at this macro-level understanding, the researcher in this area must first concentrate on the textual level (Gitlin, 2000). The focus here is on the shared message about the sociocultural enterprise of counterterrorism. That is, the *interpretive framework* (Kuypers, 2006) constructed in one particular category of contemporary texts– the counterterrorism thriller.

### **3. Emergence and Characteristics of Counterterrorism Entertainment Genre**

Researchers have been building on the foundations of critical media studies over the last decade, theorizing and offering evidence these framing processes are occurring in post-9/11 media texts in the construction of terrorism, counterterrorism, and corresponding justice frames. Rapping (2003) concluded the GWOT was overtly framed and executed in television fiction in a “juridical context of criminal justice and practice” that made arguments for “the extension of law enforcement powers in the interest of national security” (p. 263). Policy debates and political rhetoric, promulgated through news media, were constructed to make the GWOT seem reasonable and justified while silencing or ridiculing any challenges to those messages (Altheide, 2005; Jackson, 2011). Studies about *24* (e.g., Clucas, 2009; Sears, 2009; Semel, 2008) demonstrated how the series offers a dialogue about torture scenarios and solutions by a U.S. law enforcement agency, which some reader-practitioners viewed as viable plots and outcomes. These processes resulted in *fictionalized facts* and *fact-based fictions* embedded into post-9/11 justice debates (Martin & Petro, 2006).



A compelling body of research into news media framing (e.g., Entman, 2003; Loseke, 2009; Reynolds & Barnett, 2003; Steuter & Wills, 2010) demonstrates how the press— especially the major newspapers and networks immediately after 9/11— acted as a mouthpiece for the Bush administration to uncritically replicate the GWOT. These works are limited to covering the justice frames put forth by the administration, current events, and related facts. While these media texts engage in some fictional embellishment (Martin & Petro, 2006), they are generally restricted to covering the news of the day and following journalistic rules. Also, the post-9/11 news media during this study’s episodic focus did not always offer the immediate closure, such as witnessing the killing of archenemies like Osama Bin Laden, or the access to its subculture sought by the public, like viewing classified materials (Altheide, 2005; Jenkins, 2003).

Compared to news formats, post-9/11 counterterrorism *entertainment* texts operate in more implicit and subtle ways, and seem to offer the desired access and closure. They can claim to be merely entertainment, yet employ actual settings, facts, and believable plots (Boggs & Pollard, 2006; Davis, 2006). They also operate largely in the fantasy realms, such as creating imaginative terror threats or having FASC engage in incredible heroic acts. Post-9/11 counterterrorism entertainment texts are positioned to *factualize* fiction stories (Martin & Petro, 2006), which were shown to be occurring in post-9/11 fiction spy narratives (Priestman, 2003). Overall, the post-9/11 “spy decade” is more about depicting factual events and political arguments than the fiction it purports to be (Britton, 2005).

Some popular texts do not make these types of factual representations, offer resolution, or provide symbolic access to U.S. counterterrorism within the realm of post-9/11 entertainment. These include popular fictions with irrelevant plots and those based on unambiguously fantastical settings and situations, such as the reemergence of superhero comic books (Lovell,

2003), *24* competitor *Alias* (Britton, 2005), and television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the slew of vampire fictions that followed (Martin, 2006). There are also a myriad of popular fictions critical of hegemonic and mainstream messages (Jackson, 2011), including songs by artists like Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen that offer emotional reflection (Hamm, 2003), and blockbuster movies offering alternative GWOT discourses, like *Dark Knight* (Ip, 2011). While these are important media locations that inform a fuller understanding of terrorism and global security, this study examines fictions that immediately, directly, and repeatedly address those issues while construed as occurring in a convincing post-9/11 milieu. Put another way: The concern is with a subgenre dropping the pretense of “this is just pretend.”

This brand of fact-based fiction enjoys a compelling level of post-9/11 mass-consumption. The tremendous popularity of *24* is documented: For instance, it had 15 million regular viewers during its 8-year initial run and reruns, online streaming, and video sales remained high into the late 2000s (Mayer, 2007). The show’s mass consumption led researchers to conclude Bauer is a contemporary icon in need of scholarly attention (Poniewozik, 2007; Semel, 2008). Counterterrorism thriller popularity is more difficult to observe due to a lack of academic attention, the allusiveness of book sales data, and being in a less visually-spectacular format. Writers who identified and isolated these thrillers as part of a new spy decade argue it is a “craze” within the broader thriller genre, yet fail to offer sales data (Britton, 2005; Lynds, 2006). Nance (2012), a journalist writing about the thriller industry, concluded thriller genre sales dramatically increased after 9/11. Thrillers took two routes: One, counterterrorism thrillers, by authors like Thor and Flynn, geared towards conservative ideologies; and another of legal thrillers, such as those by John Grisham, geared toward liberal ideologies. Both types became post-9/11 mainstays and seem to replicate the political polarization of the U.S. (Nance, 2012).

#### **4. Pillars of Bush Administration Counterterrorism and Global War on Terror**

Ideas about terrorism reinvent themselves within moments of national upheaval (White, 2002) and are perceived as a phenomenon without precedent each time a nation is compelled to (re) confront it in the face of conflict (Lacquer, 2007). This occurred right after 9/11 when terrorism and the U.S. response went from a primarily isolated law-and-order concern receiving some attention, to one involving all facets of the U.S. executive. The Bush administration's primary mission became the aggressive and offensive use of executive branch authorities, which transformed state ideology and led to drastic changes to executive missions and organizations, such as within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and FBI, and a dramatic increase of officers working counterterrorism. Approximately 1,271 governmental entities and 1,931 private companies employing approximately 1 million people were assigned to such missions by the end of Bush's presidency, versus employees on this mission in the thousands pre-9/11 (Priest & Arkin, 2010). In this period, the U.S. went from "a global economy to a military economy, from internationalism to nationalism, and from peace to war" (Mellencamp, 2006, p. 117).

While much of the related literature is critical of the extreme U.S. terrorism response, it agrees there is a legitimate security threat to which the U.S. must respond. The new global terrorism is rooted in a tradition of extreme intolerance in a minority strain of Islam pursuing a holy war targeting Western nations in the last few decades (Clarke, 2004; U.S. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004). A paradigm shift is needed— and arguably underway— revising the response to this legitimate threat. Such an approach should: Have clearer definitions and accountability (White, 2014); be conceived as a public and social issue with many voices (Gunaratna, 2004); be as much defensive as offensive (Ervin, 2006); that is multilateral instead of unilateral (Lippman, 2003); not be conceived solely as war (Howard, 2001); balance

transparency with operational secrecy (De Lint, 2004); include a community-based orientation (Brown, 2007); and adhere to democratic legal foundations and human rights (Anderson, 2003).

The Bush Doctrine was guided by a specific set of interrelated actors, characteristics, and ideas during the war on terror's formative years different from the revisions recommended above. For this study, they will be called the *five primary pillars* and they summarize the core elements of the Bush Doctrine in place between 2001 and 2009 (i.e., this work's historical focus). These elements act as valuable points of comparison to the thriller messaging, and also represent exemplars of the ideological paradigm shift in the U.S. during this period.

The first pillar is the *war paradigm*, which involved framing the response to terrorism as war and coalescing the missions of both main branches of the military (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008) and law enforcement (U.S. Department of Justice, 2006). This war frame was codified into law (e.g., with the USA Patriot Act) and the official language used by the Bush administration was warlike (Crenshaw et al., 2008). President Bush released the new *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (The White House, 2003), stating "America" was at war with,

[A] transnational terrorist movement fueled by a radical ideology of hatred, oppression, and murder [...] Our strategy recognizes that we are at war and that protecting and defending the Homeland, the American people, and their livelihoods remains our first and most solemn obligation. [The GWOT...] is a different kind of war [...] a battle of arms and of ideas. The paradigm for combating terrorism now involves the application of all elements of our national power and influence. Not only do we employ military power, we use diplomatic, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement activities to protect the Homeland and extend our defenses [...] We have broken old orthodoxies that once confined our counterterrorism efforts primarily to the criminal justice domain. (pp. 2-3)

As part of this paradigm shift, within a couple years after 9/11 the U.S. initiated wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and executed unconventional global military actions, such as detaining, removing, and interrogating "foreign enemy combatants" (Cole, 2008, p. 59).

The second pillar is *neo-conservative* ideology. Most of the key administration counterterrorism actors were neoconservatives during the GWOT's formative years, providing the "blueprint" for the response to 9/11 (Halper & Clarke, 2004). Clarke (2004) argues the following were the primary neoconservative ideologies driving U.S. counterterrorism: A propensity to see the world in binary evil versus good terms, low tolerance for diplomacy, willingness to use military force, emphasis on U.S. unilateral action, dislike of multilateral organizations, and a Middle Eastern focus. These ideologies moved to the forefront after 9/11 (Berry, 2004; Cole, 2008; De Lint, 2004; Kellner, 2003). The conservative movement does not appear to disagree: For example, a publication by *The Project for a New American Century*— a U.S.-based, non-profit, educational organization with members in the Bush administration and a well-known backer of post-9/11 GWOT policies— justifying the War in Iraq confirms these key ideological characteristics (Halper & Clarke, 2004; Kagan & Kristol, 2004). In addressing their post-9/11 role, the organization listed their mission is dedicated to these fundamentals:

American leadership is good both for America and for the world; such leadership requires military strength, diplomatic energy and commitment to moral principle; and [the U.S....] should capitalize on its military and economic superiority to gain unchallengeable superiority by all means necessary. (Project for a New American Century, n.d., n.p.)

The third pillar is the application of the *preemptive model*, established under the Bush Doctrine and based on the idea that "different rules" had to apply because these were terrorists, not common criminals or conventional war combatants (U.S. National Security Council, 2002). Under these new rules, exceptional policies were employed to prevent another terror attack. The model had two prongs: Preventative law enforcement, such as attempting to identify and detaining individuals with certain (i.e., mainly Islamic) immigration visas, and military action not in self-defense of the country, such as the preemptive war in Iraq (Cole, 2008).

The fourth pillar is *enhanced executive power*, which was founded on notions that executive powers need to be emboldened to take action and resulting restricted liberties are a cost of war (Yoo & Posner, 2003). This power must be unilateral and not limited by the Constitution, international law, or other government branches; leading to unprecedented discretionary powers given to executive institutions and their agents, and blurring police, military, and intelligence roles and authorities (Andreas & Price, 2003; Deflem, 2004). A legal basis for this power was the “Authorization to use Military Force,” sanctioning the president,

[To] use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons in order to prevent any future act of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations, or persons. (U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001, n.p.)

This expansive authority was institutionalized under various federal agencies (Jackson, 2011). According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2006), the “highest priority” for the largest U.S. law enforcement branch (i.e., the FBI) became “preventing acts of terrorism (n.p.).” The FBI assigned 4,000 of its 11,500 agents to such missions, despite its many existing law enforcement responsibilities (Deflem, 2004). Likewise, the new U.S. Department of Homeland Security, with its wide range of sub-agencies, has a primary mission of stopping terrorist attacks (White, 2014).

The last pillar is a mandate for *secrecy*. There is agreement the GWOT (i.e., the first five or so years after 9/11) was blanketed in it (e.g., Deflem, 2004; Mayer, 2007). This secrecy was an all-encompassing counterterrorism policy and practice. It included practical operational secrecy, but also routine reports, private U.S. business records, legal interpretations, court rulings, and inmate information (De Lint, 2004). Cole and Lobel (2007) considered this *preventative secrecy* that became an operative assumption. This broad secrecy was justified as a national security requirement under the executive “state secrets” privilege (Cole, 2008, p. 38).

A significant body of critical literature (e.g., Burnett & Whyte, 2005; Ricigliano & Allen, 2006) demonstrates how the GWOT amounted to the construction of dominant ideological meanings that benefited the body of elite institutions promoting those meanings. The situation can be viewed as a cultural ordering by a group with authority to offer *preferred solutions* (Altheide, 2005) that convinced the U.S. public to view the approach as common sense. As a social construction project, contradictory, complex, and inaccessible terrorism issues were omitted (Jenkins, 2003). As a result of this construction, the Bush Doctrine was institutionalized and specific ideological messages on terrorism were supplied to the public and practitioners through popular media during this historic episode (Jackson, 2011).

### **C. Statement and Significance of the Research Problem**

The narrow Bush GWOT frames resulted in negative consequences, such as the excessive use of power and revised security frames contrary to basic tenets of U.S. democracy and justice (Cole, 2008; Danner, 2009). These implications— compared to the ideological framework in the thrillers throughout the analysis below— amounted to an enhancement of U.S. executive power and a reassertion of ideology founded in existing forms of masculinities and patriarchy (Powell, 2011). Security studies and terrorism-related “expertise literature” (Jenkins, 2003, p. 4) emphasizes practical aspects of the topic, such as those examining radical groups and the effectiveness of relevant technologies and tactics (Hoffman, 2006; White, 2014). While substantial literature addressed the news media’s role in influencing ideology (e.g., Entman, 2003; Reese & Lewis, 2009), less scholarly attention has been paid to popular fiction’s influence on ideology as a way to better understand aspects of U.S. cultural identity during this period (Jackson, 2011). This study addresses this gap.

The limited research into post-9/11 thriller fictions (e.g., Holloway, 2009; Van Veeren, 2009) indicate such narratives do reflect and embolden highly masculinized, illegal, irregular, violent, and extreme counterterrorism and help to transfer and consolidate power in those U.S. security entities embodying and applying national power. The thrillers examined in this study represent a set of regularized images that frame terrorism and counterterrorism issues and are expected to be similar to the GWOT ideological national narrative. The texts appear to be offering expertise, resolution (e.g., terminating terrorists) and access (e.g., experiencing what it is like to be a FASC) unavailable to most. A perceived reality is produced through the conflation of fact and fiction, limiting the public discourse about critical justice issues. These claims to truth need to be further interrogated to broaden that discourse.

The significance of genre forms is established in the analysis of comparable Cold War texts where dominant ideologies empowered certain groups at the expense of others. During major cultural shifts, it is in the “lower, less established genres that cultural innovations and shifts tend to emerge” (Rapping, 2003, p. 50) versus more sophisticated stories that develop as cultural complexities are recognized, such as how the U.S. public’s view on torture transformed after visually witnessing the realities of Abu Ghraib (Gibney, 2008; Kirk, 2006; Morris, 2008). The emerging revitalization of a popular genre form has been overlooked. And, like Cold War spies (Gallagher, 2000) and popular television’s prosecutor heroes (Rapping, 2003), these thrillers deploy heroes embodying dominant ideology. Understanding these heroes as emblems of U.S. identity and ideal types to which readers likely submit represents an underexplored and powerful cultural perspective. Formal agents of social control have become cultural mainstays—a lens through which counterterrorism is known (Jenkins, 2003), much like how popular



entertainment portrayals of police are one of the main lenses through which crime and justice is comprehended (Surrette, 1998). One writer (Danner, 2009) observed that U.S. politicians,

[Remain] convinced that still fearful Americans— given the choice between the image of 24 's Jack Bauer, a latter-day Dirty Harry, fantasy symbol of untrammelled power doing 'everything it takes' to protect them from that ticking bomb, and the image of weak liberals 'reading Miranda rights to terrorists'— will choose Bauer every time. (n.p.)

#### **D. Significance of Study**

As Danner (2009) suggests, 9/11 was so terrifying and produced such anxiety and uncertainty that a major response has been to turn to fiction to comprehend it (Houen, 2004). In what has been considered a “bleak landscape of personal loss, paranoia, and political cynicism” (Dixon, 2004, p. 3), U.S. culture became intensely symbolic. Within this mostly metaphorical realm— initially dominated by the Bush Doctrine— post-9/11 thrillers are especially relevant because they have high rates of consumption, are less visible but full of spectacle, enjoy the free expression of fiction yet deal in “realistic” and “factual” justice, and propel this messaging through a hero embodying an explicit solution. When combined with public demand for more access, information, and closure during an episode veiled in secrecy (Altheide, 2005), the texts are situated to help construct ideological formations at the core of U.S. democracy and the application of a super-empowered U.S. security apparatus.

This research not only illuminates an empowered genre text, it expands theories and methodologies, such as applying frame analysis techniques typically used for news media analysis to fiction media and demonstrating the appropriation and re-inscribing of myth in thriller messaging. This study identifies, combines, and engages a broad range of academic concepts, disciplines, and techniques and focuses them on a concise underexplored research problem within a defining period of U.S. history.

A better comprehension of a cultural moment in the recent past is significant, yet topical debates and issues of this ideological struggle persist: Consider ongoing disputes over “enhanced” interrogation methods, the worldwide proliferation of U.S. drone strikes resulting in civilian casualties, the issues surrounding the closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, Muslim Americans being targeted for hate crimes, and revelations about NSA monitoring. Some conclude elements of the Bush GWOT have tacitly persisted under the Obama administration (e.g., Jackson, 2011). Also, thrillers by the authors selected for this study continue to be best sellers (USAToday.com, n.d.), *24* was re-released in 2014, and Hollywood is producing a movie based on a post-9/11 counterterrorism thriller written by author Brad Thor (McNary, 2014).

Deconstructing ongoing popular messaging increases an understanding of key factors of cultural identity in order to effectively conceptualize the ideological dimensions of dominant texts and assess a broader scope of their effects (Kellner, 1995). Revealing such effects here will help expose and illuminate a symbolically empowered narrative positioned to have significant sociopolitical implications during a meaningful moment in U.S. history. The next step required to reach this goal is an examination of related and established theories informing such an investigation.

## II: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The goal of this chapter is to expound on theoretical conceptions of ideology to offer a broad, active, interpretive, and discursive approach geared towards popular media. Two primary sets of theories (i.e., Hall, 1997; Mumby, 1989) are supported by related sources (e.g., Fiske, 1991; Kellner, 1995) to help explain how media independently channels ideological power—often during moments of uncertainty like this study’s episodic location— in support of state institutions and how such transference can seem normal. These theories also clarify how popular media helps create conditions where genre readers are expected to consent to such messaging.

Ideas related to framing and frame analyses comprise the second part of the theory section and are based largely on Oliver and Johnston’s (2005) view that ideology and framing inextricably interrelate. Ideology is the *content* and framing is the *process*. Together, they explain how ideas are formulated and managed. These concepts are applied to analyze how ideological frames are constructed, organized, understood, and justified in popular media.

In the framing subsection, works focused on news media framing demonstrate why related theories can and should be applied to entertainment media. Theoretical conceptions focused on how texts distort meanings about sociocultural enterprises are engaged (Altheide, 2005; Entman, 2003). More direct framing types are also considered, such as *problem* and *issue-oriented* frames (e.g., Gamson, 2001), which oversimplify and offer moral evaluation. Devices used to package ideology and analytical tools used to deconstruct those claims provide groundwork for this dissertation’s methods. Theory related to the *framing agents* (e.g., Oliver & Johnston, 2005) as *informed sources* that control messaging is also discussed.

Framing agents rely on supportive cultural elements as framing devices because frames have to be convincing to connect with the audience (Reese, 2009). It seems the primary way the

subject texts convince is by summoning myth and using mythic speech. Framing processes invigorate ideology through “the promotion of mythology, a set of ideas or ‘stories’ that explain things, organize our view of the world, and puts people, places and events into convenient categories” (Altheide, 2005, p. 20). Popular texts access and (re) inscribe prevalent U.S. myths and mythical language to bolster emotional and symbolic narratives. A range of related theories are examined in this subsection (e.g., Barthes, 1964/1968; Campbell, 1988; Wright, 1977).

The final subsection of the theory section focuses on gender ordering and masculinities, crucial because the thrillers appear to be about U.S. imperialism, patriarchy, and masculinized war. The apparent textual centerpiece— a male hero— represents a personification of masculine ideology (Connell, 1987). Theories of masculinities and gender are infused into the other theoretical components because they are unavoidable when discussing dominant forms of ideology, framing mechanisms, and myth prevalent in U.S. culture. Since Western gender ordering represents an existing system of domination that forms, reflects, and promotes its own ideological positions and mythmaking (Kellner, 1995), it is differentiated from the other theoretical elements. It is important to understand related theories because it is a parallel formation the subject thrillers can access and activate as an underlying cultural phenomenon.

#### **A. Foundations to a Model of Ideology in Contemporary Popular Media**

The concept of ideology, as it pertains to the literary, sociological, and cultural studies, is rooted in the philosophies of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Berger, 1998; Brooker, 2002; Hall, 1997). To these founders, ideology is created by the ruling class who control modes of material production and, by extension, the means of “mental production.” Those owning the means of production protect and maintain power by producing and circulating a dominant ideology, such as through religious, legal, and political systems. To Marx and Engels, while

ideology is a distortion of cultural realities, subordinate classes are led to believe it is natural. This *false consciousness* leads to an acceptance of the ruling class's power and ideology– the public remains mostly unaware of their true condition. These foundational features of ideology rely on stratified classes and coercion to protect it (Hall, 1997).

Gramsci (1971) built on the ideas of Marx and Engels, but rejected the reliance on class conflict, coercion, and economic determinism because he considered them reductionist. Gramsci argued there was a shift from industrial economies to service economies in Western capitalistic democracies. With this shift, ideology became a struggle between social groups for knowledge to gain control of the ascendancy of thought and practice. This power was a form of moral and intellectual leadership– a veiled form of control called *spontaneous consent* whereby the state and its subalterns apply socio-political power instead of armed force (Gramsci, 1971).

The idea of *hegemony* is found throughout the literature used in this study and inextricably relates to foundational ideas of ideology. The bases of this research are clarified by drawing distinctions between the two concepts. Hegemony is authority resulting from the constant negotiation of social groups within a culture or regarding some sociocultural enterprise (Hall, 1997). It is “a form of power based on leadership by a group in many fields of activity at once, so that its ascendancy commands widespread consent and appears natural and inevitable” (Hall, 1997, p. 259). This leadership involves one group dominating through persuasion (i.e., versus outright coercion) within competing cultural, social, political forces where power is negotiated– a consequence of hegemonic control is some groups consent to a dominant ideology. Hegemony is exercised *throughout* a society/culture to become an existing structure (Gramsci, 1971). “Knowledge” is a social construct that legitimates these structures, which typically equate to control by the state.

In the modern era, the struggle for hegemonic control has played out in popular media as the primary place to gain domination and control over knowledge (i.e., ideas, conceptions, practices, and policies) (Gramsci, 1971). This mainly involves struggle over political positions—the ability to dictate conservative versus liberal ideologies (e.g., played out in what has been called the *culture wars*) (Kellner, 2003). For example, post-9/11 terrorism framing involved hegemonic messaging. This was found in the Bush Doctrine, which included a march to war and the increased surveillance of citizens, and was directed by ideologues like Vice President Cheney, but was proliferated through the media and other empowered actors (Glassner, 2004; Jackson, 2011). The hegemony created a new reality through political messaging, which had an interest in reestablishing imperialism and neoconservative ideologies (Rothe & Muzzatti, 2004).

Hegemony explains how and when certain actors, like journalists and terrorism “experts” (Jenkins, 2003), help a populace consent to an authority represented as a natural part of popular consciousness. However, *ideology* is more useful for approaching the kind of amorphous power and ideas in which popular texts deal. Ideology is a broader system of fundamental, transcendent, and abstract dominant positions. While hegemony involves the actors empowered with and maintaining its dominance through the ability to control ideology (Kellner, 2003); ideology represents the cultural, social, and political forces being controlled.

Foucault (1982; 1995/1975) offers another set of foundational theories that clarify this type of power. While this theorist did not directly support a strict Marxian version of “ideology,” he is often attributed as pioneering the importance of discourse in understanding how knowledge is constructed in industrial, Western, and modern societies. Foucault’s *discursive approach* is a way of conceptualizing knowledge about an enterprise, in a specified culture, and in a particular historic moment, as well as how the enterprise exists as a social “reality” in that

location. This theorist's approach is crucial because it helps explain how discourses act to organize the world through ordered systems of knowledge that create those realities. This process is political in nature: Certain cultural groups are afforded authority to make claims to truth. These groups distribute and circulate *regimes of truth*, which are sets of knowledge entangled with social, economic, and political practices. These regimes can become institutionalized and then reflected in specific discursive formations, and vice versa. Foucault's (1982; 1995/1975) theories help explain how knowledge becomes entangled with political power, how knowledge is obtained through systematized discourse, and how deconstructing such processes should be accomplished within the existing socio-historic context.

Foucault's (1982; 1995/1975) theories are also valuable because they emphasize the function of culture in producing legal meanings and the resulting social control by the institutions and state authorities that benefit from them. These consequences of discourse— or the “goals” of a regime of truth— are key because power only exists when it is put into action (Foucault, 1982). For example, Foucault's (1995/1975) analysis of Western “correctional” systems demonstrated how punishment shifted from the overt enactment of responsibility and explicit barbarism (e.g., public hangings and mutilation), to acts masking the true nature and barbarism of modern penal systems (e.g., prisons). Through discourse, the power to punish the body and soul of those subject to imprisonment is given to an institution. As this social control— developed from the perceived knowledge and truth about punishment— pervades sociocultural locations, the boundaries of private/public, formal/informal, official/unofficial, and fact/fiction fade away. How legal meanings are made— and the cultural groups creating and benefiting from those goals— requires deconstructing the various discursive formations supporting the practices.

These foundational concepts are useful and are referenced in various ways and at key points throughout this dissertation. This study purposefully does not adhere to one approach, or attempt to delineate and debate theoretical terminology. Instead it seeks to progress a useful model to focus on a post-9/11 counterterrorism text and is critical of popular media's role in supporting and constructing potentially harmful ideologies– those channeled independently in support of Western state-run institutions at dynamic cultural moments. Hall (1997) and Mumby (1989)– who also build upon different aspects of these foundational theorists and others– are well suited to explain this more specified form of dominant ideology.

### **1. The Power of Media Discourse**

Hall (1997) built on the founding theories above to focus on ideology as a struggle for power within constantly shifting media discourses. When a perceived authority claims to own the knowledge over something and the audience– the public– is in a position to believe it, that authority obtains power (Hall, 1997). This approach is about exploring how meaning becomes truth without actually having been proven (Hall, 1997). It is about struggling against the privileges of knowledge– in the current study, knowledge circulated by popular media about U.S. justice, law, and national security– where claims to truth are made. Focusing on discourse helps identify and critique institutions, texts, and practices that enhance or maintain forms of domination and oppression. Hall (1997), like Foucault, is concerned with how a perceived truth– or, a given ideology– has an actual consequence to the “social body” through domination.

When a grouping of popular media discourses refers to the same objects, share the same style, and support a particular strategy or political pattern, they are a *discursive formation* (Hall, 1997). These formations need not be a part of some social or cultural institution to function. The ideology of law is a telling example. Law maintains order not through coercion, but through



constructing cultural consent in a value system— power is developed through the exercise of law. Legal systems and exercises act to construct subject positions, wherein the public gives themselves over to the power in order to build meaning. Because experiencing police action and prison are rare for most people— as a “tool of last resort”— the primary way the subjugation occurs is not through meaning disseminated from the state, but via media culture through the reproduction of images and meanings portrayed as “true” or “realistic” legal events (Hall, 1997).

Popular media texts are increasingly prevalent vehicles for spreading ideologies through a discourse of images (Hall, 1997). Popular media also plays a central role in the construction of ideology in contemporary culture (Altheide, 2002; Berger, 1998). To Thompson (1984), the key,

Feature of the modern world is not as Marx argued, the rationalization, bureaucratization, or desacralization of the world, but the ‘mediation’ of the world, the penetration of the world (through newspapers, television, and other communicative means) by language, symbols, and concepts which secure and enhance relations of domination. (p. 11)

“Ruling elites” have gained control over language, symbols, and concepts in the media, allowing them to manipulate the media for ideological purposes. Elites keep the public entertained in an all-encompassing media environment, while materialism and commercialism give the public an illusion of control, such as having the power to buy an endless array of products (Hall, 1997).

The *mediation* of ideology is also a double-edged sword. Ruling elites have more efficient ways to mobilize their messages and perspectives— or bigger “mouthpieces”— while the populace is distracted (Berger, 1998). But the populace has more access to alternate positions and exposure to these manipulations— much more than the ruling classes prefers (Thompson, 1984). Through mediation there are more cultural sites for readers to access counter-ideologies that influences different interpretations of texts as readers negotiate meanings (Hall, 1997). This appears especially pervasive in the Information Age. Some researchers (e.g., Hamm, 2003; Ip, 2011) have also identified media texts directly challenging dominant post-9/11

ideology, demonstrating how media ideologies are constantly contested (Scott, 1998). An awareness of differing positions is valuable because they highlight important contrasts to dominant ones, but this study's purpose is to focus on a popular text that seems to support dominant discursive formations and how empowered actors "win" through shared messaging.

A frequently referenced example of "winning" an ideological contest comes from Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (1978), who analyzed a spike in muggings in 1970s England. The researchers identified a communal *moral panic*, based on Cohen's (1980) theory<sup>i</sup>, over muggings that justified a harsh crackdown on muggers through a cooperative social control project by state actors, namely the police and judges, and the news media. State actors inflated crime statistics to enhance fears and the local news cooperated by covering those statistics and creating a demonic image of the "muggers" (i.e., young minorities). These researchers conclude the media was an ideological apparatus intent on reproducing dominant ideologies, yet the status of the hegemony led up to the moral panic. Just prior to the panic, there was a hegemonic crisis, or a loss of control by those in power. This moral panic acted to reunify power and re-manufacture consent to ultimately re-secure ideological domination. This example also helps distinguish ideology and hegemony because the crisis was hegemonic, yet it took ideological media claims to restore the weakening state power (Hall et al., 1978).

According to *genre theory*<sup>ii</sup>, genre products are one specific media site where constructors of ideology struggle for power (Hall, 1997). Genre products have proliferated in Western cultures increasingly focused on rapid entertainment media. These texts use repeat characters, mass-produced fiction, and recognizable storylines to promote what readers come to view as credible through the process of *cultural verisimilitude*, which is a reflection of what the dominant culture constructs as true. Hall (1997) emphasizes the difference between *generic* and

*cultural* verisimilitude found in genre texts. Fiction genres draw on what the dominant culture believes to be true to manufacture “reality” and “truth.” While generic verisimilitude includes the broad ideas accepted *within* the texts; cultural verisimilitude are the mores, norms, and common sense the text draws on from the outside milieu the text exists within. This process is what readers expect and it enhances practices and ideas that become normative perceptions of reality. These types of repetitive media texts constitute symbolic forms that carry ideological meanings at specific cultural locations (Thompson, 1984).

Believability works regardless of whether the narrative is fiction or nonfiction and relies on the reader’s willing suspension of disbelief. Hall (1997) details the proliferation of genre products, which are easily recognizable and operate on a massive, yet simplified, scale. They include television sitcoms, soap operas, westerns, and mystery thrillers and draw on the cultural moment— both as source material and a way to demand audience reception to messaging by conforming to contemporary versions of cultural verisimilitude (Hall, 1997).

Genre products and the cultural verisimilitude they rely upon are particularly potent during times of historic change— that is, when ideologies are up for contestation (Hall, 1997). Television police drama *Cagney and Lacey* responded to the Woman’s Movement at the time and became a site for the negotiation of gender roles and sexuality, as well as changing approaches to law and policing. In law and justice genres, the dramatic success of an emerging genre is a sign of a significant sociocultural change (Rapping, 2003). Regardless of format, genre products almost always protect ideological dominance and patriarchal privilege. Genre theory draws attention to the underlying rules and codes of genre products— founded primarily on repetition and difference— to reveal the ideological meaning behind them. Changing historic circumstances retain some threads of a genre, but adapt within cultural episodes (Hall, 1997).

## 2. Channeling Ideology and Sense-Making

Dominant ideology needs to be understood through a discursive approach (Mumby, 1989). Media can employ certain discourses at contested sites helping readers subject or link themselves to dominant meanings, which are most influential during times of uncertainty. Mumby (1989) offers additional theoretical backing about how those without power participate in their own subjugation through ideological *interpellation*, a process first described by Althusser (1971/2014) and one similar to Hall's (1997) subject positioning wherein those who do not have the power to create meanings— the vast majority of the populace— become willing participants in ideology by identifying themselves within it.

Mumby (1989), building on Althusser's core ideas, explains media ideology in terms suitable for this study. To the researcher, ideas are not derived from what humans inherently know, but are the resulting material, or products of social practices. Ideology represents the imagined relationship of individuals to their actual conditions of existence or, inversely: Individuals, in imaginary form, represent their real conditions of existence (Mumby, 1989). Ideology is not based on the real, but the symbolic. For example, powerful priests in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe provided a set of ideological myths, such as Christian fables or Bible interpretations, people consumed and believed (Mumby, 1989). This ideological formation allowed corrupt and powerful priests to dictate the populace's worldview through religious dogma and imagery. This process is found as far back as Greek civilization, where Plato realized the police of the day— called the “guardians”— could not monitor each citizen so they told “beautiful lies” (e.g., myths) about how to act and what to believe in order to police themselves (Althusser, 1971/2014).

These lies are fueled by myth and the heroes of the subject thrillers likely embody ideology. Yet, ideology cannot exist without the media audience in subject form (Mumby,

1989). This “ideology effect” provokes individuals who are always and already subjects (Althusser, 1971/2014 in Mumby, 1989). Ideology functions as a mediator between systems of power and individuals, allowing hegemonic power to reproduce by incorporating individuals who take part in institutional activities, rituals, and other discourses to produce ideological belief, largely without a critical examination of them. The accuracy of these ideas is disconnected. For instance, the notion “all are equal before the law”—a fundamental ideal of the U.S. justice system—is an ideological construct appearing to be true through activities, rituals, and discourses, but is not true within the actual legal system (e.g., power gets more privilege before the law). Interpellation involves imaginary and subjective recognition of themselves by individuals and groups within the ideology (Mumby, 1989).

Two core concepts helping to clarify ideological dominance are *repressive state apparatuses* and *ideological state apparatuses* (Althusser, 1971/2014 in Mumby, 1989). Repressive apparatuses are uncommon and purposefully reside within official state structures, such as the police, army, and prisons. Ideological apparatuses operate semi-independently of the state, including churches, schools, and the media, and may or may not be conscious or intended. The populace and state agents must be convinced what they are doing makes sense so ideological state apparatuses can preserve repressive ideologies. This is why ideological state apparatuses are important: They channel ideological justifications to support the repressive ones (Mumby, 1989). Ideologies are not primarily political or pushed down through a powerful hierarchy. They are spread through subtle and subversive apparatuses that cram citizens each day “with doses of morality, nationalism, chauvinism, [...]” (Althusser, 1971/2014, p. 250). The church and education systems are the most influential ideological state apparatuses, teaching morality and “meaning of life” ideologies that enhance capitalistic power (Althusser, 1971/2014).

Mumby (1989) helps clarify how ideology is formed through the social construction of meaning and why interpretation is so important to understand how such linking is accomplished. Culture is a complicated web created by humans and therefore not measurable by experimental science, but through interpretation. Culture has the function of exemplifying struggles and conflicts within that culture, or the means by which domination is produced and reproduced. Meaning is created through human interaction based on abstract sign systems that can be deconstructed (Mumby, 1989), which relates to semiotics and will be discussed below as a crucial component of this study's methodology. Ideology connects discourse with domination and power— acting as a conceptual link between communication and power. Communication is the *vehicle* through which ideology is disseminated in culture, but also constitutive— formed constantly, having the power to produce institution— of a social actor's culture and meaning is not separate from domination and power. Culture is a struggle over the dominant ideology and who has the power to interpret each situation (Mumby, 1989).

The power in the case of this study appears to reside with thriller genre authors. As such, this study seeks to explain how that particular dominant group constructs, reproduces, and maintains conditions wherein the subordinate groups— the fiction genre consumer— will theoretically consent to and support ideological knowledge that equates to state power.

Three interrelated theoretical principles help reveal the power behind dominant ideology (Mumby, 1989). First, ideology is not a product of an individual psyche or consensually produced by social groups, but allows each individual to participate in the ideology in different ways. That is, “ideology produces both subjection *to* a given social order, and subjects *of* a given social order” (p. 302). Second, ideology maintains the domination of certain groups by a) denying or manipulating contradictions within culture; b) representing ideological interests of the

dominant group as universally accepted and supported; c) constructing ideological phenomena so they seem fixed; and d) a more specific process of hegemony, wherein subordinate groups self-identify with the dominant group's goals and values. Individual and group identity is formulated through the interaction of power, culture, and ideology. Third, an analysis of ideology must include the discursive practices that constitute those meaning formations and deformations.

Ideology is amorphous, obscure, and independent of the system of interests and power structures benefitting the most from it (Mumby, 1989). Power is “a constellation of interests that constitutes a particular institutional infrastructure” (Mumby, 1989, p. 302) and is transferred into institutions, such as the U.S. counterterrorism apparatus. According to the researcher:

By viewing ideology as *both* socially located *and as* constitutive of social reality, we thus create a different context in which to treat ideology in a pejorative sense. Our focus now becomes one of examining the ways in which social reality is constituted through the ideological meaning formations, which are articulated by the various interest groups that make up a particular social structure. (Mumby, 1989, p. 295)

In this way, ideology is a shared set of ideas that order and guide group life and operates within a narrower realm to define, legitimize, and channel power versus worldviews of institutions encompassing the broader activities and beliefs of a cultural group (Barnhurst, 2005). Ideology from this view is founded on distortions and falsehoods. This approach is not merely critical of the powerful groups, but also attempts to enter into their perspective to uncover how they are able to get away with producing misleading and false information (Barnhurst, 2005).

The support of dominant media ideology is only possible when it appears to be natural, or as *common sense* (Gramsci, 1971). This power was more transcendent within culture and requires ongoing persuasion and negotiation— an idea expanding ideology from a set of formal ideas to include habitual attitudes assimilated from the dominant group's ideas that originally came into being as artificial concepts serving a specific social group's purposes (Gramsci, 1971). This normalization helps explain how media texts, like Cold War espionage fiction, create

situations where certain justice responses seem obvious, natural and, thus, hidden. Ideologies in media texts “naturalize the meanings of the social world that serve the interests of the dominant; it works to create *common* sense out of the *dominant* sense [emphasis in original]” (Fiske, 1991, p. 446). This transformation is at the crux of this study’s purpose.

### **3. Fundamental Structure of Media Ideology**

Sense making is accomplished through the structural components of ideology, which include: “Diagnosis (how things got to be how they are), prognosis (what should be done and what the consequences will be), and rationale (who should do it and why)” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 6). To these researchers, ideology must have this linear framework to provide the holistic meaning making of a sociocultural enterprise. But simpler structures are embedded in this framework.

Ideological tensions are played out in genre products through symbolic binary oppositions (Hall, 1997). Civil discourse in the U.S. is ordered around democratic and counter-democratic ideologies, such as active-passive, controlled-passionate, and realistic-unrealistic (Alexander & Smith, 1993). The post-9/11 speech acts of the Bush administration demonstrate the fundamental argument that U.S. ideological discourse is “generally structured by binary codes, whether of our two party system, adversarial legal system, or even the journalistic notion of ‘balance’ that reduces any issue to two equal sides” (Christensen & Ferree, 2008, p. 289). The news media discourse surrounding post-9/11 terrorism was organized in these oppositions: East versus West, rational versus irrational, and equal versus dominating (Alexander, 2004). These inflated oppositions, like the superhero versus the villain, are key supporting cultural elements.

Regardless of dialectic tensions, the main pillar of ideology is about the interpellation of individuals as subject– the reader or audience– into an “absolute” position:



For ideology, the “I” position from which ideology speaks, is that of (usually) white male, Western, middle-or upper-upper class subject positions, of positions that see other races, classes, groups, and gender as secondary, derivative, inferior, and subservient. Ideology thus differentiates and separates groups into dominant/subordinate and superior/inferior, producing hierarchies and rankings that serve the interest of ruling powers and elites. (Kellner, 1995, p. 61)

This viewpoint, or “absolute subject” position (Althusser, 1971/2014), occupies the unique place of the center, a mirror effect that constitutes the ideology in question and ensures its ability to function. This is how ideology is an active system of subjugation designed to legitimize forces oppressing those not represented as the “norm” (Kellner, 1995).

Dramatic devices and repetition are valuable structural components of media ideology and enhance the binary and subject positioning (Hall, 1997). The dramaturgical ideology on *Fox News* shows how media ideology plays a dual role in highlighting which issues will be dramatized and, concurrently, helping the community cohere around the alleviation of those tensions through catharsis (Jones, 2012). *Fox News*, which is geared toward U.S. politics, offers themes of political action and points of conflict resolution. The news program is successful because it offers sensational devices, including symbolism, personification, conflict, and suspense, in a repetitive (i.e., 24 hours, 7 days a week) format. Jones (2012) concludes this is a symbolic form of *performance ideology*.

## **B. Summary and the Value of Framing Theory**

Understanding how power and knowledge are channeled, such as through the use of dramaturgical devices and performances, offers a diagnosis, prognosis, and rationale for ideological claims expected to be found in the subject texts. However, a better understanding of how ideology is transmitted within a popular media text requires theoretical bases to explain those processes. Ideology, together with framing, represents an effective way to comprehend the cultural transmission of ideas, values, and assumptions (e.g., Benford & Snow, 2000; Brooker,

2002). In delineating the relationship between ideology, frames, and related concepts, ideology is understood as a wide-ranging, logical, and enduring grouping of beliefs (Benford & Snow, 2000). The two concepts relate and overlap in their empirical referents, but ideology is more long-term and pervasive while frames are more dynamic and short-term extensions of ideologies, offering support for or opposition to dominant strands (Oliver & Johnston, 2005). Framing, thus, is useful in providing the analytical basis to help expose ideological power.

### C. **Ideological Frames in Popular Media Texts**

Goffman (e.g., 1974, 1987) established an initial theoretical foundation for framing and frame analysis. He described frames as a schema of interpretation enabling people to perceive, identify, and label events in their lives and the world at large. “By rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). The term “frame” is merely a label conceptualized by situational definitions built on basic principles and elements of organization—those governing the events of human activity. Frames are thus simple cognitive structures that get noticed and are viewed as observable “reality.” As such, people negotiate, manage, and comprehend information through framing. Ultimately, frames are not consciously constructed, but are unconsciously manifested through human experience (Goffman, 1974).

Goffman’s (1974, 1987) primary frameworks are basic and familiar reference points— a particular belief system, culture, or “cosmology”— people rely upon to gain an understanding of what is going on around them. Goffman (1974) subdivides these into *natural* and *social* frameworks. The former are viewed as unchangeable and based on science, such as natural disaster as an explanation for catastrophic death. The latter explain events and connect them to human experience to make sociocultural enterprises meaningful. Primary social frameworks are

typically broad and established. For example, the frame that violating a human right for no reason is wrong, but can also involve more interpretive cues that are indexical and involve *bracketing* (Goffman, 1974). These more subjective and relative sub-frames tend not to disturb the broader ones— thus, violating a human right remains wrong, unless it is done within a frame of war (to protect one’s nation) or, perhaps, as an act of moralistic revenge (in response to an evil). This study is concerned with both bracketed frames that function to justify ideological stances, like the torture a person being legitimized under a particular worldview, and established ones, like gender ordering.

### **1. Point of Entry for a Customized Interpretive Model of Framing**

Since Goffman, the development of framing and frame analysis has been fragmented and pluralistic, resulting in numerous conceptualizations (Gamson, 2001). Framing has been applied as an approach, method, model, technique, and theory, remaining a burgeoning paradigm (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2009). In addition to these criticisms about lack of continuity and clarity, methodological framing devices have been denounced as arbitrary and unpredictable (Reese & Lewis, 2009). But these criticisms can be conceived as strengths when viewed from a qualitative and interpretive paradigm because they realize “in piecemeal fashion communication’s mission to meaningfully integrate theories and methods from across the social sciences and humanities in order to illuminate a complex process” (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2009, p. 20). Frame analysis is a *bridging mechanism* uniting many fields and theories because it has multiple areas to select from to develop rich tools and creative processes to accomplish customized tasks (Reese, 2009).

Since there is no unified media framing theory after Goffman and it is difficult to apply his ideas directly to the study of contemporary media texts<sup>iii</sup>, D’Angelo and Kuypers’ (2009) suggest utilizing *theoretical integration*. This approach reflects on indigenous foundations

(Reese, 2009), but mostly draws from topically pertinent and authoritative works to create an individualized theory. This study's theoretical "point of entry" (Reese, 2009) combines various works (e.g., Altheide, 2002; Entman, 1993; Gamson, 2001) to create an interpretive and progressive approach that promotes an active and deliberate view of framing. This dynamic approach considers the subjective influence of individuals and small groups on outcomes and is critical of the power unequally channeled by frames. The approach focuses on the manipulation by *media sites*— as opposed to human interaction or frames in individuals' minds— that limit the understanding of complex issues and scenarios to organize ideology and considers the cultural and political content of media frames that draw on shared meanings to operate.

## **2. Why Framing Approaches of News Media apply to Entertainment Media**

The initial challenge with using the sources above as theoretical backing is almost all of them focus on the analysis of actual narratives, events or news reports of those narratives, political messages, and public policy debates within the *news* media<sup>iv</sup>. Some of the more recent and comprehensive works identified were compilations focused on journalistic framing activity (e.g., *Framing Public Life* [Reese, Gandy, & Grant, 2009]; *Doing News Framing Analysis* [D'Angelo, 2009]). The same framing theories and related ideas, processes, and conceptions employed by these researchers can and should be applied to entertainment texts, especially those texts portrayed as being about "real" organizations, events, and situations. This argument represents an opportunity to expand frame analyses to fictive texts.

The initial basis of the argument that available framing theories should be applied to entertainment texts is the assertion that frames are *universal* (Goffman, 1974). That is, there is no distinction between fact and fiction because humans use everything available to them to garner meaning. Goffman's (1974) psychological conception also ties in with the core theories

above that ideology can be formed and promoted through any discourse that creates subject positioning within the audience, whether church doctrines (Castelli, 1991) or mass-produced genre products (Hall, 1997).

Gamson (2001), in examining media's role in the social construction of reality, concludes there is an "artificial distinction" between fact and fiction texts, akin to intertextuality (Fiske, 1987). Altheide (2002, 2005) exemplifies this artificiality by expanding the notion of problem-solution framing to argue the problem frame, and the powerful news media actors who rely upon it to promote agendas, *program* contemporary U.S. culture. The programming relies on "elements of action" founded in entertainment formats that emphasize visual, brief, action-oriented dramatic tempo geared towards one purpose: The willing suspension of disbelief. The same is the case with the fear frame, wherein the reader is exposed to a fear and the frame agent offers a solution to eliminate the source of that fear. Altheide's (2002, 2005) work shows that post-9/11 counterterrorism thrillers are precisely the kind of framing format familiar to readers within news *and* entertainment. Put another way: Fiction is responding in the same problem frame as news media. Altheide's (2002, 2005) examples also highlight the phenomenon of the "blurring of fact and fiction" evident in the post-9/11 milieu. Post-9/11 entertainment and news texts share an interpretive framework where fact and fiction can appear indistinguishable.

### **3. How Media Frames Function**

Frames are explicit and specific agents of ideological processes, structuring ideology and reinforcing the interests of those benefitting from them (Reese, 2009). Media framing is the power of a communicating text, whether press article, personal utterance, or work of fiction, in selecting certain features of a perceived reality to construct a narrative that emphasizes connections amongst the features to serve a specific interpretation (Entman, 2007). The receiver

is more likely to perceive the information, decipher meaning, and process it in memory with increased emphasis. This helps to persuade the receiver and instill in them specific worldviews. Texts embody specific meanings of an issue through the *salience* and *selection* of aspects of that issue. If a textual frame emphasizes “in a variety of mutually reinforcing ways that the glass is half full, the evidence of social science suggests relatively few in the audience will conclude it is half empty” (Entman, 1993, p. 56). As such, media frames become a deliberate conceptual framework (Benford & Snow, 2000).

These types of frameworks can be broadly understood by Goffman’s (1974) process of *keying*, wherein an agent framing a sociocultural enterprise signals an association with a primary framework’s established meaning. The key is a particular component of that communication. An example of a key in a post-9/11 text could be a reference to a well-known counterterrorism agency, like the CIA, that will signal the reader to a certain justice frame. Through keying, frames can be changed, including through *modalization* that involves “transpositions between original frames to copies” (Goffman, 1974, p. 43). *Copies* are different versions of keys crucial because, as the frame moves from the original established version, meanings can transform. An example of this is an original frame would be the actual gang violence in inner-city Chicago, and a copy could be a dramatized version of that violence framed in a popular movie. Actors involved with framing use these practices and tools to construct ideological frameworks.

The way a sociocultural enterprise is framed will influence the vast majority of the audience (Goffman, 1987). Tversky and Kahneman’s (1981) compelling example of framing involves the way a hypothetical question was posed to respondents about an impending life-threatening epidemic. Responses on how to respond to that epidemic are inverted– a “reversal of preference”– depending on if the question is framed in terms of the numbers of lives *lost* versus

the number of lives *saved*. Goffman (1987) provides a more familiar example by explaining how the way a person perceives a U.S. football game, such as which team they think is best and should win and the perceived fairness of calls, is often determined by what side that person is rooting for. The perceptions are determined by how the competition is framed.

The framing of an issue is accomplished by simultaneously focusing attention on one aspect of an issue while directing attention away from other aspects of the issue (Altheide, 2002; Gitlin, 1980). The supporting terminology related to the issue becomes solidified once the frame is widely accepted. Media actors lose credibility when they refer to a certain frame and fail to use corresponding terminology to talk about the situation or enterprise (Entman, 1993). For instance, post-9-11 journalists who did not use the “war on terror” framing term were perceived as not fully understanding the situation (i.e., of being at war with Islamic extremists) (Entman, 2003). This emphasis on terminology is key in considering methods to examine framing devices.

The following four framing functions, which mimic the structural components of ideology explained in the previous subsection, are crucial in approaching media texts because they: 1) *Define problems* by determining what causal agents are doing and at what costs-benefits, 2) *diagnose causes* by categorizing the forces that created the problems, 3) make *moral judgments* by evaluating causal agents and their effects, and 4) suggest *remedies* by offering and legitimizing treatments (Benford & Snow, 2000; Entman, 1993). Entman (1993) examined the Cold War frames dominating U.S. news on foreign affairs at the time to reveal how the media apparatus focused on select foreign events as problems, such as civil wars, identified the source of those problems, such as communist groups, and offered moralistic judgments, such as denouncing communist atheistic state aggression. Ultimately, the framework recommended specific U.S. solutions, such as concluding the U.S. must support the communist opposition– all

accomplished in one delineable ideological media framework. In similar cases involving U.S. governmental action related to some cultural phenomenon, the most important components of framing are 1) the problem, because that is where the framing begins; and 2) the response, because it reflects the governmental actions the frames support or do not support (Gitlin, 1980).

Framing occurs in four places: The *culture*, *communicator*, *text*, and *receiver* (Entman, 1993). The communicator makes conscious or unconscious judgments of what to communicate; the text is where frames exist; the receiver is the audience or reader and is subject to and internally processes frames; and the culture is a broader realm that includes more expansive elements used to enhance those frames (Reese, 2009).

#### **4. Media Frames and the Channeling of Ideology**

One way to further clarify media frames is to view them as “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese, 2009, p. 11). This view leads to two questions: 1) How frames can only be understood through the meanings in broader cultural and historic contexts? And 2) How those meanings interact to support group interests?

Frames are not freestanding constructs. Instead, they exist within a web of culture and in relation to broader cultural, political, social, and historical contexts that support frames and give them legitimacy (Gamson, 2001). As “explicit agents of ideological processes” (Reese, 2009, p. 18), frames are not just news media events, topics, etc.— they latch on to broader meanings and thus reflect nuanced versions or variances of those longer-termed, shared contextualization (i.e., as supportive cultural elements). Because frames organize and structure these elements, they have broader meaning than the topics themselves.



Frames, and the functions and locations they appropriate and use, guide and reflect public policy and opinion (Gitlin, 1980). Through connection with broader meanings and cultural-political-social elements, the frames gain legitimacy to create meaning about a social situation. Framing is about *moral evaluation*— that is, latching on to specific language, references, myths, and other established components of a cultural morality to guide discussions (Reese, 2009). Frames and sub-frames can concurrently manifest at various discursive sites. Understanding these interrelationships and interactions requires inquiring into how power relationships and,

[Institutional] arrangements support certain routine and persistent ways of making sense of the social world, as found through specific and significant frames, influential information organizing principles that are manifested in identifiable moments of structured meaning and become especially important to the extent they find their way into media discourse, and are thus available to guide public life. (Reese, 2009, p. 12)

Media frame researchers are concerned when frames guide public life and result in an unequal distribution of power in sociocultural enterprises, as certain frames are unequally created and lead to power being channeled to certain interests and not others (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2009). From this perspective, frames are interpretive packages influencing perceptions and, thus, outcomes. This study examines how issues are defined in the first place, and then how the ideological nature of the media supports, reflects, rejects, or otherwise interacts with institutional ideologies. The academic concern is not with frames influencing minor matters of power; but large ones like the GWOT, use of nuclear power, and agenda setting of politicians (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2009). These types of frames do not simply relay information from politicians and powerful elites— they participate in a deliberate process of packaging stories to create meaning (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2009). Because of this, a critical and interpretive approach to see how the frames guide policy and opinion, such as how meanings are connected to support certain interests (Reese & Lewis, 2009), is applied in this dissertation.

Popular media's preeminence in contemporary U.S. culture amplifies and reflects framing's tendency to oversimplify. This assumption is also embedded into Goffman's (1974) work, which argues humans gravitate to simple frames because they thrive on mental shortcuts. Humans are "cognitive misers" who want to do as little work as possible to frame meanings, scenarios, narratives, and other sociocultural practices (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). As with the media-focus of dominant ideology, the rise of information technology and ease of mass communications altered the view of social issues and, through framing, the way these issues are understood has become *media spectacle* (Gamson, 2001).

### **5. Prominent Types of Framing Packages**

Elements of media spectacle signal readers to packaged media frames and include simulation, hyperrealism, and the concealment of reality (Altheide, 2002; Benford & Snow, 2000). Two types of framing packages that employ these elements are called *problem* and *issue* frames, and they are useful here. Problem frames exemplify packaged formats pertinent to the study of media texts. By presenting issues in a problem-solution format, frames delimit debate on the issue by ruling out alternate viewpoints (Gitlin, 1980), thereby:

Media problem frames offer a boundary for discussing an event and focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and, above all, how it will not be discussed. It is helpful to think about frames as very broad thematic emphases or definitions of a report, like a boarder around a picture that separates it from the wall and other possibilities. An example is treating illegal drug use as a public health issue as opposed to a criminal justice issue. (Altheide, 2002, p. 279)

Framing drug abuse as a law enforcement concern versus public health issue, for example, demonstrates how different frames can results in two different effects.

As stated above (i.e., Entman, 1993), all framing processes begin with a problematic effect. The fear frame— an established theoretical concept in justice analyses<sup>v</sup>— is a concrete example of problem framing. Several researchers (e.g., Altheide, 2005; Glassner, 2004;

Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004; Kundnani, 2004) concluded the most important variable in the Bush GWOT was a fear, or *terror*, frame. Fear is essential in understanding post-9/11 terrorism and the U.S. response, which primarily relates to the framing and legitimizing of ideological definitions and violent emotional responses through a lens of fear (Glassner, 2004).

The fundamental, broader unit of public discourse (i.e., a *package*) represents a range of policy positions derived from a frame and a grouping of symbolic devices (i.e., codes), which can signal the audience to specific justice positions and judgments (Gamson, 2001). *Issue framing*— an idea derived from Goffman’s *issue-oriented frames*— is a more dynamic theoretical notion of framing wherein frames are “like a storyline or unfolding narrative about an issue” (Gamson et al., 1992, p. 385). *Issue frames* fit into and interact with primary social frameworks (i.e., as sub-frames) and can cause *frame transformation* about aspects of the broader frame when they do not resonate with the current dominant messaging (Gamson, 2001). A hypothetical example of this that relates to the U.S. response to terrorism, which included the GWOT as the dominant framing device, is how expectations within the primary frame of morality could be shifted to make brutal acts of torture morally acceptable. The terrorism sub-frame— positioned within the large one— would be transforming the established frame.

Frame researchers need to be aware of these potentially transformed variations in order to conduct effective analyses. One way to accomplish this in frame analysis is to examine a unit of public discourse as a *package* containing “various policy positions derived from the frame as well as a set of ‘symbolic devices’ that signify the presence of frames and policy positions” (Gamson, 2001, p. 143). There are four dimensions of news influencing frame development: “Syntactic structures or word choice; script structures or an evaluation of the newsworthiness of an event; thematic structures, including causal themes for news events; and rhetorical structures,

which include ‘stylistic’ choices” (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 55). This study attempts to understand these types of structures via the methods and expose them through data analysis.

This investigation deconstructs frames found in counterterrorism thrillers to reveal how they operate and the ideological meanings they convey. This section integrates theories emphasizing media frames and how they function, where they are located, and how they are expected to interrelate with broader media ideologies to provide a backing for such work. The framed versions of sociocultural enterprises can become so embedded in a culture that they seem “obvious, ubiquitous, and invisible— like popular culture itself” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6), making the view of an event or story part of a culture’s common sense (i.e., an ideological position)— despite being unequal, superficial, and oversimplified. The task of revealing how common sense is constructed— that is, linking a frame’s meanings with supportive cultural elements— must also consider the agents who execute those tasks.

## **6. Theoretical Notes on Media Producers as Framing Agents**

Frame theories are also aware of the power of the *framing agents* doing the framing (Gamson, 2001). Primary social frameworks are promoted through drive actions and keying by social agents, including fiction authors, who want to send the message that “we” (i.e., sender and receiver) are in a particular framework (Goffman, 1974). Framing agents align media frames with readers to invigorate values and beliefs in these orientations (Benford & Snow, 2000). By selectively packaging rhetorical elements in ways that encourages certain interpretations and discourages others (Gamson, 2001), these quick and easy mental filters give the framing agent power to influence reader interpretation. This leads to frames perceived— like ideology itself— as commonsensical (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). These works show how popular fiction *producers*

garner respect within a cultural moment to promote and organize certain ideologies, consciously or unconsciously acting as ideologues that construct propaganda (Oliver & Johnston, 2005).

Common sense was constructed in the post-9/11 terrorism milieu when neoconservatives acted as propagandists who framed and promoted GWOT ideology (Altheide, 2005). “Terrorism experts” were portrayed as *informed sources*<sup>vi</sup> in an area of justice, regardless of actual expertise or access, that dictated an understanding of those enterprises at a moment of cultural uncertainty about them (Jenkins, 2003). Producers in Hollywood created post-9/11 terrorism movies that propagated images of political violence in sync with U.S. imperial power and strategy (Boggs & Pollard, 2006). In news media appearances, 24 producers were depicted as knowledgeable authorities supporting the Bush pro-torture agenda (Clucas, 2009).

This study treats the thriller authors as framing agents who, as Holloway (2009) found, engage with readers in a contract wherein certain expectations, like certain characters and plot outcomes, and pleasures can be realized. These thriller authors appear to be constructed as insiders and informed sources on terrorism and related topics, such as the U.S. military and the inner-workings of U.S. law enforcement. Awareness of this power is crucial in understanding the ideological meanings those structures promote (Mumby, 1989).

#### **D. Myth’s Relationship with Ideological Framing**

As suggested throughout the preceding subsections, “mythology” or “myth” plays a fundamental role in popular storytelling (e.g., Gibson, 1994; Wright, 1977) and ideological framing processes (Altheide, 2002; Gamson, 2001). A key purpose of this study is to investigate myth’s role in counterterrorism thrillers because every ideology relies on myth— ideology is the rational side of an endeavor while myth is the irrational side (Morong, 1994). But what does this concept mean in this study’s context and why emphasize it as a key component of this research?

All myths are manifested in the collective unconscious of a culture and help explain psychological functions (Jung, 1968). Mythology is a symbolic representation of the collective and imparts values and supports certain social enterprises and orders (Berger, 1998). This was the case in ancient cultures, like how Greek Mythology— through a series of gods and demigods— was used to explain the natural environment, such as the existence of stars and the passage of time, and the practicalities of leading a moralistic and happy life (Berger, 1998). *Sacred myths* of indigenous cultures similarly explain the relationship between man and nature (Wright, 1977).

To renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell (1988, 2008), *hero myth* has existed since the dawn of human civilization and reflects a universal pattern in storytelling. Campbell's *monomyth*<sup>vii</sup>, also called the *hero's journey*, follows this pattern: The hero is at home engaged in some routine activity; receives a call to adventure; goes on a mystical journey in a special place; faces a great challenge; courageously succeeds with the aid of a magical item rewarded as a gift; and, finally, must decide whether to return home to help the world with the gift or use it for selfish gain. This sketch of Campbell's (1988) theory explains a storytelling archetype that connects emotionally with the collective psyche that humans have recognized and respond to for millennia— ultimately, the internal symbolic struggle for liberation through a rite of initiation.

One of Campbell's (1988, 2008) lasting contributions was revealing how mythology recurs throughout humanity— in art, religion, literature, and world cultures— and how storytellers impart emotional and communal attachment with readers by linking to those timeless mythological themes to invoke the mystery and awe of the human endeavor. Myth can be understood as offering poetics or aesthetics as ancient archetypes, a positive way to understand world cultures, or offering valuable insight into complex psychological journeys. But in this study, myth is viewed as *popularized* and *contemporary* phenomena found in *Western* cultures

and those– albeit rooted in foundational themes like Campbell described– appropriated, simplified, and re-inscribed as supportive components of ideological media framing.

This study sets aside the positive values of myth and their organic, foundational nature to focus on how features of those myths are extracted but retain purer aspects of the myth’s influence. Media-centric mythical characters and patterns utilize classic archetypes familiar to the Western psyche, but morph into something unnatural when purposely modified to enhance a text’s ability to *convince* (Berger, 1998; Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). The successful application of Campbell’s ideas by Hollywood in the *Star Wars* series and in Disney movies (Vogler, 2014) exemplifies the power of their convincing nature.

This study only attempts to understand how one form of contemporary popular text adapts and applies mythic themes. Here, the focus is not on the myths themselves, but how key features are activated via storytelling. As such, this study avoids the concept of “mythology”– as literally the study of a collection of myths– and its author makes no claim of being a “mythologist”– an expert in the nature or content mythological formations particular to a culture.

### **1. Popular Myth as Appropriated and Re-inscribed to Legitimize and Justify**

The importance of myth here is how it is extracted by framing agents to be exploited as powerful vehicles for framing ideology (Altheide, 2005; Hall, 1997; Rapping, 2003). For instance, when emotional attachment existing in a myth is replaced by *characters* that represent those myths, the original mythic form is lost and the attachment is infused into a character that can modify, or simultaneously represent various, meanings (McLarty, 1999; Tomasulo, 1999). Mythic speech can conflate nature and culture so certain mythical attributes associated with a cultural enterprise are assumed to be natural (Sharrett, 1999). In these situations, popular media audiences recognize familiar and simple formats, themes, metaphors, and tropes and “naturally”–

through the underlying emotional power of the myth— assign meanings to them. As such, myth is a descriptor for the “fundamental notions people hold (usually without much conscious thought) about how the world is structured, what is valuable and unworthy, who is good and who is bad, and what actions are wrong and right” (Rafter, 2000, p. 9).

This critical view of myth helps explain why some popular narrative components seem so prominent and lasting— that is, they take from and modify accepted mythic formations (Ewick & Silbey, 1999). For example, in popular U.S. movies and television, violent foundational myths from human history have been infused into modern storytelling, leading violence to be a functional component of history and ideology (Sharrett, 1999). Such texts, ranging from the *X-Files* to *Natural Born Killers* to *Braveheart*, cling to a *lens of mythology* that conflates morality and violence and relies on emotional attachment to make violence seem like a natural response to most sociocultural issues (Sharrett, 1999). The U.S. cowboy is also a prime historical example of a mythic character that promulgated simple mythic elements (e.g., freedom, westward expansion), which seem commonsensical at the emotional level (Christensen & Ferree, 2008).

These examples of mythical storytelling can also be understood through theories demonstrating how myth is reinterpreted and applied to keep a populace under control and pacified. Althusser (1971, 2014) concluded throughout Western history the clergy in conjunction with the state’s promotion of Biblical teachings used religious mythology to keep entire populations in check. The idea is the citizenry need to be led to do what is “right” by those claiming to have the wisdom and knowledge to decide what is “right.” More recent analyses of GWOT framing showed how Bush neo-conservatism was based on the notion the U.S. populace needed the guidance of “simple myths” that were propagated by political elites and rooted in neo-conservatism (Altheide, 2005). Neoconservative framing agents employed



mythicized deceptions and falsehoods to promote intense fear to support a political agenda justifying U.S. self-righteous action (Altheide, 2005).

A related theoretical feature of myth operating in genre films relates to ritualistic or communal elements inherent in ideology (Ibarra, 1998). Such films are “directed at resolving contradictions that emerge between personal desire and social law, between the individual and the collective, in short, in the archetypal conflict between nature and culture” (Ibarra, 1998, p. 412). The persistent contradiction in U.S. culture between individualism and society is resolved in such texts with myth’s help. The cowboy serving society accomplishes this in Westerns; in the gangster genre, this is done through the failed opposition to society; and in detective films, this is solved by the hero’s social transcendence. Genre products assume myths to construct a coherent and continuous understanding of the world, offering simple and gratifying resolutions to complicated sociocultural issues (Hall, 1997). In contrast, non-genre products, like works of English literature, are seen as esoteric, complex, and less popular because they do not rely on myth’s “common sense” (Ibarra, 1998) and tend to offer more questions than solutions.

Sometimes mythic formations become so regularized in popular media that contemporary myths are developed as distinguishable formations, just as Sharrett (1999) honed in on a myth of violence. These often act as *legitimizing myths* when they protect the complex ideological structures that justify an inequitable distribution of power (Chase, 1986). The myth of “law” in the U.S. is a prime example: Popular culture makes it seem like a fair and equitable system when it really is a primary way patriarchal power is protected and certain groups are condemned as unlawful because they are subject to law more often (Chase, 1986). Formations can reach a level of recurrence and be labeled by researchers as distinct myths used in mediated texts to summon mythical value. Several germane myths of this kind will be further examining below— including

the *warrior myth* (Gibson, 1994) and *ticking-time-bomb myth* (Wong, 2006)– and unmasking them helps to reveal meaning.

Myth's role of legitimizing, simplifying, and resolving is important in this study because mythic characterizations and speech function as the underlying fuel– the fabric surrounding and supporting ideological framing processes, or the emotive symbols framing agents rely upon to connect with genre readers. Barthes (1957/2012) suggests this sort of use of popular myth removes the realities of the actual situation and replaces them with satisfying packages that are eternalized and justified in such a way as to make them appear as statements of fact. This symbolic content is based on an abstract structure– *sign systems* reflecting mythical patterns (Wright, 1977) appropriated by and manipulated in popular media culture.

## 2. Structure of Popular Myth: Sign Systems and Paired Oppositions

Hall (1997) is again useful at this point in focusing on how myth is structured in popular media and, in particular, genre products. Hall builds on the works of Saussure to explain signs, founded on the idea that the literal, obvious, denoted, language sound-image of human communication means nothing without meaning attached to it from an inferred connoted concept. The form, whether a character or the choice of a word, is the *signifier*; while the connoted meaning behind it is what is *signified*. According to Hall (1997), “both are required to produce meaning but it is the relation between them, fixed by our cultural and linguistic codes, which sustains representation” (p. 31). A sign is a combination of signifiers and signified meanings. A sign system is a grouping of codes that can be decoded through an analysis of popularized connoted images (Hall, 1997).

Hall (1997) concludes Saussure's version of sign systems focused on the study of linguistics as a precise and measurable endeavor was, while pioneering, not open-ended enough

for the examination of meanings within a wide range of cultural representations. Hall, thus, turns to the *semiotic approach*—commonly associated with Barthes’ (1957/2012, 1964/1968)—to reach an understanding of how appropriated media myths function in Western cultures. An updated and media-based focus on Barthes explains denotation as the basic level and connotation as the second level of signs, or “conventional conceptual classifications” (Hall, 1997). The researcher can interpret the completed signs in terms of a broader realm of sociocultural ideology:

[The] general beliefs, conceptual frameworks, and value systems of society. The second level of signification, Barthes suggests, is the more ‘general, global and diffuse’ It deals with the fragments of an ideology... These signifieds have a very close communication with culture, knowledge, history and it is through them, so to speak, the environmental world [of culture] invades the system [of representation]. (Hall, 1997, pp. 91-2)

Myth operates in this realm of second order systems and connoted images, inserted to become the underlying fabric of ideology and signaling to readers “we” are going into a certain framework. Both of these levels of signification, to be understood, require an analysis of codes. Such codes are easy to know at the basic or first denoted level of signification, as obvious and literal interpretations. But the second, broader level of connotation requires the analysis of cultural codes to arrive at the social ideology behind them (Hall, 1997). For example, an understanding of violent masculine action by men may require the action to be coded as referencing existing warrior myth (Gibson, 1994). By jumping beyond what is “really going on,” the sign, as the total concept and image, becomes a mere signifier in the second level (Barthes, 1964/1968). Myths mask these mechanics by making them seem like natural processes. An awareness to sign systems is important here not in an effort to conduct an in-depth semiotic analysis, but to realize the mechanics on several levels that are loaded with meaning behind surface-level imagery.

Meanings behind myth will also be better understood by exposing the pattern of paired oppositions buried in mythic texts (Hall, 1997), which has been called *paradigmatic analysis*

(Berger, 1998). Wright (1977) set out to apply this idea, basing his work on theories of the existence of inherent human structures by analyzing the conceptual structure of tribal (a.k.a., sacred) myths. Binary oppositions work is primarily psychological:

An image of something (a man, say) is structurally opposed in myth to an image of something else (a jaguar, say). In this way the sensible differences between things become symbols of conceptual difference [...]. An image of a character (man) in a myth does not come to represent a concept (culture) because of any inherent properties of the image, but only because of the differences between it and the image or character (jaguar) it is opposed to. (Wright, 1977, p. 21)

It is through this system of interrelated oppositions that member's of a certain culture come to understand— albeit, unconsciously— its myths. Wright (1977) incorporates this psychological approach with social interaction. That is, the researcher assumes the world is ordered and classified through social symbolic interactions, not just within the human mind.

Mythical storytelling binds human behavior and offers three narrative properties:

[that] explain a change in situations, their explanations cannot be questioning in their own terms, and everything in the narrative contributes to the explanations. Returning to myths, then, we see that myths like other stories contain all the information necessary to understand its characters and events. (Wright, 1977, p. 129)

This structure allows repeat social types, or familiar story characters, to establish new relationships through narrative action. Myths revealed in Westerns correspond with institutional changes, demonstrating a specific mythological sign system in action. This primarily involves the resolution of cultural conflict of individuals— progress versus freedom, law versus morality, violence versus Puritanism. Myth changes and is linked with broader cultural patterns: The “successful Western corresponds most exactly to the expectations of the audience, to the meanings the viewers demand of myth” (Wright, 1977, p. 13). When myth is appealing it conveys symbolic meaning, which in turn reflects the particular social attitudes and institutions nourishing it. Narrative structure reveals a cultures social, political, economic and psychological

organization. Reading myth exposes worldviews and values through repeated patterns of narrative "functions." As such, myth *explains* social and cultural interaction (Wright, 1977).

Wright's (1977) work highlights the critical role characters—like the more recent images of good lawyers (Menkle-Meadow, 2001) or the terrorism outsider (Porras, 1995)—play in myth construction and how the interaction of these characters can be viewed as mythical struggles. Messenger (2002) observed the activity of a character represents the ideological demarcation as material that has “been worked on” to create a new sign. Myth helps explain how murderous mob characters acting with impunity in *The Godfather* could be accepted and likable— that is, honing in on the authority of the signifier to expose it as an imposter. Sign systems conceive “fact” by masking it with exaggerating, omitting, and demarcating in story form. By stirring the emotions and simultaneously eliminating inconvenient complexities, these systems of myth make the irrational seem rational. This study attempts to demystify this process to understand how contemporary myth is transformed from foundational myth to bolster the subject text's messaging about justice, law, and security through the lens of post-9/11 U.S. counterterrorism.

In the subject thrillers, it is anticipated that the two most prominent paired oppositions in character form, is the hero versus a symbolic *Other* (e.g., Connell, 1987; Hall, 1997, Said, 1978). Heroes are known components of framing, conjuring up myth and simplifying the frame and such characters are directed at readers as an essential component of subject positioning (Hall, 1997). U.S. culture has been repeatedly drawn to the single-action hero morphing over phases of U.S. history, typically proceeding major conflicts like the Cold War and WWII (Rafter, 2000). An exemplar of this is the American superhero (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002) and the subject text's hero appears to be a reiteration of that exemplar.

The process of *Othering* involves placing cultural images into ideal types not like “us” to scapegoat an Other, or “them” (Hall, 1997). By emphasizing sameness, Othering acts to deny them of any of the characteristics that “we” embody, like dignity, reason, nobility, love, and human rights. This process results in a moral community signified as us accompanied by the exploitation, oppression, and denial of humanness of the Other (Hall, 1997). The subject texts also seem to consistently deliver the dialectally opposed Other in an Islamic extremist terrorist formation. This character typology appears to mimic aspects of the established theory of *Orientalism*, which involves stereotyping Muslims as a mythicized group that is uncivilized, barbaric, and in opposition to U.S. culture (Said, 1978).

#### **E. U.S. Masculinized Gender Ordering in Relation to Myth**

Sign systems containing dichotomies like the hero versus the Other are also reflected in *gender ordering*, wherein subordinated masculinities and emphasized femininities are compared against masculine messages to bolster patriarchal power (Connell, 1987). The former offer counter messages like weakness and homosexuality or depraved and misguided versions of manliness to complement masculine dominance. The latter complement it by offering ideal versions of compliance, sexual receptivity, and motherliness, which also correspond to the purpose of foiling. Gender roles are negotiated at the more commonplace levels of interaction where gender order maintains patriarchal social order and the ascendancy of masculine power—that is, cultural sites like religious doctrine, public policies, and media content (Connell, 1987). The subject texts represent a predictable location where gender ordering is done in story form.

The similarities between mythical character devices and gendered processes emphasize the challenge of comprehending and applying the interrelated theories of ideology, framing, myth, and masculinities. From the onset, they seem indistinguishable because mythical

constructs in both ideological framing and gender ordering rely on the symbolic binary. Gender difference has been described as the archetype of binary reasoning (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) and Hall (1997) asserts genre fiction's most prominent duality is men versus women (i.e., with woman playing the Other). Thus, distinctions are difficult and the influence of gender and patriarchy on the main theories (i.e., dominant forms of ideology) and subject matter (e.g., war stories and heroes) of this study is undeniable, necessitating a separate summary of these topics.

Gender ordering and the resulting hegemonic patriarchy are distinct because they represent an *existing system* that categorizes men and women under a regime (Connell, 2002). It is an underlying and precise example of the intersection of ideology, framing, and myth resulting in an established cultural construct (Scott, 1998). As an established social construct, masculine performances tend to reinforce the understanding of those formations (Khan & Blair, 2013). While mythical characters and mythic speech stand alone as something to be conjured in support of such a system, they remain at the symbolic and emotional levels as opposed to gender inequality and stereotyping that are observable sociocultural results.

As both a concrete and symbolic system, gender intertwines with other discourses and influences them, shaping various aspects of culture (Scott, 1998). The counterterrorism thrillers likely feed from this system of ideological dominance and align themselves with mythical constructs discussed throughout this study. This specific cultural system used by framing agents to support ideological claims about gender is not managed by actors who forcibly assert masculine ideology and dominance, but by more routine social actors (Connell, 1987). These actors include “priests, journalists, advertisers, politicians, psychiatrists, designers, playwrights, film makers, actors, novelists, musicians, activists [...]” (Donaldson, 1993, p. 5).

Connell (1987, 2002) offers concepts of masculinities and corresponding femininities, which he considers inseparable in understanding gender construction. This researcher is concerned with how social power is maintained by men through highly organized social patterns and practices. Patriarchal privilege and dominance is “achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes” (Connell, 1987, p. 184). The accepted and consistent global domination of men over women— *masculinized hegemony*— is a broad and public patriarchal social order most males are motivated to uphold because of the benefit they receive (i.e., their *patriarchal dividend*). Masculinized hegemony is an expression of power operating under the conventional models of masculinity that emphasize strength, aggression, and violence (Connell, 2002).

Connell (1987, 2002) details a gender hierarchy with different ideal types at stratified levels and masculinized hegemony on top. Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to Othered types, a process maintaining the established (U.S.) *gender order* that is historically strong but always negotiated. The gender order in contemporary U.S. culture is an institution, a system of sociocultural views and practices that construct the distinct categories of “men” and “women” (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) and organizes inequality on the basis of difference. While these researchers are primarily concerned with social interaction within that system, they agree core masculine and feminine categories are universal *ideological* depictions that guide U.S. culture. These “abstracted, hegemonic understandings of men and woman” (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 513) are summarized as: Men are more status worthy, “agentic,” rational, instrumental, and competent at things that “matter most;” women are nicer, more communal, less status worthy, less rational, and not as competent at what matters most.



These dominant ideological constructs delineate what is “proper” and “improper” to offer a “natural order” in the gender domain (Kellner, 1995). This classification system says women are naturally more passive, domestic, and submissive and their appropriate domain is the private sphere, namely at home; while the public sphere is allegedly reserved for the more rational, active, and domineering men (Kellner, 1995). This allows masculine ideology to position the interests of empowered groups as the interests of the entire U.S. populace.

### **1. Gender Ordering as Framing and Heroic Hyper-masculinity**

These gender beliefs—constructed of horizontal differences and hierarchical worthiness—are social frames entrenched in U.S. culture (Donaldson, 1993; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). A content analysis of the yearlong news media debate over the 2003 U.S. war in Iraq offers this theory on the use of competing versions of masculine ideology:

When gendered symbols are employed rhetorically to frame political issues, the speakers align themselves with understandings of gender as well as express their positions in relation to specific policies. As a consequence, media discourse preceding the war in Iraq were a debate both about which notions of masculinity are positively valued and the appropriateness of a decision to go to war, with each side of the war debate simultaneously contesting both the policy and versions of masculinity symbolically invoked to justify their positions. (Christensen & Ferree, 2008, p. 288)

Since nation-states are powerful forces and the decision to use military force is an expression of this power, war debate becomes a forum for observing connotations of gender and power.

Gender ideologies are political framing processes that “symbolically structure the social world, organize power relations, and provide a catalyst for historical change” (Scott, 1986, p. 1095). Gendered symbols offer a complex system of reference signifying masculinized ideology— not only as constitutive elements of social relations founded on perceived gender differences, but also as a primary way of signifying power relationships, also considered a form of *reciprocal signification* (Scott, 1986). For instance, gender carries connotations of strength or

weakness, like in references to “emasculating America,” and invoking connotations of gendered strength and weakness, such as the “pitiful, helpless giant” (Christensen & Ferree, 2008).

The U.S./Western gender system these researchers describe illustrates the power of masculine framing processes and ideology. The texts under investigation here are about struggles of *men versus men*—the surest way to understand the status of gender at a given cultural moment (Connell, 1987). The subject texts are also predominantly about masculine solutions to justice challenges and patriarchal notions of U.S. exceptionality observed in other post-9/11 texts (e.g., Christensen & Ferree, 2008). Theories of gender and masculinities are thus essential in understanding how masculine dominance— as engrained in ideology and framing— operates in counterterrorism thrillers to make their messaging more convincing.

As suggested in the myth subsections above, the hero is at the core of how masculine ideology functions and is often responding to masculine crises to reassert authority within media saturated environments (Gibson, 1994; Kellner, 1995; Rafter, 2000). Gender ordering employ mechanisms to maintain power and one of the most potent mechanism is embodied and naturalized in the form of a masculine hero as the centerpiece of specific texts, including westerns, ballads, sagas, and *thrillers* (Connell, 1987). These exalted heroes stabilize “a structure of dominance and oppression in the gender order as a whole. To be culturally exalted, the pattern of masculinity must have exemplars celebrated as heroes” (Connell, 2002, p. 84).

The theoretical concept of *hyper-masculinity* (e.g., Mosher & Tomkins, 1988) as a subcomponent of heroic masculinity in gender studies is important because— again like hero Bauer (Van Veeren, 2009)— thriller heroes are likely to be characterized as such and take extreme masculine action. This concept involves the adoption of exaggerated masculine traits of virility, physicality, and a tendency to view women as inherently weak— embodied by hero Callahan as

*Dirty Harry* in U.S. popular culture (Rafter, 2000). Mosher and Tomkins (1988) suggest four characteristics of the hyper-masculine personality from a psychological perspective: Violence as manly, danger as exciting and sensational, callous behavior toward women, and regarding emotional displays as feminine. In post-9/11 popular media, rugged frontiersman with the “anointed destiny” to single-handedly save the world is an exemplar of the hyper-masculine reforming contemporary gender ordering in Hollywood (Boggs & Pollard, 2006) and intensely violent special forces video games offer hyper-masculine identity affirmation (Mirrlees, 2009).

## **2. Pertinent Myths Arising from U.S. Gender System**

Two specific myths become relevant through examination of theories about myths that exist in or reflect the broader U.S. gender system and coupled with an awareness of what is expected in the subject texts. The first relates to patriarchal dominance, which is a legitimizing myth deeply rooted in the Western psyche and often reflected and promoted in popular culture (Friedman, 1989). More precisely, *patriarchal myth* is based on sacred stories recurring and reflecting the systemic premise that men must save the day (Caputi, 2004). These myths are rooted in ancient times when women were subordinated by male power and involve a universal heterosexual ideal preordaining the notion of being the way it always was and should be. Patriarchal myth manifests itself in a broad range of prominent and popular tropes, like heroic characters and violent resolutions to social problems, and is set in contrast to underlying positive myths of women and matriarchy difficult to find in Western cultures (Caputi, 2004). Popular culture products continue to celebrate hierarchal patriarchal family values with the man on top, and wife and children as subordinate and needing the care of the man (Damean, 2006).

The myth of *American exceptionalism* is established in the literature related to U.S. masculinity and is a dominant ideology asserting: The U.S. behaves better than the rest of the

world, U.S. success is due to a special genius, most of the good in the world is because of the U.S., and the U.S. is on the side of “God” (Walt, 2011). This myth promotes the idea the U.S. is the most superior and gifted nation on earth. Some have argued it has been on the rise since 9/11 as an impetus of neo-conservatism (e.g., Jackson, 2011) and used in policy debates as a moral justification for U.S. global exertion of masculinized military force (Homolar-Riechmann, 2009). American exceptionalism can be thought of as pre-existing truth regime that appropriates “narratives and motifs common to American political culture, such as ‘innocence’, ‘heroism’, ‘unity’, good versus evil, divine calling, universal values, ‘justice’ and historical myths of the American roles in World War II and the Cold War” (Jackson, 2011, p. 398).

**F. Theory Summary: *Informing an Interrogation of Counterterrorism Ideologies***

The theories integrated above advance a flexible model to help expose an active process of ideological framing occurring within an under-examined popular text. The following is a summary of core theoretical ideas detailed above (e.g., Connell, 1997; Entman, 1993; Gamson, 2001; Hall, 1997; Mumby, 1989), as well as supporting ones (e.g., Campbell, 2008; Kellner, 1995; Wright, 1977), and how they are expected to work together to inform this study.

In an increasingly mediated culture like the U.S., fictional forms like genre texts play a large role in creating and supporting dominant ideology. This study seeks to examine how counterterrorism thrillers appear to exemplify this type of cultural production. Dominant media ideology asserts and reasserts itself at historic cultural moments and is most influential during times of upheaval and uncertainty. The decade following 9/11 and the Bush GWOT represent a contested moment where such messaging is expected to thrive. Investigations into media ideology must enter into and interpret the cultural site through a discursive approach to reveal the

conveyed knowledge and understand how it operates: This study attempts this through a critical reading and frame analysis of the subject texts.

Ideological media framing relies on distortions and falsehoods masked to appear as factual, fixed, and natural– as common sense. Counterterrorism thrillers– asserting to be “faction” and based on the explicit marketing of the genre– involve factualized plotlines and “realistic” solutions to terrorism. Dominant media ideology is also structured in binary oppositions, the “I” perspective, and dramaturgical formats. These are structures this thriller genre seems to employ. Myth, in the form of mythic speech, mythical characters, and contemporary tropes will act to organize and invigorate this brand of popular genre text messaging. Relatedly, gender ordering as a macro frame reflects and enhances such processes. Understanding interrelated processes common to this medial format will help deconstruct the features anticipated in the thrillers.

The theories above also explain how popular media consumers participate in dominant ideology through interpellation and subject positioning. Counterterrorism thrillers appear to create such conditions for the audience. Text creators maintain power by infusing worldviews into sociocultural products in an effort to convince readers to identify with– to accept, adopt, and internalize– dominant values and attitudes during a moment of uncertainty. Dominant ideology operates outside the confines of class or politics or hegemonic control to impact all cultural facets, including gender and identity: This study intends to develop this critical and broader view of how ideology is framed.

Dominant ideology will be grounded in cultural discourses that produce knowledge and define, channel, and justify its power, which ultimately involves channeling it into institutions that gain authority from the power. This dissertation’s goal is to explore how the thrillers act as

a discursive formation in U.S. culture to support increases in U.S. executive, as well as related institutions, laws, and legal practices. While fictional texts represent only one way dominant ideology is spread through a culture, there is value in interrogating a popular form poised to be influential in defining justice and state power. Critical works exposing and exploring this type of media construction— and focused on key topical areas— are examined next.

## G. Chapter II Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Moral panic is an exaggeration or distortion of some perceived deviant activity or criminal threat and includes grossly exaggerating the seriousness of the event according to criteria like the number of people taking part in violence and the amount and effects of violence (Cohen, 1980). “[It is] a complex interplay of behaviors and responses involving several actors [...]: (1) folk devils, (2) rule enforcers, (3) the media, (4) politicians, (5) action groups, and (6) the public” (Cohen, 1980, p. 31).

<sup>ii</sup> Genre texts belong to an overarching *genre system* governing the division of mass-produced audio, visual, and print fictions into discernable story types (i.e., genre products), including sitcoms, westerns, thrillers, and soap operas (Hall, 1997). Genre theory helps explain how “economic and production mechanisms, particular textual forms, and audiences or readers interconnect and struggles for hegemony take place” (Hall, 1997, p. 351).

<sup>iii</sup> Some have argued Goffman’s (1974) frames are presented as tacit and existential (e.g., Gitlin, 1980; Maher, 2001). Koenig (2004) argues Goffman focused on the psychology of everyday life and unconscious processes that act to *enable* communication, versus limit it. Gamson et al. (1992) similarly discussed how Goffman’s frames are focused on static structure instead of agency.

<sup>iv</sup> Most of the framing-related works reviewed for this dissertation are focused on news media as a key site of cultural struggle. Political interests and interest groups intervene to shape the terms of a debate with greater or lesser effect on how the news shapes public understanding of policy issues through use of clear and simple images of complex issues (e.g., Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson et al., 1992; Snow, 2004).

<sup>v</sup> The ability or use of fear to construct or develop danger in order to promote ideologies and corresponding policies is not a new phenomenon. For example, Cohen (1980) and Becker (1971) established how fear is used to define social issues. More recently, Beckett and Sasson (2004) demonstrated how the U.S. “wars” on crime and drugs are dependent on a public perception of fear and threat from crazed murderers, gang-banging drug lords, and the like.

<sup>vii</sup> The monomyth is detailed in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and is based on the theory of a recurring hero archetype and struggle (Campbell, 2008). This is a fundamental myth that does not dissipate, but is renewed over and over in various forms that retain a core structure or principles he organizes into stages of a journey. Campbell asserts that *all* stories connect with this mythology, but bases his ideas largely on ancient cultures and their relics.

### **III: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter is comprised of two sections developed from a broad selection of critical works from the social sciences and humanities. The first section is a review of literature directly investigating counterterrorism thrillers. Since literature on this topic is minimal, a robust body of scholarly work on television show *24* is included as a relatable popular media form engaged in the post-9/11 terrorism narrative. The second literature grouping includes textual analyses from the waning (a.k.a., *détente*) period of the Cold War (i.e., 1980s, early 1990s), which offers an antecedent episode of dominant ideology in action and is based on the theoretical value of comparative qualitative texts at different historic moments (Creswell, 2009). Cold War novels in particular are comparable fictive texts complicit in channeling ideological power to official discourses. These groupings also emphasize where research is lacking to underscore the value of this dissertation— that is, filling a void of research into the thrillers and demonstrating how comparisons to Cold War narratives are valuable.

#### **A. Post-9/11 Counterterrorism Thriller Genre**

##### **1. Literature on Print Thrillers**

A single comparative English Studies essay focused on post-9/11 counterterrorism thrillers was found. Holloway (2009) analyzed five Western “war on terror espionage thrillers,” including Flynn’s (2004) *Memorial Day* (also a subject text in this study) to understand if and how the texts act to legitimize human rights abuses by the West. This work’s conclusion is the thrillers appropriated, recycled, and mimicked the rhetoric, actions, and justifications of Western political elites. As such, the imperial Western narrative (e.g., in the Bush ideology) interrelates and supports the war on terror thriller narrative, and vice versa.

Holloway's (2009) work is based on the idea that 21<sup>st</sup> century wars have been legitimized under the rhetoric of expanding human rights— a brand of elitist political discourse designed to make the populace believe new wars are based on the noble expansion of international humanitarian efforts. The discourses make claims justifying “liberal pragmatism” (e.g., state-sponsored human rights abuses) ironically under the guise of humaneness (i.e., “brutal but necessary” action). Through this discourse, war on terror thrillers make ideological claims about how contemporary wars must be fought. The narratives depict terrorists as something outside of the definition of enemy war combatant or criminal and thus not worthy of the protections those labels afford, like legal rights— mirroring the claims of political elites. The researcher argues the texts also normalize torture by portraying it as a “small evil” supporting the human rights of many and protecting truth, justice, and U.S. superiority. Torture is constructed as pragmatic and righteous violence in defense of U.S. liberty (Holloway, 2009).

Holloway (2009) also defined Western power projection as a “virtuous and progressive force” (p. 30) on the world stage emboldened by intense masculinization. One example is President Bush's appropriation of the brutalization of Muslim women by Muslim men as a further justification for war, which was hidden behind the human rights trope. The researcher concludes this gendered human rights discourse of Muslim women is “background noise” in the thriller narratives. A constant theme in the fictive texts is these women are little more than domestic servants and child-bearers. This lack of identity and agency is instead positioned against discourses framing Muslim men as “Islamic rapists.” Holloway (2009) considers this an emerging cultural archetype of the post-9/11 war on terror built upon traditional Westernized portrayals of Eastern men as sexually deviant and savage, much like Said (1978) theorized.



The Other positioned against the Muslim women's lack of agency is the depiction of "strong" Western women in the thrillers (Holloway, 2009). This characterization is of a female coming of age in the harsh masculine environment. Such a character—subordinated to the masculine hero—can reach a level of respect and counterterrorism success if she manages to "hang in there." If she proves tough enough, the hero educates her in masculine wisdom so the "generic emphasis on Western women's agency and Muslim women's abjection is often reinforced by a self-conscious ironizing of the ultra-macho" (Holloway, 2009, p. 35). Woman characters can even tease the male hero, as long as the masculine ideology remains secure.

Holloway (2009) reveals two more interrelated discourses playing into the legitimacy and supremacy of the messages and offering justification for violent ultra-macho counterterrorism responses. These themes are propelled through the narrative point of view of the Western male who "steps into this hellhole everyday" (Holloway, 2009, p. 36). Firstly, protagonist heroes are depicted as patriots. As related to normalizing torture, the heroes are those out there making personal sacrifices for the nation. The second point of view is of the omnipotent and monolithic security state. The thrillers inventory state-of-the-art techniques and gadgets and various factoids to provide a "factualized melodrama" easily channeled into ideologies. This leads to the conclusion, "of course it is true." Through this process, the reader succumbs to state's authority and power and it becomes an emotional pleasure—this is the *imperial security sublime*.

The researcher asserts this emotional attachment exemplifies Althusser's (1971/2014) interpellation, which is a profoundly ideological genre pleasure wherein the reader seeing the enterprise through the eyes of the patriotic protagonist and his supporting cast of macho characters—pragmatic security forces saving the day. The heroic resolution gradually shifts the treacherous, unknown, and confusing realm of terrorism into a linear plot familiar to genre

consumers. This process leads to the “abasement of readers to imperial narrative points of view, and to the security sublime that encodes imperial state power” (Holloway, 2009, p. 40). These narratives reflect, according to the writer, a broader shift in U.S. political culture from consent to coercion— a response to a crisis in Western imperialism and the gender order.

Holloway (2009) applies several of the theoretical concepts detailed above, such as genre theory and masculinities, to help understand how the texts operate. He uses several concepts with differing terminology that are fundamentally the same, such as “themes” (a.k.a., frames) and “ultra-macho” (a.k.a., hyper-masculinity). This researcher’s core imperial security sublime theory offers a basis for this study, suggesting a need to focus on the apparent authoritarian narrative turn occurring more broadly and better understood with a more in-depth investigation of heroic masculine personification. Yet, Holloway (2009) is narrowly focused on human rights as one ideological strand, while this dissertation attempts to understand broader ideologies. Also, as a single humanities essay, this study does not apply qualitative methods nor represent a significant body of literature needed here for a fuller comprehension of the subject.

## **2. Literature on Television Show 24**

Television show *24*, with the exception of being in visual form, is nearly identical to the post-9/11 counterterrorism thriller. The following is a summary of the genre conventions (Hall, 1997) they share: 1) Created in same timeframe, 2) both are serials, 3) both have singular recurring elite male FASC heroes, and 4) a common textual format and narrative point of view. The two also have similar plotlines, such as the “ticking-time-bomb” scenario. Overall, both texts offer an interpretive framework (Kuypers, 2006) on terrorism and counterterrorism. Due to this repetition of a cultural form and lack of direct literature on the thrillers, as well as perspectives on theory and methods used in the *24* studies, I next review 8 studies of *24*.

24 has been referred to as the war on terror's *cultural product* (Yin, 2008; Poniewozik, 2007). The U.S. went from peace and internationalism to war and nationalism after 9/11 and television programs mirrored this transformation (Mellencamp, 2006). 24 was on the forefront of this programming and, unlike comparable programs that waited several months before release (e.g., *Alias*; *The Agency*), the show aired within weeks of 9/11 (Sears, 2009). This immediate entertainment response triggered researchers to develop a serious body of research.

24's premise and formula revolves around the activities of Jack Bauer, an agent of the FBI's "Counterterrorism Unit." Each episode in a season represents an hour within a day and the day is the entire season. The day corresponds to a "real-time" ticking-time-bomb terrorism scenario that hero Bauer and his unit must stop within 24 hours (Clucas, 2009). This format offers a dialogue about ticking-time-bomb hypotheticals, wherein the viewer gets to watch 16 isolated hours of hero Bauer resolving terror threats (Yin, 2008). The format is such that, show after show, terror threats are made to seem omnipotent, immediate, and catastrophic, and extreme violence is found to be more effective than not at defeating the threats (Van Veen, 2009). The would-be crimes on 24 are "so huge and imminent the anti-terrorism team believes it does not have the luxury of playing by the rules" (Cusac & Sandburg, 2005, p. 4). Hero Bauer uses violence to eliminate recurring terror threats almost exclusively by himself.

***a. The Heroes' Use of Torture and Preeminence of Violence***

"Torture"—its use, definitions, and effectiveness—was one of if not the primary terrorism-related debate in the immediate years after 9/11 that was consequential to interpretations of U.S. law, justice, and security. This debate is acted out in 24, because it is hero Bauer who routinely tortures. This seems to explain why torture is the most prominent line of inquiry in this literature set. This questioning mainly relates to Bauer's use of torture for a counterterrorism imperative

that is portrayed as effective, despite findings the show is unrealistic and torture is unlawful, immoral, and its effectiveness is unclear. Semel (2008), who examined existing literature on military interrogations in the *24* context, found Bauer uses torture even though it was illegal; there is some political support for torture mainly using the ticking-time-bomb justification; that despite complex debate over “what is torture,” the techniques on *24* are torture; and the existing research on if torture works is inconclusive. Yet, “large portions of the U.S. still believe it is a quick, easy, and justifiable way to get intelligence” (Semel, 2008, p. 1).

Mayer’s (2007) findings mirror Semel’s and add that Bauer’s actions represent a broader “torture shift.” According to the Parents Television Council (PTC), between 1996 and 2001, there were 102 primetime torture scenes (Mayer, 2007). That figure jumped to 624 between 2002 and 2005. According to the PTC, the worst offender was *24*, showing the most frequent and graphic torture and Bauer executing it. Mayer (2007) argues this represents a shift on television from villains as torturers, to heroes as torturers. The new hero is willing to dissolve all ethical and moral boundaries for a perceived higher end, causing the writer to ask: What has changed that we would be willing to accept such actions previously associated with “hardened criminals” and “Nazis”? Mayer (2007) found Bauer is also typically contrasted by stereotyped liberal characters and has the support from those with the highest levels of power, including the U.S. President who— in some scenarios— condones Bauer’s torture tactics.

A more practically-oriented body of research related to *24* was completed by the Intelligence Science Board (2006), which was a non-partisan group of academics, practitioners, and private sector experts given the mission of consulting with high-level U.S. intelligence leaders on scientific and technical matters, including analyzing effective and legal ways to employ interrogation to gather valuable and usable counterterrorism information. The

researchers examined examples of Bauer's tactics in extracting information in the context of actual U.S. interrogations, concluding the ticking-time-bomb concept– the show's key plot device– was implausible. Actual terrorism related interrogations involve far more time, complex scenarios, and subjects who may or may not have useful information. Additionally, there is no compelling evidence violence works to elude information (Intelligence Science Board, 2006).

Yin's (2008) legal analysis of *24*'s torture found a key legal issue with the show is how Bauer never interrogates the wrong individual and there is inevitably a terrorist plot planned by parties pre-destined as being guilty. In some extreme circumstance under U.S. and international law, torture may be justified, but *24* does not have to take any of this into account because of the certainty of guilt, while Bauer is committing criminal offenses to arrive at these results. In reality, the author argues, interrogation is a legal tool used to determine guilt and discover if plots even exist. The author calls this the *24 effect*, wherein juries and legal actors come to expect the level of forensic certainty seen regularly on the mega-popular *CSI* and similar shows. Torture is used each week on *24* in such simplistic, quick, and certain plots that judges, jurors, and lawyers could become desensitized to increasingly illegal and harsh techniques that violate civil, human, and privacy rights. Justice actors may gradually believe in the viability of those techniques, eroding the legal meanings crucial to legitimate tools and proceedings (Yin, 2008).

Yin's (2008) findings related to torture also include two findings distinct from the other works reviewed. First, Bauer never tortures women, which supports masculine heroism and protects Bauer from being viewed as an outright "monster." Second, Bauer is not executing these violent and illegal acts as a murderous psychopath. He is instead portrayed as a "likeable good guy." Yin argues Bauer's charisma is unrealistic because research on the impact of torture on torturers reveals that such exposure causes one to become degraded and absent of morals.

Sears's (2009) content analysis of *24*'s first six seasons is founded on this core research question: The extent to which the show's torturous violence is justified by a *national security imperative* coded as an immediate need to stop a terror plot against the U.S. This researcher's most significant finding is contrary to the studies discussed above. The researcher found, more often than not, torture was *not* specifically represented as effective for security success. This work directly confronts what appears to be an assumption in most criticisms of *24*: That Bauer's torture is actually used to stop the ticking-time-bomb scenario. Instead, the hero just tortures and uses other violent methods frequently. Sears (2009) quantified torture scenes and coded the imperative to demonstrate this difference. Nonetheless, these findings support drastic increases in torture and violence on television, which Bauer uses exclusively in executing his counterterrorism mission.

***b. 24's Telling Intertextuality***

The first line of questioning in the *24* literature relates to torture, useful in understanding the violence applied by counterterrorism thriller heroes. The second line of questioning involves official and FASC support for, and application of, those counterterrorism tactics and the broader use of the show's discourses in promoting political agendas and ideological messages. The Intelligence Science Board (2006) examined the employment of such methods by the actual U.S. government, finding state actors were negatively influenced by entertainment's "colorful and artificial view of interrogation." Referencing *24*, the Intelligence Science Board (2006) warned:

The characters do not have time to reflect upon, much less to utilize, what real professionals know to be the 'science and art' of 'educing information.' They want results. Now, the public thinks the same way. They want, and rightly expect, precisely the kind of 'protection' that only a skilled intelligence professional can provide. Unfortunately they have no idea how such a person is supposed to act in real life. (p. 10)

Entertainment characters, like Bauer, act in a world where they do not have time to properly educate information. The audience is getting a view of a FASC contrary to how they do and should execute their counterterrorism missions. The greatest concern is not so much public consumers, but “law-abiding lawyers and state actors” (Intelligence Science Board, 2006, p. 12) believing these extreme measures because they seem to make sense. For example, the authors argue the Bush administration employed police-state tactics as offensive and cost-effective methods that made “common sense” under their doctrine, but were shortsighted and unethical.

The use of torture on *24* became so routinized that actual U.S. Army officers were unnerved by its effect (Mayer, 2007). One army interrogator told staff members of *24* that “people watch the shows, and then walk into the interrogation booths and do the same things they've just seen” (Mayer, 2007, p. 5). Semel (2008) identified numerous political debates wherein *24*'s ticking-time-bomb scenario was used to justify torture-related policies. Semel also provided anecdotal evidence of Republican lawmakers referencing *24* in public speeches as a viable counterterrorism approach. Former U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff said the show “reflects real life” in presenting scenarios with “no clear magic bullet to solve the problem” (Yin, 2008, p. 2) and former CIA Director James Woolsey claimed it depicted realistic threats.

Clucas (2009) examined the political use of *24* as a *cooperative hegemonic exercise* based on Gramsci's (1971) idea that media producers can, willingly or unwillingly and covertly or overtly, support dominant ideological goals. Her research was not geared towards state actors, but the texts' producers. The study was an analysis of the “speech acts” of *24*'s producers in various media venues residing outside of the text during a five-year time frame. A major finding was producers engaged in an intentional effort to promote the Bush administrations' pro-torture

agenda. Clucas concluded the promotion was an act of surreptitious propaganda– a “pervasive ideological message”– asserting torture was morally necessary to protect the U.S., while concurrently portraying it as “merely entertainment” to mask the propaganda.

*c.      **24 and the Ideological Intersection of Fact and Fiction***

The findings from the 24 research discussed so far demonstrate how the show had a significant impact on redefining approaches to terrorism by creating scenarios and responses under new forms of justice in a precise U.S. episode. These studies are limited because they narrowly focus on the show’s framing of tortuous violence and its relation to official agendas. Van Veeren (2009) and Nikolaidis’s (2011) analyses offer more relevant and comparable models expanding on the ideological intersection of fiction and fact and how narrative structure (re)articulates broader aspects of the sociopolitical features of U.S. counterterrorism.

Van Veeren’s (2009) critical reading of 24 found the series reemphasized key elements of the Bush GWOT. It is focused precisely on framing, intertextuality, and the role of the show’s producers. The researcher delineated a historic moment and the corresponding production of the new counterterrorism. A narrative space is interrogated– one where fiction and reality become inseparable. Because reality is socially constructed, all of reality is mediated fiction and it is those with special access, such as entertainment producers and counterterrorism elites, who create it (Van Veeren, 2009). This “reality,” wherein the real draws on fiction and the fiction draws on the real, becomes a privileged signifier impossible for readers to challenge because of the power behind it and the lack of access to alternate sources of information. By “conceptualizing fiction and reality as texts which we treat as part of the same “pick-and-mix” (or ‘image bank’) for our constitution of meaning in the world may be more useful for our own understanding of how commonsense is produced” (Van Veeren, 2009, p. 364).



Through this conceptualization, consent is obtained by framing justice policies as common sense. Van Veeren (2009) details a network of relations between *24* and Bush political actions and discourses constituting public images of world politics that facilitate and legitimate militarized and repressive justice practices discussed throughout this dissertation, such as rendition, illegal detention, and torture. This process mimics those found in police dramas, often setting up criminals as “ideological straw men” who represent an agreed upon criminal type. Or it is similar to U.S. Wild West narratives where the townsfolk were too scared, weak, and lawful to do what the hero had to do. Throughout the study, the researcher also refers to the “established relationship” between U.S. security, police, and intelligence organizations and Hollywood. Van Veeren (2009) confirms that a major component is what is omitted in the frames, such as how terrorist groups may have grievances with U.S. policies and actions that motivate them, but are never explored in the narratives.

Van Veeren (2009) identified broad justice frames, including the new terrorism is immediate and ubiquitous. Terrorism could happen anywhere at anytime and the results will be catastrophic, resulting in the image of what the researcher calls *super-terrorism*. The threat also originates solely from foreign entities and terrorists willing to commit random acts of violence against civilians. As such, the terrorism hero cannot afford to act within the confines of morality and rules. They must “go rogue”—operating as a legal actor outside of the law. The new terrorism is an exceptional threat and a maximum use of force is required to fight it. Another component of the new frame is messaging about how the U.S. is exceptional and the natural leader of the war.

Nikolaidis’s (2011) findings bolster Van Veeren’s, but are unique because the researcher closely examined the narrative structure of *24* at the institutional versus the individual level to

demonstrate how the show leaves the reader with no other option but to accept the application of *irregular law enforcement*. The text is viewed as political because there is a clear dialogue between it and the official war on terror. The researcher reveals a “layering” at work, including how the text discards alternative forms of terror response; imminent danger; ticking time; and engages in a denial within the texts that anything is wrong:

The representation of irregular law enforcement in *24* signifies a discursive context in which terrorists are posing an exceptional threat to social order and are necessarily and legitimately met with an exceptional counter-terrorist response. The normative correlation between the two effectively curtails the value of civil liberties and guarantees, and as a result security prevails at the expense of due process. (Nikolaidis, 2011, p. 222)

These works (i.e., Nikolaidis, 2011; Van Veeren, 2009) are useful in unraveling a broader scope of the subject thriller ideologies related to justice, law, and security, and as models for this study’s comparisons to U.S. institutions and practices. Another way to enhance understanding is by comparing the subject narratives to the similar phenomena found in previous U.S. periods.

## **B. Previous Comparable Period: Cold War Era**

Dominant Cold War ideologies offer a familiar response to post-9/11 terrorism, simplifying the goals and means to attain national security and justifying “extreme measures in pursuit of a policy objective” (Ricigliano & Allen, 2006, p. 87). Reagan-era, or the détente Cold War era, terrorism was an established ideological discourse extracted by the Bush administration for the GWOT (e.g., Jackson, 2011; Winkler, 2006). These researchers expose parallels between the two periods linked to the promotion of similar mindsets and actions. During the period between Cold War’s end and 9/11—approximately 1992 until 2001—there was a lull in what has been considered a recurring *threat narrative* (Ricigliano & Allen, 2006). During this timeframe, the U.S. culture created domestic enemies, such as with the “wars” on drugs and crime (Beckett & Sasson, 2004). There was a lack of an external enemy and hero to fight that enemy. For this

study's episode, what materialized was terrorists / terrorism as a new enemy and a specific call to war. After 9/11, "reborn warriors" in a symbolic war reflected a rebirth from the Cold War of strategic fictions built on images of catastrophic and *future war* (Davis, 2006).

Works on détente era Cold War were selected because of these parallels. The political and sociocultural contexts and elements of the corresponding fictions offer valuable points of comparison to the subject texts. They represent a distinct period in U.S. history and include critical analyses of how popular media culture informs, reflects, and influences knowledge— that is, they offer a collective investigation into an interpretive framework. The following sections include Gibson's (1994) analysis of post-Vietnam narratives followed by three studies of Cold War-era spy novels (a.k.a., "techno" or espionage thrillers). These subsets are grouped together because they are focused on media from the same period (i.e., late 1970's through early 1990s) and inform the actions and ideologies of President Reagan (in office from 1981 to 1989).

### **1. The Post-Vietnam New War**

Gibson (1994) investigated masculinities and violence in the approximate 10-year period after the U.S. left Vietnam. The researcher analyzed and compared media texts, sales figures of weaponry and militaristic tools, official documents and transcripts, entertainment texts, reader responses, and, through interviews, actual "warriors" acting out the mythos. Remaining at a socio-historical level to draw conclusions from the data, these findings expose a new mythical narrative that emerged in certain brands of media during a delineable historic episode and responding to perceived failures. The narratives involved a distinct administration (i.e., Reagan's) and influenced contemporary justice debates (Gibson, 1994).

A *new war* developed after the U.S. military left Vietnam (Gibson, 1994). The U.S. had waning known enemies in the late 1970s and early 1980s, so certain cultural themes of anger and

hatred were redirected into a fantasy realm of mostly unseen enemies. An emerging brand of hero— reborn from *warrior myth*— led the new war as the new protector of justice, which involved the swift, brutal, and excessive application of violence. Many men bought into this myth by attempting to embody the violent heroes as part of a “paramilitary subculture,” doing things like buying increasingly larger weaponry, reading mercenary literature, and acting out survivalist scenarios. There were some enemies that could actually come into the sights of these violent men, such as Communists in Asia and the Soviet Union, but the new war was almost exclusively acted out in fantasy realms. Here, an unseen and unlikely enemy could be made to encompass “evil infinite of human desire [... and] symbolic archaic evil” (Gibson, 1994, p. 158) in popular narratives activating established guiding stories that glorify war and the warrior. The warriors were not just groups of men, but a pervasive cultural regime. This regime reestablished violent masculine action as the solution to justice issues and enemies of the state (Gibson, 1994).

The most obvious and popular fictive narrative examples of the warriors were *Rambo* and *Dirty Harry* (Gibson, 1994). These heroes’ texts were in the form of mass-consumed blockbuster movies. To the researcher, these “commando cops” epitomized the new war’s masculine subculture and represented the need for the U.S. to forget about diplomacy and rule of law and have “real men” get the job done using moralistic violence. Hero Harry was also a rejection of “failed” policies, laws, and excessive freedoms of the Civil Rights Movement that, the narratives argue, caused many of the U.S. justice problems at the time. The hero represented a return to *law and order* policing, countering the rehabilitative models prevailing at that time.

Gibson (1994) also identified *magic weapons* that— unlike the deployment of weapons by heroes in other post-war eras— were vital and powerful symbols with telling connotations. These elaborate or customized weapons are the new hero’s “particular tools for inflicting death [...and]

so powerful they readily mark the hero's independence from other people. With them, one man or small group can hold the world at bay" (Gibson, 1994, p. 82). Weapons depicted in movies (e.g., *Sudden Impact*, *First Blood*), popular magazines (e.g., *Soldier of Fortune*), and pulp-novels (e.g., *The Survivalist*) became symbols of masculine potency and "magical" when coupled with the hero to achieve supreme justice in extraordinary ways. The weapons became increasingly large in the actual and fictional world, but their deployment had to stay in the fantasy realm.

President Reagan's military expansion policy and its interplay with popular narratives exemplify a hero-militaristic approach to politics and foreign policy based largely on the war movies Reagan acted in and watched (Gibson, 1994). He was "a shaman of sorts who wanted to restore and build on America's fundamental creation myths through Presidential performances" (Gibson, 1994, p. 268). This mythic mentality legitimized a war against "international peril" that employed covert military actions and excessive force. Reagan's fascination with war stories and masculine operations impacted his presidential policies. The results of those policies are internationally renowned (e.g., the Iran-contra affair), but they also impacted domestic affairs wherein the police apparatus became increasingly militarized (e.g., initiating the War on Drugs). Reagan later agreed with the valuable role of myth and Hollywood in shaping his policies:

Maybe I have seen too many war movies, the heroics of which I sometimes confused with real life, but common sense told me something very essential— you can't have a fighting force without this esprit de corps. So one of my first priorities was to rebuild our military and, just as important, our military's morale. (Reagan, 1989, p. 14, as cited in Gibson, 1994, p. 268)

Reagan and his supporters not only took from popular media culture, but also used contemporary mediums to create a sense of danger, such as propagating fictions that constructed "terrorist networks" and justified militaristic responses to them (Gibson, 1994). The popular image of terrorists at the time—grounded in Communist Cold War enemies and their powerful

adherents in Russia— gave the Reagan administration legitimacy to use violence to solve many problems redefined as intricately related to a series of “terrorist networks.” These networks were caricatures representing an oversimplified target for the administration. The only solution to stop the evil networks was waging a U.S. holy war utilizing the military and CIA to target the source of the evil, depicted as the KGB. The populace consumed and enhanced this narrative through mass entertainment throughout and after his 8-year administration (Gibson, 1994).

## **2. Détente Cold War Espionage Novels**

A broad range of research perspectives, timeframes, cultural perspectives, and novel genres are found within the scholarly research on popular Cold War spy thrillers. Works focused on the following were selected to isolate those most comparable to the counterterrorism thriller: The analysis of U.S. mass-market authors, topical novels from a U.S. perspective, those from the détente period, and works addressing the sociocultural implications of the narratives.

Gallagher (2000) investigated “techno thrillers” of the 1980s and 90s written by Tom Clancy and Clive Cussler. This researcher analyzed corresponding popular movies, such as *The Hunt for Red October*, which was based on Clancy’s book of the same name. He selected these texts because of their mega-popularity as a dominant form of U.S. cultural production. The researcher argues the authors and media conglomerates behind the texts targeted aging white males and used a unique formula acting simultaneously as fiction and fact. The fictive component included a fantasy world of fast cars, easy sex, and absurd action. The fact component included a narrative realm of painstakingly detailed military equipment, advanced technology, historical facts, and factual settings (Gallagher, 2000).

Gallagher (2000) compared Clancy and Cussler: The former made direct claims in the story narration that “reality” was being depicted versus the artificial “fantasy worlds of film

westerns and television police dramas” (p. 2498). The latter clung to the fantasy realm, insisting on the cartoonish entertainment value of his fiction. There are other distinctions and additional ways the novels created appeal to the targeted readers, such as depicting heroes who have the aches and pains of middle-age but are still able to accomplish risky missions. The more germane finding was how these thrillers framed the solution for the global crisis of the Cold War, which was the narrative space of these stories (Gallagher, 2000).

Gallagher (2000) found the narrative favored a model of *conflict resolution* executed by masculine rationale, toughness, and problem-solving skills. This gendered space emphasized a routinized world of multinational capitalism and a return to the traditional divisions of labor promoted by Reagan-era policies and efforts. These texts responded to cultural trends occurring since World War II, such as corporate downsizing, the reduced utility of physical labor, and feminism's perceived encroachment on patriarchal privilege. Aging white male readers who felt disenfranchised in the 80s and 90s could reaffirm their privilege through “prosocial” narratives wherein sympathetic heroes overcome threats to conservative ideology. The process redefined masculinity through visual spectacle and formulaic codes of action and personal style. As such, the aging male could be the master of a fantastic, albeit limited, narrative space that allowed complicated plots, factoids, and technical details to deliver male mastery as a function of reading. Gallagher's (2000) work demonstrates how a popular genre can be understood as responding to a crisis of male gender identity by acting out a narrative of conflict resolution.

Hixson (1993) also examined Tom Clancy novels and highlighted how the novelist was the most popular contemporary fiction writer in print by the time he published his three novels in the 1980s. By then, Clancy had sold 30 million books in the U.S. The researcher focused on bestselling spy thrillers because of the assumption that popular culture's most valuable function

is the dissemination of shared symbols, attitudes, and values to create “sociocultural consensus.” This work’s contribution included assessing the narrative impact these texts had on the political leaders of the U.S. during the Cold War’s final years from a diplomatic history perspective. Hixson (1993) first detailed the narratives before analyzing those impacts or interpretations on that unique group of readers, which he described as politicians and other elites.

Hixson’s (1993) analysis highlights Cold War propaganda and focuses on the use of Othering in Clancy’s thriller novels. This researcher conceptualizes the *cult of national security* as a small group of administration elites supported by powerful economic and media actors who are obsessed with Soviet threats, believe the U.S. executive is alone responsible for those threats through strict control over foreign policy, and subvert or discredit any domestic opposition to their goals. Clancy is identified as part of this cult and his hero representations typify the cult’s messaging. In opposition to the heroes are two groups of demonized enemies: 1) Soviets, characterized as the ultimate villain and part of an “evil empire”; and 2) anyone opposing the goals of the cult. The first group’s perceived threat is obvious, but the second is mainly domestic political foes characterized as being foolish or immoral for daring to question the need for an enhanced U.S. military under the auspices of American exceptionalism. Clancy’s narratives promote the need for the bolstering of advanced weaponry and strategic arsenals as a Cold War solution. Narratives of U.S. supremacy—based on good prevailing over evil—win over those involving diplomacy and the reduction of tools of death and destruction (Hixson, 1993).

Hixson’s (1993) findings most relatable to this study’s focus are the commonalities of these narratives to diplomatic actions and frames, as well as the Reagan’s approach to the Cold War. Reagan praised Clancy and his administration used Clancy as a spokesman to promote weapon systems and military spending. Clancy narratives were also used as a successful navy



recruitment tool. Another telling example is how the administration provided resources to promote Clancy's texts. For instance, the U.S. military gave production support for the movie version of *Hunt for Red October* while simultaneously refusing to support the production of *Platoon*, a narrative critical of U.S. actions in Vietnam. Like the stories' heroes, these political and diplomatic elites were part of the national security cult who enhanced the narratives. Clancy readers accepted the security cult narrative, bolstering the Cold War ethos and showing how such texts play a "meaningful role in shaping opinion in the real world" (Hixson, 1993, p. 612).

A final pertinent analysis of Cold War popular narratives is Baraban's (2003) study of sociocultural depictions of Russia and Russians from a comparative literature perspective (i.e., Russian versus English studies), addressing the impact of U.S. spy fiction in historical terms. Popular representations of Russians in the 1990s are not random pictures, but embedded with "certain cultural meanings that generate distinct social responses" (Baraban, 2003, p. 112). This *chronotope of culture* denotes a culturally specific perception of a historic episode (i.e., 1990s Cold War) differing from meanings before and after. The researcher argues the Russian people actually viewed the Cold War as a struggle for peace, and were not evildoers bent on the violent overthrow of the U.S. Yet, readers received the latter discourse in 1990s U.S. spy fiction.

The texts promote this discourse in many ways, such as repetitive negative and oversimplified characterizations of Russians, including depicting them as Stalinists and lazy bureaucrats, or linking them to Hitlerism (Baraban, 2003). This work's contribution is not necessarily the actual discourses but identifying how the novels revise history. These are "representative texts" and the researcher views them as engaging in historic ideological re-constructionism. In this case, evil and negative Russian constructs are linked to the past. The waning Cold War period caused a crisis in the 1990s wherein fiction had nowhere to go, so it

turned to the past— resulting in perceptions of present-day Russia to be placed in a perspective of an inaccurate Cold War history (Baraban, 2003).

The narratives longed for the simple Soviet enemy— that is, nostalgia for the days of black-and-white morality and identifiable enemies even after the Cold War was “over” and the U.S. had “won” (Baraban, 2003). While high culture shifted and moved on by demonstrating the complexity of the struggle and even blaming the U.S. through multidimensional characterizations, popular culture stayed in the past. In earlier Cold War periods, it was easy to create a popular Cold War enemy for the West, which was employed as an object of fear. In the 1990s, this recycled history became an object of nostalgia. This work exemplifies how texts are not reflections, but purposefully contribute to the construction of meaning. Texts may include facts and maintain historical accuracy, but its treatment is still fictive. Popular culture acts as if it is in the moment, while history and politics are organically dynamic (Baraban, 2003).

Détente Cold War fictions were set in contemporary society and had to maintain a delicate balance between reality and fantasy to be successful (Gupta, 1991). This balancing act is also observed in the subject thrillers, which further emphasizes the value of interrogating the genre text at the center of this study. The Cold War mass-consumed techno-spy narratives helped contend with the anxieties of nuclear war (Hixson, 1993). Gradually, the détente Cold War period held some promise of peace (i.e., in the 1990s) (Sharrett, 1999), but this changed after 9/11. In response, the subject thrillers were repackaged to address the anxieties of 9/11. In them, Islamic extremism replaced communism to equal all the U.S. has to fight against (Powell, 2011). Both print genre formations offer a way to “better analyze the process through which society absorbs and perpetuates predominant themes of national security discourse” (Hixson, 1993, p. 600). The methodical approach used to unravel this discourse is discussed next.

## V: METHODS

Popular détente Cold War fiction narratives exemplify how those stories support and reflect ideological power of official discourses and were effective at ideological messaging through reliance on supportive cultural elements like macro frames (e.g., fear) and myth (e.g., American exceptionalism). This investigation's central purpose is to reveal and understand ideological power found in post-9/11 counterterrorism thrillers and assesses how the power is situated for transference into potentially detrimental justice narratives, such as those threatening human rights and due process, or promoting anti-democratic forms of law. The language or tactics—the devices—employed to make claims seem commonsensical can be explained through framing processes. Deconstructing framing devices requires customized methods.

This study, like many of the theorists and researchers referenced in the first few chapters (e.g., Altheide, 2002; Entman, 2007; Mumby, 1998), takes an *interpretivist* approach to the analysis of discourse (Strauss, 1987). Applying this paradigm for a qualitative methodical approach is justified here based on these assumptions: Reality is socially-constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003); meaning is constructed through recognizable visual, audial, and written language patterns, or *coding systems*, particular to cultural moments (Hall, 1997); and these coding systems can be organized, analyzed, and interpreted by employing methods to encode and decode that system (Schwandt, 2003). The researcher adhering to an interpretivist approach must be an engaged and active participant in the methodological process—that is, interpretation is only possible when he or she is immersed in the texts and negotiates personal biases as a function of the project's customized method (Berg, 2007). I incorporated the active research approach in my methods and discuss related implications at the end of this chapter.

The theories referenced above (e.g., framing, ideology, and interpretivism) point to many and varied methodical approaches. I adapted, intermixed, and combined this vast grouping of available methods into a case-based model (Berg, 2007) tailored to the study's topics (i.e., dominant, justice-related ideological frames in the data) and data format (i.e., a popular fiction genre text). I did not apply a single prescribed analytical model. Instead, I developed a hybrid of rhetorical criticism (Kuypers, 2006), open coding (Berg, 2007; Strauss, 1987), frame analysis (Gamson, 2001), social semiotics (Berger, 1998; Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001), and constructivist grounded theory techniques (Charmaz, 2003, 2006). I interspersed these approaches and techniques throughout the study to make it innovative, adaptive, dynamic, and interactive—based on the “bricolage” concept (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) that “takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation are added to the puzzle” (p. 5).

I also employed a *spiraling research approach*, wherein ideas, theory, design, data collection, and analysis are in a constant state of reexamining of each element, as opposed to leaving “stages” behind in a linear progression (Berg, 2007). This iterative method was dynamic and responsive—capable of seeing various viewpoints and incorporating a range of approaches and ideas throughout the process.

This project's methodological structure was based on a modified version of Creswell's (2009) model for qualitative textual data analysis<sup>i</sup>. I divided the model into seven areas detailed in the following subsections. The methodological paradigms referenced above were integrated at pertinent locations within this model:

- A. Selection and Preparation of the Data
- B. General Reading and Questioning of the Data
- C. Open Coding

- D. Focused Coding and Memoing
- E. Category Development and Theory Integration
- F. Frame Analysis and Meaning Interpretation of Ideological Claims/Content
- G. Comparing Thriller Ideological Claims/Content to those of the Cold War and GWOT

**A. Selection and Preparation of the Data**

**1. Selection and Summary of 11 Counterterrorism Thrillers**

I first applied genre theory to ensure potential texts had comparability (Hall, 1997).

Genre theory helps examine how post-9/11 counterterrorism thrillers represent a genre product where repetitive, simple, and recognizable textual components like characters, storylines, and plots negotiate content to protect ideological dominance. Genre theory assumes media texts will draw on the cultural moment as source material and direct the audience to recognize and accept themes from that moment as part of cultural verisimilitude (Hall, 1997). My focus on texts from the same genre was crucial to situate the use of genre theory as part of my methods.

The main way I established commonality was through *genre conventions*, which represent a system of signifiers, codes, and signs, and the potential combination of– and relation between– signs that together form a genre (Hall, 1997). Below is each of Hall’s conventions followed by the corresponding ones I identified in the counterterrorism thrillers:

*Format and Medium:* Fictional serial thriller, written between 2002 and 2009

*Subject Matter:* Terror threats, terrorism, counterterrorism, political-military intrigue, U.S. national security action

*Settings and Locations:* Post-9/11 U.S. and locations related to U.S. war on terror, including many international locales

*Narrative Pattern:* Fact-based fiction; terrorism threat; hero saves the day; the counterterrorism threat / saga continues; omnipotent narration

*Character Types:* Male heroes who work for U.S. government (i.e., FASC) in counterterrorism role; terrorist Others; various secondary and tertiary characters

*Plots:* Limited plotlines (i.e., 2 to 4) based on character; future apocalyptic or impending terrorism threats to U.S. or its interests

I made sure each selected thriller shared these common genre conventions, which also became specific reference points for comparative purposes.

In selecting texts with these shared genre conventions, I used the rationale of searching for the most mass-consumed texts, or those having the highest sales levels. To ensure I selected only the most popular from amongst the many available thrillers published between late 2001 and 2009, I included only those spending time on at least two of the following: *New York Times Bestseller's List*<sup>ii</sup>, the *USA Today Best-Seller List*<sup>iii</sup>, and the *Publishers Weekly*<sup>iv</sup> bestseller list.

According to industry and news media sources, verifying and quantifying “best sellers” is challenging because access to raw data is scattered, the exact numbers and processes used to determine rankings are considered trade secrets, and are based on reports from U.S. book wholesalers and retailers versus exact point-of-sale figures (Donadio, 2006; Gross, 2006). The best point-of-sale data on book sales is the *Nielsen BookScan* (Andrews & Napoli, 2006), but I could not obtain that information because of its propriety nature.

I am confident the selected texts are amongst the most popular despite not having access to raw data. For instance, *Publisher's Weekly* reports only .02% of all books published make it on their list once (Maryles, 2006). To further confirm these texts are mass consumed, I also compared the selected counterterrorism thrillers to the *Amazon.com*— the largest U.S. online bookseller— bestseller lists, which are based on cumulative online sales by book genre. In July 2011, the 11 selected thrillers collectively represented four of the top 15 bestsellers for the

“thriller spy genre,” and eight of the top 20 sales of the “political fiction” genre categories utilized by Amazon (<https://www.amazon.com/books>).

I considered author popularity as another selection factor. There are many authors who have written post-9/11 counterterrorism thrillers, but few with long-term bestseller careers and repetitive book sales during 2002-2009. The three thriller writers I selected– Brad Thor, Vince Flynn, and W.E.B Griffin– have all been best-selling authors for between 7 and 25 years. These authors have an ongoing post-9/11 counterterrorism thriller series with a distinct recurring hero and appear to be portrayed as knowledgeable insiders. By reviewing author websites (<http://www.vinceflynn.com>; <http://www.bradthor.com>; <http://www.webgriffin.com>), I determined the 3 authors included in this study had the following number of thrillers in each series published by 2016: Thor, 13; Flynn, 14; and Griffin, 8.

I selected the following Vince Flynn thrillers: *Executive Power* (Flynn, 2003), *Memorial Day* (Flynn, 2004), *Consent to Kill* (Flynn, 2005), and *Extreme Measures* (Flynn, 2008). FASC hero Mitch Rapp, who works for a covert CIA unit called Orion Team, is the focus of Flynn’s thrillers. By author W.E.B. Griffin, I selected the following: *By Order of the President* (Griffin, 2004), *The Hostage* (Griffin, 2006), and *Black Ops* (Griffin, 2008). Griffin’s thrillers revolve around FASC hero, Charlie Castillo, a federal law enforcement officer assigned to work as a “Presidential Agent” on high-profile counterterrorism cases. I selected the following thrillers by Brad Thor: *Blowback* (Thor, 2005), *Takedown* (Thor, 2006), *The Last Patriot* (Thor, 2008), and *The Apostle* (2009). Scot Harvath, an agent assigned to the “Office of Investigative Assistance” in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, is the centerpiece of Thor’s thrillers. I also only chose thrillers interspersed within the historic location of this research. Appendix A includes plot details, bestseller information, and hyperlinks with more information on each text.

As a result of my selection process, I removed several candidates, including the *Teeth of the Tiger* by Tom Clancy and *Liberty* by Stephen Coonts, which seemed representative of the post-9/11 counterterrorism thriller and were written by well-known bestselling authors. I included these texts in earlier versions of this study. While these texts are relatable and have been mass consumed, I concluded they did not represent an ongoing “realistic” narrative about terrorism through repeat publications. The authors I ultimately selected had continuous popular releases throughout the historic timeframe in question and included the repetitive FASC hero.

## **B. General Reading and Questioning of the Data**

The researcher conducting a qualitative textual analysis should first complete a broad reading and questioning of the data after it is collected and organized (Creswell, 2009). This step in my research model was to read the thrillers and get an overall sense of the material. I combined this broad reading with my knowledge obtained mainly from the works detailed in the Literature Review and related to the GWOT to arrive at a baseline of *sensitizing concepts*—specific topical areas of interest corresponding to a series of research aims and pertinent and provocative questions (Charmaz, 2003). Sensitizing concepts are “background ideas that inform the overall research problem [...] act as points of departure from which to begin the study of the data” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 259). I initially developed the following six sets of concepts:

1. National identity— meanings of justice, patriotism, and morality
2. The attribution of causes
3. Masculinities
4. Meanings of safety, security, and surveillance
5. The role of secrecy
6. The blurring of fact and fiction



These sets of concepts corresponded to the expanded list of specific research questions I created during my initial readings of the related literatures, which are listed in Appendix B. I focused on questions intended to keep my research model attuned to one of this study's core objectives: To focus it on legal, constitutional, and other justice-related debates related to terrorism and counterterrorism. For instance, within the *national identity* grouping are questions about due process, rule of law, and the compromising of human rights in the name of "justice." My approach enhanced awareness to the data while keeping in mind the concepts were subject to modification during the more in-depth coding processes— not ending points for evading data analysis or imposing the theories that led to the concepts (Charmaz, 2003).

The concepts guided my general reading and initial data probing, as did *jotting*— a tool that involves writing notes using evocative descriptions intended to later jog the researcher's memory to an initial thought or feeling they had when broadly reading the text (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). My jottings became critical reference points when writing in-depth memos.

Another unseen but crucial line of inquiry when questioning data generally, and more specifically in coding processes, is an awareness of what the texts *omit*. Scholars referenced throughout this study (e.g., Altheide, 2002; Jenkins, 2003) warn about the often-overlooked and unseen narrative. The sensitizing concepts and interpretivist approach is attuned to these omitted discourses. I jotted notes about possible omissions during my general reading, such as justice responses to terrorism (e.g., diplomatic or defensive) absent in place of the dominant irregular, aggressive, and violent responses.

### **1. Use of Qualitative Software and Note about Author Writing Styles**

During the general reading I began using a qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) package<sup>v</sup>, which is a "markup tool system" designed to assist in selecting and sorting coded data,

execute and refine keyword searches, recode and sub-code information, and generate data reports (Hart, 2011; Weinstein, n.d.). The QDAS helped me process a large data set (i.e., from 13 books) and efficiently apply my analysis techniques.

It is expected these types of analyses include subject authors with varied writing styles that are useful points of comparison (Gallagher, 2000). I identified a distinction between Griffin's versus Thor and Flynn's storytelling when comparing the writing style and narrative voice of the three authors during the general reading. That is, Griffin's style is more distant, slower, and loosely plotted and his narration is less politically charged and preachy when contrasted to the economical, up-close, present tense, tightly plotted, and fast-paced style and explicit didactic narration of the latter two authors. Griffin often describes story events and plotlines in the past tense and "off-screen," seemingly more interested in ramblings about historic facts and the U.S. military. This dissimilarity almost caused me to remove Griffin's texts from the dataset, but I concluded they should be included because they fit the same genre conventions and rose to a similar level of continuous popularity. I also found the most prominent textual feature, which is the masculine hero, were nearly identical across all of the stories and the writing differences provided useful contrasts when delineating framing processes.

### **C. Open Coding**

The coding process is based on the assumption the subject texts will contain a system of formulas, cues, modalities, and contexts inherent in the genre and geared to readers familiar with certain cultural references (Berger, 2008; Creswell, 2009). I anticipated the texts would rely on image-based logic to condense and oversimplify perceptions of reality, employing techniques like metaphor, metonymy, mythic speech, and catchphrases to convey meaning (Berger, 2008; Reese & Lewis, 2009). Coding begins the deconstruction of sign systems and signifying

practices (e.g., Asimov & Mader, 2004; Hall, 1980). By encoding-decoding the relational and situational representations fixed by codes, meaning is revealed. Identifying and analyzing specific devices and formulas occurred later in my methodological design after the emergent process of *open coding* (Creswell, 2009), which involves a line-by-line reading (Charmaz, 2003).

The encoding-decoding process in qualitative textual analysis is often associated with the formal and precise linguistic analyses of specific cultural coding systems accomplished in semiotics (Berger, 1998). I did not attempt a strict semiotic analysis, but one akin to *social semiotics* (Berg, 2007; Berger, 2008; Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). I focused on revealing sociocultural meanings, with an awareness of signifiers and the signified, through a broader and more flexible approach. I relied, in part, on Strauss's (1987) set of guidelines for open coding<sup>vi</sup>, which helped me determine the most suitable concepts and categories for the data.

Open coding is not about interpreting meaning (Creswell, 2009). Instead, it involves arranging the data into chunks, or textual packages. By segmenting the images, paragraphs, or sentences into categories and labeling them with a term or phrase, the researcher begins to identify textual elements (Creswell, 2009). As such, "coding is a heuristic— an exploratory problem-solving technique without a specific formula to follow" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). To accomplish these purposes and broader coding goals, I used Creswell's (2009) 8-step coding guide that, like my model, begins with a general read segueing into open coding.

I used predetermined (i.e., *a priori*) and emergent (i.e., *inductive*) codes during open coding. Creswell (2009) argues a combination of emergent and predetermined codes is suitable. My open coding technique involved reading each line of text with an idea of the codes I was anticipating. The primary goal was to cover all of the data and keep in mind while developing

these codes that more is better (Emerson et al., 1995), but care should be taken to only code data relevant to the study to sharpen the use of sensitizing concepts (Charmaz, 2003).

A qualitative codebook should be updated throughout open coding (Creswell, 2009). In my design, the codebook is found in the QDAS, within which the codes were constantly updated, revised, split, and commented upon. I cut and pasted a final version of this list in Appendix C. My process involved developing initial codes, which were added to, refined, and deleted as needed. I also identified and tagged sub codes nested in the larger codes, added comments to codes, linked comparable codes, and grouped codes into sets. I completed coding procedures for each individual thriller. Later, I compared results, conducted searches, generated reports, and cut-and-pasted portions of the data into working memos. The QDAS assisted me in sorting data and engaging in open coding. I kept the codes flexible and dynamic, or as *active codes* that help make visible interrelated processes rather than isolated and static topics (Charmaz, 2003, p. 261).

Selecting a small representational portion of the data for a pre-open coding helps to establish a baseline (Creswell, 2009). I did this by choosing two thrillers (i.e., Griffin's [2004] *By Order of the President* and Flynn's [2008] *Extreme Measures*). Through my general reading, the pre-coding, and ongoing reference to the sensitizing concepts, I developed a tentative codebook with these code groupings:

Us versus Them	Attributions of Terrorism Causes
Counterterrorism Techniques	Counterterrorism Tools
Civil and Human Rights	Code of Conduct/Rules of Engagement
Fact versus Fiction	Hero and Masculinities
Inciting Fear	Interrogation/Rendition
Military versus Policing	Patriotism
Presidential Role	Role of Religion
Safety and Security	Secrecy
Sub-Masculinities/Femininities	Surveillance
Ticking-Time-Bomb	American exceptionalism

These initial codes were broad and generic in substance, but purposefully short and simple as a functional label (Charmaz, 2003). I updated a description of each within the QDAS codebook tabs as they became more descriptive, focused, and organized.

#### **D. Focused Coding and Memoing**

After organizing the data, the general reading, open coding, and refining a codebook, I conducted *focused coding*, or a “fine grain analysis” intended to develop thematic groupings and sub-codes to better examine how those themes interrelate (Emerson et al., 1995). Focused coding is the second stage of coding directed at synthesizing and explaining large volumes of data and deciding which initial codes make the most analytic sense (Charmaz, 2006).

Focused codes are refined through *initial memoing*, wherein the researcher writes about each code grouping and codes begin to change, split, and become refined to only the most germane and credible (Emerson et al., 1995). Initial memo writing is “aimed at the construction of conceptual analyses” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 261) to bridge coding and the themes used to develop the final product. They should be written on the surface, through free writing, and without interjection from outside sources (Charmaz, 2003). This technique kept me focused on analysis and engaged with data description, meaning, and interpretation— as opposed to the broader purpose of open coding— to organize data. My initial memos were extemporaneous and open-ended. Memo writing must also emphasize raw data (Charmaz, 2003). I did this by cutting and pasting excerpts from the thrillers seeming to exemplify developing topical categories and avoiding the urge to interject established ideas.

The consistent use of comparative methods (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss, 1987) was another key component of my approach. Focused coding and initial memoing involves comparing codes and sub-codes across all incidences within the data. For example, I developed a memo called

“soft-hearted dupes” wherein I recorded and discussed certain thriller characters depicted as working for the U.S. government and being “liberal,” “weak,” or otherwise soft on terrorism. I coded these dupes as subordinated versions of masculinities and femininities positioned against those characters coded as heroic and seeming to represent the dominant masculinity. Some of the dupes were also attributed as being a “cause” of terrorism and a direct threat to the hero, thus fitting into the *attribution of terrorism causes* code. I had to then compare the different versions of the dupe in order to arrive at a better understanding of the meanings.

#### **E. Theme Development and Theory Integration**

The main purpose at this step is the gradual progression of codes, which are intended to point the researcher to the right places to label the data and arrive at *themes*, or *categories* (Creswell, 2009), through constant and increasingly intense memo writing. My objective in this step was based on the recommendation that the goal of textual coding is inducing five to seven themes based on a combination of anticipated findings, the recurrence and frequency of ideas, or the discovery of compelling, surprising, or unusual ideas (Creswell, 2009). The intent is to focus on a limited amount of themes selected because there is a substantial amount of data found on them and / or they engage theories and findings in other works and the sensitizing concepts (Emerson et al., 1995). Some ideas of categories rose to the top, such as *magical tools and techniques*, but I remained cognizant to whatever materialized from my interaction with the data. I developed numerous initial memos on a broad range of categories. At first, I had too many to codes to use. But through increasingly focused coding and memoing, I removed those not relatable to the research goals or those with not enough support in the data, or subsumed them into each other. I then decided upon the code groupings the were most compelling. The codes developed into these six interrelated themes and corresponding memos: 1) Fools and foils, 2)

special operations cowboy hero, 3) U.S as exceptional and national security emphasis, 4) counterterrorism tools and techniques, 5) facts portrayed as truth, and 6) impending doom.

When developing my themes, I avoided inserting specific theories, references, and previously recorded meanings into my memos. I took Charmaz's (2006) advice to attempt to *induce* findings when first working with the data. Yet, I found it impossible to avoid the result that— through the sensitizing concepts and from having read many topical works— theory and data eventually becomes entangled (Emerson et al., 1995). A comparison between established theories and those derived from the data of the study is essential at some point (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2009). Thus, I integrated the findings into a theoretical framework during this stage. This involved both developing my own theoretical ideas about what I found in the data (i.e., in the form of categories) and the established theories in the theory and literature review sections.

Another technique I used to hone in on categories was *clustering*, which involves developing an alterable visual map of the codes (Charmaz, 2006). I used Microsoft PowerPoint to arrange different and interrelated codes, which helped with comparisons and visualizing categories in the data. This led me to develop Figures 1-5, which help clarify my findings.

After category development, I focused on developing *integrated memos*, which is when writing becomes an in-depth analysis of how meanings are conveyed that incorporate theories and sources related to the subject (Emerson et al., 1995). Charmaz (2006) agrees memo writing continues into an advanced stage and develops into a crucial tool to help the researcher: “(a) [Grapple] with ideas about the data, (b) to set an analytical course, (c) to refine categories, (d) to define the relationships among various categories, and (e) to gain a sense of confidence and competence in their ability to analyze the data” (p. 262). I kept my memos at this point provisional, preliminary, and partial, as recommended by Charmaz (2006).

## **F. Frame Analysis and Meaning Interpretation**

So far in my methodological process my sensitizing concepts made codes visible, which in-turn made themes visible. The next step in explaining and understanding the data was using the themes to identify frames and, thus, the ideological meanings those frames represent. This step involved reengaging frame theory and framing analysis to interrogate the data using techniques, ideas, and approaches from framing studies and related areas of content analysis and social semiotics. I returned to the raw data to further understand *how* certain frames were constructed to identify when themes end and framing begins (Reese, 2009). I also incorporated Kuypers (2006) approach to rhetorical criticism in news media frame analysis to enhance my close textual read. Kuypers's (2006) method, which was particularly germane to my work because of its focus on the GWOT, involved the gradual progression from themes– as general topical areas– to frames, or the use of rhetoric by the framing agent to achieve specific goals. I paid close attention to how the themes could be comprehended as having active purposes.

Once I began to recognize the frames' activities and could name them, I further honed in on the subcomponents, or specific framing mechanisms. Frames manifest via the “presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). These symbolic devices are specific linguistic structures such as metaphors, visual icons, exemplars, and catchphrases that communicate frames (Reese & Lewis, 2009), and signal the reader to a larger unit of discourse containing policy positions. I considered these recommendations when looking for these positions: 1) the production processes that alert researchers to issues of power and resources; 2) the functioning of texts on various analytical levels; and 3) the complex interaction of texts with readers (Gamson, 1987).



## 1. Identifying Framing Devices

Symbolic framing devices are the precise formulas, elements, processes, and figures employed in the texts. I found these mechanisms operate on various levels, such as at the macro level in the established war, patriarchal, and fear frames; as well as on more specific levels, such as references to privacy rights of citizens, FASC's use of police powers, and due process rights of terrorism suspects. I focused on these devices through an iterative process of switching between the data and my core literatures. This step was also intended to further reincorporate key theories, such as Othering (Hall, 1997), the American monomyth (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002), and moral panic (Cohen, 1980), into the analysis (Charmaz, 2006). The following is a list of interrelated symbolic framing devices within the categories and the corresponding theories and techniques I used to identify and interrogate the frames:

*Binary Oppositions:* Paradigmatic analysis involves searching for hidden patterns of character oppositions to help reveal meaning and framing processes (Berger, 1998). Genre text conventions construct meaning through various shifting polarities, including those in characters, plotlines, themes, where ideological tensions are played out (Hall, 1997). I went through the data and made a list of oppositions tied to key characters and events. I paid particular attention to masculine versus feminine representations, as gender tends to be the main duality found in genre texts (Hall, 1997).

*Mythic Elements and Monomyth:* This also involved a focus on the binary and the specific structures of mythic speech. I focused on mythic terms such as "God" and "Armageddon" and myth such as the ticking-time-bomb. A more recognizable device employing a series of mythic elements is Campbell's (1988, 2008) monomyth. I paid close attention to structures that seemed to coincide with the hero's journey.

*Speech Figures:* This technique is akin to Gamson's (2001) advice to search for topical catchphrases, as well as the recommendation to make a list of speech figures identified by keywords that can be detected in the data and systematically organized in coding software (Koenig, 2004). I listed out speech figures I found and ran key word searches to further refine categories and delve into the use of charged terms like "9/11," "rag head," "operator," and "liberal." I did not attempt to quantify usage, but rather identify and capture the use of key figures of speech. I also remained aware of *metaphors of terrorism*, which are simple symbolic frames of warfare, policing, epidemiology, and prejudice used when constructing terrorism in the media (Crenshaw et al., 2008).

*Settings, Plot Devices, and Symbolic Imagery:* I determined it was important to examine the use of symbolic settings, plotlines, and images used to convey meaning. These techniques include looking for icons (Gamson, 2001), spectacle in genre convention analysis (Hall, 1997), gendered depictions of geopolitical locales and movement (Dodds, 2008), and symbolism in popular culture visual forms (Asimov & Mader, 2004). I noted plot location and how imagery was used in the texts. I was also alert to symbolic spaces like the White House, international locales, or places that signify poverty or lack of civility (e.g., war zones). I also looked for the use of spectacle and iconic symbols.

*Alignment with Primary Frameworks and Macro-Framing Processes:* Content frames are key to identifying and sorting cultural meanings (Benford & Snow, 2000). The idea is to broadly identify and organize these content frames into master frames or metanarratives, including the established *ethno-nationalist* and *liberal-individualist citizenship* frames (Goffman, 1974). I paid attention when more relatable and recent frames were employed (e.g., fear frames [Altheide, 2002]). I also treated the U.S. gender system (Connell, 1987) as one such primary framework and looked for devices using those representations.

*Factual Representations:* Works referenced above demonstrated how *24* (Van Veen, 2009) and Cold War thrillers (Gallagher, 2000) used actual events, factoids, and high tech gadgetry to enhance messaging. *Factualization* within fiction enhances believability (Martin & Pedro, 2006). I focused on titles, tools, organizations, and other devices framed as fact in the texts.

*Intertextual References:* This relates to factualization but more precisely involves a form of intertextuality (Fiske, 1987): Textual references of actual terrorism events and/or related justice issues/debates occurring in U.S. (as depicted in news media) during or around the same time frame as portrayed in the subject text. I paid close attention and coded these devices, such as references to military engagements, terrorism-related trials, and those related to the Bush GWOT.

*Character Typologies, Tropes, Relationships, and Demarcations:* Various popular culture and mythical character representations (e.g., the Other, superhero, and foil) act as the devices that embody meaning as the main way plotlines are developed. I paid attention to characters as representations, which interact, have conflict, and are depicted in ways that embody symbolic meaning (Wright, 1977).

## **2. Framing Processes and Interpreting Meanings**

Once these patterns became increasingly recognizable and predictable, I was able to confirm framing processes and became confident in the development of frames and sub-frames involved with ideological messaging. I initially identified six frames<sup>vii</sup>, which I eventually

realized were functioning as a framework consisting of several frames and sub-frames working together to construct meaning.

After establishing the frames and how they made ideological claims, I then examined meanings and developed theories through writing up findings— that is, placing the findings within a theoretical argument (Charmaz, 2006). Returning to the conception of ideology's basic structure (i.e., diagnosis, prognosis, and rationale [Benford & Snow, 2000]), the purpose of this methodological step was to use the writing process to interpret ideology. To accomplish this, I relied on the writing advice of the core theorists from this methodical model (e.g., Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Emerson et al., 1995), such as rendering through writing and developing thick descriptions. The writing process helped me develop thematic narratives and create theories consistent with this study's goal of identifying dominant ideological justice frames in post-9/11 thrillers and understanding what they mean and why they are so important.

While writing, I engaged in a back and forth between the content versus process (Oliver & Johnston, 2005). This is how I engaged the findings and is reflected in the approach I used to write up the findings in the following chapters. Thus, the findings represent a constant exchange between my interpretations of how the thriller authors framed meanings and what they represent. When attempting this type of theory integration, the researcher should search for evidence to disprove existing theories and those key ideas being developed by the researcher, which Berg (2007) called *interrogative hypothesis testing*. I always returned to the data to search for any evidence contrary to my conclusions as I worked through my writings, and either added the inconsistent data or removed the idea if the contradiction made the finding lack credibility.

Constant comparative methods at every research level are essential for the methodological paradigms I utilized (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss, 1987). In addition to comparing

data points, such as between the texts and text groupings by author, codes, and categories to theories and related literature, such as the studies of 24, I also compared dominant ideological frames and consequences against those of the détente Cold War fictions and Bush GWOT.

**G. Integrated Comparative Analysis: *Cold War and GWOT***

This step allowed my findings to be compared to fundamental aspects of institutional phenomenon and to established findings, as well as to evaluate the theoretical credibility of my analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Such an effort provides for a socio-historic grounding useful in examining contemporary dominant ideology (Thompson, 1990)— here, in analyzing similarities and differences to the last threat narrative (Ricigliano & Allen, 2006) where established and similar content is found (i.e., the détente Cold War), as well as comparisons to the official ideology of the GWOT. My focus was, again, on comparing content related to U.S. law, justice, and security. I wrote a set of integrated memos focused on the intersection of such issues while reflecting on the socio-historical perspective of the research period (Thompson, 1984).

I compared the thriller ideologies with those found by researchers of détente Cold War techno-thriller novels (hereafter: I term these “novels” to distinguish them from the subject texts), such as the works found in the literature review. This was based on the premise the novels represent the last set of comparable texts and several ideological positions were borrowed from the Cold War for the GWOT (Jackson, 2011; Winkler, 2006). I also compared thriller ideologies with established dominant state ideologies to better understand how power is channeled and ideology is accepted. These comparisons are made at the intersection of ideological frames, such as fear, war, and secrecy, which for the GWOT were constructed primarily in news media (Entman, 2003; Ricigliano & Allen, 2006). This is the work of intertextuality, as introduced in Chapter I and accomplished by 24 researchers (e.g., Van Veeren,

2009). The analysis of how both narratives are similar and different to the thriller narratives– and the key implications of that analysis– are integrated into my findings.

#### **H. The Active Process: *Researcher Location and Reflexivity***

Because active researchers are obliged to locate themselves in the subject and adapt with the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), I immersed myself in the texts as an instrumental part of this study. This *analysis of interaction* assumed my background would influence my readings, analyses, and the study's conclusions (Berg, 2007).

The subjective and value-laden role of an active researcher must consider *reflexivity* and its impact on individual interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; DeVault, 1990; Hertz, 1996). This requires the constant awareness of *location*. The researcher must reflect on his or her position in life, such as citizenship, race, ethnicity, class, and age, as well as the other influences of power and politics (Berg, 2007). This self-analysis and awareness must be present at every research step, from considering why one selects a certain topic to observing how an individual's location influences data analysis. A researcher is reflexive when they are aware of their internal dialogue and attempt to understand how they came to know something– that is, what caused them to have certain worldviews. An ongoing conversation with the internal self as a process of active construction (i.e., vs. the simple finding of facts or reality) leads to more reflection and insights into individualized origins of knowledge (Berg, 2007).

To reach the appropriate level of reflection throughout writing this study, I constantly reflected how I come from a position of considerable privilege, such as being an upper-middle class and a white male. I was born, raised, and spent my entire life living in safe and comfortable geographic areas of the U.S. I was cognizant of the individualized cultural perspective that engrains assumptions, worldviews, and biases in you starting in childhood

(Berg, 2007). This self-awareness is essential for interaction with the data. Examples I watched for during my research included my likely partiality towards enticing but illusory “common sense” ideas of American exceptionalism (Walt, 2011) and masculinized roles of white men in U.S. culture. I paid attention to my lack of understanding in pertinent subject areas, such as my complete lack of experience and education with regard to Islam.

Reflexivity also involves awareness of how practical experience influences topical and data interaction and interpretation (Berg, 2007). I am and was in a professional position— a U.S. federal agent and former U.S. Army intelligence officer— imbued with power. I have engaged in counterterrorism activities related to the justice topics of this study, such as applying powers derived from the USA Patriot Act, participating in classified court proceedings, deploying with the U.S. Army on a GWOT mission, and working on criminal “terrorism” cases. Being an active and ongoing member of the U.S. police and military subculture comes with complex insider-status and confidentiality considerations<sup>viii</sup> restricting my discussion of actual cases, agents, and organizations. Nonetheless, my experiential knowledge puts me in a unique situation.

My access to a secretive and protective subculture for over 20 years gives me perspective and context, as well as an understanding of the inner workings (e.g., structures and institutions) and culture (e.g., acronyms and language; customs) of the U.S. military and police. I have worked with actual counterterrorism FASC that appear to represent a solution to terrorism in the subject texts. This gives me an “insider’s view” into the subculture depicted in the texts— one of the primary objectives of interpretivistic, qualitative work (Berg, 2007).

Another consideration of my location is the interplay of my own popular media culture consumption versus my experiential reality, which led me to initiate this research. I was a non-academic consumer of counterterrorism thrillers and avid viewer of *24*, both of which I found

entertaining, appealing, and cathartic. Yet, I gradually observed a disconnection between the justice realities I experienced in law enforcement fieldwork and my GWOT military deployment, versus the texts I consumed— that is, a tension between two internal readings. Just as Asimov and Mader (2004) found of lawyers exposed to legal dramas and interviewed about their interpretations, I perceived my own media consumption was out of sync with the justice realities I experienced. I was at different times *inside* and *outside* of the myth (Barthes, 1957/2012), representing two versions of the same phenomenon— a disparity at the core of this study.

## I. Chapter IV Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> In designing a qualitative model, Creswell (2009) suggests an interactive approach based on various levels that begin with raw data and end at the interpretation of meaning in the data. These levels are induced in the following steps: 1) Organize and prepare data, 2) read through all the data, 3) coding data, 4) description of data, 5) advance themes represented in the narratives, and 6) interpretation of meaning.

<sup>ii</sup> The “NYTBSL” is the preeminent list of best-selling books in the U.S., published weekly in the *New York Times Book Review* magazine and is based on weekly sales obtained from approximately 3,000 bookstores and wholesalers representing over 28,000 retail outlets (*The New York Times Staff*, n.d.). The process for bestseller selection is a trade secret, but is based on individual sales as opposed to wholesale sales.

<sup>iii</sup> According to *USA Today* (n.d.), that newspaper’s best-seller list includes the top 300 best-selling books each week. The list is based on a computation of weekly nationwide retail sales. Included are over 1.5 million volumes from approximately 4,700 chain, independent, discount, and online booksellers.

<sup>iv</sup> I was unable to determine the method used by *Publishers Weekly* to select bestsellers, mainly because it is considered by the periodical to be a trade secret. However, according to *Publisher’s Weekly’s* website (*Publishers Weekly Staff*, n.d.), it is based on a weekly survey of small and large retailers.

<sup>v</sup> The QDASMS analyzer for Mac OSX is a qualitative data analysis tool developed at the University of Washington. The program was designed as a free software program for coding and analyzing qualitative texts. More information can be found at: <http://www.tamsys.sourceforge.net>.

<sup>vi</sup> Strauss (1987) offers four strategies for open coding: “(1) Ask the data a specific and consistent set of questions, (2) analyze the data minutely, (3) frequently interrupt the coding to write a theoretical note, and (4) never assume the analytic relevance of any traditional variable, such as age, sex, social class and so forth until the data shows it to be relevant” (p. 33). Strauss cautions to make sure all texts in the dataset have been consumed, considered, and reconsidered before making grand conclusions about meaning.

<sup>vii</sup> Here are the initial frames I revealed: 1) The fools and foils frame, 2) special operations cowboy-hero frame, 3) the U.S. exceptionalism and security sublime frame, 4) magical counterterrorism tools and techniques frame, 5) the facts as truth frame, and 6) the impending doom frame.

## PART 2: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### OVERVIEW

The following four chapters detail five distinct thematic frames discovered in the thrillers that concurrently and collectively construct an ideological framework necessitating and legitimizing specific conceptions of law, justice, and security. The findings reveal that the framing processes are organized as issue frames (Gamson, 2001) and problem frames (Entman, 1993)— features that help explain the framing functions in the texts.

The first two frames are repetitive and mobilize each story. The *imminent doom frame* (hereafter: *doom frame*) repeatedly constructs a terror threat characterized as persistent, massive, and immediate. The *U.S. homeland frame* (hereafter: *homeland frame*) constructs an idealized model of the U.S. with a masculine power structure, political worldview focused on national security patriotism and superiority, and cultural image conforming to a variation of patriarchal myth (Caputi, 2004). Imminent terror plots threaten the illusory and idealized nation constructed in the homeland frame and rely on themes recognized as provoking fear and paranoia.

The first two frames narrow and distort the view of the U.S. terrorism problem and prepare the storyline for a new war (Gibson, 1994) to protect American exceptionalism (Walt, 2011), and constantly invigorate a national security imperative (Sears, 2009). By presenting dramatic “what-if” terrorism (Davis, 2006) in the doom frame, more credible threats (e.g., small independent homegrown terror cells [Bergen, Hoffman, & Tiedemann, 2011]; long-term plots [Cole, 2008]; suicide attacks in foreign countries [Hoffman, 2006]) are ignored. By constructing a narrow vision of “America” in the homeland frame, the diverse and multicultural interests, views, and voices found in the post-9/11 U.S. (Deflem, 2004; Gunaratna, 2004) are discounted.



With the problem established, the *Islamic extremist frame* attributes the main cause of the problem. Threat in these stories is consistently presented in various radical Islamist character typologies— as various Muslim-as-threat formations— posed to harm or already invading the “homeland” from the outside. These foreign Others (Hall, 1997; Said, 1978) are dehumanized, are well situated and outfitted to wreak mayhem, and follow no rules of traditional warfare. This frame contains the most nuanced characterizations and is complicated by corresponding realities, such as how contemporary terrorists do claim to act in the name of a radical, militant version of Islam (Hoffman, 2006). The framing nonetheless implicitly labels the religion of Islam and Muslim peoples as being the cause of the problem frame and having no role in the solution to the issues and problems presented in the narratives.

In the *failures frame*, standard responses to terrorism, like long-term criminal investigations, military action in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, and diplomacy adhering to U.S. and international laws, are delegitimized and discounted. These failures are represented in actions predestined to fail and through institutional and character foiling (Gieryn, 1983). This frame signifies a set of *counter-ideologies* (Rafter, 2000) to those the dominant textual framework represents. The distorted versions of terrorism erode rationality, logic, and democratic legal ideals several have argued need to be applied when thinking about and responding to terrorism (e.g., Cole & Lobel, 2007; Hoffman, 2006). In the process, many of the actual complexities of justice within the domain of terrorism are sidestepped.

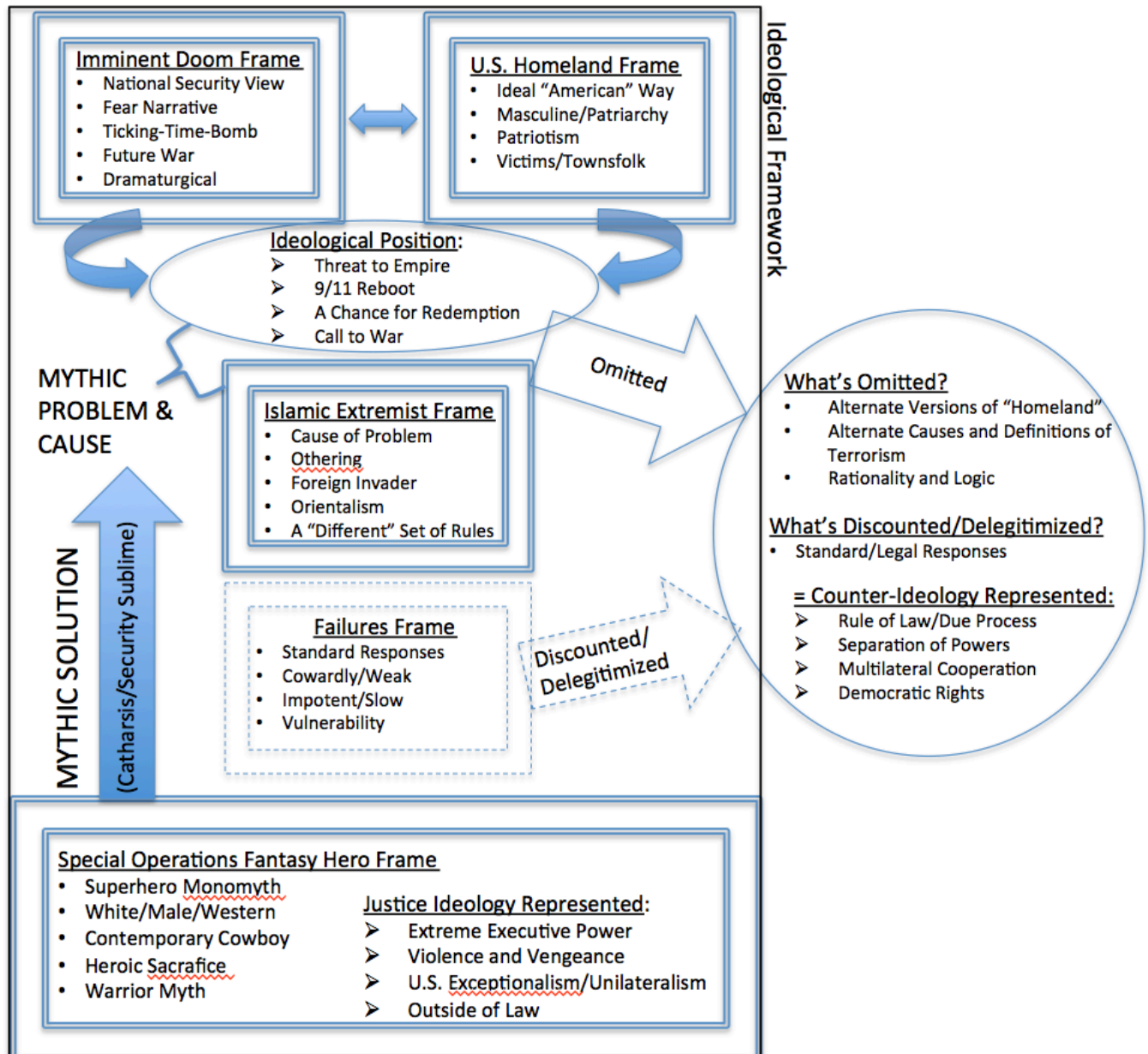
The frames discussed so far act together to necessitate a justice solution represented in the *special operations fantasy superhero frame* (hereafter: *superhero frame*). The true-to-life hero constructed in this frame becomes a mythicized solution to the problem constructed in the doom, homeland, and Islamic extremist frames, and is simultaneously dichotomized against the

failed responses. He is invariably depicted as white, having stereotypically attractive masculine traits (Donaldson, 1993), being from the U.S., possessing hyper-masculine (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988) physical and mental prowess, and being an expert in national security, terrorism, and Islam. I conclude he's a contemporary superhero embodying a special operations trope.

Through a series of character interactions and demarcations he becomes the centerpiece, and his exceptional patriotic nature relies upon and replicates the American monomyth (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). In each story, he (re) establishes heroism through a moralistic *call to action*, by entering the *counterterrorism shadows*, and when using *special tools and techniques* to confront the enemy—acts often done outside of the law.

Through an idealized male point of view, solutions that would logically seem exceedingly violent, excessive, irregular, illegal and in violation of basic rights and principals within a transparent and impartial democratic U.S. justice system, are framed as being the natural, common sense (Gramsci, 1971) response. Through hyper-masculine performances this political rendering reveals support for extreme and unfettered executive power. The process constructs a distinct dominant ideological position while dismantling the ideals, morals, and principles represented in the failures frame.

Below, Figure 1 illustrates the ideological interpretive framework (Kuypers, 2006) accomplished by the five frames. The frame ordering and format of the dissertation chapters are not intended to suggest a linear process. The framing effects are developed throughout the storylines, albeit the hero only temporarily defeats the terror so a need for a terror war remains and the serial story form is ritualized. This normalization allows for a formula of actions and cues that promote familiarity and continuity expected of genre texts (Hall, 1997), which unify the hero traits perpetuating the narratives and ideological constructs.



**Figure 1:** Framework of ideological framing process in subject texts

My chronological analysis of the subject texts revealed a gradual decrease in the intensity of its interpretive framework as the texts' publishing dates move away from 9/11. Something similar happened in 24 after the show received negative news media attention that the most popular serial television program was repeatedly portraying stereotypically Muslim terrorists. In

response, later episodes in that season depicted Russians and even U.S. citizens as terrorists, opposed to the boilerplate darker skinned Arab (Mayer, 2007). Although my study does not examine the reason for such shifts, they are noticeable. By lining up all of the 11 thrillers chronologically, I observed gradual nuances in portrayals of “terrorists” and those supporting them, a decrease the magnitude and immediacy (and corresponding increases in the complexity) of the terror plots against the U.S., and a decline in the number and intensity of violent acts (e.g., torture) by the heroes. A thriller written in 2003, for example, adheres more doggedly to the framework than one written in 2008.

I will highlight areas in the findings where this shift is present and I will further discuss the phenomenon when discussing conclusions and proposals for ongoing research. Nevertheless, the texts collectively adhere to the model depicted in Figure 1. The shifts represent only variations and degrees to which they meet the messaging. The shifts reflect nothing contrary to the framework’s ideological messaging.

## V: IMMINENT DOOM AND U.S. HOMELAND FRAMES

These first two frames establish the U.S. as being in the midst of a *new terror war* (Davis, 2006; Gibson, 1994). This new war is constructed by accessing known sources of terror fears, such as 9/11-style threats, in dramatized but plausible “what-if” plots fixated on the U.S. and perpetrated by Islamic extremists. The frames demonstrate how the U.S. is constantly vulnerable to a form of super-terrorism (Van Veeren, 2009). The frames construct the U.S. as an idealized version of an exceptional homeland— one that could be destroyed if the war is lost. This danger triggers a need restore the honor and safety of the homeland through conflict resolution. This is how the doom and homeland frames broadly diagnose and develop a recurring problem, which is how problem framing is expected to function (Entman, 1993).

### A. The Imminent Doom Frame

The doom frame creates a linear and progressive threat, initiating the first step in the causal sequence of issue framing (Gamson, 2001). The framing devices presented below demonstrate how the interpretive framework constructs an ever-present terror threat that mobilizes each story. This mirrors 24’s super-terrorism theme, where the world,

[Is] a very, very dangerous place to live. It is a world filled with nasty but familiar threats targeting U.S. citizens: car bombs, chemical attacks, hostage takings, presidential assassination attempts, nuclear explosions, train bombings, and radiological attacks, all the result of terrorism and all on a scale never seen before. (Van Veeren, 2009, p. 372)

The framing of an endless array of possible apocalyptic threats follows a U.S. popular culture tradition originating during World War II after Pearl Harbor and reflected in mass fear of nuclear attack during the Cold War (Gibson, 1994; Van Veeren, 2009). Post-9/11 popular movies like *The Sum of All Fears* (based on Clancy’s espionage novel) represent a rebirth of strategic fictions relying on impending terrorist-based nuclear war to perpetuate fear (Davis, 2006). Such

hypothetical plot devices play into existing anxieties of mass death and destruction and are justified by the assumption there is intellectual value in “thinking the unthinkable.”

Post-9/11 techno-thriller imagery organizes U.S. global policy to reinvigorate “a grand fight against its own worst enemy— its future” (Davis, 2006, p. 36), as previously accomplished by Cold War fictions (Gallagher, 2000). Future war-storytelling is embedded in the U.S. mythos and confuses probable and realistic security threats with more dramaturgical ones portraying the possibility of any imagined scenario (Davis, 2006). By making the U.S. appear to be in a developing state of emergency and needing to defend itself, popular media texts make it more difficult to have a realistic debate about, and give logical attention to, actual or more likely threats. According to Davis (2006), the result is ideologically charged responses are justified by improbable, fictionalized events. A comparable real-world example is the justification of the U.S. preemptive war in Iraq based on the Bush administration’s assertions Saddam Hussein “could” hypothetically attack the U.S. with weapons of mass destruction (Davis, 2006).

In the thrillers, the sense of emergency is first apparent in the doom frame through depictions of rampant terror threats. Impending plots directly threatening the U.S. or its interests are presented as occurring on a repetitive and massive scale. *Takedown’s* (hereafter: *Takedown*; Thor, 2006) narrator broadly asserts this doomsday situation when claiming that contrary to,

[What] the White House press secretary was spinning to the media, terrorist plots against America and American interests were not on the decline. They were in fact on a marked upswing [...Every] attack the United States thwarted, three more popped up in its wake. The operations tempo in the intelligence, military, and law enforcement communities was higher than ever [...The U.S.] was running well beyond the capacity and it was only a matter of time before the overtaxed system collapsed. (Thor, 2006, pp. 5-6)

The narrator’s basis for the increase in terror threats and poor status of U.S. national security is unclear, but it is depicted in an authoritative voice with precise insider knowledge— a factual representation suggesting the U.S. is on the verge of collapse.

The texts' plots put into motion act-of-war style impending or occurring threats, which include: Crashing a stolen airliner into the Liberty Bell (*By Order of the President* [hereafter: *By Order of the President*; Griffin, 2004]), hostage taking of high-value U.S. persons (*The Hostage* [hereafter: *The Hostage*; Griffin, 2006]), poisoning the U.S. currency with a chemical weapon (*Blowback* [hereafter: *Blowback*; Thor, 2005]), the development of chemical weapons in a plant in the Republic of Congo intended for use against the U.S. (*Black Ops* [hereafter: *Black Ops*; Griffin, 2008]), a military-style assault on New York City (*Takedown*), an attack on Washington D.C. to culminate with the bombing of the U.S. National Counter Terrorism Center (*Extreme Measures* [hereafter: *Extreme Measures*; Flynn, 2008]), and nuclear weapons being smuggled into the U.S. to be detonated at a gathering of political dignitaries (*Memorial Day* [hereafter: *Memorial Day*; Flynn, 2004]). There are also revenge-style assassination attempts by terrorists against the heroes and U.S. President (e.g., *Black Ops*). These plots are focused on harming the U.S., versus dangers to other countries or conflicts unfolding in distant lands.

Along with menacing physical attacks on the U.S. or its symbolically valuable citizens, the stories simultaneously construct immediate dangers of the spread of extremist Islamic terror ideology or the empowerment of its supporters. In *Executive Power* (hereafter: *Executive Power*; Flynn, 2003), a terrorist group plans to assassinate Palestinian and Saudi leaders to induce war in the Middle East, alienate the U.S. from Israel, and secure a national political office in Palestine for an Islamic extremist. In this plotline, which is complex relative to the other thrillers, the “ultra –orthodox Wahhabi sect had spread like an unruly weed” (Flynn, 2003, p. 376) across Saudi Arabia and was on the verge of establishing a Palestinian state and destroying Israel. In the story, Saudi authorities depicted as Islamic radicals threaten the U.S. with suspending oil if

the U.S. intercedes. The U.S. reliance on oil is shown to be a weakness preventing an aggressive U.S. response. Meanwhile, extremists are depicted as successfully spreading radical ideology.

A similarly complex terror plot in *The Last Patriot* (hereafter: *The Last Patriot*; Thor, 2008) involves Islamic terrorists attempting to prevent, through a series of assassinations, the release of a recently discovered ancient manuscript proving the prophet Muhammad had a final “revelation” that Islam must *not* be violent. The story’s Islamic extremists intend to destroy the document because it endangers their cause. This factual representation reveals a broader conspiracy the narrator describes as a campaign to destroy the U.S. “from within, quietly, peacefully, even legally” (Thor, 2008, p. 63). A secondary character details how the threat is spreading because of inaction within the U.S:

‘By not fighting back, by allowing groups in particular like FAIR [the Foundation of American Islamic Relations] to obfuscate what is really happening, and not insisting that the Islamists adapt to our culture, the United States is cutting its own throat with a politically correct knife and helping to further the Islamists’ agenda.’ (Thor, 2008, p. 64)

In response, another character clarifies the need to “take the fight” to the Islamists. The message here is not to debate the existence of a conspiracy to take over the U.S. from within. The threat is well underway and is demonstrated later in the narrative when terrorists easily infiltrate the U.S. to plan an attack. Plots involving the proliferation of Islamic-related ideology are framing devices based upon terrorism metaphors (Crenshaw et al., 2008). Threats are constructed as *epidemiological* (Crenshaw et al., 2008)—envisioned as the proliferation of a silently spreading disease, or a weed-like infestation. The threat in *The Last Patriot* is also an example of a later thriller (2008) wherein the terror plot is more complex and not as imminent.

*The Last Patriot*’s plot illustrates another theme I found in the textual framework: A primary reason the U.S. is vulnerable is because it has become too politically correct. Plots about U.S. inability to “correctly” identify a group as an “enemy” is a result of political



correctness that leaves “us” vulnerable. This idea stems from the U.S. *culture wars*, which is an ongoing sociopolitical discourse pitting conservative / “traditional” (political right) views against liberal / progressive (political left) views (Kellner, 2010). The former views include favoring the dominance of capitalism, military might, heterosexual family values, and individualism over government. The latter position prefers civil liberties and equal rights over market dominance, and argues the government is needed to ensure social fairness. Generally speaking, these wars see each perspective as “winning” at different moments in U.S. history, such as the right reaching a pinnacle during the Reagan era. Being overly politically correct has a negative connotation of cultural weakness associated with the left’s agenda of extreme sensitivity to diversity and multiculturalism, such as catering to “non-traditional” religions and races (Kellner, 2010).

In the subject texts, Islam is depicted in a homogeneous way and embodying negative values antithetical to America’s “Christian” values. The texts imply Muslims are not adapting to U.S. culture and their values are spreading. The U.S. is failing to take action largely because of political sensitivities. This will be discussed further as a way to depict an “American” populace as signifying an inactive response in contrast to the heroes’ effective violent actions.

### **1. Constructing Terror Threats as Familiar and Believable: *It Could Happen***

The notion of “it has not happened does not mean it cannot happen,” or thinking the unthinkable, is a doomsday approach mirroring those circulated in dominant post-9/11 news media and official GWOT discourses (Altheide, 2005; U.S. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004), and is another example of intertextual references being employed as a framing device. The claim Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction— although untrue— was initially portrayed by the media as plausible (Davis, 2006). The subject thrillers mimic this approach, helping to further blur the lines between fact and fiction. The texts’ plots cannot be

entirely outlandish fantasy scenarios, such as James Bond-style incredible “end of world” situations (Britton, 2005) or those set outside of the post-9/11 U.S., because they maintain the impression of being factual and about the realities of an existing place and time. Thus, the thrillers are constructed to make doomsday scenarios relevant and believable.

Imaginary plots are functional because in order for a genre product to be a success, it must be designed as suspenseful and entertaining while simultaneously presenting plots as factual, credible, and applicable to the present-day condition (Hall, 1997). This balancing act conforms with the genre formula of using cultural verisimilitude— adhering to what dominant ideology believes to be true (Hall, 1997). These beliefs are confirmed again and again as a result of the serialized nature of the genre texts. This process is also found in fear framing, wherein media texts mimic reality in order to pre-establish believability. This facilitates a suspension of disbelief when consuming what are actually far-fetched narratives (Altheide, 2002).

Conceiving terror plots as realistic is primarily done through painstaking factualization (Martin & Pedro, 2006). Griffin’s thrillers are packed with facts, including detailing how a stolen jetliner could sneak into U.S. airspace (*The Hostage*) and the specific ingredients and devices needed to make a chemical warfare plant (*Black Ops*). The narrator of *Memorial Day* expounds upon details of how nuclear bombs could be smuggled into the U.S. on steamship lines and the method used by Islamic extremists to slip across the U.S. and Mexico border.

*Blowback*’s plot involves al-Qaeda being on the verge of infecting the U.S. currency with a recently rediscovered and deadly chemical. The hero, a *sidekick* (i.e., a typology complimenting the hero and fully explained in the hero chapter), and a tertiary character discuss how Islamic extremists plan to use U.S. dollars to deliver the poison because they are fibrous and could easily disperse the substance. One explanation the characters have about how the chemical

could be spread in this way is the factualized example of how cocaine has allegedly infected “four out of every five” (Thor, 2005, p. 569) dollar bills in the U.S. in the recent past. The sidekick explains how the users of drugs are a root cause of the infection, but:

‘[Represent] an almost negligible minority when it comes to how bills get contaminated. When a powdered substance like cocaine is very finely milled, it passes easily from one surface to another. The biggest contamination culprits are ATMs. Once infected, they spread trace amounts of cocaine to all the bills they distribute. Counting and sorting machines like those used in banks and casinos are just as bad. Even the machines tested in several Federal Reserve banks were shown to be contaminated.’ (Thor, 2005, p. 569)

The sidekick continues, detailing how the contamination can grow exponentially when in the stream of commerce. The tertiary character—depicted as an accomplished scientist—concludes the idea was brilliant and could spread to every citizen using money, as well as act to decimate the value of the dollar. This realism, including the details, precise examples, and “scientist” character, signifies how such a chemical attack could become a reality in the U.S.

Another feature of the threats is the individuals and groups executing them are well funded. Super-terrorism plots are more credible when represented as having the support needed to make them possible. This also reflects the paradigm of *paranoia* prevalent after 9/11, which relates to perceived grand anti-U.S. conspiracies involving international, pervasive, and well-funded terror networks (Letort, 2016).

The texts also construct plausibility by linking the imminent threat with 9/11. In the doom frame, an attack on par with 9/11 is perpetual, just as Van Veeren (2009) concluded of super-terrorism. In *Takedown*, the U.S. President, which is a prominent character typology found throughout the data, ponders how many more “9/11s” will happen before he gets public support for wartime action. Griffin’s stories have several twin tower references and, in *By Order of the President*, the narrator refers to the “rag-heads who flew skyjacked 767s into the World Trade Center” (Griffin, 2004, p. 49), assuming the reader knows the meaning of such references.

Another device involves highlighting the victims of the war on terror, such as enumerating deceased U.S. soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan as a consequence of the actual GWOT (*Extreme Measures*). In *Memorial Day*, the hero contemplates the loss of “the innocent men and women who were forced to jump out of the burning World Trade Center” (Flynn, 2004, p. 196). These realistic and emotional triggers act as constant reminders of the events of that traumatic day. September 11<sup>th</sup> represents the ultimate U.S. terrorism metaphor and keeps the framework locked in on one black and white moment in history (Crenshaw et al., 2008). The omnipotent and authoritative narrative language found in all the texts also reinforces the believability of the threat framing.

This type of storytelling mimics what Barthes (1957/2012) theorized as a type of contingency and imperative requiring myth-telling to be rooted in an existing historic concept. Barthes criticized French imperialistic bourgeois messaging for creating believability by attaching the myth to something established as being true—by reimagining the recent or distant past. Ideology functions to steal a historic discourse and insert it back in as a new manifestation (Barthes, 1957/2012). The main myth-made-believable in the doom frame is the false and apocalyptic view that monumental events like 9/11 are always on the verge of occurring.

## **2. The use of Mythic Speech and Symbolic Imagery to Enhance Doom Framing**

Plot believability is fueled by mythic speech and symbolism—brands of hyperbole designed to stir emotional attachment (Sharrett, 1999). Besides mythicizing 9/11, another device is the use of inflated depictions of scale to signify the massive nature of the threat. *Memorial Day*’s narrator asserts hero Rapp must torture a terror suspect to get the needed information to prevent the potential death of a “a half a million people or more” (Flynn, 2004, p. 112). The chemical weapon threat in *Blowback* poses a threat to millions of U.S. lives (Thor, 2005). The

narrator in *Consent to Kill* (hereafter: *Consent to Kill*, Flynn, 2005) enumerates thousands of fictionalized deaths as the result of terror attacks that occur during the story. In *Black Ops*, the terrorists' chemical plant is producing "weapons of mass destruction"—another metaphoric allusion left to the reader to surmise. This type of hyperbole is found in 24 plots, which portend death for "hundreds of thousands of Americans, [dangers] bigger than anyone could have imagined," and attacks as the worst "in the history of our country" (Van Veeren, 2009, p. 372).

In *Blowback*, the U.S. military has obtained footage of the effects of the chemical weapon terrorists are planning to introduce into the U.S. currency supply. Members of the U.S. national security team watch a video compiled by the "USAMRIID"—another factual U.S. entity—chronicling the effects of the chemical agent tested by the terrorists on an Iraqi village. The U.S. security personnel, including the president and hero Harvath, watched as sickness spread through the villagers and victims were quarantined and restrained. All of the patients displayed,

[Extremely] aggressive behavior, with many trying to bite their caregivers, or anyone who came across their path. In many of the afflicted, a bizarre state of heightened sexuality was also observable. Many of them complained of severe insomnia and headaches [... The] few IV bags the village had available had to be hidden beneath towels, as patients who saw anything even remotely resembling water would fly into a rage and their throats would swell up, making it impossible for them to breathe. They were hypersensitive to light, and their skin had taken on a very strange pallor. (Thor, 2005, p. 54)

Later in the video, Western aid workers at the scene are observed catching the illness.

"Everyone around the table watched in silence as the aid workers began convulsing. Soon a strange, dark fluid began to pour from their nostrils, and moments later they were dead" (Thor, 2005, p. 55). The footage "scared the hell" out of everyone, including the president. This is a rare instance where language is more fantastical than factual, such as using vampire themes prevalent in popular culture around this period and representing constant dangers in "borderless worlds" (Martin, 2006). Still, vampire themes represent another epistemological metaphor of

terrorism (Crenshaw et al., 2008) linked with contemporary sources of fear of violent death from terrorism, such as paranoia over the potential release of chemical and biological agents that could spread to infect the air breathed and water used throughout the U.S.

In contrast to the last few examples from Flynn and Thor, Griffin's (2005; 2006; 2008) thrillers lack dramatic scale and visceral immediacy. This textual incongruity can mainly be explained by the latter author's aforementioned writing style: It is not fast-paced and action is in the past tense or at a distance. But Griffin's thrillers do not offer alternative depictions: It is presumably left to the reader's imagination to fill in the blanks of what is going on behind the scenes, which is indicative of the function of intertextuality (Fiske, 1987). Griffin's implied meanings must be understood within a broader textual milieu of a new terror war and the corresponding popular images readily available in the GWOT's wake (Boggs & Pollard, 2006).

Griffin does however— as do Thor and Flynn— explicitly engage in myth-making involving symbolism specific to the U.S. Regarding the intertextual references to the 9/11 attacks on the New York World Trade Center, the building itself was a architectural signifier of a powerful country and city that, up until that day, had no reason to fear for safety outside of the borders of those places (Schneider, 2004). The building's towers signified U.S. financial superiority and untouchable capitalistic muscle (Altheide, 2005). Several of the imminent plots also involve threats to similarly idealized U.S. symbols, including those represented as: Iconic executive power (e.g., the U.S. President), capitalism (e.g., attack of currency supply and New York City [*Blowback*]), and icons of historic patriotism (the Liberty Bell [*By Order of the President*]), and Washington D.C. as a national symbol [*Extreme Measures*]). Such symbols tap into national emotions that invigorate fear of the vulnerability of them and what they represent, and are prompts to the constant threat of personal harm in the post-9/11 U.S. (Altheide, 2005).

### 3. Accessing Ticking-Time-Bomb Myth

In addition to being constant, plausible, and of dramatic proportions, the doom frame depicts the threat as being immediate, conforming to the ticking-time-bomb myth proliferating in U.S. culture after 9/11 (Wong, 2006). This scenario was a popular concept used in the GWOT via news media (Intelligence Science Board, 2006; Wong, 2006) and is epitomized in *24*, where the basis of the program is an hour-by-hour countdown to some catastrophic terror event (Nikolaidis, 2011). In *24*, Bauer must torture a multitude of suspects, terrorists, and accomplices who refuse to provide information crucial to neutralize the imminent threats. Proponents of torture and other extralegal measures used this ticking-time-bomb scenario as a justification for those measures (e.g., Dershowitz, 2002; Intelligence Science Board, 2004). Some argue the ticking-time-bomb is a Bush-era myth with the ideological power to desensitize moral and ethical decision-making about what are acceptable state actions (Wong, 2006; Yin, 2008).

The ticking-time-bomb scenario is a hypothetical akin to the “trolley problem,” wherein an unstoppable trolley will run into five people on a track and kill them unless the driver veers onto another track where one individual is working (Yin, 2008). Both scenarios “dare the reader to adhere to non-consequentialist decision-making, when doing so will absolutely lead to greater loss of life than that which would occur if one made a deliberate decision to kill (or torture) someone else” (Yin, 2008, p. 16). The scenario is designed to force one to concede violent acts like torture may be necessary on moral grounds, despite legal norms (Nikolaidis, 2011). This scenario is highly improbable and a dangerous ideological premise, but has been presented as a rational approach to thinking about post-9/11 terrorism (Wong, 2006; Yin, 2008).

Regardless of its improbability, the subject thrillers—like *24*—use this hypothetical approach with regularity. While the thriller plots are not as intense and immediate as the *24*

ticking-time-bombs wherein the time continuum is a condensed 24-hour period, thriller scenarios have varying degrees of looming immediacy. In *The Hostage* and *The Last Patriot*, kidnappings are already underway and each second counts. In *Takedown*, the attack is real-time; in *Memorial Day* the narrator details how a ship will dock on the U.S. East Coast with a nuclear bomb within days. Although gradual, once thriller plots are activated they do not stop until the imminent threat is stopped. This device frames situations that later help justify the heroes' responses. In *Consent to Kill*, the narrator summarizes a situation and how it was resolved:

[A terrorist] was involved in a plot to detonate nuclear bombs in both New York and Washington. U.S. Special Forces had apprehended the man in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan, just days before the attack was to take place. With the clock ticking, Rapp was left with little alternative than to torture [the man...] into revealing the details of the plot. The information Rapp got from the terrorist helped intercept one of the bombs before it could be brought into the country. (Flynn, 2005, p. 265)

This type of framing acts to refute any critical consideration of the falsehoods of the ticking-time-bomb myth. That is, they are really happening, there is no time to use standard responses, and many and / or important victims are at risk. Despite if the situation is a distortion of reality— as dominant ideology is expected to function (Barnhurst, 2005)— the ideological position becomes the moral and ethical imperative to act.

#### **4. The Threat most cannot know: Access to Insider Information**

As suggested in several of the above scenarios, terror plots in the doom frame are usually *unseen* to the ordinary U.S. populace until the attack is realized. This is an effective device because 1) The reader gets to be an insider and experience “real” threats of terrorism, and 2) it helps establish the location where terrorism occurs— that is, in the *counterterrorism shadows*, a menacing and transcendent location detailed below in the hero chapter. Ordinary citizens of the U.S. cannot be privy to counterterrorism details, but the texts provide access to that secret realm.



In *The Last Patriot*, “classified,” or insider information available to the hero and his sidekicks supports this technique. Sidekick Ozbek is a CIA agent with access to secret material:

[He] had seen a chilling collection of classified evidence before it was made public in a terrorism financing trial in Dallas, which laid out the Islamist agenda to take over the United States. The evidence contained a detailed strategy memo from the Muslim Brotherhood, the oft-cited parent organization of Hamas and al-Qaeda which was [...] tied to FAIR’s laying out steps for how the U.S. Constitution and Western civilization could be destroyed from within and replaced with sharia law. (Thor, 2008, p. 64)

The narrative again offers fact-based insider information uniquely available to the narrator. Discussion of this particular topic in the story (i.e., “FAIR,” the Foundation of American Islamic Relations) is another example of intertextuality (Fiske, 1987) because there is an actual organization with a similar name (i.e., the *Center* for American Islamic Relations, or “CAIR”) and a subject of a controversial trial involving terrorism financing and similar accusations of an Islamic agenda corresponding to the text’s publishing date (MacFarquhar, 2007). This fact is conflated within this fictive text as a form of replication to signal the reader to what “we” are talking about. It promotes the perspective of “if they knew it” and conveys the message that readers are insiders provided special knowledge about what needs done.

##### **5. The U.S. Under Attack: *Situating an Opportunity for Redemption***

The plot contrivances in the doom frame rely on the underlying threat narrative (Ricigliano & Allen, 2006) readily accessed in the post-9/11 U.S. Fear framing (e.g., Altheide, 2005; Kundnani, 2004), or *fear mongering*, is a common phenomenon in contemporary U.S. popular culture and involves a powerful agent, such as a fiction author, accessing U.S. cultural insecurities to promote their own ideological positions (Glassner, 2004). Fear mongering includes these elements: Repetition of the source of fear, making the source seem like a trend instead of an isolated incident, and misdirection away from other perspectives of the issue

(Glassner, 2004). The subject texts reboot 9/11 fears by conceiving events that could happen at any time and place, and offering few alternates of the nature and status of the fear's source.

In comparison, the Bush Doctrine likewise normalized a specific form of fear and created conditions of a constant state of insecurity. The GWOT accessed the macro fear frame (Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004) or the *terror narrative* (Altheide, 2005), signifying a constant thematic and mythicized backdrop to U.S. counterterrorism. Both narratives intersect to promote emotionally charged notions of post-9/11 danger and paranoia to help construct an unending discourse of being under attack, and the U.S. and its security apparatus as vulnerable.

By invigorating such fears, the doom frame reduces the discussion of the problem to a U.S. national security concern involving a series of impending, massive, and insidious plots endangering many U.S. lives and directly threatening the U.S. or its interests. The only things left to talk about are the “facts” of the frame, regardless how conflated fact and fiction become. These fact-based fictional scenarios avoid, for instance, long-term investigations not requiring urgent action, isolated homegrown terrorism, and threats potentially prevented by cooperating with foreign governments. The texts instead construct outside attacks on par with 9/11 as a form of super-terrorism (Van Veen, 2009), and on a scale not replicated in the U.S. before or since (Bergen et al., 2011). The effect mimics moral panic, wherein a perceived deviant threat is grossly exaggerated and distorted the seriousness of the event based on criteria like the number of people taking part in violence and the levels and effects of the violence (Cohen, 1980).

Another explanation for portrayals of a new terror war relates to violent and dramatic war plots as a manifestation of a U.S. failure to “win” at war, such as the case of Vietnam (Gibson, 1994). Such failures damage the U.S. patriarchal identity based on the warrior tradition of U.S. military superiority from the Revolutionary War through World War II. By getting violently

angry and reproducing what-if scenarios, like Davis (2006) observes, “we” can fight all over again. The fictional rewinding of history was done when Rambo returned to Vietnam to settle the score by gunning down an endless stream of faceless Asians (Gibson, 1994), or in the never-ending Cold War fictional portrayals of Soviet citizens as evil, even years after public realization they are not (Baraban, 2003). The events of 9/11 signify a disruption of U.S. cultural identity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). In *24*, 9/11 is presented as a severe blow to Western masculinity because it challenged U.S. global hegemony. Bauer is propelled back “into the fight” to re-establish those masculinities. The show helped U.S. viewers come to terms with having a massive attack on their own soil, and a refuge to numb the pain of the loss (Nikolaidis, 2011).

The doomsday threat is not portrayed as a conflict in a foreign land: It is within “our” borders— on college campuses, in cities, or within national resources— and directed at an idealized image akin to the untainted image of the threatened empire (Barthes, 1957/2012). Threats are directed at “us,” which imagines the U.S. as a very special place: The “homeland.”

## **B. The Homeland Frame**

The homeland frame is about the production of an idealized U.S. signifying a certain image of family, country, patriotism, national security, and how those ideals are threatened, vulnerable, and in need of protection. This frame helps construct terrorism as a threat of personal invasion into “our” homes and way of life, versus a political concern reserved for the state. I explain this framing in the following themes: 1) Representations of a broad U.S. populace “out there” threatened by terrorism and / or as oblivious terror victims; 2) representations of the family and family life; 3) subordinated and omitted depictions of women who need protection and act as familial representations; and 4) “regular” U.S. national security actors embodying “American” patriotism and honor.

Broadly speaking, this frame uses established macro ideological frames like ethno nationalism and ethnocentrism (e.g., Goffman, 1974; Hall, 1997), as well as myths like American exceptionalism (Walt, 2011) and patriarchal myth (Caputi, 2004), to construct a threatened nation. The U.S. is conceived as an innocent homeland facing the imminent dangers described above, perpetuated by the Islamic extremists detailed below. The ideology in this frame is about the values and ideals the hero will be compelled to protect and save. This is largely accomplished through the character demarcations framing “traditional” U.S. values and identity. Such frames cordon off the U.S. into an “inside” versus “outside” the homeland scenario, conforming again to what is expected from popular genre texts (Hall, 1997).

The homeland frame is a reiteration of militant, patriarchal, and nationalist codes found in Cold War novel narratives, which imagined the U.S. as the nation responsible for global “justice” and a rightfully extraordinary nation (Gallagher, 2006). The U.S. is represented through the hero’s lens— via a *male solution* to the threat— as having material superiority and equality for anyone who comes to the country. What the heroic men fight for is a generic set of sociocultural codes and expected behaviors signifying traditional conservatism, which Gallagher (2006) called a “coherent world of common experiences and attitudes” (p. 122). These include male camaraderie, moral purity, and men expertly running the institutions (e.g., economic, political, military) signified as having the most value.

Like in Cold War narratives, the frame’s future war storytelling presumes there was a better time or place in the U.S.— reminiscing about the way it “used to be.” These imaginings are based on “traditional values of male identity” (Davis, 2006, p. 6). Like the communal depictions in popular legal television stories filling a void of community, mutual values, and shared feelings perceived as being increasingly absent (Rapping, 2003, p. 271), and construct what it means to

be “real American” based on the “traditional” Christian-Judeo white family. Starting in the 1950’s, popular media texts normalized and idealized a myth of the “ideal American family,” represented as a nuclear one consisting of a married, heterosexual, and white man and woman raising their biological children in a happy, safe environment (Chambers, 2000).

Before explaining how these ideals are framed in the subject texts, the term “homeland” warrants further discussion because it is highly charged and contentious as a result of its proliferated post-9/11 use. This is especially true when used in conjunction with U.S. national security (Dittmer, 2005). The term is prominent in the GWOT Bush rhetoric (Crenshaw et al., 2008) and was institutionalized by using it to name an entire executive agency (i.e., the Department of *Homeland* Security). Scholars critical of the term assert it connotes fascist ideologies of racial purity (e.g., like the pre-World War II German “fatherland”), rhetorically establishes a nationalistic form of territorialism, and this rhetoric was “a reaction to the violation of the inside/outside dialectic of territorial differentiation by the assaults on the World Trade Center and Pentagon” (Dittmer, 2005, p. 637). While some writers assert there is value in using the homeland ideal to unite the nation (e.g., Kaplan, 2003), both arguments remove “the boundaries between inside and outside, about seeing the homeland in a state of constant emergency from threats within and without” (Kaplan, 2003, p. 90).

A critique of the term “homeland” is that it encapsulates a nation’s ethnocentrism and arrogant claims to global superiority. However, I use the term because it captures what the texts convey and is one of several metaphors of terrorism (Crenshaw et al., 2008) thriving in post-9/11 U.S. The homeland has become a prominent way “we” imagine “our” country, and the thrillers reflect this vision. Individual subject texts do it in varying ways, but never in conflict with the overarching message of the need for patriarchal protection and the U.S. as superior.

# 1. The “American” Public: *Innocent Victims and a Patriarchal Foundation*

Townsfolk living in the U.S. Wild West were depicted as ignorant, hardworking, boring, and tame—embodying morality and positive social types for that particular “homeland,” but playing no meaningful role in resolving conflict (Wright, 1977). The monomythic “expectation of a passive, incompetent, spectator public” (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002, p. 362) also plays out in 24 when “ordinary” people follow rules, defer to authority, and are incapable of heroism:

[Members] of the community in 24 are never brave or resourceful enough to rescue themselves and must be provided with guns and encouragement in order to fight back (4.13); led to safety and rescued (4.17); or are helpless victims without any agency, too afraid of “the terrorists” to act (4, 5). (Van Veen, 2009, p. 383)

These typologies are standard on 24 as representative of the U.S. public in need of help and protection because they are unable to comprehend GWOT “realities” (Mayer, 2007). This feature is found in the subject thrillers as, generically, the U.S. public constructed through narration. Hereafter, I refer to this thematic as the *American public*.

I use the term “American” with trepidation because, like “homeland,” I consider the term problematic as an exemplar of the misleading myth of American exceptionalism. As Said (1993) argued: “America,” like “Oriental,” is an ideological label reflecting an assumed imperialistic authority. The term denotes U.S. primacy over a continent of at least 50 countries, countless cultures, and various languages, peoples, and conditions—those not represented by a single country. Nonetheless, since America(n) is used with such consistency in U.S. culture and the subject texts, Bush used it throughout his GWOT speeches, and it is even in the legalese of the GWOT strategy (U.S. Whitehouse, 2003), I use it here as a putative label.

The American public is represented broadly through the speech figures of “American” and “America” found with regularity in the texts. The narrator from *Executive Power* asserts:

As far as the American people were concerned, Rapp felt that the majority didn't want to know what he was up to. America had been attacked. The country was at war and war was ugly. They didn't want to see the gruesome details of how it was fought. They didn't start the war but they sure as hell didn't want to lose it. They wanted someone like Mitch Rapp to take care of the dirty work. (Flynn, 2003, p. 113)

This type of language separates ordinary “Americans” from the hero and suggests the masses do not want to know the gory details of counterterrorism. This view also positions Rapp as a masculine authority figure— a patriarch caring for the American public when it cannot care for itself. What Rapp “was up to” included kidnapping and assassination, and the reference to the U.S. being “attacked” rouses the fear frame and war narrative. Rapp takes the necessary masculine action and protects the public from the source of fear. These sorts of tautological arguments, where the narrator packages a truth without any evidence or counterpoint, are found throughout the texts.

Claims about what the American public wants to know are complimented with depictions of Americans being ignorant about the situation. In *Extreme Measures*, the narrator reflects: “In the waning light of the attacks that had briefly awakened America to the threat of Islamic radical fundamentalism” (Flynn, 2008, p. 240). This messaging implies most U.S. citizens remain unaware of the Islamic threat, which plays into the insider information theme and the hero's mandate to operate in the shadows. More blatantly, in *Memorial Day* the hero and sidekicks are in Pakistan about to execute a secret mission while “their fellow Americans went on with their lives, these Special Forces operators were on the other side of the planet stoically settling a score [referring to 9/11]” (Flynn, 2004, p. 33). The narrator of *The Apostle* asserts:

Americans slept soundly in their beds at night believing their country had countless James Bonds around the world infiltrating terrorist networks and rogue regimes in order to keep them safe and prevent the next attack. If they only knew the real truth, they'd be marching on D.C. with torches and pitchforks. (Thor, 2009, p. 34)

The texts distinguish the hero from the public by demonstrating how the hero's job is to protect the ignorant public, usually characterized as being safely tucked away and oblivious. This importance of this ignorance is underscored by how the insiders— the hero, the president, and select secondary characters— know everything about the situation. A situation presented as so menacing— bolstering doom framing— that if most citizens were not so naïve, they would be protesting the government for allowing it to happen. If the American public realized how huge the threat was, they would know what needed done. Nonetheless, Americans remain unaware and, even if they knew the “truth” they probably were not capable of handling it. *Takedown's* narrator reflects on the difficult choices the U.S. President was making in combating terrorism:

How many more September 11<sup>th</sup>s had to happen before the American people realized the savage enemy they were facing? It was one of the most trying challenges of his administration, but the President knew that however unpopular his choices may be, he had to put the welfare of the country and its citizens first- even if they couldn't stomach what had to be done. (Thor, 2006, p. 17)

Again, even with super-terror attacks, the public just does not understand and it is the president-as-patriarch who is worthy enough to know the corrective action needed (i.e., by deploying the hero). This is why, in *The Hostage*, the president is compelled to place hero Castillo in charge of “the security of all [...] Americans” (Griffin, 2006, p. 263). In the texts, there is a sense that each and every U.S. citizen is just generically out there, inactive, and waiting for protection.

Sometimes, the American public is directly presented with the dangers but remain incapable of action, such as having their hands tied by political correctness. The doom presented in *The Last Patriot* includes an effort for terrorists to cover up the revelation about Islam that could hurt their cause. In the story, two Islamic extremists roam a college campus— a symbolically U.S. democratic locale— and blend in while they look for a professor to assassinate as part of their cover up. The narrator claims citizens are not suspicious of the terrorists walking



on campus because they are overly sensitive and fear stereotyping a Middle Easterner. Due to this weakness, the public is incapable of identifying a terrorist in their midst.

In another, more explicit excerpt from *The Last Patriot*, the American public's inability to properly react to the spread of Islam within the homeland is presented. In one scene, two secondary characters have a dialogue about the alleged increase of "Islamism." One of the characters— a sidekick to the hero— is asked if this phenomenon bothers him:

‘It should bother every American. And it’s already happening. They have brought about women-only classes and swimming times at taxpayer-funded universities and pools. Christians, Jews, and Hindus have been banned from serving on juries where Muslim defendants are being judged. Piggy banks and Porky Pig tissue dispensers have been banned from workplaces because they offend Islamist sensibilities. Ice cream has been discontinued at certain Burger Kings because the picture on the wrapper looks like the Arabic script for Allah. Public schools have been pulling pork from their menus. Women have been beaten, strangled, and killed by [men] for ‘dishonoring’ their families. It’s death by a thousand cuts, or sharia inch-by-inch as some refer to it, and most Americans have no idea this battle is being waged every day across America.’ (Thor, 2008, p. 87)

These are all established political issues in U.S. that pit predictable “American” values and emblems of what it means to be American (e.g., piggy banks, ice cream, the English language) against the encroachment of a religion— one notably depicted as a *moderate* version of Islam. This mimics a post-9/11 terrorism theme: That is, the danger of spreading values in conflict with the traditional (e.g., patriarchal, Christian) U.S. values (Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004). The threat of the replacement of “our” values by those of Islam emphasizes a particular vision of the freedoms that make America “great.” The excerpt concludes with another reference to how Americans do not realize the danger they face. The representations of Americans, America, and its values can also be understood as signifying victimization.

In works directly related to this study’s subject matter and timeframe, popular media narratives frame ordinary citizens primarily as victims of terrorism (Altheide, 2005). This victimization is one way communal U.S. ideology is depicted, threatened, and symbolically

protected. Victims— be it the cities, groups of people, or individual citizens in the imminent doom frame— face cataclysmic and omnipotent terror dangers where thousands of people could die and a certain way of life is put at risk (Altheide, 2005). The danger of impending and massive death represents the victims and potential victims the FASC hero— not scared for his own safety— must prevent, fight, and avenge. To Altheide (2005), the post-9/11 brand of problem-fear framing with a victim who is saved by the hero is a new version of a *morality play* wherein characters who represent the difficult struggles the hero overcomes, thus preserving morality. This new framing features everyday life filled with problem-generated fear and victims the hero resolves to protect and, thereby, secure communal U.S. values. I will continue to point out the victimization and morality themes throughout my analysis of findings.

The construction of America described so far is mainly done tacitly and in broad strokes. As is the history of social problem construction, they rely on the threat to America's "normalcy," and an image of the nation is often a blank to be completed by the audience (Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004). Just like *Captain America's* comic book sketches of "small town" U.S.— with main streets and church steeples and kids playing in the park— scenes are left to be filled-in by what is already known about the traditional "American story" (Dittmer, 2005). This is especially true in the opaque images of America in the Griffin thrillers, a place rarely described in depth because the hero and the supporting cast of secondary characters are always traveling the world to fight counterterrorism. These characters are associated with military units and decorations and special operations adventures, mostly national security *regulars*. Through them, Griffin's "homeland" becomes the part of American tradition valuing the U.S. military.

Framing the homeland is also accomplished by degrading other countries in contrast to the U.S. In *Takedown*, besides ignoring international treaties and violating the laws of Canada,

the narrator is judgmental about Canada, criticizing its “liberal” asylum policy that allows terrorists to easily plan and launch attacks just north of the U.S. Griffin thrillers are similarly critical of Islamic nations, examples of which will be detailed in the Islamic extremist frame. Mexico’s poor border security allows the terrorist to breeze across Mexican waters into the U.S. (*Memorial Day*). In *Blowback*, U.S. Special Forces led by the hero move illegally about Pakistan before kidnapping a terrorism suspect to go on trial in that country’s legal system. This is about a country’s borders getting no respect, versus the expectation that U.S. needs stronger borders. This positioning against other countries act as a signifier for “homeland” and imply a sense of exceptionality entailed in the walled off nature or inside versus outside thematic.

## **2.     The (Yearning for) Family**

The use of “America(n)” as a way to describe a superior nation with a populace incapable of action includes the ideal that the nation is worth fighting for because of the underlying communal representations of “traditional” U.S. family values. This theme aligns with and promotes established features of patriarchal myth found in U.S. culture (Caputi, 2004), such as casting women as being bearers of love, morality, emotion, and a happy home, while inevitably weak and in need of protection. Even storylines about murderous mob heroes like *The Godfather’s* Corleone family act to preserve traditional masculine values, like the family business, fighting for capitalism, and the value of domestication (Messenger, 2002).

A man settling down with a wife and raising children is a key feature of the patriarchal myth and male identity (Chambers, 2000). This perspective is found in détente Cold War novels, wherein male adventure “takes a back seat to promotion of broader social and economic conservatism” (Gallagher, 2006, p. 123), including the esteem of family and expectations of woman in support of patriarchal success. The recurring hero of Clancy novels (i.e., Jack Ryan),

for example, has a long-time marriage to a beautiful and successful wife (she is a surgeon), a nice suburban home, and respectable children. This is all through hero Ryan's perspective: He has to be the standard-bearer of family success, while his wife's achievements are at the expense of tradition. For instance, her beauty and responsibility of caring for her kids, as judged by the patriarchal narrator and hero, are compromised as result of her masculinized success as a doctor (Gallagher, 2006). As Cold War stories progress, they include traditional married men— as “it should be”— who even experience the aches and pains of middle age and settle into gentler but respectable professions, like analysts or professors (Gallagher, 2006). These heroes seem further along in achieving their “American dream,” perhaps because the *détente* period is near the end of that martial period (i.e., after earlier adventures of young and more vigorous hero versions).

Having a satisfying marriage and family is allusive to the post-9/11 thriller hero, but something he nevertheless desires. How can “our” heroes— out there day and night risking their lives, flying around the world, and battling imminent terror— feasibly maintain the proper family? The heroes— particularly Harvath from the Thor (2005; 2006; 2008; 2009) thrillers and Rapp from the Flynn (2003; 2004; 2005; 2008) thrillers— yearn for the ideals embedded in domestication. But the dream is set perpetually in the future and unfulfilled. It is natural for an ideal man to have a family, but his special calling to fight terrorism prevents, or at least delays, it. This calling is signified as a personal sacrifice, also helping the men achieve superhero status.

While I further explore the tension between his desire and calling in the hero chapter, I think hero Harvath's situation in the Thor series demonstrates how heroic desire constructs the familial image in the homeland frame. The hero struggles to connect with his fiancée, Tracy, throughout these stories. The couple tries settling down, but counterterrorism demands keep getting in the way. Harvath ponders how most of his buddies— even his former SEAL

teammates— were married and starting families. Finally, in *Takedown*, the couple sneaks away on a vacation and they talk about getting married and raising children. In one scene during the trip, Tracy takes a morning walk outside on a gorgeous summer morning:

[She] took in a deep breath and tried to pinpoint the wonderful smells that seemed to be coming at her from all directions. She was worlds away from Manhattan, and being here with Scot was like nothing she had ever known. If their lives would let them, she could stay here forever and never leave. (Thor, 2006, p. 151)

In this moment, as she holds a puppy the hero brought her, she is attacked by a terrorist who came to the U.S. to seek vengeance on Harvath, who almost killed him. A badly injured Tracy has extended hospital stays, ultimately losing an eye. Harvath later seeks revenge on those who attacked his wife— in *Takedown*. This is common throughout the thrillers: A glimpse into what could be— idyllic representations of domestication— immediately taken away because of counterterrorism. More broadly, this also emphasizes how the Islamic extremist can potentially take family away from any of “us”— once again signifying why the hero must protect the public.

Earlier in the Thor series, the narrator in *Blowback* expounds on the tribulations of the hero’s devotion to his work in the post-9/11 world he existed within:

While no one would say his priorities were out of whack, they definitely came at the price of his social life. Even his on-again, off-again girlfriend, Meg Cassidy, was reaching the end of her rope with him. How could you have a relationship with someone who was never home? Harvath didn’t blame her. He watched his mom go through the same thing with his father. It wasn’t until Michael Harvath transferred out of active SEAL duty to become an instructor at the Navy’s Special Warfare School near their home in Coronado that his mother had been truly happy. (Thor, 2005, p. 95)

The hero’s sacrifice emphasizes what is important to the homeland, which is the traditional value of a wife being relieved her husband has returned home for the family. Similarly in *Blowback*, a secondary character named Reynolds is described as losing his first wife as a consequence of working in special operations. Reynolds regretted his decisions and since left the CIA to make more money and start a new family. In one scene, the character asks Harvath about his love life.

The hero avoids the topic, but Reynolds offers unsolicited advice: ‘people in this game have chosen their career over having a family, and I think that’s a bunch of crap’ (Thor, 2005, p. 563).

The narrator suggests that Harvath knows this is true, but struggles because all he knows is fighting terrorism. He opines maybe he has been sabotaging his own relationships to stay in “the game,” but the matter at hand soon overtakes his thoughts— refocusing on his mission.

Rapp likewise reflects on how the murder of his pregnant wife by terrorists forced him to admit his desire for a family in *Extreme Measures*. A bomb killed his wife, but he survived:

[He] paid for it with the loss of the woman he loved and the child he so badly wanted to meet and hold and raise and be a father to. He thought of that blissful, brief time that they’d had together after she’d told him she was pregnant. It was only a week, but he could still taste the emotions [...] the ultimate gift of a child, she knew, would be the final piece of leverage to get him to walk away from his dangerous profession. She had said to him once after making love that he’d given enough to his country. (Flynn, 2008, p. 237)

These last examples are all allusions signifying the ideal American family (Chambers, 2000): For example, a reunited father and mother, the bliss of being pregnant, and the liberating scents and feelings of domestication. For Rapp and Harvath, efforts to be married and raise children are thwarted not only by work demands, but terrorism itself. American “values” are constructed through tension created by the hero’s inability to have what is available to the “ordinary” man. The unrequited desire also bolsters the value of family by framing it as a masculine struggle.

In rare instances, secondary characters like Reynolds have an idealized wife and family. Mike Nash from the Flynn series is another example of a sidekick supporting the hero’s extralegal and violent techniques. Nash was “married, with four kids” and regularly crossed over, “back and forth from suburbia to the black-ops world of counterterrorism – soccer and lacrosse games followed by late night interrogation and the occasional liquidation” (Flynn, 2008, p. 97). Nash struggles to balance the rigors of his work with those of domestication, sometimes

even running into marital challenges, like erectile dysfunction. In *Extreme Measures*, Rapp realizes he must remain committed and fight for people like Nash:

Rapp now felt a massive sense of responsibility for setting things right [...] Because of his job and its solitary nature, Rapp had been trained to survive by thinking of himself first and foremost. But now he looked around at people like Mike Nash and his family and he realized what was at stake. In a suddenly immediate sense, Rapp felt the need to protect these people and set things right. (Flynn, 2008, p. 239)

“These people” are the American public. The data described so far in this section is mainly from the Thor and Flynn thrillers. In Griffin’s thrillers, familial and communal themes are less prevalent because the storylines are more international– the hero is constantly at work and has no time for a family. Hero Castillo also has no immediate desire for domestication but enjoys sexual encounters with women and his military family– I examine both next.

### **3. Representations of Women: Omitted or Subordinated**

Masculinity is supported in popular patriarchal formations through the *absence* of women or feminine themes because masculinized forms of success, action, and control consume the narrative space (Connell, 1987). In the thrillers, agency resides with men, the masculine, and the paramount success of the single-action hyper-masculine hero. This is expected in traditional hierarchical versions of patriarchy (Damean, 2006). Contrasting ideological messages are derived from delegitimizing and omitting. The exclusionary function of framing involves messages being “sent” by not sending them. In gender framing, this process reserves political issues for men to contend with and simultaneously marginalizes the role of women (Scott, 1986).

This marginalization includes non-existent depictions of Muslim women in the dataset. There were no Muslim or even Middle Eastern primary or secondary female characters, much less any with agency or helping solve the problems posed in the narratives. Like Holloway (2009) found, Muslim women are invisible, which somewhat ironically reflects Western

perceptions of Muslim men subjugating “their” women and hiding them from view. This bolsters Othering— a complex representation I discuss in the terrorist frame. While dominated by men, I will show how there are some women characters that play secondary feminine roles.

There are generally three accepted forms of femininity in Western gender ordering and the counterterrorism thrillers mimic them. The formations are: 1) Those resisting masculine dominance and displaying noncompliance; 2) those complying with the interests and desires of men through subordination, or emphasized femininity; and 3) a complex combination of compliance, resistance, and cooperation (Connell, 2002). This gender ordering involves the process of framing in support of the homeland ideology of what “we” are fighting for.

The first female character formation (i.e., those displaying noncompliance) are almost always those with a role in the current justice problem. Here, that involves a woman having a position of authority in responding to the imminent terror threats, such as lawyers, politicians, lawmakers, or diplomats. These characters act as feminine stereotypes representing certain ideas about terrorism response and legal / justice formations, like following rule of law and diplomatic efforts. These women are usually portrayed as highly educated, intelligent, and liberal. I explain this feminine form in the failures frame, where I show how they signify certain negative aspects of being American (e.g., following rules, being disciplined, and being forced to listen to women) posited to the masculine strength entrenched in “America’s” destiny embodied by the hero.

The second feminine form is found in the texts in two character types representing compliance and identified in these stereotypes: The wifely and motherly supporter and the sexualized woman combined with homosexual depictions— both adhering to a heteronormative worldview (Connell, 2002). In *Consent to Kill*, the hero’s wife Anna is depicted as the ideal woman— accomplished, pretty, and dreamlike. One of the main themes of the story involves



Anna becoming pregnant and the couple spending time together to plan a perfect future. But Anna suggests the hero needs some therapy to deal with his work-induced stress. Rapp doubted anyone could help him, an “assassin.” He decides he is wise enough to administer self-therapy:

One of Rapp’s forms of self-therapy was to never deceive himself. He didn’t sugarcoat what he was, even though other people did. In national security circles he was referred to as a counterterrorism operative. He knew it was a nice way of saying he was an assassin. This had never bothered him, but now that Anna was pregnant, it gave him cause to rethink his profession. His days of being self-sufficient, of thinking first and foremost of himself, were receding with each heartbeat of the little baby in his wife’s womb. Rapp was not afraid of fatherhood [...but he] did not want his child to go through the same agonizing pain of losing a parent that he had. He was suddenly looking at the risks he took on the job in a whole new light. He’d been fighting it since the day he’d fallen in love with Anna, but now there was no more putting it off. He owed it to both her and their unborn child. (Flynn, 2005, p. 205)

This last excerpt exemplifies not only a typical American dream and that heteronormative view; it also demonstrates how Anna is judged through Rapp’s perspective and how he has a patriarchal responsibility to his wife and child. All of Rapp and Harvath’s significant others— the wives, girlfriends, and fiancées— found throughout the data are portrayed as physically attractive and act to support the hero during his challenges. In *Executive Power*, Anna gets upset at Rapp getting shot again, but cares for his wounds; in *The Last Patriot*, Tracy acquiesces to Harvath’s role as a protector of America as taking precedence over their budding relationship. All of these woman companions play supporting roles, and all— as I have and will demonstrate— personify the victimization that is a core feature of the homeland frame.

While there are other tertiary female characters that play supportive roles, one in particular stands out and recurs in the Flynn series: Irene Kennedy is the CIA director, hero Rapp’s supervisor, and a go-between for the president and hero. Kennedy is portrayed as a late middle-aged respectable, classy, and accomplished woman. But she is also a motherly figure to Rapp. Like a traditional matriarch, she is always there for him, but gets frustrated when he takes

risks, gets out of control, or gets hurt. In *Memorial Day*, Rapp is described as Kennedy's protégé and their relationship is so strong because Kennedy knows all about the hero's secretive work (i.e., something his real family knows nothing about). In *Consent to Kill*, Kennedy is concerned because she learned terrorists have put a "hit" out on the hero. But Rapp accepts the danger— it is part of the job. The concern is left to Kennedy. She urges the hero: 'just promise me you'll be careful.' 'I always am,' Rapp replied. 'I always am.' 'And promise me you won't hesitate to ask for security if you notice anything out of the ordinary.' (Flynn, 2005, p. 21) Kennedy fills the role as the protective, wise matriarch who has the hero's back.

Unlike these supporting characters in Flynn and Thor's thrillers, the women in Griffin works are mostly nonexistent. When they are presented, they are usually inconsequential and objectified sexualized representations, reflecting the second character type of the compliant feminine form. Hero Castillo, described as having the characteristics that get men "laid a lot" and as having "worked through" a series of "attractive females" (Griffin, 2004, p. 53) has several hook-ups and girlfriends, sometimes giving them code words to label them. In *By Order of the President* he codes one woman "Big Boobs." In *Black Ops* he refers to a woman he partners with throughout the story as "Sweaty," similar to her name of "Svetlana" but presumably based on perspiration from having sex with the hero, which Castillo's sidekicks make jokes about. Another secondary character involved with special military communications is repeatedly referred to as "Sexy Susan" by male characters. Women in the Griffin stories are of little consequence. If they do get involved with masculine counterterrorism work, they only cause problems and or otherwise play no role in masculine counterterrorism success.

Representations of male homosexuals and homosexuality, like the female stereotypes above, conform to hierarchical masculine messages adhering to heteronormative roles of the U.S.

gender order (Connell, 2002). This is mainly accomplished by omitting this group: That is, they do not offer a valuable contribution to the justice solution. Instead they are portrayed as another form of the Othering of nontraditional Americans. When made, homosexual depictions serve two purposes: 1) Subordinated as relating to the depravity of the Others (e.g., linking the Taliban to rampant homosexual activity [*The Last Patriot*]); and 2) subordinated as jokes or fodder for the hero and his sidekicks. I discuss the former below in the chapter on the Islamic extremist as part of the way Muslim terrorists are constructed as “backwards.”

The latter versions of homosexuality are, once again, most common in the Griffin texts. His characters meet the stereotypes of man’s men often engaged in “locker-room” jocularities. In *The Hostage*, an ordinary officer questions the orders of hero Castillo, who is a *Major*. The other officer, however, is a *Lieutenant Colonel*. It is abnormal to be given orders by a lower ranking officer in the U.S. military. But the hero is special and backed by the president:

“Does that mean you understand you’re under Major Castillo’s orders?”

“Yes, sir,” Lieutenant Colonel Newley said softly. “What? I didn’t hear that. You’re supposed to sound like an Air Force officer, not some faggot wearing the wings of an Air Chad cabin attendant.”

“Yes, sir,” Lieutenant Colonel Newley said, much louder. (Griffin, 2006, p. 110)

This insult, which gets laughs from the hero and his pals, is directed at homosexuals (i.e., the derogatory term “faggot”), which helps to contrast regulars to the “real men” in the story. The insult is also directed at the developing (and mostly Muslim) nation of Chad, distinguishing the homeland from a less civilized place.

Hero Harvath and a sidekick are also insulting in *Takedown* when they discuss where to go to have beers and meet some potential sexual partners: ‘For that we probably need to find you some high-end gay bar. But maybe they’ll be some cute navy guys there you could hook up with’

(Thor, 2006, p. 64). In response, Harvath gave his friend the middle finger and Bob laughed. While these events are infrequent, they maintain the subordination of “weak” masculine forms.

The third and final formation of female characters in the counterterrorism thrillers involves the complex interplay of resistance and compliance with masculine primacy (Connell, 2000). Such characters are non-existent in the Griffin texts, but can be found in the other two. I consider them sidekicks because they join forces with the hero. These are “strong” women who are not outright subordinated or dismissed like the first set of failures. Two characters are exemplars: One, Jillian, is a scientist who joins hero Harvath in *Blowback* on his adventure to track down the source of the ancient chemical weapon to be used by terrorists as part of their plan to reestablish a Muslim caliphate. Another is Dr. Julia Gallo from *The Apostle*, who is a doctor who volunteered to work in Afghanistan to help communities, women, and children, and is saved by the hero when the Taliban takes her prisoner.

Both women are presented as independent, idealistic, hardworking, and smart. Jillian seeks to get to the bottom of a historic scientific discovery and its implications, while Gallo has an intense desire to help Muslim women gain independence from the Taliban and preserve their rights and dignity. While Jillian and Gallo have voice and authority in the text, they ultimately join the hero and—implicitly—support his hyper-masculine efforts. Jillian, after initial protests, looks the other way when Harvath tortures, having come to appreciate the sobering “realities” of his work. She later kills a terrorist, Alomari, and feels horrible about it until Harvath sets her straight about the horrible things Alomari had done. She realizes the hero is good and, by the story’s end, decides to have sex with him. Gallo also eventually accepts the hero using enhanced interrogation for information, understanding how violence must be met with violence when

dealing with the sort of people who held her captive. These types of women maintain strength by assuming– or skeptically accepting– masculine stereotypes of toughness and aggression

These select *Western* women are like the “strong” women characters Holloway (2009) identified that come of age in a masculine realm and manage to “tough it out” long enough to garner some respect. Woman like Jillian and Gallo are exposed to just enough to see how effective hyper-masculinity is while creating sympathy for the hero burdened with the task. While they are given temporary agency in thrillers and even pursue alternate / positive perspectives (e.g., helping those with no voice, noble intellectual pursuits), in the end their primary purpose is to support the dominant ideology. Given the national security perspective, the preeminence of the terror threat, and their “realizations,” they agree with a messaging that says: “You see, even these do-gooders need the help and protection of the dominant ideology and would realize it if they were truly exposed to it.” These more complicated female characters are also another way the underlying ideology seems to operate more subversively as the texts move away from 9/11. In particular, *The Apostle*– written in 2009– presents a drawn-out threat and humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan (i.e., versus merely war).

#### **4. National Security Perspective: Obedient Soldiers Signifying National Honor**

National honor and patriotism is a prominent feature of the homeland frame, despite what I later describe as the foiling of entire governmental bureaucracies and bashing of conventional forms of U.S. law enforcement, intelligence, and diplomatic agencies. The narrator and hero emphasize how U.S. security is paramount, the U.S. is an exceptional place, and certain groups are forever honorable and patriotic– an inseparable feature of an ideal homeland. While the hero encapsulates a specific heroic form of exceptional violent sacrificial honor and justice, this sub-frame includes *national security regulars* (hereafter: regulars) acting to support ideals of

nationalism and patriotism. This is one way the texts create a martial mentality– that is, the broadening of authority of all facets of the executive, the U.S. law enforcement (e.g., the U.S. Secret Service) and intelligence community (e.g., the CIA) are generalized as the homeland’s security establishment. This framing secures the national security perspective and the preeminence of masculine, conflict-based perspective and resolutions during this new war.

Regulars and what they represent is not a new trope. U.S. culture is obsessed with the war mythos and within it, these two fundamental stories: One celebrating the lone warrior; and another “portraying the good soldier who belongs to an official military or police unit and serves as a representative defender of national honor” (Gibson, 1994, p. 17). These myths, sometimes competing and other times overlapping, reflect the patriotism of warrior myth and define the shifting martial mentality of the U.S. during different episodes (Gibson, 1994). The challenge in popular texts is to balance the bashing of the broader government with honoring warriors at the individual level. This balancing act happens in post-9/11 crime dramas depicting the CIA’s response to terrorism: The CIA needed to be “glamorized” and masculinized through positive portrayals of CIA agents to help regain its respectability as an iconic U.S. agency (Rapping, 2003). Similarly, the security sublime (Holloway, 2009) is based on the idea the security apparatus is monolithic. Thus, in terrorism thrillers, sets of soldiers and select executive security actors maintain the appearance of hegemonic control, working in concert to protect the U.S.

While the failures frame questions the monolithic nature of U.S. security and causes the hero to bypass the larger executive and conspire with the president to protect U.S. supremacy, the underlying way honor and patriotism is secured in the subject texts is through celebration of police and military units and individuals generically represented as “good soldiers” who defend U.S. honor. Monolithic portrayals of regulars include references to battle campaigns, famous

generals, specific units and their exploits, as well as related honors, insignia, and codenames.

There are numerous examples of this, especially in the Griffin stories. In *By Order of the*

*President* the narrator describes how the president assigned generalship:

Starry reorganized what was to become Central Command so that it would function when needed and then retired. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, and the first President Bush ordered CentCom to respond, its then commander, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, went to war using the authorities Starry had demanded of Reagan and Reagan had given to CentCom. [... Schwarzkopf's] ground commander in the first desert war was General Fred Franks. Franks was the U.S. Army's first one-legged general since the Civil War. He'd lost his leg as a result of Vietnam wounds incurred as he rushed to help his wounded colonel. (Griffin, 2004, p. 25)

The narrator continues, detailing the command structure and how effective it was in the “first dessert war” and how it was now working well in the “new one” (p. 25). General Naylor, a key sidekick, reflects he had to fight battles to keep CentCom in force in the new war, which is another intertextual reference (see <http://www.centcom.mil/>). This undercurrent is so prevalent that the military becomes like a way of life— a *family*— in the Castillo hero series, which are also packed with footnotes detailing all aspects of the military.

In a similar celebration of the military in *Blowback*, the narrator details a specialized U.S. unit responsible to clear buildings in a war-ravaged Iraq:

Soldiers from the U.S. Army's 3rd “Arrowhead Brigade,” 2nd Infantry Division Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) had spent enough time in Iraq to get used to the sound of enemy rounds plinking off the armor plating of their eight-wheeled infantry carrier vehicle, but ever since they had driven into the small village of Asalaam, one hundred fifty kilometers southwest of Mosul, things had been dead quiet. (Thor, 2005, p. 10)

This unit was also responsible, according to the narrator, for helping save naïve Americans who put themselves in danger (e.g., journalists, missionaries) in Iraq. This description exemplifies how U.S. soldiers are always working hard and risking their lives. There are also similar celebrations of select law enforcement agencies, like details of the U.S. Secret Service and their

noble efforts to protect the president (*The Apostle*). Both are also examples of factual devices: They are always real units described with elaborate detail.

The regulars provide a baseline of *patriarchal militarism*, the male myth of warfare also common in post-9/11 Hollywood productions (Boggs & Pollard, 2016). The embodiment of obedient and courageous servicemen represent nostalgia for the patriotism, valor, and sacrifice needed to protect “our” homeland— a dominance by institutions of social control (Altheide, 2005). Not even the hero can take away from the demand for conventional police and military forces to defend the honor of the U.S. and protects its superiority around the world. This framing holds together what Hixson (1993) found in the Cold War novels— a national security cult that hones in a version of security that favors conflict-resolution, celebrates the warrior, presents security as the way the homeland is protected; versus celebrating alternative, less masculine, and martial forms, like diplomats, those protecting the borders in defensive posture, or lawyers. This device embodies the masculine tradition of the militaristic warrior mentality that values social hierarchy, violence, sexism, gun worship, and conquest. As such, regulars become one of the repositories for traditional patriarchal values of “America.”

### C. **Chapter Summary: *The Homeland in a Moralistic New War***

True to a core function of dominant ideology (Mumby, 1989), the doom and homeland frames *distort* the reality of the U.S. and the terrorism threat it faces. The result is a moral challenge to fight for “traditional” ways of life, communal values founded in “American” patriarchy, and predictable forms of national honor. An exceptional nation is threatened and vulnerable. Just as terrorism victims and potential victims need redemption (Altheide, 2005) and Wild West townsfolk desperately need help (Wright, 1977), depictions of terror threats as being



made to innocent citizens and initiated from the outside necessitate the “defense” of a nation and, thereby, authorize a violent response. This is a *call to war* (Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004).

The GWOT was similarly framed: Crenshaw et al. (2008) conclude it was unprecedented in U.S. history as a reversal from conventional war, combining all elements of national power and providing for excessive executive authority. Zellman and Clark (2009) argue the Bush administration portrayed the war as existing *outside* of any historical or geopolitical context to send a message it was uniquely new, and, thus, had newly imagined rules. The narrative of an inevitable clash between good and evil was a break from the past because this new threat was not an enemy—like a state (e.g., the Soviet Union)—to be bargained with. The GWOT involved marshaling core national values to frame-off the policy from any criticism (Reese & Lewis, 2009)—to publically go against it would be to go against the prevailing notions of “freedom” and “liberty.” A popular media progression framed a consistent and constant war terminology, creating a policy that appeared natural (Reese & Lewis, 2009). The doom and homeland frames mimic this: The U.S. progressing an unconventional war based on a constantly perceived need to defend itself from attackers.

The new terror war, thus, looms. Such a security strategy must be understood as a “narrative act of building worlds forever on the edge of catastrophic attack” (Davis, 2006, p. 15). As a genre formula (Hall, 1997), the subject texts access this familiar territory wherein the natural question becomes, “So what are we going to do about it?” This is culture vermissulitude activated in a genre product—repetition and expectation tapping into perceptions of truth. By framing a tense and mystical realm of terrorism, readily available since 9-11 and symbolically threatening the foundations of America, the macro frames of fear and war ideology (Reese &

Lewis, 2009) are invoked. This is accomplished in a convincing and fact-based way with “well-researched” and recognizable histories, locales, and scenarios.

The rebooting of 9/11’s moral calling to fight back provides a space for the U.S. to make amends for its losses. The homeland frame implies that an attack like 9/11 must not be allowed to happen again because the U.S. is the greatest empire on earth and a righteous capitalistic power. The messaging mirrors what was described as the U.S. *millennial destiny* theme in monomythic stories (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). In those versions, the homeland and its values do not usually include positive portrayals of Muslims, blacks, women; nor much diversity, ethnicity, or progressive ideals. Instead, homeland discourse adhere to the patriarchal portrayals of the passive, innocent, victimized, spectators of stereotypically subordinated men and women and their families in need of protection afforded by white men who know best what to do. This framing also creates the threat as a personal affront to the people of the U.S.— not just political.

Another way of understanding the first two frames— and a reason I put them first in organizing my findings— is as a function of setting and plot to progress linear framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). The texts fix the “trolley track” where many innocents could die. The constant state of imminent threat as an emergency (Van Veen, 2009) is not *directly* about ideology, as I find happens in the Islamic extremist and superhero frames. Instead, it is about preconditioning: That is, establishing preconceptions and assumptions about the situation inserted via a particular vision of terror threat. The frames revisit a series of apocalyptic threats on par with 9/11 and its associated fears— claiming it was done wrong the first time and the homeland was emasculated. A mystical domain full of spectacular dangers is created wherein the anxieties of destruction and sense of urgency rekindle underlying emotions and anxieties. The frames present an opportunity

to redeem U.S. masculine supremacy in the ongoing war. They are a preamble to a patriotic *ritual of redemption* (Altheide, 2005) the thriller hero embodies.

With impending threats to the homeland akin to 9/11 evoked in the thrillers, the next natural question when seeking to explain the subject texts is– as was on the minds of the U.S. public right after 9/11 (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003)– “Who did this to us?” The next predicted step in issue framing is to question the thing that planned and executed the imminent plots (Gamson, 2001). This chapter was about the righteous “us.” I now turn to my analysis of “them.”

## VI: ISLAMIC EXTREMIST FRAME

In the thrillers, the cause of the problem is attributed to violent and extreme terrorists and terror groups depicted as: 1) non-American (Powell, 2011) and international terrorists (Porras, 1995) invading the U.S. or threatening the homeland from a foreign land, and 2) motivated by Islam and/or constantly identified as Islamic. Although often depicted as an extreme version of the religion, Islam in the *Islamic extremist frame* is implicitly represented as an underlying cause of the problem that originates from outside of the U.S. The image of the outsider terrorists motivated by religion enhances the vulnerable homeland and victimized populace themes found in fear discourses (Altheide, 2002). The resulting ideological construct is the new war is waged only with Muslims, a process complicit in Othering an entire group of people (Hall, 1997).

My broad finding in the subject texts is similar to previous U.S. periods and is predicated on war, conflict, and fear. The *myth of conflict* manifests itself in Western cultures when the following is constructed: An ongoing war, “superior” nation, and demonized enemy (Keen, 1986). Border invaders (Porras, 1995) or terrorist “thems” threatening U.S. ideals possess the skills and motivations to harm “us” (Rapping, 2003). These devices justify extreme beliefs and barbaric actions against an enemy depicted not as individuals, but as stereotypes defined by the groups in control of popular media messaging (Altheide, 2002; Garland, 2001).

Folk devils are the fundamental mythical actors positioned against the powerful framers of moral panics (Cohen, 1980). They are constructed as being responsible for the deviance and a threat to preferred ideologies and patriarchal interests. As “unambiguously unfavorable symbols: the embodiment of evil” (Cohen, 1980, p. 145), folk devils exemplify the binary reductionism (i.e., the “us versus them”) of image-based popular culture media logic. Within the post-9/11

context and the texts examined here, Islamic terrorists replicate these characteristics and represent what have been called *terrorist folk devils* (Rothe & Muzzatti, 2004).

Said's (1978) work on Orientalism is also crucial here, starting with his basic premise that Western ideology, which was first found in Europe and later (i.e., post-World War II) in the U.S., projects an image of non-Western nations as violent, primitive, ignorant, and irrational. Orientalism is a "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the Orient' and most of the time 'the Occident'" (Said, 1978, p. 2). The Occident is presented as civilized, enlightened, and rational. The *Oriental Other* is a common monolithic portrayal repeatedly set in contrast to those superior themes associated with the West. This generic "East" versus "West" dialectic is an established starting point in describing groups of people from the East, which includes drawing conclusions about their customs, destiny, and mindsets (Burnett & Whyte, 2005).

This type of Othering was identified in the GWOT, such as when Bush rhetorically constructed Muslims, and sometimes Middle Easterners more broadly, as the homeland's enemy—instead of enemies as individuals and isolated groups of violent extremists (Cole, 2008; De Lint, 2004). One researcher concluded the following of GWOT-era news media:

Through naming of the terror suspect, descriptors assigned to the agent, motive for the act, probability of a future threat, and portrayal of the victim(s), a clear pattern of reporting emerged that differed between terrorists who were Muslim with international ties and terrorists who were U.S. citizens with no clear international ties. The episodic coverage of acts of terrorism has become so programmatic as to create a thematic frame of terrorism: *war of Islam on the United States* [emphasis added]. (Powell, 2011, p. 105)

The frame of Islam as the leading threat to the U.S. renders a group of terrorists as "un-American" while simultaneously identifying what it means to be "American" (Jackson, 2011). Threats on 24 had to be foreign in order to maintain certain perceptions of the "American"

identity (Van Veeren, 2009), like those I detailed in the last chapter. This also conforms to the inside versus outside thematic and stereotyping in genre texts (Hall, 1997) found in the thrillers.

All of the imminent terror plots detailed above are planned and executed, with rare exception, by individuals or groups associated with Islam who recur in each story and borrow from preexisting cultural fears as macro frames (Reese & Lewis, 2009) of the Oriental Other (Said, 1978). Framing employs devices to define problems and causation in order to situate a solution to the problem (Gitlin, 1980). I conclude the doom frame is not convincing without mythic Others attributed as the primary and underlying perpetrators of the threats. There are two overlapping dichotomies in operation: Victimized populace versus Islamic extremist, and hero versus terrorist Other. This chapter explains the framing both at the broad or group level (e.g., stereotypes, depictions of religions and institutions) and the level of character demarcation and relationships. An array of Islamic extremists are compared and contrasted below.

My greatest challenge in understanding this framing is the extent to which the devices depict Muslims more generally as complicit in the cultivation of U.S. imperialism. Assessing this messaging was difficult because the texts usually contrive the problem as relating to militant / radical versions of Islam. I address this distinction throughout the chapter, but conclude the threat is ultimately framed as religious. There are sporadically few “good” Muslim characters and no Muslim is a hero or associated with one. The framing is about the dangers of the underlying religion that causes the generic Others to be dangerous, not– as reputable terrorism scholars have concluded (e.g., White, 2014)– individuals and small groups that misappropriate a religion as a justification for extreme hate and violence. Viewed another way, no Muslim succeeds in the texts– their actions and motivations are devalued.

**A. Generalizations and Stereotypes: *Characterizing Muslims as a Threat***

Threat and vulnerability is constructed in the extremist frame to demonstrate the spread of Muslim ideology as a threat to U.S. culture– to “our” values– coupled with failed conventional responses or the populace’s inability to realize or do anything about it. In *Executive Power*, the terror threat is a Muslim group obtaining control of Palestine and threatening Israeli and, implied in that, U.S. interests. The notion Islam is spreading into state politics and causing nations to live under religious law is presented as an overarching problem, happening now. And most of the world is depicted as being unaware it is happening.

In *Blowback*, the underlying premise is a group of influential and extreme Wahhabi Muslims within Saudi Arabia have progressed a plan to install a new caliphate, presumably to control all governmental and religious institutions and provide direction for all Muslims as would be (according to the narrator) required under Islamic law. This group also enlists militants to employ an ancient chemical to eliminate all non-Muslims– a weapon that mysteriously does not harm Muslims and would make death seem natural. Yet, this physical threat is portrayed as secondary to the dangerous spread of religious ideology that– the texts assert– would be accepted by *all* Muslims when a new caliphate is established. The “revolution” would unite the Islamic world as a resurgence of the Ottoman Empire. By the text’s end, the hero temporarily prevents the release of the chemical weapon, but the spread of Muslim ideology continues. The narrator and the hero and his sidekicks are the only ones who seem to know about the threat– they possess a knowledge and expertise that legitimizes the messaging. I think the key ideological message here is not so much about an extremist group planning a revolution that includes murdering millions of non-Muslims, but the presumption that nearly a billion Muslim people would accept the worldwide dictatorship under Muslim law that would follow.

*Extreme Measures* has the subplot wherein mosques in the Washington D.C. area are involved with recruiting and training international terrorists depicted as illegally entering the U.S. from Middle Eastern countries. In the story, the CIA has information foreign terrorists are hiding behind local mosques, but the agency is afraid to take action out of concern they would violate religious freedoms and their actions could produce negative press attention. This subplot demonstrates two things: While terrorists were being radicalized in the U.S., the ideology came from overseas and is protected and promoted within ordinary Muslim houses of worship and 2) exemplifies a U.S. institution as failing by being overly politically correct. The international outside threat involves the spread of Islam in a tangible, religious location in the U.S.

*The Last Patriot* offers the most in-depth and explicit discussion of the proliferation of Islamic influence from international terror threats. In the thriller, involving the plot of the rediscovered Koranic manuscript wherein Allah had a final revelation that Islam must be nonviolent, moderate Muslims and scholars want to find the final revelation because it would give them a basis for nonviolence. Conversely, terrorists in the story try to silence the finding because it could hurt their fundamentalist cause. At various points, hero Harvath expounds on his knowledge of the religion and reasoning behind the manuscript. The hero asserts U.S. President Jefferson fought Muslims in the Barbary Coast because that president realized the Koran's inherent violence. Harvath explains this to his fiancé:

‘While people outside of Islam spoke of the need for it to reform, next to nothing was being done on the inside of Islam where the commitment and desire really mattered. If Thomas Jefferson had been successful in discovering lost Koranic texts and if those texts could uncouple Islam from its militant, supremacist tendencies, the entire world needed those texts now more than ever.’ (Thor, 2008, p. 132)

If the final revelation was handled positively, according to the hero, it could destroy the Islamic extremists ‘and propel the moderates into true control over their religion. The war on



terror could be all but won' (Thor, 2008, p. 132). Harvath claims the majority of Muslims around the world are moderate and peaceful and the religion brings comfort to billions. Yet, the hero clarifies this for his fiancé by explaining, if Koranic verses conflict:

'[The] later verse shall take precedence. The most violent sura in the Koran is the ninth. It is the only chapter in the Koran that doesn't begin with the phrase known as the Basmala' Allah the compassionate, the merciful. It contains verses like slay the idolaters wherever you find them and those who refuse to fight for Allah will be afflicted with a painful death and will go to hell as well as calling for warfare against and the subjugation of all Jews and Christians.' (Thor, 2008, p. 33)

The instructions left by Mohammad and his followers have been 'driving violence in the name of Islam ever since' (Thor, 2008, p. 33). According to Harvath, it is a challenge for peaceful Muslims because in that last true instruction, Mohammed committed to violence and must be followed since he is viewed as the perfect model for all believers. The hero implies with the way the Koran is now, Islam is founded on violence. If a new revelation could be found, it would give the religion a theological basis for peace. Instead, radical Deobandis 'controlled over fifty percent of the mosques in Great Britain and counted among their most devoutly faithful Afghanistan's notoriously evil Taliban regime' (Thor, 2008, p. 131). The narrator of the story concludes that extreme and militant Islam was the "biggest ideological problem" faced by the world and given "Muslims made up a majority in sixty-three countries around the globe [...and] of the thirty major conflicts under way in the world, twenty-eight involved Muslim governments" (Thor, 2008, p. 181)– the world should be gravely concerned.

This extended summary of the religious history lesson found in *The Last Patriot* shows how the text proves a negative by suggesting Islam is currently violent since the final revelation has never been found. The hero and narrator provide an in-depth rationale for this as authoritative subject matter experts– both as non-Muslim Westerners explaining how it is and as a patriarchal character (hero) educating a subordinated character (hero's fiancé). The text theorizes prophet

Muhammad had a final revelation Islam must *not* be violent. This messaging suggests there is hope for the religion to be peaceful, but it is nonetheless responsible for international terrorism and remains an ideological danger spreading throughout the world. The framing adds and takes from the myth of conflict (Keen, 1986) by presenting the entire religion in terms of global conflict. The frequent factualization and intertextual reference bolster this message.

I conclude the broader position in the text—implied in the first three examples in this section—is Islam is based on violence. Also, most Muslims (often described monolithically as being expected to follow the religion’s basic tenets) are potentially violent. Thus, Islam itself is a threat to the U.S. Although the insider-experts (i.e., through narration and the hero dialogue) explicitly claim *extremists* are to blame for the new terror war, peaceful and moderate versions are confused and conflated with the violent image of Islamic terrorism. Devices like having a mosque shelter and train terrorists (*Blowback*) and claiming a caliphate established by extremist will garner the support of Muslims around the world (*Extreme Measures*), signify the war “we” are in is not one with a small group of thugs with no regard for human rights, but a war with an Islamic ideology potentially supported by all Muslims.

The texts routinely associate terrorism with the religion. There is no serious critique of this position because few other versions are offered, such as Islam being an apolitical one that embraces tradition while supporting human rights, democracy, and individual freedoms. The claims made in *The Last Patriot* are played out in the story, most notably in its characterization of FAIR (the Foundation of American Islamic Relations, discussed above in the doom frame). In the text, FAIR is shown as a moderate cultural organization on the surface that CIA insiders—through classified access—reveal has a broader agenda to take over the U.S. with Islamic law.

The contrast to Cold War fiction enemies emphasizes the shifting nature of the U.S. archenemy. The Russian threat (i.e., the problem) was presented as sheer military power existing in a specific country. Soviets were demonized through their dictatorial nation, portending global crisis from a state actor with deadly weapons and motivated by a dangerous communist ideology (Baraban, 2003). Like the spreading weed of Islam in my findings, communism was shown to be a threat proliferating through the fabric the U.S. in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. It threatened “traditional” cultural values, creating a group of insiders and threatening outsiders (Dittmer, 2005). But in the waning days of the Cold War, fears about communism as a spreading ideology were moderated, leaving only the practical threat of Russia’s enormous military (Baraban, 2003).

The post-9/11 war on terror messaging shifts that imperialist threat to a discourse of fighting for freedom and moralistic righteousness to help legitimize preemptive, global war (Holloway, 2009). The post-9/11 archenemy (Islamic extremism) is insidious: “They” can easily come over borders, invade “our” water, and move throughout the lands— a crisis squarely involving the U.S. The mythical barbarism of the new enemy has far more mythic and hyperbolic proportions when compared with the conventional Soviet threat. With such an exceptional Other, vengeful emotional punishment seems justifiable (Holloway, 2009).

The subject texts also engage in the Othering of Islam by using Middle Eastern or Muslim stereotypes to describe terrorists. These representations also conflate being a terrorist with being Muslim, as well as being Middle Eastern as meaning Muslim. In *The Apostle*, the narrator states: “How nineteen goatherds could do what they did on 9/11 to the most powerful nation on the face of the earth was still beyond Harvath” (Thor, 2009, p. 34). The exact meaning of “goatherds” in a cultural context is not clear, but it suggests an ethnic stereotype related to Arab men being poor, ignorant, and uncivilized.

I found the repeat, almost flippant, use of “raghead” in the Griffin texts. The term here, which is a religious stereotype that derogatorily imagines all male Arabs based on their religious headgear, is only associated with terrorism. The hero and sidekick have an exchange about a terror plot in *The Hostage*. The sidekick offers his opinion about the threat:

‘I’m all ears for anything you have to say.’

‘One scenario that came to my mind is that we’re dealing with a lunatic or lunatics not necessarily ragheads; maybe even American’s who get off by whacking important people.’ (Griffin, 2006, p. 409)

The two men speculate as to if they are dealing with terrorists who are more than the standard crazy Muslim, thereby further distinguishing a “raghead” as someone *not* from the U.S. and emphasizing what it means to be a terrorist. Later in the story, the airliner stolen by the terrorists for their terror plot is described as “Rag-Head Airways.” The use of derogatory cultural references is one way Othering is accomplished: Meaning is attributed to slurs (Said, 1978), not unlike the religious and racial slurs used in Vietnam— like “gook” “chink,” and “dink”— as a way to categorize, dehumanize, and, ultimately, justify violence against an enemy (Gibson, 1994).

In a *Black Ops* scene, a sidekick talks with the hero about where terrorists obtained products and technology necessary to build and operate the chemical munitions plant in Congo to be used to develop weapons of mass destruction against the U.S.:

‘The laboratory in the Congo,” Berezovsky explained, “requires not only chemicals unavailable in Iran or anywhere else in the Arab world; of course, the laboratory equipment, centrifuges, that sort of thing, with which to manipulate these chemicals. Also unavailable anywhere else in the Arab world. It has been credibly suggested that one of the reasons why the Muslims hate the West is that they are scientifically four hundred years behind the West.’ (Griffin, 2008, p. 295)

The stereotype of the Arab world being less scientifically advanced and hating the West because of it resonates with Orientalism, which groups Arabs together as less civilized and behind the times (Said, 1978). Simultaneously, it suggests the West is superior and plays into the

“American” ideal of destiny and exceptionalism that justifies the expansion of U.S. worldwide power and control over other nations (Jackson, 2011). The notion an entire religious group “hates” the West because of the West’s alleged scientific superiority links the terrorist act with Muslims and implies a cause of terrorist action relates to the Other’s envy and hatred.

The use of Muslim or Islamic or some related version is a common contrivance used in conjunction with the terrorist perpetrating the imminent doomsday plots. In *The Hostage*— with the plot to crash an airliner into the Liberty Bell— secondary characters discuss the imminent threat. One sidekick, Pevsner, is concerned with the physical danger posed to his family, described in the story through a photograph of a physically attractive blond wife and three kids that looked like a “Clairol advertisement” (Griffin, 2006, p. 149). This snapshot of a traditional Western family perfected and idealized through a readily available popular commercial image is in contrast to the Muslim terrorist “fanatics” who, in this scenario, were Somalis. Thus, the Muslim theme is juxtaposed as a threat against 1) The idealized family and 2) the iconic symbol of U.S. freedom and independence. This is about us versus them: Signifying a dark-skinned and backward Muslim threatening the white, pretty and pure family, as well as U.S. liberty.

In *The Last Patriot*, when Julia Gallo is a Taliban prisoner in Afghanistan, Taliban members brutally torture and kill her Afghani colleague and translator, Sayed. At one point, she is in her cell, frightened, and thinking about Sayed. She next hears chanting outside from who are presumed to be Taliban boys. The narrator explains Gallo was so scared because she knew what “they” were capable of and it would be worse than what happened to Sayed:

The chanting of the young boys increased in intensity. Gallo steeled herself for what was going to happen. Being in captivity, she had not taken her birth control pills recently and then almost laughed out loud at herself for the concern. Getting pregnant was the least of her problems at this moment.

She looked at the young boys and recalled the high level of homosexual activity among the Taliban. There was an old fable that said that birds flew over Taliban territory with only one wing because they needed the other to guard their rectums. (Thor, 2008, p. 103)

This is a broad representation of Taliban Others, including boys, as being capable of horrible acts against Gallo— an attractive, white altruistic doctor from the U.S. This excerpt could also be a reference to the practice of rape of boys by adult Taliban members— that is, an Other conceived as morally degenerated coupled with the subordinated masculine trait of homosexuality.

All of the devices, references, and representations discussed thus far require characterizing Islam— versus specific terror threats by violent and isolated non-state actors— as being antagonistic to the West. Repetitive ideological constructions are needed to demonstrate domination and authority over the Orient. In particular, this is accomplished through the image of the “Arab” as a savage border violator ready to invade the West at any opportunity, which Said (1978) called the “menace of jihad.” This menace is founded upon a belief that all Arabs/Muslims/Islamists are united in a struggle against the West and a fear those Others will take over the world. Also, the texts make no distinction between Islam as simply a religion that is practiced versus it being a reason for political aggression— the “church and state” are always intertwined. This resembles what has been considered a religion-based “clash of civilizations” constructed in post-9/11 news media coverage in support of the Bush GWOT (e.g., Powell, 2011). Holloway’s (2009) identified the same theme in his analysis of terrorism thrillers: That is, an unending war between Western civilization— often epitomized by the U.S.— and those opposed to the West, grouped together as Islam.

The “clash” is perceived as a fundamental divide between civilizations developed through human history and is a result of the sides being incompatible— war is the only outcome in an effort to preserve the self-interests of each side (Holloway, 2009). Within this ideological

perspective, aggressive acts of any sort are justified in defense of “our” civilization. Bin Laden had a similar theory on the opposing “side”: He considered his acts as self-defense— not terrorism— against a Western civilization that was violently destroying Islam (Lippman, 2003).

Not found in the thrillers, but prevalent in GWOT messaging is the positioning of Muslim against the righteous U.S., in terms of Christianity versus Islam. Besides the underlying notions of homeland that implies a traditional Christian Judeo basis (Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004), I found little data to support a strong Christian perspective. Conversely, researchers (e.g., Powell, 2011) found data demonstrating how the Bush rhetoric depicted Muslims negatively and, simultaneously, “Christian America” as the salvation. Popular news media frames promote an ideological conflict of cultures that influences perception of the issues and, thus, policies and actions corresponding to those ideological positions (Powell, 2011). Bush and his supporters relied on Christian themes and metaphors and imagery, such as biblical rhetoric in his speeches and fiery images like the burning twin towers (Altheide, 2005). These are not as prominent in the subject texts, highlighting how the U.S. actions in the thrillers are framed primarily as a political endeavor, and politics and religion are made to appear as inseparable.

According to Said (1978), an antagonistic view of Islam as a monolithic religion clashing with the West also requires those perpetuating the messaging (i.e., framing agents from the West) as having a limited understanding of the religion. This ignorance is evident throughout the Griffin texts, where the narrator in *Black Ops* claims the terrorists flying the stolen aircraft are motivated to get a “harem of virgins” in the afterlife or the recently referenced assertion *all* Muslims despise the West. These monolithic portrayals make no distinction between different practices and beliefs of the religion. Likewise, in *By Order of President* such ignorance is

demonstrated when a sidekick theorizes to hero Castillo about what the terrorists might do with the stolen airliner:

‘Think about this: What these rag-heads are really trying to do is get all the other rag-heads united against us, right? And so far they're not doing so hot, right? So what would really piss off all the world's rag-heads? An American airplane crashing into that black thing—whatever it is—in Mecca.’ (Griffin, 2006, p. 39)

Not only does this demonstrate an uninformed view of one of the holiest relics in the world for all Muslims (i.e., the Kaaba Stone), it oversimplifies a position that all Muslims would unite against “us”—presumed to be the West in this text—because of an attack perceived as originating from “America.” Although I am not an Islamic scholar, I conclude positions made by authors Thor and Flynn about the religion above also lack a full understanding of the faith.

Like many of these examples suggest, Islamic stereotypes and other assumptions about that religion are predominantly found in the *Griffin* thrillers. This author’s past tense and distant writing style affords no complexity, humanizing, or depth of character. Like Clancy novels, boilerplate enemies are best viewed at a distance and left for the reader to fill in the blanks from existing stereotypes (Gallagher, 2000). The generic Muslim-as-terrorist primarily found in the Griffin texts also corresponds to the faceless, masked or “unknown aggressor” (Boggs & Pollard, 2006) found in Hollywood, where the media consumer—presumably borrowing from popular themes—is left to complete the image and draw conclusions from broad representations.

In *Black Ops*, the hero and a sidekick discuss if the hero’s mission was successful, concluding: ‘it worked, didn’t it? Here you are, two wars later- three *if you count the one we’re in with the Muslims* [emphasis added]’ (Griffin, 2008, p. 347). As with the other Griffin passages, the key language is a war “we” (America) is in with Islam. This is about Islam being dangerous as an ideology: The homeland’s enemies are Muslim, justifying why “we” are in the



midst of war. But the actual differences are acted out at the character level (discussed next) and later when I examine them in relation to the hero.

## **B. Character-Level Tropes**

The previous section explains how the texts explicitly stereotype Muslim Others and how the U.S. is at war with “them.” Framing is more complex and implicit at the character level, which varies in scale and intensity and involves complicated motivations for terrorism. I describe these framing mechanisms as *character tropes* because I could not delineate character typologies corresponding to one theme. Instead, the tropes reflect predictable roles, traits, personalities, and motivations perceived as true in the post-9/11 milieu. Characters borrow from and blend different features, resulting in characters as vessels containing the tropes of being: Savage / uncivilized; devout Islamists; and having the resources to wage war. These tropes correspond to reasons for being terrorists and work towards this conclusion: They are un-American, from the outside, and immoral because their Islamism is dangerous and what they do is exceptional, which forms the ideological basis for an exceptional, violent response to them.

### **1. Character Trope of Savage, Immoral, and Uncivilized**

One predominant terrorist trope involves “them” being evil, crazy, or having some variation of morally degenerated characteristics. Several Islamic extremists in the subject texts adhere to the post-9/11 counterterrorism conception of a “mad bomber” based on the popular media representation that constantly suggests that terrorists are insane or commit acts of terror based only on their love of destruction and murder (Jenkins, 2003).

Above, the narrator in the Griffin stories describes the terrorist in broad strokes as “insane” (*By Order of the President*) and “fanatics” (*The Hostage*). In *Black Ops*, the hero and some sidekicks discuss the specific individuals behind the Liberty Bell attack plot: “[With] stolen

727 headed for your beloved Liberty Bell, and why whoever it was had involved the African-American Lunatics in Philadelphia, only a very few of whom can walk and chew gum at the same time' (Griffin, 2008, p. 175). The terrorist is portrayed as being degenerates and lunatics—a variety of terminology is used by this text to generalize the Somali's planning the attack.

Thor and Flynn—once again set in contrast to Griffin's writing—offer more direct and personalized terrorists that compliment the broad descriptors and generalizations. Those specific versions include the main Saudi terror plot funder in *Executive Power*, described as a corpulent, ignorant, and sexually perverted murderer overjoyed to fund the plot to create a war between U.S. and the Muslim world. The terrorist from *Consent to Kill* is a “porn freak” (Flynn, 2005, p. 29) and “radical thug” (p. 5) who recruits innocent Somali teenagers to be suicide bombers. In *Takedown*'s opening scene, a high-level terrorist, Mohammed bin Mohammed, is in Somalia to train terrorists, but also described as luring 11-year-old boys into his hotel room to rape them.

These more direct characterizations—terrorists as sexual deviants and abusers of children in the particularly heinous versions—justify an aggressive war response to a morally corrupt group of people. This mirrors the conclusion media culture has spawned a new category,

[Of] human beings— a category of terrorists that ostensibly captures the essence of cotemporary jihadist violence. The personality type exists beyond history, beyond politics, beyond psychology, a type so irredeemably evil and irrational that no normal mode of interpretation is possible. (Boggs & Pollard, 2006, p. 350)

This includes both describing barbaric traits, as well as planning and sometimes completing horrific acts against the U.S. This trope is easy to fill as part of the available image bank of intertextual themes—the U.S. populace has been repeatedly exposed to this popular media portrayal of the Islamic extremist (Altheide, 2005; Crenshaw et al., 2008).

In *The Apostle*, hero Harvath and the president plan to have the hero sneak into Pakistan, kidnap terrorist Khan, and trade him for Julia Gallo, imprisoned by the Taliban. But Harvath decides he could not trade or negotiate with Khan because he was a terrorist and was:

[Exactly] what he would go back to being. There was no reforming these assholes. You had to either lock them up or kill them. Setting Khan free was an option Harvath was not willing to entertain. Not when it meant more people who didn't deserve to die would die. [...A] man with Khan's background could be behind the next 9/11 or 7/7 attacks. Knowing he had had him and had released him back into the wild if something like that ever happened was not something Harvath could live with. (Thor, 2009, p. 268)

In addition to being described as a brutal murderer, Khan is depicted as a sort of caged beast who the hero does not want to release back into the "wild." These terrorism metaphors (Crenshaw et al., 2008) help to Other terrorists as savage and uncivilized. They also fuel the doom frame, such as Khan potentially executing another super-terrorism 9/11-style attack (Van Veen, 2009).

Wildness and related animal metaphors also help construct the landscape the hero—depicted as a modern cowboy—enters to track down the villain. In *Memorial Day*, for example, the chase to find that terrorist is constantly portrayed as the hero hunting a savage and dangerous character in a desert wasteland. This theme is omnipresent: Others exist "somewhere outside society's orderly boundaries" (Rapping, 2003, p. 64). In that space, there is a different set of rules, and it is a shadowy and uncivilized world: I call this space the *counterterrorism shadows* and it is the battlefield where the hero must confront the degenerate Other.

International terrorists in the subject texts are not all insane and savage, but when they are, and concurrently presented as Arab, this trope (as savage, uncivilized, and in moral opposition to the U.S.) becomes an ideological position playing into the Oriental Other myth (Said, 1978). My findings support those of Merskin (2004): Islam, through negative depictions of Muslim and Arab individuals and characters that stereotype them, was demonized in popular media over the last couple decades into the evil and animalistic terrorist image.

## 2. “True Believer” Character Trope

While some of the Others in the counterterrorism thrillers seem to be purely motivated by insanity or uncontrollable animalistic urges, almost all are motivated by Islam. In this next trope, found with varying degrees in various characters, I found an emphasis on terrorists’ motivations as being devoutly religious, even righteous. These motivations are sometimes discussed with complexity and sympathy, including the use of conflicted characterizations.

David, the mastermind Palestinian terrorist in *Executive Power*, encapsulates this trope. The narrator presents him as being a pure and devout Muslim, and a committed family man. He plans and executes attacks, but only on specific Western military-type targets he believes will have an impact without bringing unnecessary harm to innocent woman and children. A far more vicious and barbaric terrorist, Prince Omar, kills David. Omar tricks David into planting a bomb David did not know was intended to kill civilians. In this plot, Omar’s greed and selfish power trumps religious conviction. An enemy depicted as acting out of religious devotion with positive values, as opposed to the more simplified trope of acting out of savagery and hatred, seems to create a superficial sympathy. Nevertheless, David shares Omar’s hatred of the West and views about what needs done, which Omar shares with David when he strays:

‘You overestimate the people of this nation. They are soft and stupid. The reason political correctness and multiculturalism exists is because they are too lazy to hold others to what it once meant to be an American. This nation is dying and we are not the problem; we are the solution. Islam, pure Islam is what will save America.’ (Thor, 2008, p. 231)

David acts on this view and uses unconventional terror techniques and travels the world targeting the U.S. His devotion fails him, losing out to pure immorality. David builds on the trope of devotion to Islam as being inherently dangerous. Omar simultaneously highlights U.S. vulnerability and implies it is based on “America” not being like it used to be.

Sometimes the narration provides a backstory explaining the reasoning behind why characters have become disillusioned with the world and convert to Islam, which typically sets them on a path to radicalism. In *Takedown*, a terrorist named Nassir is on the verge of executing a suicide bombing in New York City. The narrator recounts Nassir's story and how he got involved with an inspiring imam he met at his mosque. He entered the U.S. 10 years prior—as a foreigner coming from the outside (mimicking the inside versus outside threat theme [e.g., Porras, 1995; Powell, 2011])—and became “disenchanted with a failed business, a failed marriage, and what he saw as his downtrodden American existence, he had looked everywhere until he found the one thing that filled the emptiness inside him— Islam” (Thor, 2006, p. 22).

Nassir studied the Koran and dreamt about achieving paradise:

[He] had thrown out his record collection, had stopped smoking, and was chastising his younger sister on a daily basis about the evils of dancing, the type of friends she associated herself with, and the revealing American clothes she wore. One day, she finally worked up the nerve to suggest that if he didn't like America and its ways, then maybe he should go back to their home country. Nassir had seriously considered it [...] but then the Imam had come into his life. After they had gotten to know each other he had suggested another idea; one that would require him to place the greater glory of Allah above his own self-pity and self-serving desires. (Thor, 2006, pp. 22-23)

The imam eventually gives Nassir a special task. Since he believed the task was an honor and duty before Prophet Mohammed, Nassir eventually blows up the bridge in New York City and himself just after reciting his Koranic prayers. This perverse form of “righteousness” is often aimed at failings of certain freedoms of the “American way.” While Nassir finds some level of comfort in the benefits of living in the U.S., ultimately his conversion to Islam causes him to murder U.S. citizens. “America” is in opposition to the Imam (representing Islam), which is the character who diverts Nassir from leaving to return “home,” outside of the U.S., and to take evil action against the U.S. Above all, Islam itself led Nassir to become a terrorist— he is lost and disaffected like the previous character. The men who do the suicidal acts of terrorism—

the popular image of the Muslim bomber (Crenshaw et al., 2008)— are never coerced, tricked, or charmed into it. Their actions are based on being a religious path that eventually blurs faith and belief with the political action of terrorism. This path never results in positive outcome.

The outcome is the same is even for Dodd from *The Last Patriot*, who is a rare Western character who converts to Islam. Dodd is a CIA operative who becomes a double agent spying for the Islamic extremists. Dodd's history, like Nassir's, is tragic: He lost his wife and kids and could not find any solace in the U.S. or its ways. Dodd believed Islam offered something the U.S. was missing— faith and a moral code. The narrator summarizes his views:

Up until the 1950s, American children yearned for adulthood. When their time came to be adults they stepped into the role proudly, leaving childhood behind and taking up the mantles of responsibility, honor, and dignity. They embraced and championed the ideals of those who came before them while valiantly tackling new ideas and problems that their families, communities, and nation faced. [...] Americans now shunned adulthood, preferring to remain in a state of perpetual adolescence. By failing to move forward with grace and dignity, they left a gaping hole in American society. They treated relationships like disposable lighters, tossing marriages away when they ran out of gas. Children were left without families, and even worse, they were left without adults who could be role models of responsible behavior. (Thor, 2008, pp. 32-33)

Dodd concludes the American populace was devoid of values and now worshipped materialism, instead of submitting to God. This is the path that leads the character to turn to Islam.

Dodd seems to be the closest a character comes to being a “good Muslim,” demonstrating how a conversion Islam could provide a positive change for the U.S. To Dodd, Islam offered a form of salvation and he reminisces about the traditional American ideal (e.g., when adults could be role models) found in the homeland frame. This character is also an example of a more nuanced version of the terrorist image in a text that occurs later in the dataset (i.e., 2008). But most importantly, in this subplot Dodd's solution is to turn to Islam, which fails. He ends up inadvertently helping Islamic extremists with a doomsday attack. In a plot twist late in the story, Dodd realizes the error in his ways and kills the main terrorist in the story. However, another

terrorist then kills Dodd. It does not matter that Dodd is a Westerner and turncoat of the CIA. The trope is still present: Even Dodd's hopeful and positive view of Islam offering morality– like the peaceful version of Islam in *The Last Patriot*– is negated because he helps conspire to kill Americans and he himself is killed. The Muslim faith is again indistinguishable from terrorism and causes the characters to take pathological actions. This is one way the trope initially shows Islam as positive (i.e., it pays “lip service” to that idea), but eventually negates that notion. Islam misleads Nassir and Dodd and they become *victims* of the religion. Still, other characters are dogmatically driven by the trope.

The main terrorist in *Memorial Day*, Al-Yamani, is on a mission for Allah. He is to bring a nuclear bomb into the U.S. via what the narrator describes as the porous U.S. border with Mexico. He does this by sneaking across international waters, stealing a boat, and brutally killing along the way. As Al-Yamani approaches the U.S., he turns his attention to “what lay ahead [...] He had waited his entire life for this opportunity. It was his destiny to come to America, and it was his providence to strike a blow for Allah” (Flynn, 2004, p. 23). The narrator explains how more terrorists were “converging on America from all points of the compass. Before the week was over, the arrogant and hedonistic Americans would be dealt a crippling blow” (Flynn, 2004, p. 24).

During his mission, Al-Yamani attempts to not be seen as a Muslim, but to blend in as a secular Westerner. He denies his faith: Unable to pray, wear the proper religious garb, or keep his proud Muslim beard. Al-Yamani is described as having made the noblest self-sacrifice of exile from Allah. During the mission– since he is handling a nuclear weapon– he is slowly dying from radiation poisoning, but keeps enough energy to strike a “blow” to the U.S.,

[A] country with more shoreline than it could ever realistically defend. It was the Great Satan's one glaring weakness, and al-Yamani was planning to exploit it in every phase of

his operation. His importance was known to the Western intelligence agencies. A price of ten million dollars had been placed on his head [...His] own people had been tempted by the bounty, and if not for moles inside both the Pakistani and Saudi intelligence services who had tipped him off, he would now be rotting inside a dungeon [...he would] unleash the ultimate terror weapon on the arrogant Americans. (Flynn, 2004, p. 109)

These characterizations enhance much of the broader framework– the vulnerability of the homeland, invading international terrorists, the imminent nature of the threats– but the emphasis here is on the Islamic righteousness trope. This trope again depicts the motivations for terror as pure religion. The trope also portrays the “us” through the eyes of the “them.” The U.S. is arrogant, hedonistic, lacking morality, commercialized, lazy, immature, and weak from being overly politically correct. This is what Islam thinks of us (“America”). But this does not matter because the messages are inevitably negated– destroyed by the hero.

The prominent terrorist in *Blowback*, Khalid, exemplifies the trope’s role of depicting “true belief” as a source of post-9/11 fear. Khalid is described as knowing and having much in common with Bin Laden– both described by the narrator as Saudi “trust fund brats” (Thor, 2005, p. 26)– and being present when the leader celebrated the attack on 9/11, which is another example of the use of insider information and factualization. Bin Laden had plans for Khalid, according to the narrator, because Khalid was intelligent, spoke Western languages, and had a European appearance. Khalid would not just be a bomber or fly planes into buildings: “He was much too precious for that. He would become bin Laden’s greatest weapon, a new power that the Western world would be forced to reckon with” (Thor, 2005, p. 27). Khalid despises the U.S. He can easily pass as Western, and that is the foundation of fear– the terrorist blending in and being invisible– yet his religion is the prime motivation. He represents the idea of the spread of ideology into the physical manifestation of what it means to be Western. The terror plot also



mirrors this symbolism: The use of U.S. currency to quietly spread a poison throughout the homeland, in much the same way Khalid can creep into the country.

### **3. Character Trope of possessing the Resources for War**

The international outsider motivated by Islam in the extremist frame is supported by another trope: The idea Others have the necessary support and financial backing to terrorize. One of the most important components of constructing a terrorist “them”—to enhance believability and the perception of being at war—is to depict them as having the *resources* to execute their plans (Rapping, 2003). GWOT narratives likewise depicted the enemy as insidious border invaders with an exaggerated ability to attack anyone, anywhere, anytime (Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004). In the subject texts, this mostly relates to the funding or other means necessary to accomplish the massive and complicated plots, such as building a chemical plant, obtaining nuclear weapons, and coordinating simultaneous assaults on U.S. cities, as well as the terrorist’s ability to travel the world with apparent ease.

The data reveals these resources usually come from two places: 1) Wealthy individuals from Middle Eastern countries, like Bin Laden and Khalid (*Blowback*), associated with terrorism, or 2) backing from the government of countries with sources of wealth—mostly oil—and usually known to be Muslim. In *Consent to Kill*, funding for the terror plot originates from a wealthy Saudi Arabian prince. In *The Last Patriot*, Prince Omar similarly provides the money in his conspiracy to proliferate his version of “pure Islam” into the U.S.

In these texts, these resources are also more broadly from certain countries—namely, Saudi Arabia. In *Executive Power*, hero Harvath explains how Muslim extremists—supported by the wealthy and powerful citizens of that country—control international terrorism through Wahhabism. In *Memorial Day*, intelligence officers from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia help

terrorist Al-Yamani and warn him of dangers along the way. Less often, funding comes from the last substantial U.S. enemy: In *The Apostle*, Russia is indirectly involved in backing and supplying the weapons. In *Black Ops*, both Russia and Iran are involved with funding an attack, but few specifics are provided. Russia is unique in this regard as a Cold War holdout enemy and continued threat to U.S. interests with its own motivations for Russian security. In these cases, the U.S. former rival superpower is confused and conflated with the struggle against religion-based violence. Nonetheless, these more nuanced versions— versus terrorism support coming from the new, Muslim enemy theme— from the last two texts (written in 2009 and 2008) appear later in the chronology of texts.

The trope implies certain foreigners and foreign nations— ideologically opposed to the U.S.— have the will and ability to get terrorist's the resources they need to wage war. The trope is summed up in this way by a sidekick in *The Last Patriot*, who explains how terrorists:

‘[Are not] the turban-wearing morons most of our politicians think they are,’ continued Salam. ‘They are extremely sophisticated, and have resources you can’t even begin to imagine. If you knew the places their operatives had wormed their way into, you wouldn’t be able to sleep at night. They have armies of sympathizers, legions of apologists, and one of the best crafted public relations and media strategies ever created. These people make the Nazis look like amateurs. (Thor, 2008, p. 245)

This trope enhances the credibility of the terror plots. This is the ideological view and position of the subject texts, reflecting and producing a xenophobic and paranoid theme found in other fiction genres, like detective fiction (Friedman & Rozen-Zvi, 2001) and even thriller fiction as “paranoid fiction” (Levingston, 2010). This is about a conspiracy paradigm, which involves the belief that an omnipotent and enigmatic individual or group secretly controls the sociopolitical order (Letort, 2016). Like how popular media portrayed Russia as having the ability to nuke the U.S. Midwest (Gallagher, 2006), the subject texts portray the Others as being able to attack

anywhere. Overall, they make it seem as if powerful Middle Eastern countries and characters from them have plenty of resources, and the motivations to use them against the U.S.

#### 4. The Other-Terrorist as Irrational, Capable, and Invariably Guilty

The three tropes I explained have different purposes as framing devices, including showing how these types of terrorists are savage and insane, they commit acts of terrorism on behalf of Islam, and they have the resources to act. Although presented in varying degrees and ways, together they progress two messages: First, the Islamic extremist causes the imminent threat and does so in the name of Islam. The Other, thus, is *irrational*. This is an important descriptor because it posits the rational “us” against the irrational Other, who does not follow any social rules (Said, 1978). Second, they are willing and able to execute imminent plots.

The characterizations of the terrorists’ motivations points to another relevant feature of the Islamic extremist frame that I call the *invariable guilt* of the Other. All of the terrorists described above, including Al-Yamani, Khan, David, Nassir, Mohammed bin Mohammed, and any of the Saudi funders or “ragheads” from the Griffin stories, are always already guilty of being terrorists. This is important because it emboldens this messaging: “They” look a certain way, are motivated by this religion, are willing and able to execute these attacks against “us,” *and* are guilty of doing it now. This tautological logic removes all doubt. The stories test and prove the Othering as truth. Unlike actual antiterrorism where practical challenges include finding and analyzing large volumes of information to decide on guilt, verifying identities, or sorting through data to determine differing roles in terror acts, as was realized as the GWOT progressed (Broe, 2004); here, that difficult work is already done. By making the Islamic extremist unquestionably guilty of horrible acts or potential acts against the U.S., the texts take

another step towards creating a situation where it makes common sense (Gramsci, 1971) to take extreme action against the Other.

### C. What the Framing Omits

This is what framing does: Tells a story to organize a particular situation into a causal sequence that attends to what is represented as relevant (*within*) and irrelevant (*without*) to the enterprise at hand (Altheide, 2002). So far, the findings show how ideological framing operates through mystification, emotive devices, oversimplifications, liberal use of factualization, and misdirection—omitting in different ways. Similarly, neoconservative GWOT ideology portrayed terrorism as a social problem, treating intense terror plots and international Islamic extremists as the only problem while omitting the countless factors constituting the *objective reality* of U.S. terrorism (Jenkins, 2003). The monolithic and simplified portrayals of Islam in the GWOT and thriller narratives reinforces findings that popular news media presentations of terrorism were dominated, especially the years right after 9/11, by simple tales (e.g., tribal relations, notions of jihad) and labels (e.g., “radical cleric” and “Islamic militant”) (White, 2014). This worldview of Islam and Muslims is narrow and almost always *in relation to terrorism*. This construction, presented in moralistic tones, sends messages that radicalism “defines Islam” and most Muslims believe the same or similar things (White, 2014). The subject narratives privilege radical versions of Islam based on the religious proclamations of terror groups, which are not really religious in nature, but about fanaticism and pure violence (White, 2014).

From this perspective, Islam is distorted and misunderstood (Merskin, 2004). This view fails to see how the religion shares the same values as other religions regarding love, forgiveness, and community. Peaceful and moderate versions of Islam are not afforded narrative space. I conclude the following are additional perspectives left outside of the thrillers’ framework:

- Alternate and more complex explanations of terrorists' motivations, such as being in response to U.S. foreign policy and perpetuated by poverty and ignorance (White, 2014)
- The actual long-term and complicated nature of "terrorism" and its causes, especially crucial because terrorism remains a unclear, relative, changing, and overused idea (Laqueur, 2007; Hoffman, 2006)
- Domestic forms of terrorism in the U.S., such as homegrown cells (Bergen et al., 2011)
- Less dramatic, massive, and imminent plots– shown to be the reality during the corresponding historic period in the U.S (Jackson, 2011)– are ignored
- The real U.S. populace and culture that is threatened, which includes diverse voices and worldviews from the nation instead of the homogenous idealized version provided

As concluded of the GWOT, actual international terrorists cloak pure violence and ignorance with religion (White, 2014)– constructing this threat as a religious issue misdirects an understanding and analysis of the objective situation. By mirroring the dominant GWOT thinking about terrorism that was based on simplistic metaphorical frames of warfare, policing, prejudice, and epidemiology (Crenshaw et al., 2008), the subject texts also hinder the ability to use valid reasoning and logic in understanding complexities of significant consequence on U.S. policy, justice, and security. I continue this analysis throughout the remaining findings chapters.

#### **D. Chapter Summary: 9/11 Reboot and the Other**

A key feature of this shared war conception is the enemy is only depicted as Muslim. Both narratives play into the fear of the Oriental Other (Said, 1978), which is about the "civilized" U.S. identity, versus the "uncivilized" Other identity, and the common sense this process creates. The common sense in the post-9/11 context includes treating all Muslims as part of the problem and Islam as signifying a barbaric group of people (Powell, 2011). The first years of the Bush Doctrine rhetoric– mainly in speeches about 9/11 and the U.S. response– reinforced and ratified existing Muslim-as-terrorist stereotypes (Merskin, 2004). This was done in four ways: Identification of a *monolithic evil* originating in Islam, removing individualization so bad

acts were not associated with personal motivation, stereotyping, and *zero-sum thinking*, which involves thinking what is good for “them” must be bad for “us,” and vice versa (Merskin, 2004).

With the complexities removed by framing, the entertainment media logic (Altheide, 2002) of the frame is resolute. Through a dramatic lens of violence and conflict, the framing magnifies a constant narrative of being under attack by a prevalent and established version of Islam. As in the homeland frame, these framing devices reenact the 9/11 moment. By sending messages “we” are in a certain framework again (Goffman, 1974), “America” is in constant state of war and the familiar post-9/11 archenemy is rejuvenated. The paranoid narrative of the non-American, outsider, and Muslim terrorist *necessitates* a channeling a particular type of black and white ideological authority. The texts— by claiming to know the mindsets, reasoning, and even destinies of the Other— construct a monolithic “terrorist” caricature.

Othering of the foreign terrorist is about the construction of communal identity, diverting attention away from alternative enemies and directing attention to a common threat (Said, 1978). Post-9/11 depictions of “evil Arab extremists” activated cultural fears to reenergize and consolidate existing ideologies of a national enemy (Davis, 2006). Communal identity requires a separate and dissident relationship to work (Said, 1978). The reader of a justice-related fiction must perceive they are on the side of “law” and “truth” (Danielson & Engle, 1995). Western identity is often decided by these ideological differences, including masculinized versions of U.S. imperialism (Hall, 1997). As such, the international terrorist and notions of terrorism becomes “the thing against which liberal democracies define themselves [...and] the repository of everything that cannot be allowed to fit inside the image of democracy” (Porras, 1995, p. 310). The terrorist threatens to destroy Western identity and is a mythical *border violator* who does not recognize morality, family, and law and must be contained by extra-normal means.

Keen's (1986) work demonstrates how this process occurred during the Cold War and was promoted by Reagan (i.e., paranoia over "barbaric" Soviets). The myth of conflict relies on archetypes like tribal loyalty, honor, and warrior mythos that result in a paranoid culture affixing blame elsewhere— that is, to an enemy constructed into a faceless and dehumanized barbarian. This consensual paranoia and collective hostile imagination "makes it impossible to distinguish between realistic and purely imaginative dangers" (Keen, 1986, p. 24). The enemy becomes a nonhuman idea morally opposed to the Westernized "tribe." The Islamic extremist frame signifies how there is little room in the "American" tribe for Islam, or even Muslims.

Defining the problem, cause, and morality of the issue helps predetermine the outcome. Here, the hero embodies the remedy, the war, and the promotion of governmental action. The hero becomes the myth we need to get through this fear and find cathartic resolution— the warrior always needs an enemy. Besides helping to promote framing processes and ultimately justify ideologies that support undemocratic, unnecessary, excessive, violent, and irregular justice responses, the fear lens leads to an acceptance of extreme acts and social control by the state (Altheide, 2005). In this ideological morality play, Othering (Hall, 1997; Said, 1978) creates a fear necessary to offer a salvation and catharsis from the hero.

This political rendering reveals the support of extreme, unfettered, and irregular executive power. The hero becomes the "I" position (Kellner, 1995) of this ideology and the Other is the target seen through the hero's perspective. This target— because of the ideological messaging— is not deserving of any natural rights. With the national security imperative (Sears, 2009) enacted and 9/11 fear rebooted, the hero must defend the homeland's honor. The hero and the ideology he represents are examined, but first this question: Besides the hero, what other alternatives do the texts offer?

## VII: FAILURES FRAME

With the problem (i.e., imminent threat to the homeland) and its primary cause (i.e., Islamic extremist Others) constructed and plot scenarios and settings of each text activated through the new terror war and national security imperative (Sears, 2009), the next identifiable purpose of framing is to offer solutions and evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed alternatives (Entman, 1993). One solution revealed in the data involves framing a collection of approaches as unsuccessful forms of terrorism-related law, justice, and security. The *failures frame* discards or delegitimizes certain terrorism responses by demonstrating their ineffectiveness through factualized (Fiske, 1987) historic failures or depicting the inadequacies of responses through story action and character foiling (Gieryn, 1983). The ideology those failures represent is undermined or eliminated through the text's framing.

A similar phenomenon was found in *24* involving a narrative contrast between "the status of the terrorist threat, which is primarily depicted as imminent and/or massive, and the status of the standard counter-terrorist practices, which are presented as rigid and inflexible and/or ineffective and insufficient" (Nikolaidis, 2011, p. 220). Failed "standard" counterterrorism includes defensive, measured, long-term, multifaceted, and within the "ordinary rulebook" of the U.S. justice system (Nikolaidis, 2011). It is constructed as weak when set against the extreme nature of the imminent and massive terror threat. Standard responses on *24* are prearranged to fail. The show's war on terror model depicts traditional policing as insufficient (even corrupt),

[At] meeting security needs. The criminal justice model which relies on police, courts, and corrections for detection, apprehension, detention, prosecution and/or rehabilitation of accused persons to address conflict and in theory includes operating within the law, using minimal force, careful surveillance, and detailed investigation proves to be too burdensome, even an obstacle to security. (Van Veen, 2009, p. 97-98)

My analysis demonstrates how counterterrorism thrillers engage in a similar process.



The failed responses detailed in this chapter and the completely omitted ones summarized at the end of the last chapter represent *counter-ideologies*. The weakness of the broader system and uselessness of other justice options in responding to the new terrorism competes with the dominant ideologies and is manifested in the hero, mimicking a genre texts' dual function to rule *in* and rule *out* ideological resolutions (Hall, 1997). This is akin to the constantly shifting nature of crime and justice ideologies on popular U.S. television wherein oppositional formations are presented at different periods as being on the rise versus the decline (Rapping, 2003). This frame depicts the failed responses as part of the original problem, thereby strengthening the opposing ideology (e.g., like law and order vs. rehabilitative justice models depicted on *Law and Order* [Rapping, 2003]). This interplay also aligns with Western gender ordering (Connell, 1987): Failures are constructed as subordinate forms of masculinity, such as responses portrayed as overly thoughtful or pedantic, and feminine, like compassionate or diplomatic responses.

This chapter focuses on contradictory ideological constructs depicted in the data as waning, deteriorating, and eventually ruled out, as visually depicted in Figure 1. The framing is crucial because it shows how and why standard forms of justice do not work. Removing them from the textual framework helps make the hero's response a common sense choice, just as the contrast in *24* primes the viewer for the irregular response embodied by Bauer (Nikolaidis, 2011). The process of failing while promoting the hero simultaneously erodes foundational democratic ideals of justice, including rule of law, civil right, due process, and human dignity. This frame also emphasizes the vulnerability of the homeland through a barrage of failures from the historic context of this study and hypothetical what-if failures of fictionalized standard responses. I divided this chapter into two sections corresponding to—like Nikolaidis's (2011) model—the sociocultural levels where the framing occurs: The institutional and individual.

## A. Institutional Level Failings

Failures at the institutional level are contrived through symbolic framing devices, including factual representations, intertextual references, and alignment with macro-frames, in three areas: 1) Overly weak, slow, and risk-averse civilian federal U.S. bureaucracies; 2) a worthless U.S. legislative branch; and 3) the press as biased and a threat to counterterrorism secrecy. The core device of binary opposition demarcates these failures against 1) the heroes and their sidekicks depicted as “actually” executing the fieldwork and as FASC signifying the textual preeminence of the conflict-based security perspective, and 2) the imminent terror threat.

### 1. Bloated and Passive Bureaucracies

At several points in the texts, the narrator of the Rapp series (i.e., by author Flynn) explains the CIA through factualization, detailing the history of the agency, the way it is structured, and its current managers and methods. The narrator concludes the agency was no longer as it was intended to be: Since 9-11, individuals running it were chair-bound bureaucrats with no field experience. The CIA was “infiltrated by soft-hearted bureaucrats” (Flynn, 2003, p. 48) who prefer to collect intelligence from a distance using tools like long-range surveillance and foreign communications intercepts. The narrator claims these intelligence-gathering methods are easier and passive, and not “on the ground” where the most valuable information is gathered. Capitol Hill politicians “created an agency that was afraid to take risks” (Flynn, 2003, p. 49). The new CIA managers were not bad people, but a different kind of patriot “brow beaten by the media and henpecked by the politicians” (Flynn, 2008, p. 145).

The narrator of the Harvarth series makes similar assertions, such as in *The Apostle*:

[Bureaucrats] at the CIA and elsewhere were too risk-averse and too concerned with getting promoted to focus on beating America’s enemies. The men and women in the field were not getting the resources they needed, nor were they getting even halfway

decent management or leadership. The nation spent billions of dollars to find solutions to intelligence problems that shouldn't even exist. (Thor, 2009, p. 34)

These types of explicit narrative claims show how “facts” are underscored with omnipotent narration. The narrator's voice is always one of an insider-expert who knows everything about the U.S. intelligence community. The texts— through this privileged knowledge— present challenges of fighting terrorism as the result of an inadequate post-9/11 *CIA*, which signifies the U.S. preeminent intelligence agency (Van Veeren, 2009) and primary foreign intelligence-gathering civilian organization (White, 2014). They frame how the institution is focused on the wrong problems, wasteful, and ran by clueless bureaucrats who are afraid to take “real” action.

The institutional failures described by the narrators are also played out in the texts. In *Black Ops*, bureaucratic CIA managers mistakenly conclude a chemical weapons facility in the Congo was a harmless food processing plant. The institution is depicted as far away in Washington D.C. and relying on imprecise intelligence, like satellite imagery. A similar theme is found in the subplot of *Extreme Measures* wherein Islamic extremists recruit and train terrorists in Washington, D.C. mosques. The CIA in the story— as a broader institution— does not take action over concerns about violating religious liberties and following domestic laws.

In both of these thrillers, the heroes and their sidekicks or the units they lead, are forced to intervene to solve the problem. In *Black Ops*, hero Castillo uses real-time and on-the-ground intelligence to figure out the true nature of the facility in the Congo, and unilaterally decides to send in a special operations team to destroy it. In *Extreme Measures*, the hero and a sidekick create their own secret operation to monitor mosques and kidnap terrorist suspects. The individuals who take these exceptional actions embody the elite, clandestine operator— described in one text as a “wild sibling” (Flynn, 2008, p. 71) of the CIA— opposed to the failures. The heroes are forced to go around the slow, distant, and scared bureaucracies and their managers for

direct and immediate action. Such devices simultaneously blame the institution, demonstrate the vulnerability of the homeland under the standard system, and contrast it with heroic success.

There is outright blaming by *The Hostage's* narrator, who explains how a FASC sidekick “wrote a book called *I Had Osama bin Laden in My Sights and Wimps at Langley Wouldn't Let me Terminate Him*” (Griffin, 2006, p. 569). This explicit intertextual reference exemplifies how CIA managers lacked the courage to let the men on the ground take decisive action. Osama Bin Laden is perhaps the most powerful symbol in the GWOT. The FASC, assigned to a new unit led by the thriller's hero, is frustrated they were not permitted by hesitant CIA leaders to kill the U.S. archenemy. Similarly, Rapp tells a sidekick in *Consent to Kill* the main problem with the U.S. government that ‘led to 9/11 [...was a] cover your ass mentality,’ including the fact ‘heads had not rolled’ (Flynn, 2005, p. 7) at any U.S. agency for failing to prevent 9/11.

Regarding representations of the broader failure of “current intelligence efforts,” the U.S. President in *By Order of the President* tells hero Castillo that intelligence work is too often:

‘[Colored], or maybe diluted or poisoned, I learned, by three factors. I’m not sure which is worst. One of them is interagency rivalry, making their agency look good and another look bad. Another is to send up intelligence they believe is what their superiors want to hear, or, the reverse, not sending up intelligence they think their superiors don’t want to hear. And yet another is unwillingness to admit failure.’ (Griffin, 2004, p. 55)

The president's solution is to assign Castillo to act independently—reporting only to the president—to investigate the failing intelligence services in light of imminent terrorist threats.

The message is ordinary or conventional intelligence agencies and their methods and approaches are ineffective in the new terror war because of a lack of courage and wasteful politicking.

Ultimately, intelligence as a U.S. foreign policy effort is represented as ineffective.

Law enforcement agencies are also characterized as ineffective, although less frequently than intelligence organizations. The “FBI” is the boilerplate term for U.S. law enforcement in

the narratives, just as the “CIA” is a proxy for U.S. intelligence, and usually depicted as a slow-moving bureaucracy restricted by laws and preferring to respond to threats with legal methods. In *Extreme Measures*, Rapp and sidekick Nash discuss the implications of their off-the-books surveillance of mosques. Nash claims the operation saved lives and the hero responds:

‘It doesn’t matter. The FBI will tear our balls off. We’ve stepped all over their turf.’

‘The FBI didn’t have the balls to put the mosques under surveillance, so we did.’

‘It wasn’t the bureau’s fault. It was the Department of Justice who told them no.’

‘They didn’t tell them no. They told them the Judiciary Committee would freak out.’

‘So back to my point; they didn’t have the balls to do this, even though it makes complete sense, so we have to step in and do it for them and now it’s our asses on the line.’ (Flynn, 2008, p. 159)

This heroic team has the courage– the “balls,” a masculine metaphor for the toughness of “real men” subordinating the FBI as a feminized agency– to break the law and risk even their personal careers. Meanwhile, laws and broader agency procedures restrict the FBI, which, “came with a lot of rules on how things were handled. Rules Rapp felt got in the way” (Flynn, 2008, p. 390). The hero realizes ordinary agencies– those regular institutions versus irregular ones (Nikolaidis, 2011)– are regrettably restricted by rules, laws, and bureaucratic realities.

In a *By Order of the President* subplot, Castillo is considering how and when terrorists could possibly gain access to a U.S. airport. The hero theorizes the terrorists may slip-by dressed as employees and it would be difficult for U.S. law enforcement– termed generically as “cops”– to detect them. The terrorists would be disguised but also could use phony names, or could,

[Use] the name they were born with the cops might not have it. They would know John James Smith as Abdullah bin Rag-head, his Muslim name. Or if security was anywhere near as tight as it was supposed to be, airport passes would not be given to anyone on the cops’ suspicious list. That didn’t rule out a bad guy, who couldn’t get a pass because the cops were watching him, getting his brother or girlfriend, who had not come to the attention of the cops, a pass to look for what he wanted to know. (Griffin, 2004, p. 300)

In addition to offering a racial slur (i.e., another reference to a “raghead”), this narration suggests the security is not effective and standard federal law enforcement does not have the tools necessary to secure the U.S. It also demonstrates how terrorists can easily circumvent the vulnerable U.S. border. This reinforces the imminence of the danger posed by terrorism in real time and, again, the need for the hero to take action. Failures based on cumbersome inaction versus decisive action are precisely explained in *Memorial Day* with regard to the FBI’s “most wanted list” of terrorists: “They were the twenty-two terrorists that the FBI and the Department of Justice would most like to apprehend, put on trial, and incarcerate. Rapp simply wanted to hunt them down and put a bullet in each one of their heads” (Flynn, 2004, p. 25). This summary of agency failure also alludes to the hero’s pure, simple, and “courageous” version of justice.

Another example of a failed organization is the U.S. Department of State (hereafter: the USDOS), which represents possible U.S. *diplomatic* responses to terrorism. In the Castillo series, the USDOS is depicted as an agency where you “don’t make waves; and never make a decision today that can be put off until next week or, better, next month” (Griffin, 2004, p. 15). Or, there is a broad assertion that USDOS employees “demonstrated an appalling lack of knowledge of geopolitics and history” and feared taking aggressive action in foreign countries so not to “disrupt the ambience of diplomatic cocktail parties” (Griffin, 2006, p. 37).

The USDOS, like the CIA and FBI, is also dichotomized against the special operations trope in the same thriller when Castillo must negotiate a maze of bureaucratic levels to solve the problem. The USDOS and its diplomatic efforts overseas (e.g., at U.S. embassies) are factually constructed as painstakingly slow, involving cooperation between corrupt foreign governments and idealistic do-gooders. The narratives depict these efforts as ineffective in the new terror war.

The excerpt below captures one of the common themes of Flynn's thriller series– the diplomatic system does not deal with security or the terrorist threat in a direct way and the U.S. is endangered because of it. This is acted out in *Executive Power* when a U.S. Navy SEAL team executes an unsanctioned attack on a suspected terrorist location. The mission violated international law, treaties, and rules of engagement– according to the thriller's narrator– but:

The men on board did not care. Technicalities, legalities, and diplomacy were for other people to sort out, people who sat in soft leather chairs with Ivy League degrees matted and framed on their office walls. The men standing on the deck of the Mark V special operations craft were here to get a job done [...] that should have been taken care of months ago. (Flynn, 2003, p. 1)

The overly educated people sitting in the “leather chairs” are the USDOS and in this story a U.S. diplomat forwards an email to the ambassador of the nation being invaded in an effort to support U.S. diplomatic efforts in that country. The diplomat's response ultimately results in “good guys” being killed. In all plots involving the USDOS, diplomacy equates to a weak homeland.

There are many data points where intelligence agencies, the USDOS, and police are depicted as ineffective through slowness, weakness, and being bloated and having too many restrictions or inadequate capabilities to fight the new war. These devices signify responses as *active* versus *passive* action (Hall, 1997). The failures– risk aversion, slowness, cumbersome rules and legalities, indecisiveness, etc.– are also more convincing because they align with subordinate, passive masculine forms of Western gender ordering (Connell, 1987).

A complication of the institutional framing in the subject texts is the hero and his sidekicks actually work for the ineffective U.S. institutions. This is another tension revealed in the text: That is, supporting and garnering the power those agencies represent versus showing them as failures. It is problematic the protagonist of each story works for an organization the text delegitimizes. This tension also suggests a departure from the détente Cold War novels

wherein the U.S. defense apparatus— intelligence, law enforcement, military, and the entire government— were portrayed as broadly effective, highly organized, and monolithic (Gallagher, 2006). These earlier fictions maintained an integrated national security cult (Hixson, 1993) posited against the likewise monolithic Soviet empire. In the subject thrillers, only a select group (e.g., the hero, special operators, the president) is “in the know,” while entire executive institutions are undermined. One solution is the hero can effectively rise above and beyond the bureaucratic and legal confines and weaknesses to join forces with the U.S. President to preserve the nation’s executive supremacy, which is a process I examine in the hero chapter.

## **2. Counterproductive Legislative Meanderings**

A more delineated institution framed by the texts is the U.S. Congress, which falls outside of the executive and is uniformly portrayed as having no value— or being an obstacle— in the new terror war. In a scene in *The Last Patriot*, the president and Harvath are playing billiards at the White House. The president pleads with the hero to come out of the private sector and help him resolve an impending terrorist threat. The president says the hero is needed because:

‘[My] presidency has been underwater from the beginning. It has been overrun by fundamentalist Islam since the day I took office. I have been hobbled by an inept, PC, partisan Congress more concerned with covering their own asses than doing the heavy lifting that needs to be done for America.’ [...] ‘I have green-lighted more off-the-books operations than any president in history. Why? Because this Congress, Republicans and Democrats alike, doesn’t have the guts to focus on the true threat our nation faces. They want to play fiddles while Rome burns, but we’ve got a chance to be successful in spite of them.’ (Thor, 2008, p. 190)

The U.S. congress is often depicted as not having the courage, being far too slow to deal with the imminent nature of the threats, or being overly focused on politics and selfish advancement.

This is another intertextual reference to the public debate that took place in that timeframe (i.e., 2007-2008), which involved the Bush administration defending drastic increases in executive authority based on the assertion that other branches did not have the speed or resources to win



the GWOT (e.g., Crenshaw et al., 2008; Deflem, 2004). Critics viewed the Bush approach as granting excessive authority to an unchecked U.S. executive.

In *Blowback*, the president and hero Harvath discuss the possible release of information about their illegal methods in the U.S. In the story, *Al Jazeera* obtained video footage of Harvath chasing down and brutally beating a terror suspect who was really an innocent vendor. After the event is broadcasted, the narrator explains how “the entire Muslim World is up in arms” and is “out for blood” (Thor, 2005, p. 42), planning to charge the assailant under Islamic law. The president and his advisor discuss how much of a publicity problem the exposure would be:

‘Well, if the Muslims want to try our soldier, they’ll have to take a number, because the Democrats on the Hill are already calling for their own hearings.’

The president sat back down in his chair and massaged his temples with the heels of his hands. ‘Why doesn’t that surprise me?’ (Thor, 2005, p. 43)

Here, the Democratic U.S. Congress is linked with the Islamic community in an effort to take legal action against the hero. These groups are set in opposition to the hero and the president, who acts as his protector in the story. Congress holds hearings to investigate the clandestine presidential program (i.e., the president was secretly channeling taxpayer money to the black operations cell led by the hero) because it appeared illegal. This forces Harvath to go into hiding overseas, even dodging and mocking a congressional subpoena.

In *Blowback*, the president and hero succeed at protecting the identity of the assailant (i.e., Harvath) and the program overall, and thwart congressional efforts to investigate them—mainly by disparaging the senator (i.e., Carmichael, discussed further below as a foil) who was spearheading the inquiry. Also, the U.S. Congress is depicted as squandering time looking into the program—a program that the narrator claims has saved lives. Harvath, while avoiding the subpoena, discovers and ultimately stops the story’s imminent terror threat. The “Muslim

World” never learns of Harvath’s identity. The terror threat (i.e., the spread of the chemical weapon and efforts by extremists to establish a caliphate) overshadows any questioning of the methods used or the violent assault on the shopkeeper, which the president describes as an innocent mistake. The problem was not the hero’s failure to follow the law; instead, the footage dangerously exposed the operation and congress was foolish for trying to do something about it.

When the U.S. Congress is depicted holding hearings or being in session and debating terrorism-related laws and issues, they are constructed as drawn out and pedantic—endlessly discussing issues and never offering a solution. In *Extreme Measures*, congress holds hearings on a black operation led by the story’s hero, which are portrayed as involving the congress rambling on and debating inane details. Meanwhile, terror is unfolding and the hero is in the field getting the job done. In the same story, the narrator describes the senate intelligence committee as having an “Ask and Please Don’t Tell the Truth policy” (Flynn, 2009, p. 210). The process is presented as a back-and-forth game played by senators with competing allegiances, where witnesses regularly lie and the main priority is political positioning.

The examples involving the president and the others emphasize two additional features of the failures frame: First, the U.S. military—portrayed as a monolithic institution—is rarely called into question. This enhances the national security perspective, honor, and patriotism of the regulars. Secondly, the presidential office is ultimately linked with the hero. The process of eliminating all alternative options or having them fail miserably allows the heroes to go above, around, or cut through the bureaucracy and execute the war directly with the president. This bolsters the argument for a powerful and uninhibited executive destined to keep the U.S. safe.

These framing devices help construct this ideological position: Standard forms of justice (Nikoladis, 2011) represented here by the intelligence, law enforcement, diplomatic, and political

systems (i.e., *civilian* U.S. institutions, rarely the military) are overly slow, wasteful, passive, and politically-correct. They are not suited to respond to the threats to the homeland detailed in the doom and extremist frames. At this stage in the American monomyth (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002), plots call “into question the effectiveness of the institutions designed to cope with such challenges” (p. 22) as a series of undying myths signifying impotent democratic institutions.

### **3. The Threat posed by the Press**

The situation of Harvath being caught on video by the press assaulting an innocent vendor also demonstrates how news media represents an institutional-level vulnerability. *Al Jazeera* in particular is highly controversial in relation to it being state-owned and possibly supporting political versions of Islam (Higgins, 2002). Some have called the news organization “Taliban TV” (Higgins, 2002, p. 21), while others consider it the “CNN of the Arabic world” (p. 21) during this period. This type of intertextual reference invigorates the framing, drawing on a real-world debate. In *Blowback*, the president tells the hero in a private meeting:

‘Our credibility is so thin over there, all you have to do is hold it up to a light bulb and you can see through it. We talk about being a just nation, a nation that observes the rule of law, a place where people are innocent until proven guilty, but those are only words, aren’t they? And what speaks a thousand words? Pictures. And what pictures are being watched [...]? A faceless American soldier beating the pulp out of an Iraqi fruit stall vendor. What a picture that made, straight out of Central Casting. A uniformed American GI and a typical local citizen complete with turban.’ (Thor, 2005, p. 41)

The problem is not the hero assaulted an innocent man; it is the news media got hold of it and poses a risk. News media is depicted as something that cannot be controlled and unpredictable.

This excerpt also reflects a broad criticism of the media: It prosecutes before a legal process.

The fact remains that regardless of if the hero is guilty of getting the wrong guy, the hero assaulted a man he could have just apprehended. More importantly, the press threatens to expose their secret program and is depicted not positively, but as a nuisance.

The concern the news media will find out is also found at the end of *Black Ops*. The president in that story is worried the press will figure out the operation is actually an unapproved and illegal incursion into the Congo by Castillo's clandestine unit. He resolves to help the hero go deeper into the shadows: '[You're] just too dangerous a man to have around. Too many people have their knives out for you, and some of them have involved the press. I can't involve the press in this. You understand me, Colonel?' (Griffin, 2008, p. 448). The president and hero conspire to have Castillo go into hiding to avoid the press revealing the black program's true purpose and activities. The same is found in *Consent to Kill* when the hero and CIA Director discuss assassinating a terrorist overseas and what the U.S. press response would be if the murder were exposed. Rapp suggests to 'let them jump' and soon they will move on, adding:

Besides' it'll serve as a good message to all of these idiots who think they can operate in the West without fear.'

She looked back at him, her eyes revealing nothing. 'What about the president? He's going to want to know if we had a hand in it.'

Rapp shrugged. 'Tell him you don't know anything about it.'

Kennedy frowned. 'I don't like lying to him.'

'Then tell him to ask me about it. He'll get the picture, and he'll drop it. He knows the game.' (Flynn, 2005, p. 2)

These last two excerpts demonstrate both the insider relationship and "game" they both engage in that posits them against the news media. This bolsters the argument that the hero needs to operate outside the law and in the counterterrorism shadows.

Framing the news media as a problem follows a conservative tradition in the U.S. of the characterizing the news media as overly liberal and an enemy of national security (Kellner, 2004). Here, the tension is reproduced as the press having little concern for U.S. security and being obsessed with chasing stories about clandestine government programs. The liberal press

threatens to expose the hero and the special counterterrorism realm, which means a potential *loss of secrecy*. The president emphasizes this in *The Hostage* when he refers to the U.S. press as “The Washington Post, the New York Times, and other President-haters” (Griffin, 2006, p. 695). In this story, the hero and president discuss the great risks of the news media finding out about their “Presidential Top Secret” (p. 311) materials and how they need protection. This makes evident an intersection of the devices of intertextual reference (major news outlets) and factualization (the existence of this classification) that bolsters the message of vulnerability.

In *The Apostle*, Harvath contemplates the news media in relation to Jillian Gallo, who is portrayed as a media mogul and the mother of Julia Gallo, kidnapped by the Taliban:

Harvath marveled at the irony of it all. Gallo had rallied the media behind Alden’s candidacy. She and others like her in the news industry were anti-U.S. military, anti-extreme interrogation tactics, anti-Gitmo, and pro-terrorist rights on a daily basis. Now she not only needed, but wanted the help of exactly the kind of person she vilified in her papers and on her television stations. (Thor, 2009, p. 54)

This representation is found throughout the texts. The news industry is stereotyped as being against everything the hero signifies. An irony is also posed by the failure of the news media: They, like the failed institutions as part of the American populace, *need* the hero.

Failures at the institutional level also reflect future war storytelling: The *construction of defenselessness* in the status quo— of existing institutions and practices— signifies the homeland’s constant vulnerability is in the midst of hypothetical war (Davis, 2006). Yet most of these depictions are explicit and predictable generalizations. The thrillers’ ideological positioning is most compelling at the character level, which is a known feature of genre texts (Hall, 1997).

## **B. Character Foiling: Dupes as Failed Ideology**

The foil as a character typology plays a prominent role in storytelling and is found in analyses of popular narratives and literature (Gieryn, 1983). Characters opposing cop Callahan

(i.e., *Dirty Harry's* hero) included savage criminals deserving no legal rights and weak liberal lawyers and politicians representing a “failed” U.S. justice system (Rafter, 2000). Brutal vigilantism prevalent in 1970s popular culture mirrored a shift back to contemporary law-and-order policing. Callahan represented a criticism of an ineffective system and laws perceived as weak and helping crime to flourish. The hero embodied a form of aggressive and violent vigilante justice— getting “tough on crime”— contrary to the then contemporary trend of more rehabilitative models (Rafter, 2000). This process occurs in *24* in the same manner as those police dramas (Van Veeren, 2009): In addition to agreed upon criminal types, ideological straw men and others too scared, weak, or lawful, including the citizenry, to take action are presented.

Gieryn's (1983) theory on foiling as a narrative device, which in her research involves foiling in popular narratives about modern “science,” includes the demarcation of protagonist(s) versus foil(s) as one set of characteristics against those of another. Her theory includes these devices: 1) *Heightening contrast*, involving utterances using a “this is different from that” approach (e.g., dominant forms of science differ from lesser forms of inquiry); 2) *exclusion*, which involves saying something is not another thing because of particular reason (e.g., true science does not include the social sciences because the latter does not effectively apply scientific method); and 3) *blaming* some actor or action (e.g., poor governmental decision making creates bad science).

The foils' purpose in the failures frame is to offer a specific layer of counter-ideology, establishing more attribution of failed ideological distinctions through character demarcations. By applying Gieryn's (1983) three devices, I revealed these demarcations: 1) Heightening contrast— foils versus the hero to accentuate the hero; 2) *exclusion*— the foil as exemplifying the

failed system to show hero is not like or part of that system; and 3) *blaming*— actions of a foil leading to, or having led to, a problem the hero must resolve.

I examine binary character oppositions with the hero as the centerpiece and various foils contrasting him to bolster his ideological constructs (i.e., demarcation 1) in the superhero frame. In this section, although having explicit elements in contrast to the hero, I focus on demarcations 2 and 3. That is, what foils symbolize and the actions they take. They are generally depicted as misguided and misinformed and lacking the street smarts and moral fortitude needed to succeed in the new terror war. Although some are well intentioned, most foils just fumble about, do not understand what is going on, and are unsuccessful in the texts. Foils are also sometimes depicted as contributing to the problem when they hinder the heroes' violent and extralegal efforts.

Foils in the failures frame include moral cowards, hotshots, feudalists, “fatheads,” “suckups,” complacent government officials, liberal bureaucrats, and various “strawmen.” I describe these foils as *dupes* based on Mayer's (2007) *softhearted dupes* she found in *24's* narrative and described as secondary characters raising moral objections to Bauer's abusive techniques. Dupes act to demonstrate failed counter ideology (e.g., those involving technicalities and legalities) and exclude the hero and eventually emphasize his success. They are distinct from the U.S. populace because they need to represent plausible and official involvement in the new terror war, such as being factualized legislators, news media, or high-level bureaucrats with some authority in the U.S. response to the framed dangers. Dupes need this attachment so their foiling— having a justice ideology blamed or excluded— is believable and to personify the institutions ineffective at dealing with the imminent doom threatening the homeland.

These types of doubters on *24* are softhearted fools whose objections are made into jokes and promote approaches that fail, or the characters themselves suffer some demise:

A tremulous liberal, who defends a Middle Eastern neighbor from vigilantism, is killed when the neighbor turns out to be a terrorist. When a civil-liberties-minded lawyer makes a high-toned argument to a Presidential aide against unwarranted detentions—"You continue to arrest innocent people, you're giving the terrorists exactly what they want," she says—the aide sarcastically responds, "Well! You've got the makings of a splendid law-review article here. I'll pass it on to the President." (Mayer, 2007, n.p.)

In this counterterrorism text, there is no serious or balanced discussion about how human rights might have been violated in the process or how torture could undermine U.S. foreign strategy in the face of these representations (Mayer, 2007). I found the same framing in the subject data.

### **1. Dupes as Misguided, Pedantic, and Lacking "Real" Experience**

In *Takedown*, The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary, Driehaus, is a formulaic example of a well intentioned, but naïve and weak dupe. He is characterized as a desk-bound "pinhead" and an overly political "product of the 1960s" incapable of realizing "Western civilization was founded on the concept of might is right" (Thor, 2006, p. 133). According to the narrator, Driehaus also does not comprehend how the best way to deal with Islamic terrorists is by using the same sort of violent and savage methods they use against those enemies. This dupe is a U.S. executive department head walled-off from the elite counterterrorism unit engaged in irregular and illegal activities (e.g., blackmail, assassination). He is also depicted as being too naïve to see his way of running the department is ineffective.

In one scene, the U.S. President, his intelligence director, and some cabinet members discuss the president's extraordinary rendition policy and its use on terror suspect, Mohammed, who snuck into the U.S. to execute an attack. Driehaus protests the proposed rendition and instead suggests Mohammed be arrested and put on trial. He asserts rendition is a tool used by terrorists for recruiting and the policy makes the U.S. look like hypocrites. The president replies:

'No it doesn't,' stressed Rutledge, who had been getting progressively more frustrated with his appointee's refusal to be a team player. 'The policy makes us look tough. What's more, it gets results. Civilized rules of engagement and jurisprudence mean nothing to a vicious



enemy willing to do anything to succeed. If we want to win, we have to adopt the same strategy; success at any cost. I'm sorry, Alan, but if a nation refuses to bend, then that nation is almost certainly doomed to break. In this case we have to suspend the rule of law in part, in order to save it.'

That one remark tore at the very few remnants of respect Driehaus had left for the president. 'We know Mohammed exchanged information with the Palestinian and Hezbollah bombmakers who helped Richard Reid design the shoe bomb he carried on the Paris-to-Boston flight in 2001. Let's indict him under that. If we put him on trial here, a fair trial, it will go a long way to repairing our image abroad. And it'll send the message that we're tough.' (Thor, 2006, p. 5)

The intelligence director, Army General Currutt, a hero sidekick with the same view as the president, next inventories several recent legal cases when U.S. prosecution of terrorists failed to prevent terrorism— that is, intertextual references bolstering the argument. Driehaus is duped along with the referenced legal efforts in this scene, as he is throughout the story. The message is about the ineffectiveness of legal measures in stopping the new terrorism.

What is presented as working is captured in Currutt's conclusion during the meeting: 'we can't bring knives to gunfights anymore' (Thor, 2006, p. 6). This view epitomizes the hero's courage and is based on the idea the U.S. executive can suspend law in order to preserve a moralistic justice. This is why the sidekick and president condone the use of "enhanced interrogation." Still, Driehaus is adamantly against it, and argues the tactic was torture, unnecessary, and sidestepped laws prohibiting it. Currutt counters that, in fact, the president's policies "served" the U.S. Driehaus thinks Currutt is wrong, saying the U.S. is supposed to be a,

'[Nation] that holds the rule of law above all else. We use it to justify every single thing we do, including the invasion of other sovereign nations. If we don't truly place that principle above all else then we can't be any better than the terrorists we're fighting against.'

'That's it,' [... Yelled] Currutt as he rose from his chair and stabbed his thick finger at Driehaus. 'I'm not going to listen to any more of this subversive garbage.' (Thor, 2006, p. 9)

Currutt— as a representative of the U.S. military— insults the dupe. This insult is affirmed when,

as acted out in the rest of the story, Driehaus is portrayed through his inaction as soft and, through his refusal to support the illegal methods, as un-American. Meanwhile, hero Harvath kidnaps Mohammed, smuggles him to another country, and tortures him with successful results. This is how the dupe comes to exemplify failure, and highlights the vulnerability of the U.S. if dupes are in control of counterterrorism.

Gibson's (1994) work is pertinent here. He found the détente Cold War period warriors were frustrated because in addition to combatting criminals, terrorists, and communists, they had to contend with "bleeding hearts," like complacent government employees, liberal politicians, and "moral cowards," who refused to stand up and fight. One reason liberalism, set against the contemporary new war conservatism embodied by the warriors, failed was it proponents' refusal to recognize the "fundamental and absolute" nature of evil. Overly-compassionate dupes insist there "are no bad men, only bad social conditions, liberals fail to see that criminals, terrorists, and Communists commit their horrendous acts because they feel pleasure in killing, raping, and kidnapping" (Gibson, 1994, p. 74)." This liberal cowardice and softness, supplanted with the selfishness and arrogance of the hero's superiors (administrators, lawmakers, akin to the "egoists" set in contrast to the hero), is warriors like this are "forced to fight the war with one hand tied behind their backs" (Gibson, 1994, p. 76).

A U.S. Air Force captain, Leland, is duped in *Extreme Measures* as someone who fails to see the true nature of the terrorists. This first happens when he confronts hero Rapp for using torture to obtain information from a detained suspect. Leland is offended by Rapp's tactics and says the U.S. is losing the terror war because of people like him. Leland adds:

'This is about hearts and minds, and you know it. Not torturing prisoners so we can get false confessions out of them.'

‘False confessions’ that’s what you think this is about? That man sitting in that room right there; do you even know who he is?’

‘It doesn’t matter who he is or what he’s done. As an officer of the United States Air Force, I am sworn to uphold the Geneva Conventions.’

‘You’re also sworn to protect and defend the United States of America. So which comes first, the Geneva Conventions or your fellow citizens?’

‘They coexist equally.’

‘I’m sure they do in your little perfect world, Captain, but out there in the real world, on the other side of the wire, things aren’t so academic.’ (Flynn, 2008, p. 87)

Leland confronts the hero throughout the story and eventually fails, portrayed as ineffective for attempting to adhere to international laws and incapable of obtaining actionable intelligence through the legal and humane methods the dupe espouses. This is another example of an intertextual reference used to demonstrate a position. Like rendition and legal proceedings referenced in the previous example, the Geneva Conventions are central to the public debate during this historic period. In this case, the hero’s position in the U.S. should be above the conventions: To supersede it to protect the homeland, as part of post-9/11 American exceptionalism (Jackson, 2011). This is also a way to posit the hero in the shadows— or, on the “other side of the wire.” Meanwhile, dupes live in comfy, academic worlds where it is impossible to comprehend the “real world” of terrorism.

Dupes like Leland and Driehaus are found in the texts in varying degrees of prominence. They are usually bureaucrats or politicians overly concerned with human rights, legal procedures, and rules of engagement. They express a misguided counter-ideology of legal tactics that appeal in an “ideal” world, but fail in a “real” one. This is the process of how they are excluded as viable option in the new terror war. Dupes usually just do not get results, cause failure, and represent weaknesses. But, they sometimes pose a direct threat.

In *Executive Power*, one of the plotlines involves a USDOS diplomat named, Amanda Petry, who forwarded the email about the secret and unsanctioned attack by U.S. Navy SEALs of a terrorist compound in the Philippines to that country's ambassador in the U.S. The information in the email was intended to stay between the U.S. President and the special operators, but the ambassador's email was intercepted and forwarded to a corrupt general and terrorist sympathizer from the Philippine army. As a result, the terrorists were warned of the attack and able to kill SEALs in a sneak attack. In a scene late in the story, the hero— called into action to bring justice to the terrorists— confronts the dupe with photos of the deceased SEALs:

Rapp stood at the end of the long table, his fists clenched in rage. No one attempted to speak. Amanda Petry sat in shock looking at the two photos, still refusing to believe that a simple e-mail could have caused their deaths. Rapp knew that there were those in Washington who would think what he'd just done was unprofessional and insensitive, but he couldn't have cared less. In his mind this town, especially the national security apparatus, could use a whole lot less sensitivity. (Flynn, 2003, p. 324)

By the end of *Executive Power*, Amanda is arrested and charged with a crime for her mistake. Her sending the email is depicted as well intentioned because she believed the ambassador needed to know a military operation was underway in the country he is responsible for diplomatic relations within. However, her sensitivity, good intention, and naivety are to blame for a serious security situation. These sorts of narratives demonstrate what happens when the hero and president do not have total control over counterterrorism. Amanda being charged with a crime also suggests the law should apply to some, but not all. The heroes routinely violate laws and procedures, but are never (ultimately) subject to any official sanctioning.

The dupes represent various, character-level what-if contrasts to future war hypotheticals (Davis, 2006). Justice responses destined to fail pose questions like: What if the U.S. uses diplomacy in a foreign country instead of sending in a special operations team to take action without approval from the foreign government? Or, what happens when an Islamic extremist is

arrested and interviewed in the U.S. versus being kidnapped and taken to a black site in a third country? Passive, fumbling, and misinformed dupes make the answers to these sorts of questions seem black-and-white. In particular, the framing constructs democratic legal and military systems— and those following their rules, laws, and policies— as misguided and potentially dangerous. They also help to explain past failures that placed the U.S. in danger, like 9/11.

As demonstrated by the numerous quotes above, most of this framing is presented explicitly— through the dialogue of the infallible hero or through the wisdom and guidance of the omnipotent narrator. That is, the narrator and hero— having essentially the same voice— provide the inside and factualized information about dupes.

In the what-if scenario in *Memorial Day*, dupes are depicted as unable to decide how to handle the imminent nuclear terror threat. They, including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security secretary and Justice Department lawyer (portrayed as sensible and refined), analyze the motivations of terrorists for planning such an attack and brainstorming on alternate ways to respond. This perseveration causes the dupes— the cultured people back at the capital— to make poor decisions. It takes hero Rapp and a former SEAL sidekick— with the backing of the U.S. President who wants to “apply capitalistic muscle” (Flynn, 2004, p. 5)— to stop talking about it and immediately take action to prevent the attack. There are a variety of these contrasts, like when the *Black Ops*’ narrator demonstrates how the highest U.S. Army commanders are “Pentagon chair-warmer-or chair-warmers” (Griffin, 2008, p. 397) when Castillo discusses the details of the Apache attack helicopter that one commander is presented as being clueless about.

A further examination of hero Callahan (Lenz, 2005) clarifies the foiling process at work in the thrillers and their ideological implications. In *Dirty Harry*, Callahan is called before a judge and district attorney because Callahan did not read the suspect— known murderer and

rapist, Scorpio— his Miranda rights and tortured him to find the location of a missing girl. The judge and attorney, characters duped as pedantic liberal legal elites obsessed with rules and laws, ridicule Callahan because he does not know the laws and compromises the legal basis of the case. Lenz (2005) explains how the hero is more concerned with fighting crime than the law:

When told he violated Scorpio's constitutional rights, he sarcastically replies, 'Well, I'm all broke up about that man's rights.' When told that the law does not allow the evidence to be used against Scorpio, Callahan replies, "Well, then the law is crazy.' (p. 121)

Scorpio is released and hijacks a school bus and demands a ransom. Callahan has to resort to illegal and violent tactics, even when removed from the case by (duped) supervisors (Lenz, 2005). In this text, liberalism and rule of law is to blame for serious social problems and failing to stop crime, such as giving too many rights to victims. This failure is opposed to the law and order approach of conservatism at the time is, which is the get-tough view of justice. Callahan is a martyr and fictional embodiment of a form of justice that places law after “doing what is right” and seeks street justice regardless of law. Like the Islamic extremist, the Other in *Dirty Harry*— a symbol of the war on crime, or all that is wrong with inner cities— is invariably guilty. *Dirty Harry* and the subject texts are about the efficacy of common sense retributive justice, versus a flailing justice that adheres to procedure (Lenz, 2005).

The credibility of the dupes is also enhanced when understood as being aligned with repackaged forms of subordinated masculinities (Connell, 1987). The dupes' characteristics (e.g., overly-refined, slow, desk bound) correspond with established forms of subordinate masculinity, like physical weakness, compassion, and over intellectualizing (Connell, 1987). This also supports gendered cowboy myth set in opposition to “modern” forms of masculinity— that is, those valuing “talk, maturity, intellect, respect for women and self-control as signs of the progress of a “civilized man” (Christensen & Ferree, 2008, p 292). This counter masculinity is framed as “foppish” and associated with the Eastern and urbane and individuals not willing to

put their lives at risk for a cause. These generalizations are posited against mythicized heroes (e.g., President Bush) as the country masculinity of the Wild West (Christensen & Ferree, 2008). Here, the wild is the counterterrorism shadows, a place dupes do not belong. They instead exist in the world of cushy offices, fancy meals, and long-winded meetings—distant from the action.

## 2. Dupes as “Handcuffing” and Backstabbing

Another feature of dupe foiling is sometimes they not only pose a risk by being soft and incompetent, they can sometimes accuse or backstab the hero, and limit his ability to exact his form of justice. In *Extreme Measures*, hero Rapp complains to sidekick Nash when some Senators question his use of torture, saying he’s not going stop fighting and:

‘I’ve had it with these damn politicians who don’t have the stomach to take on these bastards. It’s only a matter of time before we get hit again and then you watch these pricks run for cover. Every single one of them who’s been handcuffing us is going to blame us for failing to stop these guys.’ (Flynn, 2008, p. 39)

A great concern in particular is the dupes will turn on the heroes if something goes wrong, but also suggests dupes want and need the hero to take action. The hero being “handcuffed” is also similar to critics of U.S. “failures” in Vietnam: That is, if weak politicians and bureaucrats would have let the military apply its full violent force, the U.S. would have “won” (Gibson, 1994).

In *Memorial Day*, a justice department lawyer in charge of counterterrorism, Stealey, and U.S. Justice Department secretary, (Pat) Stokes, enjoy a fine dinner while discussing the problems with the USA Patriot Act and their efforts to have it repealed, which would hinder the hero’s efforts. They drink fine wine and eat filet mignon at an upscale D.C. “hot spot.” This is juxtaposed against hero Rapp risking his life in an effort to launch an attack in Pakistan—without that country’s approval— and kidnap terrorist for torture in a third country. While the hero is off risking his life fighting in foreign lands, the dupes exist comfortably, removed from the true dangers of terrorism, and theorize about laws and plan a strategy to repeal the act. Stealey says,

‘Pat, I’m serious. This entire war on terror has been blown out of proportion. A gang of ragtag militants got lucky, and now we’ve picked a fight with half the damn world to prove that we’re not going to take it, and in the process we’re crapping all over our Bill of Rights. It doesn’t matter if it’s the Republicans who dreamed this thing up, we’re the ones who are defending it.’

He took a sip of Belvedere. ‘I’d say you’re simplifying it just a bit.’

‘Am I?’ she asked. ‘[...] I hear what the foot soldiers at the Justice Department are saying. I see the briefs that are filed on a daily basis challenging the constitutionality of that deeply flawed piece of legislation. I see the fear in the eyes of the people who are going to have to go before the Supreme Court and defend it.’ (Flynn, 2004, p. 43)

The failures sit around eating fancy meals and *talk* about these issues while the hero acts.

Later in *Memorial Day*, the president’s counterterrorism approach is clouded by Stokes and Stealey’s efforts to undo the Patriot Act. In the story, two terrorists are captured in the U.S. and Rapp wants them deported and turned over to him for torture. Stealey, who in addition to being out of touch is depicted as a corrupt justice department lawyer working her way to the top by lying and “sleeping” with influential men, goes around Rapp and convinces the president to instead have the terrorists arrested and charged criminally. The hero considers the situation:

Rapp and the president got along well, and he had no problem with General Flood, Secretary of Defense Culbertson, or National Security Advisor Haik, but when it came to the president’s chief of staff, the two hated each other. In addition, Rapp had no respect for the vice president, barely tolerated Secretary of State Berg, and did his best to avoid anyone who had anything to do with Homeland Security or the Justice Department. On one hand, having him brief the council could result in a major clash of egos [...] On the other hand, due to the gravity of the situation and the time constraints they were up against, Rapp had the potential to cut through all the bullshit and move the president to quick and decisive action. (Flynn, 2004, pp. 126-7)

The arrests happen and the liberal media makes the president look good during a campaign season. However, the two terrorists quickly get lawyers and provide no useful intelligence. In response, the hero kidnaps one of the terrorists and takes him to be tortured and finds out he was in the U.S. to help explode a nuclear bomb: The slow alternatives and the potential drawn out discussion involving egos, agendas, and other political considerations hinders the hero’s efforts.



Also, the representation of Stealey– who gains some level of power in the story but is eventually duped through her failed efforts– is an example of a heteronormative stereotype of a woman needing to use sex to obtain information and as being otherwise incompetent at her job.

Another woman dupe who uses sexuality to obtain information is the senator, Carmichael, from *Blowback*. In the story, the hero and a sidekick discuss how a Carmichael discovered the hero's presidentially sanctioned illegal black operations. Carmichael is portrayed as being out to expose the operation because she believes it is a violation of law, but also because she has political aspirations (a democrat opposed to the republican president in the story). She is described as “looking like” and being a “bitch” (Thor, 2005, p. 39) and she engages in a sexual relationship with a CIA analyst, in part to obtain details about the clandestine program.

Carmichael also leads Congressional hearings in an effort to expose the clandestine programs as illegal. The hero and sidekick worry she has information about their actions and believe she poses a serious risk. Harvath asks the sidekick how she can prove anything:

‘She doesn’t have to prove anything. This is Washington. All she has to do is have enough to suggest that the president may have been sanctioning off-the-books black ops, and it’ll hurt him in the election. It doesn’t matter that Jack Rutledge has been proactive as hell and has had the balls to do whatever necessary to keep this country safe, there’s a good percentage of the voting public out there who don’t like the idea of their president operating outside the scope of his power and not having to answer to anyone.’

‘But that’s not how he works, and you know it,’ replied Harvath.

‘[...]I] know, but what I say isn’t going to make a bit of difference. Carmichael is going to make him look like an egomaniacal despot waging his own war via his own private assassin. It’ll decimate the public’s trust in him.’ (Thor, 2005, p. 28)

Carmichael captures many of the features of the dupes: She is high-minded, political, clueless, and likes to sit around and talk about issues. But most important, she fails in her efforts to expose the hero and, by the story’s end, the FBI is able to force her resignation using video footage of her obtaining classified information through the sexual relation with the CIA analyst.

As expected in the patriarchal myth: Men win over women in the end (Caputi, 2004). Here, the ultimate downfall is the woman characterized as promiscuous. I will discuss additional dupes as egoists that hinder (aka, “handcuff”) and backstab the hero— and fail at it— in the hero chapter.

### **3. Dupes that see the Light**

In rare instances, dupes change their mind about their misinformed views on counterterrorism. This happens when they leave their idealized worlds and are exposed to the “realities” of the terror war. In *Extreme Measures*, Senator Lonsdale is initially portrayed as someone with tremendous power— being on the senate intelligence committee— to influence the continuance of the president’s (hero’s) black operations program. At first, she is skeptical of the program and takes efforts to end it because it violates laws. At this point, the narrator depicts her as impractical because she follows the letter of the law. However, during the course of the story, Lonsdale reviews classified materials and hears firsthand accounts from the hero about the true nature of, and “brutal mayhem” caused by, the terrorists. This information causes the dupe to change her position. She eventually condones a license to torture and kill for the hero.

This change begins when Rapp is put in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee on torture. The debate in the committee is if “unofficial” torture— or any other illegal method— is an acceptable “extreme” technique to prevent terrorist attacks. The narrator groups all of the senators as dupes: The committee eventually drops the matter because it is too complicated and taking up too much of their valuable time. This allows Lonsdale— after her realizations— to handle the matter privately. In a final scene, the hero, sidekick Nash, and Lonsdale discuss assassination targets. Nash clarifies with Lonsdale that she is condoning the killing and she tells the hero and his sidekick that she does not want to know what they do— they should just do it. Nash asks if she means they should “kill them” instead of bringing them to trial:

Lonsdale looked directly at Nash and said, ‘I mean, kill them. I think we would all be better off if you saved us from a circus trial.’

‘And your colleagues?’ Rapp asked.

‘I have spoken to a handful of the ones who matter. The really important ones are on the Intel Committee. I will make sure you have all the money you need. Anything you ask for, I’ll get it.’

‘Senator, you’ll have to excuse me,’ Rapp said in his wry tone. ‘I’ve been doing this for a number of years. If I’ve learned anything, it’s that as the political winds shift in this town, people tend to lose their appetite for stuff like this.’

Lonsdale gave him a curt nod. ‘Director Kennedy told me to expect this from you. So as much as I might someday regret this, I have prepared a letter.’ [...] She handed it to Rapp and said, ‘Please put that in a safe place and show it to no one other than Mr. Nash and Director Kennedy.’ (Flynn, 2008, p. 516)

The senator explains the document gives the hero and sidekick her backing to find and assassinate all of the terrorists responsible and, although it offers no legal protection, it says the senator sanctioned it. She comes around to agree that the way to deal with the problem was violence: She gets on their level and treats it as an exception to the rule.

Other characters are shown the light by the hero and described throughout my findings. This also highlights the irony that those who oppose or doubt the hero actually need him. For example, Gallo the media mogul needs the hero to free her daughter from the Taliban, although she is a dupe (*The Apostle*). The FBI dupes in *Extreme Measures* are privately grateful for the hero’s illegal surveillance of mosques. Even the U.S. President is sometimes shown the “truth” by the hero— the same president who inevitably needs the hero to enact this counterterrorism. The message: when faced with “reality,” rational people realize the legitimacy of those methods.

### C. **Conclusion: Valuable Lost Ideologies and Moral Necessitation of a Superhero**

The bloated organizations and foiled characters of the failures frame alienate, disqualify, ridicule, and overall set-up-and-fail alternative views of counterterrorism. Standard forms fail

when packaged as passive, misguided, power mongering, naïve, weak, or lacking in courage.

The ideological position becomes that law must be circumvented in exceptional circumstances, and those strictly following laws and rules are part of the problem. This is like on 24 when the suspension of the ordinary rule of law becomes a routinized necessity (Nikoladis, 2011). The texts do not suggest laws should be changed—only a certain form of justice presides over them.

Actual legal and national security tools needed to respond to terrorism are delegitimized because of this common sense framing. That is, justice alternatives represented by the dupes—whether Leland’s unwavering efforts to follow the Geneva Conventions, U.S. Senators following legislative process, Dreihaus arguing for a legal approach to deal with a terrorist, or the news media trying to act as a government watchdog—are defeated, avoided, or educated about the violent realities of counterterrorism. Through the oversimplified plot devices, well-crafted “facts,” and “realistic” scenarios, the frame is established and then gradually picked apart.

This frame’s function is critical mainly because of what it undermines, such as adherence to rules of engagement, separation of powers, and international treaties. Left behind is all the real work, the group effort of an effective law enforcement, intelligence, and military working cooperatively to (legally) conduct investigations. As such, democratic ideals are devalued and denied, and human rights and civil liberties can be suspended as needed. Democratic law becomes the ideology with no chance to be transferred into this form of authoritative justice. This is the reverse of what Mumby (1989) describes of dominant ideology. The discourse takes authority *away* from the counter-ideologies— a core finding I scrutinize in my final chapter.

The dupes’ misguided, weak, and fumbling “logic” is a device that defines and diagnoses the U.S. counterterrorism situation. It becomes a moral imperative to avoid what the dupes signify. This is summed up in *Memorial Day* with the narrator’s description of “The Facility,” a

secret site in rural Virginia where hero Rapp “interrogates” terrorism suspects. The Facility and places like it were a “necessary evil in a world full of sadistic deeds and misguided, brutal men”

(Flynn, 2004, p. 3). The narrator explains the logic of Rapp’s regular visits to The Facility:

He was a modern day assassin who lived in a civilized country where such a term could never be used [...] A democracy that celebrated individual rights and freedoms. A state that would never tolerate the open recruiting, training, and use of one of its own citizens for the specific purpose of covertly killing the citizens of another country. But that was exactly what Rapp was [...] An assassin who was conveniently called an operative so not to offend the sensibilities of the cultured people who occupied the centers of power in Washington [...] The haters of America’s capitalistic muscle wanted to analyze what we had done to evoke such hatred from the terrorist, all the while missing the point that they were using the logic of a seedy attorney defending a rapist. (Flynn, 2004, p. 3)

This is like American monomythic tales devaluing a democratic functioning justice system the U.S. should be striving for (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002): You want agencies to follow guidelines and international treaties. You want defense attorneys to protect legal processes. You want these ideals to protect the foundations of a fair and open democracy. However, the texts portray these ideals as impractical and based on feelings—simplified as an overly idealistic approach that supports the Other. This view is reminiscent of the Bush GWOT theme of being “with us or against us.” Here, being with “us” means you should reject the idealism and realize U.S. superior power and the need to employ assassins, even on U.S. soil.

The failures frame appears to replicate a reaction to a perceived breakdown of an existing U.S. justice and security system, just as Callahan fought back to bring justice to degenerates hiding behind a weak and floundering legal system based on rehabilitative justice models during the period following the 1960s Civil Rights Era (Lenz, 2005; Rafter, 2000). Aggressive and violent vigilante justice—getting “tough” on a perceived phenomenon—reflects a desire for a simple system of law and order with a distrust of any legal nuances of “right or wrong that are difficult to decipher” (Surrette, 1998, p. 26). A hero can undo a wrong by applying unilateral

power against an easily identifiable wrongdoer. Likewise, counterterrorism thrillers criticize U.S. institutions for their failure to prevent and fight terrorism, especially in the post-9/11 context. The message: The way the U.S. did it in the past and how some still want to do it was and is weak, corrupt, and confusing, and the soft and passive system fails. In this realm of crisis and paranoia, the regular “system has grievously failed its citizen-adherents; often no recourse exists; we do not know where to turn in such circumstances” (Messenger, 2002, p. 151).

These solutions to a failed justice system mimic those of hero Bauer, who is determined to ensure such mistakes do not happen again (Nikolaidis, 2011). This is like Batman’s role as a “virtuous vigilante violently cleansing a cowering community beset by an impotent legal system” (Ip, 2011, p. 226). The need for a fantasy superhero and the justice ideology he represents is a solemn obligation to do what is framed as naturally– and morally– “right.”

## VIII: THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS FANTASY SUPERHERO FRAME

This study's purpose is to investigate how post-9/11 counterterrorism thrillers construct frames that support and reflect ideological positions relevant to U.S. justice, law, and national security. The frames examined in chapters V and VI offer ideological versions of the "American" patriarchal homeland, the fear embodied in a constant future war scenario of moral necessity, and the Othering (Hall, 1997; Said, 1978) of Islam as the enemy. Chapter VII detailed the counter-ideologies embodied in failed policies, actions, and characters representing standard forms of constitutional and democratic justice. In the special operations counterterrorism fantasy superhero frame (hereafter: *superhero frame* or the *special operations superhero*), justice, law, and security ideologies are activated through the character's sacrificial acts to protect and redeem the homeland. As the impetus of an ideological vision, he personifies a version of post-9/11 justice coalescing U.S. policing, military, and intelligence into a presidential-level, ultra-elite, and clandestine security apparatus depicted as fundamental in executing the new terror war.

Media framing's final function— after diagnosing a problem and defining contextual morality— is providing a *remedy* (Entman, 1993). The framing detailed so far necessitates the special operations superhero as the new war's solution, placing him into a privileged character role in the texts with the prominent voice and point of view, or the "I" perspective of dominant ideological positioning (Kellner, 1995). Omnipotent narrators in each thriller support this authoritative perspective, enhancing messaging. Certain characters assist the superhero, such as sidekicks and regulars, but ultimately he— through his actions, plans, directives, and solutions— defeats the Islamic extremists in response to the security imperative (Sears, 2009).

The special operations superhero conforms to and borrows elements from established U.S. hero tropes discussed throughout this study, including: Combat hero hyper-masculinity

(Boggs & Pollard, 2006), all-American single-action heroism (Rapping, 2003), Cold War espionage heroics (Gallagher, 2000), the Wild West cowboy (Wright, 1977), the uniform savior (Altheide, 2005), and the outlaw hero (Rafter, 2000). He also accesses warrior myth (Gibson, 1994) and patriarchal myth (Caputi, 2004), and aligns with hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1987). As an amalgam with features from these established formations, I conclude this hero represents a renewed typology benefiting from the *superhero mythos*—U.S. culture’s ongoing fascination and nostalgia for fantastical and brave saviors that obscure what are actually representations of undemocratic forms of violent vigilantism (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). Hereafter, I use “hero” to describe both the individual characters in the data (e.g., hero Castillo) and hero descriptions used more broadly in the supporting literature. I use “superhero” when describing the character type specific to this dataset and the prototypical “American” superhero.

Heroes in U.S. popular culture are always historically situated (Rapping, 2003). I conclude these superheroes have certain recurring characteristics that distinguish them as a contemporary variation. They represent true-to-life FASC operating in a “realistic” post-9/11 national security milieu. They are historically bound and situate a specific type of extralegal, violent, and irregular—albeit plausible—state response. An emphasis on special operations subculture and imagery with a factualized basis expands into fantasy realms when the superhero uses associated tools and techniques beyond their intended purpose. The lines of military special operations are blurred when contrasted to their official roles as U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agents. These superheroes are bonded with fictional U.S. Presidents, crucial because they embody U.S. supremacy and are symbols of American exceptionalism (Gibson, 1994). Such features distinguish this character variation and parallel findings on hero Bauer (Nikolaidis,



2011; Van Veeren, 2009), which I have shown to be a poignant corresponding hero-image in recent U.S. popular culture.

Despite these variances in this historical context, this superhero is still a predicable hero trope and this is evident when the frame appropriates and employs archetypal monomythic devices (Campbell, 2008). Each story reflects a modified version of the American monomyth (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002) wherein the superhero receives a *call to duty* to go on operations in the *counterterrorism shadows*. The journey represents a moral imperative— a calling to exact a distinct version of justice. *Special tools and techniques* compliment the men on their journeys. This chapter details how the monomyth is used and what it means through a superhero lens.

Through sets of binary oppositions— fundamental to how myth functions (Berger, 1998; Hall, 1997)— heroes are often isolated as distinct from law, civility, and democracy. Such structuring necessitates this superhero's separation and ascension: The extremist frame morally opposing him, the failures frame demarcating him from the ineffective counter-ideologies, and the homeland frame defining what he is morally-obligated to fight for, as well as the place from where he arose and longs to be. Within the superhero frame, specific relationships and interactions with secondary characters, such as sidekicks, presidents, and dupes, act as devices to centralize the superhero and define his exceptional role.

My analysis of hero oppositions reveals messaging accomplished by framing processes that dictate *who should do it and why* (Benford & Snow, 2000), signifying an ideology about U.S. values and morality related to law, justice, and security. The overarching ideological message is the U.S., as an exceptional and superior nation, is destined to be responsible for global safety and security. This mission is accomplished by a unilateral, super-empowered executive using any force necessary while operating inside— or outside— the law.

In order for me to better explain superhero frame messaging and prepare an exploration of how it is positioned to act in support of hegemonic ideology and, thus, potentially empower dominant U.S. organizations and justice ideals (i.e., a core purpose of Mumby's [1989] theoretical approach to critiquing media ideology), I divide this chapter into three sections. They are: A) Superhero image with surface traits and internal character contradictions justified in the special operations trope, critical because it solidifies a consistent ultra-macho image as a repository for the ideological foundation; B) superhero's journey as a unique appropriation of monomythic elements, crucial because it constructs where the justice ideology is enacted and what he uses in that space; and C) oppositions between the superhero and secondary characters that center him to accentuate what he is while simultaneously humanizing him.

#### **A. Hero Image: *All-American Ideal Man***

The special operations superhero is superficially constructed through direct presentation of external character traits and biographies, which are often repeated in each successive genre text. The three superheroes have almost identical features and backgrounds, playing a prominent role in character demarcation. These explicit descriptors are easily found in the data because most narratives include an inventorying of appearance, accomplishments, backgrounds, and resumes. The narrator describes hero Castillo in *By Order of the President*: "At thirty-six, he was a great big guy' a little bigger than the secretary' good-looking, nice thick head of hair, blue-eyed, no wedding ring" (Griffin, 2004, pp. 5-6). Castillo is also described as very wealthy—rich enough to own and operate a private jet airplane.

Hero Harvath is similarly described in *The Apostle*: "[He] was in his late thirties, five-foot-ten, with a handsome, rugged face, sandy brown hair, and bright blue eyes" (Thor, 2009, p. 31). Harvath is also said to be a "natural born leader," have a "muscular build," be an Olympic

and professional downhill skier, be unmarried, and have made large sums of money from a military contracting business he established. In the Flynn (2004, 2005, 2008) thrillers, hero Rapp is described as six feet tall and weighing 185 pounds, “tall and tan,” having “rugged good looks” (Flynn, 2005, p. 32) a two-time winner of the Ironman Triathlon, an airplane pilot, a high school All-American Athlete, and a self-made millionaire.

The three superheroes all have U.S. backgrounds, such as being born and raised primarily in the U.S. and completing schooling and military service in the U.S., and are white. Even “Carlos Castillo”—“having a Spanish- or Italian-sounding name” (Griffin, 2004, p. 5)—is clarified as being a white “American.” In *By Order of the President*, the U.S. President first meets Castillo and tells an advisor he did not look like a “Carlos.” The advisor clarifies the superhero goes by the nickname “Charley.” The texts indicate he has some foreign “ethnic” heritage, but he is nonetheless white-skinned and blue-eyed.

The thriller narrators describe these men as being in incredible condition, winning athletes, attractive, heterosexual, wealthy, healthy, unmarried, self-made, and sexually potent. They are also not too young to be naïve and inexperienced, while not too old to be unable to accomplish difficult physical feats (i.e., all are in their 30s). By associating them with masculine and U.S. cultural stereotypes of attractiveness, physical prowess, and capitalistic “success,” they occupy the predictable and valued characteristics of the most privileged and enviable position in U.S. culture (Donaldson, 1993; Kellner, 1995). Such traits correspond to the period’s dominant forms of masculinity, as is expected of genre texts (Hall, 1997). These descriptions also correspond with the idealized vision of being “American” constructed in the homeland frame.

Depictions of the superheroes’ high intelligence levels and education are conveyed with more cataloguing. Harvath is a “Cum Laude” U.S. Naval Academy graduate and has master’s

degrees in political science and business administration (*Blowback*). Readers of *The Hostage* are told hero Castillo speaks seven languages and is a West Point graduate. Hero Rapp is a Syracuse University graduate and fluent in five languages (*Memorial Day*). The superheroes are fluent in the languages expected of Islamic extremists (i.e., Farsi and Arabic) and characterized as experts in terrorism and religious radical Islam. Hero Rapp works as an analyst specializing in terrorism in *Executive Power* and is described as an Islamic scholar. Castillo has an impressive working knowledge of world history, including the geopolitics of Islam. Exemplars of this include entire plotlines devoted to Harvath's intellectual pursuits into the origins of Islam and his expansive Koranic interpretations, as found respectively in *The Last Patriot* and *Blowback*.

These masculine stereotypes appear to continue the base characteristics of the heroic men represented in Cold War narratives – white, attractive, intelligent, and accomplished men with military backgrounds. Clancy's hero, Jack Ryan, is a former U.S. Marine officer and has graduate degrees in history and economics, and made a fortune trading stocks (Hixson, 2003). The hero of the Jason Bourne novel series has a PhD in linguistics and former officer in the U.S. Army Special Forces. This imagery continues traditional patriarchal imagery and forms the basis of the *conflict resolution model* requiring men to have superior rationale, toughness, and problem-solving skills (Gallagher, 2006).

The heroes of the subject texts are distinguished from ordinary men as perfected super-humans, devices representing not only masculine versions but also *hyper-masculine* ones (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988). They are elevated to all-American superhero status just as Callahan (i.e., the hero of *Dirty Harry*) represented a contemporary place as a Western, white, and patriarchal male that took from broader culture and fed it back to society (Rafter, 2000). A similar conclusion is drawn about Bauer: As an attractive single white man who speaks at least

two foreign languages and has a master's degree, he became U.S. popular culture's face of "successful" violent, conflict-based counterterrorism (Mayer, 2007). This trope ultimately represents a revised version of the ideal man (Rafter, 2000): A hyper-masculine fantasy depicted as a man status worthy enough to do what "matters most" in a particular period as a function of updated gender ordering (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). In the period corresponding to this study, I conclude terrorism and terror war represent prime locations where such ordering is acted out.

### **1. The Hero Dialectic: *Simultaneous Hero Constructs***

The thriller superheroes' idealized and fantasized image, conveyed through explicit narration, is predominantly static and flat. A genre text's popularity during contentious cultural moments relies on having superficial and predictable characters (Hall, 1997). The texts assure the superhero is always represented as financially stable, in fantastic shape, resourceful, attractive, smart, educated, and unwavering. These persistent traits offer an ideological foundation. However, dualities found in storylines and character interactions reveal ideological tensions—those expected in U.S. superheroes (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). Such tensions create a cognitive dissonance, or internal character incongruence, that necessitates resolution for the story to remain believable. One way this is resolved is through myth, which allows masculine Western heroes to be many—often contradictory—things at once (Rafter, 2000).

The internal conflict of the superhero appears to mirror the tradition of the true-to-life savior in U.S. cultural identity existing on two contrary but comingled threads. Ideal men have been represented at different times and formations as official (i.e., FASC) actors like cops, lawyers, soldiers, and spies, versus variants of individualists, renegades, or ex-officials gone rogue (Asimov & Mader, 2004). Traditionally, these heroes not only blur fact and fiction but also confuse and conflate official and individual action (Rafter, 2000)—like the police officer

protecting the group as a legal actor versus a vigilante exacting unilateral justice outside of the law. This type of dualistic tension is also found in the U.S. soldier hero, which has been an amorphous combination of the *lone gunman* versus *good soldier* representing shifting and contrasting versions of national honor and warrior myth (Gibson, 1994).

I found these tensions in three simultaneously and implicitly constructed dichotomies wherein the special operations superheroes are represented as: 1) personable guys anyone would want to socialize with, yet routinely engage in brutally violent acts against people and witness gore, death, and the horrors of war on a massive scale and in intimate ways; 2) idealized hyper-masculine males, but also a down-to-earth everymen; and 3) U.S. uniformed officers, but also vigilante rebels often operating independently and with impunity outside of the laws and rules intended to keep such officials accountable and legal. These internal dualisms inform both the fiction-as-fact theme, which blurs realistic policing and war making that is effective and intelligent while retaining the mythical components associated with fantasy, and a U.S.-centric struggle the superheroes are destined to confront and resolve.

**a. The Likable Violent Criminal**

The first dichotomy was likewise identified in hero Bauer, described as an improbable and contrary character because he is a likeable and friendly guy constantly involved with death, murder, torture, and other forms of repetitive violence that would leave any actual person morally decayed, suffering from mental problems, and not fun to be around (Yin, 2008). In the real world, Bauer would be a psychopath with a severe case of post-traumatic stress disorder (Yin, 2008). The superhero engages in similar types of violence, from directing military attacks to gun battles to torture to cleaning up dead bodies. He is constantly exposed to the death and mayhem of the new terrorism. Yet, he is simultaneously portrayed as likable.

Likability is a constant theme, creating sympathy in the character and embodying an intrigue and fascination with counterterrorism. Besides having the superficial image detailed above that makes him an enviable representation of the pinnacle of masculinity, there's also a "coolness factor" to the superheroes. This coolness—previously identified in the subject genre by Holloway (2009)—has many parallels with Bauer's popularized appeal (Entertainment Weekly Staff, 2009, n.p.). Sometimes, superheroes' images are linked to popular culture products: Hero Harvath frequently drinks Red Bull and has several edgy tattoos (*The Apostle*), Rapp listens to hip new music (*Executive Power*), and Castillo is frequently driving— or being driven around in— a BMW (e.g., in *Black Ops*). They are also linked to high-tech, clever tools, such as advanced satellite avionics with incredible accuracy (*The Hostage*), which emanate power and authority. Finally, two more features enhance likability: 1) Their ability to exact vengeance, always desirable in U.S. culture (Sharrett, 1999), and 2) the constant linking with the intrigue of special operations. I will continue to highlight how the superhero is made likable in the texts, but this feature is in constant competition with the underlying violence in the frame.

This duality creates tension and confusion, leading researchers to attempt to understand how, for instance, a criminal is constructed as a hero in television crime dramas (Rafter, 2000). One explanation for this phenomenon is found in an analysis of celebrated Italian mobster heroes (e.g., in *The Godfather* and *The Sopranos*): Although they are murderous and brutal thugs, the reader identifies and sympathizes with those characters to such an extent they are blinded to the realities of what the heroes are really doing (Messenger, 2002). The confounding, logic-defying brilliance of American superheroes is the way they remain popular and likable, regardless of their despicable actions (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002).

***b.     The Highly Intelligent and Educated Everyman***

The second duality constructed within the hero is as both a down-to-earth man's man versus a highly educated, wise, and intelligent individual, the former another likable trait. This duality mirrors the masculine dichotomy revealed in the failures frame wherein positive versions of masculinity of the U.S. West, such as independence, freedom, and strength, are contrasted to components of "Eastern" U.S. subordinated masculinities that give priority to intelligence and education, which is viewed as effete and weak (Christensen & Feree, 2008).

Van Veeren (2009) identified a similar theme in Bauer: He is at once depicted as a smart and educated superhuman while maintaining the image of a "man's man" who could socialize with anyone. In the thriller texts, hero Castillo is incredibly smart, yet he is modest and hangs-out with the guys—albeit, inevitable military pals—drinking beers, puffing cigars, and poking fun at gay men. There are many scenes in the Thor and Flynn series of the men doing what "down-to-earth" men do, like watching sports or visiting a bar. Yet, Castillo, Harvath, and Rapp are not reduced to simpleminded brutes executing gratuitous violence in action genre texts like *Rambo*, nor do they mimic the no-nonsense and anti-intellectual Callahan. They are also not erudite professors or analytical "nerds" where high intelligence drives their actions and attitudes. Although highly educated and intelligent, they maintain down-to-earth personas distanced from direct association with academia or intelligentsia. While they can debate with liberal and overly educated dupes, they are not like them. This thematic creates another form of tension.

***c.     The Uniformed Vigilante***

The third dichotomy found in the hero is the most confounding but the most telling as it directly relates to post-9/11 justice ideology. While the superheroes are official, or "uniformed,"

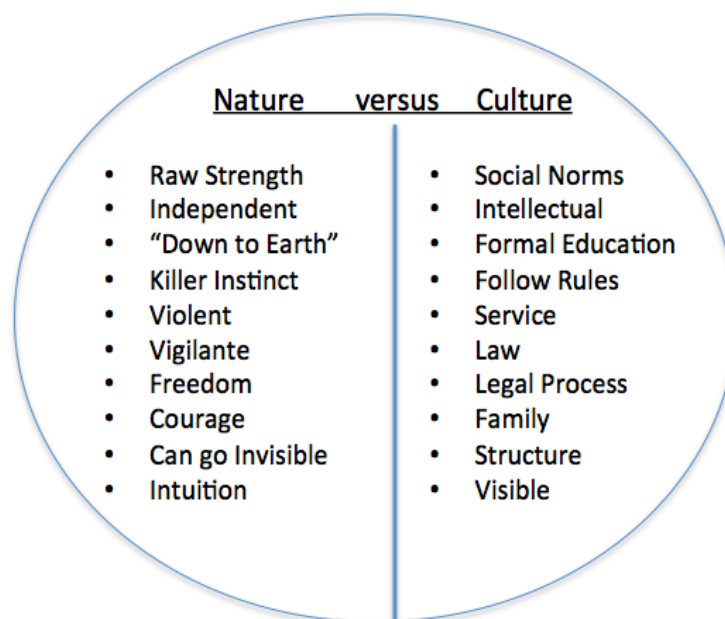


U.S. servicemen (e.g., as CIA or Department of Homeland Security employees) as explained by Altheide (2005) and Rapping (2003), during their journey they reject the rules of that service and turn rogue. By embracing vigilantism contrary to the rules and laws a legal actor is expected to follow in a constitutional democracy, similar tensions in Bauer reveal “opposition between the ideology of individualism and the constraints of institutional regulations [...found] in stereotypical portrayals of the male action hero” (Nikolaidis, 2011, p. 216).

This superhero is portrayed as a uniformed agent who has completed military service for the homeland and respects the importance of conventional police and military servicemen (i.e., as regulars). He has official authority, but is not burdened with rule of law, procedures, codes of conduct, and constitutional restrictions. As an individualist, he represents the heroism of the past while respecting fallen-heroes and current regulars, yet does not follow their rules, laws, and regulations. He is placed in contrast to the law-abiding and communal official hero as an outlaw cop— an “adventurer, explorer, gunfighter, and loner” (Rafter, 2000, p. 147) that represents the part of the U.S. imagination valuing freedom from entanglements and self-determination, yet struggles to be part of the community and its patriotism he must protect.

A pure official communal hero, like Sheriff Andy Taylor, has no tension. Conversely, the outlaw cop struggles to represent two sets of values simultaneously. A similar duality is found in Hollywood where, “both good and bad guy heroes operate on the basis of austere, unambiguous moral codes that are as bracing as they are simplistic and brutal” (Rafter, 2000, p. 141). By being two things at once— having the benefit of being uniformed patriots, but also shadowy outlaws— superheroes are free from entanglements. By switching between the values of good citizenship and the allure of criminality, they are simultaneously inside and outside law.

These dialectical tensions– shuffling between being a cutthroat killer and a likeable guy, an exceptional individual and ordinary everyman, and uniformed official and independent violent warrior– result in contradictory messaging. This reflects the persistent conflict between society and individualism, or the “archetypal conflict between nature and culture” (Ibarra, 1998, p. 412) genre texts are often designed to resolve. This theme can be understood as myth’s involvement in the ongoing U.S. cultural struggle to settle the conflict between living in a civilization with others and the innate human desire for independent freedom (Fiske, 1991). Figure 2 illustrates these tensions and the next section explains how they are resolved in the subject texts.



**Figure 2:** Superhero archetypal conflict between nature and culture

## 2. Special Operations Fantasy: Scripting the Alpha-Alpha Male

These dialectical tensions make sense when understood as being located, structured, and justified in a contemporary U.S. popular character trope that packages hyper-masculinity. That is, the popular intrigue surrounding and fascination with “special operations.” In the subject thrillers, the clandestine “operator” image allows the superhero to be a violent and cutthroat killer, but also likable; a superhuman man with exceptional traits, but also down-to-earth everyman; and can officially be a uniformed patriot, but also strikingly individualistic when depicted as operating in a space free from the rules and procedures that could hinder their action.

In the actual U.S. response to the new global terrorism (Clarke, 2004), special operations play an increasingly involved role, albeit a distinct *military* one. Terrorism security studies literature details how post-9/11 tools and techniques associated with U.S. special operations are critical on the contemporary asymmetrical terrorism battlefield (Schaller, 2015; White, 2014). Army Special Forces conduct nonconventional warfare, special reconnaissance, direct actions, counterterrorism, and internal foreign defense assistance (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2009). SEAL teams similarly execute missions like “insertions and extractions by sea, air or land, and [... capturing] high-value enemy personnel and terrorists around the world” (<https://www.navy.com/careers/special-operations/seals>). As specific post-9/11 examples, special operations units killed Osama bin Laden (Schaller, 2015) and have been regularly deployed to train Afghani security forces (Pappalardo, 2005).

Special operations units are intended to be secretive, specialized, and independent from conventional forces (White, 2014). Considered “elite,” they are difficult to gain access to and are known for extreme rigorous physical challenges and requiring expertise in specialized weaponry and techniques (Schaller, 2015). These units represent highly secretive spaces where

ordinary citizens have little access and, thus, there is little public knowledge of what they do.

“Spec ops” also represent a subculture and insider community dominated by men. Males occupy *all* U.S. special operations positions (<http://www.military.com/special-operations>). I argue this subset represents the most “vigilante” possible in the U.S. military. Yet, the units and the men in them are still required to follow pertinent rules, laws, and procedures (White, 2014).

This practical role and existing subculture has become a celebrated, mythicized, and fantasized trope in U.S. popular culture. Evidence of this trope’s popularity was introduced in Holloway’s (2009) findings on the ultra machismo operators in terrorism fictions. Mega-popular video games like the *Call of Duty* series (Gagnon, 2010) and *SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs* (Mirrlees, 2009), as well as blockbuster Hollywood versions of actual post-9/11 special operations actions in *American Sniper*, *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Lone Survivor* (Boggs & Pollard, 2016), demonstrate how engrained and celebrated the hyper-masculine actions of violent men operating in the shadows exacting unilateral justice exists in contemporary popular media.

In the subject texts, superheroes are constructed as exceptional individuals with the amazing education, skills, and athleticism described above and corresponding with what is expected of an operator. In addition to currently being U.S. intelligence or law enforcement actors (i.e., as FASC working in U.S. civilian agencies), these superheroes all have extraordinary law enforcement and military service records and training related to special operations. Castillo is an Iraq War veteran, having flown many combat missions and earning a Distinguished Flying Cross and Purple Heart for his brave actions as an Army Special Forces pilot (*By Order of the President*). Rapp completed successful missions with numerous special operations units, including the SEALs and Air Force Special Operations Command (*Consent to Kill*). In *Blowback*, the narrator touts Harvath’s “lengthy resume” that included service on,

Navy SEAL Teams Two and Six, before the Secret Service hired him to come work at the White House. While he was there, he knocked one out of the park by rescuing the president during that whole kidnapping thing in Park City, Utah [...] after that, he linked up with the CIA and started doing occasional assignments with members of the Special Operations Group. One involved a hijacking and the dismantling of the Abu Nidal terrorist organization, and another involved the Russians and the suitcase nukes they were threatening to detonate here. (Thor, 2005, p. 5)

This inventorying does not include the scars the hero received from IED explosions during a GWOT special operations deployment (*The Apostle*). The heroes' service records are all factualized units and correspond to real U.S. conflicts.

A concise summary of what operators "do" is found in this quote from *The Apostle*: "[They] conducted deep reconnaissance operations, carried out strikes and other small-scale offensive actions in hostile or politically sensitive environments, captured and destroyed enemy targets, and engaged in the sophisticated world of direct action" (Thor, 2009, p. 45). These types of intertextual references seem to be cut-and-pasted from the special operations U.S. military webpages. Special operations are depicted as a dominant form of a militaristic, intensely hyper-masculine subculture. Superheroes maintain this operator status in the stories when they are always part of elite, hidden, and nonconventional counterterrorism unit.

The texts constantly use fact-based references to the superhero belonging to elite U.S. military units, like Army Green Berets or Navy SEALs. These are not only elites units, but often associated with the *elite within the elite*. Viewers of *24* are reminded Bauer was a former member of "Delta Force," which is an ultra-select unit within the U.S. Army Special Forces (Mayer, 2007). Readers are told the same of Rapp (*Memorial Day*). Castillo has an even more exclusive military experience, having completed tours with "Gray Fox," described by *The Hostage* narrator as an ultra secret unit hidden *within* Delta Force. According to U.S. military

sources, The U.S. Pentagon refuses to admit Gray Fox actually exists

(<http://www.military.com/special-operations/intelligence-support-activity.html>).

Despite their non-military position in the stories, the special operations trope is always present in the superhero, as is detailed throughout this chapter– in the techniques used, in the sidekicks that help them, in the repeated war stories, and in the special tools and special access they have that falls outside of the conventional security arena. The ongoing celebration of special operations enshrines the superheroes as *forever operators*: It is being part of a subculture that subsumes an identity, an ethos forever with the individual. Characters in *Takedown* describe special operations as a tight community founded on the “warrior ethic” (Thor, 2006, p. 64).

The special operations ethos seems problematic because the heroes all work for *civilian* law enforcement or intelligence agencies. The U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and CIA employ Rapp, Castillo, and Harvath in the stories, respectively. In *Black Ops*, Castillo is described as a U.S. “federal law enforcement officer” (Griffin, 2008, p. 120) in the midst of planning a special operations-style military incursion into the Congo and is addressed as his U.S. Army rank of colonel throughout the story. These devices demonstrate how these superheroes are many things, but the special operations trope reconciles these roles– he can keep the realism of working for an actual state security entity but simultaneously shed the constraints of service. It does not matter if he technically is in a special operations unit. This persona, this ethos affords the men an elite, hyper-masculine aura.

***a. Myths Invigorating the Special Operations Trope: Warrior and Cowboy***

The special operations trope is reminiscent of the emergence in the 1980s (i.e., the détente Cold War/post-Vietnam era) of a highly energized culture of war and a renewed version

of the warrior myth (Gibson, 1994). This new war culture was not so much police or military, but a blurring of them that was then removed from specific association with those official roles:

[The] new warrior hero was only occasionally portrayed as a conventional member of or law enforcement unit; typically, he fought alone or with a small, elite group of fellow warriors. Moreover, by separating the warrior from his official state-sanctioned occupations— soldier or policeman— the new war culture presented the warrior role as the ideal identity for all men. (Gibson, 1994, p. 9)

This representation allows *any* man, whether cop, janitor, or accountant, to potentially rise above his ordinary station in life— the mundane conventional routine— and become the amalgam of the hyper-masculine warrior. The thriller superhero embodies the same type of warrior mythos at the core of the fantasy and is a place for a new brand of ultra macho identity (Holloway, 2009). The operator realm is, I argue, one of the last bastions of unrestrained masculinity.

The shifting history of military warriors— from the legendary guerilla fighters of the Revolutionary War to the ordinary troops of World War II— led to the mythical post-Vietnam warrior of the era’s new war. The “sheer intensity of the violence in these stories tend to make the warrior’s victories look like the definitive restoration of a fallen America” (Gibson, 1994, p.31). The heroes of the new war had another, more distinguishing characteristic: They do not recreate the sacred honor of the past warriors. Instead, they are portrayed in U.S. culture as the apex of masculine power and individual development; and that combat itself is the only idea with enough value to save (Gibson, 1994). The superhero of the subject texts draws on this myth, represented here in the introductory quote from *The Apostle*, which asserts during,

[O]ur war on terror, a new breed of operator has emerged. Passionately dedicated to their craft, they ignore the trials and hardships of their profession and work tirelessly in the face of limited support and bloated bureaucracies to achieve one singular goal: mission success. Motivated by a deep and undying love for their country, [...] operators face intense danger so that America may remain free. Once labeled ‘true believers,’ this term no longer applies. These warriors have become Apostles. (Thor, 2009, n.p.)

The superhero frame also draws from U.S. cowboy myth, particularly themes of defending U.S. expansion and operating alone as frontiersmen (Christensen & Feree, 2008). *Executive Power*'s narrator provides a history lesson on the "true intent" of the CIA's founder, Colonel "Wild Bill Donovan" according to the narrator, and how he created the "SSA," which is CIA's predecessor organization, full of "maverick operators [with] foreign language skills who had the chutzpah to run covert ops" (Flynn, 2003, p. 46). These operators were not supposed to be in Washington going to meetings, discussing intelligence issues with Congress, and being politically correct and risk-averse; they were intended to be covert, independent-thinking, risk-taking heroes out on the wild frontier getting things done while shielded from bureaucracy. Cowboy mythicizing is found in the texts, such as in *The Hostage*:

'So we saddled up. Like I said, twenty-four shooters, mostly Delta but with four guys from Gray Fox. We got two Black Hawks and two Little Birds from the 160<sup>th</sup>. Both Little Birds are gunships; we can move everybody on the Black Hawks, but you never know when you're going to have to pop somebody.' (Griffin, 2006, p. 173)

Saddling up to do the job and having shooters at the ready are reminiscent of the Wild West.

John Wayne as a template of "ideal American masculinity" (Van Meter, 2014) reflects the morphology of special operations men as modern cowboys, which reiterates the iconic image of a heroic renegade. Warrior cowboys like Wayne are subjects of fascination. Set within U.S. frontier myth, they are universal images of the lone soul, but also rational men motivated by self-interest within a capitalistic society (Wright, 1977). The infinite frontier symbolizes a promising system where every white man can exist on private lands, free from restrictions. He signifies freedom and equality, but also the idea "those qualities can lead to a civil society. He emerges from the wilderness to create market society, and his vision of civility is defined by an open frontier" (Wright, 1977, pp. 188-189). The frontier demarks the dangerous state of nature from



an orderly social contract, marking the line between savagery and civilization. The U.S. value of individualism is threatened by social change, which cowboy-style heroes act to reinvigorate.

***b. Special Operations as Repository***

The thrillers' superhero has an endless supply of masculine traits and features to choose from. It depends on each story as to which get activated, be it wisdom about Islam, brute force, street smarts, incredible expertise with weaponry, or presidential authority. Thus, the special operations trope is a repository for all the skills, capabilities, tools, and techniques available at any moment. This is like how Bauer incorporates male action traditions and legitimizes "irregular" political and ethical action through hypermaculinity (Nikolaidis, 2011). Bauer's image ultimately exceeds the individual level. This transcendent and super empowered location is where a U.S. unilateral war-fighting model, with all of the components of U.S. power and use of force available, thrives (Nikolaidis, 2011). Here, it collects police powers, intelligence capabilities, and military might while avoiding associated laws and legal processes. This is how the superheroes identify with an official, empowered role; but are not tied to an official position.

Existing *outside* of all the rules the regulars in those realms typically have to follow, these heroes reach an enchanting level of believability. This is not realistic, but through the framing process of salience and selection (Entman, 1993), these contradictions are well hidden and justified. This transcendence reinforces the special operations mystique. As the role of myth is expected to do, the trope functions to reconcile the contradictions of nature versus culture (Fiske, 1991). Being free to do and be everything at once and use an endless array of talents and tools in any imaginable scenario, the character typology embodies the best of the best of how U.S. culture idealizes uniformed actors. The result is a blurring and conflating of all the

boundaries of the executive into one trope— a spy, cop, soldier, prosecutor, and, sometimes, executioner. Roles, powers, and *actions* played out in a myriad of framing devices.

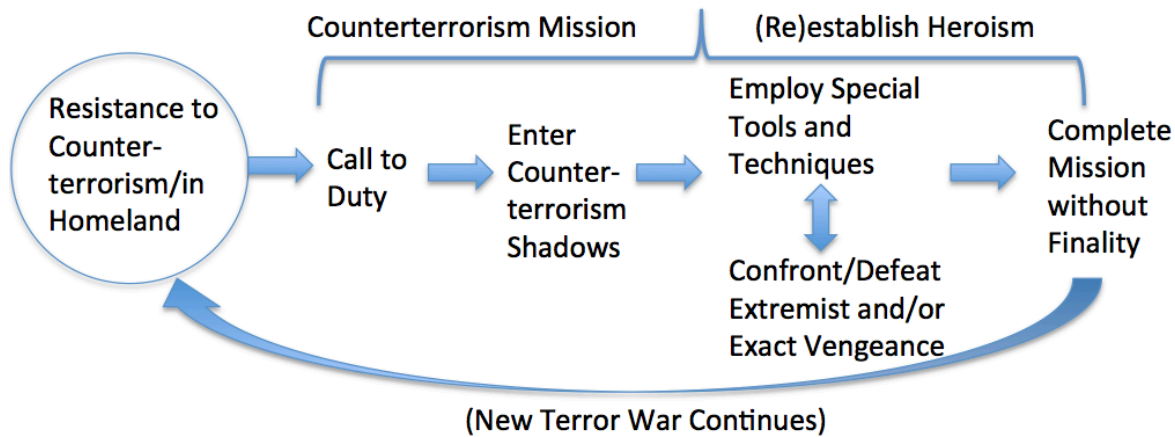
**B. A Version of the American Monomyth: *Superhero's Journey***

I now turn to those superhero actions, as well as the space they enter and the tools and techniques they employ, wherein their point of view further informs how ideological messaging is accomplished. They repeatedly embark on a journey resembling Campbell's (2008) hero's journey (Campbell, 2008) and draws from three of its key elements: 1) A "call to adventure," which I term the *call to duty*; 2) "crossing the threshold" from the "ordinary world" to the "special world," the latter concept I conceptualize as the *counterterrorism shadows*; and 3) the use of "magical" weapons to succeed on their quest, which I term *special tools and techniques* because they are more than just weapons and not depicted as supernatural. There are also lesser monomythic elements throughout the texts, such as variations of "allies" and "mentors."

The American monomythic journey (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002) informs this section by explaining heroic redemption and focusing on U.S. culture. The researchers offer this formula:

A community in harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to the paradisiacal condition. (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002, p. 6)

While the data did not precisely mimic this scheme, the commonalities offer guidelines that help explain the framing and offers familiarity to the reader through plots following a linear progression (Hall, 1997; Holloway, 2009). Figure 3 illustrates the progression and its features.



**Figure 3:** The special operations superhero’s monomythic journey

### 1. His Call to Duty: *Superhero’s Destiny and Sacrifice*

At the onset of nearly every thriller plot the superhero resides outside of the shadows and attempts to lead a more conventional life, resisting counterterrorism involvement. This theme aligns with the monomyth’s “refusal of the quest,” which leads to disaster if the refusal continues (Campbell, 2008). Here, it includes the superhero working as a regular soldier or bureaucrat, entering the private sector, getting engaged to be married, or trying to lead a more domesticated life. The resistance to fighting the new terror war ends when an imminent threat– and the superheroes’ unique ability to fight it– manifests. This mythicized framing device acts out the underlying ideological position of the character being a man of action with extraordinary traits, resume, and set of skills and experiences and the best– and perhaps only– justice solution.

In *Takedown’s* first chapter, Harvath is on the verge of leaving government service to join the private sector. In the preceding thriller, dupes exposed his clandestine program to the press and he became a terrorist groups’ target. He debates his decision with an old SEAL buddy,

Bob Herrington, in a bar on the outskirts of New York City. A sudden attack on the city is broadcasted on the bar's television. Harvath quickly realizes the tactics are those of al Qaeda:

Harvath's thoughts of leaving government service and going into the private sector suddenly seemed much less pressing. What he wanted at this point more than anything else was justice; a shot to get even, and he knew that Bob Herrington felt exactly the same way. (Thor, 2006, p. 27)

The men charge into the city while frightened, ordinary citizens rush out. Harvath is soon leading a counterterrorism operation with the president's backing. The hero knows the terrorist "playbook" and seeking "justice" becomes his mission.

Harvath again considers leaving counterterrorism work and settling down with his fiancé, Tracy, in the *Last Patriot*. At the story's onset, the couple is in Paris far from the shadows and relaxing at a café when a terrorist bombing occurs at their exact location. This sets in motion events placing the hero in the middle of another imminent plot. During the initial action, he attempts to avoid involvement and tells Tracy he only desires to be with her. Harvath does not want his "old life" back. Tracy helps him realize his calling:

‘Scot, I can’t promise you that everything between us is going to be perfect. I dropped my crystal ball the day I got shot. What I can tell you is that I understand who you are. The better part of your life has been devoted to taking America’s fight to its enemies, this enemy in particular. Now, without another person having to be maimed or killed, you have a chance to defeat one of the greatest threats civilization has ever seen. I’m not going to let you throw that away [...] This is what you’re so good at. You know how these people play and you know how to beat them at their own game. [...] This is about right and wrong. And you need to do the right thing here.’ (Thor, 2008, p. 116)

This dialogue constructs the fateful nature of Harvath's situation— he can resist it, but even his fiancée realizes the imminent threat coupled with his unique skills that mandate his call. Tracy also humanizes the hero as a supportive and contrasting stereotypical feminine role, replicating the patriarchal framing devices found in the homeland frame.

In *By Order of the President*, hero Castillo is asked by the “DCI” (i.e., the Director of Counterintelligence, the highest intelligence position in the U.S.) to lead a new secret counterterrorism cell. Castillo is initially reluctant, claiming he prefers to stay in his current military position. But the DCI, under the president’s urging, coaxes the hero to accept the duty:

‘Colonel,’ the Naval Academy graduate said with a Texas twang, ‘what we are is a group of people who realize there are things the intelligence community doesn’t do well, doesn’t want to do, or for one reason or another can’t do. We try to help. And we’re all agreed that you’re just the man to administer the program.’

‘You’ve got the wrong guy. The intel community hates me, and that’s a nice way of describing it.’

‘Colonel,’ [...] ‘this is our proposal, in a few words: you keep your people together, keep them doing what they do so well, and on our side we’ll decide how to get the information to where it will do the most good, and in a manner that will not rub the nose of the intelligence community in their own incompetence.’ (Griffin, 2004, p. 453)

Castillo hesitates like Harvath, but ultimately takes the new position. In a thriller later in the series (i.e., *Black Ops*), the hero is forced to go into hiding for fear “left-wing bureaucrats” (Griffin, 2008, p. 261) and the news media (depicted as foils) will expose their secretive cell. However, eventually the president again seeks his help because he believes Castillo is perfect for the job. This hero tries hard to just be a soldier and do his job as an ordinary military officer, which also signifies the “good American,” but keeps getting pulled back into counterterrorism.

At the beginning of *Executive Power*, hero Rapp is no longer an operator in the field. Instead, he is an intelligence analyst in Washington D.C. who has “fallen in love” and decided it was time to “get out of the killing business and get on with normal life” (Flynn, 2003, p. 48). But he is called to duty when terrorists kill several of his SEAL brethren during the unsanctioned operation in The Philippines. Rapp knows he must be reactivated to honor his lost comrades. These examples emphasize the call’s common feature of immediacy, paralleling the doom frame. The superhero is propelled into action by circumstances out of his control, happening *now*.

Resistance to the shadows relates to the negative consequences of fighting a terror war, such as mental and physical strain and absence from home. Correspondingly, there is a theme of the heroes' longing to be normal. As exemplified by familial depictions in the homeland frame, the superheroes contemplate having domestic lives, such as raising families and settling down in a quiet place. This desire is sometimes emphasized with personalized and horrible realities, present and past. For example, terrorists killed Rapp's "high school sweetheart" in the Pan Am terrorist act of the 1980s (*Executive Power*), which is another factual reference to past events and a typical masculine "American" representation. Plot devices like being denied a partner in marriage, being pulled from the routines of the regular military, or seeing comrades harmed emphasize the unrequited desires of the superheroes, underscoring their sacrificial calling.

The unrealized desire for idealized love and marriage is acted out in one of *Consent to Kill*'s primary plotlines. In the story, Rapp and his wife, Anna, are depicted spending quality time together. Soon, Anna becomes pregnant and the couple makes a plan for a new life outside of counterterrorism. But terrorists—funded by Saudi extremists—murder Anna in a bombing primarily intended for the hero. After hunting down and vengefully killing the Islamic extremists who funded and planned the attack, Rapp spares the life of the man who planted the bomb (i.e., the triggerman). He does this because when he hunts down and finds the triggerman, he is cowering in a corner with his wife and baby. Rapp seems to see himself in that image: Both as a triggerman for counterterrorism and as a would-be father. He realizes the consequences of the terror war and he, like the triggerman, is a pawn in a game. Rapp wants out.

After sparing the triggerman's life, Rapp walks to the beach of a nearby ocean:

Rapp stood in the surf with his gun in his hand and counted. He got to a hundred, thought of his wife, thought of the baby, and smiled. It was the first genuine smile he'd had in over nine months. He glanced down at the gun and then tossed it up in the air, catching it

by its thick black silencer. Rapp hesitated for a moment, and then threw the weapon end over end into the ocean. (Flynn, 2005, p. 675)

This act seems to be a variation of a classic hero scene and badge-and-gun thematic like when Dirty Harry, disgusted by the police department and legal system he works for, whips his badge into a pond— an act signifying that hero discarding the law (Lenz, 2005). Rapp is disgusted by the system but does not even consider the law because he is firmly established as being outside of it. The added contrast here is that, given the context of just witnessing the triggerman and his family and since he throws away his *gun*, I interpret this as being about rejecting the violence that destroyed his would-be family. The hero's destiny has come at too great a cost. This scene also represents a reversal of the pattern of being called to duty at the start of a story— Rapp wants out at the *end*. But not for long because this turns out to be only a temporal act of resistance: Within the first page of the next serial thriller, Rapp is back in the violent realm the gun signifies.

Special operations superheroes are constructed, like *Captain America*, as “reluctant warriors” (Dixon, 2004), not men wanting or seeking to do violence. The soon-to-be superhero does not desire power and fame, and does not enact heroism until required to do so. It does not matter if a friend, loved one, or the president reminds him, the superhero alone must sacrifice his would-be normalcy and safety. Regardless of amazing coincidence, revenge, or his unique skillset, he is personally propelled into the shadows. As a superhero, he does not choose the life of violent brutality or seek some random adventure— he is forced into a moralistic calling for the homeland's survival (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). This martyrdom likely creates sympathy (i.e., to enhance likability) in the character, like how hero Bauer is able to retain his dignity when engaged in disgracefully violent acts due to his “tragic-ethical grandeur” (Zizek, 2006, n.p.).

An interrelated feature of this mythic call to duty, which was discussed in and parallels the doom frame, is the superhero only takes action *in response* to an attack on his homeland. A

hero as U.S.'s symbolic representative must not be seen as acting to advance an empire, but protecting and defending for the highest moral purpose of the nation's security (Dixon, 2004). This reflects the national security imperative (Sears, 2009): In every story, Rapp, Harvath, and Castillo are portrayed as being compelled into action by an active threat, or a plot that is revealed to be undeniably impending.

The return to duty plot device is a formula at the core of heroic struggle. The tension to leave but being pulled back in has universal resonance. Western readers are expected to appreciate and identify with this monomythic device. It is easier to sympathize with a hero forced into revenge and brutality in defense of the nation, versus the psychopath choosing to do it for pleasure or some fanatical religion (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). This personalized evocation of necessity bolsters the purity of the ideological messaging of the white, masculine, Western, superhuman as an ideal savior (Rafter, 2000). It also emphasizes— and is emphasized by— the patriarchal myth reasserting it is men who must always save the day (Caputi, 2004).

Sometimes the call to duty occurs immediately after leaving the shadows. In *Blowback's* final scene, Harvath has neutralized the terrorists and attempts to escape for a respite at a seaside resort. But soon a hotel clerk disturbs the hero:

'You have an important phone call,' said the clerk. 'A gentleman has been most insistent. [...] Would you like me to bring the phone out here to you?'

Harvath began to swing his legs out of the hammock but then thought better of it. 'Tell him you couldn't find me.' (Thor, 2005, p. 568)

In this story, Harvath— in charge of his own actions— decides to take a two-week break where he figures the rest of the national security apparatus will “survive” without him, relaxing and delaying his destiny, or *not being a hero*. The phone call is about a new doomsday scenario by Islamic extremists only Harvath can deal with. He does, in *Takedown*. This cyclical construct



guarantees the recurring need for U.S. counterterrorism. This anticipation is also accomplished in the texts in the form of chapters from the next thriller in the series, much like *24*'s "scenes from next week" (Mayer, 2007). The previews give just enough enticing details of another calling into the shadowy world of the new terror war. Post-9/11 Hollywood combat action heroes had the same burden: An "anointed destiny" assuring they are never released from their duty and destiny to save the world from "unspeakable horrors" (Boggs & Pollard, 2006, p. 349).

## 2. Counterterrorism Shadows: *Superhero's Landscape*

The special operations superhero enters a special world (Campbell, 2008) of contemporary U.S.-centric counterterrorism when he receives his call to duty. The device of crossing the threshold (Campbell, 2008) is not as distinct as in the classic journey, but a more arbitrary passage happening anywhere and at anytime. The new terror war is set in the lawless landscape where the enemy is fought: Just as the cowboy had to move from civilization to wilderness (Wright, 1977), Rambo had distant lands to single-handedly invade and shoot / blow up (Gibson, 1994), and Cold War spy games were played with Russians in locales and setting not found in the ordinary world (Britton, 2005). Heroes and villains operate in the outskirts of society (Wright, 1977), like how Bauer routinely entered, "A realm outside the political and the legal sphere" (Nikolaidis, 2011, p. 222).

The shadows of the subject thrillers are far hazier and transitory battlefields, and I conclude more unpredictable and sinister than previous wild landscapes. In the dark and dangerous world of international counterterrorism, rules do not apply, diabolical terrorists lurk, exceptional heroes move freely about, secrecy is paramount, and ordinary citizens should not go. Examples of these random locations have been given throughout the findings, such as Castillo flying around South America (*The Hostage*), a café in Paris turned into a bombsight (*The Last*

*Patriot*), and a hidden torture facility in Virginia (*Memorial Day*). Chapters are often introduced by listing exotic places, like Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan (*The Apostle*), Tacuarembó Province, Uruguay (*Black Ops*), or throughout the Mediterranean (*Blowback*), as well as symbolic locations of U.S. power, like at the White House or “Langley” (i.e., the code for CIA headquarters). Sometimes, these settings act as symbolic devices underscoring the dangers of the work, such as Iraq’s battle torn deserts (*Blowback*) or the jungles of Africa (*Black Ops*). These shadowy locations convey the notion the terror war can take place anywhere.

In *Memorial Day*, Rapp and sidekicks are found in one of these locations and depicted as hunting down the enemy, which is the type of terrorism metaphor described in the extremist frame used to depict the Other. The team—described in depth as being operators—is in Afghanistan, which is a place they were authorized to be as the U.S. military. The terrorist, however, had fled to Pakistan outside of the warzone. The narrator claims the Others had miscalculated when dealing with the hero and his comrades,

Thinking they were safe sitting on the Pakistani side of the border [...] they had underestimated their enemy. They thought America lacked the courage and resolve to take them on. They were bullies and thugs blinded by their misguided righteousness. War was the only thing that would ever dissuade them of their ways, and they’d picked a fight with the wrong enemy. (Flynn, 2004, p. 54)

As the narrator explains, crossing into Pakistan was against international law because it is a sovereign state, and because of this law, a place where terrorists hide to avoid contact with U.S. forces. Regardless, the superhero leads the search into that country to find the terrorist. According to the narrator, the terrorist underestimated the hero’s courage to violate the laws; something Rapp was forced to do because the Others fled from the fight.

Rapp and his team, forced to track down the terrorist into countries they are not legally allowed to operate, conflates the raw “courage” to fight with abiding by rules of warfare. This is

one way the superhero is distinguished and it represents the idea that U.S. forces can cross any border to fight the Other. As an intertextual reference, the scene acts out the debate whether the U.S. can move outside of a defined area of “active hostility” (Schaller, 2015), like unilaterally entering Pakistan under GWOT auspices. This debate is often resolved in the texts– the superheroes enter any country, as needed and sidestepping international law. This signifies the idea the U.S. has power over all other nations when needed to support its own strategic interests.

In the counterterrorism shadows, the enemy and superhero are outside and in the ultimate dualistic battle. The hero has to resort to the exceptional techniques on the shadowy terrorism battleground outside of legal and political realms. This is about *hypermobility*. Just as Cold War super-spy Jason Bourne, revived after 9/11, had the capability to go anywhere in the world while being monitored. This signifies the masculine geo-political dominance of the U.S. and U.S. capability to obtain surveillance from or in any international location it wants (Dodds, 2008).

The use of settings as devices to depict the worldwide reach of counterterrorism action is abundant in the Griffin series, which even include world maps of the hero’s exploits in the book linings. Castillo never has to cross through controlled borders, deal with foreign authorities, or obtain visas or clearances that are strictly needed for U.S. official travel to other nations. The Griffin thrillers also underscore how the shadows are not necessarily dangerous places. There is no place the new terror war cannot happen: In major U.S. cities, on college campuses, or cafes in Europe– maintaining the theme of an underlying and imminently looming terror threat.

Being outside of the law and hidden away, there is rarely a record of, and no accountability for, the superhero’s actions in the counterterrorism shadows. For the most part, the shadows are hidden– even if in plain site– and reserved for the special few. *Consent to Kill’s* superhero prepares to enter the shadows after a call to duty. Walking to his closet,

His thoughts were already returning to his notes. There were a lot of things to consider. In a perfect world it would have been nice to bounce a few things off Anna, but it just wasn't an option [...] operations like this were designed to never see the light of day. That's why they were called black ops. The Freedom of Information Act would have no effect on them. No records would be kept, and the men and women who were involved would go to their graves silent to their very last breath. (Flynn, 2005, p. 9)

“Black ops” battles must be fought in the shadows where there are no rules. Superheroes make their own decisions with little restraint from higher authorities, like laws and politicians. Laws that try to guarantee public access to governmental action, such as the Freedom of Information Act, do not bind them. They *need* to break rules, as explained in *Memorial Day*: “Rapp had to move quickly, and that meant he would have to break some rules [... That] was the way it had to be. The military had too many rules [...]. The course Rapp was about to set could not be done by the book. There could be no record of it” (Flynn, 2004, p. 123). He operates anywhere and does anything, combining and *transcending* law enforcement, intelligence, and military— benefitting from all the official hyper-masculine powers with no restrictions.

Sometimes, the activities of the superhero and his sidekicks are revealed to some other authority or the public. If discovered, like in *Black Ops* when liberal politicians find out about Castillo leading an unsanctioned incursion into Africa and in *Blowback* when the press captures the superhero beating an innocent Arab man on video, blame is placed on foils (Gieryn, 1983)— as the pitiful efforts of meddling dupes or the prying news media. If the mission should come to the attention of ordinary populace, it is an injustice of the system. While these events may cause temporary obstacles and or show how foils can cause problems, ultimately there is no real punishment or consequence for superhero and his illegal and irregular activity.

The framing devices that depict the counterterrorism shadows signify two interrelated core ideological positions: First is demarking the shadows as a place that a special man needs to go, and in that space, this man is not accountable and is clandestine. Thus, the superhero

transcends laws and borders in the counterterrorism landscape to execute a covert conflict resolution model. The second corresponding message is one of U.S. power projection. The U.S., embodied in the ultimate executive image of the superhero, can, must, and will go anywhere in the world to execute the mission. Global, super-empowered omnipotence is about U.S. imperialistic dominance and finds support in ideas from American exceptionalism (Walt, 2011) and claims to superiority to unilaterally dictate when and where war is waged.

### **3. Counterterrorism Tools and Techniques: *Extensions of Super-Empowerment***

The superhero's mobility in the shadows signifies a super-empowered U.S. executive with the transcendent ability to go anywhere in the world at any time to complete that nation's counterterrorism mission. The sub-framing described in this section emphasizes the U.S. preordained and transcendent right to attack and use force in any way necessary through the superhero's expertise and access to specialized tools and techniques. The monomythic hero obtains supernatural talisman necessary to survive and succeed in the special world (Campbell, 2008), which is the mythical space the hero enters to realize his journey. Such objects correspond to the "magical agents" used by folk and fairy tale heroes as an extension of the ideological power of the characters wielding them (Berger, 1998). The agents are magical because their effectiveness is beyond normal and they bolster the hero's exceptionality— they are destined to be owned by him and he knows how to best use them, such as with Luke Skywalker's light saber (Campbell, 2008) and John Wayne's six-gun pistol (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002).

Gibson (1994) detailed the phenomenon of *magic weapons* depicted in U.S. popular fiction during the late Cold War/post-Vietnam period. The weapons of that new war were vital and powerful symbols with telling connotations, including a theme that using or owning them offered a unique and superior social status. They were classic phallic-power symbols. The reach

of the weapon determined the owner's power— a symbolic concentric circle signified the extent of his authority. These weapons also represented the individual freedom to defend oneself— a need necessitated by the failures of the government. The super-weapons otherwise represented a mythic *solution* in fighting symbolic enemies (Gibson, 1994).

The counterterrorism thrillers are full of appropriated variants of agents and weapons like those identified by Campbell, Gibson, and Lawrence and Jewett. I use the term “tools” to collectively categorize them as a framing device. One distinguishing feature is these tools are not presented as being used in fantasy realms or depicted as supernatural objects. The FASC superheroes employ tools that actually exist. Yet, the tools enhance the special operations trope when described and used by the superheroes to transcend expectations. Like their super ability to coalesce the roles of police-intelligence-military and go anywhere, they employ tools mimicking and emphasizing those all-encompassing extreme national security representations.

This framing includes not just items, but various counterterrorism *techniques* ranging from illegal surveillance, assault, and kidnapping, to torture and acts of vengeance. Superheroes can otherwise consistently outsmart the Other. Tools and techniques are framed for the interrelated purposes of constructing the superhero's success in the shadows and as extensions of his power.

***a. Special Tools: Enhancing Superpower and Likability***

Special tools demonstrate U.S. might and superiority through the access and use of a wide range of weaponry. One way this is done is through the inventorying of handheld weapons, including details of calibers, models, and other technical specifications. The hero and sidekicks in *Takedown* prepare a “veritable arsenal” to fight terrorists infiltrating New York City:

In the pistol department, Morgan had two Unertl MEU SOC 1911's, a Glock 19, and a four-inch-barreled .357 Smith & Wesson 620. Hanging next to them were a Mossberg

290 12-gauge shotgun, a Remington 40-X .308 sniper rifle, and a fully automatic Try Industries CWB-SPC A4 assault rifle that Morgan had risked a big official ass-whupping for smuggling out of Iraq. (Thor, 2006, p. 152)

Similar weapon catalogues are found throughout the texts, like in *Consent to Kill* when Rapp prepares to deploy with the “German Secret Police” to track down a terrorist. He must select from an array of “everything from Heckler & Koch MP5s and MP7s to G36Cs, modified tactical shotguns and even street sweepers” (Flynn, 2005, p. 145). These weapons are linked to the superhero and his training and expertise in utilizing them is also often highlighted and proven when they are deployed expertly to defeat the Other.

These short-range, personalized weapons are, unlike most of Gibson’s (1994), smaller and factual. These are not like the ludicrously huge machinegun Rambo uses to mow down an endless line of faceless Asians. But they are special because— unlike the regular U.S. security forces— typically the special operations superhero alone possesses the skills needed to utilize them. These tend to be the exclusive tools of operators, not issued weapons of national security regulars or those owned by ordinary men. As tools that cannot be controlled by rules or laws, like the one in the quote above that the sidekick had to smuggle out of Iraq, they are the kinds known as the best or modified to be so. They fire more, faster, and longer. The sniper rifle seems to epitomize the reach of this individualized power, as in *American Sniper* (Boggs & Pollard, 2016)— setting the hero (i.e., as a signifier of the U.S.) apart as exceptional.

Descriptions of the special weapons also involve *fetishizing* (Holloway, 2009). An example of this from *Black Ops* describes a double-action Smith & Wesson pistol the hero,

[Could] squeeze the trigger to fire a round with the hammer forward or cocked back. The latter required less pressure from the trigger finger [...] one well-aimed shot was more effective than a barrage of shots aimed in the general direction of a miscreant. He also knew that a shot fired in the single-action mode’ with the hammer drawn back’ was far more likely to strike its intended target than one fired by pulling hard on the trigger with the hammer in the forward’ or “uncocked” position. (Griffin, 2008, p. 10)

The descriptions and, ultimately, how they are used becomes a form of representational fetishizing, which involves the substitution of the seen object with an unseen power (Hall, 1997). In the cataloguing described earlier, makes, models, gauges, capabilities, as well as the intricate descriptions of using them, energize the weaponry's power.

In *Executive Power*, hero Rapp is in a private meeting with the president at the White House. Rapp had just completed a counterterrorism mission, which included torturing and a series of assassinations of terrorists. The president congratulates Rapp on the mission and seeks his council on how to contend with Middle East problems, such as terror groups intending to destroy Israel. Rapp responds by pulling out his pistol— all of the superheroes have a pistol ready at a moment's notice— to, “make his point with the president, bring him back down from the clouds” (Flynn, 2003, p. 481). In the final paragraph, Rapp holds his gun out and says: ‘This is the only thing the zealots understand, sir. If you want peace in the Middle East they need to be dealt with. Only then will the Israelis and Palestinians be able to live side by side’ (Flynn, 2003, p. 482). The gun's mythical power is a signifier in popular U.S. texts of preeminence of violence over democracy (Sharrett, 1999). Such fetishizing also signifies inanimate objects as containing an exceptional power to solve problems. The ideological position is, like Gibson (1994) found about President Reagan's security and legal policy: Violence is the most effective path to peace.

The texts go beyond guns to mythicizing and fetishizing specialized gadgets. The superheroes have access to the most advanced equipment, such as satellite phones and the latest night vision technology. The narrator of *The Last Patriot* describes a new battle dress uniform Harvath had special access to called “Blackhawk Warrior Wear,” which would revolutionize the field and “every military expert was saying was the greatest battlefield innovation since body armor” (Thor, 2008, p. 216). A SEAL designed them and now the ex-SEAL was the first to use



it in the fight. Blackhawk is a real brand (<http://www.blackhawk.com>) and one of numerous factualized references that bolster the tools' legitimacy.

The narrator of *Executive Power* describes the “low profile Mark V special operations craft” designed “to sneak in under radar.” It was made for the “U.S. Navy SEALs, and it was their choice of platform when running maritime insertions” (Flynn, 2003, p 1). A SEAL team uses it in a counterterrorism raid, signifying the exclusive use by special operations and their ability to make such operations more secretive. These devices signify special operations fantasies that transcend military and law enforcement powers and operates in shadows far from ordinary bureaucrats and institutions.

These FASC are experts at employing individualized tools and those unique to special operations, but also have access and ability to summon more powerful weapons. There is inventorying and description of impressive technologically advanced equipment and war machines. Like in *Executive Power* when the superhero deploys U.S. attack helicopters to destroy a terrorist camp outside of Hebron:

Hovering at 500 [...] lurked two of the most efficient killing machines [...] The AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopter was an unrivaled lethal machine. Its fire control radar target acquisition system allowed it to classify and prioritize up to 125 targets [...] Longbow's fire-and-forget Hellfire laser-guided missiles or AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles. The Apache was the most advanced attack helicopter in the world and in some people's minds the most advanced flying machine in the world. (Flynn, 2003, p. 184)

The superhero makes the call to bring in the Apache to annihilate the Other. In *By Order of the President*, the hero Castillo calls upon another mechanism of war to monitor the Other:

The E-3 'Sentry' is an Airborne Warning & Control System mounted on a highly mobile Boeing 707 Airframe. Its radar dome, thirty feet in diameter and mounted fourteen feet about the fuselage, provides surveillance over a range of 250 miles from the earth's surface up into the stratosphere. (Griffin, 2004, p. 465)

Griffin's numerous footnotes expound on the amazing capabilities of actual equipment and their technical specifications, such as the details of the "Pave Low III." A paragraph-long footnote details the system as "the most technologically advanced helicopter in the world" and having all the guns, gadgets, and capabilities necessary to "fully support special operations forces" (Griffin, 2004, p. 265). These types of details offer insider knowledge and expertise about the weaponry.

This frame is set within the larger myth of American exceptionalism (Walt, 2011). These last two representations are simple and pure symbols of superior U.S. capitalistic muscle. They fetishize the mass machinations of conventional warfare, mimicking the Cold War popular culture messaging where depictions of nuclear devices, advanced submarines, and mega powerful missiles represented U.S. power and need for worldwide reach and leading the military-industrial complex (Gallagher, 2000). The range and breadth is far here: The hero can deploy the greatest power of the U.S., especially through the U.S. President, who acts as a recurring framing device signifying U.S imperialism.

A divergence is found when further comparing the two texts: In détente Cold War texts, U.S. superior military technology is framed as the singular solution. Hixson (1993) concludes of Clancy: "Virtually without exception American weapons— from nuclear submarines to the Stealth fighter to SDI [the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative, aka "Star Wars"]— work unerringly and are decisive in the final resolution of his [Clancy's] plots" (p. 608). The war between Soviet Union and U.S. in those novels is based on theoretical nuclear disaster contained with deterrence requiring both sides maintaining massive weapons (Gallagher, 2006). As such, Cold War narratives manage fear and involve "spy games" that balance worldwide threat— not an effort to destroy each other. In the subject thrillers, any tool needed to wage the "unconventional" terror war replaces the singular solution involving superior technologies and massive war machines.

Still, the special operations superhero can call upon the mega-powerful tools of the state, but he does not depend on them. They often engage in up close and personal violent acts and get the job done “in the trenches,” unlike in the Cold War narratives where weapons of mass destruction pose distant threats. Gibson (1994) addressed this: Warriors of that new war relied on magical weapons and these became increasingly large to the point of absurdity, such as Rambo’s enormous gun impossible for the normal man to handle. Here, weapons remain fact-based tools used by U.S. FASC, underscoring the superheroes’ capabilities. As Gibson (1994) found of magical weapons, the tools make it so the men “never needs reinforcements from the corrupt power base” (p. 82)—the superhero alone can destroy the threat.

The special operations superhero’s use of the special tools resolves something Gibson (1994) found was missing in his analysis of post-Vietnam heroics: That is, the heroic icons from U.S. Wild West origin stories, epitomized by John Wayne, had a proven reputation for moral courage. They would get their “hands dirty” fighting face-to-face battles, which was not necessarily the case for the post-Vietnam hero. The message here is that the thriller’s superhero can get his hands dirty as a loner using personal weapons on one end of the spectrum, and call in the missiles owned by the state on the other. He has access and ability to employ whatever tool necessary to succeed—be it fist, knife, helicopter, or satellite phone, mirroring his hypermobility. The special tools of the subject texts represent power that expands as far as the ideological premise found in American exceptionalism’s global authority and prominence (Walt, 2011).

***b.      Special Techniques: Whatever it takes***

In this sub-frame, the superheroes violate rules and laws ranging from breaking governmental policies to committing violent crimes against U.S. citizens. They include arms smuggling, kidnapping, treaty violations, assault, money laundering, assassination of terrorist

suspects, and warrantless wiretapping. Like the tools, the techniques almost always enhance the image of success— emboldening “real” men who take action without fail (Kellner, 1995).

In *By Order of the President*, Castillo and a sidekick assault a U.S. citizen for information during a counterterrorism investigation. When the victim asserts he wants a lawyer and could sue, the hero threatens to (falsely) charge him with assaulting a federal officer. These serious crimes by the hero and his sidekick are used to obtain vital information about a terror plot. These FASC are not bound by rules limiting police use of force, restricted by established military procedures and rules of engagement, or burdened by intelligence oversight laws. They can go wherever they want, reporting to no one but the U.S. President.

The subplot in *Extreme Measures* involves mosques in the Washington D.C. area recruiting and training Islamic extremist cells and the CIA failing to take any action for fear of the news media discovering they are targeting a religious location in violation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment. As is usually the case, the activities at the mosque are not depicted as suspicious or complex situations, but clear-cut threats by invariably guilty Others. In response, the hero and his sidekick employ their own covert techniques, secretly funneling U.S. taxpayer money and spending, according to the narrator, about a million dollars to conduct illegal surveillance of the mosques. This clandestine technique pays off: The team identifies a terror training network, terror cells in the U.S., and an imminent plot. This plot contrivance packages the fantastical effectiveness of the special techniques and how they do so without concern for rules and laws.

These special techniques are an example of a shift from détente Cold War narratives, the heroes of which tended to stay within the confines of the law, applying legal authorities and national security exclusively in the realm of conventional war. Their enemies were of the state and, while spy games were played on the fringes of legality, they stayed within accepted

confines, and were never completed by legal actors. Those heroes remained in the “bloodless realm of Cold War information gathering” (Gallagher, 2006, p. 114). The masculinity of that period (1980s and 90s) reflected idealized representations of the middle-aged white man who relies on rationality and decision-making skills— ritualized to social responsibility and often distant from the actual fight (Gallagher, 2006). In contrast, the toolkit of the counterterrorism thriller superhero is much broader and unconventional.

I think it is safe to conclude détente Cold War heroes did not routinely practice torture. But in the subject texts— albeit not as prominent and intense as on *24* (e.g., Van Veen, 2009)— superhero’s use it to obtain necessary information, especially when the imminent doom is presented as a time-bomb. In *Takedown*, Harvath suspects a terrorist has information about a plot to attack a major U.S. city within days. So, he kidnaps the terrorist from Canada, sneaks him into the U.S., and then beats the terrorist in various ways and stages the proposed murder of the terrorist’s child (i.e., via a fake video). The methods work and Harvath obtains key information about the plot. In *Extreme Measures*, Rapp and sidekick rush a terrorist to military installation to torture a suspect they think knows about a plan to bomb the U.S. They illegally break into an interrogation facility and, during the torture, use techniques designed to leave no evidence of the pain inflicted— punching and beating the terrorist in areas that do not leave bruises. They also conduct the torture by turning off the security camera and ensuring no regulars at the military base can witness their techniques. Torture is always a secret that must be protected. They ultimately obtain key intelligence about the bomb and a broader terror network, again implying that torture is an effective intelligence gathering technique.

One related conclusion from studies of *24* is that, through the time-bomb scenario, Bauer’s illegal torture led to the victim divulging critical information, thus “enshrining a new

U.S. myth— the *virtuous life-saving torturer*” (Ip, 2011, p. 220) into popular consciousness.

Bauer’s primary technique is at the core of the myth that torture actually works. The effectiveness makes the technique itself part of endless arsenal available to special operators. This again exceeds the individual level. The mythical acts are not about the superhero himself, they are about the power they represent. This also distinguishes the superhero’s moral character from the violent act. The superhero does it mostly for virtuous purpose, not as an savage act.

In the thrillers, torture always works. In *Consent to Kill*, Rapp interrogates terrorist Abel. The hero has a poker in a fireplace nearby, and asks Abel about two assassins he hired to try and kill Rapp and actually killed his wife. Abel hesitates to reply, so Rapp reaches for the poker:

Abel answered, ‘A man and a woman. I met them in Paris. I had never worked with them before.’

‘How did you find out about them?’

Abel hesitated before answering. ‘Rashid had heard of them.’

Rapp saw the lie. He could tell by the way the man had looked quickly down and to his right before answering [...] Rapp grabbed the poker, held it out in front of Abel, and then jammed it through the top of his right foot. (Flynn, 2005, p. 646)

Torture works and the information the hero obtains leads to the location of the assassin who killed Rapp’s wife. While not a ticking-time-bomb, critical information is still obtained.

An even more violent act with immediate effectiveness is described in *Memorial Day*. In the story, Rapp has a private conversation with the U.S. President, who is accusing Rapp of being a bully and not respecting other viewpoints on terrorism. The two argue about contrary approaches to terrorism held by presidential advisors. Rapp becomes exasperated and reveals how he discovered nuclear bombs that were being shipped into the U.S., reminding the president that much of the East Coast came close to being destroyed if it were not for the hero. Rapp

offers the president a glimpse of what it takes to win the war on terror by explaining the technique he used to obtain the critical information:

‘We pulled five prisoners out of that village in Pakistan, sir, and none of them were willing to talk. I lined them all up, and started with a man named Ali Saed al-Houri. I put a gun to his head, and when he refused to answer my questions I blew his brains out, Mr. President. I executed the bastard, and I didn’t feel an ounce of shame or guilt. I thought of the innocent men and women who were forced to jump out of the burning World Trade Center, and I pulled the trigger. I moved on to the next terrorist and blew his brains out too, and then the third guy in line started singing like a bird. That’s how we found out about the bomb, sir. That’s what it takes to win this war on terror. So don’t lecture me about commitment because I doubt anyone else on your national security staff would have pulled that trigger, and don’t ever forget that if I hadn’t, we wouldn’t even have the luxury of this argument. That is for certain.’ (Flynn, 2004, p. 197)

Like the idea that torturing is “virtuous,” this excerpt demonstrates how the hero sacrifices his own morality for a morally just act, as is expected in the time-bomb myth (Wong, 2006). Here, the hero is forced to confront the president of the U.S. and reverse presidential power to demonstrate how the hero needs to get his “hands dirty” in the new terror war. The superhero shows any technique can be used for U.S. national security. Rights, liberties, laws, rules— even human life— is expendable as long as the action protects the homeland. Those who doggedly follow legal and ethical parameters— here, the entire “national security staff”— are cowards. The effectiveness of such a technique is presented as a simple tautological argument.

These last few examples— all from the Flynn and Thor thrillers— are somewhat extreme. Methods are sometimes not portrayed as clear-cut torture, but various levels of interrogation and questioning. But they collectively and eventually all work. Also sometimes, especially in the Griffin thrillers, the techniques are not as up close, personal, and real-time. Instead, they are left off-screen or described in the past tense, but again they are effective. Castillo and his sidekicks conduct “interrogations” of suspects, prompting the reader to fill in the blanks about what happened during those events behind “closed doors.”

The clandestine mosque subplot and the purposely hidden torture on the military installation also demonstrate how the effectiveness of the illegal and irregular techniques relies on being kept secret from everyone except who “needs to know,” which usually only includes the president and a couple select sidekicks. This action in *By Order of The President* exemplified the effectiveness of the special techniques:

‘What’s an ‘unidentified’ 727?’ Miller asked. ‘All they had to do was land the stolen 727 somewhere close to here and do a quick paint-over of the numbers on it, using the numbers of one of Pevsner’s 727s conveniently out of sight in a hangar in Sharjah. They would have had plenty of time to do that before Langley could turn the satellite cameras on.’ (Griffin, 2004, p. 172)

This is about hiding evidence to cover-up the actual secretive action in the shadows from the foiled bureaucracy. Castillo is always able to oversee making the unsanctioned and arguably illegal actions they take, “disappear.”

#### **4. Anything and Everything: Ideology of Special Tools and Techniques**

Special tools and techniques represent what the special operations superhero needs and uses to accomplish his mission. This framing conveys a need to employ wartime power, justifying immediate and extreme action. They are an extension of his superhuman capabilities. They always work, he knows how and when to best use them, and he has access to them at any time. The tools and techniques are only used in the shadows and, unless absolutely necessary, must remain a secret to most, underscoring the superhero’s independence. This all supports the special operations trope— the operator’s ability to adapt, overcome, and do whatever it takes while remaining invisible. Ultimately, the devices symbolize the superhero’s unbridled power and what needs to be done in times of war.

I would be avoiding a significant finding if I did not highlight that the superhero does not exclusively use aggressive, irregular and / or violent tools and techniques. Sometimes, he also



outsmarts the Other and/or uses his intelligence and analytical skills to help unravel the plot and stop it. As I concluded above, the superhero's repository includes many and varied tools he uses as necessary. As I noted above, the use of these less violent, intelligence-based methods increase while the extreme violent methods, like torture, decrease as the texts move further from 9/11.

The painstaking factualization (Martin & Pedro, 2006) of the tools and techniques and how they are used help make the narrative "realistic." But, they are fantasized and mythicized when used by the superhero with such unrealistic ease, expertise and effectiveness, and when fetishized and intensely linked with the special operations fantasy trope. The ideology is simplified and mainly founded in *violence*, or the "virtuous violence at the defense of liberty" (Holloway, 2009, p. 26). The ideology behind it is fueled by effectiveness— set within a context where terrorists lurk— therefore this violence and extreme measures are morally right. The claim is FASC must employ these techniques in violation of many rules, laws, and human rights to fight the new war, further reflecting the growth of a new brand of idealized hyper-masculinity.

The implements and techniques of justice become akin to what has been described as the favored solutions of framing agents granted the authority to decide what is best for the U.S. (Altheide, 2005). Because the techniques and tools are directed by and contained within the U.S. and glorify its superiority, they support the ideology that the U.S. can unilaterally use any force necessary in any location regardless if military, police, or intelligence action. Since no rules govern the superhero's use of weapons or techniques, and they are used and executed secretly, they can fall outside of the law. Since these dominant solutions are extremely violent but justified by moral necessity, an ideological position is also that human life, rights, dignity, and liberties are expendable and can be sacrificed for the loyalty to the justice model. Overall, since

all of the techniques are executed by FASC and are factualized objects, the message is the U.S. executive is ultimately responsible for this brand of counterterrorism.

This messaging is an ideological divergence from the portrayals of the Cold War's executive under the national security cult (Hixson, 1993) wherein the heroic men adhere to an *implicit masculinity*—managerial, refined, and with a problem-solving focus (Gallagher, 2006). In those fictions, heroes are not torturers and, in their spy games, there is even a gentlemanly respect amongst enemies. The balance of nuclear disaster made possible through the *potential* use of the machines of war contrasts the *explicit masculinity* in the subject thrillers that is intense and blatant. Justice in the détente Cold War milieu is detached, reasonable, and conventional, emphasizing the shift of “justice” found in the counterterrorism thriller: One expressly emotional, personal, and mythical, and in extreme versions based on moral redemption.

### C. Vengeance Variation: Pure Redemptive “Justice”

The special tools and techniques described above are usually depicted as needed for mission accomplishment, such as obtaining information to reveal a threat and using tools to fight that threat. Sometimes the superheroes' techniques go beyond the excessive and irregular actions constructed as necessary for security success and the homeland's safety, to *intentional* acts of vengeful violence depicted as moral retribution. These acts are justified by arguing the savage Oriental Other engages in the same behavior. Therefore, the U.S. is justified in applying what the president in *Consent to Kill* called the “same ugly, brutal mayhem” (Flynn, 2005, p. 67) sponsored by Islamic extremists. This section focuses on acts occurring at plot points *after* the threat is neutralized—those seemingly designed to restore honor (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002).

A similar and distinct feature found in classic Wild West films was coined the *vengeance variation* (Wright, 1977). In those plot versions, villains were so terrible and caused such

extreme harm to a particular town or townsfolk, the cowboy had to sacrifice his own values to protect the social group's values (Wright, 1977). In the thriller variation, the Islamic extremist is deserving of violent and extreme pain because they are so evil the ordinary people and justice system cannot execute the appropriate "justice." The special operations superhero must provide the mythicized retribution—only in mythical and fantastic realms could such actions be acceptable. Consistent with the internal conflict: This is a mythical struggle and even if the superhero must do such terrible things, he remains likable. The devices mask the true horrors of the acts. The appropriate actions perceived at the emotional, or mythical, level sometimes do not achieve justice. This is when the superhero is signified as admirable for sacrificing his morality to preserve morality.

In *Executive Power*, Rapp corners Omar (i.e., the Saudi Prince who financed the terror plot) on his yacht and shoots him in the leg with the intent of making him suffer a prolonged and painful death. The narrator claims Omar deserved it because he was a pedophile rapist who funded terror attacks against the U.S. Rapp tracks down and kills numerous terrorists to avenge the death of his wife—murdered in the bombing primarily intended for the hero—in *Consent to Kill*. As with Omar from *Executive Power*, the most brutal revenge is saved for a Saudi funder of the attack, Rashid. When the hero captures him, after killing his bodyguards, he beats him and puts a boot on his chest and asks the terrorist why he did it. In response:

Rashid had a fire in his eyes. He spoke in Arabic and said, 'Because you are an infidel.'

Rapp shook his head with disgust. 'And my wife?'

There was no smile, no fear, no pleading, there was nothing other than total conviction in the man's eyes. 'She was an infidel. You are all infidels.'

Rapp nodded and said, 'And you are going to hell.' Rapp grabbed a phosphorus grenade [...The] device reached a temperature of 2,000 degrees in less than two seconds. Rapp lifted his boot from Rashid's chest and sent it crashing down once more, this time into

Rashid's stomach. The Saudi's mouth opened wide, gasping for breath. Rapp was ready. He was holding the grenade by the top third, and he brought it crashing down with such force that it shattered Rashid's front teeth and wedged itself firmly in his mouth.

Rapp got right in his face and said, 'Fuck you! And fuck your sick, twisted, perversion of Islam.' Rapp yanked the pin [... There] was a pop followed by a blinding white flash, and then Rashid's head literally melted from his body. (Flynn, 2005, p. 661)

The image of one of the special tools being used to grotesquely melt one's face off is an act of "justice" conforms to how Bauer is set apart from previous U.S. single action heroes— not only torturing out of necessity but also to inflict grotesque and extreme violence in acts of brutal vengeance (Mayer, 2007). This depiction also emphasizes how illogical it is a person executing such cruel, inhuman, and unnecessary act could remain likable— the main explanation is revenge as a version of honorable justice on behalf of the homeland in the new terror war. These devices of action beyond what is needed appear to reflect the trend of absurd mythical violence in popular movies acting as a restorative function of "sacrificial slaughter" (Sharrett, 1999).

Harvath is on a revenge mission to assassinate terrorists in *Takedown*. During the final scene, he tortures one of the Islamic extremists— but not for intelligence or evidence, rather for payback. He forces a flesh-eating bug into the terrorist's ear, offering "some degree of satisfaction, [but] it still didn't make up for everything else the man had done" (Thor, 2006 p. 421). Not satisfied, the hero expertly shoots him in the gut so he will slowly bleed out. This act was considered one of the more "painful ways a person could die, and victims could languish for many hours in unbearable agony until their bodies finally succumbed. As far as Harvath was concerned, it was still too good for Mohammed bin Mohammed" (Thor, 2006, p. 421).

These unimaginably brutal acts— completed by U.S. civilian government employees— may also make sense when understood as mimicking terrorism metaphors assigning savagery to the Other (Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004). Rashid, Omar, and Mohammed bin Mohammed are

depicted as animals– vermin and degenerates– stalked by the superhero. Vengeful and vicious termination becomes appropriate for an Other unworthy of human dignity. The otherwise immoral acts are justified by the moral superiority (i.e., of “America”) it seeks to preserve.

The revenge does not always involve barbaric suffering by terrorists in the throes of death. The vengeance variation and corresponding hunting themes are also found at the broader rhetorical or symbolic level. This claim is conveyed in a nationally televised address by the president in *Takedown* to the “terrorists responsible” for an attack:

‘America will never stop until we have hunted every last one of you down [...]. And when we find you we shall use every means at our disposal to visit upon you a death one thousand times more hideous than that which you have delivered to our doorstep today [...] America has defeated the greatest evils of the modern world and it will defeat the scourge of Radical Islamic fanaticism.’ (Thor, 2006, p. 139)

The president’s presumption the U.S. has single-handedly rid the world of all “evil” is also about American exceptionalism (Walt, 2011)– the U.S. gift and destiny to worldwide “justice.” These representations are also reminders of the work still to be done, presumably for the superhero because the president cannot realize the justice– he only talks about what the superhero executes.

*In By Order of the President*, after the hero, sidekicks, and some regulars kill terrorists in a battle, they destroy the bodies because they are evidence of wrongdoing the press or other dupes could discover. They do this by dropping the slain terrorists from a helicopter into an area of the Florida Everglades renown for its ravenous alligators. This grotesque and completely unnecessary disrespect for the human body by a U.S. military officer can only be comprehended as a form of moral justification. This last example– from a Griffin thriller– again emphasizes how Rapp and Harvath do the more extreme and direct instances of the vengeance variation. But even in the Thor and Flynn thrillers, such acts are reserved for only the most despicable, or those

at the highest level like funders, of Islamic extremists. Also, the vengeance variation wanes as time moves past 9/11 and is not in the 2008-2009 texts—reflecting the shift discussed above.

This framing device, although uncommon and brief, expands on the ideological position the ordinary system does not have the means to succeed, and one of the successes is thus exacting retribution as part of counterterror “justice.” The superhero uses the same barbaric techniques as the Others, who deserve it and the ordinary system is incapable of bringing them the deserved punishment. Since the U.S. archenemy engages in brutal and savage acts of needless violence, the U.S. needs to do the same— it is what the Other “understands.”

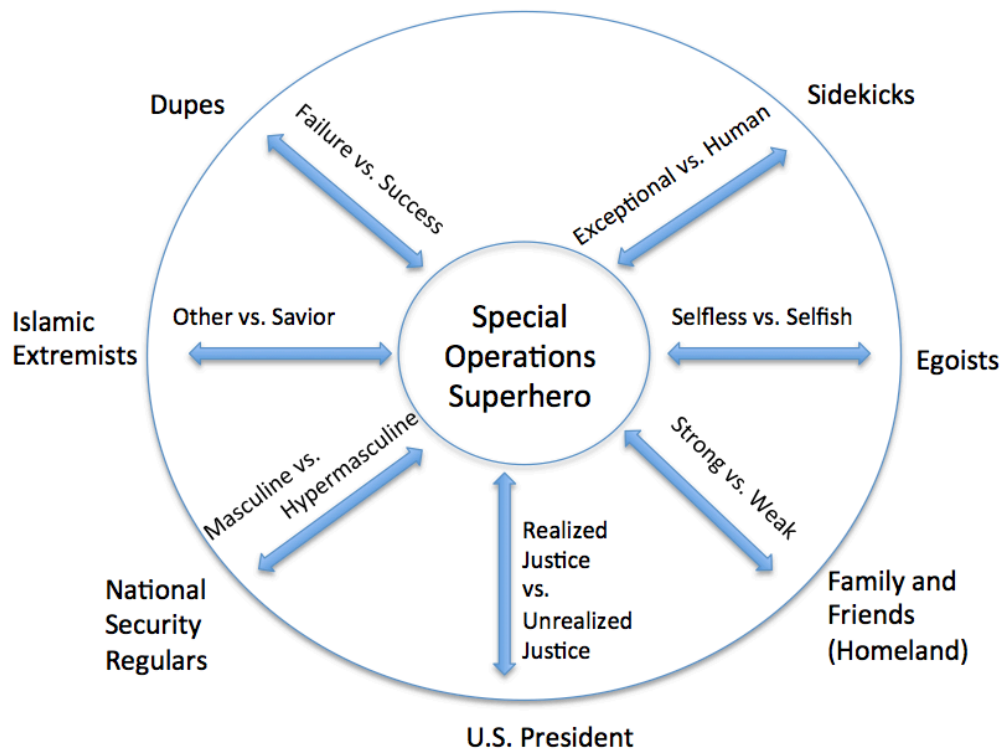
#### **D. Framing the Hero as the Centerpiece: *Paired Oppositions***

As exemplified in the themes analyzed throughout the findings chapters, the superhero interacts and sometimes has conflict with a range of secondary characters. In this section, I further focus on how he— as the protagonist and symbolic embodiment of the dominant ideology— is constructed through the use of framing devices demarcating him from all other characters. This is crucial because meanings behind myth are understood by exposing the paired oppositions fundamental to how people organize information (Berger, 1998), signifying value oppositions through sets of *dichotomous polarities* (Rafter, 2000). This is also foiling’s fundamental purpose: The foil’s personal characteristics contrast another character (usually a protagonist) in order to emphasize certain characteristics of the latter character (Gieryn, 1983).

The special operations superhero is distinguished along various axes in opposition to the following character typologies: The Other, family and friends, dupes, sidekicks, and regulars, as well as two new types I categorize as *egoists* and— what I conclude is the most significant relationship— the *U.S. President*. These personal relationships and interactions are broader social depictions that personalize the hero and center him onto his privileged role. The oppositional

devices also simultaneously create sympathy, making him more believable and humanized.

Figure 4 illustrates the relationships along sets of axes.



**Figure 4:** Binary character oppositions between superhero and other character types

### 1. Opposing the Islamic Extremists: Looking the Other in the Eye

The starkest polarity is the superhero as hegemonic masculine western power projection opposed to the savage extremist Other. The binary opposition of the Other versus the superhero as salvation (i.e. foiling)—understood as a personalized masculine ultimate struggle between man versus man (Connell, 2000). I have examined this at various points above, such as in the

extremist frame and also highlighted in confrontations described in the vengeance variation.

This is exemplified when Rapp curses terrorist Rashid and tells him to “fuck [his...] sick, twisted, perversion of Islam’ (Flynn, 2005, p. 661) before burning the terrorist to death.

That data demonstrates how the extremist personifies the Other when put in direct contrast to the purity of the superhero. Other moments exemplify this, such as in *Consent to Kill* when Rapp confronts Abel, the terrorist who planned a bombing. After torturing Abel with a searing poker and obtaining key information, Rapp burns him alive— another case of ritualistic vengeance— but not before telling him why he deserved it and witnessing him beg for his life. In *The Apostle*, Harvath has ongoing direct dialogue with the terrorists he kidnaps and tortures. This type of “tough guy” or “street-level” talk (Altheide, 2005, p. 5) also represents a chance for the superhero— for “America”— to look the archenemy “in the eye” and tell them the way it is. These emotionally charged situations seem to reflect a male fantasy and act as cathartic moments of “justice.”

In *Memorial Day*, Rapp is trying to get information from Al-Adel, a terrorist. Rapp says he hopes Al-Adel’s cell sets off a nuclear bomb in Washington D.C. The terrorists asks why:

‘Because if they do, the United States of America will end this war in one fell swoop. We will nuke your beloved kingdom all the way back to the stone age. Mecca, Medina, all the holy sites gone just like that, and it will all be on your shoulders, Ahmed. You will go down in history as the man who destroyed a religion. The man who buried the Wahhabi scourge once and for all.’ All al-Adel could do was shake his head in disagreement. ‘Ahmed,’ Rapp laughed, ‘that puny twenty-kiloton bomb you tried to pick up down in Charleston is nothing. We have a single submarine sitting in the Arabian Sea right now that has enough nuclear missiles on board to destroy all of Saudi Arabia, and that’s only a tiny fraction of our nuclear arsenal.’

Al-Adel tried to show some confidence by smiling, but he was less than convincing. ‘Your president is too weak. He will never authorize such an attack. And even if he wanted to, the United Nations and Europe would never let him do it. And what about the oil?’ he said in a taunting tone. ‘You will never bomb our country. You would be slitting your own throat.’ (Flynn, 2008, p. 253)



Rapp responds decisively and intuitively— as the superheroes always do— explaining how the U.S. would act unilaterally and the bombing would be focused on population centers far from the oil fields. Soon after this conversation, Rapp throws Al-Adel— terrified of water and unable to swim— into a swimming pool to let him drown unless he talks, which is another effective special technique used to get the terrorist to provide all the details. These dialogues are compelling: Imagining a terrorist— the homeland’s archenemy— debating with the superhero. These dialogues also supports other ideological positions, like implying a war with Islam, hinting at U.S. weakness through oil dependency, and the global superiority of U.S. through its nuclear arsenal. I use it here to show how the texts sometimes directly position the Other (as desperate, savage, and wrong) face-to-face with the savior (as confident, moralistic, and right), which is also emphasized by the superheroes’ incredible power to decide on the life or death of the Other.

## **2. Confronting Dupes: *You Guys just don’t get it***

The failures frame includes various dupes acting-out failed responses to terrorism to emphasize the vulnerability of the homeland and the inability of standard forms of law and justice to respond to imminent terror threats. In this section, I focus on when dupes directly contrast the special operations superhero to emphasize how his version of justice is the preferred solution and characterize his superior moral courage and patriotic, selfless service to the U.S. This theme is exemplified when the superhero is provoked into confrontations with dupes.

Rapp is meeting with the U.S. President and his chief of staff, Valerie, in *Executive Power*. The meeting concerns the leak by a U.S. diplomat about the unsanctioned attack of a terrorist camp that resulted in the death of several SEALs. Rapp and Valerie debate what the U.S. response should be to the killings: The former wanting to take aggressive action and the latter searching for a diplomatic response. After Valerie criticizes Rapp for being an “assassin”:

Rapp stood with his feet firmly planted, seething with anger. ‘I can take a lot of crap from people, Valerie, but one thing I can’t stand is a lack of gratitude. I’m one of those guys on the beach getting shot at, trying to do the right thing, risking it all for love of country, duty, and honor. Words that mean nothing to you. I’ve been there and you haven’t.’ He pointed at her. ‘No Starbucks coffee, no dinner at Morton’s, no warm baths. Just a lot of bugs, salty MREs and the comforting thought there are a lot of self-centered Americans who will never be able to appreciate the sacrifices you made.’ (Flynn, 2003, p. 69)

This interaction is explicit: Valerie is a dupe and she is grouped with those who caused the problem. Rapp is depicted as doing the hard work. True sacrifice and patriotism mean little to the dupe, who enjoys a comfy and safe existence while the hero in the field risking it all for “Americans,” generalized here in alignment with the corresponding theme of the populace being oblivious to what needs to be done. The populace is unaware the comforts they enjoy in the U.S. are due to risks taken by the superheroes, emboldened here as being on the side of success.

There are several examples in the failures frame of dupes living the urbane lifestyle in civilized fashion like dupe Valerie, especially in Washington D.C., often portrayed as the symbolic epicenter of bureaucratic waste. The superhero sometimes has to travel to the bureaucratic offices in D.C. from the field— that is, from the shadows. This contrast underscores how the superhero is akin to the Western / country hero out on the frontier, but also has education, language skills, and can talk in-depth about the issues with the urbane Eastern characters (Christensen & Feree, 2008). Again, he has elements of both “East” and “West” masculinities, but is not confined by one side like the soft, scared, lazy, or naive dupes.

In *Consent to Kill*, the Director of National Intelligence (a DNI, factually a congressionally-appointed position created after 9/11 to oversee the entire U.S. intelligence community [U.S. Whitehouse, 2003]), Ross, is depicted as a dupe who doggedly follows rules and desires to be president. Ross is also technically (“on paper”) the hero’s supervisor. During

the story, Ross attempts to get details of Rapp's actions and restrict his secret program. At one point, Ross confronts Rapp about the details of a file on one such operation:

This time Rapp couldn't resist. His anger got the best of him. The file was about an inch thick. He cracked Ross across the left side of his head with it. Ross's perfectly combed hair went askew, with a clump falling across his forehead, partly obscuring his left eye.

Rapp grabbed him by the front of the shirt. 'Listen, you idiot. I don't answer to you. I answer to the president. I hunt terrorists for a living, and the last thing I need is some hack like you, who doesn't know jack shit about what we're up against, looking over my shoulder and telling me what to do.' (Flynn, 2005, p. 165)

Rapp released his shirt and shoved [...] Ross back into his chair. (Flynn, 2005, p. 165)

The notion an employee of the U.S. government would and could get away with assaulting such a high level official emphasizes Rapp's pure power, and is another example of how Rapp only works for himself and the president. Ross is a comical foil and represents failed justice, while the counterterrorism action Rapp takes without Ross's approval or involvement is necessary to succeed. Dupe Ross is not a bad guy, he is just caught up in all the rules and regulations of the bureaucracy and does not understand what needs to be done, emphasizing what the hero is not.

Dupe Leland was introduced above as the U.S. Air Force captain who confronts Rapp in *Extreme Measures* for torturing a terror suspect on a U.S. base. During the scene, Leland does not back off and the interaction becomes increasingly confrontational. Leland is offended by Rapp's tactics and asserts the U.S. is losing the terror war because of people like Rapp, who responds: 'I love being told how things are by some prick in a clean uniform who thinks he has all the answers. Tell me how it is, Captain. Tell me how many terrorists you've killed. Tell me how many times you've been shot' (Flynn, 2008, p. 90). Leland is determined and attempts to physically stop the hero, who punches Leland in response. Later, Rapp succeeds with more torture while Leland is left trying to have the hero punished for assaulting him and having no role whatsoever in stopping the developing terror threat. If the confrontation is pushed far

enough, the masculine superhero always wins in a fight– his willingness and unrestrained ability to do and say what he wants without accountability is another extension of his hyper-masculine superiority. The superhero has the moral courage to fight anyone in the way of his version of justice. When forced into confrontation– when pushed to the point of anger– the interaction results with the superhero “winning.” These confrontations reinforce the frame’s dominant ideological position of an authoritative, retributive justice model backed by moral imperatives.

### 3. Dealing with Egoists: *Another Path to Superhero Righteousness*

In addition to always confronting Others and sometimes confronting dupes, the superheroes less often conflict with a third and less prevalent character typology, which I call *egoists*. Egoists– versus dupes who are weak and misled but have good intentions for U.S. security– are self-centered, greedy, ruthless, power-mongering politicians and bureaucrats driven by status, personal gain, or combinations of moral corruptions and unpatriotic motivations and behaviors. These foils are demarked for contrast and assigning blame when paired against a hero (Gieryn, 1983). They signify obstacles for the superhero and thus must be met with force.

Egoists, like some of the dupes detailed above, pose serious national security concerns. Entire groups are generalized as such in *Extreme Measures* where the narrator asserts U.S. politicians shortly after 9/11 had gone back to their “old ways” and were turning on the exact,

[People] they had asked to secure the country from attack. It always amazed Rapp that these were the very same people who in the year following 9/11 repeatedly asked the CIA if their measures of interrogation were tough enough. Now they were denying ever saying such things. They were on the attack. They smelled an opportunity and sooner or later they were going to begin destroying the lives of the men and women who Rapp now felt responsible for. Good men and women who had sacrificed for their country [...Now] an ungrateful Senate and House of Representatives were circling like sharks looking for an opportunity to boost their political fortunes into a still higher orbit. (Flynn, 2008, p. 240)

This broad statement suggests 1) Entire groups of politicians are out to harm heroes, and 2) they do it not as their duty to protect and serve the U.S., but for selfish political gain. Rapp was among those who had sacrificed for the homeland, not like a circling “shark” in congress.

Greed and egotism at the individual level and in plot action is exemplified in *Takedown*:

Just last year a self-aggrandizing senator with her sights set on the White House had been able to discover enough about him and his involvement with the Apex Project to force his resignation. Though it was only temporary, not knowing what his next move would be or what his life might be like with his cover blown was not a very pleasant experience.

[... His] was a quiet, thankless profession that could only be lived in the shadows, but he was growing very tired of being at the mercy of partisan hacks and career politicians who sought advancement by stomping on the backs of true patriots guilty of nothing more than a deep love for their country. (Thor, 2006, p. 34)

Senator Carmichael exposes hero Harvath’s illegal operation, which was called the “Apex Project” and was sanctioned by the U.S. President. Carmichael is depicted as doing it not because it was the right thing to do, but because she desired attention and career progression. The unsanctioned and illegal acts under the Apex Project were successful at stopping terrorists while senators, led by Carmichael, are grouped as interfering with that success. Carmichael is described as a “brass-balled bitch” (Thor, 2006, p. 233) and, most disparaging, shown sleeping with a CIA analyst to gain insider information about the Apex Project. When Carmichael has subpoenas issued for information about Harvath and the president and their illegal activity, the hero is forced to respond by helping the FBI frame the senator, forcing her resignation.

Cold War spy fiction heroes had similar opposition to not only the Soviets as the archenemy and part of an “evil empire,” but *anyone* opposed to the goals of the national security cult (Hixson, 1993), which is similar to Rapp and Harvath being forced to confront U.S. senators. The first group is obvious (i.e., the Islamic extremists), but the second are mainly domestic (i.e., internal) political foes characterized, like Carmichael, as greedy power mongers and enemies for

daring to question the need for an ultra-enhanced U.S. military during the Cold War. These types of characters oppose the hero:

Sentenced to hell by the media, unappreciated by most ordinary people, and abused by the power structure, in time the new war warriors are forced to let go of their old allegiances. Instead of being part of the system, they feel they have been betrayed by it. So the warriors must always fight on two fronts. (Gibson, 1994, p. 76)

This “fight” in counterterrorism thrillers could also be the failed system. In the extreme, if egoists begin to seriously threaten the superhero— his masculine action, privilege, or righteousness— the response is brutal force. If provoked, the heroes have the courage to eliminate even a non-terrorist threat in the U.S. by force. Egoists are selfish and do things for the wrong reasons, emphasizing how superheroes are not like that, they are the opposite in character.

In *Extreme Measures*, Rapp is arrested for assaulting dupe Leland for illegal torture and, while detained, is offered a deal by a U.S. Justice Department lawyer named Kline. The deal involves Rapp being given leniency if he informs on other CIA officials engaging in the illegal activities. Kline is depicted as aspiring to move up in the department and exposing the hero’s clandestine program would boost his career and get him positive press attention. With Rapp handcuffed in a cell, Kline reveals all the evidence he has against Rapp, who in response says:

‘You’re a big talker, Kline,’ Rapp said in a confident voice. ‘I’ve seen your type come and go every few years. You’ve got your righteous gung-ho attitude. You talk tough about cleaning up crime and defending Lady Liberty, but we both know why you do it.’

Kline looked amused. ‘I can’t wait to hear this. A knuckle-dragger from the CIA is going to impart a pearl of wisdom.’

‘It’s your ego. It’s not a sense of duty. You want to make a name for yourself. You want to climb the ladder of success [...]. You’re nothing but a big pussy in a suit. You wouldn’t last a day out there doing what we do.’

“I would never stoop so low as to do your work.”

‘You mean killing terrorists and saving lives. Of course you wouldn’t because you’re a selfish little prick.’ (Flynn, 2008, p. 257)

During this jail cell scene, Rapp is able to free himself from his handcuffs and manages to pin Kline into a corner of the cell. Then, he chokes Kline unconscious, causing him to urinate his pants. Kline, who is sleeping with Senator Lonsdale (a dupe described above and shown the light by the hero), ultimately fails at his efforts to expose the illegal program. More importantly—as exemplified by this scene—the hero is proven to be far superior in wits and strength than the egoist. Kline represents an inferior masculine formation, one so insufficient he is considered a “pussy”—the worst derogatory statement leveled at a man by a superior man because it implies he is like a woman. Kline represents the enemy within the system and demonstrates how real men work for duty, not pride or fortune. The immorality of egoists helps justify an aggressive response by the superhero and underscores his superior morality, courage, and selflessness.

#### **4. Contrast to Americans, Family, and Friends: *Separated from the Herd***

The homeland frame characterizes the “American public” as the generic citizenry. This communal value of family and friends (e.g., the desire for marriage, to have children, and a steady home) occupy an ideological version of the threatened traditional patriarchal U.S. The populace represents the ideological vision the superhero seeks to be a part of, but also a victimized and threatened community he must fall outside of as a sacrifice for the “greater good.” Relationships here provide contrast—the superhero parts ways with the ideal to go rogue.

As demonstrated throughout my findings chapters, the superhero has a destiny and he is not like anyone else. In their relationships with the ordinary, Rapp, Castillo, and Harvath exceed the masculine stereotypes. This is when the superhero is contrasted to the homeland along the strong-weak axis with the vulnerable and the ordinary systems and citizenry as impotent and powerless. The “common folk,” in U.S. Westerns represented the masses and way of life the cowboy must fight to protect and the majority of people in the world he cannot be like (Wright,

1977). In general, citizens in the Wild West need to adhere to societal expectations and preserve community; the hero must leave the herd and operate autonomously. In post-9/11 terrorism-related Hollywood texts, the powerlessness of the U.S. public is set against the hero's power to save the day (Boggs & Pollard, 2006). Heroes are burdened with the difficult and selfless sacrifices needed to rescue an impotent and terrorized community:

When individuals do become heroes, it is most often because they “get their hands dirty” and carry out actions that involve sacrificing their own morals and/or welfare. This willingness to “go rogue” and sacrifice themselves sets the heroes of CTU—despite their simultaneous construction as “everyman”—apart from the ordinary members of the community. Their presence as a “superempowered” individual operating without boundaries. (Van Veeren, 2009, p. 383)

This framing device also mirrors fairy tales, which are all based on strong individuals separated out from a group of weaklings (Berger, 1998). Part of the superhero myth unique to the U.S., whereby “heroes endowed with the powers to save ordinary citizens are themselves incapable of abiding by the laws of citizenship, maintaining political relationships or responding to the preferences of the majority” (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002, p. 117). These devices contrasted and preserved the hero's unique individuality.

In the homeland frame chapter, I demonstrated how this happens with Rapp and Harvath's wives and significant others— who have normal lives and struggle to be with the superhero— ultimately support him to be strong alone. Likewise, the superhero must leave a place of normalcy when he gets the call to duty. More specific contrasts include how Harvath has a brother working in the “normal” world (as an accountant) and their dialogues emphasize differences between the two worlds. Castillo has conversations with family members but he never reveals his secret exploits to them. The relationship is mostly implied between the hero and the groupings of “Americans,” like those detailed in the homeland frame. Superheroes are



strong and different; they are set apart from the masses. Family and Americans simultaneously humanize him, but mainly is the simple fact that it *is* the special one who does it, all alone.

Without these relationships and interactions, the superhero would be a lonely renegade—lost, desperate, and isolated. This device demonstrates through dialogue and action how he does not become a superhero because of his ego or evilness, and he is not complacent like the populace. Instead, he does it because it is his destiny and sacrifice to apply moral “justice.”

### **5. Relationship with Sidekicks: *Emphasis through Almost Heroes***

There can only be one superhero in the texts and, for the most part, it is a lonely place. It is unequivocal the superhero saves the day, but sometimes certain regulars reach a level of proximity to him and assist in the background. There are many examples above involving the sidekick, such as the Army colonel who convinces Castillo to lead the team in *By Order of the President* and General Currett, who backs Harvath and belittles dupe Dreihaus in *Takedown*.

Like superhero sidekicks from other texts (e.g., Robin, Batman’s sidekick), they provide contrast to the hero because they enhance the framing of the hero as exceptional while still offer a humanizing element. Also like Campbell’s (2008) “allies,” sidekicks have similar traits to the superhero: Typically, they are special operations-style men from the national security cult.

A model of a recurring sidekick is Mike Nash, who has a role in all of the Rapp thrillers. Nash works directly with the hero in his clandestine unit, and helps him on many missions. Nash, a black man with a wife and children in suburban Washington DC, comes close to also being a hero but does not have the calling. Nash helps to a certain point but ultimately the hero must go it alone. In *Extreme Measures*, Nash takes on much of the responsibilities of their unit while the hero is overseas, but ultimately the hero realizes he must protect people like Nash and set things right. The proximity of sidekicks like Nash demonstrate just how special the hero is

and the exceptional nature of his destiny while humanizing again what the hero desires, protects, and comes close to achieving.

This is a temporary process wherein a masculine character is baptized into the world of the “truth” of terrorism and becomes temporarily hyper-masculinized. Another framing device is the occasional use of a regular who gains access to crucial information known only to the superhero (or president or CIA Director) and then decides it is necessary to violate laws and rules because the system would fail otherwise. By giving the sidekick some access to the shadows offers insight into the shadowy worlds, like when American monomythic superheroes bring characters on adventures and they see the hero’s perspective and understanding why he does what he does (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). These are almost always the men of the elite units and work at the direction of the hero to do tasks in the shadows. Sometimes, female sidekicks are exposed to terrorism realities (e.g., Jillian and Julia Gallo), providing a starker contrast to the more (stereotypical) feminine associations with being human and imperfect.

#### **6. Contrasted with Regulars: *Masculinity versus Hyper-masculinity***

Like the sense of community created by family and friends, national security regulars help situate the patriotism, honor, pride, and sacrifice made for “America.” In the homeland frame, I examined characterizations of conventional, rank-and-file regulars crucial to the idealized and foundational U.S. masculine strength and patriarchal militarism (Boggs & Pollard, 2016) the superhero protects, and the ranks from which he arose. This messaging is achieved whenever the superhero interacts with regulars, which is often and mostly positive.

Another role of the regulars in relation to the superhero is to *support* the superhero. That is, they often deliver the superhero to where he needs to go, which is often the case with the

many travels of Castillo through a network of supporting military cast members who fly him around the world as a very important person. Consider this *Black Ops*’ narrative:

Captain Richard M. Sparkman, USAF, was the most recent addition to OOA. After five years flying an AC-130H Spectre gunship in the Air Force Special Operations Command, he had been reassigned to the Presidential Airlift Group, 89<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, based at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland [...] His superiors’ [...] had decided that it was time to rescue him from those regulation-busting special operations savages and bring him back to the real Air Force. He was, after all, an Air Force Academy graduate, and stars were in his future. [...] It was] solemnly decided that flying very important people’ very senior military officers and high-ranking government officials, around in a C-20, the Air Force’s designation for the Gulfstream III, would broaden his experience and hopefully cause him to forget the outrageously unconventional things he had learned and practiced in special operations. (Griffin, 2008, p. 59)

Besides several more examples of intense factualization by Griffin, regular Sparkman is described as different from the special operations “savages” and, in the story, is responsible to fly Castillo around the world, often interacting with him to emphasize how the hero is unique and set apart from Sparkman’s position in the “real” military.

In *The Hostage*, Castillo is interacting with a Regular while he is conducting a counterterrorism mission. The regular is a new officer oblivious to the clandestine operation’s true nature and is just following procedures to transport the hero:

‘Yes, sir,’ the lieutenant said, saluted again, did a crisp about-face movement, and marched back up the ramp. Castillo watched as he went. The difference between me and that natty young officer is when I was out of Hudson High as long as he’s been out was that I had already fallen under the mentorship of General Naylor called it, the corrupting influence of General Bruce J. McNab, and had already acquired at least some of his contempt for the spit-and-polish Army and a devout belief in the Scotty McNab Definition of an Officer’s Duty: Get the job done and take care of your men, and if the rules get in the way, screw the rules. (Griffin, 2006, p. 445)

Like the previous excerpt, a distinction is made between the rank-and-file (e.g., “spit-and-polish”) soldiers and special operations heroes.

Regulars support the hero and take him places, but cannot go the final step. Rapp hangs out with his old military and Secret Service pals, and they sometimes assist in the battle as

sidekicks, but usually they are asked to leave or turn the other way or cannot make it the final step. The superhero is responsible for the decision, is face to face with the Other, reports to the president— that is, is burdened by the task. The superhero must also part ways with the regulars of umbrella organizations like the CIA. Van Veeren (2009) identified a similar phenomenon in *24*, which walked a fine line between bashing the failed system under which hero Bauer worked— and the system of CIA rules he had to break to succeed— and leaving the audience confident the heroic stature of the overall security system was preserved.

Ultimately the heroes are not regulars, helping solidify the distinction in the texts between the masculine and the hyper-masculine. Regulars are framed as lesser heroes who have ordinary battles to fight, but they are often a nuisance when the ultra dangerous and specialized work of counterterrorism needs accomplished. This device emphasizes the elite “operator” connotations. The extraordinary nature of special operations is emphasized by the ordinary. The ideology is the sanctity of rules, regulations, and laws (e.g., the Geneva Conventions), should and must be flexible. For the hyper-masculine men, the regulars’ rules just get in the way.

Superhero confrontations with sidekicks offer the starkest contrasts. An *Extreme Measures* plotline involves Rapp and a sidekick secretly torturing a terrorist on an overseas USAF base. The individual being tortured is guilty (i.e., known through narration and the invariable guilt theme of Othering) and characterized as an Islamic extremist conspiring to attack the U.S. During the interrogation, two USAF officers, including the base’s commanding general, discover what is going on and stop the torture. The general confronts Rapp, who replies:

‘We walk in different circles, General. I don’t expect someone who puts on a uniform like yours to fully condone what I do. You guys have your rules [...] your discipline. You need that to remain an effective fighting force [...] I am the guy who sneaks out under the wire at night and crawls up next to these guys and cuts their throats.’ (Flynn, 2008, p. 87)

With the superhero as centerpiece, regulars are demarked more like foils that emphasize the superhero and contrast his status as the hyper-masculine alpha male destined to operate outside the ordinary realm where obedient regulars “need to remain.” This device reveals an eventual split between conventional members (inside law) and the superheroes (outside law).

In a scenario discussed above wherein two terrorist get lawyers at the behest of dupes / foils, Rapp is compelled to take matters into his own hands and to kidnap one of the criminally charged terrorists and take him to a remote location for torture. During this scenario, Rapp is confronted by a regular (i.e., a U.S. marshal) who the hero physically subdues while apologizing to the regular in the process. A local patrol officer in *Takedown* also becomes an obstacle because he cannot make a decision of how to process the apprehended hero Harvath. The hero also subdues the police officer so he can continue on his mission. In these last three situations (i.e., with the general, U.S. marshal, and patrol officer) the superhero respects the regular’s role. This implies there is a place for rules of engagement, human rights, civil rights, due process, and criminal procedure. The superhero just has a *different* job to do and their small amount of suffering is insignificant. These scenarios act to empower the superhero, separating him out while simultaneously respecting the baseline the regulars represent.

## **7. Relationship with U.S. President**

A male U.S. President is a secondary character in every text. He does not play a constant and active role in the stories but is present at critical plot points, like during U.S. executive decision-making about security imperatives or executing overseas counterterrorism operations. The president also has frequent one-on-one dialogue with the superhero. He often calls directly on the superhero and the superhero has quick and reliable presidential access. The president could be considered a sidekick, but the data reveals the president-superhero relationship is

distinguished from other characters as a combination of benefactor, protector, cheerleader, and—less often— foil. In this character typology, a U.S. President is usually depicted as selecting, condoning, and monitoring the superhero and his often violent and illegal activities, as well as covering up those activities when dupes get in the way.

The U.S. President embodies American exceptionalism (Gibson, 1994). In popular texts, the president is depicted as the “most powerful man in the free world” and “commander-and-chief” of the strongest military on Earth and responsible to ensure laws are “faithfully executed” (Moore & Dewberry, 2012). These titles and responsibilities reflect an authoritarian and militaristic image exemplifying U.S. culture’s gender regime (Moore & Dewberry, 2012), which prefers masculinity’s achievement, success, strength, and dominance (Khan & Blair, 2013).

The U.S. President and superhero bond signifies the following ideological positions: Masculine U.S. supremacy, the sanctioning of the special operations-style extreme action, and securing the security sublime otherwise compromised because of the failings of standard forms of security. Here, supreme executive power is mandated. The superhero acts as a *proxy* for the president, setting into motion authority, discretion, and actions requiring the highest power in the homeland. Through the superhero’s special access to tools, techniques, and the shadows the president helps provide, the superhero also enacts what the president cannot. A similar feature was found on *24* wherein Bauer had support from high level executive actors, who sometimes secretly condoned the hero’s torture, but were never involved in the acts (Mayer, 2007). As such, thriller genre heroes act as a *substitute* for an idealized version of executive U.S. power.

***a. Presidential Masculine Myth Bonded to the Superhero***

The U.S. president embodies hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy and occupies a definitive position of dominance, success, power, and control (Khan & Blair, 2013; Moore &

Dewberry, 2012). Masculinity is a dynamic and contested construct and the presidential imagery is one such place where men have struggled to reassert potency (Khan & Blair, 2013). Since the original militaristic image of the U.S. President (i.e., General Washington as reincarnated Roman hero Cincinnatus [Lawrence & Jewett, 2002]), presidents strove to demonstrate dominant masculinity as their prominence on the battlefield diminished. This is found in various performances, such as in Roosevelt's "Rough Rider" image (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002), the athletic prowess of presidential candidates (Moore & Dewberry, 2012), and associating President Reagan with post-Vietnam warriors (Gibson, 1994). This masculine reassertion has also been found in post-9/11 television and movie fictional portrayals (Khan & Blair, 2013).

These representations of executive power are also found in the GWOT ideology, which was a response to a crisis to hegemonic authority and a reassertion of patriarchal control (Rothe & Muzzatti, 2004). Neo-conservative Bush ideology was built around Wild West-style American expansionism: The white male U.S. cowboy was reinvented in President Bush's image during his debates about going to war in Iraq. As the cowboy willing to go anywhere to get the job done in opposition to "wimps," he "symbolically mobilizing masculinity in this context contributed to the shallowness of media debate by placing the voices for peace, both in the US and in Europe, on a devalued, feminized footing" (Christensen & Feree, 2008, p. 288) while casting Bush as quintessentially masculine. These representations come easy in a popular media environment because the U.S. President persona is a pervasive and prevalent image and "quick and convenient images tell easy-to-consume stories" (Moore & Dewberry, 2012, p. 422) that generate emotional responses. The president represents the pinnacle of heterosexual power— an accessible and entertaining myth effective in enhancing ideological framing.

This type of packaging is replicated in the counterterrorism thrillers. Fictional presidents assert manliness on the post-9/11 “battlefield” through their relationships and interactions with the superheroes. The explicit way the texts access symbolic presidential power is by linking them directly with the superhero. Although there are some characters that technically stand between the superhero and the president, such as a CIA director, the relationship is strong. Narrators often summarize this relationship, such as in *Memorial Day* when Rapp is described as “the president’s man” (Flynn, 2004, p. 235) who the president relied on because the hero was so reliable, decisive, and effective. The narrator in *Black Ops* describes a new counterterrorism unit, the “Office of Organizational Analysis [to be led by] Presidential Agent” (Griffin, 2008, p. 10) Castillo. The narrator claims the unit answered only to the president:

There is an exception, so they say, to every absolute statement. The exception to the absolute statement that the National Intelligence director exercised authority over everyone and everything in the intelligence community was the Office of Organizational Analysis, which answered only to the commander in chief. (Griffin, 2008, p. 87)

In *The Last Patriot*, Harvath’s mission and mandate under the “Apex Project” is explained in much the same way as Castillo and Rapp’s. The project is described as being part of a secretive branch of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security called the OIIA (Office of International Investigative Assistance):

The OIIA’s overt mission was to assist foreign police, military, and intelligence agencies in helping to prevent terrorist attacks. In that sense, Harvath’s mission was in step with the official OIIA mandate. In reality, he was a very secretive dog of war enlisted post-9/11 to be unleashed by the president upon enemies of the United States anywhere, anytime, with anything he needed to get the job done. (Thor, 2008, p. 5)

The hero-president bond establishes how the superhero works directly and *only* for the president and, when paired, they succeed. Also, only the president can “unleash” the superhero.

The president and Castillo have a private conversation in the White House’s presidential apartment in *Black Ops*. They debate recent findings of an investigation by the hero and how to



handle certain terrorist suspects. The president orders the hero to find the Islamic extremists and “render them harmless” (Griffin, 2008, p. 30), which is a recurring type of wink-and-a-nod phraseology used by the president to direct a superhero to do something without talking about what *it* is. Instead of saying something like, “go out and kill and cover it up” or “torture the suspect until he talks,” the president needs deniability due to his political role, and to shield the superhero as his proxy. In *Extreme Measures*, Rapp even remarks about the words used to mask what they are really doing, such as saying they have a “detainee” instead of a “prisoner.”

The *Black Ops* example also shows how counterterrorism is a secret the privileged characters share in the shadows. The U.S. President is aware of the superhero’s actions (i.e., executing a mixture of extreme, violent, extralegal, and illegal techniques) that, if publicized within the realistic post-9/11 setting where each story unfolds, the fallout would be problematic. The president is complicit—both are in on it and have access and knowledge of the “black” operations. Yet the president must maintain deniability. The superheroes’ actions cannot be tracked back to the White House and the president cannot enter the counterterrorism shadows.

The presidential apartment where the render-them-harmless conversation is held also exemplifies how setting is a device used to underscore the president-superhero bond. These locales, including the Oval Office (*Executive Power*), in a limousine during a presidential motorcade (*Memorial Day*), and on super-secret communication devices (*The Hostage*), connect the characters and connote an aura of executive power. The conversations at these locations are usually intimate interactions between just the two characters.

These types of interactions capture the relationship between men in the story— a complimenting of masculinities Connell (1987) emphasizes as crucial for understanding the social dynamics of gender roles— that is, representations of powerful men meeting to solve the

world's problems. Such conversations are congenial— characters sharing a beer, telling war stories, talking sports, or joking about politics, like in this scene from *The Last Patriot*:

[U.S. President] Rutledge pulled out a can of Diet Coke for Harvath and a bottle of St. Pauli Girl for himself and opened them up. He handed the can to Harvath and clinked his bottle against it [...] 'Did you know that President Lincoln was a confessed billiards addict?' asked the president.

'No, I didn't,' replied Harvath, who had played pool once or twice with Rutledge on the road, but never in the White House game room.

'Lincoln called it a health-inspiring, scientific game that lends recreation to an otherwise fatigued mind. Why don't you choose a cue and we'll lag for break.'

Harvath took a sip of his Diet Coke, removed his jacket, and then selected a cue. He beat the president just barely on the lag and was given the honor of the break.

They settled on a straight game of eight ball. Harvath had learned a long time ago that the key to a clean break was the same as a good shot off the golf tee. It was all about a smooth backswing and clean follow-through.

[He...] struck the cue ball and sent it rocketing forward. There was an impressive crack as the cue met the other balls, sending three spinning into pockets. (Thor, 2008, p. 331)

This situation creates a special connection between men of power having a drink (note: Harvath was not drinking alcohol only because he was "on the clock"), playing billiards, and talking intimately. This everyman (Van Veeren, 2009) bond signifies the extreme executive power in the narratives granted to the superhero and his fantastical ability to use that power at will.

If the bond is not evident at different plot points, the superhero can conjure up his relationship with statements like 'the president has me on speed dial' (Flynn, 2008, p. 23) or 'I am acting on the direct orders of the president' (Griffin, 2004, p. 102). The president also calls in favors to save the superhero from trouble, like calling the French president to have Harvath set free after he was arrested for breaking French laws (*The Last Patriot*). These presidential assurances and insurances enhance the far-reaching ideological power of unchecked, supreme power embodied and executed by a hypermobile special operations superhero.

***b. The President as Hero Benefactor and Gatekeeper***

The pairing of the superhero and president can also be understood as a variation of the relationship between the “supernatural guide” and the hero described in Campbell’s (2008) monomyth. Early in the hero’s journey, the hero meets with a mentor imagined as an omnipotent and seasoned traveler with access and wisdom of supernatural tools and the special world the hero must enter. The mentor represents a set of guiding principles that support and reassure the hero, embodying “the protecting power of destiny” (Campbell, 2008, p. 59). In the American monomyth, the superhero is wise and strong– albeit less humble than Campbell’s version– but ultimately needs access and some form of moral authority (e.g., religious intent, official state backing) to sanction his actions (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002).

The mythical relationship is appropriated here when the U.S. President accesses authority and resources in the counterterrorism shadows. It is a place the superhero cannot typically enter without executive approval and support. While the president does not directly provide the superhero with supernatural tools– he accesses those as needed– or incredible skills and wisdom– he embodies those– the president aids access with resources and power to protect the superhero’s destiny. The president acts as a gatekeeper.

Special authority and access is repeatedly granted to the superhero: Each is assigned to an elite unit hidden within a larger bureaucracy, reportable only to the president, and given access to all the executive power and discretion necessary for mission accomplishment. In *The Hostage* this authority is explained in a classified memo [caps in original]:

IT IS FURTHER FOUND THAT THE EFFORTS AND ACTIONS TAKEN AND TO BE TAKEN BY THE SEVERAL BRANCHES OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT TO DETECT AND APPREHEND THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO COMMITTED THE TERRORIST ACTS PREVIOUSLY DESCRIBED, AND TO PREVENT SIMILAR SUCH ACTS IN THE FUTURE ARE BEING AND WILL BE HAMPERED AND RENDERED LESS EFFECTIVE BY STRICT ADHERENCE TO

# APPLICABLE LAWS AND REGULATIONS.

IT IS THEREFORE FOUND THAT CLANDESTINE AND COVERT ACTION UNDER THE SOLE SUPERVISION OF THE PRESIDENT IS NECESSARY.

IT IS DIRECTED AND ORDERED THAT THERE IMMEDIATELY BE ESTABLISHED A CLANDESTINE AND COVERT ORGANIZATION WITH THE MISSION OF DETERMINING THE IDENTITY OF THE TERRORISTS INVOLVED IN THE ASSASSINATIONS, ABDUCTION, AND ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION PREVIOUSLY DESCRIBED AND TO RENDER THEM HARMLESS. AND TO PERFORM SUCH OTHER COVERT AND CLANDESTINE ACTIVITIES AS THE PRESIDENT MAY ELECT TO ASSIGN. (Griffin, 2006, p. 461)

This authority compartmentalizes the president and superhero into a domain that only they and a select few know about. Such excerpts imply unbridled power only the president can grant. The narrator also explains Castillo is selected mainly because of his U.S. Army Special Forces skills and experiences. This act of granting authority packages many of the framing processes found throughout the superhero frame, including: The president being in complete control, blurring of policing (U.S. Department of Homeland Security) and military (i.e., Castillo is an officer with law enforcement authority); presidential authority to do whatever is necessary; need to operate outside normal channels; and failures of the ordinary system.

The “Presidential Memorandum” is also a factual representation device. These insider intelligence tools and techniques found throughout the texts, such as the president typology in actual settings (e.g., the White House) and presidential details (e.g., insider information on Secret Service protection [*The Apostle*] and executive evacuation routes [*Memorial Day*]) construct the president and his challenges and actions into a believable president in U.S. office, post-9/11.

Another component of the mentor-hero mythical relationship is the guide gives the hero a *swift kick* (Campbell, 2008) to get him moving on his journey. In these stories, the swift kick is the call to duty. The president sometimes summons the superhero and reminds him of his critical

role in the security of the homeland, like in *The Apostle* when the president sends a team of U.S. Secret Service agents to bring Harvath out of his retirement from government service.

Success within the shadows is not possible without extensive resources, such as military support, police backing, and secure (classified) access. Like the Islamic extremists who get funding from state sponsors to enter the shadows, it takes large sums of money for the superhero to do things like travel the world with no borders, pay locals, and obtain weaponry. Most of this is implied in the presidential directives, but sometimes the source of funding is explained. In the final scene of *Black Ops* when the president is forced to disband Castillo's covert unit because of pressure from dupes—namely, a liberal press and do-gooding bureaucrats—the hero asks the president what to do with \$16 million they confiscated from terrorists. The president then asks where the money is and if the hero has control of it. Castillo replies:

‘Sir, to make sure we could retain control of money, we already have. It’s now in the Riggs Bank.’

‘I am not going to get involved with dirty money,’ the President said. ‘You understand that, of course?’

‘Yes, of course, Mr. President.’

‘But on the subject of money, and apropos of nothing else, Charley [...] I funded OOA with two million from my discretionary funds. That’s really not very much money, and I have a good idea of how expensive your operations are. Sooner or later, you’re going to have to come to me for more money, and right now I just don’t see how it will be available. It’s something to keep in mind.’

‘Sir, are you suggesting?’

‘Major, I have no idea what you’re talking about.’ (Griffin, 2006, p. 30)

The president grants Castillo authority to continue his secret operation and pay “severances” to sidekicks. At the end of *Black Ops*, the hero returns to his special operations comrades and they conspire to continue the off-the-books operation with the president’s tacit approval and funding.

In one of the several conversations in the White House in *Takedown* the president tells the hero how important the hero's work is to the country and is not recognized, as it should be. He then gives the hero an envelope containing documents related to an estate the president has made the hero "caretaker"—a historic church called "Bishop's Gate" on the banks of the Potomac River near Washington's Mount Vernon. This invaluable and historically significant property—and a factual location—turns into the hero's private counterterrorism operations base.

In *Memorial Day*, the hero's access and protection is not monetary, but guarantees of power to single-handedly execute the new terror war. At the story's end, the hero threatens the CIA Director he will 'walk away from the fight' unless he is granted unrestrained power 'to hunt down every last son of a bitch who had a hand in this attack' (Flynn, 2004, p. 357). The director and president give their word to allow the hero to exact vengeance and blind themselves to the future crimes they are condoning. The same is true in *Consent to Kill* when, as the title suggests, the president gives the hero authority to kill:

[The president] gave the matter some thought. After a lengthy pause he said, 'Officially I want him involved in the CIA's international aspect of this investigation. Please take special note of the word international,' Hayes paused for effect. 'Unofficially, he has my consent to kill anyone who had a direct hand in this.' (Flynn, 2005, p. 278)

Approving premeditated killing is similar to the "license to kill" granted to James Bond signifying a moral authority to dispatch death in defense of Western empires with the backing of the highest executive levels and simultaneously masking the activity's true nature (Britton, 2005). Thriller presidents fight numerous internal battles to keep the public, media, and other politicians from discovering the special units and their activities in the counterterrorism shadows.

The last quote shows how the president is "unofficially" aware— as a wink-and-nod— of the superhero's activities in the shadows. But he must, again, maintain official deniability. In *The Hostage*, the president watches press coverage of what he knows is to be an off-the-books

counterterror operation in Costa Rica led by Castillo. He expects the major news networks to report the havoc executed by Castillo's team, but is relieved when the mission is portrayed as involving minor damages: "True to its professionalism, Gray Fox had left behind no bodies' American or Costa Rican' and no 727 gloriously in flames, and no traceable evidence that could place them ever at the scene" (Griffin, 2006, p. 56). The president dispatched the unit responsible for the cover up and observes the shadowy activity from afar. Although this secrecy protects the illegality of the action, the president is complicit in violating international law. But the connotation is intact: There is nothing to worry about, as long as dupes do not know about it.

In *Executive Power*, the narrator explains how "in operations such as these, it was best to avoid the president from having any blame" (Flynn, 2003, p. 470). This is not long before the hero vengefully murders Omar, the terror financier. In *The Last Patriot*, the hero and president meet to discuss what to do with the dead body of a U.S. military official, the character named Ramadan the hero killed during the story's climax. The narrator clarifies:

Though Rutledge didn't expressly request the disposal of Ramadan's body, Harvath knew how to read between the lines. The president didn't want what little time remained in his administration to be taken up by a scandal. The Pentagon official was a traitor to his country, and now he was dead. As far as the president and Harvath were concerned, justice had been served. (Thor, 2008, p. 464)

These examples of granting access and resources and making unilateral executive decisions again underscore the underlying theme of how the president cannot do the dirty work the special operations superhero can and must. As with Campbell's (2008) mentor-hero relationship, the mentor cannot be part of the journey— the hero must face all challenges alone. In the thriller narratives, the U.S. President has a different national security role in the sheltered, high-level political world, while the hero is in the trenches risking his life for the American

exceptionalism and national sanctity the president signifies. Both hyper-masculine versions compliment each other, and both are complicit in the extralegal acts.

Presidential deniability and insulation— versus explicitly supporting the superhero— mimics a contradiction in U.S. presidential performances found in American monomythic stories: The U.S. presidential oath itself can be viewed as contradictory because executing expansive executive powers to protect the U.S. is in stark contrast to the mandate to preserve and protect the U.S. Constitution (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). In the subject texts, the president maintains the appearance of protecting constitutional rights by not personally violating them. But he simultaneously and implicitly supports the superhero as the proxy for unchecked executive power. By accessing mythical archetypes found throughout fiction and nonfiction (Campbell, 2008), the superhero frame enacts a justice ideology of unfettered executive power outside of law— a violent response the president himself could not otherwise execute.

*c.      **President as Foil***

The unique role of the president as providing access, authority, and protection for the superhero is sometimes compromised, offering powerful messages emphasizing the president's fallibility as a foil (Gieryn, 1983) set in opposition to the superhero's infallibility. In *Memorial Day*, the president's counterterrorism approach is clouded by arguments by dupes to restrict the USA Patriot Act. In the story, two Islamic extremists are arrested in the U.S. Rapp wants them sent to an overseas CIA black site. Stealey— the egoist U.S. Department of Justice lawyer working her way to the top by lying and having sexual affairs with superiors— convinces the president to instead have the terrorists charged criminally, thereby not enacting the act's aggressive, post-9/11 authorities. The latter happens and the liberal media makes the president



look good during his campaign. But the terrorists get defense lawyers and provide no useful information about the imminent terror plots (i.e., a representation of failed legal measures).

In response to the dupe's effort, the hero single-handedly kidnaps one of the charged terrorists and tortures him until he admits to a conspiracy to detonate a nuclear bomb in the U.S. Rapp reveals this information directly to the president, Stealey, and others at the White House:

The president slapped his hand down on the table and yelled, 'Damn it, Mitch, I have had enough your reckless antics. I don't care what you've done in the past, I can't protect you any longer. You have become a major liability, and your irresponsible behavior can no longer be tolerated.'

'Do you have any idea what the media is going to do to us over this?' asked Jones.

'Do you have any idea that al-Qaeda has smuggled a second nuclear weapon into the country?' Rapp leaned forward, placing both hands on the table. 'That's right, Mr. President, so before you get rid of me, please allow me to save your ass one last time.' [...] 'While you've been busy listening to these two idiots,' Rapp pointed at Jones and Stealey, 'chatter in your ear about the ills of the Patriot Act, and the upcoming election, and how good a running mate Attorney General Stokes would make, we've been out busting our asses trying to figure out what these terrorists are up to [...]' (Flynn, 2004, p. 262)

By *Memorial Day's* conclusion, Rapp stops the terror plot and the president still looks admirable and thanks the hero for setting him back on the "right path." When the president engages dupes or egoists in discussions about rules, laws, alternatives, etc. (i.e., the counter-ideologies), time is wasted and bad things usually happen. For a moment, the president is one of the dupes from the failures frame until the hero enlightens him and he's brought back to "reality." There is no time for reflection on these matters, as revealed in the nature of the doom frame. Stealey is made to look like a fool— both because she supported the useless arrest and did so for greedy purposes while depicted as an immoral "whore" who derives power from sex. The key message here: Only selfish fools are misled enough to support civil rights in times of war.

The second exception is explained in *The Last Patriot* and relates to a plotline in a previous Harvath thriller. In the story, President Rutledge made a discreet deal to release a

known terrorist from Guantanamo Bay who, once released, targeted Harvath for revenge and nearly killed the hero's girlfriend (Tracy) and successfully killed some sidekicks. The president released the terrorist to gain a national security advantage— and satisfy pressure from dupes— but it resulted in the vengeful targeting of the hero as retribution for his work against that terror network. The president's mistake convinces Harvath to retire from his official position as a covert operative and move to Paris with Tracy. Yet, Harvath receives the president's call to duty, as introduced in the scene where the two play billiards at the White House. Later in the scene, the president details how he has always tried to do his best for the country in regards to the terrorist threat:

Harvath leaned on his cue and took another sip of his Diet Coke. Though he made up his mind to let bygones be bygones, the air was still thick with tension. 'I know you have, sir,' he replied.

'Scot, I need to tell you in person how sorry I am for what happened. If I had known any harm was going to come to you or the people you care about, I would have warned you.'

[...] 'I made a deal with terrorists,' he continued, 'and you personally suffered because of it. Though they violated the nature of the agreement, I still held you back from getting involved and protecting those around you. That was wrong, and I take full responsibility.' (Thor, 2008, p. 332)

The president apologizing to the hero helps bolster the hero's hyper-masculinity. Superheroes never negotiate with terrorist or concede to the pressures of dupes— they take unilateral action.

The last two examples seem like forgivable mistakes, but the third one is more egregious and ends with the president's forced resignation. In *The Apostle*, the parent of a child who is kidnapped by terrorists blackmails the president. The blackmailer, the dupe and egoist media mogul, Gallo, helped finance the president's successful campaign. She coerces the president to deploy the hero to save her daughter, an altruistic doctor working in Afghanistan (i.e., sidekick Julia Gallo), from terrorist captors. Gallo is in a position to blackmail the president because she

holds information about a fatal DUI car accident the president covered up because it implicated his mistress. The president secretly deploys Harvath to save Gallo and, in the process, thwart another terror threat. But by the end of *The Apostle*, the president is forced to resign because of the efforts of Elise Campbell, the Secret Service agent who conducted her own unsanctioned investigation and forced the president to resign. In this rare instance, the president fails, but the hero must keep going. In the story's final scene, Harvath is with his special operations sidekicks at a bar and the resignation is broadcasted on the television: The warriors bond by recuperating for later hyper-masculine action while the president is publically disgraced in the background.

Elise, who is forced to use illegal techniques and violate the strict rules of the Secret Service to expose the president and bring about "justice," is also a representation of a female character that "sees the light" of such techniques during the story (i.e., she starts out as a straight-laced agent, but sees what the president is up to through her official position), supporting how those techniques are sometimes necessary. I think Elise is the closest a woman character comes to heroism in the texts. Her actions mirror those of the special operations superhero in the story: They both have to break the law and rules to accomplish the mission. Elise is successful and admirable in a male dominated field. Nonetheless, by the end of *The Apostle*, she is forced to leave the Secret Service. Although she is portrayed as strong, the narrator claims she "wanted to have a family," was "just old fashioned," and would be married when she met the "right man" (Thor, 2009, p. 139). Although this theme does not directly support the president-hero bond, it supports the overall messaging of how even the strongest female characters eventually return to their subordinated positions in the patriarchal system (Damean, 2006).

The president's disgraceful resignation in *The Apostle* was not due to misusing power, condoning torture, or covering up the hero's illegal actions; but poor moral judgment unrelated

to national security. The president never faces consequences for his actions and, more importantly, the hero is inevitably unscathed and virtuous. The president makes mistakes of varying magnitude. Not the superhero. Sometimes, the superhero saves the president from his temporarily misguided steps to preserve the sanctity and morality of the office. The fact the president and superhero are never punished for their actions, like lying to Congress, violating international treaties, human rights abuses, and unsanctioned assassination, further signifies “justice” must be done for higher moral purpose and outside the law, if and when necessary.

***d.     The Unique Ideological Framing in the Superhero-U.S. President Relationship***

The special operations superhero is paired with the president through congenial man-on-man scenes, accessing presidential power, the superhero sometimes reorienting the president, and crossing into the counterterrorism shadows as a proxy with the office’s resources and protection. This unique bond is fueled by the existing presidential patriarchal myth available to the texts. The relationship also helps resolve a potential problem if the superhero were depicted as operating unilaterally as a renegade. Without the president, the superhero is more like former true-to-life heroes forced to take matters into their own hands as pure vigilantes (e.g., Paul Kersey in *Death Wish*; Rambo; The Lone Ranger). In those stories, the ex-official hero severs his ties with the state. Not here because the president is constant and counterterrorism action is always made with executive backing. Without this protection, the superhero could be arrested, imprisoned, or killed around the world. A related concern was identified in 24: A viewer could lose confidence in the ability for the U.S. to fight terrorism based on the constant negative view of the regular security apparatus and the dupes running those entities (Van Veeren, 2009). Bauer assuages these concerns with the support of like-minded, high-level executives.

As in *24*, the failures frame constructs a predominantly weak, slow, and impotent conventional national security apparatus. While some regulars and sidekicks help protect the homeland, the special operations superhero eliminates the relevant threat. He can circumvent all that is wrong with the government and tap directly into imperial power. By going around the “red tape,” “bloated bureaucracies,” and “desk jockeys” obstructing heroic success, the problems, limitations, and failures of bureaucratic institutions are avoided. Like *24*, the plots necessitate the hero not go off on his own because he needs grounding in the U.S. security apparatus (Nikolaidis, 2011).

The president relationship also helps resolve the superhero’s dualistic tensions. The superhero is paired to the highest power of national authority, representing U.S. dominance and patriotism, while retaining his down-to-Earth, man’s man persona. As both an official and uniformed warrior patriot and rebellious maverick, he can go rogue for a while but always rejoins with the president to preserve authority. Castillo, Harvath, and Rapp move freely between the trenches of the war and the highest perch of national power, satisfying an old ideology (rugged individualism [Wright, 1977]) and new one (a national security perspective [Holloway, 2009]). Combined, these two narrative points of view— the Western man that regularly enters the “hellhole” of counterterrorism and the monolithic security state (Holloway, 2009)— strengthen the likability of the superhero by symbolizing his loyalty and virtuousness.

This illusion of common sense and ruling out of all other options— that is, the denial of ordinary law and military action— affords the superhero-president team with narrative space to act-out hyper-masculine action in pragmatic fashion. The president encompasses all U.S. executive authority found at the convergence of the military, police, and intelligence entities. The superhero simultaneously enacts the all-in-one mega-security force and ultimate ideological

message of the value of U.S. worldwide, conflict-based imperialist action. The president has access to a secret weapon (i.e., a superhero) he can send around the world with all authorities and no oversight or a need to follow the foreign laws and treaties he is expected to uphold.

**E. Superhero Summary: *The Fantasy, Superpowers, and Extraordinary Justice***

Special operations superheroes are constructed as American monomythic characters (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002) with spectacular powers, including idealized hyper-masculinity; access to all U.S. law enforcement, military, and intelligence authorities; summoning and amazing skill in using special tools and techniques; aggressive counterterrorism efforts effective most of the time; transcending law; worldwide hypermobility in invisible realms; and connection with and protection by the president. These powers coalesce in the special operations trope.

The thriller narratives are not set in pure fantasy settings like futuristic apocalyptic worlds (*The Matrix*), hypothetical cities like Gotham (*Batman*), or cartoonish landscapes (*Captain America*). Instead, they assert to be about plausible events, existing institutions, imaginable terrorism scenarios, actual locations, detailed tools, and real tactics— all blurring fact and fiction and claiming to know what the shadowy battlefield of terrorism looks like within a genre that contrives a believable image of post-9/11 history. What appears natural in this space is the true-to-life operator. In the particular moment (i.e., the 8 years following 9/11) and place (i.e., a newly imagined terror war in the U.S.) scripted in the narratives, he is constructed as making common sense (Fiske, 1991). This superhero is inserted into the contemporary moment not as a fantasy, but confused and conflated as really existing, or needing to.

Since these thrillers, as *faction*, make such outright claims to realism, they cannot simply employ the magic of fantasy. All superheroes have superpowers that tend to be magical, like the power of “the force,” the ability to turn invisible, being bullet proof, or the power of flight.

Superhero fantasy here is subtler because this character must be held to the realities of human existence. Still, he has implied superhuman traits, embodying the perfect hyper-masculine specimen with an intelligence and wisdom superseding most. His access to and use of special tools and techniques prove to be capable of destroying just about anything, and can be miraculously used to obtain the information needed to accomplish the mission. His hypermobility to easily move about the world is not far off from he, himself flying through the air. These are the superpowers of the special operations superhero—ones mythical and unbelievably effective and arisen from powers granted at the highest executive levels. A supreme power used to exact a version of justice supernatural in its effectiveness.

He does whatever and goes anywhere at anytime. Using any level and type of U.S. force needed from his pistol to calling upon attack helicopters, he has all the necessary courage and intelligence. As a cop or intelligence officer embodying the special operations persona, he can judge and exact punishment and violate laws with impunity— all hidden in shadows that afford no accountability or transparency. Shrouded in the ultra secrecy and mystery of special operations, it is a believable space where fantasy can operate freely to garner official powers, like arrest authority and unending resources, while masking his outlaw role.

The texts frame a view of counterterrorism claiming these “patriots” exists, constant and imminent plots of this kind are plausible, violent responses are effective, the compromise to morality is justified, and the battle can be replayed and won to restore past failure. “Our” precious homeland can be— if only temporarily— safe again. As in the American monomyth (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002), superheroes traditionally wear masks to protect their identity and hide their humanity. The mask this superhero wears is the well-known disguise of secrecy as a

national security mandate. The superheroes' costume is not visible, but if it were it would like an operator equipped with his mesmerizing tools of the special operations trade.

Rationality and human limitation confirm these sorts of men with superhuman traits and skills do not really exist and, unfortunately, do not save the day. Like James Bond, they represent male fantasies (Britton, 2005). While American superheroes do not resemble any existing person (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002), counterterrorism thrillers continue a perplexing mystery of persistence— the enduring hope a man will swoop in to use powers usually reserved for God in dealing with evil to save the day. As such, they are “the individuated embodiments of a civil religion that seeks to redeem the world for democracy, but by means that transcend democratic limits on the exercise of power” (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002, pp. 34-35).

On the sociocultural level, this male prototype signifies a reestablishment of masculinities through the state as a force in the construction of masculinity (Connell, 1987). Special operations superheroes represent powerful agents of socialization— men (i.e., FASC and their supportive sidekicks and presidents) doing masculine activities (e.g., violence). With subordinated femininities throughout the texts (e.g., weak diplomatic responses, reminders of past GWOT failures), the narratives reflect a reemergence of a gender orders dominated by masculine heroism, helping to reclaim this arguably lost universal and mythical space (Rafter, 2000). As solitary and singular souls (more masculine representations), these men are willing and able to make difficult and selfless sacrifices necessary to save the impotent and terrorized community. U.S. masculine supremacy was hurt on 9/11 by super-terrorism, and this is one manifestation of a hyper-violent response to an ongoing super-terror threat (Van Veeren, 2009).

Like the fallacies of gender orders and the fable of Jack Bauer, what is left is a beautiful lie (Barthes, 1957/2012) effective because it is a trick designed to make an audience believe it is



plausible and because these superheroes— like all superheroes— are likable. Embodying the privilege position of ultimate masculinity, simple and straightforward (i.e., because people are cognitive misers [Fiske & Taylor, 1991]), special operators take violent action (Sharrett, 1999) and offer vengeance at a moment when the culture wants it. This martyrdom is at the core of U.S. identity, which relishes any destiny perceived as involving the pure and unrelenting pursuit of justice. This is how “best-sellers often probe a wound on the surface of society; then numb the pain, and appear to make all the contradictions cease” (Messenger, 2002, p. 151).

Counterterrorism thriller superheroes are cultural “saviors” who protect “us” from a mostly unseen enemy (Altheide, 2005). The GWOT propaganda machine did this: Through actions like the Iraq War and color-coded terrorist threat levels, it maintained a discourse of being under attack. By selecting certain frames, the Bush administration— supported by other powerful actors— promoted aggressive policing, an enhanced war machine, strict security measures, and other intrusive practices. The saviors became police and military FASC, acting as “agents of the politics of fear” (Altheide, 2005, p. 202). Through the discourses, readers-as-victims joined forces with the saviors to defeat the emerging threats to moral and symbolic order. This post-9/11 *entertainment visualization* was enacted through the role of emerging heroes in both fictionalized fact (i.e., mainstream press) and fact-based fiction narratives (Altheide, 2005).

Entertainment offers salvation from social fears, which is accomplished through a process where fictive texts, in a complex interplay between official sources and news media, define social situations. Through this framing, the official FASC become status symbols needed to do the dirty work and make ultimate sacrifices for freedom. The “fighting back” drama acts to *ritualize patriotism* (Altheide, 2005), performing the vigilance required to protect the homeland from the evildoers. It operates to make the supreme sacrifice to avenge fellow fallen uniform

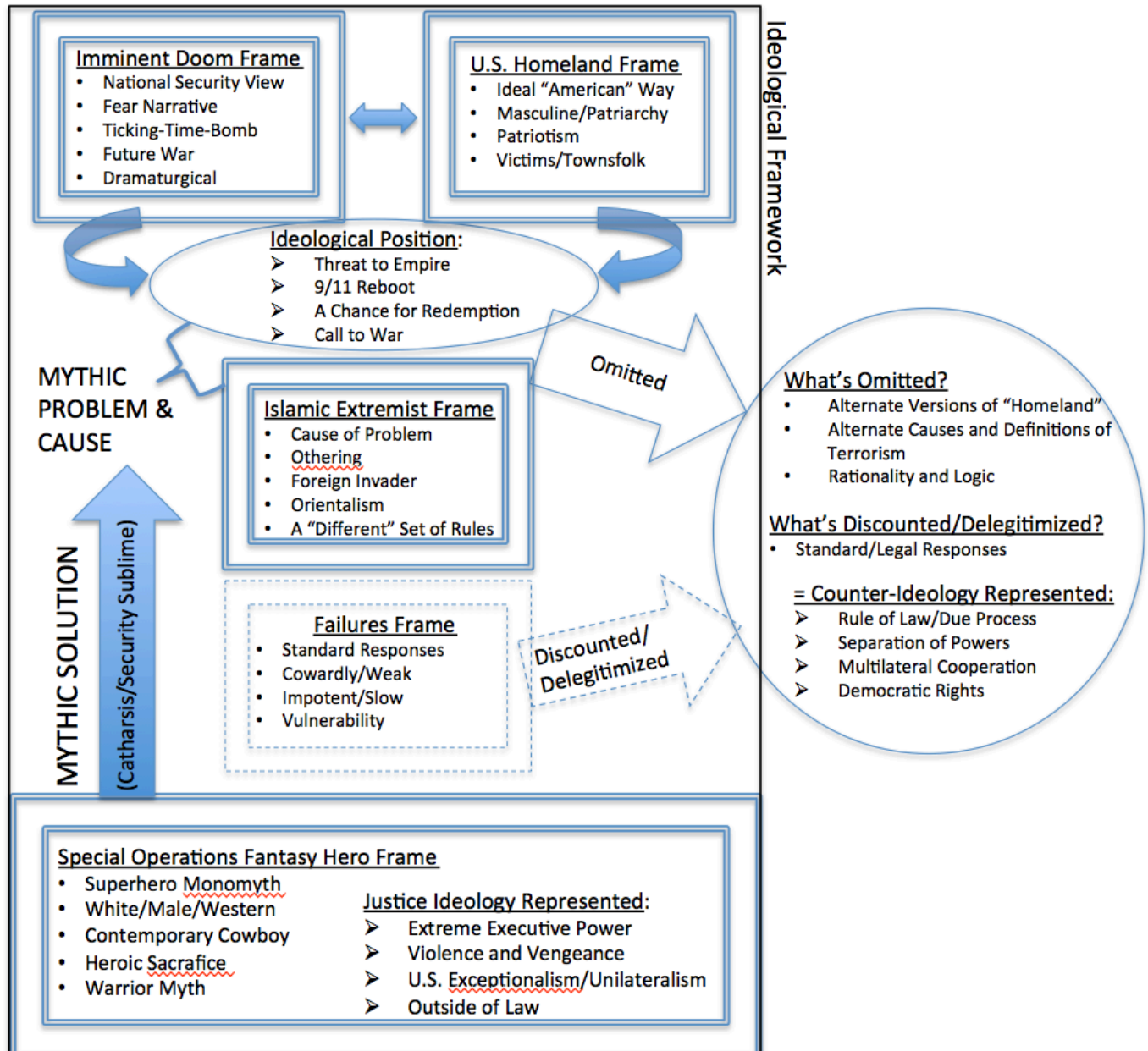
heroes, taking violent action and defending against anyone questioning it. In this process the personified image of the superhero is inserted subliminally, almost unnoticed (Holloway, 2009).

Ultimately, the subversive images of the superhero or the devices or framing processes do not much matter. What matters is how they work to allow a specific justice ideology to flourish. The ideology imposes a distinct political position constructed through an inevitable and moral form of counterterrorism. A position presenting the U.S. in the traditional masculine form as an imperial nation that is both able and, when necessary, sanctioned to use extreme violence in a global war. It becomes a patriotic duty to flex the capitalistic muscle of the nation unilaterally applying executive powers with disregard for consequence— scripted so the means justify the result. Violence, irregular state action, unbridled use of force— even criminal behavior— is confused with justice. Here, “justice” does not respect rule of law, separation of powers, due process, human and civil rights, oversight, accountability, and checks and balances. This is a justice only one kind of man— if an audience accepts this interpretive framework— can achieve.

## **IX: DISCUSSION, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND ONGOING RESEARCH**

I revealed a self-serving and self-fulfilling framework in the subject texts. The framing tells a repetitive story: Certain men are ready, with incredible capabilities and equipped with mythical tools and methods, to enter the shadows and defeat the contemporary Other– the homeland’s archenemy. Ready to “settle the score” and restore the honor, patriotism, and “American” patriarchy damaged on 9/11, superheroes sacrifice themselves to secretly and often violently wage a moralistic war. The framing reasserts patriarchal supremacy through fetishizing authoritative law and order national security policy and action. In the narratives, war and state violence is no longer a tool of last resort. Instead, it is the preferred method to spread and protect dominant ideology– dominance challenged during this historic episode. Through a new war of purification required to counter apocalyptic threats, alternative views are diminished. In the textual space, rational debate is discouraged and the tautology of mass media logic (Sherwin, 2000) prevails.

Framing makes communication simpler and easier for an audience, which can limit the amount and type of information they receive regarding complicated and sometimes contradictory enterprises (Goffman, 1974). The subject texts do this: Reducing the information available, a complex and mostly unobservable enterprise is made visible, comprehensible, and manageable. The consumer of these narratives has few other options than the responses provided, resembling a prearranged scheme like those found in James Bond films (Nikolaidis, 2011). Such spectacular schemes lure and hook the audience, as also accomplished by Hollywood’s post-9/11 action movie filmmaking (Boggs & Pollard, 2016), to mask ideological messaging about a retributive and imperialistic counterterrorism approach. A framework I presented as looking like this:



#### A. Interpellation, the Security Sublime, and Implications to U.S. Justice

I conclude the counterterrorism thriller readers will go through the process of interpellation (Althusser, 1971/2014; Mumby, 1989) as a result of this text's framing, which is a profoundly pleasurable experience that helps an audience accept a framework's ideological

content. This process allows power to be packaged and transferred to reinforce certain state authorities and institutions, thereby influencing facets of U.S. justice, law, and security. I base this conclusion on these foundational theoretical ideas, which are also engrained and supported in my findings: Popular media texts will influence reader interpretation of sociocultural enterprises like counterterrorism, especially when they replace a void of missing information and deal with a populace's longings and anxieties (Hall, 1997). Dominant media ideology is expected to deny logic through distortions and falsehoods (Barnhurst, 2005). Framing tricks readers with the illusory common sense created by framing processes (Entman, 1993). Also, myth and masculinities will invigorate existing ideological positions (e.g. presidential authority, American exceptionalism). Furthermore, theories on the power of popular genre fiction say devices (e.g., linear plots, likable characters, enticing facts) construct a perceived knowledge base of a situation (Baraban, 2003) to help instill certain worldviews in an audience (Hall, 1997).

These conclusions are also supported by theories about how such frameworks receive more attention when they are congruent with other schemas dominating a social, cultural, and political moment (Entman, 2003). Popular media texts are expected to *serve* dominant ideologies (Papke, 2007). The commonalities between the subject texts and GWOT exemplify this, and it is expected narrative schemes (i.e., as signifying systems [Hall, 1997]) will be more successful when linked to existing frames ripe with ideological content (e.g., the ticking-time-bomb myth, the mad bomber trope). Cold War commonalities enhance this as well. As some scholars have theorized (Baraban, 2003), a reader will know what to expect and assume it to be "true" because they have "seen it before." Overall, this process normalizes the imperial security sublime viewpoint (Holloway, 2009). Through the perspective of the superhero and supporting FASC, an illusory sense of control over the situation is created. Here, the reader is invited to

submit to the pragmatic security state (Holloway, 2009) and enter an ideological domain wherein justice and its laws and security approaches are presented, put to the test, and “proven” effective.

Interpellation in the security sublime creates a situation where the reader is expected to succumb to state authority, which is invoked by and invokes emotions like anger and pleasure (Holloway, 2009). The ideological domain in the counterterrorism thrillers is fueled by emotive cues and conditions, which usually receive more attention than cognitive ones in mediated environments (Entman, 2003). These are mostly in sync with the culture of fear (Altheide, 2005) features, and include obsessive panic and paranoia. The doom and Islamic extremists frames represent fear-inducing emotional tales encouraging readers to feel sad, mad, and vengeful. They also seem to access the primal impulses of righteous indignation, like found in conservative crime dramas (Lenz, 2005). These emotions are expected to have a psychosocial impact on their acceptance of whatever is necessary to prevail over the threatening sources (Loseke, 2009).

The emotive cues and conditions are rooted in the communal bond implied in the texts. The reader will be expected to identify as “American”—as part of a *tribe* (Keen, 1986)—to invoke a familiar and comforting sense of belonging with “us.” The framework summons feelings like intense patriotism, protecting family, nationalism, and military pride—celebrating “traditional” identity (Keen, 1986). These emotional and mythical conditions are typical to the myth of conflict (Keen, 1986), wherein the audience is convinced of the need to protect the threatened values of the tribe *through* the state interests and enhanced mechanisms of warfare.

### **1. Subject Positioning of the Superhero and Intertextual Convergence**

The genre reader is likely to find emotional relief through this point of view due to the subject positioning (Hall, 1997) of interpellation. Here, the main subject is “becoming” the special operations superhero. This trope works at the intimate and personal level—in the

“trenches.” He is humanized through his sacrifices and relationships, which are characteristics common in genre subject positioning and superhero myth. Representing what Holloway (2009) concluded of terror thrillers: What the conservative white middle-aged male desires. Maybe this is why 24 fans buy “Bauer Power T-shirts” and claim they are “a Jack Bauer kind of guy” (Mayer, 2007, n.p.). When readers accept heroes like Bauer and Rapp as representatives of how the world should be, what values one should have, which actions to take, and what attitudes lead to success, they embrace heroic inspiration (Van Veeren, 2009).

This process is about personification. Anyone consuming the subject texts—be it salesperson, factory laborer, cop, or CEO—can enter into a secretive world and be a hero. It is pleasurable to act out super heroism and, through the comfort and safety of reading a book, enter a world so few gain access and to witness actions rarely seen by the public. Through experiencing cathartic relief and resolutions to problems (e.g., witnessing foolish bureaucrats learning their lessons, the rebellious breaking of cumbersome rules, viewing “classified” materials, “facing-off” with terrorist Others), readers are given the illusion of control through the superhero lens. This is the crux of interpellation—the act of reading becomes the consumer’s experience. Pleasure is derived in the genre through the successful execution of state power. This fear and pleasure interplay is structured to be intellectually persuasive and arouse passions known to be effective at channeling ideology (Alexander & Smith, 1993).

This brand of superhero subject positioning enables the reader to shuttle between vengeful “justice” and safety (Hall, 1997), helping to relieve what are known as some of the culture’s most profound anxieties (Rafter, 2000). Such heroes help provide a sense of hope to portions of a paranoid U.S. citizenry who felt disempowered after 9/11 (Letort, 2016). An emotional bond is created where there is an illusion that powerful actors—blended into a uniform

image from fact and fiction— are doing a service for the consumer-victims (Althiede, 2005). This is especially enticing when accomplished through hyper-masculine actions, which are known to be particularly pleasurable to those desiring to aggressively act out dominance and conquer danger (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988). When a thriller reader subjects themselves to this domain— becoming emotional, summoning myth, being scared, getting mad, and acting out violence and cathartic impulses through the combative special operations perspective— the imperial security sublime (Holloway, 2009) is enacted. The mythic performance is ritualized, and endorses a subversive form of coercion conforming to the post-9/11 authoritative turn (Holloway, 2009).

This is a realm ripe for the transfer of power from these fiction texts upwards to the centers of state hegemonic authority. Power packaged in this form represents a grouping of interests that constitute a specific institutional infrastructure and is transferred into those institutions (Mumby, 1989) (e.g., the U.S. counterterrorism apparatus). I conclude this is how a discursive formation produces and reproduces meaning formations that create and represent the power structures and dynamics of dominance in a specified institutional context (Hall, 1997). The result to justice, law, and security is that it normalizes the conditions necessary for aggressive, illegal, violent, and hyper-masculine responses to thrive. Researchers have provided examples of this being ritualized (e.g., Boggs & Pollard, 2016)— by acting it out, state authority is reestablished and imperialistic powers are normalized.

This normalization resembles how popular texts “naturalize these positions (conservative ideologies of ‘the way things are’) and thus help mobilize consent to hegemonic political positions” (Kellner, 1995, p. 59). The GWOT narrative, like the Cold War, represents a “manifestation of an ever-present threat narrative that functions to provide focus and coherence – an ideological mission – to the institutions of U.S. foreign policy” (Jackson, 2011, p. 395). The



GWOT corresponds with the publication of the 11 subject texts and is based on the premise dominant popular and official discourses tend to share tropes and narratives, or *structural homologies* (Boggs & Pollard, 2006). These shared features help construct– shape, reflect, promote, and normalize– ideological meanings of justice, law, and security (Van Veeren, 2009). When comparing post-9/11 Hollywood combat movies about terrorism to the GWOT, Boggs and Pollard (2006) found common features included, “patriotism, the cult of guns and violence, glorification of technology, a hyper-masculine hero, [and] obsession with ‘alien’ threats” (p. 45).

In a similar comparison of the intertextuality of the Bush counterterrorism versus *24* narratives, the researcher found they:

[Work] together to normalize the existence of a terrorist threat that is constructed as exceptional and ubiquitous, legitimizing certain counter-terrorist strategies that are militarized and repressive, where heroes do “whatever it takes.” Just as police dramas “present fables about crime and law” within society and thereby shape our understanding of crime and law [...and] spy dramas such as *24* present a rationale for a particular conception of security and counter-terrorism policies. (Van Veeren, 2009, p. 368)

The result was an archetypal and dramatic fight between the forces of “good and evil.” The combined messages represent an intertextual convergence– the “fact” and the “fiction”– of an ideological view of a sudden threat of terror from archetypal evil (Zelman & Clark, 2009) met with a single conflict-based solution by the virtuous side of a state-led, extraordinary response. These framing mechanisms “hold together in a kind of popular cultural logic, serving each other, with the connections cemented more by custom, myth, and convention than by the principles of valid reasoning or syllogistic logic” (Entman, 2003, p. 418).

## **2. Justice, Law, and Security Consequences of this Ideological Domain**

The basic and essential consequence of this ideological normalization– and starting point for the discussion in this section– is how it defines “justice.” Justice is a debated ideal and abstract principle that shifts with perspective and motivations. I define it within the context of

this study as *democratic justice* (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002), which is intended to be impartial, impersonal, rational, and fair. The U.S. justice system is based on core ideals, such as the rule of law (Nikolaidis, 2011), due process that guarantees fair treatment (Lenz, 2005), constitutional rights founded on equal treatment by the state (Cole, 2008), and a procedural system that includes accountability, oversight, and separate but equal branches designed to check and balance each other (De Lint, 2004). These basic tenets are crucial to U.S. justice and are intended so it is sought and executed *within* legal confines.

The thrillers' version of justice is at odds with these democratic tenets. The subject texts confuse, conflate, and otherwise make no distinction between criminal justice and warlike responses to terrorism. This conflation causes there to be no separation between the variations of justice in a "just war" versus a domestic legal system, leaving no room for an analysis of those nuances. In the imperial security sublime, justice is a monolithic imperative. In a landscape of mythical images and fantasies, it becomes primal, emotional, personal, and instinctual. Justice like this functions as an "all-in-one" system, wherein a cop-soldier-spy decides, adjudicates, and punishes. The FASC has total discretion, free from law or legal institutions and their rules. Violence in this realm is practical— an act of needed punishment, in some cases even supporting patriotic revenge. This reflects the neo-conservative doctrine of the *rule of power* (De Lint, 2004) and extreme forms of retributive law and order found in the perceived "golden age" of masculinized, neoconservative justice (Lenz, 2005). With this worldview, the audience must accept the "truth" in order to believe and agree with the text. The performance desensitizes the reader: By defending the homeland at all costs, "courageous" moralistic patriotism takes precedence over the rationality of law.

The consequence of this performance is the promotion of what I call *retributive terror justice*. With conditions of fear, paranoia, and emotion-driven solutions in this fiction-as-fact realm and imperial perspective, the Other embodies the problem. If violent terror wars are to be successful political struggles, the “terrorist” must be ideologically signified as actionable, knowable, and *controllable* in a specific form (Burnett & Whyte, 2005). The construction of the enemy as a religion/ideology consisting of a group of peoples the state can do something about (e.g., profiling Muslims, monitoring mosques) helps justify the expansion of its juridical and military reach in taking action against the targeted group. When the Other is perceived as controllable via the application of this view of justice— versus being presented as not controllable when using a justice model adhering to democratic tenets— readers are likely to condone legal abuses and enhanced security measures. These exceptional and emotional responses can lead to disproportionate actions and attitudes against Others (Burnett & Whyte, 2005).

A widespread and intense ignorance about the realities of Islam and Muslims enable a prejudicial worldview, helping the West project its own violence onto Others (Said, 1978). It becomes “logical” to feel a sense of universal anger and hatred against the new U.S. alien “enemy.” This view had tangible consequences under the Bush Doctrine, such as inciting discrimination, hate crimes, profiling, and stereotyping of an ethnic group and a religion (Cole & Lobel, 2007). People of Arabic descent in the U.S. with uncertain citizenship status (e.g., on visas) were detained on “immigration issues” under the auspices of being possible military threats (White, 2014). Outside of the U.S. and under GWOT auspices, “unlawful combatants” were detained at black sites without habeas corpus rights and several Guantanamo Bay detainees were not given due process for over a decade (Cole, 2008). These consequences are expected when an audience— or a populace— condones or even tacitly accepts retributive terror justice

against a fabricated Other. Few of those detained were ever charged or had a clear connection to acts of terror, showing how the approach also led to a lack of governmental accountability (Cole & Lobel, 2007). While guilt-versus-innocence is not an issue in the subject texts (i.e., *all* detainees are guilty *all* the time), it is a problem if believed these authoritarian, state-led practices are reasonable.

Another potential security-related consequence of the subject text's ideological justice is the perspective— paradoxically— supports actual “terrorists” (i.e., extremists) by reinforcing how they want to be perceived. A leading terrorism scholar defines terrorism as “the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change” (Hoffman, 2004, p. 40). Fear *manipulation* is one of the main goals of any extremist group (White, 2014). Extremists primarily benefit from popular, post-9/11 mediated fear because it reaches beyond physical damage, demoralizes citizens, and helps them reach their political goals (Posner, 2002). I think these individuals and groups *want* the U.S. public to think they are well funded, resourceful, and able to effectively plan and execute super-terrorism plots on a regular basis. These perceptions tap into fears and conspiratorial myths to help make “us” think “they” could wage these types of attacks and plots. Viewed this way, narratives constructing terror threats as imminent, massive, and repetitive— as well as Islamic extremists as savage, yet well-funded, organized, on the verge of invading the U.S., and permeating all aspects of the homeland— may help “terrorists” in their goals of spreading paranoia and panic.

A more concrete result of support for authoritative justice formations relates to how the conditions it creates have been linked with the extreme and often unnecessary enhancement of the military, police, and private security (White, 2014). A potential result of the process here: Just as Clancy helped enhance President Reagan's military-industrial complex, these narratives

give legitimacy to arguments for increases in military and law enforcement spending. Support for this type of spending has already been shown to increase the militarization of domestic agencies given funding based on “counterterrorism” premises (Beckett & Sasson, 2004).

The GWOT’s rapid and massive expansion of executive agencies and agents working on counterterrorism and a re-missioning of agencies to make it their primary mission, versus other pre-9/11 missions. This led to the expanded use and power of law enforcement, intelligence and other civilian entities under the U.S. executive. Newly empowered security forces coalesced around one mission and were given impressive resources and complete discretion, with limited instruction and precedent on how to use them (Andreas & Price, 2003; Deflem, 2004).

This expansion also resulted in a distorting and transcending of the long-established legal divide between police-military-intelligence powers. Prior to 9/11, there was a more distinct line between state actors within the military and those in police forces (De Lint, 2004). This was based on *the separation of powers doctrine* designed to keep civilian and military separate and restricting military action and intelligence gathering on U.S. soil and police action overseas— a basic principle in U.S. governance (Cole, 2008). In conventional war (prior to 9/11) the use of force was limited to *enemy combatants*, who were afforded protections under the laws and customs of war. Within the GWOT and subject texts, targeting all terror suspects, associates, and supporters linked to 9/11 is justified by a new version of continual “wartime” (Burnett & Whyte, 2005). This enhanced power, especially under the National Security Strategy (The White House, 2003), amounted to a doctrine of *unlimited use of force* against a broadly defined enemy. Under this militarized view of terrorism response, it is easier to justify broad action against one involved in the war on the “other side.” The *unlawful combatant* label afforded the U.S. justification to avoid the Geneva Conventions and prosecute alleged combatants under military

law. Overall, the GWOT led to a blurring of policing and military powers never before seen in U.S. history (Andreas & Price, 2003; Deflem, 2004)– a phenomenon replicated in the thrillers.

The U.S. system was intended to have separation of the military and civilian law enforcement (Beale & Felman, 2002). This includes three important areas of distinction: 1) Authority and purpose; 2) governing rules and laws; and 3) structure, organization, and chain of command (Cole & Lobel, 2007; Weber, 1999). The military has authority under the Constitution to wage war in extreme circumstances (e.g., in self defense) anywhere in the world. The mission is to fight off threat or immediate threat and designed to be temporary and a tool of last resort. On the other hand, law enforcement derives authority from specific laws and its purpose is to enforce those laws. The military of a nation is designed to protect it from *external* security threats, while the police provide *internal* security by enforcing laws (Andreas & Price, 2003). While war is supposed to be temporary and extreme based on security threats, criminal law enforcement is driven by how long it takes to conduct an investigation– restricted by law like with statutes of limitations. The problem with the type of justice presented in the GWOT and the subject thrillers is that these separations and differences are not even considered. Instead, both authorities are combined and expanded, such as the policy of “preventative” military-intelligence-law enforcement policies and state actions (Cole & Lobel, 2007).

Changes to policing– mostly pursuant to The USA Patriot Act– expanded the “war on crime” culture dominating the justice system leading up to 9/11 (Beckett & Sasson, 2004). This culture– found in both the GWOT and the thrillers– is based on law and order approaches, punitive policies, unprecedented levels of imprisonment, and other aggressive efforts, formed a policy that looked like a “security state” and lead to discrimination and reliance on social control. Post-9/11 counterterrorism policies have only exacerbated this through policies and provisions

that, for example, broadened the definition of terrorism and allowed for roving wiretaps without probable cause (Beckett & Sasson, 2004). A concern is these policies and procedures will not only be for terrorism, but used in other-than counterterrorism investigations or over-broadening the meaning of those investigations. For example, under The USA Patriot Act, a person involved in a bar-room brawl could be considered a terrorist and have intrusive powers under the law used against them as an unlawful combatant, contrary to the U.S. due process doctrine (Cole, 2008).

In the extreme, retributive terror justice promotes an acceptance of torture, which has been documented as occurring during the GWOT in U.S. controlled war zones and in U.S. sanctioned black sites around the world (U.S. National Commission on Terrorists Attacks, 2004; U.S. Senate, 2012). While the torture was happening, some argued U.S. executive leadership's role and oversight was structured so those in charge of the state actors (including the president) could maintain deniability and be protected from responsibility for those actions (e.g., Cole & Lobel, 2007). This mimics my findings wherein the president authorizes the superhero with a "wink-and-nod," but purposefully does not know about– and can deny– illegal activities.

These illegal techniques– found throughout the thrillers– are undemocratic and in violation of human rights, international laws, the U.S. rule of law, rules of engagement, and the established practices of law enforcement and military interrogators. I also consider torture– and some of the other violent practices accepted under retributive terror justice– as immoral. Yet, the dominant narratives assert it is moral and ethical to violate a detained person's rights if and when done so to protect innocent U.S. lives (Dershowitz, 2003). Regardless of this, what makes torture especially problematic is all the arguments for the techniques– the executive can employ all methods necessary at times of war, Islamic extremists deserve no rights, and the techniques actually work– are unfounded. The literature agrees there is no evidence torture is an effective

way to obtain information (e.g., Intelligence Science Board, 2006; U.S. Senate, 2012) and the ticking-time-bomb scenario is improbable (e.g., Dershowitz, 2002). Related criticisms include that post-9/11 counterterrorism torture is a prime example of unbridled official power in action and torture itself has negative psychological and sociocultural implications on the torturer and tortured, and their communities (Semel, 2008).

A final potential consequence of an acceptance of retributive justice is how it supports what De Lint (2004) called the GWOT's *endarkened policy*. The GWOT and thriller narratives promote the ideological position that national security—mainly with regard to counterterrorism—needs to be done in total secret. At the GWOT's inception, Vice President Cheney set the stage for state secrecy with this pronouncement: “A lot of what needs to be done here will have to be done quietly, without any discussion, using sources and methods available to our intelligence agencies [...] we will operate on the dark side” (Kirk, 2008, n.p.). Secrecy became a blanket policy and operational assumption. It was a cultural frame that seeped into non-operational realms not requiring such secrecy, were at odds with rule of law, and reached beyond its intended counterterrorism scope (Altheide, 2005; Jenkins, 2003). The Bush administration defended this broad authority under the premise of the “state secrets” privilege (i.e., as a legal defense) and “national security” justifications—legitimate to protect certain operations, identities of spies, and sensitive tools and techniques used by the U.S. (White, 2014)—but abused as a blanket policy. Some conclude the Bush administration manipulated secrecy as a functional component of its policy to control public exposure (Deflem, 2004) and create legal “black holes” (De Lint, 2004).

Support for this position acts to protect the executive's rule of power (De Lint, 2004). By accepting this secrecy mandate, the illegal actions of an autocratic state remain hidden. The state does not need to defend or explain a policy or action if no one knows what is going on. Secrecy



in the Bush Doctrine allowed for illegal practices, including unwarranted detentions, wiretaps, and illegal renditions and interrogations, without oversight (Cole & Lobel, 2007; Danner, 2009). The prime example of this in the subject texts is complete support for an entirely clandestine unit— often funded by illegally channeled funds— reportable only to the president and with no accountability. While there is a need for limited operational secrecy (i.e., in time and scope) with strict reporting and oversight (De Lint, 2004), a broad endarkened policy threatens the basic democratic principles of the rule of law and a transparent government. The ideological message is national security actions are necessarily hidden from the regular system, ordinary populace, news media, and all dupes and foils— or they will not work. Both narratives take a “don’t worry, we got this under control” approach where there is a limited level of oversight and transparency.

It seems, however, the GWOT’s endarkened policy and the retributive and authoritative justice it protected were challenged as the U.S. public gained more access and understanding of the situation. When the public realized, for instance, that torture was ineffective and made the U.S. look bad through the Abu Ghraib exposure (Gibney, 2008; Kirk, 2006); the tremendous impact on privacy rights the USA Patriot Act resulting in changes to that law (Wong, 2006); Iraq was unjust and not related to international terrorism (Davis, 2006); and the value of working with other nations and respecting their sovereignty in antiterrorism efforts (U.S. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004), they slowly rejected sensational narratives promoting increased social control (Altheide, 2005). This *public scrutiny* (Broe, 2004) played out in major news networks, which gradually began to challenge GWOT language and disrupt official messaging (Reese & Lewis, 2009). But in the thrillers and terrorism fiction like *24*, another 9/11 super-terror attack or threat is imminent.

### 3. Crucial Forms of Antiterrorism Delegitimized by Retributive Terror Justice

In addition to promoting justice policies and practices that have a negative impact on U.S. legal and security institutions and ideals, retributive terror justice detracts from broader, alternative antiterrorism efforts. I detailed the discounted counter-ideologies in the failures frame, but an interrelated issue is actual institutions and their efforts. A detrimental mistake of the GWOT was the failure to understand the *roots* of terrorism— the underlying conditions, history, religion, and subcultures, all of which interrelate with violence, social issues, economic disparity, and international relations (White, 2014). Popular media’s misdirection and omissions allows actual terrorism to flourish, other forms of terrorism to be underemphasized, and differing perspectives from other nations and authorities to be ignored (Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004). Such poor conceptualization reduces terrorism responses by Western nations to an issue of state power (McCulloch, 2001). The dialogue, then, is founded on coercion and social control instead of a frank discussion about what terrorism really is: A shifting, relational, socially specific, and often contradictory phenomenon requiring coordination between nongovernmental and governmental institutions, and cultural groups, as well as public and international cooperation.

This idea is underscored in the conclusion that the Bush Doctrine was “so obsessed with playing offense, it failed at defense” (Cole & Lobel, 2007, p. 2). Defensive antiterrorism is not promoted under retributive terror justice. These efforts include protecting the U.S. from an attack, such as border security, and are designed to be responsive after an attack, such as the vast realm of emergency responses (Ervin, 2006; White, 2014). During the GWOT, changes were made to improve security, but U.S. ports remained susceptible to attack, visa and passport fraud remained serious problems, borders remained porous, critical infrastructures were unguarded, cyber-attack threats were not adequately considered, and emergency services were unprepared

(Ervin, 2006). A more telling set of studies involved having “red cells” successfully bring weapons into airports through baggage screening more often than not. Despite the billions spent on the GWOT, in this period the U.S. was only a little more secure than pre-9/11 (Ervin, 2006).

When power is transferred to more imperialistic versions of justice and executive institutions, it is also taken away from non-coercive and preventative antiterrorism. Consider Howard’s (2002) argument that antiterrorism should be viewed as an international crime requiring an emergency response. The U.S. should view terrorism threat from the root causes of inception, to post-attack strategies. This view highlights a myriad of alternative, multicultural voices not heard during the GWOT (Gunaratna, 2004). An example of a specific justice model that loses under the GWOT and post-9/11 counterterrorism thriller ideology is the community-policing model. This approach was on the rise in the U.S. up until 9/11, but drastically reversed after (Howard, 2002). Community policing was severely damaged as a result of post-9/11 policies, resulting in a rift between community oriented policing practices versus aggressive security measures, the latter getting most of the political and financial backing (Brown, 2007). Community policing has since been shown to be particularly important in post-9/11 antiterrorism efforts as a way to identify extremism and build trust with the Muslim community (White, 2014).

Homeland defense as a cooperative international effort is also discounted in the narratives. As I demonstrate in the failures frame, efforts by characters or the USDOS to use diplomacy are dismissed or shown to fail. Retributive terror justice devalues diplomacy, known now to be a key component of effective antiterrorism efforts (White, 2014).

The justice that hero myth’s promote alienate the actualities of what the state is charged with doing to protect a nation (Barthes, 1957/2012). The practical realities of actual terrorism-related investigations— such as investigations are long-term and complex, threats are usually not

impending, determining guilt and innocence and the variations of complicity requires difficult analysis, legal processes can and should be followed, or there is no “magic bullet” of a superhuman who can be deployed to eliminate a suspect— is mostly incompatible with retributive terror justice. An effective response to extremism is complicated, long-term, difficult, involving a collaborative and flexible international and combined public-private-governmental effort. Authoritarian narratives evade these realities, simplify the situation, and mask them in a series of factoids and half-truths and distortions. Instead of a thoughtful complex discussion of these ideals, the texts’ framework reduces the situation to a victimized homeland, immediate war, an impotent democratic system, and simplistic superhero. These processes show how U.S. justice, law, and security itself is compromised for the sake of a specific type of retributive terror justice.

A related consequence is taking attention away from the national security actors who actually do the work of *antiterrorism* and related fields across the U.S. These are not just the special operations superheroes, but the many soldiers, police officers, security guards, first responders, analysts, doctors, lawyers, lawmakers, diplomats, academics, and others contributing to a collective response to the new global terrorism. Men using special operations expertise have a place in this collective response to terrorism— just not the one depicted in the thriller narrative.

Terrorism researchers from the security studies field and practically oriented towards understanding terrorists and terror acts (e.g., Clarke, 2004; White, 2002) identified an inherent danger in the new global terrorism. An appropriate level of attention to it is needed to execute an informed antiterrorism effort. But an extreme focus on super-terrorism (Van Veen, 2009) style threats and an exaggeration of insecurity creates a misunderstanding of the situation, which can be misused by some in positions of power to promote dangerous ideological agendas (e.g., Mack,

2004; Scarborough, 2005). A balanced approach is needed— not one based on emotional and unrealistic panic and paranoia— limiting the influence of the prevailing ideology.

## **B. Contributions of Dissertation**

I have isolated a post-9/11 fact-based and formulaic thriller in this study. These unique texts, given the counterterrorism realities of secrecy, ongoing debate, and lack of resolution during the historic period in question, offer a significant (and cathartic) discursive alternative to actual experience in, and a logical engagement of, a complex enterprise. I detailed the power of these fictional portrayals to reflect and shape beliefs, attitudes, policies, and— based on established theories— justice practices. They help produce a common sense about where, when, why, and how to do counterterrorism. The narratives offer a delineable space to routinely access an exciting subculture, and experience results. These texts were consumed by millions throughout the timeframe and are about foundational issues of U.S. democracy, including morality, rule of law, privacy, and national security— discourses positioned to influence the U.S. public's understanding and accepted purposes and practices of state security apparatuses.

The discourses also appear to represent a reshaping of masculinities— resolving conflict with, like the Cold War Soviets and Nazis of the past, evil terrorists lurking at our borders or already invading the homeland. The myths of American exceptionalism (Walt, 2011) and patriarchy (Caputi, 2004) were endangered. The preferred solution in this context is hyper-violent action. The superhero saves the day, suggesting this narrative offers a version of a revised modern heroic epic as a reaffirmation of a damaged and threatened masculine identity. These reinvigorated male fantasies fill a void the U.S. public is yearning to know more about. They are part of a regime of social institutions and popular culture producing “knowledge” about how the U.S. acts during a terror war (Jackson, 2011).

By deconstructing this system, my research has added to the literature in the following four ways: First, I expanded the analyses of post-9/11 fictions into addressing a distinct serialized thriller genre scarcely identified in scholarly literature, despite its high popularity. My comprehensive preferred reading of this narrative, which I delineated as functioning in a historic moment, contributes to the existing understanding of post-9/11 versions of justice. Second, I expanded the use of framing theory and framing analysis techniques to entertainment fiction media (limited to news media in the existing literature) to discover issue-oriented and problem framing in the subject texts. Third, I built on other works to demonstrate how these genre thrillers confuse and conflate fact and fiction so effectively that they appear to be a post-9/11 reality. By comparing and contrasting this fiction-as-fact of the current historic period to the last comparable moment (i.e., the *détente* Cold War), I developed a better understanding of changes in U.S. cultural meanings and identity— comparisons mostly ignored in existing works.

My third contribution relates to the fourth because at the core of the fact-as-fiction phenomenon is the mythicized special operations superhero. I believe my most valuable contribution is expanding on the American superhero fascination to show how this subject texts' hero— although not being a fantasy figure with supernatural powers— becomes a superhero through the special operations trope. His characteristics (e.g., superhuman skills, masculine perfection, extreme patriotism) and journey (e.g., sacrificial calling, martyrdom) reach superhero status. Thus, my work underscores the ongoing significance of the U.S. superhero and appropriation of myths in ideological messaging, updating an understanding of revised features and how they function to impact U.S. justice. I highlighted a prominent post-9/11 trope— one not emphasized in the current body of literature.

I have nominated the subjects texts to be *demythologized* (Fiske, 1987) as a result of my direct and critical analysis. By building on works helping to debunk myths and highlighting state interests served by having the ideological messages normalized in popular media (e.g., Altheide, 2005; Jackson, 2011; Van Veeren, 2008), my goal was to bring the narrative out of the realm of common sense. My contributions equate to a cautionary tale about cultural texts acting against democratic justice. The core danger of the U.S. superhero narrative is the threat it poses against the democratic ethos (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002), one that should be built on the core principles of liberty, humanity, peace, opportunity, freedom, democracy, innovation, and morality (e.g., Edwards, 2004). My dissertation helps protect these ideals and worldviews by exposing and describing a popular countervailing myth threatening them. While I am mindful ideology is constructed at many cultural locations (Pan & Kosicki, 1993), I am confident this discursive formation plays an influential role. My efforts to reveal and describe it offer another popular media location to look for warning signs and indicators of the condition of U.S culture.

### **C. Limitations of Dissertation**

The overarching limitation of this dissertation is I was unable to assess *audience response* (Gamson, 1987), which would involve directly investigating the influence of the ideological messaging on the readers' views and attitudes about related justice, law, and security issues. Examining the influence of the narratives on the worldviews of readers is important to further understand the ideological processes explained above. Studying audience response is useful because readers of popular media do not passively accept texts (Hall, 1980, 1997). Framing researchers have similarly emphasized the importance of audience response because the processes of frames are largely accomplished through audience action (e.g., Entman, 1993; Gitlin, 1980). I included this line of inquiry when first designing this study; however the size,

scope, length, and resources needed to achieve that goal along with the close textual reading caused me to remove this component in the proposal stage.

Another, related limitation is I was not able to examine the points of view of the thriller authors as framing agents. In considering how the authors may respond to my findings, I conclude thriller authors may reply in this way: “Of course this is a distortion because I am trying to depict something extreme and what the U.S. needs to do in exceptional circumstances like these.” Or, perhaps: “This is only about responding to terrorism, not about broader issues of the U.S. justice.” Framing agents represent popular voices with influence over the ideological interpretation of justice-related sociocultural enterprises (Burnett & Whyte, 2005; White, 2014). Ideally, this study would have sought a better understanding of how the thrillers authors are presented outside of the texts and implications related to the industry.

I was unable to completely examine the shifting nature of the narratives in my findings. My analysis became (organically) primarily *synchronic*—that is, focused on static oppositions and patterns in the framework and on simultaneous analytical relationships (Berger, 1998). An increased emphasis on a *diachronic* approach—focused on how narratives evolve over time and relate to historic change (Berger, 1998)—would enhance my analysis. Dominant media ideology gradually shifts (Oliver & Johnson, 2005), which I identified in my findings. In the post-9/11 U.S., the shifts in these topical areas (e.g., terrorism, responses to terrorism, impacts on justice) appear to correspond with presidential administrations. In what I consider the *post-post 9/11* timeframe, the Obama administration—rhetorically at least—had a modified approach, such as being against the U.S. 2003 Iraq invasion because it was not a legal war (Jackson, 2011), seeking to close the Guantanamo Bay facility because it was internationally contentious and viewed as a recruitment tool for extremists (Kappeler & Kappeler, 2004), and rejecting GWOT rhetoric as



dangerous because terrorism should not be viewed solely as a war (Wilson & Kamen, 2009). Kellner (2000) argues this played out in Hollywood: The social liberalism of Obama responded in popular movies to the right wing neo-conservatism of the Bush Administration. Now, the U.S. is in the first moments of a new presidency. My findings are limited because I was unable to focus on ideological formations as they shifted during this study's historic period.

#### **D. Developing Ideas for Ongoing Research**

By exposing and attempting to de-mythicizing the ideological messaging in these thriller narratives— and considering limitations and the changing historic moment— I have highlighted four topics for ongoing research: 1) The special operations hero trope; 2) the shifting but remaining prevalence of post-post-9/11 popular counterterrorism texts; 3) framing agents as experts; and 4) audience reception of the ideological framework.

##### **1. The Special Operations Superhero Trope**

The superhero is a crucial subject of study because it cuts across all media formats and packages an ideology in a distinct set of images. It is also a recurrent and shifting popular trope that signals the direction the U.S. culture and status of democratic justice (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). I conclude the most symbolically compelling theme of these narratives is the special operations trope found in the post-9/11 counterterrorism FASC hero. This masculinized symbol represents an ideal type of justice. As part of a distinct hyper-masculine subculture, special operations themes blur military, intelligence, and police power and employ what seems to be exceeding violent, isolated, and extralegal justice methods. These (re) emerging “all-American” and entirely male uniformed superheroes can become surrogates of contemporary justice. I believe such extreme “true-to-life” tropes are a sociocultural indicator: If you see superheroes like Bauer, Harvath, or Castillo gaining popularity, pay attention.

The image of the operator seems incredibly powerful and mystical in the U.S.: Consider the proliferation of special operations-style paramilitary tactics and weapons in mainstream policing (e.g., Kraska, 1999; McCulloch, 2001) and the mesmerizing “shooter” perspective in graphic special operations video games like *Call of Duty* and *Rainbow Six* (Gagnon, 2010). These exceptional men are celebrated in already iconic stories like the SEAL team in *Zero Dark Thirty* killing Bin Laden and depictions of the epic efforts of real U.S. Army Special Forces in *Sole Survivor* and *Blackhawk Down* (Boggs & Pollard, 2016). Images of these men are familiar: Their distinct helmet and goggles, clever gadgets, night vision, compact machine guns with silencers, black battle dress uniforms, and little helicopters supporting muscular white men attempting to blend in, often with grizzled beards. These visions seem to have intense cultural resonance, especially in the post-9/11 period. Correspondingly, comic superheroes have enjoyed a post-9/11 resurgence (Lovell, 2003)—like found in *Ironman*, *X-men*, and *Captain America*—and suggest an interrelated phenomenon of a renewed desire to engage in popular superhero worship.

Despite these seemingly prolific images, few studies focus on this version of the modern superhero. I would like to obtain a better awareness, understanding, and analysis of the trope and its intrigue. This dissertation led me to questions like “what does it say about U.S. identity?” Is the mystique about special operations a form of voyeurism? Why does it seem to appeal to so many? My future analysis will include an analysis of imagery in visual and written formats to increase an understanding of the impact of the special operations trope in justice-related arenas.

Some research like this has been initiated. Boggs and Pollard (2016) analyzed the depiction of SEAL sniper Chris Kyle, accredited with the most wartime (U.S. war in Iraq) sniper kills in U.S. history, in Hollywood’s *American Sniper* (2014). The researchers conclude this hero signified how the U.S., in the midst of an illegal war (Iraq) unrelated to terrorism, can go

anywhere and indiscriminately kill. The hero summarily executes humans depicted as foreign animals in what seems to be a shooting gallery— U.S. entitlement and reach portrayed through a singular, exceptional man (Boggs & Pollard, 2016). *American Sniper* was the highest grossing movie within a 5-year period. I hope to better understand such popularity and its implications.

## **2. The Shifting Post-Post-9/11 Era: *The case of Homeland***

While violence and intensity in the thrillers wane as they move from 9/11, they remain popular and continue to blur fact and fiction. Prevailing forms of political ideology develop through the contingent pairing of cultural meanings to social practices, which often transform in emerging contexts (Hall, 1997). As examined in my findings, there is a shift from war with individual Others to one more focused on an extremist ideology. Like the shift from the Cold War to an era of relative peace in the U.S. with no bloodshed (Sharrett, 1999) to after 9/11, there seems to be an emerging period corresponding with the end of the Bush Administration (around 2009). Nonetheless, these texts correspond to a precise historic period and continue to be consumed. Authors Thor, Flynn, and Griffin released thrillers during Obama's administration involving the same counterterrorism series superheroes (e.g., see <http://amazon.com/>). I plan to focus on this transformation by focusing on the ongoing ideological discourse about justice, law, and security, and comparing them to the political new media climate and current fiction.

Television show *Homeland* is a popular counterterrorism genre series text exemplifying a shifting post-post 9/11 narrative. I conducted an exploratory analysis of the show by watching the first four seasons (Gansa & Gordon, 2011), jotting notes, memoing, and comparing it to the preceding narratives. This show— produced by two individuals who wrote for *24* (i.e., Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa) (Paskin, 2012)— debuted in 2011 and features FASC hero Carrie Mathison who works as a CIA agent charged with a counterterrorism mission focused on Islamic

extremists and the Middle East. Mathison is presented (like Bauer, Harvath, Castillo, and Rapp) as having spectacular talents at fighting terrorism, and for sacrificing herself to protect the U.S. I found the show generally presents the continual threat posed by jihadists. Similar to the earlier thriller versions, *Homeland* conceives an overarching state of emergency and vulnerable nation—conditions known to rely on and perpetuate fear. Like I found in the homeland frame, the show constructs a political threat to the state as a personal one endangering individual lives and homes. *Homeland* also refers to facts from U.S. history, provides an insider-expert perspective, and perpetuates the ongoing global war on terror thematic with conflict as the problem's solution.

But some differences are apparent: The threat is not as imminent, the hero is a woman who does not use brawn and direct violence to solve problems, torture and illegal techniques are less acceptable, and plots are more long-term and complex. The creators seem to realize they cannot “get away” with *24*'s blatant violence and unlikely ticking-time-bomb premise. Consider what one of the show's producers, Mr. Gansa, told an interviewer:

‘[Being] in the world 10 years later, after Guantánamo, after Abu Ghraib, after two wars in various states of winding down, and the consequences of those wars were being understood. Carrie lives in a world where torture is no longer tolerated. And she lives in a world where everything doesn't happen in 24 hours.’ (Paskin, 2012, n.p.)

*Homeland* seems to accept how actual terrorism investigations and responses are long-term, complicated, and should at least attempt to follow due process and rule of law. The plotlines spend time developing investigations involving following money, analyzing satellite imagery, developing human intelligence sources, and awaiting evidence from legal processes. Mathison is almost fired when her supervisors catch her employing an illegal wiretap in the U.S. (Season 1). Unlike the bare-knuckled, gloves off, exigent circumstances of the subject thrillers where there is no time to spare, *Homeland*'s pace is slowed down. This thematic leaves room for reflection and alternate forms of antiterrorism. Investigative challenges are central to the plots,

wherein multiple agencies and governments are burdened with the rules FASC are expected to follow. In at least a few scenarios, humane interrogation techniques focused on rapport building— versus torture— are successfully used to obtain critical information from terrorism suspects (e.g., Season 2, Episode 5). Similarly, the U.S. security apparatus is portrayed as detached and impersonal. Methods are not “up-close and personal” and retributive. Instead, they are at a distance, like with targeted drone strikes and via global surveillance.

Characterizations of the origins of the terrorism threat (i.e., Othering processes) are also more nuanced in *Homeland*. There is uncertainty throughout as to if the second main character, Nick Brody (i.e., the U.S. Marine who was captured and held captive by al-Qaeda for 8 years), is supporting Islamic extremism or not. Brody also has a meaningful personal relationship with the main (Muslim) terrorist target, Abu Nazir, whom Brody comes to respect. The enemy and the plots they advance are not as explicit. Terrorists can be non-Muslim, and networks are far more overreaching to other countries and more complex categories of people. Sympathy is also developed for victims of counterterrorism actions, such as when a U.S. drone strike resulting in many civilian casualties (including 82 schoolchildren) is seen through the perspective of Arab family (Season 2)— a nonexistent perspective in the subject thrillers. Overall, unlike the invariable guilt of the Other in the counterterrorism thrillers, the guilt of the potential terrorist threat is not revealed and suspects are investigated over more reasonable expanses of time.

Another explicit difference in *Homeland*— versus the counterterrorism thrillers and *24*— is a woman is the protagonist hero and the show is from her narrative point of view. Mathison is portrayed as an alternate, stronger version of femininity versus the subordinate roles in the preceding thrillers. Although the plots are drawn out and conspiratorial, she uses all available tools to thwart the conspiracies. She is portrayed as brilliant, cunning, and moralistic in her

efforts. Mathison is so committed to her mission that, in one episode, she uses sex (i.e., her own body) to obtain information about a terror plot (Season 4). She is also placed in charge of the distant drone strikes on terrorist targets, versus overseeing violent acts or doing them herself.

Hero Mathison pays a sacrifice for being different. Unlike the super-perfected men from the subject texts, Mathison has several vulnerabilities and weaknesses (special operations superheroes have none of serious consequence) that play out in her personal life: She has bipolar disorder, leading her to even attempt suicide (Season 1). This creates confusion in her job— at one point she asks herself if she is imagining a terrorism plot (Season 2, Episode 2). Her family life is in disorder. She is also unmarried, at times promiscuous, and seems desperate for a partner in Brody. Throughout the first four seasons, Mathison relies on men to ultimately solve the terrorism problem (e.g., Brody and her CIA supervisor, Saul). Unlike men such as Rapp and Bauer, she is not the sole actor in this version of conflict resolution.

I think this amounts to implied reminders of her subordinate position in the masculine patriarchal gender order. She is explicitly successful, but it is at the expense of failings in other, patriarchal expectations. This reflects the cost of being different imposed by masculine ideals— “see what happens when a woman takes this on?” Thriller superheroes and Mathison make sacrifices and have unfulfilled desires (e.g., for family, for stability), the latter’s is far more consequential. Mathison is marginalized in the cultural context, versus marginalization of the superhero within his failed bureaucracies. She loses feminine values in this version of the patriarchal system (e.g., motherhood, being pretty, domestication) (Damean, 2006), thereby indirectly supporting them. *Homeland* is more subversive, as I also found in later thrillers and as played out in the GWOT, suggesting violence and unbridled masculinity became subtler.

A more in-depth analysis of *Homeland* (Letort, 2016) supports my cursory findings. This researcher reveals expansive conspiratorial and paranoid themes, such as how the terror threat can come from anywhere, there are global plots being developed constantly, and how an intricate and unpredictable web of terror is looming. There is also an increasing role of surveillance (e.g., countless screens and the omnipotence of a monolithic security state), versus rogue, clandestine operators on a frontier solving the homeland's problems. In *Homeland*, some of the suspected Islamic terrorists turn out to be innocent, acting to reverse "the prejudicial narrative that makes the Arab the bad guy" (Letort, 2016, p. 13). Mathison is also found to have a telling dichotomy: She is both an investigator with gifts of intuition and analysis, but simultaneously vulnerable because she is paranoid and delusional— that is, she is masculine while fragile (Letort, 2016).

Initial attention to the shifting post-post-9/11 themes of *Homeland* versus the post-9/11 counterterrorism thrillers introduces future, more diachronic, research I hope to complete. Some think *Homeland* is an antidote to what *24* got wrong and Bauer's misplaced violence and anger (e.g., Paskin, 2012). I want to further explore this idea and ask questions like: Is Mathison just a façade for a modified continuation of the patriarchal agenda found in the subject texts?

### **3. Counterterrorism Thriller Authors as "Insider-Experts" and Ideologues**

I also plan to pursue an ongoing analysis of counterterrorism thriller authors as framing agents (Gamson, 2001) outside of the texts. This effort will build off my findings of them being depicted as insiders and subject-matter authorities within the texts. The rise of such "experts" in the ideological processes of mainstream news media, starting in the 1970s and proliferating in the 1990s with the Internet, led to the normalization of opinionated journalism and ideological broadcasting by those agents (Barnhurst, 2005). Regarding the influence of hard-boiled detective fiction on aggressive forms of law and order policing, Friedman and Rosen-Zvi (2001)

warn the researcher to be alert when fiction authors appear to be offering instruction in their genre texts. I detailed above a similar finding about Tom Clancy, found to be a deeply entrenched participant of the national security cult, read by world leaders, and influential in President Reagan's military proliferation efforts (Hixson, 1993). Such framing agents can be viewed as ideologues helping to promote state-backed propaganda (Oliver & Johnson, 2005).

This is crucial since 9/11 in relation to terrorism-related justice frames, which in this study's context includes the sudden proliferation of informed sources (Jenkins, 2003)—pundits, entertainment producers, celebrities, journalists, politicians, ex-government officials, think-tank scholars, and public relations firms—claiming to be subject-matter experts in areas like terrorist groups and tactics, Islam, the Middle East, antiterrorism techniques, and related legal authorities. Some scholars (e.g., Altheide, 2005; Jackson, 2011) demonstrate how GWOT meanings amounted to a power grab by such political elites engaged in selecting, focusing on, and labeling certain frames to construct a dominant war ideology. The news media and politicians (i.e., framing agents) have an interest—be it to gain power, profit, or to promote an agenda—in misguiding the public into a state of unnecessary fear that helps support legislation and legal actions with negative sociocultural consequences (Glassner, 2004; Rothe & Muzzatti, 2004).

By likewise focusing on post-9/11 counterterrorism thriller authors-as-framing-agents, I will attempt to evaluate the industry behind the texts—here, part of an industry producing this genre “faction.” Faction, as previously discussed, can be understood as historical fiction with detailed research, an intermingling of real and imagined characters, and realistic plots linking the storyline (Knight, 2008). Yet a more critical view suggests faction's purpose is to postulate outcomes, predict current events, and help “educate” the reader while entertaining.



My findings demonstrate how the authors involved with this study— via their narration and superheroes— are depicted as experts through framing devices, such as with details of factualized tools and interpretations of Islam and its history. A preliminary analysis of external representations of authors, as well as the thriller industry, supports those findings and reinforces a need for continued research. I found the apparent construction of the authors as experts and insiders in a cursory review of author interviews on major media outlets (e.g., CNN Headline News), industry websites (e.g., <http://thrillerwriters.org/>), and the publishers and sellers of the fiction (e.g., *Amazon.com*, *Publishers Weekly*). I also found this construction explicitly in book reviews, on book covers, and in liner quotes. For example, popular author Dan Brown called Flynn’s *Executive Power* “a globe-trotting geopolitical thriller that sizzles with insider information, military muscle, and CIA secrets” (in Flynn, 2003, n.p.). *Publisher’s Weekly* claimed *The Hostage* was “Studded with convincing insider details [...Griffin] is probably the best man around for describing the military community” (in Griffin, 2006, n.p.).

I also found these claims on the authors’ “official” websites:

[Flynn] is lauded for his research and prescient warnings about the rise of Islamic Radical Fundamentalism and terrorism. Read by current and former presidents, foreign heads of state and intelligence professionals, [...Flynn’s] novels are taken so seriously one high ranking CIA official told his people, ‘I want you to read Flynn’s books and start thinking about how we can more effectively wage this war on terror.’ (<http://www.vinceflynn.com>)

[Thor] is a regular contributor to *The Glenn Beck Program* and has appeared on *CNN Headline News* as well as MSNBC, ABC, CBS, NBC, and PBS programs to discuss terrorism and [...he] served as a member of the Department of Homeland Security’s Analytic Red Cell Unit, is a fellow of the Alexandrian Defense Group, lectures to law enforcement organizations on over-the-horizon/future threats and has been the keynote speaker for the National Tactical Officers Association’s annual conference. Thor has spoken at [The Heritage Foundation] on the need for robust missile defense. He also sits on The International Free Press Society’s Board of Advisors. (<http://www.bradthor.com>)

The phenomenon of genre fiction authors being presented as viable experts and granted the power of framing agents— as claimed by the above website excerpts— and backed by a massive

industries, leads to many research questions: Who are contemporary “experts” in U.S. culture? Are genre fiction authors without academic credentials or professional experience considered national security experts? How prolific are such claims and how do readers interpret them?

The value of addressing these questions is so important because of the powerful industries that support the framing agents and popular culture’s increasing acceptance of those agents as informed sources (Jenkins, 2003). I also think the thriller authors reflect the cause of neoconservatives who, during the period in question, were complicit in the GWOT agenda (Altheide, 2005). This type of analysis would provide further insight and understanding of how ideology works at the intersection of fact and entertainment.

#### **4. Audience Reception**

My conclusions above suggest the audience will self-identify with counterterrorism thrillers and engage in subject positioning (Hall, 1997), which will influence their knowledge and worldview in lieu of experiential reality. This will guide certain beliefs and actions, such as how they vote, the programs they support, and the state authorities and actions they accept (Jackson, 2011). This is the ultimate power in the chain of dominant ideology. Yet, as I highlight in the limitations section, my study was unable to evaluate this conclusion. This limitation underscores what I consider my most significant opportunity for ongoing research. Researchers of post-9/11 terrorism narratives agree audience reception analysis is needed (e.g., Jackson, 2011, Sears, 2009). Many of the key studies I depended upon, such as Nikolaidis (2011), Hixson (1993), and Altheide (2005), drew conclusions about how the texts have real consequences, but did not incorporate audience research. This is understandable because it is time consuming, expensive, and difficult to arrive at the depth needed to assess individual

interpretations (Jackson, 2011). I plan to systematically examine these worldviews to help fill that void and evaluate my conclusions in relation to the interpretations of the thriller audience.

Another type of audience response involves those of actual counterterrorism practitioners and politicians with the powerful roles of publically discussing, influencing, and executing law, justice, and security in the post-9/11 terrorism context. At the highest political level, this relates to conclusions that President Reagan made policy decisions influenced by his consumption of violent popular Hollywood movies (Gibson, 1994). This brand of intertextuality has been found in studies of 24, where anecdotal evidence suggests U.S. FASC tested Bauer's "interrogation" techniques (e.g., Intelligence Science Board, 2006; Mayer, 2007). While it is unlikely I will be able to interview high-level officials, I believe there is value in examining how agents involved with investigating and adjudicating terrorism-related matters respond to the messaging.

With regard to my own audience reception, when I reflect on my own worldview in relation to my consumption of the narratives and in contrast my role as a practitioner involved with related issues of justice, law, and security, and working with U.S. agents more active in antiterrorism, a few observations come to mind. I have consumed these narratives and felt the cathartic effects of "experiencing" violent forms of justice. I also think superhero myths and mythicized versions of justice played a prominent role in my decisions about studying criminal justice, serving in the military, and pursuing a career in federal law enforcement. When I was deployed in 2002 for the U.S. Army for the GWOT, I imagined myself going to distant lands to exact vengeance on Muslim extremists. Yet, through education and in preparing for and conducting this study, I am now aware of the disconnection and view those narratives critically.

At the same time and during the years after 9/11, I heard soldiers executing the GWOT in Afghanistan routinely use the term "raghead" when describing the enemy. I have had

discussions with FBI agents assigned to counterterrorism express confusion about whether they are a law enforcement officer working on intelligence or an intelligence officer with policing powers. I have also seen, firsthand as an intelligence officer involved with training on pre-9/11 prisoner of war interrogation, a shift in U.S. Army interrogations: I witnessed approaches centered on building rapport, offering comfortable settings, and being respectful while adhering to legal limits, move towards “enhanced” techniques involving mental and physical deprivations that push those limits. More recently, I observed a senior-level manager of my own federal agency having an office bookshelf full of Flynn, Thor, and thrillers by similar authors lined-up next to legal and procedural manuals. As I sat in his office, I wondered if those stories had any impact on his decision-making about how our agency handles criminal investigations.

These anecdotes from my personal and professional experience mean little next to the implications of the type of ideological framing I found in the subject texts. As the U.S. begins a new historic episode under a Trump presidency, attention to these forms of ideology as a shifting phenomenon need even more attention. The U.S. continues down a path wherein fact and fiction appear to be increasingly diminished. The role of fiction— of media entertainment logic and mythic spectacle— is consequential. It contains the power to define sociocultural enterprises and create “truth.” The consumption of popular media, in all of its forms, invigorates the reader and reinforces certain political views and versions of national security. My analysis underscores how important it is for the academic community to constantly examine these stories: How Othering shifts in “America,” how the “homeland” is portrayed, whom “we” do war with, and what views are devalued within these mediated locations. And it seems most valuable to be constantly aware of how, when, and why the U.S. celebrates— or even consents to— a violent and mythicized single-action, all-American action hero as one of “our” representatives of justice.

## APPENDIX A

### DETAILS OF SELECTED THRILLERS AND NOVELS

#### Post-9/11 Counterterrorism Thrillers

*Author Vince Flynn.* These thrillers revolve around FASC hero Mitch Rapp, who works for the “Orion Team,” a covert counterterrorism unit of the CIA.

1. *Executive Power* (2003). *New York Times* and *USA Today* Bestseller. #7 bestseller in *Amazon* political fiction genre. Hero Rapp investigates a complex terror plot designed to create a Palestinian state. See also: <https://www.amazon.com/Executive-Power-Mitch-Rapp-Novel/dp/143918965X>
2. *Memorial Day* (2004). *New York Times* and *USA Today* Bestseller. #1 and #4 bestseller in *Amazon* political fiction genre and spy thriller genre, respectively. Hero Rapp and his team must stop a terrorist group’s efforts to bring a nuclear weapon to the U.S. See also: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-7434-5397-4>
3. *Consent to Kill* (2005). *New York Times*, *Publisher’s Weekly*, and *USA Today* Bestseller. #9 bestseller and # 3 bestseller in *Amazon* political fiction genre and spy thriller genre, respectively. Hero Rapp seeks the presidential consent to assassinate a suspected Saudi terrorist who is plotting terror attacks on U.S. interests. See also: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-7432-7036-6>
4. *Extreme Measures* (2008). *New York Times* and *USA Today* Bestseller. #6 and #11 bestseller in *Amazon* political fiction genre and spy thriller genre, respectively. Rapp uses torture to obtain information about a planned terror attack on Washington D.C. See also: <http://reg.publishersweekly.com/978-0-7432-7042-7>

*Author W.E.B. Griffin.* These thrillers revolve around FASC counterterrorism hero Charlie Castillo, who is an U.S. Army officer assigned to work as a federal “Presidential Agent” on high-profile counterterrorism cases.

1. *By Order of the President* (2004). *New York Times* and *USA Today* Bestseller. A terrorist group hijacks a plane in Angola for probable use in a terror plot against the U.S. and hero Castillo is assigned by the U.S. President to investigate. See also: <https://www.amazon.com/Order-President-Presidential-Agent-Novels/dp/0515139777>
2. *The Hostage* (2006). *New York Times* and *USA Today* Bestseller. A terrorist group kidnaps a U.S. diplomat’s wife that is linked to a terror plot involving Iraq and Castillo is assigned to investigate. See also: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/books/2013/06/21/the-hostage/2444877/>

3. *Black Ops* (2008). *New York Times* and *Publisher's Weekly* Bestseller. Hero Castillo investigates terrorists building a chemical weapons plant and assassination plots against U.S. agents. See also: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-399-15517-8>

*Author Brad Thor.* These thrillers revolve around FASC counterterrorism hero Scot Harvath, an agent assigned to the Office of Investigative Assistance in the USDHS.

1. *Blowback* (2005). *New York Times* and *USA Today* Bestseller. #10 bestseller and #12 bestseller in Amazon political fiction genre and spy thriller genre, respectively. A high-ranking Al-Qaeda operative is planning a massive terror attack on the U.S. and hero Harvath and his team must travel the world to find the secret weapon. See also: <https://www.amazon.com/Blowback-Thriller-Brad-Thor/dp/1451608284>
2. *Takedown* (2006). *New York Times* and *USA Today* Bestseller. #13 bestseller in Amazon political fiction genre. A plot to attack New York City is discovered when Harvath kidnaps a terror suspect and brings him to the U.S. He must work with an elite counterterrorism team to mitigate the attack. See also: <https://www.amazon.com/Takedown-Thriller-Harvath-Brad-Thor/dp/1451636156>
3. *The Last Patriot* (2008). *New York Times* and *Publisher's Weekly* Bestseller; #17 bestseller in Amazon political fiction genre. Hero Harvath investigates an “ancient mystery” about radical Islam and attempts to reveal the “truth” about Islamic terrorism. Harvath also tracks down a series of related high-profile assassinations by terrorists. See also: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-1-4165-4383-1>
4. *The Apostle* (2009). *New York Times*, *Publisher's Weekly*, and *USA Today* Bestseller. #20 bestseller for Amazon political fiction genre. Hero Harvath is assigned to rescue a U.S. citizen taken prisoner overseas held for ransom for the release of one of Osama bin Laden's lieutenants. Harvath reveals and must deal with a plot to create war in the Middle East. See also: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-1-4165-8657-9>

## APPENDIX B

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### National Identity - Meanings of Justice, Patriotism, and Morality

- How is rule of law and due process framed?
- How is U.S. patriotism constructed? What images and symbols are used?
- How and when are characters depicted as unpatriotic?
- How is morality framed?
- Is there moral erosion evident in the narratives? Explain.
- Is justice reached in the stories? How and to what end?
- Are FASC counterterrorism actions illegal, brutal, and/or vengeful and, if so, how are they justified?
- How are and how should terrorists be brought to justice?
- What are the differences between U.S. police and military powers used in counterterrorism?
- Are FASC heroes framed as law enforcement and/or military personnel?
- Do FASC counterterrorism characters follow common civilian law enforcement procedures, rules of engagement, or similar codes of conduct?
- How is U.S. nationalism framed? Are ideas like “moral righteousness,” “Manifest Destiny” and U.S. “exceptionalism” represented?
- What are the differences between morality and law?
- How is the U.S. framed politically and morally on the world stage?

#### The Attribution of Causes

- Who or what has caused the need for U.S. counterterrorism?
- How is evil versus good framed?
- Who are the victims and/or the “innocents”?
- What role does religion play in explaining the threat?
- What potential terrorism causes are omitted?
- What are the characteristics of the terrorists?
- How is fear conveyed? What visual and emotional cues are employed?
- What are the characteristics of “friendlies” that helped cause these terror threats?
- Are foils employed at all as causes of problems?
- How should the U.S. treat its enemies?
- Are there differences between military and criminal justice solutions for those who engage in acts of terrorism? Are there separations of powers?

#### New Masculinities

- What are the characteristics of the counterterrorism heroes in the narratives, to include ethnicity, race, gender, education level, background, education, experience, military service, and technical proficiency?

- How are female characters depicted in the narratives? Are women omitted from counterterrorism?
- What types of tools and techniques do the counterterrorism heroes employ in responding to terror threats in the narratives? How? To what result?
- Is counterterrorism framed as war? How? How is it justified?
- Do the levels and type of violent aggressive counterterrorism efforts correspond to the terror threat?
- What other forms of counterterrorism (e.g., defensive, proactive, community-based) are depicted or omitted in the narratives?
- What is the ideal type of FASC for the war on terror?
- How are U.S. presidents, or other extreme symbols of U.S. power, depicted?
- Who helps or harms the hero in the quest to defeat the threat in the narratives? How?

### Meanings of Safety, Security, and Surveillance

- What can be given up for safety and security?
- How imminent is the security threat and threat to safety?
- What human and civil rights can be given up for safety? Where is the balance between these rights and national security?
- Are due process and rule of law important?
- How is fear versus actual security threat conveyed?
- Who is responsible for security?
- What level of surveillance on U.S. citizens is depicted? Explain. How is it justified?
- How is war framed? When will it occur? Where?

### The Role of Secrecy

- Who has access to counterterrorism efforts in the counterterrorism narratives?
- What justifications are given for secrecy in the narratives? Why is secrecy necessary?
- What role does the U.S. public play in the narratives in relation to the counterterrorism efforts? Is the public made aware of counterterrorism efforts?

### The Blurring of Fact and Fiction

- What historic timeframes are depicted?
- How factual are the settings, plots, organizations (e.g., governmental entities), historical information, counterterrorism tools/weapons, and actions in the narratives?
- Do the text narrators directly address actual counterterrorism issues or other current counterterrorism-related debates? How?
- What factual references are made in the narratives?
- How are actual organizations, such as the FBI, CIA, and U.S. military, portrayed?
- What authority on counterterrorism issues do narrators discuss?
- What distinctions are made between fact and fantasy?
- How are the creators of the counterterrorism narratives framed in outside media sources, author websites, and book jackets/online summaries?



## APPENDIX C

### FINAL LIST OF ALPHABETIZED CODES WITH DEFINITIONS

<b><u>Code:</u></b>	<b><u>Definition:</u></b>
AttributionofCauses	Who or what caused terrorism or forced the U.S. to respond this way/root problem counterterrorism responds to
Binary	Incidence of apparent binary opposition, any form
CTTechniques	Techniques used for counterterrorism
CTTools	Tools and magic weapons used to execute counterterrorism
CivilRights	Reference to civil rights or possible violation of them
CodeofConduct	How FASC follow/not follow rules of engagement, codes of conduct, laws
Facts	Depictions of fact, like actual locations/events/entities
Fear	How fear of terror threat is depicted
Foil	Foiling of a character
Hero	Key definitions and actions of the counterterrorism hero
HumanRights	Reference to civil rights or possible violation of them
IconSymbol	Use of symbolic devices like settings and iconography
InterrogationTorture	Interrogation as possible torture, effectiveness as counterterror tool
InterrogationRendition	Interrogation as possible torture, effectiveness as counterterrorism tool and/or removal of human to other location for such interrogation
Intertextual	References to actual events, debates, etc. occurring during historic period of study
Justice	Notions of what justice is and means
MISC	Other comments or note– interesting but unclear where fits
Masculinities	Apparent references to hegemonic masculinities and subordinated femininities, patriarchal references
MilitaryversusPolicing	Defining counterterrorism as either military or policing action/issue. Framing as war versus criminal justice issue.
Monomyth	Related to hero journey, American superhero
Othering	How are those who caused the terror threat or problems are depicted and described
Patriotism	Related to meanings of patriotism or nationalism
Presidential	Role of the President as symbol
RoleofReligion	Role of Islam in Terrorism; role of Christianity or other religions or religious symbols
SafetyandSecurity	What safety and security means
Secrecy	The role of secrecy in counterterrorism operations
Surveillance	Role of surveillance, use in stories
Tickingtimebomb	Use of this type of myth
TerrorismMetaphor	Use of these types of metaphors
USExceptionalism	How the U.S. is exceptional / how U.S. is compared with other nations on world stage / respect of international laws

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## VITA

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### Education

PhD Candidate, Criminology, Law, and Justice, University of Illinois –Chicago,  
Expected doctorate to be awarded Spring 2017

- Dissertation: *Post-9/11 Counterterrorism Thriller Ideology: Framing Retributive Justice through Special Ops Superheroes*

MA, Public Administration and Security Management, Webster University, St. Louis,  
Missouri, Graduated March 1997

- Thesis: *An Evaluation of the Fayetteville, North Carolina Cumberland CrimeStoppers Program*

BS, Criminal Justice and Military Science (cum laude), Bowling Green State University,  
Bowling Green, Ohio, Graduated August 1994

### Academic Presentations

The Annual Conference of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), June  
2007, New York, New York

- Presentation: *Post-9/11 Agents of Social Control and Popular Novel Depictions*

### Employment Experience

Senior Special Agent, U.S. Department of Commerce, Chicago, Illinois, June 2003-  
Present

- Criminal investigations, duties included providing witness and grand jury testimony, and completing warrant affidavits and drafting federal charges

Intelligence Officer, United States Army, various locations and deployments, August  
1994-May 2003

- Earned rank of Captain; Duties included strategic intelligence analysis and writing articles for defense journals (specifics classified) and training enlisted soldiers in interrogation techniques and intelligence analysis

Special Agent, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Inspector  
General, Chicago, Illinois, June 1997-June 1998

- Criminal investigations, duties included providing witness and grand jury testimony, and completing warrant affidavits and drafting federal charges

### Professional Affiliations

Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association

## Employment Presentations and Training Events

Presentation for Addison-Clifton Global Trade Compliance Solutions consulting: *Trade Compliance Seminar*. Wisconsin, October 2007

Training Presentations at Singapore Customs as part of the U.S. Department of Justice, International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program: *US-Singapore Export Control and Counter-Proliferation Exchange Workshop*. Singapore, September 2010.

Training Presentation and Facilitator at the Beca trade association: *U.S. Export Control Reform and Enforcement Trends*. New Zealand, May 2016.

Presentation for the Global Business Club of Mid-Michigan and Michigan State University: *Export Controls and Compliance*. Michigan, March 2017.

## Employment Training Completed

*Military Intelligence Officer Basic Course*

U.S. Army, Fort Huachuca, Arizona, 1995

*Criminal Investigator Training Program*

Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, Georgia, 1997

*Auditing in Investigations*

Inspector General Auditor Training Institute, Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, Georgia, 1997

*Money Laundering Training*

Chicago High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas, Chicago, 1998

*Basic Gang Investigations Training*

Multijurisdictional Counterdrug Task Force, Illinois State Police, 1998

*U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Cross Designation Course*

DEA, Florida, 1998

*Inspector General Basic Training Program*

Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, Georgia, 1998

*Military Intelligence Officer Advanced Course*

U.S. Army, Fort Huachuca, Arizona, 1998

*Advanced Interviewing and Interrogation*

Reid Interview School, Chicago, 2005

*Proliferation: Players, Issues, and Technologies*

CIA University, Washington DC, 2007

*Advanced Missile Technology Proliferation Course*

U.S. Department of Energy, Utah, 2016