ABSTRACT

HERO AT WAR AND SURVIVOR AT HOME: THE EVOLVING IMAGE OF THE AMERICAN WAR HERO IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WAR FILMS

By

David Rehm

August 2015

Media and culture are interrelated, which shapes what is culturally relevant. War films reflect a culture's view on war as well as the viability of a culture's mythology of war. Grounded in the concepts of war myth and genre, this thesis takes the stance that the Iraq and Afghanistan War film genre transforms the image of the American warrior. Iraq and Afghanistan War films, specifically *The Hurt Locker, Green Zone, Lone Survivor,* and *American Sniper* illuminate the destructive reality of war and the humanness of the warrior hero. They reaffirm the warrior's heroism and sacrifice while also acknowledging war as damaging to the warriors' psyches, hearts, minds, and bodies.

HERO AT WAR AND SURVIVOR AT HOME: THE EVOLVING IMAGE OF THE AMERICAN WAR HERO IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WAR FILMS

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Communication Studies

California State University, Long Beach

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Communication Studies

Committte Members:

Sharon Downey, Ph.D. (Chair)
Amy Heyse, Ph.D.
Jennifer Asenas, Ph.D

College Designee:

Amy Bippus, Ph.D.

By David Rehm

B.A., 2013, California State University, Long Beach

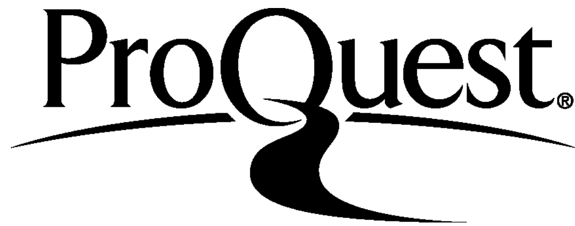
August 2015

ProQuest Number: 1597788

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS
The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed,
a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 1597788

Published by ProQuest LLC (2015). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.
This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Copyright 2015

David Rehm

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the family, mentors, and friends that guided me along the way to help me to survive this thesis project. Kristina, you are a saint for putting up with me, how you do it no one will ever know. Without you and the support you gave I am most certain I would not have been able to finish this. For that I am eternally grateful and will spend the rest of my life making it up to you. I would like to thank my mom and sister for the insurmountable and unconditional love you two have given through the years. Thank you Sister, for making me take the time to surf during this project, I do not think I would have kept my sanity had it not been for our "sibling surf sessions." Thank you Fetu for always reminding me that there is an end in sight and that the sounds of doves crying is an electric guitar. A special thank you to Seth, your friendship and mentorship have been such a positive influence.

Thank you to all my professors at Cal State Long Beach: Dr. Smith, Dr. Utley, Dr. Kreiser, Dr. Derme, Dawn Kelsey, and Dr. Sauceda. Your insight and wisdom are gifts that I can never repay. A special thanks to the committee members; Dr. Sharon Downey (Madam Chair) I truly do not know what I would have done without you. You have seen me at my best, as well as at my worst. You always asked the best questions that made me think in ways I never thought I could. To have had the opportunity to not only be your student, but to work on this project with you is an honor. Dr. Amy Heyse, your insight and understanding truly propelled me into and through graduate school, I

was fortunate enough to have you as a teacher, and advisor. Thank you for letting me bombard your office every week to vent about life and this project, your words and kindness will never be overlooked. Dr. Jennifer Asenas, thank you for allowing me to have you on my committee, your humor and knowledge are an inspiration to the person I wish I could be. It was your incredible mind that led to inspiration of the title of this thesis. You three amazing individuals remind me that there are in fact good people in the world, I am lucky enough to have three of those people on my committee. A big thank you to the wonderful women in the front office for their hard work to keep this department running, and always making me feel at home (Candace, Ann, and Wendy).

Thank you to my amazing peers and colleagues. Alix, you have always been a role model and an amazing source of support. You coined the hashtag term "thesisbuddythursday" which will always remind me of the time we spent staring at computer screens trying to get this done. Thank you, Barry, for the time you sacrificed to help keep me sane. We talked each other off many ledges, and then we broke one in front of Dr. Sauceda's class. A big thank you to Jamie for always believing in me. You always made me laugh, even when I did not want to. Your support and belief really mean a lot, and because of that I was able to find my inner Whitney and power though. From fruity pebbles burbs to the uncontrolable laughter you have brought, thank you (mew 4 lyfe). A special thanks to my entire cohort, Class of 2015, it was a privilege and honor to have shared this journey with you all. I will always remember our battle cry, "I did it for the cohort."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

CHAPTER

1. IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WAR FILMS AND THE PLIGHT OF RETURNING VETERANS.. 1

    Film and Society 6
    American Mythology of War and the Warrior Hero 10

2. MYTH, MYTHIC EVOLUTION, AND THE AMERICAN MYTHOLOGY OF WAR.. 16

    The Significance of Myths 16
    The Evolution of a Myth 19
    American Mythology of War 25
    Burke's Pentad Analysis 28
    Mythic Evolution in War Films 30
    Rationale for Texts 50

3. ACTS OF WAR 52

    The Hurt Locker 52
    Green Zone 67
    Lone Survivor 82
    American Sniper 94

4. MYTHIC EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN WARRIOR IMAGE 110

    Pentad Comparison of the Films 111
    Social Implications 118
    Theoretical Implications 119
    Evolution in the American Mythology of War and Image of the Warrior. 120
    Dialectical Disorientation 122
    Future Research.. 123

WORKS CITED.. 125

CHAPTER 1

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WAR FILMS AND THE PLIGHT OF RETURNING VETERANS

The events of 9/11 eventually sparked U.S. military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan or what President George W. Bush would call the "War on Terrorism." Lasting for over a decade—notwithstanding the recent rise of Islamic State (ISIS) terrorism in Iraq and Syria which has reignited conflict in the region and raised the prospects of more U.S. "boots on the ground"—President Barack Obama officially ended U.S. combat presence in these two countries in 2013.

Reflecting back on the decision to go to war, Americans may have been satisfied with the U.S. incursion into Afghanistan to root out terrorists responsible for the 9/11 attacks after Osama bin Laden was located and killed by the Navy's elite SEALs. Regarding the war in Iraq, however, "about half (52%) of Americans said the U.S. had mostly failed to achieve its goals in Iraq" (Drake). News coverage, such as *Time Magazine*'s July 21, 2003 issue entitled "Untruth and Consequences," generally reflected those feelings of failure, and after no Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) were discovered anywhere in Iraq, the justification for the war fell apart. More recent polls according to Drake of the Pew Research Center indicate that most Americans continue to view the Afghanistan and Iraq wars as mistakes and losses.

Nowhere is this more strongly felt than with U.S. combat casualties. Since the U.S. involvement in 2001 in Afghanistan and 2003 in Iraq, "about 2.5 million members of the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard and related Reserve and National Guard units have been deployed in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars" (Adams). Of those, Goodman of *The Huffington Post* stated that as of 2014, 4,486 American soldiers died in Iraq and almost 2,000 in Afghanistan. War's toll on returning veterans has proven to be profoundly disturbing. In the March 5, 2007 issue of *Newsweek*, the cover read "Failing Our Wounded." It chronicled an epidemic of veterans returning home suffering from both physical and psychological damage. Advancements in the technologies of war have drastically reduced death rates evidenced in prior wars, but simultaneously have significantly increased the number of veterans returning home with combat-induced injuries, or what Achter calls "unruly bodies." The wounds endured by military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan are actually greater in number than those from earlier wars. Although more troops are surviving, that survival comes at the cost of damaged minds, hearts, and bodies.

Roughly 33% of "veterans say they know a fellow service member who has attempted or committed suicide, and more than 1 million suffer from relationship problems and experience outbursts of anger which are two key indicators of post-traumatic stress" (Chandrasekaran). It was estimated that "about 22 veterans committed suicide each day in 2010" (Freking). According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 18% of troops are likely to have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after they return. In addition to PTSD, veterans are also at risk for other mental health problems, such as alcoholism, addiction, and depression. Estimates of depression in

returning troops range from 3% to 25%, a mental illness that can have a dramatic, continuing impact on a veteran's life. According to Adams, as of 2012, "the VA's health system had seen more than 270,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans for potential PTSD, and the agency's disability system had awarded PTSD benefits to more than 150,000 of them."

In addition to mental trauma, returning veterans suffer from horrific physical injuries. An estimated one million veterans have been injured from the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan (Reno). This staggering and "grim" milestone has gotten so bad that the VA has stopped sharing this information with the public (Reno). The physical injuries suffered are what the U.S. Department of Defense call "common combat injuries" which include second and third degree burns, broken bones, shrapnel wounds, brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, nerve damage, paralysis, loss of sight and hearing, and amputations. These types of physical injuries have been seen over the historical course of all wars, yet what is so alarming is that many of the injured veterans as stated earlier are surviving these horrific injuries.

The Washington Post reported that more than half of the 2.6 million Americans dispatched to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are suffering from a physical or mental health issue stemming from their service; moreover, these veterans feel disconnected from civilian life and do not have faith in the government to meet the needs of this generation of veterans (Chandrasekaren). Nicholas Johnson, a former specialist in the Army National Guard, spent his time in Iraq covering up blast holes created by improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Pouring concrete and using jackhammers with body armor, Johnson essentially broke his back. He now avoids certain freeways where

he lives because it reminds him of Baghdad's insurgent-riddled airport road. He panics at the sight of trash on the street because that is how Iraqi guerrillas covered IEDs. Johnson stated, "I left the war zone, but the war zone never left me." Similarly, Natasha Young was a tough and proud Marine who went to war twice with a close-knit team of Marines who disabled IEDs. Six of the Marines in her team died in bomb blasts, and after returning home her commander took his own life. Staff Sergeant Young tried to keep it together, but was eventually diagnosed with PTSD and was medically discharged from the Marines.

Many U.S. war veterans, then, have returned to the United States with life changing illnesses. Once home, they often feel abandoned and further injured by lack of support or understanding from citizens, the government, and Veterans Affairs. As Chandrasekaran notes, "almost seven in 10 [veterans] feel that the average American routinely misunderstands their experience, and slightly more than four in 10 believe the expressions of appreciation showered upon veterans are just saying what people want to hear. More than 1.4 million vets feel disconnected from civilian life."

In addition, according a national survey, the Iraq War veterans are actually perceived as valuable assets and welcomed by the general public; however, "the same survey also indicates that many Americans hold stereotypes about the very people they say they admire and value" (Bryant). This confusion is "contributing to the belief that this generation is having problems transitioning back to civilian employment" (Bryant). Despite the national support for returning veterans, the stereotypes of wars past are alive and well. Soldiers are even awarded medals for political purposes; soldiers such as Sergeant Tommy Rieman, a Marine who found himself in a firefight and used his own

body to shield his gunner. Rieman was awarded the Silver Star, and "in nominating Rieman as an American hero, President Bush employed the figure of metonymy, reducing his argument for American virtues into seven sentences about Tommy Rieman's willingness to sacrifice his body for his country" (Achter 51).

The high rates of both physically and psychologically injured veterans returning home has also flooded the VA systems and many veterans are left without proper care, or are forced to wait for months at a time to even be seen. The *Washington Post* reported that a VA clinic in Phoenix, Arizona was "hiding the amount of time that veterans had to wait for medical appointments. According to the report, 1,700 veterans were kept on such waiting lists and veterans waited an average of 115 days for an initial primary care appointment" (Zezima). This was occurring in VA hospitals all over the country. For example, in Fort Collins, Colorado, clerks were instructed to fabricate records so it looked like doctors were seeing more patients than they actually were. In Columbia, South Carolina the gastroenterology program had 3,800 backlogged appointments. And in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at least six veterans died after an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease due to human error within the VA clinic. Though our veterans are welcomed home, they are injured, used for political gain, or largely ignored by the very government system that is supposed to help them reintegrate and recover.

The magnitude of the injuries suffered by Iraq and Afghanistan returning veterans is one qualitative difference from previous U.S. wars. The nature of the wars themselves also distinguishes soldiers' experiences in both battle fronts. For example, in Iraq and Afghanistan, there were no front lines to mark enemy territory or assess the wars' movement or progress. IEDs were the main enemy weapon, troops wore bulky protective

gear most of the time, and "wounds that do not fit the military's classic definition became the norm" (Chandrasekaran). The enemy behind the IED also differed from other wars. In Iraq, the United States fought against "no nation, no organized army, no visible or unifying leader, but a collection of shadowy terrorist bands" (Medved). Consequently, the battle experiences of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars by U.S. soldiers were vastly different from warriors of both the Vietnam and WWII eras (Dorell). U.S. soldiers, then, endured unusual experiences in the Mideast wars and unique challenges upon repatriation.

The lack of attention paid to U.S. soldiers' combat experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, and their aftermaths, extends to symbolic mass-mediated representations of the wars and warriors, particularly films. To date, only four commercially or critically successful films feature the combat experiences of U.S. military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan Wars: *The Hurt Locker*, *Green Zone*, *Lone Survivor*, and *American Sniper*.

The dearth of Iraq and Afghanistan War films is both surprising and theoretically intriguing for three reasons: because of the relationship between mass media/film and society; because war films comprise the most popular and enduring of film genres; and because of the sanctity accorded to American mythology of war and the heroic image of the warrior.

Film and Society

Mass media shares a symbiotic relationship with society informationally and rhetorically. According to Dakroury, media and culture are interconnected, thus shaping and framing what is culturally relevant. She also claims that "media screens have become essential elements in public and private daily-life practices in societies" (1).

While mass media reports on and reflects societal conditions, it also employs a reciprocal function by setting agendas that can influence a culture's value orientations and the direction of its collective thoughts and norms (McCombs). More specifically, Rushing and Frentz argue that films are "public dreams" that symbolically reflect a culture's reality, conflicts, socio-political problems, and moral quandaries. Films project the "collective images, fantasies, and cultural values" of their societal origin, and "often dramatize symptoms of certain social needs of an era" (Rushing and Frentz, "Rhetoric" 64-65). What this means is that the media form can capture complex and often unarticulated cultural anxieties through storytelling that simultaneously confronts a culture's existing value conflicts and provides a symbolic resolution to those conflicts. National anxieties about war and warriors occupy a prominent position in the cultural imagination.

Films have always been captivating. By their very narrative nature, film draws its audience into a larger-than-life world where sight and sound are choreographed for maximum dramatic impact (Firth). Fashioning a new sense of reality, movies escape the constraints of time and generate a sense of immediacy and realism (Firth). More than just entertainment, film creates a culture's fantasy world visually, establishing a "post-modern consciousness" that allows narrative fantasies and value orientations to be applied to a culture's most compelling contemporary issues, including war and warriors. War films narrate America's history, ideals, and justifications for war, and in a more universal sense, storytelling is the primary way in which heritage, customs, and histories are passed along from generation to generation. Humans who fight each other for survival is a

ubiquitous feature of most cultures' history and lore, and frames a culture's understanding of itself. In our contemporary times, war films act as our storyteller.

War Film Genre

Genre is simply defined as a category of artistic composition, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter. Specifically a film genre "will be distinct by a film's motifs and styles within the presentation such as comedy, western, detective, science fiction, and war films" (Whillock 245). Although the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars ground daily news coverage through field reporting, television documentaries, newspapers, magazines, and the internet, symbolic film representations of war and warriors in the United States are so pervasive that they comprise one of the most enduring and popular of film genres (Langman and Borg). According to Beck, the subject of war is the most exciting theme of our popular culture discourses. War and soldiers' experiences in war have been chronicled in films over and over. War-themed films date back to 1915 with *The Battle Cry for Peace*. Thousands of movies since then have narrated American armed conflicts. For example, *Fury,* which was released in the fall of 2014, is a recent war film situated in WWII; seventy years after the war's end, WWII films continue to be a Hollywood staple. From comic book heroes such as Captain America to the "Duke" John Wayne, Hollywood also repeatedly reproduces heroic images of the American warrior.

The war film genre is a predictable story, comprised of recurring conventions and icons (Whillock). Kaminsky identifies five characteristics of the typical war film: the mission, the justification for involvement in the war, the development of the symbiotic relationships within the unit to survive, the stark and open landscape, and the elevation of

characters above the madness and violence of the war. He also states that "these films must have clearly defined constants so that the traditions and forms within them can be clearly seen and not diluted into abstractions" (8). Typical of war films are action-oriented plots featuring soldiers' experiences, POW escapes, war vessels and instruments of war (submarines, aircraft, machine guns), battles, espionage, personal heroism, brutalities, the trenches/frontline experiences, and almost always some type of masculine bonding. Themes portrayed in war films include combat, survival, sacrifice, the pointlessness of fighting, the effects of war on society, and chronicles of both morality and inhumanity.

The functions of war films vary in American culture. Slotkin contends that war films contribute to U.S. consciousness regarding war, both past and present. They serve as remembrances, and celebrate warrior sacrifice for the larger goal of defense of nation. War films also reinforce justifications for war as well as the moral or immoral principles attending the use and abuse of controlled violence. For example, during the Vietnam War era, films often portrayed the psychological damage American soldiers endured and inflicted. The *Deer Hunter, Rambo, First Blood,* and *Full Metal Jacket* depict characters largely unfit to operate in normal society because of the horrors they faced in war. Importantly, by dramatizing social needs and exigencies facing the entire country, war films give tangible structure to social phenomena (Rushing and Frentz, "Rhetoric"), and model ways to reorient society's value structures (Rushing and Frentz, "Frankenstein"). One of those dominant value structures is contained in American mythology of war.

American Mythology of War and the Warrior Hero

All cultures that have triumphed in war throughout history possess an image of the hero as a warrior (Campbell, *Myths*). American culture is no exception for the warrior and the cowboy personify our society's depiction of the hero. The mythology of war and the actions of the warrior comprise a "monomyth" that advances particular values a culture should embrace to establish and preserve its national identity (Slotkin, "Dreams"). Slotkin contends that our culture's method of reproducing cultural identity and fulfilling our destiny is by "regeneration through violence"—i.e., war ("Myth" 5). Our culture's dominant mythic narrative makes war and victory in war central to our image of ourselves. Not surprisingly, then, war films are a main vehicle to reinforce American identity, and shifts in the values accorded to war and warriors as heroes can threaten or affirm that self-image.

The most pervasive war covered in film is World War II. Often called the good or "just" war, WWII films fit the traditional myth of war and the warrior as they fulfill the goal of cultural regeneration through violence. In contrast, Vietnam War films subverted traditional war images, reproduced the "dark" or vicious side of war, and generated cultural anxieties that have taken decades to mend. For the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, it is unclear how films fit into American myth consciousness because so few have been produced that have resonated with the American public to be called commercial or critical successes. Perhaps the absence of Iraq and Afghanistan War films should not be surprising because, despite U.S. involvement for more than a decade, these wars for all practical purposes continue, while symbolic treatments of specific wars tend to be retrospectives. In addition, the dilemma of returning veterans from these wars

cannot escape notice. Damaged soldiers may not play well in war films for audiences that expect routine reaffirmation of traditional war mythology in the film genre. Whatever the case, given that the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars are entering their second decade, film representations merit critical attention.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the only four popular, critically-acclaimed Iraq and Afghanistan War films, to identify how both war and warriors are depicted, and what these symbolic representations imply about war, warriors, and our cultural war myth that is sustained by "regeneration through violence."

The Hurt Locker is an intense portrayal of a group of elite soldiers who have one of the most dangerous jobs in the military—disarming bombs. When a new member, Sergeant James, takes over command of a skilled bomb team, he shocks his two subordinates, Sanborn and Eldridge, with his recklessness. James's ego plunges them into deadly bouts of urban combat. As Baghdad bursts into chaos, Sanborn and Eldridge struggle to uphold military command hierarchy while trying to survive their maverick new leader. The audience learns that James is dangerous to his men and a risk-taker who cannot live without war.

Green Zone tells the story of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Chief Warrant Officer Roy Miller and his men are charged with finding weapons of mass destruction to validate justification for America's military intervention. A CIA operative Brown tells Miller that there are no weapons and the justification is merely a ruse for the United States to take over Iraq and install a puppet leader who will favor American interests. *Wall Street Journal* reporter Lawrie Dayne, however, slips information to Miller about an Iraqi informant, code-named Magellan, who can assist Miller to discover

the truth about the existence of WMDs. Miller indeed finds no evidence of WMDs and in the process loses faith in the U.S. government for its conspiracy. The film ends when Miller, contrary to his military oath, turns his information over to reporter Dayne so the explosive truth can be exposed.

Lone Survivor follows a four-man SEAL team sent into the mountains of Afghanistan to capture or kill a high ranking Taliban leader. They are discovered and betrayed by villagers after entering the country and are forced to fight an unsuccessful battle against a multitude of Taliban troops. One of the four SEALs manages to contact base to enlist air support. However, after one of the helicopters is shot down, there is no chance for any speedy rescue of the team. After three of the four are killed, Marcus Luttrell is saved by a local Afghanistan man and brought to his village to be protected. Although Taliban troops eventually find him in the village and fighting recommences, Luttrell is saved when American rescue teams finally reach the scene of battle. This film is based on the real life failure of Operation Red Wings which occurred in 2005.

American Sniper is from the memoir of the deadliest American sniper in military history. A native Texan who learned to shoot on childhood hunting trips with his father, Chris Kyle was a rodeo champion prior to joining the Navy. After 9/11, he was thrust into the front lines of the War on Terror, and soon discovered his "purpose" as a sniper. Nicknamed "The Legend" by his SEAL brothers, from 1999 to 2009, Navy SEAL, Kyle documented the most sniper kills in United States military history. The Pentagon officially confirmed more than 150 of Kyle's kills. Iraqi insurgents feared Kyle so much they named him Al-Shaitan (the devil) and placed a bounty on his head. Kyle earned a legendary status among his fellow SEALS, Marines, and U.S. Army soldiers, who he

protected with lethal accuracy from rooftops and covert positions. In Fallujah, he recorded a 2,100-yard kill shot as he faced heavy fire to rescue a group of Marines trapped on the street. Kyle's savior complex leads him to become the legend, but it also leads him to his demise.

These films enact the warrior's excruciating experience of war, and then follow him home in its aftermath. Their plight after returning home mirrors the real-life problems plaguing military veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan in our contemporary society. Reflecting cultural problems, these films are commentaries on war and appear to highlight the vulnerabilities of humans coping with the crucibles of war. This thesis argues that these Iraq and Afghanistan War films chronicle the transformation of soldiers from highly trained proficient warriors to irreparably changed and damaged war survivors. They are heroes at war, but survivors at home. Like war veterans in real life, we want to honor them but it almost seems that we do not know why. These films depict warriors as heroes who nevertheless have been broken by war. As such, the films rhetorically challenge the traditional mythic image of the warrior hero by highlighting the internal psychic turmoil wrought by the experience of war and the human vulnerabilities of those engaged in it. These soldiers are highly trained and endowed with an intrinsic heroic status at the beginning of each film, but by the end, they end up damaged by their experience of the Iraq and Afghanistan War, physically or psychologically. Ultimately, these films chronicle the transformation of warrior heroes into vulnerable humans whose experiences in war create damaged hearts, minds, and bodies. In other words, at a more abstract level, war damages everyone.

While each narrative paints a different appearance of war, all four films are intertwined. The real problems that soldiers and returning veterans face are reflected in these films. *Green Zone* is related to the alleged existence of WMDs that justified American involvement in Iraq. The warrior ends up acting outside of military structures and protocols because of his distrust of and abandonment by the U.S. government and the CIA. *The Hurt Locker* is linked to the deaths of troops from roadside bombs. The warrior's overzealous enactment of his mission jeopardizes his teammates and destroys his ability to reintegrate into his family or society upon his return. This soldier's psyche mimics other returning veterans who cannot reintegrate back into society. *Lone Survivor* tells the story of a highly elite special ops group who were unable to complete their mission. The ranking sergeant's decision to let the shepherds live, rather than killing them to protect the SEAL's unknown presence, follows command orders but determines the team's tragic fate as well as the guilt of the survivor. The only SEAL to return home suffers traumatic physical and psychological war injuries. *American Sniper* highlights the damage and reality of war on the warrior's mind. The warrior becomes so elite that in order for his service to be meaningful he has to complete his mission against an equally powerful enemy. His obsession with his mission causes him to damage the relationship he has with his family and reality, reflecting the social trend of returning veterans suffering from mental trauma and disconnected from civilian life.

The forthcoming film analyses are informed by the evolving theoretical contexts of war and myth. This thesis thus proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 provides a theory-driven discussion of myth, including its definition, function, characteristics, and evolution. It also identifies American mythology of war, paying particular attention to

how this myth has retained permanence and stability yet has undergone transformations from its traditional origins to various iterations from WWII to the present. The chapter provides the methodology that will be used as the basis for the analysis of the four films. Consistent with previous research on myth and war, this thesis applies Kenneth Burke's pentad criticism to illuminate the drama and motives of Iraq and Afghanistan War films.

Chapter 3 applies pentad analysis to each of the four films to identify the motive of each film as it pertains to war and warriors' actions. Finally, Chapter 4 addresses the theoretical as well as social implications of the analysis, with attention to the evolution of the American mythology of war and the continuing problem of war and the treatment of returning veterans.

CHAPTER 2

MYTH, MYTHIC EVOLUTION, AND THE AMERICAN MYTHOLOGY OF WAR

This chapter identifies the methodological and theoretical perspectives grounding the forthcoming analysis of the image of the American warrior in Iraq and Afghanistan War films. It begins by describing the universal importance of myths to cultures, the purposes myths serve to a society, and how myths evolve to retain their significance and viability for a society. Then the chapter focuses on a myth central to U.S. history and culture: the American mythology of war and its image of the warrior as a hero. After identifying the myth's characteristics, this chapter addresses various transformations of the myth as it has been symbolically presented in popular war films from World War II through the Gulf War and up to the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This discussion is important because these shifts establish a context for the exigencies confronting American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan War films, and help explain the films' narrative emphasis on warriors' damage from experiences on the battlefield. The chapter ends with a summary of Kenneth Burke's pentad analysis as an appropriate method to analyze Iraqi and Afghan combat films.

The Significance of Myths

Joseph Campbell contends that humans would not be able to find fulfillment in life without myths ("Historical"). A myth is a powerful story that defines the worldview

of human cultures and connects humans to a larger cosmos (Slotkin, "Dreams"). This worldview reflects an ideology that prescribes the way a people should live their lives, advances particular values, beliefs, and customs, and acts as a charter for social order. Slotkin states that "myths are primarily archetypal, consigning human consciousness to the universal realm, to the extent that there are universalities in the human condition and our consciousness" ("Dreams and Genocide" 38, 39). Mythic stories are passed from generation to generation in a society to retain their value for current as well as future communities (Campbell and Moyer). The truth value of a myth is also premised on faith rather than factual evidence from science or history thus myths potentially can provide insights into the unknown or even unknowable (Campbell, "Historical"),.

Jean-François Lyotard claims that the most profound and powerful stories circulating in a culture are "grand narratives." Such stories integrate many unrelated events to create an understandable history, legitimize organized control, and emphasize dominant ideologies (xxiii-xxiv). These stories communicate important messages to both individuals and the culture at large because they give structure and meaning to people's lives, and help formulate and sustain a culture's identity (Asenas).

Any myth is a narrative that takes place in mythic time and place, includes a hero and a villain, and uses archetypal symbolism to convey its story. Importantly, myths are moral tales that require the hero to experience and overcome dialectical tension between two important values in order for the myth to exercise its power and provide a guide for people's behavior. For example, the Frankenstein myth is a dystopian tale about humans' fear that technology will outsmart and control them. The *Terminator* film series takes place in a modern Los Angeles and one 49 years in the future. Computers eventually

connect with one another and instigate a nuclear war decimating the world and killing off most of humanity. The series features Sarah Connor and her son as the heroes who must fend off the Terminator sent from the future back to the past to kill Sarah and thus prevent her son from being born and later heading the rebellion against the Skynet computers in control. Technology and humanity are the values that face off against one another through symbolism of wreckage, computer grids, and android robots. Humanity eventually defeats technology to resolve the tension between the two dialectical values of humanity and technology. Thus, both a return to nature and the force of the feminine restore human control over the technological instruments originally made by humans.

Myths have multiple purposes or functions for societies. They allow people to feel safe and secure. For example, if Christians are coping with extreme life circumstances, they will most likely turn to a biblical story of perseverance to reassure themselves that their struggle is not in vain. Since they believe this mythic narrative, these individuals are comforted. In addition, myths tie individuals to communities by uniting people collectively through rituals be they church services, weddings, or military rites (Campbell, *Myths*).

Myths can protect and enforce standards as well. Rituals involving birth, death, and transitioning into adulthood, for example, complement important events in human life (Cassier). Active partaking in such rituals affirms the bonds between individual, group, and culture, thus placing the individual "in" the group as opposed to "out" of the group. People on the outside risk any bond with their culture. Myths and their rituals, then, are important to a community's social order and sense of identity.

A myth's rhetorical power stems largely from the values it conveys in its story. Those values are dialectically related because they are simultaneously interdependent and opposed to one other in a narrative, thus requiring a protagonist hero to make a difficult moral choice between those values. Rasmussen and Downey describe the war myth's values as *militarism* and *moralism*, requiring a soldier to be a proficient killer and a humane agent, or a moral fighter who balances the inherent tension between killing and the ethics of killing ("Dialectical Disorientation in Vietnam"). The American Dream is another myth which illustrates the effort to balance two connected but opposed values of materialism and moralism. Walter Fisher's essay on the American Dream lays out how tension can be managed through these key American ideals. He states that the myth exhibits materialism through the pursuit of self-interest, yet morally does not deny the same interest for someone else. Thus, Americans are allowed to pursue prosperity and a better life (materialism) but not at another's expense (moralism); if others are harmed by one's striving to get to the top, then this constitutes a subversion or violation of the principles of the American Dream's values of tolerance, charity, compassion and the honor of integrity and worth of every individual (Fisher). Threats to the integrity of the myth and its values also may trigger mythic change or evolution.

The Evolution of a Myth

Frentz and Rushing's original formulation of the "social values model" was designed to illustrate how a myth's central values can shift in order to retain its utility for a culture. Since that time, other scholars have extended their theory to explain how dominant cultural myths are challenged, changed, or undergo evolution. The first way a myth evolves is through the alteration of the central dialectical values underlying the

myth. Frentz and Rushing lay out this process of transformation in the social values model's five dimensions.

> First, societal values exist in dialectical opposition. Second, symbolic conflict [i.e., film] is the dominant form for value change. Third, this symbolic conflict may assume the pattern of either *dialectical transformation,* involving an inversion of power between dominant value systems, or *dialectical synthesis,* demanding a conceptual integration between existing value systems. Fourth, each pattern requires specific psychological conditions within the changed agents; dialectical transformation requires only knowledge of the value systems in question, while dialectical synthesis necessitates both knowledge of the existing value systems and an internal capacity to integrate them into a unified whole. Finally, since there is greater identification by an audience in a change process that is cooperative and integrative, a more intensified sense of involvement is found in the pattern of dialectical synthesis than in dialectical transformation. (231)

Rushing noted in her examination of the American Western myth three additional ways in which myths evolve through value change. *Dialectal pseudo-synthesis* occurs when paradoxical elements are brought together seamlessly by glossing over their inherently contradictory nature ("Rhetoric of the American" 26). In a *dialectical reaffirmation,* both aspects of the paradox are strengthened and the tension is reinstated ("Rhetoric of the American" 21). *Dialectical emphasis* favors one element over the other ("Rhetoric of the American" 22). In addition, Rasmussen and Downey revealed yet

another pattern of change, *dialectical disorientation*. This is defined as "a distinct pattern of change emerging from conflict between two antithetical but complementary life worlds and resulting in a paradoxical acceptance of the uncertainty and ambiguity of the human condition"; in other words, both values are rejected ("Dialectical Disorientation in Agnes" 68). It possesses a "disjunctive nature which features ambiguity and uncertainty and the concomitant need to accept resolution through embracing disquieting uncertainty" ("Dialectical Disorientation in Agnes" 69).

When a myth is able to manage dialectical tensions between its values, the myth reaffirms the social order (Asenas). If the myth's values are not balanced, then the viability of the myth and its values comes into question. To remain salient, myths have to evolve with their culture's experiences and exigencies; otherwise these exigencies potentially threaten the myth's stability and its cultural significance. As national exigencies emerge, the dialectical tension in a myth's values is tipped. For example, Rushing and Frentz's analysis of the film *Rocky* illustrates how social values can adapt to and revive a dying myth. The events surrounding President Nixon and the Watergate scandal undermined cultural faith in the American Dream since the dream is symbolically represented by an elected president, what Tulis proclaims is "the rhetorical presidency"("The Rhetorical" 7). Materialism prevailed over moralism when Nixon (the materialist) defeated McGovern (the moralist) but "the first Presidential resignation in history dealt perhaps the severest blow yet experienced to those values for most Americans" (Frentz and Rushing 232). In the Oscar-winning film *Rocky*, however, Rocky Balboa embodied both materialism and moralism in a cooperative dialectical synthesis of the myth's existing value systems. Through this synthesis, Rocky's story of triumph again

reaffirmed the American Dream through moral actions that made him a winner despite being the "underdog." The synthesis evidenced in this film, say Frentz and Rushing, reflected the same potential pattern of President Jimmy Carter when he was elected to office in 1976.

A second way myths evolve is through accommodating shifts in a society's consciousness or adaptations corresponding to a society's natural evolution in response to changing cultural conditions. Myths transform rhetorically in relation to social consciences since history is the unfolding of human conscience toward unity and away from fragmentation (Rushing, "Mythic Evolution"). Frentz suggests that the notion of a rhetorical narration demonstrates how a series of events can move social conscience closer to or away from the purpose of cultural unity. For example, the conclusion of the Civil War left the Confederate South in shambles. The context of defeat led to transformations of rhetorical myths to help the Confederacy cope with losing the war (Heyse). Given their position as a defeated people, it was natural for ex-Confederates to respond with mythic rhetoric: "Out of any conflict, the losers create more myths than the winners. It is hardly a surprise. After all, winners have little to explain to themselves. They won" (Heyse; Davis). Myths tie individuals to that unity in the form of culture and community. Therefore, a rhetorical narration can function as a symbiotic set of discourses that map the movement of social consciences to or away from the goal of unity (Frentz). In this way, myths are vital to people's lives.

Myths resonate in a culture by drawing upon "memory and imagination; that it results from a collective effort over a considerable period of time; that it represents an oversimplification of events, persons, and relationships; that it is more emotional than

logical in its substance; and that it combines both reality and fiction. In other words, it is the product of considerable abstracting on the part of many people" (Braden 68). According to Rushing ("Mythic Evolution"), myths have varying levels of structure, but largely deep structure (the archetypal) and surface structure (the cultural).

For instance, the American Frontier myth places emphasis on its scene. The tough conditions of the untamed range of the Old West call for a specific hero, a "rugged individualist." This is an "American adaptation" of the hero archetype (Rushing, "Mythic Evolution" 271). The surface structure is the cultural expression of the myth. For example, the Old West (scene) is the unknown dangerous beyond found in the hero archetype. This hero conquers the land as well as its inhabitants on horseback with firepower to expand his country. The image of the Old West's cowboy was America's version of the archetypal hero, a throwback to the tough warrior who rides into town to cleanse the settlement of corruption. This myth defines "evil" symbolically as the wilderness itself, as well as Native American Indians and outlaws who populate the scene of the frontier (Rushing, "Mythic Evolution"). The deep structure of the myth is the "essential function of the heroic myth in the development of the individual's ego-consciousness—his awareness—in a manner that will equip him for the arduous task with which life confronts him" (Henderson 112). The deep structure follows the archetypal pattern of the hero.

Western films of the 1950s showcased this myth and its dialectical tension of the values of community versus individualism. During the 1960s, western films emphasized the value of individualism; by the 1980s, film representations depicted both values as

unhealthy (Rushing, “Rhetoric of the American”), thus signaling the decline of the Frontier Myth’s cultural appeal.

The way this myth has survived is through a disjunction of its elements. The frontier myth is a grand narrative that is based on Americans’ conquest of the Western scene. However, because of surface structures to the myth of the Old West, the scene became finite and eventually disappeared, so the myth could no longer be reaffirmed (Rushing, “Mythic Evolution”). As the frontier slowly faded so did its hero, riding off into the sunset for the last time. The ego- centered, individualistic American cowboy reemerged in the city with films such as *Urban Cowboy* featuring “city cowboys riding mechanical bulls riding off into the sunset in their trucks rather than horses” (Asenas 17). The transformation of the myth reiterated the tension of individualism versus community, but in a hollow way that allowed only a pseudo-synthesis of the values, not a genuine synthesis required to retain the power of the myth. As Asenas stated, it was “ultimately subversive because it suggests ‘individualism is achieved through conformity’” thus extinguishing any tension between the myth’s dialectical values and issuing a significant threat to the myth’s preservation (Asenas 18).

The threat to the Frontier myth illustrates how narratives must evolve to reflect cultural conditions and retain cultural significance. In this case, a third way myths evolve is when a “disjunction” occurs between a culture’s reality and the core elements of the myth’s deep structure. With no more scene to enact the myth’s purpose, this element’s disappearance undermined the whole Frontier myth in dramatic fashion. Rushing explains that when an element of a myth changes structurally, it creates a disjunction that must be mended or else the myth will die (“Mythic Evolution”). This involves adapting

the old into the new rhetorical context of an era. Where the frontier of the Wild West no longer exists, a new frontier needed to take its place in order to retain the conquest intrinsic to exploration and settlement by the American hero archetype. She argues that "outer space" has become the new frontier of the American Western myth. Films such as the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* franchises, and *2010: The Year We Make Contact* continue to preserve the values of the old myth. Han Solo, for example, is a space cowboy. The emergence and popularization of sci-fi films as newer versions of post-1950s western films illustrate this transformational shift.

The American Dream and Frontier myths faced cultural destruction from emerging exigencies of shifting eras. Mythic evolution in response to those cultural exigencies symbolized through popular films and television series helped remediate the myths in ways that allowed for their perseverance and salience for future generations. A similar process of transformation has occurred with the enduring American mythology of war.

American Mythology of War

War myths are rooted in a universal belief that in order for life to regenerate, death must first occur (Campbell, *Myths*). Humans killing each other for whatever reason is a story as old as time. Campbell identifies two critical works that established narratives of war—the *Iliad* and the biblical *Old Testament* (*Myths*). Epic tales of mighty Greek heroes such as Achilles, Hercules, and Odysseus shaped the myth of war as a chess match between the gods. However, the bible paints a different story. The Hebrew god of the Old Testament does not pit his army of mortals against another god in a wager. This monotheist faith asserts that God chooses the side of righteousness, and those chosen

people must fight against subhuman enemies. Thus, war is a holistic ritual and, in combat, the warrior faces his own enemy who “is a monster;… in killing him one is protecting the only truly valuable order of human life on earth, which is that, of course, of one's own people” (Campbell *Myths* 177).

Slotkin states that myths connect history with ideology, with the system of values and beliefs by which a society lives, and through which it interprets the world (*Gunfighter*). He also contends that we must understand the role violence occupies at the center of American ideology. The mainstream culture rationalizes and justifies violence as a necessary and positive aspect of American life (Slotkin *Gunfighter*). At the very core of American ideology is its violent separation from England. The Revolutionary War gave birth to the United States, and through war America has developed and strengthened its identity. Slotkin’s phrase “regeneration through violence” asserts that America is a violent nation dependent on war to reaffirm its image of itself. Taylor and Hardman claim that “because the dominant paradigm needs violence to sustain it, our modern western cultures have created and perpetuated narratives that glorify war, warriors, and the leaders who make war” (5). Since mass media serves as a purveyor of cultural ideology, it is important to look at the development of movies as a form of cultural mythmaking (Slotkin, *Gunfighter*).

War narratives have flourished in the film industry since the inception of the medium, and the actions of warriors occupy a prominent position in those dramas. The warrior is associated with heroism and, in this sense, mirrors the same image propagated by the U.S. military culture. Those devoted to the enactment of war have their own precious and exclusive culture about war not available to ordinary members of society

(Beck). Thus, as Rasmussen and Downey note, war in film is traditionally conceived "as a sacred, purifying, culturally regenerative quest for a victory against a sinister foe" ("Dialectical Disorientation in Vietnam" 178). The central tension found in the war myth originates from the dialectical values of militarism and moralism internalized in its warriors. Militarism refers to

> the skill required of men as soldiers. The perspective is impersonal: order, efficiency, unity of purpose, and domination by a central authority are essential for survival. Affirming power and control, the stance advocates subordination of self to group norms. The military trains men in the technical skills of war, making them, in effect, instruments of combat. (180)

Left alone, militarism carries the potential for excess or indiscriminate killing in order to achieve victory. This destructive impulse, therefore, is dialectically enjoined with moralism, the value-endowed counterweight in a checks and balances system. Warriors who reaffirm the traditional myth must be both effective killers and humane soldiers simultaneously because "moralism's portrayal of people as humane choice makers becomes the foundation for sanity and integrity in war" (Rasmussen and Downey, "Dialectical Disorientation in Vietnam" 180). This dialectical tension is a persistent undercurrent in war narratives and is vulnerable to becoming unbalanced since it relies on warriors' acceptance of those values even in the chaos of battle.

In film depictions from WWII to the present, the tension between the myth's values has undergone continuous transformations, sometimes elevating one of the values over the other, or reaffirming the worth of both values, or rejecting both values in the

interests of advancing a perspective about the uselessness of war itself. The trajectory of the war myth's evolution, I argue, leads eventually to an uncomfortable focus on the internal psyches of warriors in Iraq and Afghanistan War films.

Burke's Pentad Analysis

Most scholars who analyze myths and the war myth apply the method of pentad criticism to make sense of the films and to compare films of different wars to one another. This thesis follows the same method in an effort to provide methodological continuity and, comparatively, illuminate the distinct features and functioning of Iraq and Afghanistan War films. It is important to address the method of analysis here because scholars use Burke's pentad terminology to chronicle changes in war narratives during specific eras and wars.

According to Burke, the purpose of pentad analysis is to discover an author's [speaker's or film's or rhetor's] motive. When people craft messages to interpret a situation, he says, they will emphasize or stress certain terms or sets of terms that will reveal their underlying philosophical orientation and motivation (*Grammar* xxii-xxiii). In other words, rhetorical patterns provide the clues to discern what a rhetor wants her/his audience to accept about a given situation and the means through which identification between rhetor and audience can occur. Burke found that "motive can be examined in terms of the root terms of the pentad" (Burke, *Grammar* xv-xxii). Consequently, "Burke introduced his pentad as a way to uncover human conduct and motives" (Turnage 142).

The pentad is composed of five terms: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose, all of which help make sense of how speakers would like their audiences to view the world because humans interpret "the world as a social drama," and "these five terms are ever-

present" (Turnage 142). Thus, the study of "dramatism posits that people perceive each moment, situation, and conflict through the lens of a theatrical drama" (Burke, *Grammar* 60-61). The pentad serves as a guide to answer the question, "What is involved when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" (Burke, *Grammar* xv). Burke laid out these five terms as a generating principle to investigate motive. He states, "you must have some word that names the act (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the scene (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (agent) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (agency), and the purpose" (*Grammar* xv). Burke later explained that through the examination of the terms "certain formal interrelationships prevail among these terms, by reason of their role as attributes of a common ground or substance" (*Grammar* xix). Hence, one or two terms may overtake the others to become dominant in the argument, each of which possesses a philosophical orientation. For example, if an argument is dominated by *scene,* it will reflect a materialist perspective that reduces action to motion, and people are constrained and dominated by the scene and lack free will (Turnage).

Pentad analysis involves identifying and characterizing the five pentadic terms, analyzing the relationships among the terms (where one or two terms may overtake the others to become dominant in the argument); and providing a meaningful explanation of the consequences of using a specific philosophical orientation to frame discourse (Burke, *Grammar* xv-xvi). Miller argues that "orientations develop from past experiences and lead to future expectations. It is not difficult to extend future expectations to future choices'' (229). The pentad allows a critic to map a film's situation, dominant term or

ratio, and motive. Specifically for the war film, the pentad method provides the means to document the evolution of the war film genre as well as the different situations giving rise to each war's film depictions. Moreover, how the relationship between the dialectical tension of militarism and moralism is managed by an agent is enabled through the application of pentad analysis.

Mythic Evolution in War Films

World War II Films

In most myths "a hero (agent) accomplishes a series of tasks (acts), using some means of aid (agency), in a place and time (scene), generally for the benefit of the culture (purpose)" (Rushing and Frentz, "Mythic Evolution" 270). The agent often is accompanied by guides or comrades (co-agents) to assist with the completion of the task, and they face an enemy (counter-agent) as an obstacle along the way. The structure of the American war myth presents the potential hero as a savior defending her/his people against enemies. The WWII narratives follow this structure closely and, as a result, have become one of the most popular and retold narratives of all war films. The WWII version the war film genre is what Rasmussen and Downey call the traditional image of war, which is dominated by purpose and act. Campaigns and battles serve as acts of war, and the scene is a mystifying but surmountable territory. In this narrative, the hero is able to balance militarism and moralism within the confines of war; they are fierce yet bound by their moral code or military code of conduct. The nature of the enemy as powerful, evil at heart, and subhuman justifies the need to eliminate the threat. Weapons and tools, including the atomic bomb late in the war, serve as the warrior's agencies, and the

purpose aligned with the traditional myth of war is to protect nation and preserve American ideals and security (Rasmussen and Downey, "Back" 10).

Typical WWII movies such as *The Flying Tigers* and *The Longest Day* reflect principles of the traditional myth of war because they portray the act of war as a justified call to arms. The agents of war were most often depicted as a common, moral man with the heart of a lion. Willing to fight for his country under the right leadership, these agents were effective killers. The scene is dangerous and confusing, with ground troops storming beaches and battlefields painted in the blood of their comrades and enemies. Naval troops manning big artillery guns as agencies helped their fellow airmen in dogfights in the sky. The purpose of war's engagement was victory over Nazi Germany and Japan.

The emerging dominant term is purpose, or a ratio of purpose-act, in which a warrior's actions are shaped by the goal of victory. The philosophies associated with purpose-act are mysticism and realism, where a transcendent, spiritual purpose guides agents' choices in war, especially if they are called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice to save their nation. To protect and preserve one's own people, the purpose of war, falls into the traditional war myth and asserts that regeneration through violence is a just cause for the betterment of a righteous nation.

Korean War Films

Coming off the heels of WWII was the Korean War. This was also an important moment in history because this is when America entered into the period known as the Cold War. The main participants in the Cold War of 1945-90 were the United States and the Soviet Union. It is called the Cold War because during the entire period neither of the

principal combatants actually confronted the other on the battlefield. Instead, they engaged in various types of "'cold,' non-lethal disputes, including cultural conflict. The Cold War was, in part, a massive propaganda war—fought both at home and abroad" (Pickowicz). One film that captures the constraints of the Korean War is *Pork Chop Hill*. The anti-Communist McCarthy era evoked propaganda that demonized those who differed from McCarthy's views about American values and ideals. *Pork Chop Hill* recalls one of the key battles in the Korean War. While negotiators are in Panmunjom drafting a way to bring the war to an end, Lt. Joe Clemons is given orders to attack and retake Pork Cop Hill. The soldiers know that the negotiations are on-going and no one wants to die when they think it will all be over soon. The hill has no strategic military value. Under the impression that the battle has been won, battalion headquarters orders men to withdraw when in fact they are in desperate need of supplies and reinforcements. As the Chinese prepare a counterattack and broadcast propaganda over loudspeakers, the men prepare for what might be their final battle.

Although not many films of the Korean War were produced, they are similar to WWII films in many ways. First, they depict epic acts of battles and valor, displaying the agent as heroic and just. Second, they paint a very similar picture of the scene, a dangerous and challenging terrain that the agent can overcome with the right means agencies. Last, they draw on same purpose for war to preserve a way of life threatened by enemy ideology communism. The dominant term remains purpose, and motive is reiterated through the higher order principle of mysticism, or accepting that the nation is greater than the individual warrior.

Vietnam War Films

Depictions of the Vietnam War contrasted significantly from the traditional mythology of war. They essentially questioned the myth itself and the purpose for war. Rasmussen and Downey observed disparate transformational shifts in films addressing the Vietnam War. Slotkin predicted that the United States would evolve through war, and understand ourselves better through war ("Dreams and Genocide"). That crucible came during the Vietnam War era and its aftermath when the U.S. lost the war and failed to honor its warriors. Films such as *The Deer Hunter, Platoon,* and *Full Metal Jacket* portray war as destructive and morally ambiguous, leading to uncertain actions which create "dialectical disorientation" about the war myth's values and thus constituting a subversion of both values (Rasmussen and Downey, "Dialectical"). They also state that this disorientation destroys faith in the purpose of war and the moral integrity of the warrior ("Dialectical Disorientation in Vietnam" 177). In this version, acts of war shift from "just" to "barbaric" and the scene from surmountable to unknown, dangerous, and hellish. The agencies of war are reflected in the powerful weaponry used to cause arbitrary and catastrophic destruction. The agent is depicted as unequipped to cope with war, which transformed the purpose of war from defense of country to sheer survival.

Full Metal Jacket exemplifies the violence and turmoil that soldiers experienced both in war and in training. The film takes its audience through boot camp as the opening scene displays new recruits standing at attention as Gunnery Sergeant Hartman proceeds to "drill" them. Sgt. Hartman degrades many of the new recruits, giving them nicknames equated to stereotypes and threatening them with violence. One recruit, Private Leonard, whom Hartman renames Gomer Pyle, is continuously ridiculed, physically assaulted, and constantly forced to make up for his "shortcomings."

In a routine matching drill Pyle places his rifle on his right shoulder as Hartman gives a left shoulder command. Hartman proceeds over to Pyle and after he verbally assaults him he openhandedly strikes Pyle's face as he says,

Hartman: What side was that Private Pyle?

Pyle: Sir, right side, Sir.

Hartman: Are you sure?

Pyle: Sir, Yes, Sir!

Hartman strikes Pyle's face again, knocking his hat off.

Hartman: What side is that Pyle!?

Pyle: Sir, left side, Sir!

Hartman: Don't fuck with me again Pyle.

The next scene shows the squad in marching formation as Pyle follows behind with his thumb in his mouth and pants around his ankles. Pyle eventually turns it around, however, but it comes at a steep cost. The scene of boot camp proves too much for Pyle and the night after graduation Pyle executes Sergeant Hartman and then himself.

The film finally transitions to the war in the jungle scene of Vietnam where the chaos of the battle scene causes soldiers to abandon moralism altogether and use excessive militarism as a means to survive. The killing of innocent villagers and conflicts between squad members create a picture of barbaric savagery. The acts of violence in the film are precedent -setting in their presentation of the scene of war, and therefore the dominant pentad term in this subversive image of the war myth is scene. It incorporates the brutality of agency, with sniper rifles and heavy artillery, and breeds immorality in its agents, which is psychically paralyzing to warriors. The purpose

transforms from savior of nations to survival at any cost (Rasmussen and Downey, "Back"). Without a governing higher moral purpose, warriors are unable to balance the tension of moralism and militarism in the context of war, and since the perceived purpose is simply to survive, war itself becomes the enemy (Rasumussen and Downey, "Back"). The counter-agents are presented as hordes of crazed killers that continue to surface, regardless of how many already have been shot down. The motive of these films is based in determinism, where the natural forces of the scene in which the warrior finds himself cause his actions.

This version of the Vietnam War shattered the traditional war myth and the image of warriors as heroes; indeed, Vietnam warriors were perceived without moral fiber. In turn, this mythic subversion created havoc with Americans' image of and faith in their own identity. Thus, a series of other Vietnam War films began appearing on the silver screen, and seemed to function to try to rehabilitate the war myth and restore integrity to the American warrior. These patterns follow Heyse's observation that myths can appear in incomplete forms.

"Back-to-Nam" films. Efforts to repair the American war myth began with a series of films in the 1980s when U.S. soldiers "returned" to Vietnam to achieve purpose through a "surrogate victory." The war "eroded both the structure and the values" of the traditional war myth (Downey and Rasmussen, "Back"). Back-to-Nam films focused on act, the sole mission of finding and rescuing American POWs left behind in the jungle scene of Vietnam. Similar to how the Confederate South generated new myths to cope with its loss, America took parallel action by calling upon agents, Vietnam's veteran warriors, to return to the very scene of defeat and use their military prowess, which was

often their god-like superiority, for a righteous purpose. These films proved to be significant because they helped mend the damaged war myth by presenting a version of it that "united symbols from other viable cultural archetypes in an apparent reinstatement of the war myth," and restored morality to warriors (Downey and Rasmussen, "Back" 4).

Rhetorical forgetting, or collective amnesia as Benedict Anderson calls it, allows any collective to deny or feel better about its past, especially contentious or morally ambiguous parts. At the same time, forgetting the unpleasant details of a collective's past allows rhetors, in this case filmmakers, to fill in memories with even more favorable impressions (Hasin and Carlson). This altered public memory, in other words, consisted of what Downey and Rasmussen called a "pseudo-myth" that could function as a mythic symbol of life and a resuscitation of the fallen warrior to renew our faith in war.

A popular film that epitomizes this notion is *Rambo Part II*. Agent John Rambo, a former Green Beret, is released from prison and called back into service by his former commander, co-agent Colonel Samuel Troutman, to participate in a top-secret operation to bring back POWs still held in Vietnamese prison camps. Rambo's mission is limited to taking pictures of the POWs and where they are being held. However, Rambo discovers POWs who are still alive and wants to get them out. He is teamed with female co-agent Vietnamese freedom fighter Co Bao. Rambo embarks on his own new mission, to rescue the POWs, who are being held by counter-agents Vietnamese Captain Vinh and his Russian comrade, Lieutenant Colonel Padovsky. Rambo starts killing every single enemy soldier while still focusing on his purpose to rescue the POWs. American officials involved in the mission include U.S. government representative, Marshall Murdock, who was ordered to make sure no POWs are found and leaves Rambo to die

when Rambo locates them. Murdock emerges as an evil bureaucrat and the enemy of the film.

The dominant ratio of agent-purpose emerges through the relentless pursuit of the warrior to free POWs. He must have knowledge of the enemy and terrain, he must be efficient and humane at the same time, and he must be willing to fight to the bitter end. The reason why purpose emerges as dominant is because of the subverted myth produced by the first version of Vietnam War films. Rambo doesn't care about his own survival; instead he has returned to the scene of America's defeat to conquer it and bring back the prized jewels (his lost brothers). Rambo is a warrior unlike the warriors of the previous Vietnam War films. Here in this pseudo-myth, he transcends the normal boundaries of an ordinary man and becomes a superhero, regaining honor where it was once lost. Rambo restores the moral worth of the American warrior, but because he was a superhero, he also lacked the dialectical tension indigenous to the warrior, so the film accomplished some mythic repair but it was a mere Band-Aid on a gaping wound.

Fighter pilot films. The repair of the American War myth took a different track in the mid- and late-1980s in the form of fighter pilot movies. In narratives about aviators who flew during the Vietnam War, the films depict an immensely different experience for Vietnam's fliers compared to their American ground troop counterparts. The sky warrior agents of Vietnam in films such as *Hanoi Hilton*, *Bat 21*, and *Flight of the Intruder* were seen as the antithesis of the Vietnam ground warrior's experiences. As would-be but fallen heroes, the "grunts'" quest for honor in a failed war was not to be realized (Downey, "Top"). But the aviator was portrayed as

> a background figure, either the visage of metal streaking over the jungle to intercede on behalf of trapped combatants, leaving vapor trails and napalm fireballs in its wake; or as nameless, faceless POWs awaiting liberation by the superhero soldiers' return trip to Vietnam to recover some semblance of victory. (4-5)

The routine missions told through the warrior pilot, illuminated a different element of the Vietnam War. An interesting component of the fighter pilot films is the agency that Downey outlined as "gut-instinct" ("Top" 22). The Vietnam jungle remains as the scene and the purpose is presented as "survival with honor" which "allowed them to emerge as warrior heroes" (Downey, "Top" 33). The dominate ratio surfaces as purpose-agent, a reflection of the pilot's integrity and professionalism in the military that functioned as a higher order principle to sustain the pilot's heroism and make him useable as a leader in the future.

The aviator symbolically attempts to repair the American war myth as the redeemer from above. These heroes are shown successfully completing the archetypal hero's quest. That journey is made possible by positioning the warrior in the context of Vietnam, but removing him from the moral uncertainty of the scene (Downey, "Top"). Even though fighter pilot films never achieved the same level of popularity or critical acclaim as the grunt soldier films, these films ultimately could not fully reinstate the traditional American war myth, but they did offer audiences a glimpse of the largely "hidden" resources of warriors of Vietnam.

Vietnam Veteran films. The lasting effects of Vietnam still linger to this day because of the damage of Vietnam to a core American myth. Vietnam War films began

to reflect social needs to preserve the viability of the American war myth, so they tended to focus on putting the shattered pieces of faith back together by rehabilitating the honorable image of the warrior.

The "Vietnam Syndrome" describes the "illness" that the Vietnam War had on American culture and its returning warriors. The lingering effects have been mediated in films not only during the time of war but the post-Vietnam War films as well. Through their analysis of the Vietnam veteran, Rasmussen, Asenas, and Downey assert that a group of films, including *Born on the Fourth of July* and *Jacob's Ladder* reflected efforts to mend the sickness of the American warrior simultaneously with healing his wounds and reintegrating the Vietnam Veteran back into the culture. Often the recovery of the veterans took shape through confession, mortification, and martyrdom (Owen).

The cinematic representation of the re-integration of Vietnam War veterans places emphasis on the agent. In the film *Jacob's Ladder,* a Vietnam veteran, who now works for the New York postal service, is trying to act to keep his tattered life from unraveling. His days are increasingly being overrun by flashbacks (agency) of his dead son, his first marriage, and his time in Vietnam. His new co-agent wife attempts to help him keep a grasp on reality, but his delusions progressively grow more and more intoxicating. Jacob realizes that he actually never made it home from war, and was murdered by his platoon. Only through his post-death hallucinations (scene) of his family is he able to find peace (purpose).

Other films depict returning veterans as avengers (Rasmussen, Asenas, and Downey). *Rambo, First Blood* presents agent John Rambo as a bewildered wandering war veteran. As he is hitchhiking from city to city hoping to see friends from the war, a

sheriff tries to make him leave. Rambo refuses and is arrested for vagrancy. While in custody, a deputy takes enjoyment in harassing him. Rambo then escapes (act), relies on his fighting skills (agencies), and heads into the woods (scene) as the local authorities (counter-agents) try to find and arrest him in the wilderness. Things eventually get out of hand so authorities contact Rambo's old commander, Colonel Trautman (co-agent), to intervene, and Rambo surrenders to his old commander, ultimately showing that the veteran will not and cannot attack his own people. To right the wrongs that were done to him in Vietnam (purpose), Rambo avenges the injustice by stripping the villainous authority figures of their power to judge and condemn.

In another film that features the Vietnam veteran returning home, *Dead Presidents* exemplifies the invisibility and lack of recognition of the Vietnam veteran. The film chronicles the life of agent Anthony Curtis from his teenage years to his experiences during the Vietnam War. Once he returns home to the Bronx (scene) Curtis struggles to support himself and his family (purpose). He eventually turns to a life of crime (act) with his Vietnam War brothers (co-agents) as they rob armored trucks, using the skills they learned in the war (agency). What emerges from *Dead Presidents* is the agent's psychological trauma. At the end of the film after Curtis' brothers at arms are all dead, he is the only one left and must pay for their collective sins. Standing in the courtroom, a judge gives him a sentence of 15 years to life. Curtis' attorney states that he is a decorated war veteran. The judge cuts him off and states that he was also a Marine and served in WWII, a "real war," thus giving no leniency or agency to Curtis' existence as a veteran. The film concludes with Curtis reacting in a violent manner in the courtroom, throwing chairs and yelling obscenities, implying that his trauma continues.

These veteran films of the 1980s and 1990s offer contrasting images of the veteran's return home after the war. They reflect an attempt to cope with the Vietnam Syndrome, so agent-purpose emerges as the dominate ratio. The idealism of warriors finding peace within family and community is the central motive for veterans, but that process requires recovery before reintegration. The three veterans of these films were portrayed as deadened, ostracized, misunderstood, and so angry that they cannot function. While these films clearly reflect veterans' turmoil during war, and initial rejection by society after war, they also provide insight into the veterans' slow recovery from war traumas that entail his acceptance of his reality before he can transcend it. The films also chastise society for rejecting Vietnam veterans, yet provide no means through which society can redeem itself.

Gulf War Films

The United States entered the six month, intense Persian Gulf War in 1991 after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. The conflict was largely fought in the air, and the recurrent images of the Gulf War were typically from the perspective of the pilot controlling computer-like grids for precision bombing of select buildings and weapons installations (Rasmussen and Downey, "Gulf"), and more resembled an interactive game than full-scale troop engagement on the ground. The victory for the U.S. was quick, complete, overwhelming, and fully controlled by the military and its commander, General Norman Schwarzkopf. President George Bush's decision to intervene in Kuwait, accompanied by his vow of "no more Vietnams," meant that the military would be granted the authority to orchestrate America's involvement in the Gulf. While uneasiness over the legacy of Vietnam lingered, along with cultural apprehension about entering any

new conflicts (particularly in Eastern Europe and Somalia, as President Clinton refused to intervene in either place but did inaugurate humanitarian assistance to those dispossessed by war), the Vietnam War was slowly receding into the background.

For these reasons, few films featured the Gulf War or the experiences of American combatants. *Three Kings* was essentially a remake of a WWII film entitled *Kelly's Heroes*, but featured a Gulf War platoon motivated to find a cache of gold at war's end. However, when they discover Iraqi civilians being persecuted by the Iraq army, they forego the gold and instead take the high moral ground to save the citizens. The two most important films during this time were *Courage Under Fire* and *G.I. Jane*, both works ostensibly about the inclusion of women in the military, but temperamentally about the "re-masculinization" of the warrior and the war myth. These films featured "friendly fire" and internal conflict among team members.

In *Courage Under Fire*, agent Lt. Colonel Serling is a Marine struggling with his own demons from Desert Storm for ordering fire on what turned out to be a friendly tank. Because of the incident, Serling is sent home from the Gulf and assigned to investigate (act) the circumstances surrounding the death of Medal of Honor candidate Capt. Karen Walden. Some conflicting accounts about Walden's character from her crew and fellow soldiers cause Serling to wonder what really happened to Capt. Walden during the war. At first it appears that she made a spectacular rescue of a downed helicopter crew, and then held her crew together to fight off the Iraqis after the crash. However, another version of the story was that she was a coward who abandoned her leadership. Serling becomes intent on getting to the bottom of the story (purpose) using his investigative

know-how (agency) within (scenes) in the desert war zone and stateside military installations.

In truth, Capt. Walden's death was murder by mutiny. She remained in a combat zone to hold off enemy fire so her crew could be rescued safely. As air rescue support lands and takes the injured crew aboard, they ask about her whereabouts, but are told by one of her mutinous soldiers that she died. Armed air support is then called in to napalm the enemy, not realizing that a still-alive Walden is holed up in the fiery blanket. Walden indeed proved that she was a consummate warrior who sacrificed her life to save her crew, but was betrayed and abandoned by that same crew of males who did not believe that women should occupy leadership ranks in the military. She ends up as the only female in a combat role in the Gulf War and the first female to ever receive the Medal of Honor (Owen, Stein, and Vande Berg). While the story acknowledges and honors the female soldier, her death erases her significance (Owen, Stein, and Vande Berg). Serling, however, brings her back to life posthumously, and this is the agency through which he confronts the damage he has suffered, thus recovering and repairing his own sense of honor. Because Serling is only able to recover through Walden's "sacrifice," Owens et al. argue that it is not a genuine restoration of a warrior's honor but "wounded masculinity" that has been restored (218).

Another example of the evolution of the American warrior image is depicted in *G.I. Jane*. The presence of the female body in the elite combat ranks greatly disrupts the historical foundations of masculinity within the military. Allegedly, the female body threatens the cohesion of a unit, creates an unfair double standard based on physical limitations, and leads to uncontrollable eros, or sexual activities, among the troops

(Owen, Stein, and Vande Berg). The film features an agent, Capt. O'Neill, who competes to be the first female U.S. Navy SEAL (act). During the film O'Neill degenderizes herself (agency) by embodying the masculine ideal (shaving her head and buffing her muscles to conform to male military standards). During a captivity exercise (scene) she is beaten and about to be sexually assaulted by the Master Chief (counter-agent). She fights back and prevents the assault by overpowering him and breaking his nose, all with her hands tied behind her back. The Master Chief recovers and beats her until she is nearly comatose. The rest of the trainees (co-agents) call out the Master Chief and turn their backs, even though he explains that his motive was to demonstrate that O'Neill is a threat to the unit and makes them all vulnerable.

As she staggers back to her feet, the rest of the unit cheer her on, thus showing unity toward their leader (purpose). *G.I. Jane* attempts to integrate as a female through masculinizing herself; other female-centered warrior films generally follow this same model that merely creates a false female empowerment not a transformation of the military patriarchy. This group of films supports an agent-agency ratio through negation: women cannot thrive either as female agents because they are sacrificial lambs, or through the agency of the masculinization of self because it is held in contempt. So, the underlying motive is a redefinition of the American warrior where the act is men's vial treatment of women, agents are men disgusted by their own behavior; agency is truth and integrity; scene is the military itself; and purpose is purifying the military by accepting women into combat roles in the military.

Post-Vietnam WWII Films

War film patterns after Vietnam are preoccupied with restoring credibility and moral principles to the warrior and the military in general in order to return the warrior to the hero status he enjoyed in the traditional war myth. Yet, questions about the purpose for war, in Vietnam and the Gulf especially, persisted. The late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed a resurgence of WWII films. Asenas calls these productions "post-Vietnam WWII films" that sought to reaffirm the justification for war. Asenas argues that during this period, WWII films after the debacle of Vietnam functioned not only to pick up the pieces of the shattered war myth, but to mend it back together by reaffirming the principle of a "just war."

Her analysis of three prominent post-Vietnam WWII films, *The Thin Red Line, Saving Private Ryan,* and *Pearl Harbor*, posits the view that while Vietnam created trauma for its warriors, there are still good reasons why America has to fight wars, WWII being the prime example. These films are grounded in the idea of a just war, a necessary war, and acceptance of that reinstates the traditional values of the American war myth. Returning to a specific time and drawing upon memory and imagination allows for the oversimplification of events, persons, and relationships (Braden). Coupled with the rehabilitation of the warrior, revisiting WWII connects the warrior with a just cause and a reason for sacrifice, the conditions required to be able to balance moralism and militarism and help us remember who a warrior is supposed to be (Rasmussen and Downey, "Dialectical Disorientation in Vietnam").

Saving Private Ryan is a prime example of the resuscitation of the traditional myth. It follows the story of a squad of WWII soldiers on a quest (act) to locate one man

fighting in the European theater (scene). This man is Private James Francis Ryan, the brother of three KIA soldiers. General George Marshall instructs Captain John Miller (agent) to find Private Ryan so he can return stateside to his family (purpose). Once he is found, Ryan is shocked by the news that all three of his brothers are dead. He refuses to return home with Miller and states that he is loyal to his fellow soldiers. Miller, infuriated, stays with Ryan and the whole crew takes up arms (agency) against German tanks. Numerous soldiers give up their lives in the fight. Captain Miller is eventually shot as he defends a bridge and shortly after dies with Ryan by his side. The end of the film moves to the present day where Ryan, an old veteran, stands in front of Miller's grave and pays tribute to him. The dominate ratio of post-Vietnam WWII films reappears as purpose-act, that the reality of war actions are justified by a mystical, noble purpose.

Although this film does not shy away from the horror of war, it reaffirms the purpose of war in traditional mythic form. The sacrifice Miller made to protect Ryan reinstates the image of the noble hero. Although the political agenda might be seen in these films as advancing the necessity and ideals of war, the WWII period renews the significance of war's purpose.

Universal Hero Films

During the early 2000's, in addition to the resurgence of WWII films, another group of war films was reborn. I label these films "epics." Films such as *Gladiator*, *The Last Samurai*, and *Troy* recapture the warrior's image in archetypal form. Each film takes one of the great empires of old and romanticizes war but, more importantly, advances the warrior as a universal hero rather than a cultural hero. The retelling of one

of the greatest war myths of all time, the *Iliad*, strengthens the heroic image of the warrior (Campbell, *Myths*). The Roman legionnaire, Samurai, and Greek heroes have been historically proclaimed as some of the greatest warriors in history (Khan). Returning to the primordial birth of war normalizes and naturalizes the universal presence of the warrior as hero and the hero as warrior.

The image of both the universal and cultural warrior hero was the foundation for the film *The Last Samurai*, where U.S. Army Capt. Nathan Algren (agent) is suffering from PTSD. The traumatized Algren has been hired by the Japanese emperor to train (act) his newly formed Imperial army. However, Algren is captured by the opposing samurai warriors and becomes a POW. Unlike the POW experience in Vietnam, Algren is treated as a guest in a rural village (scene) and exposed to a culture he simply cannot understand. Algren befriends the leader of the samurai rebellion Katsumoto during his captivity and slowly learns the way of the warrior. By embracing *bushido*, the code of honor (agency), Algren gives up his rifle for a sword and fights in the rebellion against his former commander and the troops he was supposed to train. In the end, the samurai are defeated by superior weaponry, but the death of Katsumoto is seen as honorable as he was strong enough and respected enough to commit *seppuku*, ritual suicide. Algren is the only remaining soldier of the samurai's rebellion. He walks into the emperor's chamber in his Army garb and presents the sword of Katsumoto to him. The emperor is overcome with emotion and begins to feel empowered rather than a political puppet. The focuson regaining honor (purpose) in the film relates to the agent Algren, who is only able to find peace and cure his demons by accepting *bushido*.

The epic warrior films present the agent of war as the timeless hero in the universal myth (Campbell *Hero*). The dominate ratio is act-agent which ascribes to the philosophy that actions shape a person, and a person should aspire to be an honorable warrior. Fulfilling the hero's quest allows each warrior to take his place in history and recreate the legacy needed to revive faith in the warrior hero and his call to arms for honor and just war.

In summary, WWII films highlighted the traditional myth of war and its purpose as it reflected a ratio of purpose-act. The Korean War films similarly placed importance on the purpose of war and warding off threats to the American way of life; hence, their motive was to defend against threats to American ideals. By contrast, Vietnam War films emphasized the chaotic scene of war, which transformed the traditional purpose for war from warriors protecting their people to soldiers' protecting themselves, and surviving by any means necessary. The damaged soldier of Vietnam, coupled with the loss of the war, shattered the cultural image of the American warrior and war itself as a site for "regeneration through violence" because warriors could not overcome the power of the scene of war. The "back-to-Nam" films attempted to achieve a surrogate victory in Vietnam with the just cause of returning American POWs left behind, and reinstated the moral worth of the American warrior. The dominant ratio of agent-purpose emerged in this genre, for agents who are worthy understand the purpose of war and never leave their comrades behind. Vietnam veterans were featured in rehabilitation narratives as deserving of recognition and reintegration into society. Although not all veterans were able to transcend their hellish war experiences, many became avengers at home and thereby continued to serve their society, albeit in unconventional and often violent ways.

The warrior of the Gulf War was largely invisible behind a screen of advanced military technologies. In response to women's inclusion in the military, warriors often went astray in a futile and immoral effort to re-masculinize the military. Ironically, women soldiers were the embodiment of the traditional warrior hero in these films, and were punished for it through ritual sacrifices. Males who understood the evil they were doing to women were eventually endowed with honor. Agent emerged as the dominate term in these narratives and the motive appeared to be the recasting of the idealized warrior into an inclusive warrior. Post-Vietnam WWII films ultimately reinstated the WWII narrative of a just war thus reminding audiences of the purpose for war and the need for well-regarded warriors. A purpose-act ratio reappeared, for acts by warriors are understood and justified if war has a noble purpose. The honor code for warriors in universal epic war films was sufficient to transform damaged, shattered warriors into nostalgic, romantic heroes, reflecting an act-agent ratio bestowing honor on warriors who follow the *bushido* code.

From fighting the good fight to fighting each other, the American warrior has undergone significant transformations. Similarly, the image of war has changed dramatically from WWII to the present. The agent has evolved from heroic nobleman, chaotic barbarian, redeemer/avenger, sacrificial female, and back to hero. The scene has transformed from dangerous grounds, savage lands, and jungles of mental disarray to city streets and villages. The purpose has shifted from protection of one's tribe, sacrifice, and self-survival to protecting the American way of life. The agency has changed from sword and shield, bullets and tactical gear, to atomic bombs and chemical warfare.

An important part of understanding mythic evolution is that a myth must remain viable in a culture, so it must evolve to retain its rhetorical power. Moreover, a myth that is incapable of genuine enactment is no longer usable (Asenas). The Iraq and Afghanistan Wars have created the conditions for another transformation of the American war and warrior myth, given that the enemy or counter-agents are terrorist groups hidden among civilians, the technologies of war are so advanced (i.e., drones, which are non-human agents) as to redefine the very nature of war, and medical advances are now capable to keeping soldiers alive when they should be (or wish they could be) dead. Using the theory and chronology of the war film genre enables the analysis of *The Hurt Locker, Green Zone, Lone Survivor*, and *American Sniper*, four Iraq/Afghan war films that I argue feature the dominance of the warrior's psyche, exposing these agents' all too human vulnerabilities.

Rationale for Texts

The "War on Terror" (Iraq and Afghanistan Wars) is over a decade's duration and the majority of the films produced "have largely failed at the box office" (Philpott 325). "Fictional films made about the war in Iraq and about US policy and practice have either raised questions about the wisdom of such policy, been overtly critical of it or explored the consequences for ordinary Iraqis and Americans alike" (Philpott 342). The films selected for this thesis represent the very few films that have reached critical acclaim. In the process of selecting the films to be analyzed, many were left out. Most notably was *Zero Dark Thirty,* a film that follows CIA agent, Maya, as she is assigned to Pakistan where she learns how to torture and seek out Osama bin Laden. She becomes obsessed with finding bin Laden and in 2011, the terrorist leader was killed by the U.S. Navy

SEAL Team following her lead. Though this film received critical acclaim and popular significance, it is centered around the assassination of bin Laden rather than focusing on the plight of the American warrior. Captivating as it may be, *Zero Dark Thirty* does not fit the theme of the other films included in this thesis and was, therefore, omitted

CHAPTER 3

ACTS OF WAR

This chapter examines the depiction of war in the following films: *The Hurt Locker*, *Green Zone*, *Lone Survivor*, and *American Sniper*. More specifically, I argue that these films portray the dilemmas of balancing the dialectical tension of militarism and moralism intrinsic to the warrior hero. Through identifying the pentad elements of the dramas, the motive and overarching message will reveal itself, thus setting up the implications about the American war myth and, specifically, the image of the American warrior.

The Hurt Locker

The Hurt Locker (HL) is a critically acclaimed film about the "War on Terror," directed by Kathryn Bigelow, the first woman to win an Oscar in this position. The film begins with a quote from Chris Hedges' book, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*: "The rush of battle is often a potent and lethal addiction, for war is a drug." As the noise of vehicles and voices becomes audible, the words begin to disappear, but "war is a drug" remains visible before that too fades to black (Bennett). The "film's narrative and spatial strategy… lock[s] us into a claustrophobic identificatory relation with the soldiers—to place us inside their vehicle" and their heads (Bennett 170). As such, *HL* personalizes the experiences of a skilled ordnance disposal team—Sanborn, Eldridge, and their new

Commander, Sgt. James—as they attempt to disarm bombs while engaging in deadly bouts of urban combat in the streets of Baghdad. The film's conflict centers on Sanborn's and Eldridge's efforts to uphold military command protocols and orders, and rein in their maverick new leader. The audience learns that Sgt. James is a danger to his men because he is a reckless risk-taker who cannot live without war. This addiction eventually will subsume him and destroy his ability to reintegrate into society after his tour of duty.

Act: Missions Impossible

The elite bomb squad's mission is to locate and diffuse bombs and IED's throughout Iraq to protect soldiers and citizens, and simultaneously function within the U.S military's war efforts. Intrinsically dangerous but conventional in warfare, disarming bombs are (acts) that require highly skilled agents to accomplish missions. The film chronicles a series of armed bomb events necessitating critical decisions made by agent Sgt. James. As the film progresses, his choices become increasingly threatening to his squad, leading to disquieting effects that reverberate on warriors' bodies, psyches, and spirit.

The squad's first mission together consists of disarming a bomb that is preventing U.S. troops from advancing. After ignoring standard protocol to use a robot for a first glimpse at the suspected bomb, Sgt. James walks casually toward the device in his bomb suit. He pulls the pin from a smoke grenade and tosses it behind him; the smoke covers his visibility from the enemy but also from his own team. This does not sit well with Sanborn, who is providing backup cover. Sanborn calls: "Blaster one what is going on? BLASTER what are you doing!?" James does not respond immediately but eventually

says, “I’m creating a diversion.” This reason irritates Sanborn who then asks “where are you in relation to the IED?” James responds “I’ll tell you when I am standing over it, Cowboy.” Later, James walks back out of the cloud of smoke looking smug, superior, and victorious as he approaches the convoy of troops awaiting his threat assessment. In the aftermath, the film cuts to James taking off his bomb suit at mission’s end.

James: That wasn’t so bad, first time working together. What do you think?

> Sanborn: I think us working together means, I talk to you and you talk to me.
>
> James: Are we going on a date Sanborn?
>
> Sanborn: No! We’re going on a mission, and my job is to keep you safe so we can keep going on missions.
>
> James: This is combat, buddy.

Although accomplishing the mission, James’ actions disregard his squad and mission protocol, which engenders distrust of him and lack of confidence among his team. His reckless decisions under combat conditions establish the recurrent theme of the film.

The film’s final mission continues James’s maverick tendencies but ends in failure. This time, a terrified Iraqi man has a bomb strapped to him and is pleading for help to get it off while American troops shout and point their guns at him. James and Sanborn arrive at the scene whereupon James instructs the sergeant in charge to set up a perimeter so he can do his job. When one of the soldiers asked James if they can just shoot the man, James initially hesitates but says no, his family is there. He ignores Sanborn’s opinion that the situation is “suicide,” and risks sacrificing his life to complete his duty. However, James cannot decipher the bomb’s mechanics because although a

bolt cutter can cut the steel locks holding the bomb, it is also set on a timer, thus making it impossible to remove the locks before the bomb explodes. Still, James refuses to retreat and, at the last moment; he looks at the Iraqi man and with cracking voice says, "I'm sorry." His inability to stop the detonation is the first time in the film that James fails his mission.

This failure is significant because it reveals his human imperfections, his lack of invincibility. Although he survives this episode, he is damaged physically and mentally. Acts within a war campaign can showcase a warrior hero's skills and bravery, but in *HL* ultimately are stark reminders of human vulnerabilities and the human costs of war.

Scene: Rubble and Sand

Like the typical hero's quest journey, *HL* presents a warrior who leaves his ordinary world—at home in the United States—and descends into the nether world—war—to be tested. The film almost exclusively enacts its narrative within the scene of war-torn Baghdad and its environs, but a second more desirable scene of returning stateside is frequently implied. The two worlds represent hell and heaven, but this opposition becomes blurred as the story unfolds.

HL's theater of war takes place in Iraq at the beginning of the U.S. "War on Terror." There are countless panoramic and up-close images of bombed-out villages covered in debris, swirling sands and relentless heat. The urban streets of Baghdad reflect the effects of barrages of mortar round shelling, bullet-pocked concrete buildings, and an ominous sense of emptiness and silence that eventually gives way to chaos. In one example, the bomb squad heads out to a Baghdad location to assess a suspected car bomb. The camera follows James as he struts down the road with his convoy behind him.

This imagery highlights the elitism and individualism of the U.S. warrior and parallels Campbell's universal myth of the warrior as the chosen one. As James approaches the car, an insurgent shoots at it, igniting the car into flames. The entire convoy turns to the direction of the shot and shoots at the insurgent as he attempts to run away. As the car becomes engulfed in flames, Sanborn and Eldridge rush over to check on James, but James continues his slow walk to Eldridge, who is waiting with a fire extinguisher.

James begins issuing orders, Sanborn as top cover and Eldridge to accompany James. Sanborn takes off to get into position while James and Eldridge head to the burning car. Putting the fire out, James pries and kicks the car trunk open. Instantly, he drops the crowbar, rips off his protective suit, and tells Eldridge, "There is enough bang in there to send us all to see Jesus. If I am gonna die, I want to die comfortable." He begins to tear the car apart looking for the trigger, becoming enraged when he cannot find it. Meanwhile, Sanborn and Eldridge notice civilians standing on balconies watching James, one of whom is recording the event. When Sanborn radios James to warn him to hurry because the crowd keeps growing, and the man with the recorder begins sending signals to three different men standing on a tower. In response, James grabs his cans (headset), throws it to the ground, says, "Fuck, I get it," and gives Eldridge the middle finger. As his squad becomes increasingly anxious and takes cover, James continues his search and eventually dismantles the explosives, either unaware of or intentionally ignoring anything else occurring in his vicinity.

This episode establishes the nature of the scene in *HL* through a juxtaposition of images of James and the field of view of Sanborn and Eldridge. On the one hand, the scene of war is chaotic and threatening. The squad is surrounded by unknown observers,

ominous enemies, at least one sniper, and crowds that increase in numbers at an alarming rate. Unpredictability escalates fear and the potential of violent confrontation. On the other hand, this setting is merely the background for the scene's central action, namely up-close details of James as he works on solving the bomb problem. In this sense, the scene of war does not play a significant role in *HL*; rather it is background or context for James' work, which boils down to a psychological competition between man and bomb.

The secondary scene is home. Going home signifies Eden, returning to the Promised Land. For Sanborn and Eldridge, going home means surviving war, and their behavior grows more cautious as they countdown their number of days in country. For James, however, the prospect of returning home is more complicated and darker. The audience observes James at home sometime soon after his tour of duty. He is in an American grocery store with his family. His wife asks him to grab cereal, a simple task that proves to be more difficult for James than any he had in the Middle East. He stands in the aisle overwhelmed by the variety of choices. Looking up and down, he randomly grabs a box and tosses it into the cart.

Later, James interacts with his wife and child for the first time in the film. He talks about war and his experiences. While his wife listens and smiles throughout the narrative, she is making dinner and innocently hands him carrots, asking, "You want to chop those up for me?" Bennett notes that "this is the closest they come to a reciprocal conversation anywhere in the film" (172), but it is clear they have little basis for identification or understanding. When James plays with his baby boy, he talks to him: "As you get older, some of the things you love might not seem so special anymore; by the time you get to my age maybe it's only one or two things...with me I think it's one." This

jarring scene is followed by the film's closing shot of James strutting down an Iraqi street in his protective suit. He grins as the screen superimposes the message "365 days left in Delta Company." The home front provides him little satisfaction for he is at home only on the battlefield.

Agent: Bomber Man

HL depicts ordnance disposal specialist Sergeant First Class William James as the warrior hero of the story. His calm, relentless pursuit of his missions to disarm explosives throughout the film testifies to his earned hero status. However, as the audience comes to view James as unusual because of the eerie adrenaline rush that attends his missions, he also reflects a hero-victim binary, in this case, that "war might be hell, but peace is worse" (Bennett 172). According to Rasmussen and Downey ("Dialectical"), warriors are expected to balance dialectically conflicting militaristic and moralistic values in order to emerge whole and fulfill their service to nation. In this film, though, James' militaristic actions come at the expense of moralism.

Militaristically, James is highly skilled in combat bomb disposal. His knowledge and experiences make him an elite soldier and designated squad leader. He orchestrates his unit's missions, typically assigning the lead position to himself. In one instance, James reaches the area of a suspected IED, spots a wire, and follows it to a bomb hidden under trash bags full of rocks. He diffuses the bomb carefully and then tells Sanborn and Eldridge they are good to go. Their relief is short-lived, however, because James finds a secondary wire attached to five more bombs. Putting Sanborn and Eldridge back on high alert, James commences to efficiently disable all of them.

He also demonstrates initiative and take-charge individualism when unanticipated events threaten to imperil missions. For example, after disposing of an IED, James strolls down the street to reconnect with a convoy troop. Just then a taxi comes on the scene and stops at an intersection right in front of James. When James pulls out his pistol and points it at the driver, the convoy readies for action and Sanborn gets on his radio, telling everyone to stand down because they are too close to the blast zone. Eldridge asks James if he wants back up but James simply replies, "I got it." James motions to the driver to back up, and fires at the ground when the driver does not obey. He eventually shoots out the windshield, walks directly up to the driver's window, places the barrel of the gun on the driver's forehead, and orders him "back." The driver finally complies whereupon he is apprehended by the troops. While Sanborn and Eldridge stew, James merely responds to the situation by laughing and then lighting a celebratory cigarette.

James' image is reminiscent of the American Western myth's cowboy. While his cigarette embodies perhaps the most famous cowboy in American pop culture, the Marlboro man, James fits the criteria of the traditional rugged individualist whose exploits pave a safe way for communities to follow. In *HL*, this western hero conquers the untamed frontier of war and the new warfare of the IED on behalf of American troops. The value of this image is reinforced by his commander Colonel Reed.

> Colonel Reed: That's just…hot shit. You're a wild man you know that? He is a wild man you know that? I want to shake your hand.
>
> James: Thank you, sir.
>
> Colonel Reed: How many bombs have you disarmed?
>
> James: I…I'm not sure

Colonel Reed: Sergeant!

James: Yes, sir?

Colonel Reed: I asked you a question.

James: 873 sir.

Colonel Reed then praises James' approach and nicknames him Wildman. Yet, the Colonel's sentiments are not shared by a squad that views him more as a savage of the Old West than a sacred cowboy. They question his leadership because he has his own way of doing things, and that makes him a "reckless and obsessive team leader" who neither follows safety procedures nor action protocols; instead he pushes the boundaries of risk-taking and thereby endangers his team (Bennett 167). Sanborn and Eldridge are in perpetual states of high anxiety in every operation, while maverick, cowboy, hotrod James is unperturbed by his own actions. This recklessness generates constant tension within the squad. From a moral standpoint, James is self-oriented and selfish, which not only undermines trust, comradery, and the responsibility of warriors to one another, but has the twin effect of subverting the squad's militaristic proficiency, efficiency, and codes of conduct.

This is not to say that James has no moral moorings, just that they are inconsistently applied. In one scene, the team investigates a bomb lab where they find that the vessel for IEDs is inside human bodies. This disturbs everyone, but James takes it the hardest because the body they found resembles Beckham, a boy who worked with vendors on base and was befriended by James. James becomes so emotionally overwrought that he goes rogue, chasing the vendors into the city armed only with a pistol. Despite his efforts, James fails to find those responsible for Beckman's death. His

humanitarian streak also extends sporadically to his squad. When Eldridge wants to take out snipers, for instance, James reminds him how to clean the rifle magazine so it will not jam when he shoots, and serves as Eldridge's second set of eyes, calling out targets as Eldridge fires. When the mission lasts well into the night and both are exhausted and dehydrated, James gives Eldridge the only pouch of juice they have between them. When Eldridge shoots the final sniper, James mutters under his breath, "good job, buddy." Their teamwork reflects a sense of cohesiveness for the first time in the film.

The toll of James' inability to balance moralism and materialism is best represented during an after-battle celebration, a drunken, testosterone filled evening that evokes images of James' mental instability. The men peek through a crate of James' keepsakes, finding one picture of a baby boy, and the rest the triggers of all the bombs he disarmed. Later, when James returns to his room to sleep, he wears his bomb suit helmet just like a child does with a security blanket to find comfort. James' fixation with war has damaged him and his mental acuities, as obsession negates the possibility of enacting the warrior's mandate to balance militarism with moralism.

Agency: Brains and Bravado

HL features two competing types of agencies. First, there are the conventional physical instruments of war, including weapons, IEDs and explosive devices, protective suits, guns, contact radios, advanced technologies, and troop transportation, among others. Additionally, the military's command structure that plans, coordinates, and employs these instruments for squads to carry out war campaigns fits in this category as well. The second agency is more internal, resources found within the agent, including his mental acuity, leadership, wits, confidence, skills, experiences, instincts, and intuitions.

Although James utilizes both agencies, his brash and impulsive actions are qualities he most depends upon to successfully accomplish assigned tasks. Given that James frequently violates command and squad protocols to the degree that his behavior negatively affects his relationship with his team, and underutilizes many of the advanced technological inventions of the war-making industry (i.e., robots), it is clear that agencies internal to the warrior dominate the external instruments of war.

The protective bomb suit best symbolizes this dynamic in *HL*. Just as the military hierarchy strategically designs war's progress, so too does the bomb suit advance the means through which a disposal specialist can potentially survive a dangerous mission. In this sense, James is reliant on advanced technology to protect him as he does his job. In one mission, for instance, had James not been in his protective gear, he would have died because of his proximity to the blast radius of the bomb. However, it is telling that during his second mission James rips off the protective suit and headset radio before disarming a car bomb with nothing more than pliers and his wits. In doing so, he rejects the protective safety devices of military technology and his own squad in favor of relying on his own instincts; this implies the uselessness of physical agencies unless embraced by an agent. Consequently, agencies become a function or extension of a warrior rather than powerful tools in their own right. Going rogue in this fashion means that agent subsumes agency, so agencies are secondary or incidental to the power of the agent's internal resources.

Co- and Counter-Agents: Frien-Enemies

U.S. forces in Iraq must contend with an unconventional enemy since there is no intact national army of Iraqi troops. Rather, the enemy is the insurgent, most often a lone

sniper picking off American soldiers, or an individual or small group planting IEDs in unsuspecting places to kill American soldiers. Largely invisible, this counter-agent nevertheless lurks everywhere and attacks remotely, thus creating apprehension in virtually every scene in the film. The enemy is also evil incarnate, a portrayal confirmed when James crosses paths with an insurgent who, after planting a bomb, sticks around to watch James dispose of it. As James follows the wire to its source, he makes eye contact with the insurgent and, smiling, shows him the explosive trigger he clipped from the bomb. Jogging away, the insurgent dumps his remote in front of a child who appears to have been a burn victim of an IED. The wounded child is doubly victimized by an enemy that initially injured him with an IED and then showed complete indifference to the destruction of innocent youth. Such evil deserves to be vanquished.

Yet, a more complex relationship develops between co- and counter-agents because *HL* focuses on the dysfunctions of James and his team, the result of which establishes James as ally and enemy, and simultaneously his squad as co- and counter-agents. Because of James' recklessness and maverick nature, he rarely can see past his own motives; as team leader, his actions create tensions within the squad that come to a boiling point as he continues to disregard team safety. After yet another rogue mission by James, where he refuses to communicate with either Eldridge or Sanborn, James shrugs off any wrongdoing as the team regroups at their Hummer. Sanborn then punches James in the face, and orders him to never again turn off his headset.

This tension is consummated in two later scenes. The three are tasked to set off some active bombs. Eldridge and Sanborn become frustrated when James tells them to wait while he retrieves the gloves he left down at the bomb site. As James takes off in

the Hummer, his squad begins to talk suggestively about blowing up James to insure its own safety. Later, the squad finds itself in a shootout with insurgent snipers at a fiery bomb site filled with screams and smoke. Staring into the flames, James tells his team that this explosion was not the work of a suicide bomber, but of a remote trigger man who is still lurking in the shadows of night. Although James and Eldridge agree to hunt this person down, Sanborn reminds them that such a foray is not their job. James responds to Sanborn: "You don't say no to me Sanborn, I say no to you, ok? You know there are guys watching us right now. THEY'RE LAUGHING AT THIS! AND I AM NOT OK WITH THAT! Now turn off your goddamn torch cause we're going." James' eventual "wild man" tactics are responsible for Eldridge getting shot and almost taken hostage. James and Sanborn rescue him, but the damage has already been done. Sanborn and James visit Eldridge before he is sent home to recover from a shattered femur. It is at this point when the audience discovers that James is the one who shot Eldridge. Eldridge goes berserk, screaming and cursing at James for his need for a "fucking adrenaline rush." Subsequently, Sanborn breaks down too, shedding tears as he censures James for taking such risks. The tensions of the squad remain unresolved, and the three never see each other again.

HL's treatment of co- and counter-agents recalls Vietnam War films that are disorienting because soldiers turn against one another in order to survive internal conflicts between platoon members and leaders (Rasmussen and Downey). James' recklessness transforms his co-agents into wary, reluctant participants who perceive their leader as a formidable enemy. The agent's actions have the power to invert the meaning of allies and enemies in war.

Purpose: Army of One

Of all of the film's dramatic elements, purpose may be the least important. The U.S. military intervened in Iraq in order to stop terrorism threats against American and Iraqi citizens. In this sense, the goal of military operations is to eliminate that threat and restore peace, goals which are not questioned in *HL*. Insurgents who unleash bombs and IEDs establish the conditions for combat and especially the justification for ordnance disposal specialists. Both purpose and scene, then, provide Sgt. James with the opportunities to exercise his addiction to war. Indeed, James' character has little meaning outside of combat and war's existence is his enabler. Within this context, James' actions further the military's conventional purpose; hence, they are positively evaluated, even if detrimental to his own and his squad's psyches.

Dominant Ratio and Motive

The most influential pentadic terms that emerge in *HL* are act, agent, and alleged co-agents. However, because co-agents transform into counter-agents as a result of James' unhealthy risk-taking, it is the act-agent ratio that dominates the narrative. James' addictive relationship to war is freely vented and blossoms through acts within the context of the Iraq War, acts that simultaneously define him as a war hero, create "violent antagonism" with fellow soldiers, and make him "ill-equipped to cope with ordinary, (normal) life" (Bennett 171). The philosophical orientation of act is "realism," or that the acts of war speak for themselves and are realities that cannot be ignored. The philosophical orientation of agent is "idealism," or identification with the image of a warrior as a self-sacrificing, protective hero to his nation. While agents perform actions necessary to succeed in war, it is the reality of war itself that inevitably changes warriors

for the worse. In *HL*, soldiers' experiences convert them into maladjusted and damaged beings, even though their heroic status remains intact.

War may be inevitable, as *HL* suggests, but its recurrent message relates to the tolls of war on its participants. While Sanborn and Eldridge succumb to physical wounds and psychological trauma, James' mental plight is perhaps most insidious because he is alive only under combat conditions. The film's motive, thus, is to question the very act of war itself as the trigger for inevitable harms wreaked upon its warriors in combat and post-war life.

Green Zone

2010's *Green Zone* (*GZ*) is a war film that moves its audience to a "very different zone of indifference" (Peacock 158). According to Roger Ebert, the film stands out because it showcases American warriors as fools duped by their own government rather than as combat heroes in a clearly justified campaign against a diabolical enemy ("Green Zone Review"). The film follows Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) Roy Miller and his outfit who are tasked to find evidence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and therefore validate the U.S.'s decision to invade Iraq and dispose of the threat of its leader Saddam Hussein. The film chronicles the beginning of war in Iraq during a time of high military and political anxiety over the War on Terror in neighboring Afghanistan. Miller's trust in the U.S. government is destroyed when he discovers not only that WMDs are non-existent in Iraq, but that government officials fabricated their existence to falsely provide the rationale for armed intervention in the country. The film's conflict is grounded in the warrior's decision to break the military chain of

command and uncover the truth about WMDs and the deception that led to war. This rogue mission breaks Miller's faith in his own government, and his spirit as a warrior.

Act: Weapons of Mass Deception

Unlike the other three Iraq and Afghanistan War films, *GZ* features two related but different acts. Initially, CWO Roy Miller, the leader of a Mobile Exploitation Team (MET), is assigned the mission of finding and securing Iraq's infamous WMDs, an important campaign in the Iraq War because nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons pose significant threats to stability in the Middle East and the safety of citizens worldwide. In pursuit of the mission, Miller engages in a series of raids on installations throughout Iraq. After three failed incursions, however, Miller begins to suspect that the intelligence reports given to him by government, Pentagon, and CIA officials were wrong or misleading. He vocalizes as much during a briefing in command headquarters in the Green Zone, the result of which sets into motion an internal conflict between two high-ranking government officials—Brown and Poundstone—over the veracity of Miller's assigned mission and about subterfuge at the highest levels of the U.S. government. The truth is that there are no, and never were, WMDs in Iraq.

Armed with this deception, Miller defies explicit orders and embarks on a new mission to prove that alleged but non-existent WMDs ended up starting a war. For the remainder of the film, he goes rogue, unilaterally engaging in critical decision-making acts that peel away a powerful web of lies confirming the American government's complicity in a massive cover up.

What began as a relatively simple mission cut short by failure gives way to multi-layered mayhem as Miller and his team travel through a labyrinth of confusion in search

of answers about the WMDs. The team heads to the next suspected WMD site, Al Mansour, and begins digging holes. While there, Miller meets an injured Iraqi man, Freddy. He claims to have seen members of Saddam's inner cabinet—General Al-Rawi—meeting at a safe house in the vicinity with other former Iraqi leaders. Convinced by Freddy's arguments and insistence on helping, Miller makes the judgment call to trust Freddy despite his cohort Sgt. Wilkins' reminder that the team's only mission is at the Al Mansour site. Miller disagrees, mobilizes his force, and tells them to "get your fucking game face on." They raid the house but are successful only in apprehending minor figures and the homeowner, Seyyed Hamza, to take in for questioning.

During the interrogation, Hamza reveals that General Al-Rawi is the only person who knows the truth about the WMDs. Miller understands that his next act must be to go under the radar and find Al-Rawi before Poundstone does. This becomes even more important because Poundstone soon unleashes a U.S. Army Special Forces unit under his command to take Hamza from Miller. Hamza later "mysteriously" dies in his prison cell. Confused, Miller turns to CIA official Brown who agrees to help if Miller keeps the information from Poundstone. Miller then says, "I thought we were all on the same side." Brown replies, "Don't be naïve." As Miller exits the meeting, he is confronted by Poundstone who tells him enigmatically, "You chose the wrong side."

The film's denouement occurs during Miller's last mission, which he undertakes alone, to contact Al-Rawi. Abducted by Al-Rawi's men, he is taken to a safe house where the two finally meet face-to-face.

Al-Rawi: Who are you?

Miller: General, my name is Roy Miller, I am a Chief WarrantOfficer with the U.S. Army.

Al-Rawi: What do you want?

Miller: I came here to bring you in, General. I am aware that you had contact with a U.S. official leading up to the war. I know you were ready to tell him everything about Iraq's WMD programs.

Al-Rawi: What programs? There are no programs. I told your official, we dismantled everything after 9/11.

Miller: He told my government that you confirmed that the programs were still active. He lied about what you said, that's why we are here.

Al-Rawi makes it clear that the reason Miller is here is because the U.S. government wanted Saddam out and did whatever it took to accomplish that. With those words, Miller now possesses the truth that there never were WMDs and, more importantly, no justification for war. This information breaks Miller, shattering all of his beliefs that led him to take the warrior's oath of allegiance to his country. The loss of faith not only breaks his heart and damages his psyche, but increases resentment toward his own government for the massive deception that has since killed thousands of American warriors.

Miller's last act, therefore, is to insure that the truth of the deception is exposed. Because he no longer can trust higher ups in the military or government, he makes the difficult decision to turn his mission report over to a *Wall Street* journalist, Lawarie Dayne, who first broke the story questioning the existence of WMDs in Iraq. Only through full public exposure can the magnitude of the moral breach be confronted.

CWO Miller was faced with the likelihood of a government-engineered conspiracy, so true to his warrior ethics, he took independent action in this war of deception within the larger Iraq War. To do otherwise meant accepting a role as powerless, expendable, and complicit, a pawn in a political manipulation of the highest immoral order. Although counter to the warrior's creed, Miller violates command orders, steps outside of the military and political hierarchy, and intentionally commits what amounts to an act of betrayal to pursue the truth. Despite a clear justification for his actions, he is guilt-ridden, grieving, and dispirited, his faith permanently shattered by his government's ultimate betrayal.

Scene: Green Zoned

GZ presents two incongruous scenes, one of war, the other of a more important war within a war. While the film takes place in the city of Baghdad, it opens with a visual synopsis of the U.S. takeover of Iraq. Air strikes light up the night sky as buildings burn and crumble to the ground. Ground troops must navigate treacherous terrain comprised of toppled statues of Hussein, concrete rubble, spoiled garbage, narrow alleyways, unpopulated half-destroyed homes and apartment buildings, undriveable streets, and the general disorder of hordes of Iraqis as they try to reestablish businesses and neighborhoods. The scene is a study of normalizing life amid the destruction of many parts in the city and outside its limits when Miller visits alleged WMD sites. Like other Iraq and Afghanistan War films, the atmosphere is foreboding, dangerous, and often chaotic. Alleyways and rooftops, in particular, suggest valleys of death, as Miller experiences when he traverses the city under the cover of night to meet up with General

Al-Rawi. There is no safe place in *GZ* outside of the confines of the Green Zone, and the city scenes graphically reflect images of the aftermath of modern technological warfare.

The Green Zone itself emerges as a critical scene of action in the film. The Green Zone is a sealed and guarded area in central Baghdad. Inside its wall are former President Saddam Hussein's palace, appropriated for military use, and post-war living quarters for U.S. personnel stationed in the country. The Zone also houses the civilian ruling authority of Iraq, made up of coalition forces and civilian workers. For those on temporary assignment to Baghdad, it is their home and work locations.

Although the Green Zone is supposed to be the base of command, hence a sanctuary, it proves to be just as treacherous as the battlefield and, in fact, is a combat zone of internal conflicts and corruption that provide no comfort, rest, or collegiality for Miller. The audience discovers progressively in the film that the CIA and Department of Defense (DOD) are engaged in a battle of wits over explosive confidential information that must remain secret or else the United States will lose all credible standing in the Middle East. The work areas of the two are isolated from one another, information is not shared and, even during intergroup briefings, these units are tight-lipped. Overpopulated despite command's vast space and warren of offices, the scene is frenetic, with unidentified people moving quickly through the buildings carrying out business for unknown reasons. Miller's mission places him in the middle of it all, but he is viewed with suspicion and acknowledged by few. The leadership and range of activities at the base that seem to operate at cross-purposes to one another is reinforced in the command site. As a result, Miller is constantly confused and unable to access any clear, uncomplicated information.

War's scene encompasses the aftermath of battle, with the Green Zone a place of secrets and conspiracies. While both reflect the obstacles Miller encounters on his tour of duty, his ability to operate outside of command structures reduces the relevance of scene in the narrative.

Agent: (Hero)-ticized Warrior

Agent Roy Miller is a seasoned, skilled military officer and leader who transforms into an avenger by the end of the film. Dialectical tension between militarism and moralism arises when Miller attends a meeting that includes his immediate superior Colonel Bethel and the commanding General and his staff. The briefing's purported purpose is to update the General on the status of the search for WMDs, but against the Colonel's wishes, Miller wants to raise the issue of compromised intelligence because the data Miller was given has thus far led to three raids coming up empty on WMDs and combat engagements resulting in casualties and collateral damage. Miller raises questions about the source and accuracy of intelligence. Although the General listens, he rebukes Miller: "Here is the thing, Chief. These intelligences packages have all been vetted, they're good. Your job is to execute, not worry about how they are put together. We clear on that?" Miller simply nods and says, "Yes Sir."

The General has effectively stripped Miller of the strengths of his militarism, reducing his value to following orders only. But following orders suspicious in origin subverts militarism because it disallows Miller to use his skills to accomplish his mission. Soon thereafter, he meets Freddy and interrogates Hamza; thus, in short order, Miller learns that the intelligence reports were falsified to sabotage the WMD mission and send him on an endless series of goose chases. That conclusion is verified when Poundstone

seizes Hamza and orchestrates his death. Miller then realizes that his limited ability to exercise his militaristic proficiencies is a conspiracy to cover up the non-existence of WMDs.

At this point, dialectical tension becomes severely unbalanced. Unable to carry out his assigned mission, Miller's frustration generates unbridled moral outrage, redirecting him from a contrived mission to a search for truth. During the course of this mission, militarism will resurface, but in a subordinate status to the moral instincts compelling his behavior. This decision makes him vulnerable and takes a toll on his psyche because in order to carry out his new mission, he must violate command orders and operate outside of the military structure that frames the value of militarism.

With renewed purpose, Miller accepts Brown's offer to locate Al-Rawi. He proves his physical combat skills when he escapes Al-Rawi's guard through physical force. He proves his wit as he successfully pulls off a bait and switch tactic within the military detainee camp in order to speak to Hamza, right under Poundstone's nose. Miller acts as a magnet, drawing every detail of the story to him, leaving nothing unturned. With each new piece of information he uncovers, he validates his decision to forego military protocol. His moral determination is what sustains his actions and grounds the successful completion of the mission.

The culmination of his tour comes when he writes the final mission report. Chronicling the whole sordid mess, he leaves nothing out, including proof of the government's deception and manipulation regarding the WMDs. He then presents his report to Poundstone.

Miller: Here is a copy of my intel report, I wanted to give it to you personally.

Poundstone: Thank you, is this Al-Rawi?

Miller: Yeah.

Poundstone: I heard about this, this is some pretty strong language here. Oh, but what's the point, Miller? Do you think anybody is going to listen to you?

> Miller: I know what you did.
>
> Poundstone: What did you say?
>
> Miller: You made him up to get what you needed, Magellan [supposed source of intel], you made him up.
>
> Poundstone: I don't know what you're talking about.
>
> Miller: When you pedaled that shit in DC did they know it was a lie, or did they just never bother to ask?
>
> Poundstone: Ok, come on, none of this matters anymore, WMD, this doesn't matter.
>
> Miller grabs Poundstone violently: What the fuck you talking about? Of course it fucking matters! The reasons we go to war always matter! It's all that matters! It fucking matters! Do you have any idea of what you've done here? What's going to happen next time we need people to trust us?

Miller turns around, walks away, and delivers the report to journalist Lawarie Dayne. The U.S. government's deception challenged Miller's role as a warrior, generating an imbalance between the values he embraces as a moral and militaristic soldier. In order to uphold the ethics of the warrior, he had to sacrifice militarism for moralism. Although his mission succeeded, he had to face an ugly truth about his government, in essence, betraying his government in order to heal it. That long walk

down the dark hall of shattered faith was neither resolved nor restored by the film's end. Consequently, Miller left Iraq haunted by his experience of war.

Agency: Disconnects

Since *GZ* represents a different form of combat—unearthing government corruption—the agencies available to Miller also differ from conventional agencies employed in Afghanistan and Iraq War films. The routine physical instruments of war are present throughout Baghdad, especially weapons, transportation vehicles, and advanced communication devices. Miller also has advanced military hardware to ferret out nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons in his search for WMDs. Other than hand-held weapons, however, Miller cannot avail himself of these agencies. Significantly, intelligence reports are the backbone of military operations, but this normal agency was corrupt and false, thus reducing Miller's mission options.

Consequently, Miller must rely on internal resources accumulated from his military experiences, particularly intuitions and his own intelligence to cut through deception and concealment. His willingness to take risks, for example, is what prompted him essentially to drop his mission, reject the conventional agencies of war, and go underground. His instincts for sizing up people enabled him to cultivate informants and engender trust to fulfill his assignment to find Al-Rawi. Miller's wits and problem-analysis skills proved to be an important agency because his craftiness in the detainee camp provided him with the information he needed to piece the WMD sham together. It was Miller's intuitions that led to the discovery that Poundhouse concocted the intel source Magellan in spite of how deep this secret was buried. By far, however, truth-telling is Miller's most influential agency, the product of the warrior's moral integrity.

Co- and Counter-Agents: Red, White, and Green

Given the deception at the heart of *GZ*, the film presents a confusing and unconventional array of allies and enemies. Other than his squad, which he trusts implicitly, the only government co-agent was Martin Brown, a grizzled CIA officer with extensive experience and knowledge of the region, and a guiding force for Miller. Brown recruits Miller away from his original assignment and presents him with the Al-Rawi case. Had it not been for Brown's wisdom, Miller would still be raiding empty WMD locations.

The most important guide accompanying Miller in his quest is Freddy. Unable to be a soldier because of an injury that cost him his leg, Freddy assists the U.S. soldiers as Miller's translator and informant. There are two crucial moments in the film when Freddy's words to Miller remind the audience of the war's real victims. The first is after Miller's team chases Freddy down and Miller offers him a reward for his work. Telling Miller that he did not risk his life for a reward, he says, "You think I do this for reward? You don't think I do this for me? For my future. For my country. For all these things? Whatever you want here, I want more than you want."

The second occurs after Freddy shoots and kills Al-Rawi. Miller screams at Freddy, ordering him to put his weapon down. As Freddy complies, he looks Miller in the eyes and says, "It is not for you to decide what happens here." Those two game-changing scenes remind the audience that many natives are suffering because of the carnage to their country. It also reaffirms public opinions of Iraqis not wanting the U.S. government involved in their reconstruction. Freddy's role is important because he

proved his courage and patriotism for a free Iraq when Miller could not. Freddy's contribution to Miller's journey is invaluable for that reason.

Another key player in Miller's journey is Lawarie Dayne. She is a *Wall Street* journalist who has been publishing stories about the WMD locations from an Iraqi source (Magellan) via Poundstone. Lawarie's neutrality keeps her in the middle of it all, but she can be perceived as both friend and foe. Lawarie published a plethora of stories using Magellan as her source. It was her inability to check the story that reaffirmed the WMD program (the reason for war). In the end, Lawarie was given a second chance by Miller to "write" her wrongs.

In much greater numbers, Miller confronts a slew of enemies throughout the film. An Iraqi sniper, Al-Rawi, and Al-Rawi's guards are all formidable foes, but his most perplexing and insidious enemy is his own government, represented by Pentagon intelligence officer Clark Poundstone. At his core, Poundstone is an opportunist, preaching idealistic mantras of "we are the good guys," all the while manipulating the entire U.S. military to buy into his deceit. Among the U.S. forces in Baghdad, there are countless acts of backstabbing and betrayal, forcing people who think they are fighting on the same side into direct conflict. Poundstone also has a special military unit answering directly to him and headed by Briggs, who squares off with Miller multiple times in the film. The most distressful incident of their conflict comes at the end of the film. Poundstone instructs Briggs to take his team, hunt down, and kill Al-Rawi. Briggs then asks what he should do with Miller. Poundstone replies, "Don't let him get in your way," meaning "kill, no capture."

What makes Poundstone such a powerful counter-agent is that he has political power over Miller. For instance, when Miller first agrees to meet Brown, he files a request to transfer, which Poundstone intercepts and denies. Poundstone also has Miller's chain of command under his control. This is why Miller is forced to go rogue, violating his militaristic values. The single most important pentad element in *GZ* affecting the agent's actions is the counter-agent, for agents barely can survive missions when the same commander who orders the mission is the warrior's enemy.

Purpose: Causalities of War

According to Miller, the reasons for war always matter. In general, the Iraq and Afghanistan War films presume a justified purpose for the armed conflicts they feature, so the questioning of war's purpose is minimal in these films. However, in *GZ*, at stake is the integrity of the very purpose for U.S. military intervention. The purpose of Miller's mission is simple: "to find weapons and save lives," a motive consistent with his role as a soldier. Yet, the obstacles Miller confronts trying to fulfill his purpose lead him down a different path by necessity.

What began as a straightforward mission turns into a tangled web of lies and betrayal. Miller's purpose, then, shifts to surviving long enough to expose the truth by relying on the warrior code to do the right moral thing. His love for his country would not allow him to carry on in a war falsely created and justified. Ironically, in the film's final scene, Miller drives out of Baghdad as the camera shifts away from Miller's convoy to settle on an oil facility, perhaps reflecting the real reason for the war. In this film, purpose emerges as a foundational pentad element that makes the narrative interpretable.

Dominant Ratio and Motive

GZ details the relentless efforts of a single warrior to do the right thing. The terms that emerge as dominant are counteragents, purpose, act, and agent. *GZ* clearly undermines the image of the enemy in the traditional American mythology of war. The enemy is neither Iraqi troops nor insurgent forces because they do not appear in the film. The enemy candidate could be Al-Rawi, but at the same time he could help mend the political tears that war has created in Iraq. The overwhelming enemy is the U.S. government, and Poundstone proves to be the worst enemy of the collective group of Iraq and Afghanistan War films because his manipulation and lies destroyed American credibility in the region, deceived its warriors and the world as a whole, and may well have given birth to the insurgent uprising that plagues Iraq to this day. Exposing the lies underlying the purpose for war is also implicated strongly in this film. If the United States had not masked its true intent for engaging in war in Iraq, then the prevailing enemy in the film would have disappeared.

Keeping in mind the influence of purpose and counter-agent, the act-agent ratio emerges as the dominant force in the film. The film highlights the agent warrior and his difficult choice to embrace a second act and pursue it because it is the morally right thing to do, even if it undermines military command. Although Miller pays a mental, emotional, and physical price for his choices, including a loss of faith not likely to be restored, those injuries pale in comparison to the heroic accomplishment of exposing the truth. Thus, the film elevates Miller to heroic status, even though he is unable to balance the dialectical tensions of militarism and moralism.

The film's motive is that reasons always matter in war. The philosophical orientation of act is "realism," that war speaks for itself or, in this case, the aftermath of

war speaks for itself. However, to understand war's action intrinsically means to understand why actions are performed, thus necessitating a purpose that matters, not one that deceives. The philosophical orientation of agent is "idealism," in this film meaning that a warrior rose to the occasion to stop injustice by speaking the truth. *GZ* reaffirms the warrior's heroism as well as acknowledge the sacrifice of his body, mind, and heart.

Lone Survivor

Released in 2014, *Lone Survivor* (*LS*) recounts the true story of a four-man elite SEALs unit and their experiences in an intense battle fairly early in the war in Afghanistan. Three of the four soldiers die during the exchange, but not before heroically sacrificing themselves in an effort to protect their "band of brothers" and complete their mission. As sole survivor Marcus Luttrell narrates: "I died up on that mountain. There is no question that a part of me will forever be upon that mountain dead as my brothers died. There is a part of me that lived because of my brothers." Physically maimed and spiritually broken, Luttrell returns from war wracked by survivor's guilt. According to Boone from *rodgerebert.com*, this film carries a sense of sincerity and respect for the troops that should not be confused with profundity. He goes on to claim that this film honors the sacrifice of the American War machine (warriors); which is all about enduring whatever hardship is thrown at you while protecting the brother at your side ("Lone Survivor").

The film begins with the extraction of Luttrell from the battlefield. Medics work feverishly in the helicopter to revive and preserve his decimated body until they can get him back to the base hospital before he succumbs to death. As this dreadful sequence of images plays out on the screen, Luttrell's voice materializes, taking the audience back to

the beginning to narrate events accounting for his current dire condition. The film centers its conflict in critical choices soldiers are called on to make in war and the triumphant or catastrophic outcomes stemming from those decisions. In this case, soldiers faced the impossible dilemma of following orders or their consciences, a forced choice that resulted in physical, mental, and emotional destruction.

Act: Flying Home on Red Wings

A highly trained, close-knit SEALs team—Petty Officer 2nd class Danny Dietz, Petty Officer 2nd class Matthew "Axe" Axelson, Lieutenant Michal Murphy, and Petty Officer 1st class Marcus Luttrell—is one of several squads deployed in various regions in the mountains of Afghanistan to find and "neutralize" a high-ranking Taliban leader, Ahmad Shah. To accomplish their mission, call sign Operation Red Wings, they must remain concealed and undetected by surrounding villagers so Shah cannot be forewarned or elude capture or death. The combat mission is danger-ridden but typical of the kinds of acts in the conduct of war in Afghanistan. Almost immediately after establishing their stronghold, the SEALs face an ordeal that threatens the mission and requires a critical choice with far-reaching ramifications. That choice is either to kill or release an indigenous family of goat herders who chance upon the squad in the mountain, thus exposing the soldiers' presence.

The SEALs wrestle with this unexpected development in open conversation because while the mission is compromised, their options also are limited by the rules of engagement issued from military command, namely that civilians are not to be harmed unless they pose a compelling threat. Axe looks at Murphy and says, "Soft compromise. Terminate the compromise… Shah's down there. We let them go, Shah disappears.

Mission fails." Murphy then suggests they kill the three males, an older father and two young boys, but Marcus chimes in with, "I'm just saying, it ain't going to be private. Gonna be out there for the whole fucking world. CNN: SEALs kill goat farmers. I don't want that legacy, bro. I'm not killing goat farmers. Not feeling that. " When he suggests the alternative of tying them to a tree, Axe rebuts, "We tie them up, we have no control over when they get found, get free. I will die before I let them dictate when we die. I will not end up showing your body—your head—on television. On the computer. No way; they do not get that vote." Axe is convinced the herders will betray the SEALs to the Taliban at the earliest opportunity, yet all remain cognizant of their sense of right and wrong as well as command protocol prohibiting the killing of civilians except as a last resort. The final decision is made by squad leader Murphy; after listening to the arguments, he humanely lets the villagers go.

The goat herders do indeed disclose the SEALs' location, and soon thereafter Murphy goes on reconnaissance where he discovers a small army of Taliban troops on top of a hill preparing to surround the squad. The camera's shifting uphill to downhill perspective reflects the view that the ensuing battle will be an uphill fight for survival with a downward trajectory toward death. Murphy informs the team they will soon have enemy contact, and then leans over to Marcus asking, "How fucking fast are these guys?"

Marcus: Fast.

Murphy: What are you thinking?

Marcus: I think we are about fixin' to get into a pretty good gunfight.

Murphy: Copy that.

Marcus: Looks like I voted wrong.

> Murphy: Negative. We've been given the opportunity to reach out and make some hell fucking strong contact with our friends from the other side. Job well done.

This pre-battle scene is important symbolically because it reveals their readiness for combat, the *raison d'etre* of their role in war, but also the tenuousness and uncertainties that attend human decision-making in war. The SEALs had no good options once the goat farmers appeared: freeing them meant combat against an enemy with numerical advantage, killing them was reprehensible and a violation of orders, and retreat was unthinkable. Moreover, there were no "do-overs" once their choice was set in motion. Spouting bravado and apparent nonchalance, they appear to accept the consequences of human mistakes indigenous to war. One of those consequences is exposing the vulnerabilities of the human body, the site upon which carnage is heaped for the rest of the film.

Scene: Bringing the Fight

The opening scene of *LS* features the ubiquitous helicopter flying across open plains with a majestic view of nature in the background. This image is incongruous with the frenetic and claustrophobic activities occurring inside the helicopter after a severely injured warrior is extracted from a place of battle. Almost immediately, the scene fades into a calm dawn at an American base in Afghanistan where the audience witnesses troop training activities while soldiers await their marching orders. The base establishes a conventional military backdrop of technologies of war along with a sense of structure, order, cleanliness, and routine. The busy pace of operations is silhouetted in soft day breaks and dusk, like a temporary respite for the battle-worn. In this cloistered, relatively

peaceful environment, the SEALs' team develops bonds, stays fit, and relishes the opportunity to demonstrate their superior skills in action. This short segment presents the only benign scene in the film.

As the squad embarks on its mission, they are dropped into the pristine grandeur of the Kunar Province Mountains, a formidable landscape into which they easily blend, but not for long. Images of trees, the forest, the panoramic snow-capped mountains, and the simple villages form a restive background juxtaposed sharply against the relentless chaos and violence that overtake the scene once combat begins. Two sequences in *LS* illustrate the incongruities between the power of nature and the violent actions of war.

First, battle between the four SEALs and Taliban forces begins high on the tree-topped hills above the village of Asadabad. Because of the sheer number of enemy troops, the squad is forced to move downhill below the tree line where the topography changes to jagged boulders that span the rest of the way to the bottom of the hill. The squad has already sustained bullet wounds by the time they are pinned in by the rock formation below them and the enemy above them. Their only choice—a non-choice—is to plummet down the mountain through the gauntlet of boulders and hope to escape. But they are overwhelmed by the environment's obstacles. Cameras capture in excruciating detail the ravishing of their meek bodies against the unforgiving rocks. One soldier smashes back-first into a boulder while another goes airborne, breaking bones after the freefall. They are at the mercy of the forces of gravity and nature, and they can neither withstand the onslaught to their bodies nor regroup to ward off the Taliban once they hit ground.

Second, nature symbolically returns as the warriors die one by one. When Murphy sacrifices himself to call base for backup, he dies overlooking a beautiful mountain range. When Taraq kills Dietz, Dietz watches a display of sunrays shining through trees and over cliffs. Once Axe finally has no more fight left in him, he sits against a tree gazing up into a clear sky displaying lush tree branches.

The juxtaposition of nature's beauty and war-torn bodies accentuates the damages of war. As the scene grows more chaotic, insurmountable, and unabated, the inability of the human body to withstand the effects of the physical environment becomes more apparent. Consequently, this incongruity amplifies the vulnerabilities of the warriors. In addition, compared to nature, the violent combat actions seem unnatural and out of place. Scenic elements ultimately frame war's costs, yet the environment does not trigger action. Instead, scene emerges as an intricate part of the film's background, but only as a final resting place for warriors.

<u>Agent: Last Man Standing</u>

The early portion of *LS* depicts the SEALs as untested but consummate warriors with all of the qualities that define a hero. Short segments feature soldiers as they train and bond as a unit. They are physically fit, expert marksmen, cohesive as a team, and equipped with advanced weaponry and communication capabilities to function proficiently in the field. They also have the requisite confidence and "can-do" attitude expected of elite SEALs. Lone survivor Marcus relates this orientation through voiceover at the film's beginning:

> There's a storm inside of us. I've heard many team guys speak of this. A burning, a river, a drive. An unrelenting desire to push yourself harder and further than

> anyone could think possible. Pushing ourselves into those cold, dark corners, where the bad things live. Where the bad things fight. We wanted that fight at the highest volume. A loud fight, the loudest, coldest, darkest, most unpleasant of the unpleasant fights.

Prior to their mission, these warriors embody a proper balance between militaristic prowess and moral integrity intrinsic to the traditional myth's warrior hero. These qualities remain intact early in their mission until tension is activated between militarism and moralism when the team decides to free the group of civilian goat herders. It is their moral fiber, not their militaristic credentials, that is tested. An imbalance thus arises, not because their contested choice makes combat inevitable, but because acting on moral principles eventually will undermine their militaristic capabilities. From this point on, the film chronicles the progressive deterioration of the elite commandos as they struggle futilely to survive in battle. The instinct for self-preservation makes maintaining a balance irrelevant.

The SEALs appear to be holding their own militaristically at the onset of the film's combat sequences. For example, in typical war film fashion, the American warriors are swift and cunning as they take out hordes of enemy troops. In one scene, Axe emerges as superhuman when he leaves his cover and calmly walks into enemy fire, taking out numerous Taliban soldiers without sustaining an injury. It is not until Dietz attempts to contact the command base that an American takes a hit; Axe follows, taking a bullet in the shoulder and then the ear. He is attacked and engages in hand-to-hand combat where god-like tenacity and skills reemerge. After a Taliban soldier pounces on and mounts the SEAL, Axe manages to disarm him, bashes the enemy's head against a

nearby rock, and then grabs his gun and kills him. At this point, like the visage of Rambo, Axe symbolizes the superhero's invulnerability and invincibility.

Not surprisingly, however, the squad becomes increasingly powerless to control their circumstances, and militarism's options dissipate. Protective instincts for one another remain strong, which generates selective moralism reserved only for the brothers in arms. This redefinition of moral responsibility implies that militarism and moralism have merged into one entity, so conflict between the values no longer exists since the squad's survival is their only motive for acting. In one scene, Axe, who has now lost his ear and can barely walk, provides cover fire as Marcus grabs Dietz's body and shouts, "GET THE FUCK UP AND GET YOUR FUCKING LEGS MOVING!" Throwing Dietz over his back, the men scale down a steep ridge while unsuccessfully trying to avoid crossfire. What is important here is the symbolic act of retrieving Dietz. Later, Marcus and Axe are both wounded and afraid, but have nothing left except each other. After Marcus gets a grip on his emotions, he tends to Axe, still alive and cognizant despite a dangerous head wound. Axe asked Marcus, "Are Mikey and Danny really dead?" Marcus responds, "I don't know." Axe then asks, "Are we dead?" To which Marcus replies, "Not yet."

Their warrior resources are no longer sufficient. Another explosion from heavy enemy fire separates the two warriors. They look for one another frantically, each shouting the other's name as though contact might reduce their vulnerability. The camera slowly zooms in on Axe, now a mere mortal, one eye swollen shut and blood dripping down his decimated body. In spite of his courage, he is a shell of himself, a dying soldier who was no match for the instruments of war. The show of brotherhood is common in

many war films and fully embedded in the military code of honor. Thus, refusing to leave his comrades behind, Marcus' loyalty to the end positions him as a noble, compassionate, and courageous agent.

Agency: High Tech Uselessness

Like the other Afghan/Iraq War films, the warrior agent possesses two agencies with which to undertake his mission: military hardware and weapons, and the agent's internal resources, including the skills to utilize these weapons and technologies. In *LS*, however, war technologies are rendered virtually useless. The special-ops team enters the scene with enough high-powered guns, communication equipment, and medical and food provisions to sustain them for the duration of the mission. However, because of the uneven geography of the drop zone location, their equipment does not perform adequately. On numerous occasions, their "comm" attempts fail to connect with base operations, causing the team to miss check in times and necessitating that the team make its own decision about the fate of the goat farmers. Ironically, the only time Murphy succeeds in contacting military command is when he climbs to the peak of a mountain to secure a connection. Yet, that move exposes him to enemy fire and he ultimately dies making the extraction call.

The remaining SEALs destroy the communications equipment, except for the satellite phone, and end up with only their guns for defense. They too prove insufficient in the long run because there are not enough bullets to cover the enemy horde. Moreover, an extraction sortie of two Blackhawk helicopters is deployed to retrieve the embattled SEALs. They appear on the horizon reflecting the symbolic image of the pilot savior (Downey). Immediately upon landing, one of the Blackhawks is struck by an RPG,

killing everyone on board, while the other is forced to vacate the scene—against the demands of the rescue SEALs' team, one of whose members threatens the pilots at gunpoint to stay on the ground—until additional support arrives. The power and security of military agencies collapse.

The warriors in *LS* are forced to rely only on one another and their survival instincts. For three SEALs, even these skills lacked the force to repel the enemy. The lone survivor, Marcus, eventually is stripped of his weapons, leaving him injured, vulnerable, and absent the resources for self-protection. It is only the intervention of a local villager, Gulab, and his son that saves Marcus; sans weapons, their humanitarian act proved to be the most powerful weapon for survival.

<u>Co- and Counter-Agents: Lions and Lambs</u>

The counter-agents in *LS* are the diabolically evil enemies of the traditional American mythology of war. In name, they are the Taliban, who embrace an extremist view of Islam, violently took over the country of Afghanistan, and were ousted from power by the United States after 9/11 and the discovery that Afghanistan harbored Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda terrorists. In the film, the Taliban, led by Ahmed Shah and his second-in-command, Taraq, have retreated into the rugged mountains where they continue to terrorize villagers and vow death to Americans, The film juxtaposes Taliban evil against U.S. warrior goodness through a sequence that cuts back and forth between the SEALs' briefing mission and a vicious killing in a village next to the SEALs' impending drop zone. As the SEALs cover mission protocol and assignment details, Taraq and Shah interrogate a villager suspected of helping Americans. Back at base, Murphy informs his team that Shah is a "tier-1 target" responsible for killing at least 20

Marines. The audience shifts back to the village where Shah and Taraq are seen giving credence to Murphy's brief about their evil. Dragging the suspected man out of his home, they hold him down on a log as Taraq hacks at his neck in front of the entire village. Taliban troops, and those who support them, are the only counter-agents in *LS*, and they are a powerful adversary.

The obvious co-agents in the film are the squad members. They are a close-knit group of soldiers and friends, they close ranks in battle, relentlessly trying to protect and save one another. Murphy, for example, becomes the group's martyr, sacrificing himself to communicate with command so the other three members of his squad can be rescued. The brotherly banter and support Dietz receives from Luttrell also illustrates the value of the co-warriors; he carries him, drags him out of danger, and attends to his wounds as a natural, innate display of loyalty. In fact, the film's core is its depiction of warrior bonding and the protection and sacrifice of each warrior for the others.

However, salvation for Marcus comes from an unlikely source, villager Mohammed Gulab, who looks like the enemy, but risks his life to protect Marcus from the Taliban. Gulab finds a stressed out Marcus at a water pond, nonverbally convincing the wary survivor to follow him to the village. He ends up at Gulab's house, apprehensive as he accepts his help and pleads with him to take a map to the Americans. This establishes the beginning of a bond of trust. When Taraq and his soldiers enter the village, they find Marcus and wrestle him outside to the beheading log. Before he can be executed, however, the villagers fire on Taraq. Gulab tells him that an ancient Afghan welcoming custom makes the villagers responsible for protecting their guest Marcus. Taraq leaves momentarily but returns to attack the village, and a fierce battle ensues.

Gulab eventually kills Taraq, thus partially fulfilling the SEAL's failed mission, and Marcus, with help from Gulab's son, dispatches another Taliban, who is choking the life out of him. Both agent and co-agent survive because they were "never out of the fight."

The arrival of American rescue choppers ends the fighting. Marcus wants Gulab and his son to come with him but is denied. Mustering the last of his energy, Marcus embraces the boy, shouts out his gratitude to Gulab and the villagers, and is airlifted away, returning full circle to the scene that opened the film. We learn later that Gulab and his family immigrated to the United States and settled in the same town as Marcus.

Purpose: Surviving

The purpose for Operation Red Wings was to hunt down and kill a Taliban officer in a nation at war with the United States. Given the ingrained evil of the enemy, this purpose was clearly warranted and consistent with the "noble" justification for war in traditional mythology. It also fits into the social context of the "War on Terror" following 9/11 and the role of the Taliban in promoting world terrorism and opening their country to protect Al Qaeda and known American hater Osama bin Laden. In addition to neutralizing Taliban war managers, the mission's subtext was to seek retribution for the murders of American troops.

After the mission was compromised, however, the squad's survival became the primary goal for continued combat. To live to fight another day is a part of the warrior's code, and the lone survivor accomplishes that mission.

Dominant Ratio and Motive

Lone Survivor details the chaos and anxieties that warriors face day in and day out in war. The film follows a narrative of hopefulness to hopelessness as the madness and

violence of the experience of war destroys the mission and its agents. Of the pentad elements, act, agent, scene, and co-agents rise in importance compared to agency, counter-agents, and purpose. The scene is compelling because it renders agencies useless and vividly contrasts the intrinsic beauty of nature with the brutality of the experience of war. Co-agents are also important, not only because the squad acted as one unit or one set of agents, but because co-agents paid the ultimate price for Marcus to survive. It is significant that an emergent co-agent, a local Afghan resistant to the Taliban but seemingly powerless to overcome that enemy, saved Marcus' life and simultaneously partially completed the task the SEALs set out to accomplish but could not because of the vulnerabilities of the human condition.

Consequently, the act-agent ratio dominates the film's presentation. The narrative encapsulated the journey of an agent who survives war. However, the threat to that agent's survival and his co-agents was a product of human action within a mission, a moral choice of a group of soldiers to allow a group of citizens to survive. That decision set the entire drama into motion, eventually placing warriors into an impossible situation they could not overcome. Broken minds and bodies resulted from the encounter. The act's philosophy of "realism" signifies the inability of humans to withstand the crucible of participating in war, at the same time that the agent's philosophy of "idealism" reifies the heroism of warriors who are called to carry out war and sacrifice in it. Taking responsibility for the actions of warriors in war generates inevitable guilt for war's survivors. The film's motive, then, is that for all of its glorification, war is hell that haunts those touched by it in any way. Marcus Luttrell lived through his experiences, but

was transformed and permanently damaged. Even as he emerged from war a hero, he remains a troubled survivor at home.

American Sniper

A 2015 film, *American Sniper (AS)* tells the story of Navy SEAL Chris Kyle, the most effective sharpshooter in the history of the military, with 160 confirmed kills out of 255 claimed kills. Through four tours of duty in war-ravaged Iraq, the film depicts his slow transformation from a hero-savior to a hero-victim who continuously struggles to readjust to a "normal" way of life each time he returns home. *AS*, according to Powers of *NPR.com,* essentially captures the heartbreaking truth of the war for millions of Americans who admire the bravery, sacrifice and patriotism of our men and women in uniform. Powers states, "It speaks emotionally to audiences who sense that we lost something in Iraq, yet still want to honor the heroism of those who risked their lives for the cause, whether or not it was ultimately a great one" ("The Cost of War"). In this sense, *AS* not only highlights the warrior's deterioration in war, but equally emphasizes Kyle's troubles transitioning out of war and reintegrating back into society, a plight that is becoming more and more common with returning Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans. The film's conflict revolves around two disparate relationships: maintaining a healthy family life with his wife, Taya, and their children, and resolving a psychological duel with his nemesis, Syrian sniper Mustafa. As it turns out, the very acts that created the legendary hero are responsible for the damage to his psyche and functioning.

Act: The Master Journeyman

Chris Kyle is an expert sniper attached to a Marine unit; they carry out missions on orders from military command that typically require "protection from the top" during

incursions in Iraq cities and surrounding areas to smoke out targeted high-ranking Al Qaeda operatives and insurgents. He performs these acts hundreds of times over four tours in Iraq. The film is preoccupied with up-close images of Kyle's face and particularly his eye through the rifle's scope as he pans the urban landscape for evidence of concealed enemies. This tight focus enables the audience to observe how the soldier arrives at the difficult decision to hold back fire or shoot to kill, and then to gauge his reactions. After identifying targets, he must quickly determine if they are friend or foe, if their behaviors are suspicious, and if U.S. forces are endangered by the target's location. His choices are tension-ridden and often agonizing, yet eventually decisive. The accumulation of his sniper hits progressively takes a toll on his psyche throughout the film.

His first war kill is noteworthy because the targets happen to be a mother and son. Perched on a rooftop, Chris has a bird's eye view of both targets and their distance from American troops. As the mother and child exit a building, the woman hands her son a grenade, and the boy begins running toward an approaching American convoy oblivious to the unfolding danger. Only Chris has noticed the grenade exchange, so despite his apprehension, he squeezes the trigger and strikes down the boy. He does the same to the mother when she grabs the grenade to complete the suicide mission. The Mrine backup with Chris praises him, calls the dead woman an evil bitch, and leans into the sharpshooter to give him a congratulatory hug. Chris responds, "Get the fuck off me." Chris appears to be in a state of shock and perhaps regret for the outcome of his actions, but this momentary pause becomes a ritual, allowing him to shrug off any remorse so he can continue to carry on the mission.

Each rifle shot creates bedlam and resolution at the same time; it evokes incompatible emotions of confusion, trepidation, relief, and ultimately anxiety that do not go away. He lifts weights and performs difficult "deadlifts" as a coping strategy to work off stress, anger, and feelings of revenge that persistently ruminate within him because of the harms the enemy inflicts on his fellow soldiers. These efforts are insufficient, however, to assuage his conscience, and Chris evolves more into an avenger with each kill.

Throughout his tours, Chris has been fixated on assassinating three Al Qaeda terrorists: Zarqawi, the Butcher, and sniper Mustafa. This mission consumes his thoughts for years, and not until his final tour of duty does he succeed in taking out one of the three enemies—Mustafa. In the meantime, his obsession distorts this victim-hero's ability to think clearly, and his relationships with others in country and at home suffer as a result. During his fourth tour, Chris and his team are informed that engineers attempting to build a wall are being picked off by enemy sniper fire. Believing the sniper is Mustafa, Chris is ordered to find and kill him. After spotting his nemesis, he realizes that his backup is too far away, so if Chris fires, then enemy troops will discover their location. One of the commandos encourages him to take the shot despite the risk, and he does. Mustafa is taken out from over a mile away, proof of the sniper superiority of Chris after all. Later, Chris is wounded when the team escapes its hideaway, but Mustafa's death justifies those injuries in his mind.

Snipers are critical to the effectiveness of missions, especially in confined urban settings. During these missions, the agent shoulders significant responsibility for making decisions that vitally affect his squad and the combat conditions for larger groups of

Marines the sniper squad oversees. Clearly, Kyle is up to the task, yet the anxiety that plagues him gradually affects his mental acuity and that, in turn, compromises his ability to cope on the battlefield and the home front. The same acts that make him an expert warrior make him sick.

Scene: Rooftops Near and Far

Unlike the other three Afghanistan and Iraq War films, *AS* divides its time between the two seemingly different scenes of Iraq and the United States. The film provides almost equal coverage of each disparate world, but eventually these scenes become uncomfortably inverted: war becomes home and home becomes war.

On four different occasions, Chris is deployed to Iraq, specifically to the large cities of Ramadi, Sadr City, and Fallujah. Each city is interchangeable with the others, for all are rubble-strewn and barely functional due to war's decimation, yet they are dangerous, ominous places. For example, when his squad receives intelligence that the Butcher is hiding out in a known building, they infiltrate a home directly across from the building. Its owner says he does not know of any terrorist activity in the area. Since it is a holiday, he invites them to join his family for dinner. At the table, Chris notices the man has rubbed-raw elbows, a telltale sign of a gunman spending a lot of time perched on his elbows. Chris finds the man's stockpile of weapons, and then manipulates the insurgent to gain entry into the Butcher's building. A tense room by room search fails to find the Butcher, but the squad discovers a complicated series of tunnels through which the Butcher has escaped. Chris' combat skills, while not as refined as his sharpshooting, nevertheless serve him well in the largely elusive and inexplicable urban decay.

The primary war scene Kyle inhabits is the rooftop where he spends endless hours trolling for the enemy. From this panoramic position, the sniper exists "above" the combat zone, where he can visually recon, oversee its progress, and engage in battle at will. Literally "on top" of war, he maintains control through a hyper-vigilance that enables him to detect secret hiding places or act on the slightest of movements that might indicate enemy presence. One telling segment describes both the advantages and challenges of life on the roof. "It smells like piss," says Marc Lee as he relieves Chris of his post. The smell of urine resulted from Chris lying in a prone position all night while picking off eight Al Qaeda soldiers. Unable to move due to his assignment, Chris had to urinate where he lay and remaine in it until he was pulled from duty. The roof, then, is an effective home for Chris because he can engage the enemy while protecting his fellow servicemen.

This scene sits in contrast to his other home in America, a place where Chris feels distinctly "out of place." The audience views him in multiple locations during his trips home—at his house, a tire shop, a backyard pool party, the VA hospital. These are normal places for community life, yet he zones out, becomes distracted, or confines his time to the television catching up on the status of the war. He has lost the capacity to identify physically or psychologically with the mundane business of ordinary living because his temperamental home resides in war.

As incompatible as scenic images seem, the film shifts between them frequently until they begin to merge or run on parallel paths. The scenes in *AS* look different but are functionally similar; for example, hunting in the forest mirrors sniping from a rooftop, or mall shopping crowds look like throngs from the outdoor market, or roads packed with

vehicles are interchangeable between countries. The key symbol, however, is the shooting range, metaphorically as well as literally. Chris Kyle's life cycle is defined through shooting, and these acts occur in both war and home. He grew up shooting a rifle as a hunter, he worked in a rodeo showing off his horsemanship and shooting prowess, he trained to be a sharpshooter at the military's shooting ranges, and his job title is sharpshooter. Hunting is shooting, sniping is shooting, training is shooting, combat is shooting. The film revels in scenes featuring the quiet, concentrated demeanor of a killer looking for prey. Significantly, Kyle's post-war solace and recovery come from opening his own shooting range for other troubled, disabled veterans. In this way, he remains tied to the mission and scene of war but also is able to find satisfaction within the confines of civilian life.

The film's scenes are important mainly to provide arenas for the warrior's actions in war and as he struggles at home to put the pieces of his fractured life back together. His inability to compartmentalize the worlds of war and home is psychically damaging, scenic baggage that he carries within him.

Agent: The Legend

Sharpshooter Chris Kyle is the central agent featured in *AS*, the film conveying its narrative through the perspective of the agent as he experiences war and subsequent distress at home. In short order, this agent proves his effectiveness and efficiency in combat, earns the nickname "The Legend," and is hailed as a genuine hero by Americans back in the states. On all criteria, he emerges as an elite warrior with uncompromising moral integrity. He has a dark side, however, that gradually surfaces throughout four deployments to Iraq. The more proficient and seasoned he gets as a warrior, the more

out-of-character he becomes as a normal functioning human being. The film highlights his early years as a prototype of the ideal balanced warrior. That identity is threatened, though, when his war experiences lead him to adopt a hyper-militaristic persona, a transformation which also generates hypo-moralism. The warrior's dialectical imbalance creates conflict, particularly at home, and impairs the agent from letting go of war. The restoration of the warrior's health does not occur until Kyle is discharged from the Marines, receives assistance from the VA, and begins a program of volunteer service to other troubled veterans.

Immediately following Kyle's first sniper mission, the film cuts to an extended segment of Chris as a boy growing up in a conservative, Christian family. The audience discovers that the boy hunts deer (learning never to leave his rifle in the dirt), prays for guidance (with a bible he pilfered from the church), rides the rodeo circuit (while his girlfriend entertains another man at their home), and in other ways embodies the iconic image of the American cowboy. At dinner one night, Chris' father, Wayne, lectures his sons about the need to embrace a certain code of honor. He says:

> There are three types of people in this world: sheep, wolves, and sheepdogs. Some people prefer to believe that evil doesn't exist in the world, and if it ever darkened their doorstep, they wouldn't know how to protect themselves. Those are the sheep. Then you've got predators who use violence to prey on the weak. They're the wolves. And then there are those blessed with the gift of aggression, an overpowering need to protect the flock. These men are the rare breed who live to confront the wolf. They are the sheepdog.

The description of the sheepdog provides a glimpse into Chris' character. Earlier that day, he yanked a physically larger bully off of his younger brother and beat him in a moment of rage. Blood-soaked knuckles attest to the beating he inflicted on this bully. Wayne then rips off his leather belt, slams it on the table, and tells the boys, "We are not raising any sheep in this family, and I will whup your ass if you turn into a wolf." The father's lecture concludes by telling his sons, specifically Chris, that we protect our own and that he gives permission to finish what wolves start. He then asks Chris if he finished it; Chris simply nods his head. From a very young age, Chris was taught to find the proper, virtuous balance that defines the sheepdog in order to be a man of honor. Generally, he adhered to this model until he experienced war. At that point, his militaristic overkill undermined his moral upbringing.

Chris embodies a militaristic philosophy in his role as a sniper. He is proficient, protective of his team, and deadly accurate. Despite these credentials, apparently this is not enough to satisfy him, as the audience learns when a doctor mentions his superior sniper record, and asks whether he has any regrets about those kills. Chris tells the doctor he only regrets not being able to save more American troops. He takes militarism to excess through two means. First, he succumbs to narrow-mindedness, rejecting anything or anybody as distractions to his mission. As a result, he becomes robotic and uncommunicative, programmed to be a killing machine. This attitude later yields to obsessiveness about his failure to assassinate the three deadly Al-Qaeda operatives. Like the Terminator, he will not stop, thus accounting for return trips to Iraq for the second, third, and fourth times.

Second, he crosses the boundaries of his assignments. During his first tour, he is providing coverage for Marines going door to door looking for Zarqawi. He and his friend, sniper Marc Lee, argue over how the mission should be executed. Chris wants to join the ground troops to help search for the "bad guys," as he puts it, but Lee reminds him that his job is protection at the top, that when the troops know he is up there, they feel invincible. He ends the conversation by telling Chris, "Why don't you just keep banging on the long gun, and let these dogs sniff out Zarqawi."

The consequence of overusing militarism is underusing moralism. Kyle becomes rigid, judgmental, and intolerant either because he cannot do more, or others are not doing enough. For example, after his first kill, Chris watches Marines down below clearing out houses. When he sees two Marines carrying a third who is injured, he looks at his Marine backup and says, "Fuck this. I am going to go clear houses with Marines. You coming?" The Marine replies, "Fuck no I ain't coming," and then defends his decision. Chris responds coldly, "Well, if I don't see ya down there, make sure I don't see ya again." Later, he runs into his brother, Jeff, who looks troubled and despondent. When he asks how is brother is doing, Jeff just says he is tired. But as he passes Chris, he mutters "fuck this place." The sentiment catches Chris off guard, and despite being close, the two do not resolve the underlying tension between them.

Even his squad mate and friend, Marc, earns censure for questioning the war. During a briefing Chris leads, Marc expresses regrets about the U.S. presence in Iraq. Chris then reminds him that there is evil here, and it is their job to stop it. When Marc questions Chris about the concept of evil, Chris retorts, "Do you want these motherfuckers coming to San Diego or New York?" Marc is later killed in an ambush.

Chris attends his funeral and tells his wife that the ambush did not kill Marc; it was his loss of faith in the war that killed him. Because he let go, he paid the price. Chris' behavior no longer reflects any remorse, and he resents his friends for their apparent betrayals.

His troubling behavior extends to his home life, as it symbolizes the tenets of moralism while war represents militarism. Chris cannot stop talking about the war, and takes offense at Americans living their simple lives while American boys are dying. Even the birth of his son does not seem to sway Chris' attitude. He volunteers for third and fourth tours over Taya's strong objections. She tells him that life is "not about them…it's about us." She eventually relents, pleading for him to "make it back to us." By his fourth tour, Taya presents him with an ultimatum that, if he leaves, she and the children will not be waiting for him when he returns. Despite this threat, he deploys nonetheless.

In this film, the agent demonstrates his ability to balance militaristic and moralistic values to worthy ends for both. War changes him, however, creating a compelling and almost insurmountable imbalance between war's engagement and engaging in a home and family life. The imbalance corrupts his moral virtues, alienates those he cares about most, and generates excessively risky actions on the battlefield. He comes home for the last time a damaged warrior without the resources to heal himself. Seeking help, he was well on his way to recovering both balance and spirit when he was tragically killed trying to help another mentally damaged veteran.

Agency: Scopes and Shadows

Two agencies stand out in *AS*. The first are war's conventional instruments—weapons, explosive devices, advanced technology, troop deployment, and the like, available to both American personnel and the enemy. Although the United States controls the market in advanced weaponry and the mechanics to carry out war, equally deadly are suicide martyr missions, IEDs, and terrorist raids by enemy forces and the fear they engender. These agencies are in full view throughout the film, and exert no dominating force in the narrative.

Since *AS* tells the story of war from an individual sniper's point of view, then the symbolic power of agency stems from the sniper's weapon of choice: the "long gun." In the hands of an expert, the long range rifle is an influential extension of the agent which personalizes killing. Prior to every kill, the audience is privy to Chris' visual perspective as he pinpoints the target and zooms in on a close-up of the target's face and activities; they witness firsthand the power of the rifle bullet's penetration and subsequent shattering of bodies. Without this weapon's capabilities, the sniper is stripped of his power and rendered ineffective.

For example, during a mission to locate the Butcher, Chris and his team are in the back of a Hummer. Mounted on this Hummer is a .50 caliber machine gun. Mustafa, who also uses a "sniper rifle," singlehandedly takes out more than half of the team in the Hummer. The machine gun proves to be no match for the stealth and range of the sniper rifle. The ensuing battle shows Chris pinned down behind a wall because Mustafa is firing at him nonstop to create a diversion so the Butcher can escape. Because Chris was not able to employ his long gun, he was incapable of influencing the battle's outcome.

Instead, the Butcher and Mustafa were able to act with fearlessness and impunity while Chris watched helplessly as the Butcher murdered an informant's young son using a drill gun.

The sniper rifle, then, critically determines the agent's mission success or failure. Dispatching enemies from a safe distance prevents them from fighting back. However, it is the agents that wield these weapons who prove to be most powerful because agents become part of the agency of death. The sole mission of Chris' final tour is to kill Mustafa. It is only fitting that these two men would face each other in a contemporary shootout. Mustafa, a former Olympian for Syria, is a world champion shooter, and Chris is a cowboy/rodeo champion. The final act pits the two men against each other in a clash of titans, the ultimate agent-agency relationship that reinforces an old aphorism, "live by the gun, die by the gun." The agency through which Chris and Mustafa found fame and legend eventually claimed each other's lives.

Co- and Counter-Agents: Brothers in Blood

The counter-agents in *AS* are simultaneously conventional and unusual. The clear enemy is the terrorist and insurgent, from Al-Qaeda operatives to individuals like Zarqawi, the Butcher, and sniper Mustafa. Yet, they are hidden, carrying out clandestine activities through a network of informants comprised of Iraqi citizens. In this sense, the enemy is always near but mostly invisible in the film. Mustafa is the most visible enemy with the greatest impact on American troop deaths. However, it is not until his final tour that Chris is able to confront him. Mustafa in a way is the perfect counter-agent for Chris. They both hold the same prestige. Chris is a Texas rodeo champion, a father, and one of the best snipers in the military. Mustafa is a Syrian Olympic medalist, a father,

and one of the best snipers in his class. The similarities are disquieting as their eventual confrontation reflects a competition more than a combat engagement.

The most significant image of the counter-agent comes from the traditional myth's definition of the innocent in war—women and children. For an American soldier to kill a mother and son is antithetical to the myth's unspoken warrior code. Of course, women and children are not typically included in the category of "enemy," so despite their obvious threat to the safety of American troops, it is not surprising that Chris hesitates and rechecks his perceptions before taking them out. This film validates the evolving nature of the enemy in war, making it more difficult to distinguish between friend and foe, innocent or guilty.

All soldiers and veterans are Chris' co-agents. They live in war and at home. During his four tours in Iraq, Chis formed a bond with Marc Lee. Marc was also a SEAL and Chris' best friend in the war. The film portrays these two having a very close brotherly bond. After Marc's death, Chris enters the VA hospital to visit another squad member (Biggles) who was also injured during the mission. Soon, they begin to argue about Chris' decision to go back and hunt down Mustafa. Chris looks at Biggles and says, "You're my brother. They have to fucking pay for what they did to you."

Another unusual co-agent is Chris' wife, Taya. Even though the war has strained their marriage, she supports his decisions throughout the film, accommodating him repeatedly so he can accomplish his goals. The war comes home to her, though. Taya calls Chris to inform him they are going to have a baby boy. At that moment, he is sitting in the back of a Hummer with fellow troops, and they all start to celebrate Chris' baby. Then, as soon as they turn the corner the driver is shot by the Syrian sniper, Mustafa. As

the Hummer comes to a halt, Mustafa kills the gunman manning the .50 caliber machine gun while the rest of the team takes cover. Taya hears all the mayhem on the phone and shouts in disbelief as she collapses to the floor outside of the hospital, stateside. Mustafa pins the U.S. troops back as the Butcher unleashes his punishment for talking to the Americans on the home owner's son. The Butcher takes his weapon of choice, a drill, and begins drilling into the boy's skull; the father charges and too is shot dead. All the while Chris is desperately trying to get in position to have a shot at the Butcher. Mustafa pins him down with shot after shot forcing Chris to remain behind cover. Taya hears the whole debacle as it unfolds, and for the first time, she is a direct participant with her husband in war.

Although ally and enemy are conventionally understood in *AS*, there are enough twists in the relationship between co-agents and counter-agents to blur distinctions between the two. That women and children occupy the enemy role makes it a jarring experience to watch Chris neutralize both of them, and even more unsettling to concede that anyone is a potential enemy. Taya experiences war from across the ocean by listening to the agony of battle as an invisible co-agent. Although enemies, Mustafa and Chris share a symbiotic relationship of identification: in a Jungian sense, they are the persona and the shadow of one another, simultaneously working with and against one another as co- and counter-agents in a quest for wholeness. They exist only because the other exists. The film's treatment of the relationships among agent, co-agent, and counter-agent creates confusion and dismay, thus furthering the troubles facing the agent.

<u>Purpose: Fighting is Reasonable</u>

Chris believes that war is the way to protect the world from evil. This view is consistent with America's War on Terror and its justification for U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. The film highlights the idea that there is no shortage of terrorist enemies in our contemporary times: Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussain, Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban are but a few. The uncontested purpose in the film relates to repelling or neutralizing terrorist threats in order to create the conditions for stability and peace.

The purpose for war always matters. *AS* depicts warriors unconditionally accepting that war is necessary, and trusting their commanders' decisions about entering into war. Such loyalty is a universal warrior code. For example, the samurai lived for the purpose to serve their lord or master with honor. If they no longer possessed honor, then there was no reason to live. They remedy this loss by killing themselves in a ritual known as seppuku. Without a justifiable purpose, warriors cannot muster the conviction to fight. Kyle's commitment grew stronger as war persisted, implying that he understood why Americans fought in Iraq, despite the hardships this presented. He entered the armed services with a traditional call to arms, but ended his service with a personal vendetta to kill a killer and thus avenge his fallen brothers in arms. Although the experience of war damaged him, his motivations to serve never wavered.

Dominant Ratio and Motive

AS showcases the damaging effect war has on the warrior's mind. The film portrays an American hero in Chris Kyle fighting valiantly and defending his country and brothers at arms just like the traditional image of the American warrior. It is only when he is away from war that the damage inflicted on him comes to light. Struggling to think

about anything other than war, Chris has neglected his full attention to fatherhood, his marriage and, most importantly, his grip on reality.

The film emphasizes the pentad terms of agency, scene, counter-agent, act, and agent. The narrative builds drama with the mystery of the enemy sniper's whereabouts and who is the superior sharpshooter. The long gun is critical to the enactment of combat for these two characters. The two fittingly participate in a contemporary shootout reminiscent of those between cowboys in the Old West, and the cowboy triumphs over the "savage." The scene plays a significant role in *AS* because a sniper needs site and sight to be effective. In addition, the integration of war and home scenes creates an interdependence that vitally affects livability in both. However, scene is ultimately subordinate to the agent and the agent acts upon the scene rather than the reverse.

Thus, the act-agent ratio is central to understanding the film and its motive. War creates heroes and villains, epic showdowns in combat, and the need for skilled warriors. Chris has the skills the military needs to carry out missions and influence the direction of war. Moreover, those skills protect other soldiers engaged in battle. Consequently, the agent, using his rifle as an extension of the self, makes difficult and sometimes tragic choices in the interest of military objectives. At the same time, the enactment of war so alters the psyche of the agent that Chris is rendered incapable of extricating himself from his place within the war machine, and of substituting that role with one more conducive to peace. Philosophically, the reality of war is destruction, so damage to warriors is inevitable, even though, idealistically, they continue to be honored as heroes. The motive of *AS*, then, is to provide a glimpse of the psychological trauma heaped on warriors and

their families and, in doing so, advances the position that war may be justified, but the damage never ends.

CHAPTER 4

MYTHIC EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN WARRIOR IMAGE

Grounded in the image of the American warrior, this thesis takes the stance that Iraq and Afghanistan War films illuminate the destructive reality of war and the humanness of the warrior hero. Collectively these films reinstate the militarism and moralism dialectical tension intrinsical to the agent. They reaffirm the warrior's heroism and sacrifice while also acknowledging war as destructive to the warrior's psyches, hearts, minds, and bodies. This chapter addresses each of the films as a collective group and how they shape, change, and transform the image of the American warrior in a society grounded in the concept of regeneration through violence. First, it will compare and contrast the four films to illuminate their meaning. Second, it will discuss the relevant social implications and real-world problems uncovered in the film analyses. Finally, it will explore the theoretical implications of the evolution of the American mythology of war and the warrior, as well as the genre of war films.

Each of the four films reflects a similar message through different means about the warrior's experience in war. All four films feature failed missions and determined, relentless agents, demonstrating the strength of the American warrior, but also how damaging the reality of war is on each agent's mind, body, and heart. These films capture the chaos and fears that warriors must face in war, ultimately harming the warrior

and exposing his human vulnerability. In both *The Hurt Locker* and *American Sniper,* the warrior is the best at what he does, but regardless of his training, or how elite he is, he is not able to escape the toll of war. Symbolically this reflects the view that war is damaging to the warrior's psyche and his understanding of life and reality which, in turn, qualifies our understanding of the warrior as a hero.

Green Zone and *Lone Survivor* present the acts of war as moral and ethical decisions warriors must make in the heat of battle. In both cases, the warrior abides by his moral code, which engenders devastating consequences, i.e., the death of the team, and the death of faith and trust. This reflects the constant struggle of warriors to maintain any sense of balance of dialectical tension for any length of time. Regardless, the warrior is represented as a hero in war. If he lives, however, he is transformed, haunted, and otherwise damaged when he leaves war's zone. In essence, he is a hero at war, but often only a survivor at home.

Pentad Comparison of the Films

Act

The acts in each of the films all focus on the direct experience of war by warriors. Regardless of missions or military assignments, each act clearly portrays the reality of war as hell. In *The Hurt Locker*, the struggle to follow protocol and safety procedures allows James to be a Wildman putting his team at risk with every move he makes. The chaos that results from his actions exacerbates the imbalance of his militarism over his moralism. In contrast, *Green Zone* highlights Miller's internal struggle to do the right thing all the while breaking the chain of command. While both warriors stray from the path of protocol, they symbolize the different ends of the dialectic. The acts found in

Lone Survivor also focus on the warrior taking the moral path. The experience of war and the decision to free the goat herders turns into complete chaos as the four-man SEAL team is exposed to foreign terrain and Taliban soldiers who want them dead. The chaos of battle brings the audience into war with the warrior. In *American Sniper*, Kyle's war experience penetrates the depths of his psyche causing his mind to break. With each failed mission he volunteers again for tour after tour, a glutton for war because he is tormented by the missions he has failed to accomplish. The bedlam of battle wreaks havoc on all the warriors, forever changing them.

Scene

For the most part, the scene across all four films takes place in large urban and rural areas. They are usually stable and bucolic before instantly becoming chaotic. The chaos of the scene can be exhilarating or completely devastating, but the battles that take place are unforgiving. *Lone Survivor* highlights this madness as the warriors are unable to execute their missions in spite of how powerfully advanced their weaponry. In *Lone Survivor*, the scene of war and vivid depictions of death were juxtaposed with scenes of the beauty of nature, contrasting the two to emphasize the brutality of war. The scenic experience of war to the agent also shows human vulnerability as it renders agency inoperable. *The Hurt Locker*, *American Sniper*, and *Green Zone* also feature the scenic disorder of war. From stealth positions on rooftops to Iraq's unforgiving desert, the scene of war mimics that of the Vietnam War film genre in its terrible beauty.

The scene of war on the ground then becomes one not capable of domination by superior agencies. Rather, it shows the horrors of war as well as keeps the enemy hidden, implying that there is no good scene of war. These films all focus on battles that were

fought on the ground, thus showcasing the chaos and the inevitable risks warriors have to take in order to complete their missions. The only glimpse of an aerial scene is found in *Lone Survivor* as two Blackhawk helicopters attempt to rescue the besieged squad. As the Taliban soldiers watch the helicopters approach, they shoot one down with a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) killing everyone inside. The Blackhawk was unable to see the oncoming attack and maneuver out of the way because the enemy was hidden in the trees. In another instance, Lt. Murphy attempts to make a call for back-up but all he was left with was a satellite phone. The only place he could make any connection was on an exposed ridge where he ultimately sacrificed his life to make the call.

The other films portray the trenches of war in urban city streets, where snipers and insurgents lurk in empty buildings or narrow alleyway valleys of death. The ground scene, thus, proves to be merciless and unrelenting because it either traps agents or makes using advanced technologies of war unfeasible and ineffective.

Agent

Each warrior is clearly militaristic, but tend to vary in moral impulses. Two of the films showcase strong ties to moralism in the warrior's actions in war, *Green Zone* and *Lone Survivor*. The actions and decisions these warriors make exemplify high moral conduct in war. Roy Miller's mission is to discover where Iraq is hiding their WMDs. During his assignment, he begins to question the source of intelligence for the locations of the WMDs. He essentially goes rogue to find out why military intelligence reports continue to be falsified. Miller begins to untangle a web of lies spun by his own government about the existence of Iraq's WMDs. His decision to expose the truth crushes his faith in his government.

Marcus Luttrell from *Lone Survivor* was adamant about letting the family of passing goat herders go free because they were niether enemy troops nor would the killing of them be justified by the rules of engagement. His vote and Lt. Murphy's decision to free the goat herders would ultimately seal their fates. The SEAL team is eventually discovered and forced to fight to stay alive and protect each other. The terrain of the mountains worked against the elite military group, and three died brutal deaths. Marcus was the only member to make it out alive, but even then he died both literally and metaphorically. A piece of him died in the mountain range with his brothers as his body gave out in an air evacuation before he was resuscitated back at base. The price of moralism is death and shattered faith.

The other two films featured warriors that rely more so on militarism. This is not to say that the warriors lacked moral structure, but they were more aligned with militarism. In *The Hurt Locker*, James habitually disregards safety procedures while disarming bombs, which not only risks his life but the lives of his team members as well. His unconventional and reckless tactics made him a star and brought him fame from his superiors, but it also created a divide and tension within his unit. His dedication and foolish courage nevertheless make him militaristically elite. This also created alienation from his family and his perception of reality. His thirst for war became his addiction and by the end of the film he leaves his family to do the one thing he loves—chase bombs.

Chris Kyle is also a militaristically sound warrior whose dedication and skill brought him fame for the legendary amount of kills he made as a sniper. Throughout the film Chris repeatedly protects his fellow servicemen, but his inability to complete all of his missions drives him to obsession. Preoccupied with war, he is absent as both a

husband and father. Chris returns to war for four tours until he finally is able to complete his mission of killing Mustafa, the Iraqi sniper. Afterward, Chris finally returns home but the damage has already exercised its effect; the film shows Chris staring at a blank TV screen and struggling to fit in because of flashbacks. Both of these warriors suffer mental damage. James is unable to reintegrate at home and while Chris did achieve reintegration, it seemed superficial at best. His desire to return to war outweighs his desire for family and in both cases war is fashioned as a drug.

Agency

All films feature at least two types of agencies, physical or external and internal resources. However, at some point in three of the films, the physical (weapons) and the external (military support) agencies become lost to the warriors or inadequate. This is because the agent disregards them, such as James in *Green Zone*, or because the scene of war makes physical/external agency irrelevant. However, in *American Sniper*, the agency of the sniper rifle was used to personalize and personify the warrior. Aside from the sniper rifle, the absence of physical/external agencies leave the warrior unaided or in limbo. Thus, the warrior ends up having to rely only on his internal agencies. Agency, for the most part, is abandoned or irrelevant.

Purpose

Of the four films, only one questions war's purpose to any degree. *Green Zone* interrogates the concept of a just and justifiable war, an issue at the heart of post-Vietnam WWII films. Even then, by the end of the film the purpose shifts from finding WMDs to unveiling the truth that the United States knew Iraq had no WMDs. Although this film does question the rationale for entering war, purpose also is relegated to the bottom of the

pentad elements in priority. In the rest of the films, purpose appears to be a constant rather than variable element, since none of them question the purpose for being in war. This implies that by accepting purpose, the films shift focus to elevate the agent.

Co- and Counter-Agents

This is one of the most interesting and complex elements of Iraq and Afghanistan War films because who the enemy is often is vague or co- and counter-agents shift positions. Moreover, the shifting conceptions of friend or foe vary across the films and exert an influence on the agent's decisions as well as the completion of the warrior's mission. For example, there are very close co-agents in *Lone Survivor* compared to disparaging relationships in *The Hurt Locker*. Also, distinctions between co- and counter-agents become blurred.

In *The Hurt Locker*, James the team leader eventually becomes the enemy, putting the lives of his squad in danger to the point that they contemplate killing him to survive. In *Lone Survivor*, an Afghan villager, Mohamad Gulab, becomes an unexpected co-agent against the clear Taliban enemy. It is Gulab who offers hospitality to Marcus and fights against Taliban forces that come into the village seeking to kill Marcus. Had it not been for Gulab, Marcus would have shared the same fate as his brothers. Similarly, in *Green Zone*, Freddy is a native Iraqi who brings a curious presence to the element of the co-agent. The film frames Freddy as a patriot, which is interesting because he also reminds Miller of what it means to fight for his country. *Green Zone's* treatment of the counter-agent is also fascinating because the enemy is the agent's own national leaders. *American Sniper* portrays the snipers on each side identifying with one another, pitting the two as equal powerhouses destined to meet. During battle, Kyle gave up his position

to defeat Mustafa, exposing his location to droves of enemy insurgents. Kyle was able to make it out alive and yet after he returns home from war, he ends up dying at the hands of a co-agent, a mentally ill fellow veteran.

In all of the films, it is hard to know exactly who is the enemy, let alone how to identify them. The enemies are depicted as women, children, Taliban, villagers, Al-Qaeda, and U. S. government officials. This pentad element is unquestionably a source of confusion for the agent, one that affects his decisions vitally on the battlefield.

<u>Act-Agent Ratio and Motive</u>

All four films highlight the agent as he goes about his mission, following the warrior up-close, personally, and psychologically as they make decisions in war. They must cope with constant tension between militarism and moralism, and that tension changes from moment to moment. Thus, motive appears to be the same in all films: to present the crucible of war, its aftermath, and the perpetual or permanent effects of the experience of war on the warrior.

These films do not glorify war or warriors, suggesting that there is nothing necessarily sacred about either, except that they are interdependent in the context of war. In this sense the films are subversive texts. They waver from presenting the dispassionate and mundane to the horror associated with the experience of war; and whether one lives or dies, the reality is hard to take. Act also dominates agents in this ratio, showing that reality trumps idealism, but simultaneously, the choices an agent has to make are "acts" within the "mission" of the "act" of war. War after all is human action, so even though war acts on the agent, the agent chooses action. The warrior is the author of his acts, which, in turn, makes him or remakes him in accordance with his

nature (Burke, *Grammar*). These films give their audiences a glimpse into the mind and psyche of warriors enduring the crucible of war, and the image is realistic and disconcerting.

Social Implications

The act-agent ratio provides insights into the condition of returning veterans regardless of the type of damage he has sustained. The warrior has not only been damaged but, given the nature of the decisions he is forced to make during combat, it is almost as though he is complicit in generating his own injury. What this implies is a persistent feeling of guilt, regardless of outcomes, because he has to take responsibility for his actions. These films help us understand some of the problems of returning veterans, but make clear that there are no quick fixes to these problems. They certainly imply that veterans need immediate and long-term attention by our nation, especially when we supposedly revere them as heroes. To shed light on the severity of the problem, Zarembo of the *Los Angeles Times* reported in June 2015 that recent government research found that female military veterans commit suicide at a rate six times higher than that of other women. This statistic is both alarming and unsettling as it poses disturbing questions about the experiences of women who serve in the armed forces. It also is one of the few systematic attempts that have been made to manage or treat the condition of the returning veteran.

These films reflect ambiguity about the nature of the enemy. In the last couple of years, however, a clear and diabolical enemy has surfaced in Iraq and Syria: ISIS or Islamic State. This enemy is brutal and dangerous and takes as its goal the creation of a sovereign Islamic state in land from both nations. ISIS also has targeted the United

States for terrorist attacks. Although President Obama promised "no more boots on the ground" in Iraq, has recently authorized the deployment of 450 more American military advisors to Iraq tasked to train and assist Iraqi forces battling Islamic State (Gordon). Moreover, coalition forces in Iraq have requested 3,800 American soldiers as a more tangible combat force to push ISIS out of Iraq (Gordon). It is unclear at this point whether no more boots on the ground will hold up to reality given the current volatile and violent events occurring in Syria and Iraq, but if troops do go back to war, these films suggest that Americans should expect more of the same damaged returning veterans. If we are not equipped to care for damaged veterans now, the problems of the returning veteran will simply multiply. Perhaps more importantly, treating veterans with the dignity they deserve is a critical new social norm Americans must be willing to embrace.

Theoretical Implications

Iraq and Afghanistan War films appear to continue the transformation of the war film genre through a recurrent pattern of emphasis on the warrior's perspective of the psychological turmoil caused by war. It is hard to imagine that any drastic change to this pattern will occur with future films covering war in Iraq or Afghanistan. For audiences, watching these films is almost as much of a fiery crucible as actually participating in war. Presumably, there will continue to be epic universal warrior films as well as post-Vietnam WWII films because they are much more palatable to digest and they are unmistakably justified. They also generally present the warrior healed by war rather than destroyed by it. For a nation that embraces "regeneration through violence," we want to see wars that can be won, and warriors who triumph, emerge whole from the experience, and benefit our culture.

Contemporary war films tend to follow recurrent patterns in their treatment of the relationship between war and warriors. Vietnam War films, for example, reflect a shattering of faith in war itself, whereas others are preoccupied with the purification, re-moralization and de-masculinization of the warrior. Post-Vietnam WWII films reinstate war's purpose, the justification for the necessity of war, while others variously emphasize the degree to which warriors can control the scene and agencies of war, particularly in light of advanced military technologies like drones that have the capability of seperating warriors from war's tools. The Iraq and Afghanistan War films reestablish the connection between warriors and the experience of war, thus reminding us of the human costs of enacting war, and the debilitating consequences of this encounter on warriors and the larger culture.

Evolution in the American Mythology of War and Image of the Warrior

The fact that these films all focus on "act" questions the very nature and utility of war because centering attention on warriors' choices inherently transforms war into a psychological and physical tribulation. Moreover, the absence of a clearly identified evil enemy makes agents' choices even more trying and tenuous. Together, these patterns imply that war cannot be anything but a subversive experience that fundamentally damages warriors.

The analysis suggests that the elements comprising the American war myth can be viewed either as "constant" fixtures in war narratives or as narrative "variations." This invokes Rushing's delineation of the surface and deep structures of America's cultural myths. Purpose, agency, and scene were found to be relative constants (deep structures or archetypal symbols) in Iraq and Afghanistan War films, whereas images of agents, co-

agents, and counter-agents were more variable (surface structures or cultural symbols). If so, this dynamic implies that a myth can be transformed and remain viable at the surface structure level if the narrative highlights agents, co-agents, and/or counter-agents without affecting the deep structural elements of the myth. However, if purpose, scene, and/or the efficacy of agencies dominate the narrative, then the myth's deep structure level is subverted or challenged, thereby questioning the viability of the myth and its reaffirmation and utility for the culture.

This analysis also contributes to our knowledge of the traditional American war myth by illuminating the internal states of the warrior's mind, psyche, and vulnerability. These films do not support a fixed or unchanging image of the warrior except to take for granted that their sacrifice and protection are worthy of heroic status. Instead, the analysis provides a more nuanced understanding of the workings of the dialectical tension between militarism and moralism intrinsic to a warrior's actions, and the difficulties warriors face trying to balance these conflicting orientations to emerge whole in war. The decisions a warrior makes always affect the balance or imbalance of these values. As such, the act-agent ratio occupies the center of the war myth because it is the myth's human dimension and what accounts for the narrative's ability to provide a social order or model for behavior for the culture.

But the fact that agents cannot be separated from their actions, and the actions in these films are harmful to agents, these war narratives may be creating a disjunction among mythic elements that prevents any reproduction of the traditional war myth and its corresponding image of the warrior. If that is the case, then only a more permanent transformation will enable the myth to maintain its viability for contemporary culture.

Dialectical Disorientation

The Iraq and Afghanistan War films cultivate an environment for the evolution of the American war myth, specifically as it relates to the image of the warrior. Warriors who reaffirm the traditional myth's warrior image must be both effective killers and humane soldiers simultaneously because "moralism's portrayal of people as humane choice makers becomes the foundation for sanity and integrity in war" (Rasmussen and Downey, "Dialectical" 180). These films highlight the strengths and weaknesses of this dialectical tension. When moralism prevails, the cost is the warrior's death or faith as illustrated in *Green Zone* and *Lone Survivor*; when militarism prevails, the cost is mental instability like that plaguing both warriors in *The Hurt Locker* and *American Sniper*. At first glance, these effects suggest the presence of a dialectical reaffirmation of the myth's value conflict because they show the continuing tension that accompanies agents making hard decisions that affect the balance of militarism and moralism, and therefore their psyches.

This pattern is demonstrated most clearly through agents who are depicted as heroes regardless of their actions in war, a portrayal that makes sense as long as the traditional myth is grounded in the assumptions that war is endurable, healing, and possibly even strengthening to the agent. Reaffirmation, then, would reinforce tension that will not go away but otherwise leaves the myth intact. However, the Iraq and Afghanistan War films seem more consistent with a pattern of dialectical disorientation because no matter what the agent does, a dialectical imbalance remains, thus implying that the constant tension is unendurable for the warrior and not healable. If neither value orientation can correct for this reality, then the values themselves may be flawed and

perhaps unfixable. The fact that these films all end up with broken warriors challenges the entire traditional American mythology of war.

Future Research

Since most war films tend to be retrospectives, there will be more Iraq and Afghanistan War films produced for Americans' consumption. Hence, further research on these stylized films is warranted. They should be analyzed for their contribution to the evolution to the American War myth, specifically the image of the warrior, and the degree to which they refute or support the findings of this thesis. Documenting changes of pentad elements are also important, particularly the act-agent relationship and its potential role in continued mythic transformation.

Our culture perceives warriors and war veterans as heroes, but they still are largely ignored. Obviously, then, warriors deserve to be helped to recover from their injuries and to reintegrate in society as valued citizens. While this is a continuing social problem, more symbolically, if dialectical disorientation persists in contemporary war films, how can warriors transcend the subversive consequences of this pattern? In other words, is there any way for warriors to act to prevent or lessen the physical and psychological damage? This thesis claims the answer is a resounding "no," but one can hope that future filmmakers of this war will either portray war as unacceptable under any conditions, or at least symbolize options for warriors to be able to survive war without unrecoverable trauma.

The purpose of this thesis was to analyze four Iraq and Afghanistan War films to uncover their contribution to the evolution of the American war myth and the image of the warrior. The examination of these films revealed that each one symbolically

reaffirmed the warrior's heroism and sacrifice while also chronicling the transformation of elite warrior heroes into vulnerable humans whose experiences in war create damaged hearts, minds, and bodies. Ultimately, these films argue that no matter who you are, or whatever training you have to prepare you for war, war damages everyone.

WORKS CITED

WORKS CITED

Adams, Chris. "Millions Went to War in Iraq, Afghanistan, Leaving Many With Lifelong Scars." McClatchy DC, 14 Mar. 2013. Web. 1 Nov. 2014.

Achter, Paul. "Unruly bodies: The rhetorical domestication of twenty-first-century veterans of war." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 96.1 (2010): 46-68.

American Sniper. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Perf. Bradley Cooper, Sienna Miller, Kyle Gallner. Warner Brothers, 2015. DVD.

Andén-Papadopoulos, Kari. "US Soldiers Imaging The Iraq War On Youtube." *Popular Communication* 7.1 (2009): 17-27. Print.

Anderson, Martin. "'One Flew over the Psychiatric Unit': Mental illness and the media." *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 10.3 (2003): 297-306.

Asenas, Jennifer J. "Redressing the Vietnam Syndrome: Variations on a Just War Theme in Three Post-Vietnam World War II Films." MA thesis. California State University, Long Beach, 2002. Print.

Beck, Richard. "Inanimate Fact and Iraq War Filmmaking." *Film Quarterly*: 8-9.

Berinsky, Adam J. *In Time of War*: *Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. Print.

Boone, Steven. *Lone Survivor*. Roger Ebert, 25 Dec. 2013. Web. 5 Jun. 2015.

Braden, Waldo W., ed. *Oratory in the New South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1979. Print.

Bryant, Jordan. "America Values Vets but Stereotypes Them." *Military*, 14 Jun. 2012. Web. 13 Jun. 2014.

Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkley: U of California P, 1969. Print.

"Bush and the World." *Foreign Affairs*. 26 Nov. 2014. Web. 26 Nov. 2014.

Campbell, Joseph. *Myths to Live By*. London: Souvenir Press, 2009. Print.

--. *The Hero's Journey: Joseph Campbell on His Life and Work*. Vol. 7. Novato: New World Library, 2003. Print

-- *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Vol. 17. Novato: New World Library, 2008. Print.

-- "The Historical Development of Mythology." *Daedalus* 88.2 (1959): 232-254. Print.

Campbell, Joseph, and Marie-Jeanne Abadie. *The Mythic Image*. No. 3. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981. Print.

Campbell, Joseph, and Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. Crawfordsville: Random, 2011. Print.

Cassirer, Ernst. "Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and lectures of Ernst Cassirer, 1935-1945." (1979). Print.

CBSnews. "VA Hospitals Scandal."CBS, Web. 14 Feb. 2015.

Chandrasekaran, Rajiv. "A Legacy of Pain and Pride." The Washington Post, 29 Mar. 2014. Web. 13 Jul. 2015.

Cost of War Project. "US and Allied Wounded." Brown University, 2011. Web. 2 Mar. 2015.

Dakroury, Aliaa. "Editorial: Media and Culture." *Global Media Journal: Canadian Edition* 7.2 (2014): 1-3. Print.

Dodds, Klaus. "Screening geopolitics: James Bond and the early Cold War films (1962–1967)." *Geopolitics* 10.2 (2005): 266-289. Print.

Dorell, Oren. "WWII Vets Fought a Different Kind of Fight Than Those in Iraq." USA Today, 23 Nov. 2006. Web. 5 Dec. 2014.

Downey, Sharon. "Top Guns in Vietnam: The Pilot as Protected Warrior Hero." *War and Film in America: Historical and Critical Essays*. Matelski, Marilyn J., and Nancy Lynch Street, eds. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003. 114-133. Print.

Downey, Sharon, D. and Karen Rasmussen. "Mythic Repair: The Rebirth of the Warrior in 'Back-to-Nam Films'." Presented at The Western States Communication Association Conference, Spokane, WA, 1989. Lecture.

Drake, Bruce. "More Americans Say U.S. Failed to Achieve its Goals in Iraq." Pew Research Center, 12 Jun. 2014. Web. 25 Feb. 2015.

Edwards, Paul M. *A Guide to Films on the Korean War*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997. Print.

Freking, Kevin. “Veteran Suicide Rate at 22 Each Day, Department Of Veterans Affairs Report Finds.” Huffington Post, Feb. 1. 2013. Web. 7 Jun. 2015.

Frith, Luci A. “Defining American Heroes: Analyzing the Metamorphosis of the War Hero in Twentieth Century War Films Using Joseph Campbell's, ‘Hero's Journey’”. (2002). Print.

Fisher, Walter R. “Reaffirmation and Subversion of the American dream.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59.2 (1973): 160-167. Print.

Frentz, Thomas S., and Janice Hocker Rushing. “The Rhetoric of ‘Rocky’: Part Two.” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 42.4 (1978): 231-240. Print

Gardner, Amanda. “Depression, PTSD Plague Many Iraq Vets.” CNN, 7 Jun. 2010. Web. 13 Jan. 2015.

Goodman, H., A. “4,486 American Soldiers Have Died in Iraq: President Obama Is Continuing a Pointless and Deadly Quagmire.” Huff Post, 17 Sep. 2014. Web. 1 Mar. 2015.

Gordon, Michal, and Julie Davis. “In Shift, U.S. Will Send 450 Advisers to Help Iraq Fight ISIS.” New York Times, 10 Jun. 2015. Web. 13 Jun. 2015.

Green Zone. Dir. Paul Greengrass. Perf. Matt Damon, Jason Isaacs, Greg Kinnear. Universal, 2010. DVD.

Henderson, Joseph L. “Ancient Myths and Modern Man.” *Man and his symbols* Vol. 5183. (1964): 95-156. Print.

Heyse, Amy L. “The Rhetoric of Memory-Making: Lessons from the UDC's Catechisms for Children.” *RSQ: Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 38.4 (2008): 408-432. Print.

Hocking, Barbara. “Reducing Mental Illness Stigma and Discrimination-Everybody's Business.” *Medical Journal of Australia* 178.9 (2003): S47. Print.

Hoge, C. W., H. M. Goldberg, and C. A. Castro. “Care of War Veterans with Mild Traumatic Brain Injury--Flawed Perspectives.” *The New England journal of medicine* 360.16 (2009): 1588-1591. Print.

Hurt Locker. Dir. Kathryn Bigelow. Perf. Jeremy Renner, Anthony Mackie, Brian Geraghty. Summit, 2009. DVD.

Jones, M. Jeffrey. “*Support for Iraq Military Action Low in Historical Context*.” Gallup, Web. 21 Feb. 2015.

Kaminsky, Stuart. *American Film Genres: Approaches to a Critical Theory of Popular Film*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. Print.

Kephart, John, III. “A Drama in Two Acts, r the Acts in Two Dramas: The Rhetoric of the War on Terrorism.” *Conference Papers -- International Communication Association* (2004): 1-19. Print.

Kumar, Deepa. “War Propaganda and the (ab) uses of Women: Media Constructions of the Jessica Lynch story.” *Feminist Media Studies* 4.3 (2004): 297-313. Print.

Langman, Larry, and Ed Borg. *Encyclopedia of American war films*. Vol. 873. New York: Garland, 1989. Print.

Lewiecki-Wilson, Cynthia. “Rethinking Rhetoric through Mental Disabilities.” *Rhetoric Review* (2003): 156-167. Print.

Lieberfeld, Daniel. “Teaching about War through Film and Literature.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 40.03 (2007): 571-574. Print.

Lone Survivor. Dir. Peter Berg. Pref. Mark Wahlberg, Taylor Kitsch, Emile Hirsch. Universal, 2013. DVD.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Vol. 10. U of Minnesota P, 1984. Print.

McCombs, Maxwell. “Civic Osmosis: The Social Impact of Media.” *Communication & Society* 25.1 (2012): 7-14. Print.

Medved, Michael. “Iraq and Vietnam: Nine Big Differences - And One Crucial Similarity.” *Town Hall*, 22 Aug. 2005. Web. 3 Nov. 2014.

Milliken, Charles S., Jennifer L. Auchterlonie, and Charles W. Hoge. “Longitudinal Assessment of Mental Health Problems Among Active and Reserve Component Soldiers Returning from the Iraq War.” *JAMA* 298.18 (2007): 2141-2148. Print.

O'Connell, Maria, et al. “From Rhetoric to Routine: Assessing Perceptions of Recovery-Oriented Practices in a State Mental Health and Addiction System. *“Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* 28.4 (2005): 378. Print.

Owen, A S, Sarah R. Stein, and Berg L. R. Vande. *Bad Girls: Cultural Politics and Media Representations of Transgressive Women*. New York: P. Lang, 2007. Print.

Powers, John. *Full Of Complexity And Ambivalence, 'American Sniper' Shows The Cost Of War*. NPR, 28 Jan. 2015. Web. 1 Jun. 2015.

Pearson, Michael. *The VA's troubled history*. CNN, 30 May. 2014. Web. 20 Feb. 2015.

Rasmussen, Karen, and Jennifer J. Asenas. "The Vietnam Veteran as a Victim, Avenger, and Social Savior." Presented at the Western States Communication Association Confrence, Coeur d'Alene ID, 2001. Lecture.

Rasmussen, Karen, and Sharon D. Downey. "Dialectical Disorientation in Agnes of God." *Western Journal of Speech Communication: WJSC* 53.1 (1989): 66-84. Print.

---. "Dialectical Disorientation in Vietnam War films: Subversion of the mythology of war." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77.2 (1991): 176-195. Print.

Reno, Jamie. "VA Stops Releasing Data On Injured Vets As Total Reaches Grim Milestone." International Business Times, 1 Nov. 2013. Web. 6 Jan. 2015.

Rushing, Janice Hocker. "Mythic Evolution of 'The New Frontier' in Mass Mediated Rhetoric." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 3.3 (1986): 265-296. Print.

---. "The Rhetoric of the American Western Myth." *Communications Monographs* 50.1 (1983): 14-32. Print.

Rushing, Janice Hocker, and Thomas S. Frentz. "Deer Hunter: Rhetoric of the Warrior." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66. (1980): 392-406.*Education Index Retrospective: 1929-1983*. Web. 13 Feb. 2015

---. "The Frankenstein Myth in Contemporary Cinema." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 6.1 (1989): 61-80. Print.

---. 'The Rhetoric of "Rocky': A Social Value Model of Criticism." *Western Journal of Communication (includes Communication Reports)* 42.2 (1978): 63-72. Print.

Seal, Karen H., et al. "Bringing the war back home: Mental health disorders among 103 788 US veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan seen at Department of Veterans Affairs Facilities." *Archives of Internal Medicine* 167.5 (2007): 476-482. Print.

Schechter, Danny. *Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception*: *How the Media Failed to Cover the War on Iraq*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2003. Print.

Signorielli, Nancy. "The stigma of mental illness on television." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 33.3 (1989): 325-331.

Slotkin, Richard. "Dreams and Genocide: The American Myth of Regeneration through Violence." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 1 (1971): 38-59. Print.

---. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan, 1992. Print.

---. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973. Print.

Stewart, Garrett. "Digital fatigue: Imaging War in Recent American Film." *Film Quarterly* (2009): 45-55. Print.

Stuart, Heather. "Media Portrayal of Mental Illness and its Treatments." *CNS drugs* 20.2 (2006): 99-106.

Taylor, A., & Hardman M. (2004). War, Language and Gender, What New Can Be Said? Framing the Issues. *Women \& Language,* 27(2), 3-19. Print.

Tulis, Jeffrey. *The Rhetorical Presidency*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987. Print.

U. S. Department of Veteran Affairs. "National Center for PTSD." Web. 7 Feb. 2015.

Vasterling, Jennifer J., et al. "Neuropsychological Outcomes of Army Personnel Following Deployment to the Iraq War." *Jama* 296.5 (2006): 519-529. Print.

Wahl, Otto F. *Media Madness: Public Images of Mental Illness*. New Brunswick: Rutgers 1995. Print.

Whillock, David E. "Defining the fictive American Vietnam War film: In search of a genre." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 16.4 (1988): 244-250: Print.

Wong, Leonard, et al. *Why They Fight: Combat Motivation in The Iraq War*. Carlisle: U.S. Army War College, 2003: Print.

Wood, David. "Iraq, Afghanistan War Veterans Struggle with Combat Trauma." The World Post, *Huffington Post*, 7 Mar. 2012. Web. 13 Oct. 2014.

Zarembo, Alan. "Suicide Rate of Female Military Veterans is Called Staggering." *Los Angeles Times*, 8 Jun. 2015. Web. 10 Jun. 2015.

Zezima, Katie. Everything you need to know about the VA — and the scandals engulfing it. *Washington Post*, 30 May. 2014. Web. 21 Nov. 2014.