“It’s a bird. . . it’s a plane. . . it’s a journalist?”
A framing analysis
of the representation of journalists and the press in comic book films

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ABSTRACT

For the press to fulfill its democratic potential, the public must trust and utilize the press for these purposes. In the twentieth century, press depictions dramatically shifted in the early 1980s—from positive representations to negative ones. It is important to study these press depictions, since it is assumed that they likely shape and reflect public opinion. The study of press representations in film adaptations, where the storyline was created prior to the shift in depictions, while the adaptation was produced after the shift can provide a better understanding into the influence of historical context. This is a particularly important issue in regards to press depictions since these likely influence public opinion, and thus, press credibility. Comic book adaptation films allow an exploration into context and press depictions since these films are based on storylines created in earlier years. Little research has been done in this area.

The purpose of this study is to explore how journalists and the press have been framed in comic book adaptation films. Since these storylines were originally created prior to the shift in press depictions, , and to examine how historical context influences the portrayal of the press. A framing analysis of fifteen comic book films was performed. Findings indicate that journalists and press play important roles in comic book action films, appearing in 80% of the films studied, seven of which the journalist/press representations are significant to the narrative. Nearly all of the frames of the journalist and many of the press frames reflect journalist roles common in the eras in which the comic books were created. While contemporary representations of the press in film are typically negative, this study shows that many portrayals of the press in comic book films are, in fact, positive. These findings are significant because positive press portrayals

generally correlate with increased public confidence in the press. With trust in the press, the public are more likely to utilize the press for its original functions, thus maximizing the potential for an effective democracy.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

When James Madison first proposed his Bill of Rights to the Continental Congress in 1791, he argued that, **"**The people shall not be deprived or abridged of their right to speak, to write, or to publish their sentiments; and the freedom of the press, as one of the great bulwarks of liberty, shall be inviolable" (Madison 1999, p.442). This declaration of the need for a free press laid the foundation for the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America, which states that, "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech or of the press.. ." (Brant 1965, p.51). This amendment signifies that founders of the United States of America believed that a free press was vital to the newborn democracy (Gleason 1990).

Literature suggests that the press fulfills two functions in maintaining democracy. One role is to inform the public of current events, government activities, and activities of political candidates (Kobre 1969, Levy 1985). This purpose enables a well-informed public, capable of keeping the government in check and selecting good leaders (Smith 1988, Levy 1985). The press also serves as a means of communication between the government and the people (Lichtenberg 1987). With a free exchange of ideas, ideally the government can respond to the community's needs and enact change to better serve the public (Baker 2002). These two functions work together to create an effective democracy, where the informed public elects officials who listen and act on the public's behalf.

Studies have shown that the press' adherence to these functions has often correlated with public opinion about the press' performance (Good 1989). During the era of "yellow journalism," for example, when many press organizations focused on sensationalism and exploitation and therefore did not strive to accurately inform the public and serve as a forum for free exchange of ideas, public faith in the press dramatically decreased (Good 1989). Soon after, as the press began to aim for accuracy and balanced reporting, credibility strengthened and remained strong from the 1930s until the late 1970s (West 2001). In the early 1980s, public confidence in the press once again plummeted when it was suggested that the press strayed from its original functions. Problems with inaccuracy, a decrease in media outlets, and a thirst for sensationalism impaired the press' ability to provide correct information and provide public forum for exchange of ideas (McKenna 1982, Good 1989, West 2001). Since the 1980s, studies have shown that press credibility has been at an all time low (Urban 1999).

Representations of journalists and the press in popular culture have generally followed this historical pattern of public confidence in the press. When "yellow journalism" was the dominant style, journalist characters in novels were often negative and almost always despised by readers (Good 1989). In film, research indicates that journalists from the 1930s through the 1970s commonly played positive roles, usually as the central character (Good 1989, Weinraub 1993). With the downfall of public confidence in the 1980s, representations of journalists and the press also became negative and less significant to the narrative of the film (Good 1989, Weinraub 1993).

Many studies on representation of journalists/press in film have been performed. Brucker (1980) explored reoccurring themes in journalism films, speculating that the

portrayal of the male journalist shifted from the 1920s to the 1970s due to the increased professionalism in the industry. Kiste used thematic analysis to study the representation of journalists in contemporary film, concluding that many portrayals are negative and inaccurate, which may weaken press credibility. Langner-Burns (1989) also studied representations of the press, comparing the images of journalists in popular fiction to those existing in contemporary films. Among her findings, Langner-Burns determines that in both fiction and film, the journalist profession is glamorized, portrayed as successful and exciting. Finally, Bilodeau (1994) performed comparative research on press representations, examining the image of journalists in journalist" versus "non-journalist" films. He concludes that "journalist" films depict journalists in more positive roles than "non-journalist" films.

Extensive research on press representations in films has been performed. However, little research exists on the image of the press in specific genres, particularly the comic book action genre, which often contains journalist and press representations.

Since the late 1970s, the comic book action genre has escalated in popularity. In the last twenty years, according to *The Internet Movie Database* (2004) approximately 27 comic book action films have been released. *Box Office Reports* (2003) states that of these films, ten movies adapted from superhero comic books have grossed more than 200 million dollars worldwide. The popularity of comic book action films continues to rise. In the next five years, at least ten more films in this genre are expected to be released (2004). These films have a broad audience, often appealing to both children and adults (Dirks 2004). They also tend to perform well internationally, likely because these films portray easily translatable struggles between good and evil (Ghonain 2002).

Few studies have been done on the comic book action films. Yet comic books themselves have been studied. Evans (1995) looked at the evolution of superhero characters in comic books, noting how the narrative structure often correlates with changing societal values. Mahoney (1997) examined superhero familial relationships, concluding that superheroes are usually alone, without family or friends. Brown (1997) and Pustz (1998) both studied comic book culture, looking at the formation of fan communities in the comic book world. No studies reviewed examined press representations in comic books or in their film adaptations.

Statement of the Problem and Objectives of the Study

The press was endowed by the United States Constitution to fulfill specific democratic functions in society. In recent years, however, some believe the press has strayed from these functions, which has resulted in a decline in public confidence[1] in the press. It is assumed that popular culture products not only reflect cultural realities, but also shape our understanding of culture. Through representation, the media conveys meaning and shapes ideologies (Turner 1993). Therefore, since studies show that the depictions of the press in popular culture have influenced the decline of public confidence, it is important to study how the press has been portrayed in popular culture products, such as film, and how these portrayals have changed over time.

Numerous studies of the portrayal of journalists and the press in film have been performed (Brucker 1980, Kiste 1986, Bilodeau 1994). Scholars have also studied the role of comic books in culture (Evans 1995, Mahoney 1997, Carpenter 2003). Yet little

information exists on the portrayal of journalists and the press in certain genres, specifically, comic book film adaptations. Preliminary research suggests that this genre needs further study because journalists and the press play a significant role in many of these films. With the rising popularity of comic book films, it is important to examine the roles of journalists in these films, since it is believed that these types of symbolic images can affect the public's perception of the press (Kiste 1986). If public trust in the press as an institution diminishes, it is less likely that the public will utilize the press for its functions vital to an effective democracy (Good 1989). This study sought to explore the representations of journalists and the press in comic book action films, examining specifically how these films frame images of the press so that the images of journalists/press, which potentially shape how the public views the press, can be better understood. By concentrating on the genre of comic book action films, this research hopes to contribute to the understanding of the role of the media in the social construction of reality.

Two research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent are journalists/press represented in comic book action movies? How significant is their representation in these films?
2. How are journalists/press framed in comic book films?

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[1] A report for the ASNE Journalism Credibility Project, printed in *Examining Our Credibility: Perspectives of the Public and the Press*, notes that "for more than 10 years, nationwide polls have measured continued declines in the public confidence . . .of the press" (Urban 1999, p.37).

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Background

Historical Functions of the Press in Democracy

To study how portrayals of journalists and the press have changed in film, the original functions of the press, and how these functions have changed over time must be considered. When the United States Constitution was first created, it established the press as an institution of democracy, designed to perform certain functions in society. Literature identifies two main functions of the press: to inform the public by acting as a "watchdog" of government and to act as a means of communication by serving as a forum for the people (Levy 1985, Smith 1988, Licthenberg 1990). By fulfilling these roles, literature suggests that the press can serve its essential purpose for an efficient democracy and benefit both the public and its government[2].

Literature suggests that informing the people of current events and other critical information was the original purpose of the Colonial press (Kobre 1969). From ship schedules to war news, the colonial press kept people from all over the colonies informed of the "important" events of the time. Literature suggests that, besides current events, the press is also designed to inform the public of government activities, such as legislative actions, military feats, and presidential decisions, as well as political corruption. With the power to expose government corruption, the press is able to keep the government in

[2] In protecting the public by exposing government corruption, some believed that the government would benefit as well (Smith 1988). Writers, like Cato and Hume, reasoned that if problems with the government were publicly discussed in time for peaceful reform, civil disobedience could possibly be avoided (1988). With this exchange, a true democratic society could exist.

check[3] (Smith 1988). Thus, scholar Jeffery Smith, in *Printers and Press Freedom* (1988), states that a critical function of the press is to "become the eyes, ears, and voice of the electorate and its parties" (Smith 1988, p.163). Known as the "watchdog" function of the press, in this way, the press serves as an unofficial "fourth branch of government," (Licthenberg 1990, p.105). As this "fourth branch," the press works as part of the checks and balances system unique to the United States government (Levy 1985). Whether the press is reporting on corruption in the White house, or the events of a routine government meeting, this "watchdog" function is significant because it keeps the government's power in "check" by keeping the public informed (Levy 1985).

The press also provides voter participation information, which both informs and empowers voters to participate in the voting process. In *The Emergence of a Free Press* (1985), Levy states that without a free press informing voters of political candidates and other important government matters, the electoral process would be a "sham" (Levy 1985, p.273). Therefore, the information function of the press not only protects the public from the abuse of government power, but also helps the people to make educated decisions during the voting process. Scholar C. Edwin Baker takes the role of the press in the electoral process a step further. In *Media, Markets, and Democracy*, Baker stresses that the role of the press in a democracy is to not only inform the people of their candidate choices, but to empower the people to actively take part in the democratic process (Baker 2002). By promoting active involvement among the people, the press helps the public choose their government and therefore helps the government to work on behalf of the people. This informing function of the press is crucial to a democracy

[3] In addition to exposing government corruption, it is also the function of the press to inform the public of business activities and corruption (Smith 1988).

because without an informed public actively participating in the political process, an effective democracy cannot exist.

Another important function of the press is to work as a means of communication between the people and the government and within the public itself. In "Foundations and limits of the freedom of the press," Lichtenberg elaborates on the function of a free press as a communication tool, stating that the free speech entails the public exchanging ideas without censorship or government interference. Through this free exchange, multiple viewpoints can be publicly expressed (Lichtenberg 1987). Applied to the press, this definition of free speech advocates for a diverse forum where people can publicly express their ideas without fear of repercussions (1987). From criticizing the poor quality of a loom, to expressing discontent in the government, people are free to publicly express themselves through the press. By serving as a forum for public opinion, the press plays an important role in maintaining democracy (McKenna 1982).

A significant part of the communication function is that the press can communicate the public's ideas to the government. The press acts as a representative of the people—alerting the government to the public's needs and demands (Baker 2002). Ideally, then the government can respond to these demands and enact change to remedy the situation (2002). By communicating the public's discontent to the government, the press enables the government to work for the people, as warranted by its democratic nature. The communication function of the press is critical in a free society because it allows people to publicly express their ideas and criticisms to both the public and the government, who would ideally respond with changes in government policy. This flow of ideas is necessary for a democratic society to exist.

In general, the functions of the press are to inform the public and act as a means of communication. It has been suggested that if the public believes that the press is fulfilling its functions, public confidence in the press is strong. Conversely, as the press strays from these functions, public confidence declines (Good 1989). The relationship between press behavior and public confidence in the press as an institution is exemplified in the history of the press in the 20th century.

Press Performance and Public Confidence in the Press

Literature suggests that, throughout American history, the public's confidence in the press has often correlated with press behavior in fulfilling its assumed functions. The period during and after the late 19th century era of "yellow journalism" exemplifies this relationship. In the 1890s, the fierce competition between William Randolph Hearst, editor of the *New York Journal*, and Joseph Pulitzer, editor of the *New York World*, became known as "yellow journalism"—journalistic practices known for "extremes of fabrication, brutality in crime stories, gossip, and titillation" (Flink 1997, p.173). The practice of yellow journalism promoted the use of exaggerated or untrue headlines and stories, fake photographs and sensationalism, focusing on graphic crimes, gossip, and scandal (Keeler, Brown, & Tarpley 2002). What was called "yellow journalism" spread to other newspapers, whose owners used the style to increase profits (Ford & Emery 1954). During the period of "yellow journalism," instead of fulfilling the original functions of informing the public and serving as a means of communication, the press thrived on sneaky practices to beat out the competition (1954). In response to the sensationalistic and often immoral journalistic practices, the public confidence in the

press declined (Good 1989). Many people, especially those who were well educated, complained about the greed-driven apathy of the journalist, claiming that the press "pandered to the semiliterate and poisoned the atmosphere of American life" (Good 1989, p.10).

While many newspaper owners followed this trend of "yellow journalism," a few prominent publishers did not embrace the popular style. Adolph Ochs, owner of *The New York Times*, was determined to keep the "inflated truth" of "yellow journalism" out of his news pages. Ochs insisted that his newspaper would be affordable and appealing to a mass audience, yet still remain respectable and conservative (Kobre 1969). To appeal to the masses, Ochs adapted some of the "yellow journalism" tactics, such as using captivating photos, large headlines, and exciting stories, and reduced the price of his paper from three cents to one cent (1969). At the same time, however, Ochs demanded that editorials and news stories should be independent of each other so that the public could determine news from opinion (Kobre 1969).

Ochs' determination to make news more objective is significant because it instigated a movement for an "objective" media, which strived to present both sides of a story (Kobre 1969). Following the demise of "yellow journalism," the objective media became the dominant ideology for the press. It is also important to note that Ochs, while striving for objective news, also advocated for his paper to be used as forum for public discussion, thus fulfilling the "means of communication" function of the media (Kobre 1969). Ochs' dedication to preserve the original functions of the press later served as a model for publishers attempting to break free of sensational journalism. The success of

The New York Times also prompted the main proprietors of "yellow journalism" to reexamine the quality of their newspapers (Flink 1997).

As the newspaper "war" raged on, Pulitizer himself even began to despise the sensationalism. To remedy the situation, Pulitzer suggested that he and Hearst stabilize their prices in order to end "fake reporting" and other sensationalist stories (Flink 1997, p.176). Hearst refused to raise his prices, so Pulitizer began a crusade to reduce "yellow journalism" and win back many of the "serious" consumers that had dropped their subscriptions, losing trust in the press due to false stories and sensationalism (1997).

Pulitizer attempted to change journalistic practices in two ways. First, he ordered his own staff to stop fabricating stories and to reduce newspaper space devoted to "divorce, murder, and salacious stories" (Flink 1997, p.176). Next, Pulitzer created an endowment for a school of journalism at Columbia University, aiming to "professionalize the industry" (West 2001). The establishment of this first school of journalism quickly led to the formation of journalism departments at numerous other schools (2001). Consequently, instead of merely having a "natural aptitude," the requirements for becoming a journalist expanded to professional training (Flink 1997). These schools, along with a movement towards a licensing procedure for journalists, resulted in the creation of a guide to ethical standards in journalism, published by the Bureau of Accuracy and Fairness at the *New York World* (Flink 1997). This document not only outlined standards for the industry, but it also recommended firing journalists and editors who violated these codes (1997). Many of the newly founded national journalism organizations also adopted a code of journalism ethics (Keeler, Brown, & Tarpley 2002). The code of ethics established by one particular organization, the American Society of

Newspaper Editors (ASNE), laid the foundation for the code of ethics established by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) (2002). This code is especially significant, for it provides a specific model for newspapers to follow—one that strives to minimize personal biases, promoting objectivity. This idea of objectivity became the dominant style of journalism.

This "objective media" differed greatly from the "yellow journalism" practiced in prior decades. In newspapers of the "yellow press," reporters generally did not try to create balanced stories, nor did they stick to the facts of a story (Keeler, Brown, & Tarpley 2002). Instead, their stories were often one-sided and reporter opinions were apparent in news stories (2002). With the "objective media," on the other hand, news stories were only supposed to contain straight facts, with several sides of the story presented (West 2001). With this new style, opinions were found only in designated commentary or editorial pieces (Keeler, Brown, & Tarpley 2002). Following the SPJ code and other codes of ethics, objectivity became the goal of reporting in the late 1920s.

In the decades following the 1920s, the press' adherence to objectivity continued. From the 1920s to the late 1970s, the devotion to accuracy and objectivity, along with a wave of exposes on government practices and activities, increased public confidence in the media as a watchdog of the people, boosting media credibility (West 2001). Even during the Vietnam War, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when public confidence in democratic institutions began to steeply decline, confidence in the press remained strong, some said, due to the press' dedication to its "watchdog" function (Moy & Pfau 2000).

Numerous scholars mark the Watergate investigation as a high point for the press in the 20th century. On June 17, 1972, five burglars were arrested for breaking into the

Democratic National Headquarters in the Watergate Hotel (Foerstel 2001). The media played a crucial role in the investigation of this robbery, linking it to several other crimes between 1972 and 1974. Through the work of the media, particularly reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post* and their anonymous source, labeled Deep Throat, it was proven that President Nixon was involved in the scandals, which eventually led to his impeachment (Foerstel 2001). This event is significant in press history for, during the investigation, the press acted as a watchdog for the American people, informing the public of government corruption. In the time immediately following the Watergate scandals, media credibility was high—the public praised the media for their investigative reporting and generally trusted the media for accurate information (Kilmer 2002).

By the 1980s, media credibility began to decline. Problems in accuracy and increased sensationalism led to a decrease in public confidence in the press as a democratic institution. In the 1980s, several incidents highlighted the problem with accuracy. In 1981, Janet Cooke, a reporter for *The Washington Post* fabricated "Jimmy's World," a Pulitizer prize winning story about a boy addicted to heroin (McKenna 1982, p.175). A month later, reporter Michael Daly, confessed to inventing portions of an interview with a British soldier who had allegedly killed a Northern Ireland teenager (Good 1989). And in August of the same year, it was discovered that reporter Christopher Jones' trek through Cambodia, printed in the *New York Times*, was plagiarized from a novel (Good 1989). After the string of fabricated stories, public confidence in the media, specifically as a credible source of information, declined

(McKenna 1982). Besides inaccuracy, sensationalism also became a problem in the 1980s.

By the 1980s, an increase in sensationalism appeared in news stories, as exemplified by "Irangate" in 1986,[4] as well as the televised suicide of Pennsylvania Treasurer R. Budd Dwyer[5] (Good 1989). In both cases, media frenzy ensued (1989). Instead of public support of the press' actions, as in Watergate and other news stories of the 1970s, however, the public responded negatively to the behavior of the press (1989). Studies of public attitudes about the coverage of "Irangate," and the televised suicide showed a significant decline in media credibility (Good 1989). Besides increased sensationalism, a shift in journalistic style also contributed to the decline in public confidence.

In the 1970s, primarily due to Watergate, investigative reporting was applauded[6], both professionally, and by the public. Following this event, many reporters attempted to dig up scandal, hoping to achieve similar recognition like the press received during Watergate (Good 1989). By the 1980s, however, the increased muckraking had led to a decrease in public confidence in the press (1989). Many in the public believed the press had become too blood-thirsty, and distrusted the shift from the old "objective" media, where the focus was on strict facts, to "investigative" journalism, a style that integrated a journalist's analysis and interpretation into the story (West 2001). Instead of superficially covering an event, investigative journalism placed stories within a context,

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[4] "Irangate" referred to the sale by President Reagan's administration of weapons to Iraq for profits given to Nicaraguan rebels (Good 1989)

[5] At a press conference in January 1987, Dwyer placed a revolver in his mouth and pulled the trigger (Good 1989). A television station in Philadelphia, WPVI-TV, broadcasted the suicide unedited and several newspapers published large color photographs of the suicide (1989).

[6] Four out of six Pulitzer Prizes for newspaper writing were given to investigative reporting in 1976 (Good 1989).

providing background information along with the straight facts (2001). The public response to this new style of journalism was not positive. According to Darrell West in *The Rise and Fall of the Media Establishment* (2001), the onset of investigative reporting marked a lowpoint in media credibility. With the inclusion of "journalists' own impressions and values into stories," many people considered stories to be biased or skewed according to a journalist's own personal beliefs (2001, p.69). Besides the new style of reporting, public confidence in the media also declined due to the conglomeration of the media.

An increase in media mergers after 1980 has reduced the number of media outlets available to the public. These media conglomerations have hindered the press from fulfilling the function of informer in a number of ways. First, numerous mergers have left only a few media outlets to inform the public and shape public opinion (McKenna 1982). Scholar George McKenna, in *Media Voices: debating critical issues in mass media* (1982) states that having only a few media outlets is dangerous in a democratic society, because it can lead to "abuses of bias and manipulative reportage" (McKenna p.115). Some believe that increase of media conglomerations has also magnified the power of the press. According to scholars Thomas Patterson and Lee Wilkins in *Media Ethics* (2002), media organizations have become so powerful, they constitute their own "ruling class within a democratic society" (Patterson & Wilkins 2002, p.185). The magnitude of this power makes it difficult for the press to accurately inform the public, especially when corporate media interests are tied in with government affairs. Along with corporate connections with the government, journalists themselves have also become closer to government officials. It is suggested that journalists sometimes develop

personal relationships with government employees in order to guarantee inside sources (Baker 2002). With personal relationships between the press and the government, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the press to serve as an independent watchdog for the people (2002). Besides the powerful media and increased conflict of interests, other reasons exist for the decline in public confidence in the press.

According to some scholars, recent budget cuts have led to a decrease in "quality" investigative reporting. Baker (2002) says that a "bottom-line mentality within media enterprises" has developed within media organizations (p.167). As a result, media organizations seek ways to increase profits such as increasing the use of wire services, merging with other media outlets, and reducing funds for investigative journalism (Baker 2002). These actions dramatically reduce the number of press organizations providing information, resulting in fewer sources of information (2002). Fear of being labeled "biased" or un-Patriotic can also hinder the democratic process (2002). "The mere performance of watchdog role can cause inaccurate portrayals of the press as having a leftist tilt" (Baker 2002, p.167). All of these trends have significantly caused the press to stray from its watchdog role. Without a press completely independent of the government and devoted to serving the public's interest, the press cannot effectively keep the government "in check"—as intended by the creators of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Literature suggests that the press has also strayed from its function as a means of communication and motivator for active voter participation. The decrease in media outlets, such as multiple partisan papers, along with the changing style of political reporting, has contributed to this decline (Baker 2002). Baker in *Media, Markets, and*

Democracy (2002), states that numerous press outlets must exist, so that multiple parties can be represented in the media (2002). With a variety of partisan papers reflecting many voices, the press will "spur voter participation." Media monopolies, on the other hand, reduce the participation vital to an effective democracy (Baker 2002, p.148). Since the number of media outlets continues to decline, it seems likely that the function of the press as a means to spark active voters, will also diminish. Besides providing limited points of view, the tone of the press in recent years has also limited its ability to increase political participation.

Due to a trend towards "cynical" political reporting, the media has contributed to voter decline (Flink 1997). Instead of providing voters with information about candidates as to prepare voters to make informed decisions, the media "characterizes political leaders as venal, evasive, and incompetent" (Flink 1997, p.13). This cynicism leads to diminished public confidence in the government, as well as the voting system (1997). If a press does not serve as a means of communication for the people, encouraging the public to actively participate in the democratic process, a true democracy cannot exist, since a democracy, in its nature, thrives on voter participation.

The decrease in accuracy, increase in sensationalism, newfound "interpretive" style of reporting, budget cuts, increased media mergers, and political cynicism that began in the 1980s has led to a diminished public trust in the press, some scholars say. The strong public confidence in the press prior to the 1980s, and decreased confidence thereafter, seems to be generally reflected in popular culture, specifically film.

Press and Journalists in Popular Culture

Many books, magazines, and newspaper articles have been written about the image of the journalist in popular culture. This literature suggests that even before film, the press was a common theme in literature and that the types of portrayal (negative or positive) have generally correlated with public confidence in the press. For example, in the era of "yellow journalism," when public confidence had decreased, journalists were often depicted as villainous characters. In *Outcasts: the images of journalists in contemporary film* (1989), Howard Good identifies many novels during the era of "yellow journalism" (1890s-early 1920s) that portray the journalist in a negative light, such as Booth Tarkington's *The Gentleman from Indiana* (1899), David Graham Phillips' *The Great God Success* (1901), Charles Agnew Maclean's *The Mainspring* (1912) and Justin Smith's *Deadlines* (1923) (Good 1989). During this time, even with "crusading journalist[s]," whose "reporting may benefit the public and further the ends of justice in the long-run," the depictions of journalists/press' motivation was not to protect the public, but to boost circulation and fame (Good 1989, p.11). Hence, the journalist in fiction at this time was considered a person "who typically has no more conscience than the wrongdoers he exposes" (Good 1989, p.11). While a few positive representations did exist, most images of journalists during this era were predominantly negative. Representations in film, on the other hand, have been found to be more complex (Good 1989).

Many studies on the image of journalists in film have been performed. Most of these studies focus on popular films and vary in type of analysis, from thematic to qualitative content analysis. The specific purpose of the studies also differ from each

other, like examining how the image of the journalist has evolved over time, (Brucker 1980), looking for reoccurring themes in journalism films (Kiste 1986), comparing images of journalists in different media (Langner-Burns 1989), and contrasting the image of journalists in journalist films to non-journalist films (Bilodeau 1994).

In "The Journalist as a Popular Hero" (1980), Barbara Brucker explores how the image of the journalist has changed from early cinema until the late 1970s. Brucker determines that the portrayal of the male journalist has shifted, from an often drunken, "ill-mannered lout of dubious intelligence," to an "educated professional." Brucker then concludes that this change mirrors the shift towards professionalism that occurred in journalism itself (Brucker 1980, p.56). The image of female journalists has generally not followed this shift. Throughout film, Brucker says, female journalists have typically been depicted as passive (as opposed to social crusaders), yet competitive in the male-dominated newsroom (Brucker 1980). Unlike male journalists in film, the image of the female journalist has not dramatically changed since the early years of film. Brucker speculates that this is because of the woman's passive role in the newsroom (Brucker 1980). Overall, Brucker's study provides an overview of journalists in film from the 1920s until the late 1980s.

In "The Image of Journalists in Selected Contemporary Films, 1979-1986," Amy J.Kiste uses thematic analysis to examine how journalists have been portrayed in popular contemporary films, by looking for the presence of one of the four negative common themes about journalists:

> 1) reporters will do anything for a story, regardless of ethical considerations; 2) the press is a powerful institution and reporters are often arrogant and abuse that power; 3) reporters can and should remain objective but often do not; and 4) reporters consider their careers more important than interpersonal relationships (Kiste 1986, Abstract).

Kiste examined eleven films divided into three categories: domestic journalists, foreign correspondence, and comedy/satire films. From this study, Kiste concludes that these negative themes do prevail in all three types of contemporary film studied (Kiste 1986). Furthermore, Kiste states that this is a problem because not only are the portrayals of journalists found inaccurate, but also convey a negative message about journalists to the public, which is likely to hinder the already weak credibility of the press (1986). Kiste then emphasizes that it is the journalism profession's responsibility to change public opinion, and therefore, change the image of the journalist in film so that it can reflect real life (Kiste 1986).

Heidi Langner-Burns takes a different approach in her study on the image of journalists. In "The Image of Journalists in American Film and Fiction," Langner-Burns compares the images of journalists in blockbuster films and best-selling novels from 1975 to 1987 (Langner-Burns 1989). From this research, Langner-Burns concludes that, unlike films, journalists in novels tend to have families, yet romantic relationships are stressed in both media (Langner-Burns 1989). Langner-Burns found that in films, female journalists tended to be "mere accessories" for the male journalists, while in novels, female journalists played more prominent roles (Langner-Burns 1989). Langner-Burns also found that the stereotype of the heavy-drinking journalist was not present in either media (1989). Finally, Langner-Burns concludes that in both films and novels, the

journalism profession is glamorized—painted as successful and exciting. Overall, this study examines the similarities and differences between films and novels.

Like Langner-Burns' study, Bill Bilodeau also did comparative research on the image of journalists, in "Portrayals of Journalists in Academy Award-Nominated Films, 1927-1993: A Qualitative Analysis" (Bilodeau 1994). Bilodeau compares the image of journalists in two types of film: "journalist" films versus "non-journalist" films, in order to determine how the images differ between film types and if "prevailing ideas regarding the negative portrayal of journalists in Hollywood films are valid (Bilodeau 1994, p.V). After analyzing 64 Academy Award-winning films, Bilodeau found that overall journalists tended to be portrayed positively, especially as major characters in non-journalism films (Bilodeau 1994). The majority of the negative portrayals appeared in films of the 1930s and in secondary characters. Bilodeau also concludes that reporters and photographers are depicted more positively than publishers and columnists (Bilodeau 1994).

According to Casey Pittman in "In the Movies, Journalists are No Longer Heroes—Just Like Everywhere Else," the typical journalist tended to be a gruff, wisecracking, idealist (Pittman 2001). Films in the 1930s and 1940s[7] often portrayed the male journalist as a man "who wore a hat indoors, had a bottle of booze stashed in his bottom desk drawer, and insulted everyone he met" (Good 1989, p.13). While this physically describes most of the (male) journalists in early film, the behavior of the journalist was more diverse.

[7] Examples of the "gruff journalist" stereotype appear in films like The *Front Page* (1931), *It Happened One Night* (1934), *Murder Man* (1935), and *The Foreign Correspondent* (1940)

Literature suggests that journalists are generally portrayed in one of two ways. They are depicted positively—as a watchdog for the people or negatively, as "immoral opportunists." In *Stop the Presses! The Newspaperman in American Films* (1976), Alex Barris further classifies these stereotypes, expanding on the positive portrayals (watchdog), along with the negative depictions (opportunist) (Barris 1976). Both of these stereotypes have reflected and shaped the public's perception of the press at different times in history.

Barris identifies two stereotypes of the watchdog journalist. The first portrayal within the watchdog role is "the reporter as crusader" (Barris 1976). This type is prevalent in many "newspaper" films[8], in which the journalist aims to expose "social evils" to protect society (Barris 1976, p.78). The crusading journalist is determined to expose government corruption and numerous other social injustices—from unlivable prison conditions to "the horrors of atomic war" (Barris 1976, p.78). In order to protect the public, the "crusading" journalist is resourceful and passionate—willing to sacrifice anything, even love, in pursuit of the truth (Good 1989). He/she works endless hours, passes up social gatherings and relationships, and even ignores personal health in order to investigate wrongdoings (Good 1989). These journalists are committed to the job, not just for monetary necessity, but because they believe it is their duty to protect the public. On many occasions, the journalist in these films complains about the hardships of the job and considers quitting (Good 1989). But, time after time, "something deep inside him continued to resist a change in his career and allegiances" (Good 1989, p.14). In this way, the journalist was bound to his desire to seek justice, thus, could not escape his

[8] Examples of the "crusading" journalist include *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), and *Deadline U.S.A.* (1951) (Barris 1976).

destiny (1989). This portrayal of the journalist (as a truth-seeker) reinforced the function of the press as a watchdog and protector of the people.

Literature suggests that one of the last, and possibly most influential depictions of crusading journalists appeared in the 1976 film *All the President's Men*, which tells the story of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's investigation of the Nixon Watergate scandal (Pittman 2001). Working days and nights, they adamantly search for the truth (Rosen 1996). According to Casey Pittman in *In the Movies, Journalists are No Longer Heroes—Just Like Everywhere Else* (2001), this film depicts journalists "as heroes—fighters for the public's right to know," thus fulfilling the role of the watchdog (Pittman 2001, p.4). Like the stereotype of the crusading journalist, they make many personal sacrifices in order to discover the truth (Rosen 1996). Throughout film, the portrayal of the crusading journalist has positively impacted its audience. For example, studies have shown that *All the President's Men*, (along with Watergate itself) boosted public confidence in the press and led to an increase in enrollment in journalism schools (Pittman 2001).

Another type is "the reporter as a crime-buster," where the journalist is able to "out-sleuth" the police (Barris 1976, p.22). In these types of films,[9] the journalist plays the part of detective—often outshining the existing police force, which are usually characterized in these films as "dumb cop[s]" (Barris 1976). The police in these films often fail to protect the public due to corruption (where the criminals bribe the cops to "look the other way"), stupidity (failure to see the clues of the criminal) or insouciance (too lazy to pursue suspects beyond obvious ones) (Barris 1976). The journalist, on the

[9] Examples of "the crime-buster" include *The Front Page* (1931), *Hi, Nellie* (1934), *The Daring Young Man* (1935), *Nine Lives Are Not Enough* (1941), *Hot News* (1953), and *The Big Tip-off* (1955) (Good 1989)

other hand, is passionate and clever. Whether delving into crime details, interviewing suspects, or donning disguises to attain information, the "reporter as crime-buster" will stop at nothing to solve the crime, and protect an innocent person from being framed or victimized by the assailant (1976). Since the journalist strives to prevent injustice, he/she is not typically motivated by personal gain in these roles, but driven by the urge to protect vulnerable people, hence the "watchdog" role.

Not all "newspaper" films depict journalists as heroes. Many negative portrayals of journalists have appeared in films over time, where journalists play scoundrels—"vicious and greedy—as gangsters armed with typewriters rather than Tommy guns" (Good 1989, p.70). In these cases, instead of serving the public's interest, the journalist is an "immoral opportunist." The villainous journalist is often willing to discard ethics and behave immorally for profit and fame (Barris 1976). Some characteristics of these negative portrayals of journalists include a thirst for sensationalism, a tendency to exploit, and a lack of concern for the general public. Barris uses the term "scandalmonger," to describe this journalist who seeks out gossip and sensationalism (Barris 1976). Like the "yellow" journalists of the 1890s, this type of journalist is willing to do anything, (defame innocent people, fabricate stories, create "phony celebrities" and hoaxes) to report a good story. The villainous journalist also exploits people by hounding them during tragedy (i.e. thrusting microphones in a victim's face), revealing the identity/whereabouts of vulnerable people, and destroying personal reputations (1976). In addition to sensationalism and exploitation, the villainous journalist is corrupt in other ways, such as conspiring with criminals, destroying evidence, and performing other criminal acts (Barris 1976). Through deceit, sensationalism, exploitation, and corruption,

the journalist, along with his/her press, attempts to profit from the news, ignoring the consequences.

Along with the villainous journalist, the editors and publishers were also often depicted negatively in film. Publishers were often depicted as "greedy," "hypocritical," and manipulative—willing to exploit others for "his own profit and glory" (Good 1989, p.12). Many films conveyed this characterization of the newspaper publisher as an "egomaniacal newspaper tycoon.[10]" Considered ruthless and profit-driven, the publishers would often attempt to coerce their reporters to stoop to their standards (Good 1989). Throughout film history, negative depictions of journalists and their press institutions have existed on-screen. While these portrayals have repeatedly been perpetuated in film, these images have somewhat changed over the years.

Shifting Representations of Journalists/Press in Film

While both positive and negative portrayals of journalists and the press have existed in film, in the late 1970s, a dramatic shift in these depictions occurred, causing a significant difference between the portrayal of the journalist before the 1980s and the portrayal of the journalist during and after the 1980s. The first difference is the ratio of positive to negative portrayals. Prior to the 1980s, both positive and negative depictions of journalists were common in film. Literature reviewed suggests that while the negative stereotype of the villainous journalist appeared in films from the 1920s through the 1970s, it wasn't until the early 1980s that the villainous journalist became much more

[10] Some of these films, as identified by Good, include movies from the 1930s like *Five-Star Final* (1931), *Nothing Sacred* (1937) up through the 1970s and 80s, with films like *Network* (1976) *Wrong is Right* (1982) and *Power* (1986).

prominent. In the early 1980s, images of the "reporter as crime-buster" and the crusading journalist (two popular portrayals) drastically decreased, and were replaced with negative portrayals of journalists such as the "scandalmonger" or a "faceless media corporation" (Good 1989). In recent years, almost no positive depictions of journalists appear in films (Good 1989, Garelik 1993, Saltzman 1993). Commenting on this phenomenon, Garelik states, "Movies and television are disgorging a generation of fictional journalists whose flaws far outweigh their meager virtues" (Garelik 1993, p.11). Good adds, "It is a rare film today that honors journalists for their absolute commitment to their profession, or that celebrates their legendary disdain for legal niceties and ethical restraints" (Good 1989, p.16). Scholars suggest that the prevalence of negative stereotypes of journalists (and the absence of positive ones), correlated with the decrease of public confidence that occurred in the early 1980s (Kiste 1986, Pittman 2001). Besides a shift in the ratio of positive to negative stereotypes, other differences between the portrayals exist.

Another change between the pre-and post-1980s on-screen journalist, is the position of the journalist in film—from primary to secondary characters. In many films prior to the 1980s, the journalist played the central character. Since the journalist, as a primary character, was crucial to the storyline, often, extensive background information was offered for the journalist' behavior, for both positive and negative stereotypes. The audience, then, was more likely to accept and understand the actions of the journalist, even if they were less than ideal (Weinraub 1993). Also, because the journalist was the star of the film, studios often hired celebrities to play the role of the journalist, particularly in the 1930s and 1940s. As a result, even when journalists were portrayed negatively, they were still well received by the audience. Bernard Weinraub, of *The New*

York Times, argues that because celebrities like Edward G. Robinson, James Cagney, Lee Tracy, Pat O'Brien, and Barbara Stanwyck played the journalists, audience members embraced these characters, even when they were "despicable" (Weinraub 1993). If audience members already liked the actors, then their characters could do almost anything and still be liked by the audience (Weinraub 1993). For the most part, the journalist continued to be the central character of the film until the late 1970s. With the onset of the "despised" journalist, however, in many films, the journalist has become a secondary character[11] (Weinraub 1993). As a secondary character, the journalist is often just a mere annoyance in the film, hounding and exploiting the public, without a concern for the public interest (1993). When the journalist is only a secondary character, he/she is usually not played by a celebrity, who could possibly draw empathy from the crowd. Instead, with no context or personal background, the immoral journalist is typically despised (Weinraub 1993). Without star power or a storyline to explain the negative stereotype, the audience generally does not support the journalist' negative behavior, and as a result, dislikes the journalist.

Besides a shift in the position of character, the demographics and motivation of the journalist in film have also changed in recent years. Prior to the late 1970s, the typical journalist was of the working class, representing an average person. Even when journalists were portrayed negatively, audience members tended to embrace these characters because they could identify with them. In "Stop the Presses! Movies Blast Media. Viewers Cheer," in the *New York Times* (1993), Media Scholar Glenn Garelik describes the journalists of the 1930s as "blue-collar, salt-of-the earth types" who "shared the values of the people they were writing for" (Garelik 1993). Because the audience

[11] Weinraub uses the journalist in *Die Hard* (1988) as an example of a secondary character.

could identify with the journalist, he/she was more likely to excuse or understand the reporter's behavior. During this time, it was also believed that the journalist, even when deviant, strived to fulfill his/her democratic function as a watchdog for the people (1993). Since it was thought that the journalist was still acting in the public's best interest, though unscrupulous, the audience would excuse the deviant behavior (Garelik 1993). Columnist Joe Saltzman, of *USA Today* adds, "the characters were usually created with some affection and a true understanding of the journalist's role in a democratic society. . . .no matter how devious or obsessive the character may have been, the audience was sympathetic to him or her" (Saltzman 1993). Up until the late 1970s, many believed that the journalist was still working for the common good, even when fitting a negative stereotype. By the 1980s, however, several factors had caused this belief to change.

According to Garelik (1993), the journalist of the early 1980s no longer represented a common working person, nor did they fulfill their democratic function in society. By this time, journalists had become more educated and wealthier than the average person, and were considered more arrogant and elitist (Garelik 1993). Because of this transition, Garelik speculates that it became more difficult, if not impossible, for the public to identify and empathize with the on-screen journalist (1993). In addition to a shift in class and wealth, the journalist' role in society had also changed on-screen. Instead of protecting the common person from institutional power, by the early 1980s, the journalist, along with his/her media organization, had become the institutional power. As opposed to the reporter as a crusader, the journalist from the 1980s on, was part of "a single, monolithic institution, an aristocratic fortress whose highborn members. . . .eat the common people for dinner" (Garelik 1993, p.11). The media, along with its journalists,

appeared "heartless, distant. . and conspiratorial"[12] (Garelik 1993, p.11). Besides failing to represent the "average" person, it is believed that the journalist in contemporary film is no longer the watchdog of the people. Pittman states that instead of fulfilling the watchdog role, the new function of the press is "to entertain rather than inform" (Pittman 2001, p.5). Since, for the most part, the audience no longer believes that journalists, and the press, are working to protect the public, audience members do not sympathize with negative stereotypes, but instead, despise them (1993). With the change in class and shift away from the original press function, the audience, in general, does not excuse or understand negative behavior of journalists and the press.

Overall, literature reviewed suggests a dramatic shift in the portrayal of journalists and the press occurred in the late 1970s. Although both positive and negative stereotypes of journalists appeared in film before this time, following the 1970s, the images were predominantly negative—portraying journalists and the press as "scandalmongers." Along with the change in the ratio of positive/negative portrayals, the type of roles also generally changed, from primary to secondary. This shift affected the audience perception of the journalist in films because as a secondary character explanation for deviant behavior was often omitted, and celebrities were less likely to play the journalist character (Garelik 1993). As a result, audience members were not as likely to understand the character's motivation, or have a preexisting fondness for the actor in the journalist role. In addition to a change in the type of character, the shift in class and function also contributed to this alteration. In the late 1970s, the typical journalist changed from an "average" working class citizen to a more educated wealthier elite. Consequently, with

[12] Examples of the "heartless" journalist include *The Absence of Malice* (1981), *The Right Stuff* (1983), *The Big Chill* (1983), and *Die Hard* (1988).

the change the audience was less likely to identify with the character and therefore, excuse deviant behavior. Literature reviewed also suggests that audience members prior to 1970s believed that, even in negative stereotypes, journalists and the press still strived to fulfill their democratic function—as a watchdog for the people. After this time, the audience tended not to believe this was the case. Instead, it is suggested that they believe that journalists and the press are only concerned with profit and reputation, not the public interest.

Overall, there have been many studies and books written on the image of journalists in film. However, little research exists on the image of the journalist in the genre of comic book action films. Since these films continue to increase in popularity, this area requires further study.

Research on Comic Books

Although no studies on comic book films have been performed, many studies on comic books themselves have been done. Most of this research falls into one of two categories: representation in comic book history and the role of comic books in creating fan communities.

Numerous studies have focused on how various groups have been portrayed throughout comic book history (Evans 1995, Mahoney 1997, Carpenter 2003). Dan Keith Evans, in "Social and Political Commentary in Superhero Comic Books: A Critical History," (1995) looks at how superhero characters in comic books have evolved over fifty years in accordance with changing societal values (Evans 1995). Carol Mahoney examines comic books for family relationships (Mahoney 1997). In "A content analysis

of family relationships in six superhero comic book series," Mahoney explores how family relationships are portrayed in popular comic books, concluding that superheroes tend to have few friends and few family relationships (Mahoney 1997). Stanford Wayne Carpenter (2003) also explores representation in comic books in "Imagining identity: Ethnographic investigations into the work of creating images of race, gender, and ethnicity in comic books" (Carpenter 2003). In his research, Carpenter examines how race, gender, and ethnicity are constructed in comic books from the perspective of the comic book producer (Carpenter 2003). Besides studying representation in comic books, another prominent research area is the role of comic books in creating culture.

Jeffrey A. Brown (1997) and Matthew John Pustz (1998) both studied comic book fan communities. In "New heroes: Gender, race, fans and comic book superheroes" (1997), Brown explores how fans connected to the black superheroes of the African American comic books of Milestone Media. Brown's study looks at the decoding of the meaning of a text by the audience (Brown 1997). Pustz also examines fan communities in "Fanboys and True Believers: Comic Book Reading Communities and the Creation of Culture" (1998). While Brown looks at encoding/decoding of meaning, Pustz looks at the commonalities between various groups of comic book fans (Pustz 1998). With the similarities of the different groups, Pustz concludes that fans of comic books form their own subculture (1998). In addition to fan communities, comic book censorship is another commonly researched area.

In conclusion, many studies on the image of journalists in films exist. Similarly, many studies on comic books have been performed. However, there are no studies done on the image of journalists in comic book films. It is important to study the image of

journalists in comic book films because this genre has strong box office power, continues to rise in popularity, and appeals to a variety of people, meaning that representations in these films will likely shape how many view journalists/press. The film *Spider-Man* (2002) alone has grossed more than $800 million dollars worldwide, making it the ninth highest grossing film worldwide of all time. This genre continues to rapidly expand. In the next five years, many new films in this genre are expected to be released. According to the *Internet Movie Database* (2004), in the next few years, *Spider-man II*, the sequel to *Spider-man* (expected 2004). *Catwoman* (2004), *Hellboy* (2004), the third installment to the *Blade* and *X-Men* films (expected 2004, 2006), *Fantastic Four*, the movie (expected 2005), remakes of *The Punisher* and *The Phantom* (both expected 2004), and a fifth installment of *Superman* (expected 2006) are all expected to be released. Finally, journalists play a prominent role in many comic book films. Since, in recent years, most journalist portrayals are thought of as negative, it is important to study the image of journalists in the comic book genre to determine if these images are similar to the typical images of contemporary films. With the popularity of comic book films on the rise, if these images are more positive than typical portrayals in mainstream film, then the positive images in these films may help boost public confidence in the press.

Representation of Journalists in Film and Social Construction of Reality

Theory predominantly guiding this study is the social construction of reality. In *Social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge* (1966), sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann discuss the existence of a socially constructed world, in which, “individuals and groups serve as definers of reality” (Berger

& Luckmann, 1966, p.107). To belong to society, Berger and Luckmann state that people need to learn the "rules of conduct." Groups and institutions "transmit" these rules and thereby teach people their "roles" through "institutionalization," which occurs, they say, when "the objectified social world is retrojected into consciousness in the course of socialization" (Berger & Luckmann 1966, p.57). Participation in the socially constructed world makes the world "real" to a person and if a person does not play his/her "role," he/she experiences "a departure from reality" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.62). Since this "world" is dependent on human activity, it is ever changing.

Because institutions, like the media, teach and reinforce the "rules of conduct," they play an integral role in the social construction of reality. One way that the media contribute to socialization[13] is through representations or images conveyed via content. Film scholar Graeme Turner, in *Film as a Social Practice* (1993), defines representation as "the social process of making images, sounds, signs, stand for something—in film or television" (Turner 1993, p.40). Turner explains that through representations, the media is able to convey meaning and to shape ideologies. The media are so influential, Turner adds, that "to gain control of the representational agenda for the nation is to gain considerable power over individuals' view of themselves and each other" (Turner 1993, p.136-37). According to Cultural Studies scholar Stuart Hall, in *Representation and the Media* (1997) representation enables a shared culture to exist, which allows people to have a common understanding of the world around them (Jhally 1997). Through representation, the media play a significant role in helping people to construct their social worlds. With this profound influence of the media, it is important to study

[13] Berger and Luckmann define socialization as "the comprehensive and consistent induction of an individual into the objective world of a society or sector" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.120).

representations, to explore what messages are being conveyed to the mass audience. Social construction of reality applies to this study because it is assumed that members of the public learn their roles, along with the press' roles in society, through media representation. Through the narrative in film, people can better understand and negotiate their surroundings (Turner 1993).

From the beginning of the United States, the press has been assigned a place as a central institution in the democratic process of the American society. It is assumed that the portrayal of the press in popular culture shapes and reflects public opinion of the press. It is also assumed that if public confidence in the press is low, people are less likely to utilize the press for its original functions. Therefore, it is important to explore how the press has been portrayed in specific genres of popular culture and how these portrayals have changed over time. It is probable that these portrayals will influence the public's perception of the press, and thus, the extent of which the public will utilize the original functions of the press, established to help maintain an effective democracy.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to study how journalists and the press have been depicted in comic book films because these representations help construct public perception of the press. This study aimed to explore (1) if representations of journalists and the press are prevalent in comic book action films and the role that these characters play in the film's narrative and (2) how journalists and the press have been framed in comic book action movies. To fulfill these objectives, framing analysis of comic book action films was used.

For the purposes of this study, a *journalist*, used interchangeably with reporter, is someone who writes stories or takes photographs for newspaper or reports news on air. He/she may not be shown within the confines of the media organization, but he/she is clearly part of a newspaper or television station. For example, in *Daredevil* (2003), although the character Ben Urich is never shown within the newspaper building, he obviously works for a newspaper. On the other hand, someone writing in a personal journal or publishing their own writing apart from a media organization are not, for the purposes of this paper, considered a journalist.

Press is defined as the organizations that produce newspapers and television broadcasts and includes the newspaper and television staff, individual authority figures within the newspaper or television staff (such as newspaper owners or editors, or television directors), as well as products of the press (i.e. newspapers or a television broadcast). The *press* is considered a separate entity from *journalists*, since literature suggests that the representations of the press may differ from the images of a journalist (Good 1989).

C*omic book* is defined as a collection of comic strips, composed of visual images and text, placed systematically (usually in a series of boxes) to tell a story (Neufeldt 1997). Characteristics of these books include definitive narrative structure and recurring characters. For the purposes of this study, the comic book must contain a "superhero" (someone with abnormal powers, like super-human strength, or technologically advanced gadgets which makes the hero physically superior, who protects people against evil), which fights crime. The definition of *comic book action film* is a live-action[14] motion picture adaptation of a comic book.

Media Frames and Framing Analysis

Numerous scholars have attempted to define frames. Generally, framing refers to the concept of organizing central themes that imply how an issue or event should be viewed. Sociologist Erving Goffman is credited with first defining framing in *Frame Analysis* (1974), where he describes frames[15] as "definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them" (Goffman 1974, p.10-11). Scholar Shanto Iyengar in *Is Anyone Responsible: how television frames political issues* (1991) rephrases Goffman's definition, stating that a frame "refers to subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of. . . problems" (Iyengar 1991, p.11).

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[14] Animated versions of comic books were omitted for this study because, with animation, it is often the comic book creators who draw the animation, hence, there is less variation from the original comic book.

[15] Researchers have used a number of different terms in efforts to identify "frames." Scholars Deborah Tannen and C. Wallat, in "Interactive Frames and Knowledge Schemas in Interaction: Examples from a Medical Examination/Interview" (1993), identify some of these terms, such as "script" "schema" "prototype" "speech activity" "template" and "module,'" all of which refer to "the notions of structures and expectations" (Tannen, D. & Wallat, C. 1993, p.59). Norman Fairclough, in *Media Discourse* (1995), adds "schemata. . . metaphors, and vocabularies" (Fairclough 1995, p.101).

In *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (1980), Todd Gitlin defines frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse. . . " (Gitlin 1980, p.7). He then adds that as society is continually changing, frames also constantly evolve.

Frames are suggested by signifying elements, which collectively suggest particular attributes or themes in which to view an issue. In "The Spiral of Opportunity and Frame Resonance: Mapping the Issue Cycle in News and Public Discourse" (2001), scholars M. Miller and Riechert Parnell state that frames are "manifest in the patterns of symbols that people choose to argue for their positions" (Miller and Parnell 2001, p.114). These signifying patterns exist in both verbal and visual communication. In "The Role of Images in Framing News Stories" (2001) Paul Messaris and Linus Abraham argue that differences exist between verbal and visual communication, which affect framing. One difference is the "analogical quality of images"—the idea that words are entirely socially constructed, whereas "images and their meanings are based on similarity or analogy" to real life objects (Messaris & Abraham 2001, p. 216). Because of an image's origination in similarity to real life objects, images are considered closer to reality than words, even though "all images are human-made, artificial constructions" (p. 217). Because of this difference between visual and verbal communications, frames suggested by images are less obvious than verbal frames; therefore this subtlety of frames must be considered when performing framing analysis on visual images (Messaris & Abraham 2001). While visual frames may be harder to detect than verbal frames, they both affect how an audience views an issue or event.

Overall, literature suggests that frames play a significant role in creating and understanding shared meaning. Media scholar Robert Entman, in "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm" (1993), states that framing "illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location . . . to that consciousness" (Entman 1993, p.52).

According to Goffman, framing allows people to identify, classify and understand large quantities of information (Goffman 1974). Zhongdang Pan and Gerald Kosicki, in "Framing as a Strategic Action in Public Deliberation" (2001), state that this organizing process is "an inevitable way for human actors to make sense of our experiences and engage in social interaction" (Pan & Kosicki 2001, p.60). Reese adds that framing aids cognitive and cultural understanding by "provid[ing] tools for examining knowledge structures" (Reese 2001, p.9). In order to work, then, frames must have potential to convey shared meaning, such as values or expectations, within an audience. In "What's in a Frame?: Surface evidence for Underlying Expectations" (1993), Deborah Tannen discusses this shared meaning, explaining that frames work because people "see events and objects in the world in relation to each other and in relation to their prior experience," therefore these "structures of expectation make interpretation possible" (Tannen 1993, p.21).

In "Prologue—Framing Public Life: A Bridging Model for Media Research" (2001), scholar Stephen Reese applies framing theory to a media audience, focusing on the relationship between the producers (media) and receivers (audience) of frames. Reese states that, "framing refers to the way events and issues are organized and made

sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences" (Reese 2001, p.7).

Since framing affects how an audience perceives an issue, it is important to study how journalists are framed in popular culture because these frames will presumably influence how the audience views journalists. Over the years, journalists have been framed in numerous ways. For example, in *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*, scholar Joe Saltzman identifies numerous types of journalist representations in films directed Frank Capra between the late 1920s through the early 1950s (Saltzman 2002). He lists thirteen categories, which included classifications such as Flawed Male Journalist, Cub Reporter, Sob Sister, and War and Foreign Correspondents in film (2002). Identifying these types of journalist representations is significant because it is likely the audience will perceive journalists in these roles. The recent shift towards negative representations of journalists is alarming, then, because it is probable that these negative frames will construct how the public views journalists off-screen.

Sampling and Data Collection

Framing analysis was used to study depictions of journalists and the press in comic book films. To determine the films for this study, a list of superhero comic books was created from Jamie Coville's website, "The History of Comic Books" (Coville 2001). The websites of Marvel Comics, DC Comics, and Dark Horse Comics (three of the biggest comic book publishers) were also consulted to find more superhero comic books. The titles of the comic books were then entered into the search engine of

The Internet Movie Database, a website, which catalogues thousands of films (2004). The keyword "based-on comics" was also searched. The following criteria were then used to choose the films for analysis. First, all of the films had to be based on a superhero comic book, which means a comic book centered on a superhero fighting crime. Since preliminary research showed that all of the comic-book film adaptations that became box-office hits were based on superhero comic books, for this study, only films based on superhero comic books were included. Films based on comic books without a superhero fighting crime were not included. For example, the film *Superman* (1978) is part of the study because is based on superhero comic book. The 1994 film *Richie Rich*, while also based on a comic book series, was not included because it does not contain a superhero. Secondly, films had to be based on comic books created prior to the film's release date. With this requirement, the film *Men in Black*, a superhero story that evolved into a comic book, was not included in the study. Thirdly, all of the movies chosen had to be created for the film medium. Since different media vary in format and character development, this criterion was required for consistency among the films analyzed. This factor excluded the 1990 film *The Flash* because it was originally created as a lengthy television pilot. Finally, the film could not be a sequel of another comic book film. Since sequels are based on the same stories as the original film, it is probable that portrayals of journalists would also be similar. Therefore, the three sequels of the films *Superman* (1976) and *Batman* (1976), the two sequels of the 1990 film *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and the sequel to the 2000 film *X-Men* were excluded from the study. The 1984 film *Supergirl*, however was not excluded. Although the character Supergirl is related to Superman, this film is based on a different comic book series

(*Supergirl*) than the *Superman* film (based on *Superman* comics). Because one of the objectives for this study was to examine the extent of journalist/press representations in comic book movies, the films chosen did not need to have journalist characters in order to be included in the study, nor did the press need to play a role in the films. Using this criteria, fifteen films were chosen for this study: *Superman* (1978), *Flash Gordon* (1980), *Supergirl* (1984), *Batman* (1989), *The Punisher* (1989), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), *Captain America* (1991), *The Shadow* (1994), *Barb Wire* (1996), *The Phantom* (1996), *Blade* (1998), *X-Men* (2000), *Spider-man* (2002), *Daredevil* (2003), and *Hulk* (2003).

Conducting the study

One objective of this research was to determine the extent of journalist/press representations in comic book action films. For the purposes of this study, journalist is represented in a comic book action film if a person who appears in the film works for a news organization. Signs that indicate a journalist may include physically reporting to a news organization, identifying oneself as part of a news organization, asking questions using a microphone or jotting notes during an interview. A journalist representation may also exist only orally, such as through a radio broadcast or as a voice-over for a television broadcast. A press representation exists if a news organization or its products appear in the film, signified by self-identification of the news organization, identified as a news organization by other characters in the film, or identified by an establishing shot of the news organization's logo or building.

If journalists/press plays a major role in a comic book action film, they appear in the majority of the film (on-screen at least fifty percent of the film). For example, in the film *Superman* (1978), the journalist Lois Lane plays a major role. She is in over fifty percent of the film. In *Flash Gordon* (1980), on the other hand, since the press representation only exists for 30 seconds of the entire film, the role of the press is minor.

To determine how significant the role of the journalist is within the narrative structure, two questions will be considered. 1). How does this character's actions affect the main plot of the film? For example, in the film *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, reporter April O'Neal single-handedly discovers the villains behind the city's recent crime wave. Through her investigation, the secret lair of the Foot (the youth gang causing the crime wave) is uncovered and eventually disbanded. 2). If this character did not appear in the film, how would the narrative structure differ? In *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, if the character April O'Neal did not exist in the film, it is likely that no one would unearth the youth gang behind the crime wave. The character's significance in the narrative structure is not based solely on his/her actions as a journalist, but as the character as a whole. Therefore, when the journalist Clark Kent saves lives as Superman, his alter ego, Superman's actions are considered for this question. Since the role of journalists/press in minor roles could dramatically influence the narrative structure, it is possible for journalists/press to play minor roles, yet have a significant part in the construction of the narrative.

In order to determine how journalists/press are framed in comic book action films, this research examined all sections where journalist/press were featured in the narrative of the film in order to identify the role played by the journalists or the press in the film.

A qualitative framing analysis of the journalist/press representations was performed, examining verbal and visual signifying elements that suggest particular frames or stereotypical ways in which journalists could be understood in society. For this study, previous classifications of journalist/press representations were considered. Literature reviewed identified several types of journalists/press that have typically appeared in films. In early film and occasionally in contemporary film, literature suggests that female journalists often play "sob" sisters—women, equal in journalistic abilities to men in the newsroom, yet are emotional, and yearn for a domestic life (Saltzman 2002). Brucker (1980) identifies female journalists as passive, yet competitive in the newsroom. Langner-Burns' study also indicates that female journalists commonly appear as "mere accessories" for male journalists (1989).

From the 1920s through the 1970s, male journalists were often portrayed as crusaders for justice and crime-busters (Barris 1976, Good 1989). Films created during this time commonly depict the press as a single, profit-driven editor or publisher, a watchdog for the people and as an informer of the public (Barris 1976). Films produced after the 1970s often portray journalists as secondary characters who are scandalmongers, immoral opportunists, and hounds (Good 1989, Garelik 1993, Saltzman 2002). Films created after the 1970s usually present the press as a faceless media corporation focused on entertainment and profit (Good 1989, Garelik 1993, Saltzman 2002). While the classifications suggested by the literature served as guidelines for the framing analysis of comic book films, the frames identified in these films were not limited to the previously identified categories. Also, it is possible for no frames of journalists/press to exist in a particular film or for multiple frames of journalists/press to be identified.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the representation of journalists and the press in comic book action films. Framing analysis was performed on fifteen comic book action movies: *Superman* (1978), *Flash Gordon* (1980), *Supergirl* (1984), *Batman* (1989), *The Punisher* (1989), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), *Captain America* (1991), *The Shadow* (1994), *Barb Wire* (1996), *The Phantom* (1996), *Blade* (1998), *X-Men* (2000), *Spider-man* (2002), *Daredevil* (2003), and *Hulk* (2003). The extent of which journalists/press appeared in these movies, as well as the role of journalists/press played in the film's narrative were examined. In addition, this study explored how journalists/press have been framed in comic book action films.

Research Question 1

To what extent are journalists/press represented in comic book action films? How significant is their representation in these films?

Presence of Journalists/Press in Comic Book Action Movies

The presence of journalists and the press and their role in the construction of the narrative in fifteen films were examined. Of these fifteen films, three do not contain any journalist or press portrayals. There is no evidence of journalists or the press in *Barb Wire* (1996), *Blade* (1998), or *Hulk* (2003). The other twelve films studied vary on the extent of the representation of journalists/press and the roles of these character types in the narrative. The films *Superman* (1978), *Flash Gordon* (1980), *Supergirl* (1984),

Batman (1989), *The Punisher* (1989), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), *Captain America* (1991), *The Shadow* (1994), *The Phantom* (1996), *X-Men* (2000), *Spider-man* (2002), and *Daredevil* (2003) all contain at least one journalist or press representation. Table 1 illustrates the presence of journalist/press representation in the comic book films studied, the type of role present in these films (major or minor), and indicates if these roles were significant to the film's narrative.

Table 1. Role of Journalists in Comic Book Action Films

		Importance of Characters				
Film	**Year**	Jour featured in film?	Press featured in film?	Major Role(s)	Minor Role	Are Roles Sig. to Narrative
Superman	'78	**X**	**X**	**X**		**Both**
Flash Gordon	'80		**X**		**X**	**No**
Super Girl	'84	**X**	**X**		**X**	**Press only**
Batman	'89	**X**	**X**	**X**		**Both**
The Punisher	'89	**X**	**X**		**X**	**No**
NinjaTurtles	'90	**X**	**X**	**X**		**Both**
Capt America	'91	**X**	**X**	**X**		**Both**
The Shadow	'94		**X**		**X**	**Press only**
Barb Wire	'96					
The Pantom	'96	**X**	**X**	**X**		**Both**
Blade	'98					
X-Men	'00	**X**	**X**		**X**	**No**
Spiderman	'02	**X**	**X**	**X**		**Both**
Daredevil	'03	**X**	**X**	**X**		**Both**
Hulk	'03					

Of the twelve films that contain journalist or press representations, ten films have both journalist and press portrayals. Both journalists and a press organization appear in *Superman* (1978), *Supergirl* (1984), *Batman* (1989), *The Punisher* (1989), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), *Captain America* (1991), *The Phantom* (1996), *X-Men* (2000), *Spider-man* (2002), and *Daredevil* (2003). Only press representations exist in the

films *Flash Gordon* (1980) and *The Shadow* (1994). There are no films where a journalist representation is found without a press representation.

The importance of the representation (major or minor roles) is divided. In seven out of twelve of the films with representations, journalists and/or the press play major roles in the films (i.e. appear in the majority of the film). Five films contain only minor journalist/press roles. In *Flash Gordon* (1980), *Supergirl* (1984), *The Punisher* (1989), *The Shadow* (1994), and *X-Men* (2000), the roles of journalists and/or the press are minor, meaning that these characters only appear in the films for a short period of time (less than fifty percent of the film). Both journalists and the press play significant roles in the construction of the narrative in eight films: *Superman* (1978), *Batman* (1989), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), *Captain America* (1991), *The Shadow* (1994), *The Phantom* (1996), *Spider-man* (2002), and *Daredevil* (2003). In one film, *Supergirl* (1984), the press plays a significant role in the narrative, while the journalist does not play a significant role. Four of the films with representations, *Flash Gordon* (1980), The *Punisher* (1989), *The Shadow* (1994), and *X-Men* (2000) do not contain either a significant press role or a journalist role significant to the narrative.

In the film *Superman* (1978), representations of journalists are present throughout the movie. Along with numerous supporting journalist characters, two main characters, Clark Kent (Superman's alter ego) and Lois Lane and are journalists, who work for a Metropolis newspaper. The film opens with Kent as a small boy, in his native planet Krypton, and follows him through his journey to Earth. Once he grows up, Kent becomes a reporter at *The Daily Planet*, where he meets fellow journalist, Lois Lane. While writing for the newspaper, Kent, as his alter ego Superman, performs many heroic

acts, rescuing people in danger and impeding criminals. The media begin to publicize Kent's feats, which cause the editor of *The Daily Planet*, Perry White, to demand a story on Superman for his paper. Lane volunteers to write the story and Superman agrees to be interviewed. That evening, the interview between Superman and Lois Lane quickly turns romantic as Superman flies her around the night sky. Following their date, Lane publishes intimate facts about Superman in *The Daily Planet*, including information on Superman's weakness—kryptonite. A high profile villain, Lex Luthor, reads Lois Lane's story and sets a trap for Clark Kent, a.k.a. Superman. Luthor catches Superman, but he escapes. Luthor's inability to kill Superman in his lair infuriates him to the point where Luthor hatches a new scheme, forcing Superman to choose between saving two United States cities from nuclear explosions. While Superman destroys one of the missiles, he is unable to completely thwart Luthor's plan. The second missile erupts, triggering a vast earthquake throughout the West coast. After the disaster begins, Superman quickly flies to the coast, where he discovers that his girlfriend, Lois Lane, has suffocated to death in her car. Ignoring his father's orders never to alter time, Superman loops around the earth, reversing time so that he can save Lois. This time reversal allows Superman not only to rescue Lane, but also to prevent both missiles from exploding. At the end of the film, the police arrest Lex Luthor, and Clark Kent (a.k.a. Superman) and Lois Lane are together, although Lane is unaware of Superman's true identity. Since both Lane and Kent appear in more than fifty percent of the film and are central to the plot, the journalist representations in *Superman* play a major role in the narrative structure of the film. Since the narrative structure centers on Clark Kent/Superman's actions, as well as his interactions with Lois Lane, without these characters, the plot would be dramatically

altered. The fact that these characters are journalists is also crucial to the narrative structure. It is through the newsroom of *The Daily Planet* that Lois Lane and Clark Kent first meet. Lane's role as a journalist is important because it is through this position that Lane has her first meeting with Superman. Later, Lane's occupation is significant because she inadvertedly conveys Superman's weakness through her story in *The Daily Planet*. Besides providing a cover-up for his Clark Kent alter ego, there is symbolic significance for Superman to work at the newspaper. At the beginning of the film, a voiceover declares that *The Daily Planet* is dedicated to protecting and serving the people of Metropolis. Similarly, Clark Kent (as Superman) announces his objective to Lane as preserving "truth, justice, and the American way" for the people of Metropolis (Donner 1978). Overall, without Clark Kent and Lois Lane, the narrative structure of *Superman* would not exist.

Throughout *Superman*, the press plays a major role in the narrative structure. The voiceover at the beginning of the film signifies that the press is an important entity in both Metropolis and this film, declaring that the city's newspaper, *The Daily Planet*, "...whose reputation for clarity and truth had become a symbol of hope for the city of Metropolis" (Donner 1978). This introduction immediately establishes the primary news organization, *The Daily Planet*, as a driving force in both the city and the film itself. Later in the film, it is the press organization, *The Daily Planet* that unites Superman and Lois Lane for the first time, resulting in romance. When the editor of *The Daily Planet*, Perry White, discovers that other newspapers in Metropolis are printing stories on Superman's heroics, he insists that one of his reporters cover the story, assigning Lois Lane to the task. This assignment leads to Lane's interview with Superman, which

blossoms into a romantic relationship. The press also plays a significant role in communicating information to the villain and to the public. Through an issue of *The Daily Planet*, the villain, Lex Luthor, learns of Superman's weakness, Kryptonite. This knowledge enables Luthor to set a deadly trap for Superman. Later in the film, a press organization through the radio informs its public, along with the viewing audience, of the ensuing disasters, stating that earthquakes have bizarrely appeared across the United States. This information causes Lois to panic as she tries to hastily drive her car out of danger. Throughout *Superman*, the press plays a significant role in constructing the film's narrative. Without the press, Lois Lane and Superman would not have united and the film's climax could not occur.

There are no journalist representations in the film *Flash Gordon* (1980). A singular press representation exists in this film. After Flash Gordon's plane crashes into an unknown scientific lab, the shot cuts to a scientist, Dr. Zarkov, madly dashing around. Through the lab's radio, a voice states that an unknown source is causing unusual natural disasters. Following this announcement, Dr. Zarkov rushes to his rocket and then tricks Flash Gordon and his acquaintance, Dale, into boarding his ship. Zarkov launches the rocket, and the three passengers travel to the planet Mongo to save the Earth. Since the press only appears in the thirty-second radio clip, the role of the press in this film is minor. The press' role is not vital to the narrative structure because Zarkov prepares to launch his rocket even prior to the radio announcement. The information from the press mainly serves as a narrative device to prepare the audience for the upcoming events and to introduce Zarkov's character.

In *Supergirl* (1984), the character Jimmy Olsen represents the sole journalist in the film, as a minor character in this movie, only appearing in a small portion of the film as Linda Lee's (a.k.a. Supergirl's) best friend's boyfriend. In this film, Superman's cousin, Linda (Supergirl), travels to Earth in order to recapture a powerful energy ball, currently in the possession of an evil witch named Selena. Upon Lee's arrival, she enrolls in a private school for girls, where she meets Lois Lane's cousin, Lucy. When she is not in class or dining with Lucy and her photographer boyfriend, Jimmy Olsen, Lee rescues a man, bewitched by Selena. Through her crystal ball, Selena views Lee's heroics and vows to destroy her power, luring Supergirl to her cave by capturing Lucy Lane and Jimmy Olsen. Before Selena can achieve her goal of world domination and Supergirl's demise, however, Lee uses her Supergirl powers to defeat Selena. Lee then frees her friends, who promise to keep her identity a secret, and returns the energy ball to her native planet. Throughout this film, Olsen's role is not significant to the narrative structure. When Selena attacks, Olsen does not fight, but allows himself and Lane to be captured. Even when he discovers the truth about Supergirl, Olsen does not use this knowledge to benefit his career. Instead he nonchalantly agrees to keep silent. Without the character of Jimmy Olsen, little would change in the plot structure. Selena would only have one hostage, but the rest of the film would stay the same. Therefore, in the film, *Supergirl*, the representation of the journalist is a minor role.

Only one press representation appears in the film *Supergirl*. In the first Earth scene, (which follows a scene on Supergirl's native planet), while the villain Selena and her sidekick picnic, a radio announcer's voice comes through the car radio, stating that Superman has traveled a long journey to another planet. After this announcement, Selena

discovers the energy ball. With the knowledge of Superman's absence, along with her newfound energy ball powers, Selena creates a scheme for world domination. Since this brief announcement is the only press representation in the film, the press plays a minor role in the storyline. However, because the information disseminated by the press leads to Selena's creation of her evil plan (essentially the plot of the film), the press' representation is significant to the narrative structure of the film.

The film, *Batman* (1989), contains both journalist and press representations. This film centers on the story of millionaire Bruce Wayne, who loses his parents as a child. Because of their senseless murder, Wayne dedicates his life to preventing crime in Gotham City. Through his alter ego Batman, Wayne spends each night fighting crime with his array of tools and gadgets. One night, Batman confronts Jack Napier, an eccentric man, in the midst of a massive crime. This confrontation eventually causes Napier to tumble into a vat of acid, disfiguring him. Following the accident, Napier emerges as the Joker, a crazy man determined to spread evil and defeat Batman. At the same time as Napier's accident, photographer Vicky Vale hears of Batman's heroics and becomes determined to reveal Batman's identity. During her investigation, Vale attends a party at the house of Bruce Wayne with a fellow journalist. The two journalists leave the main party room and go exploring, trying to learn more about the reclusive millionaire. While snooping around a private room stocked with unique trinkets, Vale is surprised by Wayne. He immediately charms her and she forgoes investigative journalism for a romantic evening. Following this meeting, Vale appears to lose interest in her plan to reveal Batman's identity. Instead, Vale's mission becomes courting Wayne, as she begins to miss work in order to research Wayne's past. Even when she discovers the story of

Wayne's murdered parents, she does not connect it to Batman. Later in the film, the Joker realizes that Bruce Wayne is Batman. He then kidnaps Wayne's love, Vale, who Batman rescues. Following her escape, the Joker attempts to poison the city with toxic narcotics. Batman once again comes to the rescue, alerting the press of Joker's plan. The TV station Action News, as well as the *Gotham Globe* informs the public of the poisoned narcotics. At the end of the film, Batman permanently stops the Joker from launching new evil schemes by forcing him off the edge of a building.

In this film, the photographer Vicky Vale plays a significant role in the narrative of the film. Vale appears in most of the film—first as a determined photographer hungry for a good story and then later, as Bruce Wayne's love interest. Because it is the courtship between Vale and Wayne that leads to the Joker's discovery of Batman's identity, Vale's character is crucial to the narrative structure of the film since this discovery builds to the climatic battle between Batman and the Joker. Her character is also important later in the film. After the Joker kidnaps Vale, he tells her of his evil plan to poison the city's cosmetics. Vale informs Batman of this scheme, who tells the press. Without Vale, Batman would never learn the Joker's plan, therefore would not be able to warn the press, who in turn, could not protect the public from the poisoned cosmetics. In this film, the press plays a minor role, yet is significant to the narrative because although press organizations appear in less than half the film, they play an important part in the plot structure. At one part in the film, the Joker uses a TV broadcast to invite the public to a parade, in which he will dispense free cash. With this news, thousands of people line the streets. However, before the Joker can release his poisonous gas into the crowd, Batman stops him, saving the public from harm. Later, the press once again plays a

crucial role in the film by disseminating information about the poisoned cosmetics. Through television broadcasts and the city newspaper, the press warns the public to avoid the harmful cosmetics. Because of the press, no one is harmed. Without the press in this film, the tainted cosmetics would have disfigured many of the Gotham City residents. The role of the press in *Batman* points to a complexity of the press role as an informer in a democratic society in that this information is used for both good and evil purposes. In the film *Batman,* both journalists and the press play significant roles in the narrative structure.

In the film, *The Punisher* (1989), the journalist and press representations are minor. This film tells the story of a man, Frank Castle, whose family is killed by criminals. He fakes his own death and then seeks revenge on those who murdered his family. He is so successful at extinguishing the American mafia that the Japanese crime family, Yakuza, tries to overtake the American mafia through blackmail. In order to save the American mafia's children, the head of the American family, Gianni Franco, asks Castle for help. Castle reluctantly agrees and teams up with the same men who destroyed his family. In this film, journalists only appear in one brief scene. In the opening scene of the film, a jury acquits a high profile mafia man. As he leaves the courthouse, journalists surround him, thrusting microphones in his face and bombarding him with questions. Despite his refusal to answer, the journalists continue to hound the mafia man until he finally drives away. Journalists also play a role in the next scene. After a man tumbles out of a burning house, frenzied journalists engulf him, trying to snap a photograph. Yet, with all the people present, no one inquires about the man's condition. These actions indicate that the journalists are faceless, selfish people hungry for

sensationalism. The role of journalists in this film is minor because journalists only briefly appear in these two scenes and do not significantly affect the narrative structure of the film.

The press also plays a minor role in this film. The film begins with a television broadcast, as an anchor describes the 125 Mafia family murders that have occurred within the last five years. The anchor then attributes these killings to a man known as the Punisher—an anonymous assassin who stalks members of the Mafia. Following this story, the news broadcast describes the acquittal of a Mafia man in court. As the anchor details the acquittal, the shot cuts to the man leaving the courthouse. This informative broadcast establishes who the protagonist of the film is, as well as the motive for the Punisher's next killing. Immediately following the man's acquittal, he returns to a large house and celebrates with other men. Apparently believing that the man should have been convicted, the Punisher arrives and murders all of the men in the house to reprimand them for their crimes. Because the press only appears in one scene, their role in this film is minor and insignificant to the narrative structure of the film. Although the television broadcast introduces the Punisher to the public and the audience and discusses the acquittal of the mafia man, this information does not affect the actions of the superhero or villains. Because the Punisher first appears at the courthouse (at the end of the voiceover), it is evident that he does not learn of the acquittal from the press. Therefore, since the television broadcast does not affect the character's actions, the role of the press does not significantly influence the narrative in this film.

The film, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), contains many journalist and press representations. One of the protagonists, April O'Neil, is a reporter who works for

Channel 3 Eyewitness News. After a series of crimes hits New York City, April O'Neil begins to investigate the source of the crime. As she delves deeper into the mystery, a group of thugs attack her outside of the news station. While she lays helpless on the ground, a strange figure attacks the thugs, preventing them from harming O'Neil. A few days later, in the subway, the thugs attempt to attack O'Neil again. Like before, a strange figure saves her. This time, the stranger brings O'Neil into his lair. She discovers four human-size turtles and a rat, who are not only trained in martial arts, but are capable of human communication. O'Neil befriends the turtles and the rat named Splinter. Soon after their first meeting, the thugs behind the crime wave kidnap Splinter. O'Neil, along with the turtles, becomes even more determined to uncover the source of the crimes and soon learns that the thugs are a group of teenage martial arts trainees called the Foot led by a armor-protected Japanese crime lord, named Shredder. Without the support of the police, O'Neil and the turtles concoct a plan to rescue Splinter and expose the Foot to the public. In the climax of the film, the turtles battle Shredder and the Foot, while O'Neil reports her information to the city's public through a Channel 3 Eyewitness News live broadcast. Throughout this film, the journalist (O'Neil) plays a major role in the narrative structure. Without O'Neil, the public would not have discovered the truth behind the crime spree. Therefore, the Foot would have continued to victimize the residents of New York.

The press also plays a significant role in this film. Throughout the movie, the press updates the public on the day's events. At the beginning of the film, O'Neil's voiceover, along with a montage of crime taking place, establishes the setting and introduces the narrative to the audience. Press representations appear intermittently

throughout the story, via both television and newspapers, informing the public of possible sources of the crime wave. The press is also important because it is through a television broadcast that the villain, Shredder, learns of O'Neil's investigation. This knowledge causes the Foot to kidnap Splinter, thus setting up the main storyline of the film. Without the role of the press, the narrative structure would differ significantly since Shredder would remain ignorant of O'Neil's investigation and her link to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

Journalists and the press appear in the film *Captain America* (1991). In the 1940s, an evil Nazi experiment transforms a young boy into a villainous superhuman named Red Skull. To combat Red Skull, the Americans create their own patriotic superhuman, Captain America. Unfortunately, after only one battle with Red Skull, Captain America becomes frozen in Alaska and stays frozen for the next fifty years. When he finally thaws, Captain America is unaware that Red Skull continues to perform evil deeds. As he ventures South, Red Skull's men appear and try to harm Captain America. Luckily, a journalist named Sam Kolawek arrives in his car and orders Captain America to get in. At this point, Kolawek informs Captain America that Red Skull continues to commit evil deeds and has recently kidnapped Kolawek's friend, Tom Kimball, the President of the United States. Captain America believes Kolawek is lying, so he leaves Kolawek on the side of the road and returns to his boyhood home. There, Captain America discovers that his girlfriend has long since married and produced children. He also finds out that Kolawek's story is, in fact, true. Meanwhile, Kolawek investigates the true identity of Captain America so that he can warn him of Red Skull's plans. Kolawek determines who Captain America really is, along with his home address.

Kolawek travels to Captain America's home, but he is too late. As Kolawek arrives, Captain America and his former sweetheart's family are in the midst of an attack. In spite of the obvious danger, Kolawek rushes into the residence and is gunned down. Following this encounter, Captain America vows to rescue the President of the United States. Before Red Skull is able to brainwash the President into destroying the environment, Captain America saves the President and forces Red Skull to plummet to his death, freeing the world of Red Skull's wickedness. In this film, journalists and the press play an integral role in the narrative. The reporter for *The Washington Post*, Sam Kolawek travels many miles and risks danger in order to warn Captain America of Red Skull's activities. In Alaska, Kolawek's arrival allows Captain America to escape from Red Skull's men. Kolawek also informs Captain America of the President's kidnapping. Later in the film, although Kolawek is unable to prevent Red Skull's attack, he tries to stop the masked men from harming Captain America. This heroic act costs Kolawek his life, demonstrating Kolawek's dedication to protecting the American public from harm. Throughout the film, the journalist Sam Kolawek plays a major role in the film, along with the narrative. Without this character, the masked men may have overtaken Captain America in Alaska, therefore dramatically altering the film.

The press also plays a crucial role in this film. In *Captain America*, the press and its products inform the public and are used to signify time passing. At the beginning of the film, a young man, Steve Rogers, reads about the war in Europe in the *L.A. Chronicle*. With this information, Rogers volunteers for a scientific experiment promising to aid the fight for victory. This experiment transforms Rogers from a sickly, thin man, into Captain America—a strong, agile warrior with a conscience. This news story is

important because it indirectly causes the creation of Captain America. In this film, the press is also used to convey the passing of time. After Captain America becomes frozen in Alaska, a montage of newspaper shots indicates time moving forward. At the same time, these headlines chronicle the life of Tom Kimball, from boyhood, when he meets Captain America, into adulthood, where he becomes President. This information is crucial because it provides insight into the life of Kimball, which becomes important once Red Skull kidnaps him. These stories paint the character of Kimball as a good man and strong leader. With these personal characteristics, his rescue seems especially vital to inhibiting Red Skull's evil from penetrating the globe. In *Captain America*, the press plays a major role in the film, by inspiring Steve Rodgers to become Captain America, therefore protecting the world from harm and by visually depicting the passing of time. The stories during this montage also inform the public of Tom Kimball and his good deeds, which later becomes significant when he, as President, is kidnapped.

No images of journalists and only brief representations of the press appear in the 1996 film, *The Shadow*. In this film, a man, Lamont Craniston, gains the power of invisibility and the ability to "cloud men's minds" after he is kidnapped and schooled by the mystic, The Tulku. With this knowledge, he becomes The Shadow, a mysterious protector of the citizens of New York. Seven years after Craniston becomes The Shadow, an evil mind-controller, Shiwan Kan, travels to New York and threatens to blow up an atomic bomb in the heart of the city. Through the city's newspaper, *The New York Telegram*, The Shadow learns of Kan's plan and stops Kan before he can destroy the city. In a battle of physical strength and mental wit, The Shadow and Kan combat. Eventually, the Shadow defeats Kan, protecting the New York public his mind-control and atomic

weapons forever. While the press plays a minor role in this film, appearing only briefly, it is significant in the narrative structure of the film. Without the press informing The Shadow of Shiwan Kan's plan (to threaten to destroy the city), The Shadow would have been unaware of the specifics of Kan's scheme, hence would not be able to prevent his evil deeds. Because the information from the press affects The Shadow's actions and thus, the climax of the film, this role is crucial to the narrative structure.

In the film, *The Phantom* (1996), both journalists and the press play a significant role in the construction of the narrative. This film tells the story of a man, Kit Walker (a.k.a. The Phantom) from the island of Bengalla. Blessed with super powers, he dedicates his life to stopping the Sheng Brotherhood, an evil clan marked by the spider symbol. Over in New York, Dave Palmer, the owner of the *New York Tribune* discovers that a malicious millionaire, Xander Drax has been researching the powerful skulls of Togando, as well as the mysterious spider symbol. He sends his niece, journalist Diana Palmer, over to Bengalla in order to investigate origin of the spider symbol. Before she reaches Bengalla, Drax's evil clan kidnaps Palmer and holds her hostage on a boat. The Phantom arrives, rescuing Palmer and returns her to his skull-shaped cave. As she gazes into her hero's eyes, a British soldier, Captain Philip Horton appears and asks Palmer and The Phantom about the spider symbol. The Phantom explains that the symbol is the mark of the Sheng Brotherhood—an ancient evil organization committed to finding the three skulls of Togado. With the information that Drax has become involved in the Sheng Brotherhood's search for the skulls, The Phantom and Palmer fly to New York. There, they find one of the skulls in a museum. Before they can move the skull, however, Drax's men capture The Phantom and Palmer. The Phantom escapes and rescues Palmer,

while Drax continues to hunt for the other Togodo skulls. Drax locates the second skull on an island near Togodo and begins to erect a shrine that will enable the power of the skulls to transfer to him. Meanwhile, The Phantom and Palmer learn of Drax' location and travel to the Togodo islands. As they plan their attack, Drax's men recapture The Phantom and Palmer. As The Phantom watches, Drax begins the ceremonial power transfer of the skulls. At the same time, Drax's men lock Palmer and another woman in a vessel. At this point, The Phantom discovers that his skull-crested ring is the third skull Drax needs for his shrine. Using the power of his ring, The Phantom frees himself and Palmer and thwarts Drax's scheme by destroying the shrine. In the end of the film, Drax's evil reign is over, and The Phantom and Palmer are in love. Throughout this film journalists and the press play major roles. The journalist, Diana Palmer, is important because she informs The Phantom of Drax' connection to the spider symbol, causing The Phantom to travel to New York. This journey signifies the start of the battle between Drax and The Phantom. Without the journalist, Palmer, The Phantom would not know of Drax' Sheng Brotherhood link and therefore, would not travel to New York to stop him. Without the battle between The Phantom and Drax, the central storyline could not exist. The press also plays a major role in this film. Because the press organization, the *New York Tribune* sends its correspondent, Diana Palmer, to investigate the spider symbol, the Phantom learns of Drax's plan, therefore is able to stop it before he can achieve world domination. The press is also important because it is the newspaper that first uncovers Drax's connection to the Sheng Brotherhood, as well as his desire for the skulls of Togoda. Later, this newspaper informs Drax that his abduction of Palmer has failed, which alerts him to the actions of The Phantom, who quickly becomes his arch nemesis.

Since journalists and the press expose and prevent the activities of the evil Xander Drax, indirectly protecting the public from his world domination, the representations of journalists and the press, in this film, are significant to the narrative.

In the film, *X-Men* (2000), a few journalist and press representations appear. This film focuses on the imminent war between "mutants," who have special powers due to mutated genes, and humans, who do not have these gifts. Due to fear of the mutants, government officials, led by a man named Senator Kelly, push to pass a law requiring mutant registration. To prevent this law from passing, the villain, Magneto, and his fellow mutants kidnap Kelly and force his genes to mutate. Another group of mutants discover Magneto's actions and vow to stop him before he can mutate the residents of New York City. In the end, the good mutants thwart Magneto's evil scheme and the non-mutant public is safe. Journalists appear primarily in one scene of the film. As Senator Kelly leaves a government building, reporters rush to him, screaming questions. Kelly ignores the barrage of journalists, escaping to his car. Since journalists only appear in this scene, and provide no information that affects the narrative, their role in this film is minor. Press representations exist in several scenes of this film. In one scene, a television broadcast communicates Kelly's plan to the villain, Magneto. Kelly describes his belief that normal people should know who the mutants are so they can avoid them. Therefore, a mutant registration act should be enacted, requiring all mutants to identify themselves. The villain, Magneto, listens to this speech on his television and becomes infuriated. Immediately, he begins to concoct a plan to destroy Kelly and his registration act.

Another press representation exists at the end of the film, when a television broadcast alerts the good mutants to the villain Mystique (part of Magneto's group) infiltration into

the Senate. After the television shows Senator Kelly apologizing to the Senate for originally pushing the anti-mutant law, Kelly walks near the camera where a close-up reveals that he has yellow eyes—Mystique's eyes. This information tells the good mutants that Mystique and her villainous mutant group continue to plot and practice evil schemes, despite the good mutants' efforts. In this film, the press only appears in two scenes so the role of the press is minor. However, because it is the press that informs Magneto of Senator Kelly's intentions, which in turn causes Magneto to launch his evil plan (the plot of the film), the press plays a significant role in constructing the narrative in this film.

The film *Spider-man* (2002) contains both journalist and press representations. This movie features a nerdy photographer, Peter Parker, who is bitten by radioactive spider. This bite causes Parker to undergo a physical transformation, which increases his strength and jumping ability, enhances his vision and reflexes, and enables him to shoot webs from his wrist and to scale walls unaided. At first, Parker uses his newfound abilities for personal gain. However, this choice indirectly enables a carjacker to murder Parker's Uncle Ben. As a result of this tragedy, Parker (a.k.a. Spider-man) devotes his life to protecting the public—saving the people of New York City from muggings, fires, and other catastrophes and later, from the destruction of the villain, The Green Goblin. The Green Goblin, a violent, aggressive monster with superhuman strength and a thirst for vengeance, soon realizes that Spider-man is the only figure preventing him from his evil plans. In an attempt to discover the true identity of Spider-man, The Green Goblin threatens the J. Jonah Jameson, the editor of the city's newspaper, *The Daily Bugle* into revealing Spider-man's whereabouts. From the time Spider-man began his heroic feats,

this newspaper published stories about him and later, photographs. Jameson refuses to comply with The Green Goblin, and denies knowing whom the photographer who took the photographs of Spider-man is. This confrontation leads to the initial meeting of Spider-man and the Green Goblin, which is significant because it is the animosity between these two characters that drives the plot of the film. Several times, Spider-man and the Green Goblin battle in the movie, with each fight becoming more ruthless. In the end, Spider-man and the Green Goblin engage in lengthy combat, which results in the death of the Green Goblin.

Both journalists and the press play significant roles in this film. The central character, Peter Parker, is a photographer for *The Daily Bugle*, who performs may heroic feats in this film, such as catching criminals and protecting innocent people. Parker's role as a journalist is important because it indirectly causes his transformation into Spider-man. As a photographer for the school newspaper, during a class field trip, Parker lags behind the class in order to capture some photographs of the spider exhibit. Focused on the spiders and M.J. (the student he chooses to shoot), Parker is oblivious to the spider slowly dropping from the ceiling, which eventually lands and bites him. Because this bite enacts the transformation driving the entire plot (Spider-man's battles), his journalist role is crucial to the film. His occupation is also significant later in the film because this duel life enables him to capture shots of Spider-man (himself) in action. These photos get him hired at the *Daily Bugle* and eventually lead the Green Goblin to discovering who Spider-man is. The press also plays a significant role in this film. Through a series of articles in the *Daily Bugle*, the public learns of Spider-man and therefore is not frightened when he arrives at a situation ready to help. The press in this film also aids the villain's

discovery of his own identity. In one scene, the scientist Norman Osborne reads that his corporation's board of directors has been murdered. This article triggers Osborne's alter ego, the Green Goblin, into coercing Osborne to accept his new identity. Once Osborne learns that he is the Green Goblin, he becomes consumed by the Green Goblin—losing all emotional ties to his former self. In the film *Spider-man*, journalist and press representations strongly contribute to the central storyline, affecting the actions of the protagonist, the villain, and the general public.

Images of journalists and the press exist throughout *Daredevil* (2003). This film follows a character named Matt Murdock, who gains superhuman senses after a radioactive waste accident leaves him visually impaired. After members of the crime lord, the Kingpin, kill Murdock's father, Murdock (a.k.a. Daredevil) devotes his life to protecting the innocent, fighting criminals as both a lawyer and a superhero. As Daredevil physically punishes more and more criminals, Ben Urich, a writer for the city's newspaper, *The New York Post*, begins tracking and reporting Daredevil's accomplishments. The Kingpin reads of these feats and hires an assassin, Bullseye, to kill Daredevil. Through the paper, Kingpin also discovers that someone in his organization has been leaking information to the press. He identifies the perpetrator as Nikolas Natchios, the father of Elektra Natchios, Murdock's (a.k.a. Darevil) love interest. Bullseye kills Natchios, but in the process implicates Daredevil as the prime suspect. Elektra swears vengeance for her father and hunts Daredevil, believing he is guilty. At the height of the film, Elektra stabs Daredevil and then realizes that it is Murdock and he is innocent. Bullseye appears and kills Elektra, which leads to a lengthy battle between Daredevil and Bullseye. Finally, the cops arrive, shooting Bullseye. Daredevil flees to

Kingpin's headquarters, where he immobilizes Kingpin, who is then arrested by the police. In the final scene of the film, the journalist, Urich, discovers Daredevil's identity but decides not to reveal this information to the public, thus allowing Daredevil to continue his battle for justice.

Journalists and the press play crucial roles in the narrative of this film. Throughout the movie, the journalist, Urich, investigates Daredevil's activities, reporting them to the public. Urich's stories inform Kingpin of Daredevil, which leads to Kingpin hiring Bullseye, which leads to Elektra's death. Without Urich's articles on Daredevil, Kingpin would continue to be unaware of the silent force that is slowly destroying his evil posse. Urich also protects the identity of Daredevil. At the end of the film, although Urich knows who Daredevil truly is, he chooses to abstain from disseminating this information. Urich forgoes fame and fortune so that Daredevil can continue his battle for justice. Since Urich's actions affect the central plot (causing Kingpin to pursue Daredevil), as well as the outcome of the film (by protecting Daredevil's anonymity), the journalist representation is a significant part of the narrative. The press, via *The New York Post* also exists as a crucial part of the movie. Through *The New York Post*, Kingpin learns of both Daredevil and the leak in his organization. This information eventually causes the deaths of Nikolas and Elektra Natchios, as well as the imprisonment of Kingpin. Without this knowledge, it is likely that Kingpin would be unaware of the force threatening his crime schemes. Overall, journalists and the press play major roles in the narrative of the film *Daredevil*.

The extent of which journalist and press representations exist in comic book action films is surprising. Eighty percent of the films studied contain at least one

journalist or press representation. Of the twelve films with journalists/press, eleven movies had both journalists and press representations. In seven out of the twelve films, journalists/press plays major roles and in eight films, the role of the journalists and/or the press is vital to the narrative. These findings are unexpected considering the decades in which the films were produced. Studies have shown that since the 1970s, the role of journalists and the press has decreased in films (Weinraub 1993). In films with journalists/press, the roles of these characters are usually secondary and are insignificant to the narrative structure (1993). Therefore it is unusual that in seven out of twelve films, eleven of which were produced after the 1970s, journalists/press plays major roles, significant to the narrative structure. Since all of the films are based on comic books, which were created in earlier decades, it is likely that the journalist/press roles from these eras influenced the film producers. For example, the film *Spider-man* (2002) is based on the comic book of the same name, originally created in the 1960s—a film era where journalists and the press played roles significant to the narrative of the film (Weinraub 1993).

Three films did not contain any journalist or press representations. No images of journalist or the press appeared in *Barb Wire* (1996), *Blade* (1998), and *Hulk* (2003). It can be speculated that journalists/press are not present in these films because they all take place in futuristic realities. The film *Barb Wire* is set in the 21st century, where a second civil war has erupted. The plot centers on a bounty hunter who protects government information hidden on special contact lenses. The world is in chaos and no organized institutions (i.e. government, education, the press, etc.) exist. *Blade* also occurs in an alternate reality, which may explain the absence of the press. In this film, vampires

control the city. The storyline follows Blade; a half-man/half-vampire determined to protect the innocent from the spread of vampires. It is likely that journalists and the press do not play a role in this film because this is a vampire's world, far different from present reality and because most of the scenes occur at night. *Hulk* takes place at an abandoned army base where a radioactive experiment goes awry, causing researcher Bruce Banner to mutate into a violent, monstrous being known as the Hulk. The absence of journalists/press in this film may be attributed to the fact that the majority of this film occurs on a vacant army base. Overall, it is not surprising that *Barb Wire, Blade*, and *Hulk* do not contain journalists/press roles since they take place in realities other than present day America.

Research Question 2

How are journalists and the press framed in comic book action films?

Frames of Journalists

To address this question, framing analysis was used to examine the twelve films with journalist/press representations. Within the twelve films where journalists and/or the press did appear, five frames of journalists were identified: *the reporter as crime-buster*, *the reporter as a crusader*, *the reporter as romantic, the reporter as damsel in distress*, and *the reporter as hound*. Literature reviewed suggests three of these five frames as stereotypical portrayals of journalists: *the reporter as crime-buster, the reporter as a crusader*, and *the reporter as hound*. Two frames, *the reporter as romantic* and *the reporter as damsel in distress* were not suggested by the literature as common types of journalist roles. The films were examined for signifying elements (verbal or visual cues) that suggested the existence of particular frames. Table two illustrates the frames of journalists evident in the fifteen films studied.

Table 2. Representation of Journalists						
Film	**YR**	**Frame**				
		Crusader	**Crime-Bus**	**Romantic**	**Damsel Dist**	**Hound**
Superman	‘78	X	X	X	X	
Flash Gordon	’80					
Super Girl	‘84			X		
Batman	‘89			X	X	
The Punisher	‘89					X
Ninja Turtles	‘90	X	X	X	X	
Capt America	‘91	X				
The Shadow	‘94					
Barb Wire	‘96					
The Pantom	‘96			X	X	
X-Men	‘00					X
Blade	‘00					
Spiderman	‘02		X			
Daredevil	‘03	X				
Hulk	‘03					

The Reporter as Crusader

The reporter as crusader frame was found in four of the films, *Superman* (1978), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), *Captain America* (1991), and *Daredevil* (2003). This journalist seeks out truth and justice by preventing corruption, exposing social evils, and preventing crime (Barris 1976). To protect the public from harm, this type of journalist will do anything he/she can, including endangering his/herself, working endless hours, and taking numerous risks (1976). For this study, journalists are considered crusaders if they, or their alter egos, follow this description.

In *Superman* (1978), the reporter Clark Kent, in his alter ego Superman, works as a crusader to protect the people. At one point in the film, Clark declares to the police that his job is to protect “truth, justice, and the American way” (Donner 1978). His actions support this declaration. Throughout the film, Kent literally saves numerous people. For

example, when the villain of the film, Lex Luthor, sets off nuclear missiles, Kent responds without hesitation. He flies over to one of the missiles, catches it, and flings it into outer space. During this time, the second missile detonates on the San Andreas Fault, causing great earthquakes. Kent quickly reacts. He flies down into the giant crevice, and lifts the rock, patching the crack. Kent then flies around, ensuring the security of the people affected by the earthquakes. In the course of this crusade, he saves a busload of children, patches up holes in the Hoover dam, and saves Lois Lane. These actions illustrate that the reporter Clark Kent, in *Superman*, is a crusader—determined to protect the public from evil.

In *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), the reporter, April O'Neil works as a crusader for truth and justice. Throughout the film, O'Neil is determined to prove that a recent crime wave in New York City is connected to a Japan-originated ninja clan called the Foot. Although no one believes O'Neil, she persists with this theory, even when her search puts her in danger. For example, when Shredder, the leader of the Foot, sees O'Neil interview the Chief of Police on television, in which she asks him about the connection between the Foot and crime, he becomes irate, throwing a knife into the television broadcasting the news. Because she has discovered the truth about the Foot and publicly communicates her information, Shredder tells his ninja clan to "Find her. Silence her" (Barron 1990). Following his orders, they attempt to kidnap O'Neil, but the turtles thwart their efforts. Even after this incident, in another news story, O'Neil continues her battle to expose the truth about the Foot. Once again, Shredder retaliates, this time abducting O'Neil's rat friend and the turtles' mentor, Splinter, and burning down her home. Although forced into her dilapidated childhood home and eventually

fired for unexplained reasons, O'Neil still pursues her story. O'Neil's dedication to this story makes her even more knowledgeable about the villains than the superheroes, themselves. The turtles confirm this knowledge, when the leader of the turtles, Leonardo, states, "April is our only link to these guys. We have to wait until she comes up with something" (Barron 1990). It is not until after the Turtles defeat Shredder, that O'Neil gets her chance to tell her story. Channel 3 rehires O'Neil and she tells the public of the origin of the clan and the connection to the crime wave.

The reporter as crusader frame is evident in the film *Captain America* (1991) with the character, Sam Kolawek. In this film, Kolawek dedicates his life to helping his friend, President Tom Kimball help Captain America fight evil. After an accident in Alaska, Captain America winds up frozen for fifty years. Once he finally does thaw, few know of his existence or whereabouts. As Captain America begins to head south from the Alaskan tundra, a group of masked people begin to chase him. By this time, Kolawek has discovered Captain America's location and arrives at the scene. Kolawek picks up Captain America in his car and tries to persuade him that he is an American and that the President needs Captain America's help. Captain America does not believe him and kicks him out, stealing his car. Kolawek does not give up, however. In his office at the *Washington Post*, Kolawek works into the night trying to discover Captain America's real identity so that he can warn him of the latest evil-doings of the Nazi villain, Red Skull. Kolawek realizes the true identity of Captain America and rushes to his parents' house to warn them of Red Skull. In the process, one of Red Skull's gang shoots and kills Sam. With no regard for himself, Kolawek does everything in his means to help Captain America defeat Red Skull and convey Red Skull's activities to the general

public. Kolawek crusades relentlessly at great sacrifice to himself in order to reveal the truth, protecting the public and the President from evil.

Reporter as crusader was also identified in the film *Daredevil* (2003). In this film, the reporter Ben Urich, works day and night, determined to identify who the superhero, Daredevil, really is. By the end of the film, it is clear that Urich is more interested in serving and protecting the pubic than becoming famous and wealthy. This interest is exemplified in the final scene of the film. At the beginning of this scene, Urich types a story titled "Daredevil Revealed," in which he plans to expose the true identity of Daredevil. After describing how he discovered this identity, Urich types that Daredevil is really "a devil named Matt Murdock" (Johnson 2003). After this is typed, Urich's finger is shown hovering between the "print" and "delete" keys on the computer. He presses "delete" and erases the document. As the words are shown deleting from the screen, Daredevil's voiceover begins. He states, "Soon the world will know the truth, that this is a city born of heroes; that one man can make a difference" (Johnson 2003). As these words are spoken, a close-up shot of Urich sitting at his computer and then walking out of an office building is shown, indicating that Daredevil is referring to Urich as a hero. Urich, then, looks up at Daredevil, perched on the rooftop, and says, "Go get them, Matt" (Johnson 2003). Urich forfeits fame and fortune to protect the superhero's identity, thereby allowing Daredevil to continue his fight for justice. By sacrificing personal success to protect the identity of Daredevil, Urich is a crusader for justice.

The Reporter as Crime-buster

The journalist as crime-buster was identified in three of the films, *Superman* (1978), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), and *Spider-man* (2002). A journalist who is a crime-buster uses his/her intellect and resourcefulness to catch criminals (Barris 1976). This type of journalist often out-sleuths police. In films with this type of journalist, the police are commonly after the wrong person, while the journalist uncovers the true criminal (1976). Like the crusading journalist, the crime-buster works long hours and takes great risks in order to find the truth and protect the public.

In *Superman* (1978), Clark Kent (as Superman), embodies the reporter as crime-buster, often halting potential crimes before any damage can be done. For example, when a man dressed in black (presumably a thief), climbs up the side of an office building, using suction cups, Kent stands in his path, preventing further ascension. Kent then picks the man up and flies him down to a policeman, who arrests him. Upon Kent's arrival with the criminal, it is clear the policeman was unaware of the crime occurring. Without Kent's assistance then, it is probable that the police would not have known of the crime until after the criminal had broken into the building. Kent intervenes before the police do, and therefore is able to prevent property damage. While this scene is not the central plot of the film, it is one example of Superman's heroics and dedication to preventing crime. Later in the film, when Lex Luthor steals two nuclear missiles and threatens to destroy parts of the United States, it is Superman, not the police who eventually foil Luthor's plan. In fact, the police do not discover that it is Luthor who stole the missiles until Superman captures Luthor and explains his actions to the police.

Without Superman's intervention, it is probable that Luthor would have succeeded in his plight for world domination.

In *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), the reporter April O'Neil works as a crime-buster—out sleuthing police by solving the origin of the city's crime wave. From the beginning of the film, O'Neil suspects that the unusual crime wave is connected to a Japanese ninja clan. The police, on the other hand, have no knowledge of this link and deny it even when O'Neil proposes this idea to them. For example, during her interview with the New York Chief of Police, Stearns, O'Neil asks Chief Stearns if the surge of crime is connected to an "organization known as the Foot Clan" (Barron 1990). Chief Stearns responds, "There is no evidence to link such a name to these incidents" (1990). Despite what the police believe, O'Neil publicly sticks to her convictions. In a later news broadcast, she reiterates her beliefs, stating, "I've been speaking with a lot of Japanese Americans in the past few days that say that our recent crime wave is reminiscent of a secret band of ninja thieves who once operated in Japan" (Barron 1990). She then adds, "I doubt very much that Chief Stearns is taking this possible connection seriously" (1990). Throughout the film, the police never arrive in time to fight crime or prevent injury. Instead, it is the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, guided by O'Neil's thorough sleuthing, who battle the film's villains.

In *Spider-man* (2002), the photographer Peter Parker (as Spider-man) also exemplifies the characteristics of a crime-buster. Many times, Parker arrives ahead of the police and prevents a crime. For example, when a group of thugs surrounds the character Mary Jane (M.J.) and stick their knives in her face, Parker appears. He quickly prevents the attack on M.J. by physically battling them, which results in the thugs leaving the

alley. In this situation, the police are never aware of the crime occurring. If Parker had not appeared and fought off the thugs, it is assumed that M.J. would have been attacked. Throughout the film, Parker saves victims from crime before the police arrive. Later in the film, Parker catches two thieves in an attempted mugging. This time, Parker spins a web around the pair, preventing them from escape. When the police finally arrive, they find the criminals already disabled and ready for arrest. Based on the slow arrival of the police, without Parker's intervention, it is once again likely that the criminals would have gotten away with their crime.

The Reporter as Romantic

The reporter as romantic was identified in five films: *Superman* (1978), *Supergirl* (1980), *Batman* (1989), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), and *The Phantom* (1996). These journalists possess a romantic interest in another character so intense, that it interferes with his/her work as a journalist. With this type of journalist, once he/she meets an attractive person, the reporter does not focus on writing stories. Instead, he/she concentrates on instigating a romantic relationship. Signs of this type of journalist include a loss of interest in work (miss interview opportunities, focus on personal issues instead of maintaining professionalism, or refrain from working altogether), and/or a change in one's work ethic (seem dedicated to attaining a story prior to meeting the suitor and then stop pursuing the subject immediately following the initial contact).

In *Superman* (1978), the reporter Lois Lane exhibits this romantic interest in Superman.[16] After many newspapers publish stories on Superman, *The Daily Planet*

[16] Since Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent and Superman are separate individuals, Lane's romantic interest will refer to Superman, not Kent.

editor, Perry White states that whoever is able to interview Superman will have the "single most important interview since God talked to Moses" (Donner 1978). Since Superman communicates with Lane, she is able to set up an interview with him. However, the atmosphere of their meeting shows that Lane wants to date Superman more than interview him. Lane is shown waiting for Superman on the balcony of her apartment. She wears full makeup and a pale blue evening dress, and has a fancy hairdo. When Superman arrives, he initiates the interview, stating, "You know there must be a lot of questions about me that people in the world would like the answers to" (Donner 1978). Lane responds by asking him if he's currently available ("Are you married?. . .Do you have a girlfriend?") and then inquires about his superhero powers. The interview quickly turns into a date, as Lane flirts with Superman, asking questions like "What color underwear am I wearing?" Soon, Lane abandons the interview and agrees to fly with Superman, holding his hand. Her voiceover during this flight indicates that the flight is not part of her journalistic investigation. As they fly face to face, with Superman's arms around Lane, her voiceover begins "Can you read my mind? Do you know what it is you do to me?" (Donner 1978). Lane is clearly interested in Superman as a potential partner, not as an interview subject. Since the interview quickly turns into a date, it is obvious that Lane's romantic interest in Superman interferes with her journalistic duties. Clark Kent, on the other hand, as Superman, tries to keep their meeting professional. Not only does he initiate the interview, but he also tries to keep their discussion focused on himself as an interesting newspaper subject instead of a potential suitor. When Lane blurts out her question regarding her undergarments, Kent calmly explains that one of his weaknesses is his inability to see through lead. Even during their flight, the relaxed Kent

demonstrates his flying ability and ensures Lane's safety, while Lane (through a voiceover) ponders a romantic relationship. By comparing the two journalists, it is obvious that the female journalist, not the male journalist shirks her journalistic duties in order to obtain romance.

In *Supergirl* (1984), the photographer Jimmy Olsen illustrates the reporter as romantic. Although he wears a camera around his neck, throughout the film, Olsen is more interested in dating Lucy Lane than he is in taking pictures for his newspaper. Despite numerous exciting, out of the ordinary events, Olsen does not take one picture during the film. In fact, aside from his camera, the only reason the audience knows he is a photographer for a newspaper is that Lane describes her boyfriend's occupation to her roommate, Linda Lee. Even when Supergirl saves Lane after she hits her head while driving a bulldozer, Olsen does not embrace the photo opportunity (since this is Supergirl's first public appearance on Earth, it is definitely newsworthy). Instead, Olsen stares helplessly at Supergirl rescuing his girlfriend Lane. Later in the film, Olsen once again demonstrates his love for Lane over his dedication to journalism. After the villain, Selena, captures and cages Olsen and Lane, they witness a battle between Selena and Supergirl, during which it is revealed that Supergirl is really Lane's school roommate, Linda Lee. Once Selena is destroyed, Supergirl asks Lane and Olsen to keep her alias a secret. Instead of reporting the story to his newspaper, providing the public with the truth, Jimmy says that he "promises never to tell" (Szwarc 1984). Unlike the journalist in *Daredevil* (2003) whose investigation leads to a conscious decision to protect Daredevil's identity, Olsen's choice to protect Supergirl's secret is passive. Other than his camera, Olsen never shows any desire to report anything, Supergirl's actions included, to the

people of Metropolis. Because at no point does Olsen appear to be working on a story, his quick decision to keep Supergirl's identity a secret does not appear as a heroic, career-sacrificing choice, but as a friendly, uneventful agreement. Since Linda/Supergirl is Lucy's best friend, this is how Olsen demonstrates his loyalty to Lane. Throughout the film, although Olsen is a photographer, he does not seem interested in taking pictures, even when the opportunity presents itself.

In *Batman* (1989), the reporter as romantic is also evident, as exemplified by the reporter Vicky Vale, the female protagonist of the film. Early in the film, she declares to another reporter that her mission is to discover the truth about Batman. Yet, as soon as she becomes involved with Bruce Wayne, her quest seems forgotten. Instead of spending time researching Batman, Vale goes on a date with Wayne at his mansion. The dinner date stretches into the evening and Vale sleeps over at the Wayne estate. In the morning, Vale appears to have no concern for her journalistic duties, as she asks Wayne to spend the morning with her. When he refuses, she invites him to dinner. Again, he refuses and states that he must leave town. Instead of going to work to pursue her Batman story, Vale spends the day following Wayne around. Aside from her initial declaration of her Batman pursuit, Vale is never shown actually researching the story. Even when Batman rescues her, taking her to his hideout, she does not take notes or photos of the cave and never reports on her experience to other reporters. Throughout the film, Vale's romantic interest in Bruce Wayne interferes with her journalistic duties.

The reporter in *The Phantom* (1996) is also more concerned with romance than fulfilling her journalistic duties. After Diana Palmer receives her initial assignment: to discover the meaning of the spider symbol, she shows little interest in solving the

mystery. For example, when Palmer is in the skull cave with The Phantom on the Bangdella islands (where the spider symbol supposedly originated), she does not inquire about the spider symbol, nor does she look for its meaning. Instead, Palmer gazes at The Phantom, as he gives her a string of black pearls. Afterwards, she continues to stare at him and at her surroundings, without mentioning the symbol. Even when Captain Philip Horton enters (the person Palmer traveled to Bangdella to meet) Palmer does not bring up the spider symbol. Only when the Captain asks about it does Palmer even remember that she has it printed on a cloth in her boot. For the rest of the film, Palmer never mentions the paper or getting the story. Even in Drax's presence (the villain at the heart of the story), the focus is on her relationship with the Phantom, not Drax's corrupt business practices. Drax says, "I thought your true love was swinging on a jungle vine." Palmer replies, "How did you. . .?" (Wincer 1996). Palmer does not try to ask questions about Drax' plan in hopes of reporting a good story, she just stares at Drax. Later, Drax again emphasizes the idea that Palmer is not a journalistic threat. He tells his posse to bring her along for "ransom, bait, revenge" and does not seem to be afraid of her returning to the *Tribune* and reveal his evildoings in a story (1996). Overall, throughout the film, Palmer is more interested in finding love with the Phantom/Kit Walker, then reporting the truth about Drax to her paper.

The Reporter as Damsel in Distress

The reporter as damsel in distress was identified in four films: *Superman* (1978), *Batman* (1989), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), and *The Phantom* (1996). This type of journalist is a helpless female reporter who gets herself into situations where she

repeatedly needs to be rescued by the superhero. She often walks alone into dangerous places (i.e. dark alleys, empty museums, etc.) and then is captured by the villain or his/her posse. The superhero soon learns of the reporter's capture and rushes to her rescue, placing himself in danger of the villain's antics. This type of journalist is never able to escape without intervention from someone else. Helpless, she waits until her rescuer arrives.

In *Superman* (1978), the reporter Lois Lane needs Superman to rescue her several times in the film, exemplifying the reporter as a damsel in distress. Early in the film, Lane takes a helicopter ride that soon turns perilous. The helicopter crashes onto the roof of a building and dangles off the edge. Lane starts to slide out of the helicopter door, where there is a steep drop to the pavement far below. As her seatbelt, which is preventing her imminent death, begins to tear, Lane screams helplessly, unable to control the situation. Finally, her seatbelt snaps and she falls. Superman catches her, returning Lane to safety. Later, Lane must be rescued again. In one scene, Lane refuses to get out of her car after an earthquake. Instead, she yells at her car, ignoring the warning signs of danger. Sand begins to fill her car. Lane sits helplessly and screams as she begins to suffocate. Superman comes to her rescues, reversing time in order to save her. In both of these scenes, Lane is helpless without Superman's aid. Throughout the film *Superman*, Lane exemplifies the damsel in distress because she is a female reporter who constantly gets into situations where she needs to be rescued.

Vicky Vale, in *Batman* (1989), also illustrates the damsel in distress reporter. Several times, Vale walks into the villain's trap, and needs to be rescued by Batman. In one scene, the villain, the Joker, tricks Vale into going to the museum, under the guise

that Vale is supposed to meet Bruce Wayne. As she waits for Wayne, the Joker appears and tells her of his plan to mutilate her face. Horrified, but helpless, Vale is unable to flee. Batman arrives and rescues Vale by fighting off the Joker and his men and eventually taking Vale to his cave. This scene illustrates the damsel in distress reporter frame because Vale is a female reporter who gets herself into a situation where she needs to be rescued by the superhero.

The damsel in distress reporter also appears in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), where reporter April O'Neil requires rescuing several times throughout the film. For example, in one of the first scenes, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles save O'Neil from an attempted mugging. After O'Neil leaves the Channel 3 News Studio one dark evening, she walks alone to her van, painted with the "Eyewitness News" logo. As she approaches the van, O'Neil witnesses several adolescent boys lifting equipment out of the news van. One boy spots O'Neil, and says, "Bad timing," which alerts the other boys to O'Neil's presence (Barron 1990). The other boys move towards O'Neil, as one yells, "Grab her purse!" (1990). O'Neil, in turn, tries to run away from the crowd, but trips and falls. The boys surround her as she yells, "Help!" (1990). From the group engulfing O'Neil, someone exclaims, "I got her wallet" (1990). At this point, a teenage boy sits on top of O'Neil and four others encircle her. The scene cuts to the streetlight. A sai flies across the screen and knocks out the light, turning the street dark. In the darkness, there are sounds of fighting (kicking noises, grunts, and objects clanging). There is a cut to police car headlights revealing four teenage boys on the ground, bound and gagged. Another cut is made to a green face peering out from a manhole cover. The scene changes to the manhole point of view, and O'Neil is shown sitting up, looking

bewildered. A policeman then helps her up and asks her if she is okay. In this scene, O'Neil quickly becomes a helpless victim who needs to be rescued. Since the boys easily overpower O'Neil, it can be assumed that without outside assistance, O'Neil could not have escaped. Later in the film, O'Neil again needs to be rescued, when she finds herself surrounded by ninjas. Once again, a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle appears, fights off the ninjas, and saves O'Neil.

The frame, reporter as a damsel in distress is also identified in *The Phantom* (1996). When Dave Palmer, owner of *The New York Tribune*, sends his niece Diana Palmer out to the Bangdella islands on assignment, she doesn't even make it to land before Drax's crew abducts her (Wincer 1996). A female entourage holds Palmer at gunpoint and she is unable to escape by herself. The Phantom appears and fights his way through the women, finally reaching Palmer. She claims she does not need his help, but then nearly walks into the enemy before the Phantom stops her, guiding her to a safer location. The Phantom eventually gets her safely into his skull cave and then on a plane returning to New York City (1996). Later in the film, when she is separated from the Phantom, Drax abducts her again (along with Kit Walker—the Phantom's alter ego, but he easily escapes). Once again, the Phantom fights through numerous men and eventually guides Palmer, along with another woman, into an empty vessel. Here the women get into trouble again (1996). A close-up of the chain connected to the empty vessel is shown. The chain slips off the gear, and the vessel floats away. The women, trapped inside, are helpless until the Phantom swims out, unscrews the top of the vessel, and helps each woman outside (1996). Throughout the film, Palmer gets herself into

trouble and cannot free herself. Instead, she relies on The Phantom, to come to her rescue.

Journalists as Hounds

In two of the films, *The Punisher* and *X-Men*, the journalists behave like hounds, excessively swarming around their subjects and badger them with endless questions. These types of journalists seem to care little about their subject's situation. Instead, they seem motivated by their own fame and fortune (Barris 1976). Another characteristic of the hounding journalist is his/her anonymity (Saltzman 2002). These journalists are typically secondary characters with whom the audience never learns their names, much less any other personable qualities (2002).

This frame is evident in *The Punisher* (1989) in several ways. In the opening scene, a high-profile man is acquitted in court. As he leaves the judicial building, a large group of journalists run up the stairs of the courthouse, sticking their microphones in the man's face, and begin shouting questions like, "Are you afraid of the Punisher?" (Goldblatt 1989). The man responds that he is not afraid of the Punisher and then pushes his way through the crowd. Even when he is in his car, the journalists continue to yell questions and elbow each other to get near to the car. The next scene also contains hounding journalists. A house explodes, causing flames and debris to fly everywhere. From inside the burning house, a man emerges. A group of journalists appear, each trying to photograph a shot of the man in the flames, believing he is the Punisher. No one tries to help the man, calls for help, or asks if anyone is still inside. Instead they all fight to get an exclusive story for their news organizations. In these scenes, the journalists are

portrayed as a herd of anonymous, pushy, selfish people—hounds out for their own success.

This portrayal of journalists also appears in the film *X-Men* (2000). When Senator Kelly and fellow congressman Henry Peter Gyrich walk from through the White House parking lot to their limousine, a group of journalists wait for them. All at once they yell questions about Kelly's mutant registration act and thrust out their microphones. Even when Kelly refuses to comment, the journalists continue to shout questions, trying to get a response and keep yelling until Kelly and Gyrich drive away in their limousine. The journalists do not respond to Kelly's desire to not be interviewed. Instead they badger him until all he can do is leave.

Five frames of journalists are apparent in films studied: the *reporter as crusader*, *reporter as crime-buster*, reporter *as romantic*, *reporter as damsel in distress*, and *the reporter as hound*. Of the frames identified, four are described as journalist stereotypes in the literature reviewed, specifically the reporter as crusader, reporter as crime-buster, reporter as romantic, and reporter as hound frames (Barris 1976, Good 1989). In addition to these frames, one new one, damsel in distress reporter, where the journalist is constantly saved by the superhero, was identified in this study. Since most films do not contain superheroes, it can be speculated that this frame may be unique to the comic book genre, and therefore does not appear as often in other films.

One surprising finding is the frequency of the reporter as crusader and crime-buster frames. At least one of these two frames is evident in five of the films studied (*Superman* 1978, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* 1990, *Captain America* 1991, *Spider-man* 2002, and *Daredevil* 2003). Since these types of journalists predominantly appear in

films created prior to the 1980s (Good 1989, Saltzman 2002), it is interesting that so many of the films studied contain these characters, especially since four of the films were produced after 1980. Since four of these films are based on comic books that originated before the 1980s (*Superman*: 1930s, *Captain America*: 1940s, Spider-*man* and *Daredevil*: 1960s), it is likely that the journalist portrayals existing in these eras/plots influenced how the journalists are represented in the film version of these stories. In one film, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, this explanation is not plausible because the comic book was created in 1984, which according to literature reviewed contained similar journalist representations to the year 1990, when the film was produced (_____ 2003). However, since this film is in the comic book genre, which typically portrays journalists as crusaders and crime-busters, perhaps the genre itself influenced the representation of journalists in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

While the prevalence of the protector frames are surprising, at the same time, the scarcity of the journalist as hound frame is interesting. The type of journalists who hound their subjects is only identifiable in two films: *The Punisher* (1989) and *X-Men* (2000). Literature suggests that portrayals of hounding journalists (a group of self-serving anonymous reporters who harass their subjects) are the most common depiction of journalists in film since the early 1980s (Saltzman 2002, Good 1989, Garelik 1993). Because all of the films studied, except *Superman* (1978), debuted after 1980, one would think that the hounding journalist would then be the most common stereotype evident in these films. However, the number of the other types of journalist representations identified (crusader, crime-buster, romantic, and damsel in distress) exceeded the reporter as hound role. It can be speculated that since these films are based on comic books

created in earlier eras (when the other stereotypes of journalists were more common), that these portrayals influenced the film medium of the same story. The scarcity of the reporter as hound frame, as well as the frequency of the "protector" frames is significant because these film portrayals affect how the public views journalists. If a film paints journalists as selfish, anonymous, opportunists (or hounds), then the public is more likely to despise journalist than to trust reporters for accurate information (Garelik 1993). Likewise, the presence of positive depictions (like crusader or crime-buster) is promising because these portrayals encourage the public to view journalists as watchdogs for the people, therefore will more likely rely on reporters for balanced information (1993. In eras where negative portrayals of journalists far exceed positive ones, the absence of the frame, journalist as hound, in the comic book action films studied is refreshing, since these favorable images will help construct more positive public perceptions.

Another unexpected result is the gender division among the journalist representations. In the two frames in which the journalist actively protects the public (crusader and crime-buster), the journalists are typically male (i.e. Clark Kent in *Superman*, Sam Kolawek in *Captain America,* Peter Parker in *Spider-man,* and Ben Urich in *Daredevil*). However, most of the romantic and damsel in distress reporters are female (e.g. Lois Lane in *Superman*, Vicky Vale in *Batman*, April O'Neil in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and Diana Palmer in *The Phantom*). This gender difference suggests that male journalists typically play crusading crime-busters who fervently protect, while female journalists are overemotional and helpless—not only are they unable to fulfill their journalistic duties, but they require physical assistance from the men just to stay alive. Literature reviewed identifies some disparities in journalist roles based

on gender. In Saltzman's study (2002), he found that female journalists in film have been stereotyped as sob sisters, women who are skilled journalists, yet are emotional—willing to "give up anything and everything for marriage, children, and a life at home" (Saltzman 2002, p.187). Saltzman points out that while this type of portrayal was most common in the early years of film, the "sob sister" depiction still appears occasionally in contemporary film (Saltzman 2002). This "sob" sister, in some ways, is reflected in the female journalists, Lois Lane, Vicky Vale, April O'Neil, and Diana Palmer. All of these women are emotional, screaming in a frenzied panic when the villain captures them. However, it is unclear to the extent that they would abandon journalism to become housewives. Since Lane, Vale, and Palmer are all identified as romantics (sacrifice journalistic duties for romance), it is likely that they might forgo their careers for their male suitors. For April O'Neil, it is difficult to classify her as a "sob" sister since she does not play a romantic in this film. Perhaps if she had a suitor, she would be a romantic, but it is hard to tell.

Studies also indicated that female journalists were more likely to be passive and serve as "mere accessories for their male counterparts" (Brucker 1980, Langner-Burns 1989). Two journalists, Vicky Vale in *Batman* (1989) and Diana Palmer in *The Phantom* (1996) fit this description. Compared to Lois Lane and April O'Neil who are assertive and actively pursue stories (and later, for Lois, Superman), Vale and Palmer are passive. Once they meet their male suitors, the women have few lines and generally follow their superheroes. Without help from their men, Vale and Palmer make no deductions about the villain's actions, nor do they appear emotionally independent from their men (unlike O'Neil who pursues her story despite her gender and vulnerability). One explanation for

the gender division of these characters is that the sexism in the eras of the original comic books may have influenced the shaping of the characters of the films. Since these films are based on comic books, which were created in earlier eras, the ideology of women during these times may have affected the portrayal of the journalists in the film adaptation. For example, because *Superman* (1978) is based on a comic created in the 1930s, perhaps societal myths about women from this age shaped the character of Lois Lane in the film version of *Superman*. As Betty Friedan discusses in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), it was commonly believed that women should not work outside the home. It was especially discouraged in a predominantly male field like journalism (Kitch 2002). These values likely affected how co-creators Jerry Siegal and Joe Schuster developed the character Lois Lane in the *Superman* comic book, making her helpless, and desperate for love (Coville 2001). Likewise, the film version of Lois, adhering to the storyline of the original comic book, is also emotional, desperate for romance, and vulnerable. Although these stories are based on comics of a different era, the construction of gender in these films is alarming. Since, like other films, these movies help shape how the public views journalists, these films perpetuate the belief that female journalists are not as crusaders or crime-busters, but are instead weak, vulnerable, romantics who are less qualified than men. Two exceptions exist to the gender division: reporter April O'Neil acts as a crusader and crime-buster in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and photographer Jimmy Olsen only acts as a romantic in *Supergirl*. Since the comic book *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* was created more recently than the other comic books of the films studied (1984), it is probable that the contemporary ideals of this decade influenced the creators of both the comic book and the film to develop a lead

female character, dedicated to protecting the public. However, it is notable that while the character of April O'Neil is a crusader and crime-buster, she also plays a damsel in distress, requiring others to rescue her numerous times during the film. Although it is positive to have a central female journalist fight crime, her role as a victim resembles the "sob sister" common in early films (Saltzman 2002).

Jimmy Olsen, a romantic photographer in *Supergirl* is the other gender exception. Unlike other male journalists, in this film, he is neither a crusader nor a crime-buster, but a romantic. Since Olsen only appears briefly in this film, as Supergirl's friend's boyfriend, he is just a secondary character. The gender of the director may have influenced the roles in this film. While men directed the fourteen other films in this study, a woman, Jeannot Swarzc, directed *Supergirl* (1984). According to the theory of auteurism, a director's style significantly shapes the outcome of the film (Cohan 2000). As a woman, it can be speculated that Swarcz switched the traditional roles in this film. A woman plays the superhero and a man is the romantic. Since this movie was made following the Second Wave of Feminism, the ideologies of this movement may have also influenced the film's characters (Cronin 1970). It could also be that the original creators of *Supergirl* decided to develop a strong female character with weak male roles. Regardless of the motives, this role reversal is refreshing because it portrays a male journalist as emotional and love-obsessed while a woman, though not a journalist plays the superhero.

Overall, most of the frames evident in the films studied were suggested as typical portrayals of journalists. According to literature reviewed, because nearly all of these films were created after 1980, the reporter as hound should have been the most prominent

type of journalist (Garelik 1993). On the contrary, the protector frames appeared far more frequently, which implies that the eras in which the comic books, not the films, were created, influenced the characters and the storylines of the films. A strong gender division among journalist also exists in the frames identified. Men are likely to be pictured as protectors, while female journalists tend to be romantic and vulnerable. Since frames in film affect the public's perception of journalists, the presence of positive images of journalists (protectors rather than selfish hounds) is promising because these positive images will help construct a favorable opinion of journalists. The gender division, on the other hand, is alarming because it is likely that the disparity between male/female journalist portrayals will translate to the public's perception of journalists off-screen, perhaps instilling the belief that male journalists are more capable than their female counterparts. In general, from this study, it appears the ideology of the eras from which the comic books were created influenced the storylines and characters more than the ages in which the films were produced, which in turn, is positive for the images of journalists as a whole, but negative in terms of the past beliefs about female roles.

Frames of the Press

Five frames of the press were identified in the twelve films with press portrayals: *the press as informers*, *the press as the villain's toy*, *the profit driven editor*, *the press as watchdog of the people* and the *press as a faceless presence*. Of these frames, four were suggested by the literature: the press as informers, the profit-driven editor, the press as watchdog, and the faceless press. One frame, the press as a villain's toy was not evident

in the literature reviewed. Not all of the frames were found in all of the films. Table three outlines the frames of the press apparent in the comic book action films studied.

Table 3. Representation of the Press

Film	YR	Frame				
		Informer	Villain's toy	Prof-driv editor	Watchdog	Faceless
Superman	‘78	X		X		
Flash Gordon	’80	X				
Super Girl	‘84	X				
Batman	‘89	X	X			
The Punisher	‘89	X				
Ninja Turtles	‘90	X				
Capt America	‘91	X				
The Shadow	‘94	X				X
Barb Wire	‘96					
The Pantom	‘96	X			X	
X-Men	‘00	X				
Blade	‘00					
Spider-man	‘02	X		X		
Daredevil	‘03	X	X			X
Hulk	‘03					

The Press as Informer

The press as informer frame was identified in all twelve films that depict journalists or the press, *Superman* (1978), *Flash Gordon* (1980), *Supergirl* (1984), *Batman* (1989), *The Punisher* (1989), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), *Captain America* (1991), *The Shadow* (1994), *The Phantom* (1996), *X-Men* (2000), *Spider-man* (2002), and *Daredevil* (2003). The press serving as informer means the media communicates information to the film’s public through newspapers, television, or radio, thus adhering to one of the primary functions of the press (Kobre 1969). In these films, the public does not always use this information to improve society, however. Like the general population, often the media informs the villain in these movies, who in turn,

utilize their new information in developing evil plans. The defining characteristic for this frame is the press providing information to the public, regardless of what the public may do with the knowledge.

The press informs the public in the film, *Superman* (1978). Within the opening scene of *Superman*, the press is explicitly labeled as an informer of the people. Before the opening credits roll in the beginning of *Superman*, a voiceover states, "In the times of fear and confusion, the job of informing the public was the responsibility of *The Daily Planet*, a great Metropolitan newspaper, whose reputation for clarity and truth had become a symbol of hope for the city of Metropolis" (Donner 1978). Later in the film, the press continues to serve as informers of the public. Through *The Daily Planet*, the villain, Lex Luthor, receives his information about Superman. By reading Lois Lane's interview with Superman on the front page, Luthor learns about Superman's origin (the planet Kryptonite), his stature (six foot four, 220 pounds), and one of his weaknesses (Superman cannot see through lead objects). From this information, Luthor develops a master plan to kill Superman. In this film, then, the primary newspaper, *The Daily Planet*, keeps the public, including its villains, updated on the latest information. Without the press' information, the villain would be unable to carry out his evil plan, thus eliminating the plot of the film.

In *Flash Gordon* (1980), the press as informers frame is evident. During the football quarterback Flash Gordon's flight, pieces of what is labeled "moon rock" begin to fall from the sky, causing extreme turbulence. There is a cut to the inside of a laboratory where two scientists run around, turning various knobs on a large panel. While they are doing their work, a radio voice comes on in the background, stating that

NASA cannot explain the mysterious falling moon rock. The radio voice then adds that, scientist, Dr. Hans Zarkov, recently fired from NASA, has proposed that aliens are attacking the Earth, but scientists are denying this theory. Through this radio broadcast, the press communicates who Zarkov is and what his beliefs are. This information is important because it is Zarkov and his correct hypothesis that lead to he and Flash Gordon saving the Earth from the aliens.

The press informs the public in *Supergirl* (1984), as well. During the scene where the witch, Selena, discusses her desire for world domination with her follower, Mr. Danvers, the radio broadcast informs them of Superman's whereabouts. After Selena finishes her picnic lunch with Mr. Danvers, she stands up and heads toward her old car, parked nearby. When she gets in her car and turns it on, a voice on the radio states, "The president has confirmed reports that Superman has indeed embarked on a peace-seeking mission to a galaxy scientists estimate is several hundred light years away" (Szwarc 1984). From this information, Selena decides that with Superman far away, it is time for her to use her recently discovered energy ball to rule the world. Without this information, Selena would likely fear Superman's wrath and may possibly forgo her thoughts of world domination.

In the film *Batman* (1989), the press as informer was also identified. For example, when it is discovered that mixing certain cosmetics is lethal in Gotham City, the press informs the public of the cosmetics consumers need to boycott. In the Gotham City newspaper, *The Gotham Globe*, the headline reads, "Batman Cracks Joker's Poison Code! Citizens told to Avoid the Following Products" (Burton 1989). The newspaper then presents the public with a list of poisoned products. The television station, *Action*

news, also informs the public of the toxic cosmetics. The news anchor advises the public to "Avoid the following combinations: deodorant with baby powder, hairspray, or lipstick" (1989). This scene is significant because it is the press who prevent thousands of city residents from becoming disfigured by the Joker's toxins. In this film, the press, through both the newspaper and the television, informs the public, thus protecting the public from harm.

The press informs the public through a television broadcast in *The Punisher* (1989). This film opens with a close-up of a television news broadcast in which a female reporter describes the 125 murders that have occurred within the city's mafia family in the last five years. She says that a man known only as the Punisher allegedly committed the murders. The reporter then moves on to another story about a mafia man who has recently been acquitted in court. With these stories, the public learns of the Punisher, a man who silently fights crime in the city. The acquittal of the mafia man is also conveyed in this broadcast. Through the press, in this film, the public gains their information about crime and the Punisher's hunt for justice. Since the film opens with a television broadcast, it is immediately established that the media is an important force in the city, as well as in the film, *The Punisher*.

Throughout *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), the press informs the public of the exponential increase in crime. For example, the film opens with a news broadcast voice-over by reporter April O'Neil. During this voice-over, O'Neil reports on the recent surge of crime that has hit New York City, while a montage of shots show teenagers stealing stereos, food, and other items. Besides television, the media also inform the public in this film through newspapers. In one scene, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle

Raphael, reads the headline, “It’s Worse, New York Crime is on the Rise” in the *New York Post* (Barron 1990). Along with informing the public that crime is on the rise, the press also helps the public connect the crime to the Foot clan. During two of O’Neil’s news broadcasts, she mentions the possible link to the “organization known as the Foot Clan” (Barron 1990). With the various media outlets notifying the public of the crime wave, along with O’Neil’s proposal of the Foot Clan, the public is informed of the crime problem and of its possible origins. It is through the press’ dissemination of information that the police learn who leads the Foot, who its members are, and where their lair exists. Thus, with this knowledge, the police are able to apprehend the criminals and return much of the stolen merchandise. The public is then protected from the extensive crime and the runaway teenagers who belonged to the Foot are forced to return home, hopefully rehabilitated from a life of crime.

Throughout *Captain America* (1991), the press works to inform the public. At the beginning of the film, in the home of Steve Rogers (later to become Captain America), a close-up of the *L.A. Chronicle* newspaper on the table is shown, which reads, “War Rages on in Pacific and Europe” (Pyun 1991). In response to the information about the war, Steve Rogers agrees to sign up for a government human enhancement experiment, which turns him into Captain America. Later in the film, after Captain America becomes frozen, the press conveys the years passing, based on the events that occur. Following Captain America’s accident, there is a cut to a newspaper spinning into focus. The headline reads, “Peace,” communicating the end of the war (1991). Seven more cuts to newspaper headlines follow, ending with the word, “1980s” floating across the screen and the headline, “Kimball wins presidency” (Pyun 1991). This montage of newspaper

shots visually depicts the role of the press is an informer of the people. From the series of newspapers, it is clear that the press, in this film, conveys the information of the day to the public. This idea is further emphasized when both the President, Tom Kimball, and the villain, Red Skull, learn of Captain America's existence through the newspaper. A close-up of the headline, "Artic Discovery: Man Found in Ice" is shown, which cuts to the President comparing an old picture to the one of Captain America printed in the paper. The next shot, Red Skull reads a paper and stating, "It's him. Captain America" (Pyun 1991). While this information comforts the kidnapped President, it also causes Red Skull to attack Captain America's family. Throughout the rest of the film, the press continues to inform the public, with a radio newscast dictating the plans of the upcoming U.S environmental summit and a broadcast communicating the disappearance of the President. With a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, the press also helps Captain America discover what happened in the last fifty years. Overall, the press in this film plays a significant role in conveying information.

In *The Shadow* (1994), the press informs both the public and the audience of the villain's evil doings. Through the newspaper and radio, the press communicates the intentions of the villain, Shiwan Kan, to the public. In one scene, a newspaper spins to a close-up. The *New York World Telegram* flag is apparent. Below, half of a headline (part of the headline is blocked from view) reads, ". . . Threatens to Blow City Sky-High; Demands Billions in Ransom" (Mulcahy 1994). The next shot, a newspaper boy yells "Extra, Extra!" and recites the headline. Another cut occurs, to close-up of radio announcer reading into microphone, discussing the "virtual panic" caused by the threat (1994). He states, "Surely this is the work of a madman" (Mulcahy 1994). During his

voice-over, a crowd of people frantically take newspapers off stands. This scene demonstrates that the press, in this film, informs the public of current events and that the information is disseminated in several ways (radio and newspaper). In this film, the press also informs the hero. In the scene following the radio voiceover, the hero's girlfriend, Margot reads the same newspaper, runs down the stairs and reports to The Shadow that "[the villain is] demanding jewels, works of art, even gold" (1994). With this information, The Shadow is able to decipher the villain's ultimate plan of world denomination and halts it before the city is destroyed. If the press had not conveyed Shiwan Kan's threat of destruction, The Shadow may not have learned of his plan until it was too late. Therefore, the press organizations in *The Shadow* enable the superhero to protect the city from harm.

In *The Phantom* (1996), the press conveys information to the public, including Xander Drax, the main villain of the film (Wincer 1996). After Drax orders his staff to kidnap the reporter, Diana Palmer, he assumes the plan went smoothly, that is, until the *New York Tribune* tells him otherwise. In one scene, Xander walks over to a table and picks up the *New York Tribune* newspaper. As he carries the paper, the visible part of the headline reads "Abduction Attempt.." (Wincer 1996). Drax looks at the paper and says, "What went wrong?" (1996). From this scene, it is clear that the article in the *Tribune* informs Drax (and the public) that Drax's attempted abduction of Diana Palmer failed.

The press as informers frame is identifiable in *X-Men* (2000). Through the press in this film, the villain, Magneto, learns of the politician, Senator Kelly's intention to pass a mutant registration law. In one scene, a close-up of Senator Kelly appears on a television screen. He states,

> "Americans deserve the right to decide whether they want their children to be in school with mutants. To be taught by mutants. They also have the right to know the dangers. That is the purpose of registration. And mark my words, if the President isn't strong enough to do what needs to be done..." (Singer 2000).

As Kelly continues to speak, the camera pulls back to show the villain, Magneto watching the news broadcast. He is furious with Kelly's registration plan, and says, "And you may mark my words, Senator Kelly. All your plotting, all your hatred. I have plans for you. I've seen you come, and I will see you go" (2000). From this broadcast, Magneto hears Kelly's plans. As a result of this information, Magneto kidnaps Kelly, and turns him into a mutant through a process that eventually kills him, which, at the same time, prevents mutants from the discriminating registration act. Without the role of the press, Magneto may not have learned of Kelly's plans before they were put into action and the mutants would have publicly faced discrimination, yet Senator Kelly would stay alive.

The press as informer is evident in the film *Spider-man*. In the scene where the character Norman Osborn struggles with his sanity, the press, through the newspaper, the *Daily Bugle,* helps Osborn discover who he has become. Osborn believes he hears voices from an unidentifiable source in his home. The voice then directs Osborn to the mirror. While in front of the mirror, the voice instructs Osborn to look at the newspaper in his hand. Osborn reads, "Oscorp Board Murdered: Control of Company in Osborn's hands?" (Raimi 2002). With this information, Osborn realizes that he is in fact, the villain—the Green Goblin, who murdered the Oscorp board members. By informing the public, including Osborn, of recent events, the villain is revealed, at least to Osborn himself. As a result of this knowledge, Osborn becomes entirely insane, which sets the stage for the

rest of the film. Without Osborn's insanity, it is unlikely that he would have endangered many lives and fought Spider-man to the death.

The film *Daredevil*, also depicts the press as informer. Throughout the film, stories about both the superhero Daredevil and the primary villain, Kingpin, are printed in the newspaper, *The New York Post*. One story about the Kingpin, titled "Kingpin: Man or Myth?" contains so much information, in fact, that it alerts the Kingpin that someone within his operation spoke to the press and therefore, must be eliminated. By exposing truths about the city's villains, the press keeps the public, including the superheroes, well informed of the events occurring in the community. Without the press in this film, Natchios would probably survive so Elektra would not have to avenge her father's death. Therefore, Elektra would also survive. Because Bullseye vows to eliminate Daredevil after he interferes with Natchios death, without the press causing this chain of events, Bullseye would have no motive for destroying Daredevil. Overall, without the press, the narrative, as is, would not exist. The prevalence of this frame in most of the films reviewed suggests the importance of this function of the press to the democratic system.

The Press as the Villain's Toy

Two films, *Batman* (1989) and *Daredevil* (2003) contain the frame, the press as the villain's toy. In films where this frame is evident, the villain uses the press to serve his/her evil interests by broadcasting his/her message through a press medium or spreading false information to the public through the press. This frame is significant because it illustrates how the press and its information can be easily manipulated for evil purposes.

In *Batman* (1989), the press as the villain's toy is apparent. In one scene, the villain, the Joker, interrupts a televised press conference to deliver a message. As the mayor is canceling the town's two hundred year celebration on live television, Joker interrupts the mayor with his own broadcast. The news organization tries to switch off this broadcast, but cannot do so before Joker delivers his message. He states that the celebration will be held that evening and that during the parade; Joker will hand out $20 million dollars. As a result of this information, crowds fill the streets in anticipation of the free cash. Joker, then, is able to carry out his plan of luring the people of Gotham City onto main street, where he attempts to poison them with gas (but is stopped by Batman). By using the press for his own gain, the Joker is able to manipulate the public into following his leadership. This scene also illustrates how easily the press can be utilized for evil purposes, as well as how simply the press can fool the public. When Joker interrupts the broadcast, the television station cannot stop him from communicating his message to the public. Because it is a live broadcast, the TV station is also unable to edit out the Joker before his ideas are spread to the public. Like many contemporary news situations, this scene illustrates the problematic nature of live television. It also shows how susceptible the public is to press trickery. Without pausing to question the Joker's motives behind dispensing cash at the parade, or simply his presence on the television, thousands of people flock to the streets of Gotham City, awaiting what they believe will be the Joker and his free cash. This situation depicts the naïve greed of the public and their willingness to blindly accept information from the press—provided a cash incentive exists.

The press as the villain's toy is also apparent in *Daredevil* (2003), in which the villain, Kingpin, uses the city newspaper, *The New York Post*, to trick the public into believing that someone besides himself is the true Kingpin. After Kingpin discovers that one of his men, Nikolas Natchios, spoke to the press, Kingpin hires Bullseye to kill him. To protect his identity, Kingpin leaks false information to the press—that Natchios was the real Kingpin. The story is published; the public and authorities believe that the deceased Natchios was the Kingpin. By manipulating the press, Kingpin is able to blame an innocent man for his actions and prevent the authorities from becoming aware of his true identity (possibly thwarting future evil plans).

The Profit-Driven Editor

The profit-driven editor was identified in two films: *Superman* (1978) and *Spider-man* (2002). In films where this frame is evident, the reporter's boss is a gruff editor who is only concerned with increasing profits, as expressed by his dialogue and his actions (Good 1989).

In *Superman* (1978), the editor of *The Daily Planet*, Perry White, exemplifies the profit driven editor frame. In one scene, after White notices the popularity of Superman (illustrated by the story of Superman featured on the front page of five newspapers), White demands that Superman should appear exclusively in his newspaper, the *Daily Planet.* He states, "I want the name of this flying whatchamacalit to go with the *Daily Planet* like bacon and eggs, franks and beans, death and taxes. . ." (Donner 1978). White then orders his staff to get an exclusive interview with Superman, believing the interview will boost his newspaper circulation. In response to White's demands, the reporter Clark

Kent (a.k.a. Superman), calls White's ideas "cheap promotional schemes" (1978). Since White is more concerned with promoting his paper than printing newsworthy stories, his attitude and behavior are characteristic of a profit-driven editor.

The profit-driven editor is also found in *Spider-man* (2002), in which the character, J. Jonah Jameson, notices a story on Spider-man in his newspaper. He calls his staff in and ridicules them for printing the story, stating that Spider-man is a "menace." A reporter then argues that Spider-man is news and should be considered a hero because he rescued people from a fire. In response, Jameson states that Spider-man probably caused the fire in the first place and the story should not be part of his newspaper. A staff member informs Jameson that, "We sold out four printings, every copy" of the newspapers with the Spider-man story (Raimi 2002). After hearing this information, Jameson orders the Spider-man story to run on the front page of the paper. Because Jameson wants the story only when he hears of its popularity, his actions indicate that he is motivated by profits, not newsworthiness.

Press as Watchdog of the People

In one film, *The Phantom* (1996), the press works as a watchdog of the people. Like the crusading journalist, a watchdog press is committed to protecting the public from corruption and injustice (Barris 1976). The owners/editors of a watchdog press utilize their resources, risking danger and a loss of profits in order to provide accurate information to the public (1976).

In *The Phantom* (1996), it is clear that the owner of the *New York Tribune*, Dave Palmer, is dedicated to exposing crime and corruption through his newspaper (Wincer

1996). While his journalists also crusade for the truth, as indicated by their thorough investigation of Xander Drax, it is evident that Palmer is the driving force behind the paper's adherence to protecting the public. For example, in one scene, Palmer hosts an elegant party. During the party, a famous millionaire, Xander Drax approaches Palmer and tells him that he doesn't like his reporters digging into Drax's affairs. He states, "Your reporters have been poking their noses into my personal affairs and I just don't understand why, do you?" (Wincer 1996). Palmer responds that Drax will "understand when we publish our story" (1996). Palmer adds that the paper investigates Drax because he controls the trade unions, influences stock market, and is linked to the Zephro crime family. To avoid this knowledge from becoming public information, Drax offers to buy the paper (1996). Palmer refuses, stating, "Not everything in life is for sale." From this scene, it is clear that Palmer's news organization is not afraid of exposing the rich and powerful and cannot be swayed by monetary bribes. Later in the film, Palmer's dedication to serving as a watchdog for the people is again apparent, when his press organization discovers corruption that police do not know about (1996). Palmer, through his press organization, finds out that Xander Drax has been researching powerful sacred skulls and is interested in a clan marked by the spider. The press' devotion to exposing Drax' criminal activity is vital to the plot because this information eventually leads to the hero, The Phantom, preventing Drax from world domination through the power of these sacred skulls.

The Press as a Faceless Presence

The faceless press frame was identified in two of the films studied, *The Shadow* (1994), and *Daredevil* (2003). The faceless press frame is characterized by a large amount of news being disseminated to the public without evidence of a specific staff that runs the press or a building as a press "home." (Garelik 1993). The press appears as a cold, distant institutional power, where people who run it never actually appear in the film (1993).

The press as a faceless presence is apparent throughout *The Shadow* (1994). Several times in the film, the press conveys information without the press organization or an authority within the press organization present. For example, after The Shadow saves the character Dr. Roy Tam, Tam tells the Shadow that he already knows who he is, from the "rumors in the paper" (Mulcahy 1994). Later, while Tam and his wife are in their kitchen, the stories of the Shadow come over the radio. While they sit at their kitchen table, the camera zooms in on a radio on the kitchen counter. A voice states, "Morning Mr. and Mrs. Radio. . . We have another report of the elusive Shadow" (1994).
The camera then zooms out to the couple drinking coffee. Mrs. Tam says, "I think they made up the Shadow so that people would listen to the radio." From this scene, and others in the film, it is unclear who "they" is and if the press is run by a single owner or a group of executives (1994). Even later in the film, when the press is spreading information about the villain's blackmail, through the newspaper and the radio, the press organization is absent from the scene. Instead only a radio announcer and paperboys are present in the scene (1994). Overall, the press plays a powerful, yet silent role in disseminating information, be it about the "elusive Shadow" or the blackmailing villain.

The faceless press also appears throughout the film *Daredevil*. For example, after the Kingpin reads the story titled "Kingpin: Man or Myth," he fears that his identity will be exposed. He orders the man who allegedly spoke to the press, Nikolas Natchios, to be killed and then convinces the press to label Natchios as the Kingpin. Kingpin then no longer fears retaliation. Kingpin's fear of the power of the press, as the leader of the city's villains, indicates that the press has clout in the city. Yet, aside from its name (the *New York Post)*, neither the press building nor its staff is identified. Even the sole depicted journalist, Ben Urich, is not shown working for any specific person or press organization.

Five frames of the press appear in the comic book action films studied: *the press as informer*, the *press as villain's toy*, *the profit-driven*, *the press as a watchdog*, and *the faceless press*. Of these frames, literature suggests four of these types as typical press portrayals. The press as informer, the profit-driven editor, the press as watchdog, and the faceless press were described as common stereotypes in film (Barris 1976, Good 1989, Garelik 1993, and Saltzman 2002). One frame, the press as a villain's toy, was not suggested by literature as a common press portrayal. Since comic book action films center on the struggle between good (superhero) and evil (villain), it is possible that this frame is unique to the genre, although more studies could be done to investigate other films with good versus evil themes.

For the press as villain's toy frame, it is interesting how effortlessly the villain gained control of the press. For example, the *Action News* team in *Batman* is incapable of preventing the Joker's interruption in the news broadcast and cannot stop the Joker's message from infiltrating the public's television sets. Likewise, the crime lord Kingpin,

in *Daredevil*, easily manipulates the press into publishing false information about the Kingpin's organization. Although it is possible that easy manipulation of the press is unique to this genre, the portrayal of press manipulation, as well as how the film's public accepts the villain-controlled press's information without question is alarming. If these films construct the myth for the public that the press can be easily overtaken by those with malevolent power, than they may be less likely to trust the press as a credible source (Garelik 1993). Without a press resilient to outside forces (government, corporate power, etc.), it cannot function as a watchdog for the people (Levy 1985).

The depictions of the profit-driven editor and the press as informer apparent in these films are not unusual, but it is surprising that when the press did inform the public, their information, in many cases, significantly aided the villain in his evil plan. For this genre, the function of the press as a means of communication appears to extend to the villains in society. It is possible that, for these films, the press is established as a link between the superhero and villain so that they can learn of each other's actions without direct questioning, thus postponing the climatic battle of the film. Also, because villains often hide in isolated lairs, without the press, they might be unaware of current events. Media, then, in some of the films studied, are portrayed as a means for villains to gain information without revealing themselves in a public appearance. The role of the press as informer in film is significant to the public perception of the press in society. Since literature identifies conveying information as a primary function of the press, it is important that the public utilizes the press for this purpose (Kobre 1969). At the same time, it is vital that the press is aware that its information is disseminated to all types of people, some of who may deliberately seek knowledge that will aid unscrupulous actions.

The press as an informer, even to the villain, is a reminder that information is available to even those with poor intentions.

One surprising finding is the division between the portrayals common before 1980 and the press types present after 1980. Literature identifies two of these press depictions as typical before 1980: the profit-driven editor and the press as a watchdog (Good 1989, Saltzman 2002). After 1980, the most prevalent press portrayal is the press as faceless media, evident in two films in this study, *The Shadow* (1994), and *Daredevil* (2003) (Garelik 1993). Since all but one film (*Superman* 1978) was produced after 1980, it was expected that the faceless press would appear as the dominant portrayal in the films studied. However, it is likely that the era of the original comic book influenced how the press was portrayed in the film version of the same story. For the films with the faceless press (a post-1980 common press depiction), perhaps the typical press portrayals in contemporary film influenced the film's creators. These findings are significant because these frames will likely impact how the public perceives the press. While a profit-driven editor and a faceless press may appear to have the same monetary goal, these press constructions affect the public view of the press differently. At the time when the profit driven editor dominated press portrayals in film, literature suggests that many in the public could identify with the blue-collar editor, overlooking the editor's greed and continue to trust in the press as a watchdog for the people (Saltzman 2002). The faceless press, on the other hand, warrants little understanding from the public, therefore is viewed not as a protector of the people, but as an exploiter of the public (Garelik 1993, Pittman 2001). If, then, the press is constructed as a profit driven editor, instead of a faceless corporation, the public is more likely to sympathize and rely on the press for

accurate information. Similarly, the portrayal of the press as a watchdog is positive because it promotes trust in the press as a protector of the people (Pittman 2001).

In general, most of the portrayals of the press are comic book action films were suggested by literature as common film roles. The press as informers, profit-driven editor, watchdog of the people, and the faceless press are all identified as press stereotypes. It is speculated that the press as a villain's toy role may be unique to the comic book action film genre. It is interesting that the frames apparent in these films were divided between dominant press roles before 1980 and prevalent types after 1980. Since these films are based on comic books created in earlier decades, it is probable that the roles of the press common during these times influenced the role of the press in the film adaptations. Overall, these findings are significant because it is these roles that affect how the public perceives and therefore, utilizes the press.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

Over the last thirty years, portrayals of journalists and the press have shifted dramatically, from journalists and the press as watchdog protagonists to greedy, anonymous scoundrels who thrive on sensationalism and exploitation (Garelik 1993). Through representations such as these, a culture learns to understand their social worlds (Jhally 1997). Therefore, it is speculated that these negative contemporary journalist/press depictions correlate with a decline in the public's trust of the press (Good 1989, Garelik 1993, Pittman 2001).

The press as an institution was designed to fulfill two democratic functions: to inform the public and to work as a means of communication between the government and the people (Kobre 1969, Baker 2002). However, if the public does not utilize the press for these functions, the ignorant public will not be able to critically choose representatives, communicate beliefs to the government, or actively battle corruption, hence an effective democracy will not exist (Levy 1985). Therefore, because representations affect the public's perception and utilization of the press, it is important to investigate the roles of journalists/press in popular culture.

Numerous studies on the portrayal of journalists/press in film exist, many of which focus on the shift in the representations of journalists/press from the 1970s to the 1980s. However, few studies focus on the representation of journalist/press in certain genres, specifically the comic book action film genre. In recent years, the comic book action film genre has escalated in popularity. In many of these films, journalists and their press organizations, play central roles in the narrative structure. Despite the prevalence of journalists/press roles in these films, little research on these portrayals can be found.

This study explored the extent of which journalists/press play major roles in the narrative structure of comic book action films. Framing analysis was used to explore what roles journalists/press typically play in these films. Suggested by visual and verbal signifying elements, frames are organizing ideas that imply how people should view particular issues (Reese 2001).

From this analysis, it was determined that the journalists and the press appear in twelve of the comic book action films studied. Of these twelve films, journalists and the press play major roles in the construction of the narratives in seven of these films, where the actions of the journalists and/or the press significantly affect the central storyline. Both journalists and the press play major parts in the plot structure of *Superman* (1978), *Batman* (1989), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), *Captain America* (1991), *The Phantom* (1996), *Spider-man* (2002), and *Daredevil* (2003). In these films, without the journalist and press, the narrative structure of the film would be dramatically altered.

This study also attempted to classify the roles of journalists and the press in comic book action films using framing analysis. To determine the common roles of journalists and the press, stereotypes of journalists/press identified in literature were considered. In addition, common parts played by journalists/press were also examined in order to determine additional frames of journalists and the press.

Five frames of journalists are evident in the twelve films with journalist representations: *the reporter as crusader*, *reporter as crime-buster*, *reporter as romantic*, *reporter as damsel in distress*, and *the reporter as hound*. More than one frame could exist in one film and not all of the films studied contained all of the frames. From these findings, it was interesting how frequent the roles of the journalist typical in films before

1980 appear in the comic book films studied. The protector frames (crusader and crime-buster) are much more prevalent in comic book action films than the reporter as hound frame.

A gender division among frames is evident. In this study, all of the female journalists are portrayed as romantics or victims, while nearly all of the protector type journalists are male. Once again, it was speculated that the era in which the comic book films were created significantly influenced the film version of the same story, which explains why roles common before the films were produced commonly appear in these films.

Overall, it was found that the role of journalists in comic book action films is generally more positive than the representations of journalists in other contemporary films. While most films since 1980 depict journalists as anonymous hounds, in the comic book action films of this study, journalists were more likely to be portrayed as protectors of the innocent. This is a positive finding since these representations will help shape the public's perception of the press. With the extent of negative portrayals in contemporary film, this positive construction of journalists is an optimistic shift, although the portrayal of female journalists is a negative influence on how the public perceives women. With the gender division present in these comic book action films, it is likely that viewing these films may discourage the public from viewing male and female journalists as equals. Instead, these films teach that male journalists are strong protectors of the innocent, while female journalists are emotional and vulnerable.

This study also explored the portrayal of the press in comic book action films. From the analysis of twelve films, five frames emerged: *the press as informer*, *the press*

as villain's toy, *the profit-driven editor*, *the press as a watchdog*, and *the faceless press*. Of these frames, four were identified as common roles for the press by the literature. Literature suggested three of these frames as common roles before 1980: press as informers frame, the press as a watchdog, and the profit driven editor. The faceless press was a typical role in film after 1980.

One interesting finding about the press as informers was that the information from the press often helps the villain develop his/her evil plan, which reminds the viewing public that information disseminated by the press is not always used for good causes. Another frame evident in comic book action films is the press as a villain's toy. It was speculated that this frame might be unique to the comic book film genre. This frame is important because it illustrates to the public how easily the press can be manipulated and how naïve the viewing public often is.

It was surprising how divided the press frames are between influential eras, in that nearly half of the films contain one of the pre-1980s common press roles (profit-driven editor and watchdog, and half of the films contain a post-1980 stereotype (faceless press). It is probable that the eras from which the comic books originated affected the role of the press in the film version of the story. For the films with the post-1980 press role, it is likely that stereotypes from the era in which the film was produced influenced the role played by the press. The pre-1980 press images are positive findings since these roles encourage a good public opinion of the press. The post-1980 press representation, on the other hand, is negative because this role is more likely to distance the public and have them perceive the press as large, corporate, and greedy.

Overall, this study aimed to explore the presence of journalists and the press in comic book action films. These popular films often contain journalists/press representations, which likely affect how the public perceives and thus, utilizes the press. The findings of this study indicate that, in general, journalists and the press do play a major role in constructing the narrative of comic book action films. The results from this study also suggest a gender division among journalists, implying that female journalists are more love-obsessed and vulnerable, therefore less competent than male journalists. Because these representations affect how the public views the press, this gender division could help to instill the misguided belief that male journalists are more qualified than female journalists.

In this study, nearly all of the portrayals of journalists and approximately half of the press depictions are positive, reflecting the eras in which the comic books themselves were created, not the era in which the films were produced. Since studies show that the pre-1980 types of journalist/press representations encouraged public trust in the press, it is important that contemporary films continue to depict journalist/press in this way so that the public will utilize the press for its democratic functions. Without public faith in a credible press, it is unlikely that the press will serve its original purpose—to protect the people and enable an effective democracy. Therefore, this study is significant because it demonstrates that the positive images of journalists from earlier years do still exist in contemporary film, in an increasingly popular, profitable genre. If an audience can accept the journalist as a positive role in these films, perhaps, other genres could embrace the positive images of journalists and the press typical of earlier eras. When journalists are portrayed positively, the public generally views the press as positive, which in turn,

encourages people to utilize the press for its democratic functions: to provide information and serve as a means of communication between the government and the people.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Some limitations should be considered for this study. Because the films chosen were selected from analyzing various film indexes and comic book websites, it is possible that comic book action films meeting the sampling criteria were inadvertently omitted. Also, since sequels of the films researched were excluded, it is possible that the role of the journalist/press changed with the evolution of the storyline, therefore the portrayal described in this study does not accurately represent all attributes of the character. Since only comic book action films were examined for this study, findings cannot be generalized to the comic book film genre as a whole. Another drawback is the genre limitation. Because this study only analyzed comic book films, it is possible that some of the findings may be unique to this genre and thus, cannot be generalized to other film genres.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study examined the role of journalists and the press in comic book action films. In order to thoroughly analyze the representation of journalists/press in popular culture, the portrayal of journalists/press in other genres should be explored. The gender division apparent in this study could also be further explored, looking at the roles of female journalists in the original comic books. In addition, the portrayal of the press in other media, such as film and television could be studied. Research on film adaptations

could also be done looking at how often the ideologies of a story's era of creation shape the narrative structure of the film. Besides studying the representations of journalists and the press, the audience reception to these portrayals could also be measured, looking at how contemporary audiences view press representations from earlier eras.

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