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ABSTRACT

A study compared the two television series, "The Lone Ranger" and "The Equalizer" to see whether the protagonists conform to the American archetype of the justice hero--defined as the hero who deals with crime in society. A formula analysis of the two television texts reveals that both heroes are male, scrupulous, independent, possess almost superhuman faculties, are aggressive and violent, show very little emotion, are mysterious (the masked Lone Ranger rides into town in time of trouble and leaves immediately after controlling the situation, while the Equalizer is an ex-secret operative based in New York City who accepts no payment for his help), and attractive to women. For all practical purposes, the Lone Ranger and the Equalizer are the same man. Sidekicks in both series serve a similar function: they do the dirty work and act as foils. The criminals are always male, and their victims are nearly always vulnerable females. The opening credits of 'The Equalizer," depicting a dark and frightening urban atmosphere, consist of a barrage of images of men and women interacting. McCall, the hero, is highlighted at the end of the sequence--a masculine protector and a father figure. The more youthful Lone Ranger shows his masculinity in brilliant escapes and close calls. The justice hero in both series stands alone (functioning as a vigilante) outside the law enforcement system. Close study of these texts suggests that the television justice hero has remained virtually intact in his mythic structure over the past 30 years. (Notes and references are attached.) (NKA)

"The Lone Ranger" Rides Again: Recurring Images of the Justice Hero in "The Equalizer"

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"The Lone Ranger" Rides Again:
Recurring Images of the Justice Hero
in "The Equalizer"

When discussing justice heroes in American television, many people have wondered whatever happened to the old-fashioned, gun-slinging hero of the western serial. One thing is certain; few of the justice heroes on prime-time television today wear white hats, ride charging stallions and snuff out evil across the land with a hearty "Hi, Ho, Silver!" The accoutrements of the western justice hero have changed with a changing American culture. However, the basic qualities of the characters and situations in many shows, like "The Equalizer," have remained very similar to old west hero programs, like "The Lone Ranger."

In order to learn about American culture, it is useful to analyze successful televisual texts--programs on television that contain myths or symbols that many people recognize in some way (sometimes called "common codes"). Critics can learn about cultural ideals through the study of heroes in television programs. When a particular style of hero manages to stand the test of time, such as the justice hero in both "The Equalizer" and "The Lone Ranger," critics are able to study them for a better understanding of cultural values for living.

This essay will provide a critique of "The Equalizer," a popular prime-time series on CBS. The essay will employ formula analysis to show how both the structure of the show and the qualities of the hero are similar to "The Lone Ranger," a series about a justice hero in the old west. The essay will be divided into five sections: Critical Tools of Analysis, Characteristics of the Justice Hero,

Gender and the Justice Hero, Justice Hero Versus Justice System, and finally, Implications for Further Study.

Critical Tools of Analysis

The justice hero, a popular theme in American culture, seems to have remained basically the same over an approximate thirty year period, as indicated by the similarities between the two shows under study. "The Equalizer" and the "Ranger" both demonstrate heroic attributes; they are male, scrupulous, independent, aggressive, and mysterious. They show little emotion and are attracti : to women. The presentation of the male and the female is rigid; women are helpless victims of criminal violence who need masculine protection and guidance in order to survive. "The Equalizer" makes strong statements concerning the justice system's lack of effectiveness in the United States. The style of crime fighting explored in the show may reflect the strong-armed methods of lawmen in early television westerns. Speculations will be made regarding reasons for the justice hero formula's success for so many years and the implications of the values presented in the two programs (especially the current program, "The Equalizer") will be discussed.

As a survey of American literature and history will attest, heroes are very important to American culture. We seem to constantly look up to cultural heroes for leadership, support, and entertainment. Why is it important to study the heroes of a culture? John G. Cawelti notes that the study of a popular story pattern, such as the pattern in "The Equalizer," ". . . reveals both certain basic concerns that dominate a particular culture and also something about the way in which that culture is predisposed to order or deal with those

concerns."[1] Kent Ladd Steckmesser gives some examples of this in his book, The Western Hero in History and Legend:

> The short life of Billy the Kid illuminates several aspects of Western history. It reveals the unsettled state of society and the ambiguity of "law" on the Southwestern frontier.[2]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The heroes also personified traits which Americans have always admired. Courage, self-reliance, and physical prowess have usually been rated high on the scale.[3]

The study of heroes is important because their stories reveal information about the culture from which they come. In the same manner, changing heroic qualities can reveal changes in specific culture. As Cawelti puts it:

> Significant changes in the valuations or relations ascribed to elements in the formula (hero story) probably indicate significant differences in attitudes and values.[4]

One of the more obvious differences between "The Lone Ranger" and "The Equalizer" is the setting. The first takes place in a small, rural, developing western town while the second takes place in the large, urban, developed eastern city of New York. Both places were considered centers of activity when the shows were new. During the Ranger's days, the expanding western frontier was still a popular theme. Today, big cities get all the attention--New York is vogue. The difference in time between the two programs may give us a clue to more general and visible changes in American culture, as well as some of the less visible and more subtle changes.

One medium rich with images of the American hero is American television. Television programs almost always have a hero, or at least an anti-hero, of some kind. Critics can gain insight into a

culture through the study of television because it is such an immense and powerful tool. Gronbeck comments on television as a powerful attitude influencer:

> If television has the power to . . . determine what you attend to and how you perceive it--then it follows that television can significantly affect how you react to your world (your attitudes) and what you do in it (your actions or behaviors).[5]

Richard Adler, in his book Understanding Television: Essays on Television as a Social and Cultural Force, writes about the immensity of television programming in the American culture:

> The television set has become the primary source of news and entertainment for most Americans and a major force in the acculturation of children. Television has transformed the country's political processes . . . Television, in short, pervades and alters the contemporary American environment.[6]

Television is both powerful and immense. Millions of people in other countries watch our programs and produce definitions for the word "America" that may be quite far from the truth. The medium has had a great impact on Americans, as well, considering the fact that about ninety-seven percent of all American homes have one or more television sets.[7]

In order to study televisual images of the justice hero, it is necessary to choose a textual tool for analysis. Because of the time gap between "The Equalizer" and "The Lone Ranger," a careful criticism of the programs themselves will be the most revealing. How will formula analysis facilitate a discussion of the traits of the hero common to both the current prime-time program and the celebrated serial from America's past? According to Cawelti, in his essay titled "Myth, Symbol and Formula," "symbols and myths

(because of their power of integrating feelings and attitudes) shape the perceptions and motivations of those who share them."[8] This does not necessarily mean that attitudes of individuals who watch "The Equalizer" will suddenly change in response to the dramatic, violent program. Nevertheless, the audience finds the show entertaining for some reason, or it would not be so popular. Viewers continue to share with the creators of that program some basic perceptions about how the world works.[9] It follows, then, that watching the show may affect how people perceive and interact with reality, although exactly how perceptions are affected is not always clear.

A television program, as with any other type of literature, is a complicated structure of ". . . symbols or myths which are imaginative orderings of experience . . . (and can be defined as) images or patterns of images charged with a complex of feeling and meaning . . . ."[10] Cawelti defines a formula as symbols and myths that form a "set of generalizations" about how all the parts of the story have been combined to make sense.[11] Formula analysis is useful because it allows us to integrate the myths and patterns of myths that are observable in a text with ". . . other aspects of life . . . as a question of why certain groups of people enjoy certain stories."[12] The critic's job is to provide possible answers to that question in order to learn more about American culture.

Cawelti gives his answer to the question (why are certain stories popular) using the formula analysis approach:

> . . . not because they embody some particular ideology . . . but because they maximize a great many interests. Thus, in analyzing the cultural significance of such a pattern, we cannot expect to arrive at a single

> key interpretation. Instead, we must show how a large number of interests and concerns are brought into an effective order or unity.[13]

Our major critical task, then, is to show how the texts "maximize" a large number of audience interests.[14] When we compare the interests in a text today with those in a text of the past, we can determine how interests have changed or remained the same over a period of time. Critical tools of textual analysis, such as formula analysis, make this possible where empirical tools cannot. The elements of the justice hero formula can be analyzed to determine how interests have been brought together to enable the justice hero to survive for so long and to determine what implications those interests have for American culture.

It is obvious, on the face of it, that "The Equalizer" is a successful text. It occupies a prime-time slot at CBS and we can safely assume that it has a large viewing audience who watch it consistently and "share" or recognize the myths present in the television show.[15] The program's popularity makes it worthwhile for study, because it involves a large group of Americans. This was also true when "The Lone Ranger" was a new show. Many people across the United States watched "The Lone Ranger" quite regularly, setting aside that block of time for the program. "The Lone Ranger" has, interestingly enough, stood the test of time and is the oldest adventure series still shown on television.[16] However, the important fact is that it was popular when it was new. Before examining the similarities of the two shows by demonstrating that they operate from the same formula, it is necessary to briefly review the characters and settings of the two stories.

"There is always one who wields the sword of Damocles, one

self-appointed God . . . that's me . . . that's me."[17] These words are spoken by vigilante Robert McCall, the main character in "The Equalizer." Played by British actor Edward Woodward, who became famous as Harry "Breaker" Morant in the Australian film of that name, McCall is a former CIA secret agent who quit because he did not approve of the organization's activities. Today he protects helpless victims of big city crime as a "private contractor." He does not accept money for any of his work, being independently wealthy, and his newspaper advertisement reads: "Odds Against You? Need Help? Call the Equalizer." Every week a desperate female victim phones McCall, who always arrives in time to devise a plan and bring the criminal to the justice he deserves.[18] McCall's only motivation seems to come from a desire to protect innocent citizens. This hero is a well-dressed, silver-haired gentleman who is both charming and clever. Woe to those felons who underestimate "The Equalizer."

"With his faithful Indian companion, Tonto, the daring and resourceful masked rider of the plains led the fight for law and order in the early west. Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear. The Lone Ranger rides again!" Most of us are familiar with this particular hero story. The Lone Ranger, a young man who wants to protect the innocent, travels across the plains exposing criminals and helping good people get out of trouble. He wears a black mask to protect his identity and his Indian friend, Tonto, accompanies him on his meritable quest for law and order. The plot of each program revolves around the main figure: the justice hero. When analyzing the two texts, then, it seems fitting to begin by examining the characteristics of these justice heroes.

Characteristics of the Justice Hero

What is a justice hero? The word hero refers to ". . . . a man noted for feats of courage or nobility of purpose, especially one who has risked or sacrificed his life . . . ."[19] The justice hero is the hero who deals with crime in society. Usually this person first discovers a problem, then decides on a solution, or plan, deals with conflict while working toward that solution and finally solves the original problem. However, being a justice hero involves much more than simply solving problems of crime. There are usually specific qualities assigned to the hero, depending upon the particular culture being discussed.

Most of these qualities are identical in "The Equalizer" and "The Lone Ranger." Both heroes are male, scrupulous, independent, possess almost super-human faculties, are aggressive and violent, show very little emotion, are mysterious and are attractive to women. The only real difference between the two characters, other than the different time and setting they exist in, is their age--the Ranger is a young man, the Equalizer is an older man. This difference raises some interesting questions that will be covered more fully in the section on gender.

For all practical purposes, the Ranger and McCall are the same man. Their sidekicks, Tonto for the Ranger and other CIA men for McCall, are men. The criminals are always men, from the killer to the rapist to the extortionist. In fact, the only characters that are not men are the victims themselves, who are almost always women. With these similarities in mind, let us review the major characteristics of the American "justice hero."

The two justice heroes are men of scruples. Steckmesser

explains this heroic quality:

> . . . the basic appeal of the legendary heroes is that they served good causes. They were servants of justice and truth, defenders of the meek and the oppressed. They became actors in the great allegory of Good versus Evil, an allegory whose roots are deep in American history.
> . . . Because Americans have generally cast themselves in idealistic roles, they have been able to identify with these heroic representatives of the national character.[20]

"The Equalizer" is a scrupulous do-gooder who, fortunately, is independently wealthy and can afford to work for free, adding modesty and charity to his list of heroic traits. McCall's integrity is dramatically displayed during an episode titled "Nightscape," in which a woman has been raped and McCall must track down her vengeance-bent husband as well as three cruel rapists. He walks into a local pub, shows the bartender several photographs of the criminals, and asks if he has seen them recently. The bartender, typed as an uncomplex slob, asks "Why should I care?" Enraged by the man's lack of feeling, McCall gives an emotionally powerful speech on the importance of samaritans in a vicious and violent world. Reacting as if he had been shaken back to life (and feeling somewhat ashamed) the bartender gives McCall all the information he needs. This scene shows how earnest the protagonist is in protecting people. He doesn't do it for money, fame or connections; he does it because he is a "good" person. Although Robert McCall's scruples may not be considered noble by all who watch the show (he kills the offender quite regularly), the character is presented as a wise man who is doing his best to make the city a better place to live.

This is also true for the Ranger, who roves the land looking

for crooks to bring to justice. He wears a black mask to hide his identity and never sticks around long enough for people to really thank him. In a typical scenario, after saving an innocent man from hanging by revealing the true killer, the "Lone Ranger" is offered reward money. He refuses it, asking that it be given to the newly-freed man and his wife-to-be.

Justice heroes are independent--they do things on their own. In Symbolic Leaders, Orrin Klapp discusses this independence:

> A would-be symbolic leader shuns bureaucracy, impersonality, mechanization, interdependence, or an equalitarian mass from which it is difficult to stand out. He avoids close association with colleagues, henchman, managers and others who might make it hard for him to hold the spotlight alone . . . who might steal the scene from him; conversely, he prefers as co-workers colorless persons who can act as foils . . . .[21]

Both the Ranger and McCall have "foils" in each episode: the Lone Ranger has his Indian friend and McCall has other secret agents (or former secret agents) who assist him. Tonto, an Indian who owes his life to the Lone Ranger because of a heroic deed, follows the white man wherever he goes, much as a loyal dog would. He is a necessary sidekick; he does the unheroic things that need to be done--stabling horses, setting up camp, being beaten senseless. He also provides a necessary point of contrast that highlights the hero's charisma. For example, Tonto's dialogue consists almost totally of questions. "What we gonna do, Kemosabay?" is his usual response to a critical situation. This gives the man in the mask an opportunity to explain his latest successful plan. He appears quick-thinking and intelligent in comparison with Tonto's dull wit and shallow mind.

Sidekicks in "The Equalizer" serve a similar function; they do the dirty work and act as foils. Each week a different agent aids McCall's work by looking up information in a computer or tracing a phone call. Tonto, appearing on every episode of "The Lone Ranger," may be a more consistent sidekick than McCall's agents, but the similarities remain. They are secondary characters who follow McCall's orders, ask questions, run errands, sit for hours watching suspects, and fail to make any original contributions to "the plan." These agents are always uncharismatic in some way. They are either computer geeks or were fired from the CIA because they made too many mistakes. As Klapp might say, the minor characters cannot be too good looking or acting. They might upstage the lead, damaging the star role's independence. For example, during a show in which a gambler kidnaps a horse racer's son, McCall enlists the aid of a former agent who was fired because of a gambling problem. In the episode that dealt with rape ("Nightscape"), a weaselly computer programmer helps McCall find the rapists by using some special software. Each of these sidekicks help the hero without appearing too important, charismatic or sensually pleasing.

Another important characteristic of the justice hero in American culture is that he always possesses super-human traits. Steckmesser notes that ". . . the hero typifies exceptional ability in such frontier skills as trailing, marksmanship, and hand-to-hand combat with Indians and wild beasts."[22] Steckmesser is referring to the old western hero, but the description also applies to contemporary justice heroes. The hero always shows remarkable skill in every situation he finds himself in. When a stagecoach robber flees across the border into Mexico the Lone Ranger disguises himself as a Mexican bandit, complete with a believable accent. With the help

of U.S. and Mexican authorities, he lures the offender back into the country where a waiting sheriff promptly arrests him.

McCall has the best electronic surveillance equipment at his disposal and each episode involves an assistant watching and listening to suspects through these special devices. The Lone Ranger and the Equalizer are sure-shots with their guns. They hardly ever miss. Although Robert McCall is not a young man, he still possesses remarkably sharp senses, quick reflexes and powerful muscles. When a fleeing criminal pushes a heavy oak coffin off a shelf (intending to crush McCall, standing below), the Equalizer jumps out of harm's way just in time. In another episode, McCall is attacked from behind by a much younger, obviously strong, dock worker. The gray-haired agent defends himself with ease and the would-be attacker finds himself on the ground. Both of these men are supermen. They always win, they always do it with style and they are never seriously hurt.

Not only are these heroes exceptionally powerful, but they are also very aggressive and quick to use that power. Orrin Klapp describes characteristics of heroes in his book Symbolic Leaders, identifying aggressiveness as one of the main qualities:

> (1) the most active person captures the most interest, (2) the one who starts something is more likely to be a hero than the one who follows, (3) the one who gives the crowd (audience) a thrill is likely to be a hero, (4) the winner of a fight is likely to be a hero.
>
> All of these considerations put a premium on aggressiveness, taken in a broad sense; they give the advantage to the one who seizes the initiative, pushes where others will let be, starts a fight. Americans dislike, or think they dislike, aggressiveness, but the fact remains that fights create heroes . . . ."[23]

The hero in both shows being discussed is especially aggressive. Recently, McCall joined forces with another former CIA man to track down a kidnapper. The other agent began the investigation by questioning his contacts on the street. McCall soon tires of the slow, unproductive method and finally decides to take the "direct approach." McCall quickly extracts the information he needs by threatening to turn in a gambling bookie who is pretending to be blind in order to improve business. The aggressive style pays off every time in McCall's world. Steckmesser writes about a mythic hero in history, a hero who was also very aggressive:

> The John Smith legend lies at the source of this heroic tradition. The Smith of history was in many respects an ideal type-figure for the Western heroes who followed him (such as the Lone Ranger). He was of humble origin . . . and made his reputation as a fighter and man of action . . . . By dictatorial methods within the (Jamestown) colony, and by strong-handed dealings with the Indians outside it, Smith saved the infant settlement from extinction.[24]

If one were to change the name John Smith in that last quote to Robert McCall or the Lone Ranger (and then change the circumstances to fit the story), both versions would make perfect sense. The two characters are so similar in this quality, as in many, that they are practically interchangeable.

Violence is another characteristic these two heroes have in common. Old "Lone Ranger" episodes are filled with fist fights that seem gentle when compared with today's television, but were violent for their time. Robert McCall gets in his share of violent incidents and in one story he thrusts a man's head through a car window. The Ranger uses scare tactics when he locks two wrong-doers in a jail where they themselves have set up an explosion

with blasting powder. At exactly five o'clock the jail will explode, killing them both. The masked man will only release them from their cell of death if they tell the truth. Death threats are commonplace on "The Equalizer." McCall recently told two gangster-types that if they did not do what he wished, he would hunt them down and kill them. While interrogating one of those same men, McCall instructed his assistant, Mickey, to throw the man out the window because he refused to talk. The room they occupied was on the fifteenth floor, at the very least.

Emotional displays are unacceptable elements in the justice heroes of these programs. Emotion has changed slightly since the Lone Ranger's time, however. The hero in that show only showed stern, serious looks with an occasional smile or painful grimace. Today, Robert McCall experiences one other emotion: guilt. After a rough day of rapist-killing, he bears his soul in front of the woman he is dating. He expresses some guilt, but such an outpouring is unusual and poorly developed. The emotion is portrayed through camera close-ups of watery eyes, but no real breakdown occurs. These heroes are not allowed to show many tears because, perhaps, such a display might be seen as weakness. Technology may explain slight changes in the range of justice hero emotions over the years. Changing camera capabilities and modern styles of filming allow close-up shots that focus on facial expression. In contrast, there were very few close camera shots in "The Lone Ranger." The camera usually remained at a medium or long shot, including full bodies of several people at a time.

Mystery is yet another common element in the two television programs. The Lone Ranger has a secret identity--he wears a black mask and no one, except Tonto, knows who he really is. The viewer

is led to believe that the Ranger does this out of modesty; he always leaves the scene before he can be embarrassed by compliments. "The Equalizer" wears a metaphorical mask. He is a former secret agent for the CIA, a mysterious organization filled with top secret materials. "Control," a character who plays the head of the agency, often appears on the show seeking information, advice or assistance from McCall. Control, played by Robert Lansing, and McCall discuss past political scandals but viewers are never given the whole story--it all seems very secretive. People helped by McCall often do not understand who he is or why he helps them. "Who do you think you are? What are you doing? Do I know you?" asks one female in a show. This strikes some viewers as similar to the inevitable closing dialogue of "The Lone Ranger:" "Who was that masked man?" "Memories of Manon," for example, is an episode of "The Equalizer" that involves a kidnapped woman who must find the identity of an informant or see her father killed. Her apartment has been bugged, she is instructed not to tell her father, and she has no idea who "Chrysallis," the informant, really is. Notes written on napkins, secret meetings and other surprises fill the story. McCall is shrouded in secrecy and his background becomes more mysterious as he encounters people from his past. McCall sees and knows all. He has connections everywhere. He is a kind of "Shadow" who ". . . knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men."

McCall is charming and attractive to women, as is the Lone Ranger. Viewers of the older serial might remember how beautiful women swooned over the sight of the Ranger in his tight pants and black mask. Today, virtually every episode of "The Equalizer" contains sexual tension between McCall and a woman. He is divorced and dates especially attractive women who are about

his age. Unfortunately, his work often gets in the way of his social life--one of his dates gets killed and he is left to care for the woman's daughter. His concern for the security of females is revealed at the end of an evening with one particular brunette. He offers to walk her to her apartment door upstairs, with only her safety in mind, but she protests, thinking he has ulterior motives. In the end, courtesy wins and they ride up the elevator, arm in arm. McCall also brings flowers to many of his female clients, but only when they are in the hospital. Throughout these sexual scenes McCall remains a gentleman and a respectable father figure. McCall's dates must be disappointed--all they ever get is an occasional kiss on the hand. He never mixes business with pleasure, either; when a young female client is attracted to McCall and makes some seductive suggestions, McCall plays innocent: "I beg your pardon? What?"

McCall, as a justice hero, is much older than the Lone Ranger. The lead in "The Equalizer" has gray hair, a wrinkled face, and wears glasses for reading. One possible explanation for the age difference could involve changing perceptions of power. Politicians are making a much stronger display through the televisual medium today than they did when "The Lone Ranger" was new. Power is now seen in the hands of men like President Ronald Reagan, a senior leader who has made his reputation as the "Great Communicator," especially on the twenty-one inch screen. With age comes wisdom and power, according to this culture, therefore McCall's age aligns him with real-life decision-makers in state and national legislatures. "The Equalizer" is seen as a powerful government figure in other ways, by former occupation and by association. Robert McCall used

to work for the government as a CIA agent. He had a great deal of power within that organization, judging from his knowledge of missions in years past, and he had seniority. McCall continues to possess incredible influence on the agency through its leader, Control. McCall often helps Control out of a jam as a favor to a friend. In one episode, for example, he saves Control's life when a KGB agent kidnaps him.

McCall is quite a bit older than the hero in the white cowboy hat, but this adds a dimension of masculinity to his character that the Ranger does not have; McCall is a father figure. He treats women as if they are all his daughters, sometimes protects them without their request or consent, and the dialogue between him and young women on the show is always short and direct: "Pack your things. We're leaving. You're in great danger." He never bothers to tell the women how they are in danger or how he plans to protect them (or why) because he treats them like children. McCall, like all good fathers, knows what is best.

Thus far we have looked at several traits that make Robert McCall and the Lone Ranger into justice heroes. The similarities far outnumber the differences, illustrating that "The Equalizer" is sort of a modern-day western and that qualities of heroes admired by Americans have changed very little. Exploring the differences in the two justice heroes is also useful, as well as exploring the effects of gender in each show.

Gender and the Justice Hero

Another important element of most texts involving human characters is that of gender. Many psychologists agree that a person's environment (parents, peers, social norms and pressures to conform) determines his or her gender identity. Those traits

we traditionally label "masculine" or "feminine" actually have very little to do with the physical sex of the person involved. The televisual texts being explored in this essay are especially interesting because the gender roles for men and women in both justice hero shows are practically identical, even though "The Lone Ranger" and "The Equalizer" are thirty years apart. This section will identify and examine the traits associated with masculinity and femininity in an effort to reveal values present in the texts. The implications of these values will be discussed further in the concluding section of the essay.

The first clues about gender given to the viewing audience of "The Equalizer" are anything but subtle. The opening credits, which set up the mood for the entire show and introduce the main characters, consist of a barrage of images of men and women interacting. These pictures include women being watched, followed and touched against their will by male strangers. All the scenes are in a big city and the mood is dark and frightening. Police sirens wail in the distance. A terrified woman peers out of her apartment door into a dark hallway. Her baby screams in the background. Another woman misses her train at the subway and is cornered by a man. Suddenly a dark, mysterious figure in a long overcoat appears. The camera pans and light finally shines on the stern, confident, intelligent face of "The Equalizer," Robert McCall. This short sequence gives away most of the series' plots; it identifies McCall as the hero, strange men as the villains, and women as the victims.

What is considered "masculine" in "The Equalizer," and how is this different from masculinity in "The Lone Ranger"? McCall is the ideal masculine hero in this world. As stated earlier, he is

violent, aggressive and unemotional. He possesses outstanding physical strength and superior intellect. An air of untimate seriousness dominates discussions with other agents and "Control," although an occasional chuckle may arise during the final minutes of any given episode. Criminals are treated quite brusquely, usually with threats of violence, pointed weapons and arm twisting. McCall takes charge over every important situation he finds himself in and never hesitates or flinches. These traits may be considered inherent to displays of "masculinity" in both "The Equalizer" and "The Lone Ranger." The Ranger, for example, is quick-thinking, shoots silver bullets with incredible accuracy and takes his business seriously. Fighting crime is no laughing matter.

How does McCall interact with women on the show? First of all, take into the account the fact discussed earlier; women are the victims in "The Equalizer." They are always in need of help and are never in control of their own life situations. McCall comes to get them out of trouble, to take charge, to bring a plan of action. They follow his orders accordingly and are usually very cooperative, trusting McCall to make things right. McCall treats them as a father might treat his daughters--concerned looks, a gruff take-charge tone of voice and short imperative sentences. He rarely tells them exactly what the situation is and never asks them for advice. In short, as we have said before the protagonist in "The Equalizer" is a father figure. Time and time again his character assists single-parent, mother-led families. When a woman's newborn son is stolen by criminals who will sell it to the highest bidder, McCall saves the child and puts the kidnappers behind bars. During the final moments of the story, McCall and

the mother (Mrs. Daniels) talk while strolling in the park. Mrs. Daniels is a widow. Note the dialogue that takes place:

Mrs. Daniels: "You know, I'll never forget what you've done for us both, and I . . . I don't even know how to begin to thank you."

McCall: "Well, I'll tell you how you can thank me. You can drop in and see me . . . and you bring little Tommy with you."

Mrs. Daniels: "You look out for us."

McCall: "Yes, I will."

The three of them walking through the park form a tableau of sorts--they are a family for that brief moment, and McCall is the father. Later in the series, a black teenager is accidentally killed by a paranoid volunteer police force. The youth's younger brother, Eugene, and mother are left alone to fight for justice. After McCall has brought the killers to face their crime, he stands with Eugene and Eugene's mother near the warehouse where the killing occurred. The mother asks McCall to come home with them for dinner and he accepts the invitation. This image of fatherhood is an integral part of McCall's masculinity. When, for example, McCall helps protect an old fling's daughter, Evette Marcel, he discovers that she is his real daughter. Perhaps McCall's role as a father helps to explain the program's popularity--each of us may secretly long to be taken care of, to be parented.

"The Lone Ranger" is not portrayed as a father figure, although he possesses all the other masculine traits that McCall has. Picture if you will: A screaming girl in a yellow or orange frock is bound to the train tracks. A powerful locomotive is charging toward her and will soon cut her in two with its massive form. But wait! Who is the figure in white riding over the hill to the right? It is Danny Good Deed come to save the day! With a slash of his sharp

knife he cuts the ropes that tie the maiden to metal beams of doom. With a strong, sweeping gesture he lifts her now limp body (oh my, she has fainted) from the tracks and gallantly leaps from the path of the death train. Masculinity for the Ranger means brilliant escapes and close calls (the closer the better). Masculinity means treating women with a kind word and a gentle, but assertive, manner. Most of all, masculinity means protecting helpless women from harm and seeing law and order win the game.

What is "feminine" in the texts being considered here? How do women act in the two programs? Female characters in both programs are victims. This is especially true in "The Equalizer," as virtually all of the victims are women. These women come from a variety of backgrounds, including mothers, wives, working women, young women, older women. The diversity of backgrounds indicates that all women are targets of crime in the big city, regardless of their different occupations, economic levels, marital status, ages, or physical appearances. These women have only one thing in common; they are vulnerable. Women are portrayed as helpless victims who need masculine protection in both the old western and the new crime drama.

Although women are not victimized as consistently in "The Lone Ranger," that hero is still famous for his rescues of females--females who have usually been kidnapped and harassed by some dastardly dude who never shaved a day in his life. "The Equalizer" is even more obvious. Notice these TV Guide descriptions:

> McCall enlists a despondent agent (sidekick) to aid a blind music critic (helpless woman) who thinks the man who raped her years before is after her again.[25]

> McCall is on the trail of a serial killer, leaving little time to help an aspiring actress who has fallen in with the wrong crowd.[26]

> A woman turns to McCall for help after her newborn son is kidnapped from a hospital, and McCall turns up a baby-selling operation.[27]

"Joyride," an episode that dealt with the selling of crack, illustrates how McCall gives a teenage girl (an addict) a new family and a new start on life. Another woman, who even helps one of McCall's old foes frame him for murder, is portrayed as a victim of the men who hired her and took advantage of her unfortunate situation. McCall gives her a new start as well.

Not only are women consistently victims, but they are also in need of masculine protection in order to survive. Women are dependent on men, women are emotional, and women are not equipped with the adequate intellect and strength to save themselves. All of these qualities combine to create a specific definition of "femininity." Ruth, a member of one "Lone Ranger" cast, is upset because her fiance has been sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit. Ruth flees to a local church where a man of the cloth cares for her and arranges for a meeting with the masked man. The woman is eager to accept the Ranger's plan and follows his orders to the letter. She is dependent on the priest for her salvation. She is dependent on the hero for her protection. The Lone Ranger always saves the fair maiden, then delivers her home to her father, husband, brother or boyfriend. The woman is never portrayed as surviving on her own or defending herself. Significantly, she is never left alone with another woman; a man must be present to protect her.

The same is true of today's justice hero in "The Equalizer." For example, in a show early this season, a young woman calls the Equalizer because her father has been kidnapped. McCall leavers her with his son to guard her while he tracks down the kidnappers.

In yet another show, a young man is sent home to "take care" of his mother (the victim) while the Equalizer punishes the criminals. When McCall finds the rape victim's husband in "Nightscape," he brings the man and woman together. She asks her mate to come home and "take care" of her. The couple attends counselling to treat the psychological and emotional damage caused by the rape, but talk about self-defense classes is not heard.

Women are dependent on men for any kind of real action, whether that action involves good or evil. When a woman's husband is framed for drug dealing and sentenced to prison, she tries to make a deal with the judge. The judge, a man, offers a lesser sentence in exchange for sexual favors from her. She contacts McCall, who begins to work on the case, but she decides to take the judge up on his offer anyway. McCall stops her just in time. This woman had two choices: trust a man to expose the real criminals or have sex with a man who would reduce her husband's sentence.

The women in each television series are emotional; they often cry, scream and become frightened. Cannonball McKay, a comically tough female stagecoach driver, maintains her poise until all seems hopeless. Then, she weeps. It is interesting to note that when her secret marriage is revealed to everyone in the town, Cannonball sheds her leather riding gear and dons a dress with petticoats. She, too, is dependent upon the hero, the Lone Ranger, to solve her problem. A female construction worker on "The Equalizer" is scared after a terrifying chase and begins to cry, but McCall comforts her.

Being feminine in "The Lone Ranger" and "The Equalizer" means being dependent, helpless, emotional and weak. These traits seem to be exact opposites of those discussed in the earlier masculine

section of this paper. In the context of the justice hero formula, these gender definitions are consistent and have remained relatively unchanged over time.

Justice Hero Versus Justice System

Before continuing, it is important to make the distinction between "hero" and "system" absolutely clear. The hero in each story is the one who stands alone: Robert McCall, the Lone Ranger. The system is the structure for law enforcement established by society: the police departments, the courts, the sheriff. In order to appeal to the interests of the largest audience possible television shows sometimes need to deal with issues and values that are current. "The Equalizer" addresses several current issues: violence against women, big city crime, the vigilante phenomenon. One reason for the incredible appeal of the justice hero in America, especially the hero in "The Equalizer," could be that the program addresses high crime and a perceived inability of the conventional justice system to deal with crime effectively. The show, filmed in New York, may be written to appeal specifically to an audience on the east coast, where heavily populated cities struggle with the problems of crime control. Some viewers might be frustrated with the bureaucratically clogged justice system that seems to protect the guilty and spit in the face of the innocent--they might appreciate the strong-armed method of dealing with criminals that McCall uses. "The Equalizer" always gets justice and offenders are usually killed by the end of the show. Retribution is always served.

Writers of the show portray the police department (justice system) as bumbling, inadequate, bureaucratically inept, brutal, stupid, and senseless. Officers are McCall's scapegoats and he avoids no opportunity to criticize them. In "Nightscape," the

police chief issues a warrant for the arrest of a rape victim's husband (intent on revenge, he stalks the subways in search of the offenders). McCall is not pleased--the police always seem to go after anyone but the real criminals. In another story, a black teenage boy is harassed and accidentally killed by the "citizen's patrol," a volunteer police force. McCall shows that the police department is inadequate by making up for their mistakes. The killers themselves are a branch of the police department--a branch that, according to McCall (who is always right), should have been disbanded long ago. Note McCall's closing statements to the very uncharismatic police chief: "None of this would have happened if you had done your job." The police department, week after week, sends ten armed officers and five cars (sirens blaring) to the scene of a crime, <u>after</u> McCall and an assistant have everything under control. Although the Lone Ranger always seems to be doing the sheriff's job in that series, justice scapegoats are not as pivotal as they are in "The Equalizer." There is an understanding that (between episodes, I suppose) the sheriff does something other than listen to the Ranger's advice.

"The Equalizer" is a type of vigilante. This series began some time after the Bernard Goetz subway killings in New York. Goetz, a previously victimized citizen, took the law into his own hands by shooting several black youths whom he suspected were going to rob him. He was proclaimed a hero by the public, bringing on a host of national attention and extensive coverage in the media. Vigilanteism is acceptable, even praised, in McCall's world. McCall does scold a young boy for buying a gun to kill his brother's murderers, telling him vengeance will not bring justice. However, actions speak louder than words here, because minutes later McCall

does just what he claims is wrong: vengeful violence.

Implications for Further Study

How do these shows affect televisual audiences? In order to answer that question, it is useful to identify the values or assumptions contained within the texts. These values are perceived by the viewers, whether they be children or adults, and may affect how we deal with "reality." The assumptions in "The Equalizer" and "The Lone Ranger" are very similar, indicating a lack of any significant change in society regarding that particular set of assumptions. The assumptions I have listed here fall into two main categories: assumptions about justice and assumptions about gender.

Assumptions about Justice:

1. Good always triumphs over evil.
2. It is easy to distinguish between good and evil. The lines are always clearly drawn.
3. We cannot depend upon the justice system (police, courts) for our safety and protection.
4. Vigilanteism is an acceptable form of law enforcement.
5. We need vigilantes in order to make up for the ineffective justice system.

Assumptions about Gender:

1. Men are (and should be) super strong, super intelligent, macho and unemotional.
2. Men should not develop any traditionally feminine characteristics.
3. Men should be the protectors of women.
4. Men should tell women what to do.
5. Men, both heroes and criminals, control society.
6. Women are more vulnerable to crime than men.
7. Women are victims and should not use their own resources and capabilities.

8. Women should depend upon men for their safety.

9. Women want men to tell them what to do and treat them like children.

There are some problematic features in "The Equalizer." First, justice is over-simplified. Second, the assumptions presented in the text are presented as real--there is no attempt at surrealism in the production of the text. Third, men and women conform to an idealized set of gender constraints. Contrary to Robert McCall's world, women are not helpless--rape prevention classes and self-defense programs have proven that fact. On the other hand, women are targets for crime. Perhaps this show will increase viewer awareness of violence against women. Is the authoritarian presentation of masculinity somehow attractive to the audience? Considering that this brand of machismo is a major component in the episodes, perhaps the answer is yes. "The Lone Ranger" is surprisingly similar in terms of the gender-related values presented in "The Equalizer." Does this lack of change over thirty years reflect a stagnant society? Have our value systems with regard to gender progressed so little?

A study of two televisual texts, "The Lone Ranger" and "The Equalizer," indicate that the justice hero has remained virtually intact over time. Each hero is traditionally masculine, very independent, scrupulous, and super-human. Women are invariably portrayed as "damsels in distress" with no one to turn to for help but the paternal hero. Formula analysis permits a thorough critique of the two television series and enables us to compare the mythic structure of the two justice heroes, proving their similarities and explaining their differences. We have learned something about American culture through a study of two of its television heroes.

Changing presentations of the justice system in the United States have also made us aware of current issues in American justice.

Whatever happened to the gun-slinging tough guys of the old west--the Matt Dillons and the Lone Rangers? The old west hero is still around, relatively unchanged. He just turned in his horse for a SAAB, put on a three-piece suit and moved to New York.

Notes

1. Cawelti, John G. "Myth, Symbol and Formula," Journal of Popular Culture, 8, Summer 1974, p. 4-5.
2. Steckmesser, Kent Ladd The Western Hero in History and Legend, University of Oklahoma Press, 1965, p. 254.
3. Ibid, p. 255.
4. Cawelti, p. 8.
5. Gronbeck, Bruce E. Writing Television Criticism, Science Research Associates, Modules in Mass Communication, Masscom, Chicago, 1984, p. 4.
6. Adler, Richard P. Understanding Television: Essays on Television as a Social and Cultural Force, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1981, p. xi-xii.
7. Ibid, p. 11.
8. Cawelti, p. 4.
9. Ibid, p. 6
10. Ibid, p. 1.
11. Ibid, p. 4.
12. Ibid, p. 4.
13. Ibid, p. 4.
14. Ibid, p. 4.
15. Ibid, p. 6.
16. Glut, Donald F. and Harmon, Jim The Great Television Heroes, Doubleday and Company, Inc., New York, 1975, p. 37.
17. Damocles, a character in Greek history, is used as a metaphor of impending danger. McCall's use of the word is meaningful by itself, but it also shows him to be well-educated and cultured.
18. The word "he" in this case refers to the male person only; all the criminals in "The Equalizer" are male.
19. American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982, p. 608.
20. Steckmesser, p. 255.
21. Klapp, Orrin Symbolic Leaders, Aldine Publishing, 1964, p. 226.
22. Steckmesser, p. 243.

23. Klapp, p. 227.

24. Steckmesser, p. 3.

25. TV Guide, October 15, 1986.

26. TV Guide, September 17, 1986.

27. TV Guide, December 17, 1986.

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