

ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA AND “BACKSTAGE” EVENT FRAMING:
HOW 24 DEFINES TORTURE

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current study is to examine how the prime time television show *24* frames torture by US government officials almost exclusively in scenarios of high-consequence, high-confidence that are not supported by public opinion polls, provide contextual rationalizations that are unrealistic, show torture methods as a viable means to gain needed information, and show enemy combatants torturing U.S. citizens. Through a quantitative content analysis of torture on the television series *24* and an analysis of focus groups' reactions to select episodes of *24* portraying torture in such scenarios, the study seeks to investigate the role of entertainment media in influencing public opinion and providing "backstage" context from which opinions may be formed. The study examines how fictional portrayals of an event or issue such as torture can enter into political discourse on the subject. The study builds on prior research on how and when entertainment media provide context and frames to the public that the news media cannot, and helps further our understanding of how entertainment media can enter into public discourse and inform public opinion.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A. Entertainment or Reality

Terrorist have managed to detonate a nuclear bomb in Los Angeles. More bombs and more attacks are on the horizon in the next 24 hours if something is not done immediately. The federal government is frantically attempting to keep information about the looming attacks from the public to prevent widespread panic and chaos. U.S. intelligence community officials are working every possible angle to find the location of the bomb before it is too late. Jack Bauer, a maverick counter terrorism agent just released from a Chinese prison, has led a strike team to capture and detain a man the government believes to have vital information. The man happens to be Graem Bauer, Jack's brother. After crudely tying Graem to a living room chair he orders one of the members of the team to bring him "Cyacine Pentathol" a "neuro-inflammatory" designed to induce excruciating pain. Jack begins the interrogation of his brother, but knows his brother will not give over the information needed without a fight. After a brief verbal questioning that garners no information, Jack, frustrated and out of time, stabs a makeshift IV needle into his brother's arm to prep him for delivery of the Cyacine Pentathol. Jack delivers dose after dose of the neuro-inflammatory chemical to his brother who screams in agony as Jack begs Graem to simply tell him what he knows about the attacks. The scene continues until Jack, screaming and in tears, orders a near fatal dose of the chemical to be pumped into Graem's convulsing body. Finally Graem breaks and confesses his involvement in terrorist activities to Jack right before the lethal dose of the chemical is injected. Following the confession, Jack cradles his brother in his arms; both men crying.

Jack, the ultimate patriot, is in for another very long day. One riddled with violence, torture, and death. Torturing his brother is only the beginning. Before the day is done his brother will be

dead, Jack will have learned his father was behind the attacks on the United States, the love of his life is in a bizarre form of post traumatic stress disorder as a result of being tortured by Chinese captors, and he will have accumulated at least 47 kills and the torture of 5 separate individuals (Jack Bauer Torture Report, 2007). The show leaves the viewer with an overarching sense that without men and women like Jack Bauer the world as we know it would be overrun with evil and chaos. Jack is forced to break laws of both legal and moral conscription in order to ensure the preservation of those very same laws. The clock is literally ticking toward catastrophe and Jack must do whatever it takes to prevent such catastrophes from occurring. This thesis is devoted to understanding the effect a show like this has on its audience. The highly popular series is one of Fox's most touted primetime shows. How does the presentation of this ticking time bomb scenario inform opinions on how detainees should be treated? How and when should the U.S. conduct interrogations on such detainees, and what methods should be used? How are such presentations of violence, torture, and danger pertinent to contemporary political discussions?

Despite the show graphically portraying methods of torture far beyond those meeting with even marginal international approval, rightwing conservatives and other political elites have been unashamed in their praise for the tactics of Jack Bauer and the show *24*. They have used the show as a validation for both the war in Iraq and for the cruel and unusual treatment of detainees (Brock, 2007). In his syndicated column, Cal Thomas attacked "ideologically decrepit" Iraq war protesters, claiming, "Unlike Vietnam, the Islamo-fascists won't leave us alone if we leave Iraq before stability is established" (Thomas, 2007). Thomas used *24* as a means to examine the possible consequences of exiting Iraq, "Watch the TV drama '24' for what could be our prophetic and imminent future with a nuclear device exploding in major cities. Having concluded we don't

have the stomach to fight them on their turf, they might understandably deduce we are even less willing to fight them on ours" (Thomas, 2007). Fox news host John Gibson stated in reference to nuclear attacks presented on the show, "Well, certainly may be fiction for now. But 24's Jack Bauer has it right. People need to wake up to the possibility of nuclear attack...Is 24's faux suitcase nuke bomb a real wake-up call for America?" (Brock, 2007).

Others such as conservative talk radio host Laura Ingraham have used the show as a validation for extreme interrogation methods. Ingraham told host Bill O'Reilly on the O'Reilly Factor program, "The average American out there loves the show 24. OK? They love Jack Bauer. They love 24. In my mind that's close to a national referendum that it's OK to use tough tactics against high-level Al Qaeda operatives as we're going to get" (Brock, 2007). Glen Beck on his CNN Headline News program offered a similar argument in defense of torture methods uncovered in a report on special prisons run overseas by U.S. officials claiming, "I want a Jack Bauer out there. ... It's the tactics and the programs that we don't know about that make me sleep well at night" (Beck, 2006). In another discussion on the use of torture on Beck's program, author Vince Flynn and Beck discuss the possible outcome if someone such as Zachariah Moussaoui (one of the hijackers involved in the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States) had been interrogated by someone such as Jack Bauer,

"We never turned on his [Zachariah Moussaoui] laptop; we never talked to him because we were so afraid. Somebody in Washington didn't think we could even get the FISA request. So we didn't go for it. They should all be [asking] this one question. If you could turn back the clock right now, would you want -- would you be okay with somebody like Mitch Rap or Jack Bauer going into that guy's jail cell and talking to him and getting some answers out of him. They should have to ask that."

(Beck, 2007)

On the September 25, 2006, edition of CNN Headline News' Glenn Beck stated to former U.S. Army Interrogator Mike Ritz, "I think, really, most of us would like a Jack Bauer from time

to time. The reality is a lot of these guys [detainees] have information that could potentially save thousands of lives, and you gotta do what you gotta do.” Beck then asked Ritz if men and women such as Jack Bauer really existed. Ritz replied, “Sure” (Brock, 2007). Bloggers and columnist such as Brock warn that politicians on the right who are supportive of the war on terror, increased government powers of surveillance, and more extreme methods of interrogation are increasingly referring to *24* as if it is an example of reality, as if somehow the show is full of applicable lessons in the real world. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff even praised the series for “reflect[ing] real life” (Dougherty, 2007). Columnist Michael Brendan Dougherty argues *24*,

“Not only informs or reinforces views on torture, it shapes viewers’ perspective of the entire war on terror. Each day in *24* is filled with exotic threats, byzantine intrigues in the White House, and a dash of domestic turmoil. Typically, while Jack runs across Los Angeles in search of bad guys to beat down, a subplot will develop in the suburbs. In one instance, we’re introduced to a family in which a vivacious blonde is about to wed a Persian-American who works with her father. Is the groom a terrorist, or is it the father, or both? The effect is to acclimate the audience to a world in which the threat of spectacular terrorist violence is white noise—a constant, omnipresent force in the day-to-day lives of Americans, if only they will stop and notice it. Don’t let your mind fix itself entirely on wedding centerpieces and catering: there may be a terrorist in your house.”

(Dougherty, 2007)

The show has become a means by which the conservative movement has justified war, torture, and the suspension of individual liberties. Audiences are increasingly told by conservative pundits and politicians that the fictional “backstage” glimpses to a world of harrowing consequences shown on *24* are actually glimpses into reality. A reality the show and its supporters assert we are living in whether we know it or not. Understanding how fictional portrayals of torture on *24* manifest in the political discourse surrounding the issue is one of the primary goals of this research.

B. Current Study

Before one can appreciate how and why an entertainment television show can be used by political elites as justification for hawkish international and interrogation policies, one must understand how entertainment television can represent reality. First, it is imperative to understand the importance of news coverage in politics. Through news coverage of politicians and political affairs audiences are allowed certain access to ideas from which to formulate opinions. Entertainment television becomes important when events are portrayed in entertainment television that cannot be covered by the actual news media and presented in a manner that does not distinguish those fictional portrayals from reality. Thus, entertainment media through a fictional portrayal serves to inform an audience member by providing special access not otherwise available. News media cannot say how or why a specific event unfolded with certainty. News media simply report an event and speculate on the impact or potential ramifications. News media outlets reporting on the abuse of a detainee can only show that which it sees, that which it is told, or that which is factually proven. There is a burden of proof in news media that is not present for entertainment media. Entertainment media can not only show the abuse of the detainee as it happens, but it can also show who the president or acting commander conferred with before making the decision to allow the detainee to be tortured in the first place.

News coverage of the American presidency is pervasive. Events such as press conferences, speeches, and meetings with foreign dignitaries are common occurrences in the news media. News coverage of the intelligence community is more limited, often consisting of high ranking members changing policies, positions, or jobs. Though the coverage of the intelligence community is limited, it is still featured with enough prominence to allow the average citizen to grasp the major events unfolding and represent public duties performed by the intelligence

community; this is especially true in the case of the executive branch (Holbert et al., 2005). However, citizens do not generally gain access to a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the daily life of executive branch members through news coverage (Fineman, 2001), and one could make the same argument concerning the lives and routines of U.S. intelligence community members. Entertainment media are able to step in and offer interpretations and accounts of the internal affairs within these branches and departments of government (Sorkin, 2002). Holbert argues television programs, such as *The West Wing*, offer “the American public something that it cannot get from any other source, an insider’s view of what it is like to be president on a daily basis.” Allowing the average citizen the opportunity to become a “fly on the wall” to heated political arguments, inside secrets and policies, and the access which the press can only dream (Holbert et al., 2005). Through a show such as *24*, audience members are allowed to see how intelligence community officials dial the White House to speak to the president. The audience has a front row seat as President David Palmer (the fictional president on the show *24*) discusses with trusted advisors the political ramifications of murdering the family of a suspected terrorist as a method of torture to extract information. Audiences hear Jack Bauer coldly inform detainees, “You are going to tell me what I want to know, it is just a matter of how bad you want me to hurt you first.” Audiences literally see Jack Bauer snap a suspected terrorist’s fingers one by one until he reveals his terrorist connections. The behind the scene glimpses provided in entertainment media give context to issues and give portrayals of a possible reality that is not easily countered by news media. For example, entertainment media can portray the president discussing torture with an advisor. The portrayal of such an event gives the audience an impression of how politicians operate that the news media would have difficulty factually proving or disproving. The inability

of the news media to provide such backstage glimpses leaves open the possibility entertainment media portrayals of events can be seen as a potential reality.

Following in the footsteps of Holbert in the analysis of *The West Wing* television series and the framing of the public's perspective on the characteristics of the American presidency, this study uses framing theory as a basis from which to conduct a systematic quantitative content analysis of the presentation of the use of torture offered on the television series *24*. The show presents four individual mutually exclusive categories of actors using torture and/or having torture used upon them: members of the executive branch of the United States government, members of the United States intelligence community, foreign or enemy combatants, and civilians with no direct membership and/or affiliation with any of the other groups. The varying degrees and circumstances of torture are examined based on categories defined by Steven Kull's model of coercive methods in high to modest consequences in high to modest confidence in torture (Kull, 2004). All episodes for seasons 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the television series *24* were content analyzed for the presentation of torture as defined by Kull's parameters. This study builds on Holbert's study of framing and begins with a general overview of framing research in political communications. The study then discusses the importance of broadening the study of political communication research to include analyses of entertainment television. This argument is grounded in discussion of boundary constraints and domain extensions in social scientific theory building as set forth by Holbert.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Political Communication-Based Framing Research

Framing defines how an element of rhetoric is packaged so as to allow certain interpretations and rule out others (Goffman, 1974). Framing of issues in the news media help form public opinion by continuously presenting an issue in a given light or interpretation. A frame is the “the central organizing idea” that gives the social situation being communicated a recognizable and understood context for the mass audience (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). For example, if the mass media were to only portray the decision by United States military officials to use torture in situations of high consequence (like a threat of a nuclear bomb detonating in a major city), the central organizing idea is that United States military officials use torture only under circumstances involving serious risks to the nation and its population.

Scheufele (1999) and others, such as Entman (1993) have explored concepts of framing in an attempt to establish relationships between journalism, media content, mental frames that exist within audience members, and how audience frames are altered by media (Scheufele, 1999; Entman, 1993). Scheufele (1999) and Holbert (2005) have both attempted to bring greater clarity to political communication based framing research with models integrating various lines of framing research (Scheufele, 1999; Holbert, 2005). Researchers have also criticized the fact that all attempts to define and analyze framing throughout those separate lines of political communication research have focused almost exclusively on the news media (Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978).

Holbert and Entman further argue that studies of framing are about the influence of public affairs content (Entman, 1993), however the various individual-level political communication framing effects studies conducted to date focus on news influence. All of these studies leave

open the question: Is it only news content and the news media that frame the political world and shapes citizens' political consciousness (Holbert et al., 2005)? Scholars argue in order to broaden the study of framing within political communications, researchers should not constrain themselves to the study of a single type of media content (Holbert, et al., 2003).

B. News Media Frames

Studies on news media frames over a vast array of issues have been on the rise the last fifteen years (Weaver, 2007). Simon (2007) claims that in the case of equally weighted arguments in equally presented frames, citizens will choose a side of the argument independent of the media. Simon further asserts that because the public, in more complicated situations, choose for themselves, the variety and content of messages in public discourse, rather than its sheer proportion, would determine citizens' views. This discursive process links government and citizens in the formation of policy and independent decisions (Simon, 2007). Connecting this concept to an argument for the importance of entertainment media in political communications is simple; the news media have limitations that entertainment media does not. A journalist has little creative freedom from which to operate when there is a lack of political elite discourse on a topic, issue or policy, whereas professionals in the entertainment media may structure discourse on an issue in any way they see fit so long as it conforms to the confines of consumer market pressures. Whether or not entertainment media will choose to structure discourse different from politicians, and subsequently the news media, is debatable. However the very fact that entertainment media could do so is an intriguing possibility, because one must assume at some point in history entertainment media has exercised this power. Entertainment media has such power by its ability to be perceived as reality, or a potential reality, by audience members. The consequence of that potential power is intriguing. The first step in unraveling the consequences

of entertainment media's ability to provide competing frames (even when those frames do not exist in political discourse), is by reviewing research done on competing news frames.

Chong (2007) identifies key individual and contextual parameters that determine which of many competing frames will have an effect on public opinion by measuring the effectiveness of strong and weak frames. Individual knowledge, strength of the frame, and repetition of a frame all influence public opinion, but do so in differing capacities depending on the circumstances of accessibility and knowledge of the individual and given strength or weakness of a frame.

Chong's perspective adds to that of Simon, claiming frame competition allows citizens to select frames for themselves and to counter elite attempts to shape public opinion (Chong, 2007).

Most scholars agree that competition among elites allow the news media to present various frames on a single issue, and thus allows for the public a better, more succinct understanding of the issue at hand. However there are times when structural limitations of the news media, of political elites, and/or the culture both operate in, limit or altogether subvert the creation of opposing frames. Reese (2001) argues some "macro-frames," such as the war on terror, may limit media, citizens and political elites in redefining and interpreting reality. Reese states, in some respects, news media and political elites are rather limited in the formation of frames by the cultural constraints in which they operate (Reese, 2001). The role of the entertainment media in cases where structure, organization, and culture limit political discourse and news media freedom could, at least theoretically, be to provide the missing competitive voice to aid citizens' abilities to choose for themselves and protect against public opinion manipulation. For example, an entertainment television program such as *Star Trek* could expand notions of global citizenship in ways completely absent in regular political discourse concerning nationality.

In the case of a show like *24*, the opposite could be true. Political elites can use a show like *24* to subvert arguments made by academics and various media outlets, or at least a way to support their own existing argument. The apocalyptic horror presented every week on *24* is a shining example of how evil and hostile the rest of the world is towards the United States. *24* allows elites to recapture the framing of the argument on torture and the war on terror in a way that is beneficial to them.

Lewis (2001) argues the news media reflect biases toward the elite interests who have the greatest access to media, and rather than covering public opinion they tend to construct narratives about public opinion through elite provided prisms (Lewis, 2001). Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston (2007) make a similar argument, arguing news organizations are seriously constrained by their deference to political power when lacking consistent counter perspective from high-level officials (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007). Thus news media, at best, are limited in the ability to provide counter-frames to the public, for which the public can form attitudes and opinions on, and, at worst, may sometimes simply pay lip service to governing elites. In scenarios of frame dominance by elites the role of entertainment media could be to help provide counter-frames to the public that the news media can. For example, in the South a television show such as *Julia*, which aired in the late 1960's and was one of the first non-stereotypical portrayals of a single African-American woman, may have provided an alternative to the elite discourse and news media presentations of African-American women (Bodroghkozy, 2008).

This is not to in anyway imply that this always or even commonly occurs. However, one must appreciate the power and thus importance entertainment media can have in framing political discourse. Ultimately what is important to this research is not whether elites pick up

discourse from entertainment television and use it as a counter to news media opinion, that entertainment media expand the context for which an issue is debated, or serve as a needed alternative voice when news media can not. What is important is that discourse taking place in a fictional television program can stand as an equal alongside argument and debate taking place in reality. The way in which entertainment media manifest itself in political discourse is not nearly as important as the fact that fiction can manifest itself there. Entertainment media has become part of our culture reality, and that has real consequence in how we conceptualize the world around us.

The argument by Reese (2001) that elites and the news media are limited by structure and culture in the creation of frames, leaves open the question of where such cultural guidelines come from (Reese, 2001). As mentioned earlier, when lacking opposing frames the news media defer to the political elites, thus allowing for elite presented frames to dominate. However even elite created frames are created, understood, and constrained by culture. In the western world, it is a culture dominated by entertainment media. In a recent interview with former President Bill Clinton claimed: “If you're the Jack Bauer person, you'll do whatever you do and you should be prepared to take the consequences... When Bauer goes out there on his own and is prepared to live with the consequences, it always seems to work better” (McAuliff, 2007) The example is not meant to argue that entertainment media serve as the primary source for political elites, or the general public. Rather it is meant to emphasize one of the many important roles entertainment media can have in, providing cultural reference points to political elites who, in turn, can use news media outlets to further articulate these frames to the public. Clinton’s so called “Jack Bauer Exemption,” or someone willing to break certain rules to “get the job done” and face the consequences, is a great example of how entertainment media can serve to facilitate frames of

context and description to both elites and the general public. In this case, entertainment media helps to create a discourse that might otherwise not exist.

C. Importance of Entertainment Television in Existing Political Discourse

The ability of entertainment media to add further frame contexts to already existing political discourse is far more important and prevalent than its potential to manufacture an entirely new one. For example the 2008 season of *24* will feature a woman as president; conspicuously coinciding with the first time in history a woman has been considered the frontrunner in a political primary election. The extent to which gender will have a role in the election is unclear. CNN recently ran articles discussing how the portrayal of a woman president on *24* might influence political discussions about the ability of women to govern (Network, 2007). Thus, an entertainment television program becomes an outlet for further discussion on an already existing topic. The show also adds context to this discussion by visibly portraying to audiences how a woman performs as commander and chief, publically and privately. Recognizing the importance of entertainment television to add to political discourse, the Human Rights First organization gave its 2007 excellence in television award to the entertainment television show *Criminal Minds* for the show's in-depth depiction of "torture and interrogation in a nuanced, realistic fashion." The group argues the importance of entertainment media in providing to viewers "a more complete view of what can happen in the interrogation booth at a time when these issues are being hotly debated in the United States and overseas... we recognize the awesome power of TV to not only entertain, but also to educate and inspire" (Rosenblum, 2007, p. 1). The organization also speculates the dangers and consequences of post September 11, 2001 portrayals of torture in entertainment media claiming:

" 'Torture on television has a real impact on public opinion and it has influenced the actions of some junior American soldiers in Iraq who imitate the abusive techniques they

see on television and in the movies,' said David Danzig, director of Human Rights First's Primetime Torture Project. 'Military educators have told us that the popular depiction of torture now presents an enormous training challenge.'"

(Rosenblum, 2007, p. 2)

Human Rights First further notes the rise of so called "hero torture," that is to say entertainment media heroes like Jack Bauer on *24* and Sydney Bristow on *Alias* are shown increasingly to use abusive and aggressive interrogation methods regularly. The heroes' use of torture is almost always successful. On most entertainment television shows, torture is portrayed virtually the same way every time (Rosenblum, 2007). The hero stabs, punches, shoots, chokes or otherwise abuses a suspect who is unwilling to give up information in situations in which that information is imperative to the lives of many others, and in seconds after the abuse begins the captive invariably reveals critical secrets to prevent pending catastrophe. Rosenblum further argues, "In the real world, torture does not work like that at all, [and hardly ever in such dire circumstances]. Overwhelming evidence shows that the use of violence and coercion in interrogation actually hinders the ability to get good information. Unfortunately, you rarely see what does work. Very few shows take the time to truly explore the issue" (Rosenblum, 2007, p. 3). So powerful are the perceived consequences of such frames provided by entertainment media that in 2006 the Dean of West Point, Brigadier General Patrick Finnegan, along with military and FBI interrogators paid a visit to Southern California in order to meet with the creative team behind the series *24* asking them to stop using torture in the show because American soldiers were copying the show's tactics. It was an attempt by the military to inform *24* writers and "show torture subjects taking weeks or months to break, spitting out false or unreliable intelligence, and even dying. As they do in the real world" (Danzig, 2007).

The Parents Television Council (2007) notes a dramatic increase in torture portrayed in entertainment media over the course of the last decade (Parents Television Council, 2007). The increase is represented in Figure 1.

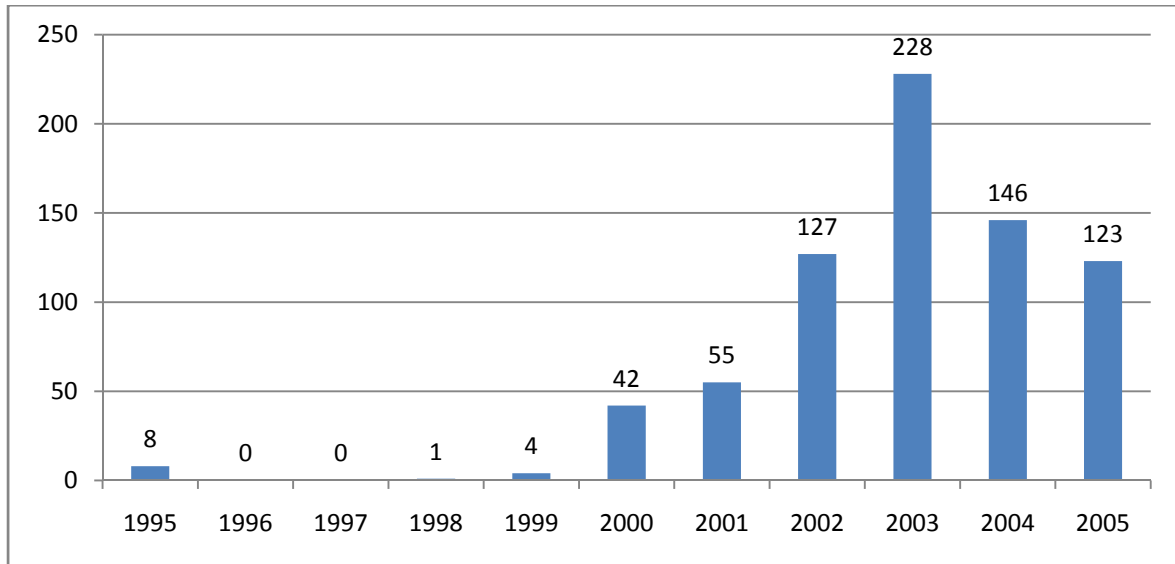


Figure 1: Scenes of Torture on Primetime Network Television

The concern over the impact fictional presentations of torture techniques in entertainment television may deal not only with how audience members interpret the justifications for torture, but also how actual military interrogators interact with detainees. Military officials worry that shows like *24* could influence those who actually perform interrogations because often the only prior knowledge interrogators had on the success or failure of such techniques are derived solely from entertainment television. Bauder (2007) argues Tony Lagouranis, a former U.S. Army specialist who questioned prisoners in Baghdad's infamous Abu Ghraib prison and several other facilities around Iraq, claimed to have witnessed instances of mock executions like that depicted on the entertainment television show *24* following some of his fellow interrogators having watched a similar scene on a DVD version of the show (Bauder, 2007).

Though most entertainment television programs feature aggressive torture methods within a frame of high consequence with subjects highly likely to have information vital to the resolution of some greater conflict (Bauder, 2007), some programs make a concerted effort to do the opposite. The entertainment television show *The Shield*, known for its controversial portrayal of corrupt police officers, has also been recognized for its nuanced and realistic portrayals of torture and the consequences of such actions (Fierro, 2007). In 2007 the show, along with three others, was nominated for the Human Rights First Award for Excellence in Television for its portrayal of torture. The show features a group of detectives called "The Strike Team" who stop at nothing to bring justice to the streets of Los Angeles. The police officers in the show use both illegal and unethical methods to maintain peace on the streets, alongside what could be considered normal and ethical police procedures. The police are also shown making profit through illegal drug and weapons sales, as well as robbery. Virtually all of the characters on the show are presented as having both vice and virtue. Police officers may be out to prevent crime, but they are not above planting drugs on and coercing confessions out of gang members to get that result. The vigilante type justice distributed by the police officers on the show, as well as the extreme interrogation methods used, have severe consequences for all actors involved and are often unsuccessful (Chocano, 2002).

Entertainment television is, of course, not the only factor at hand in abuse or torture of detainees; Bauder (2007) claims many American interrogators are simply young, receive little training and are pressured by commanders to extract information from prisoners as quickly as they can (Bauder, 2007). However, the constant portrayal of torture by "heroes" or protagonists on the part of most entertainment television programs helps unravel where our contexts for understanding torture arise (Bauder, 2007, p. 3). Understanding how entertainment media

messages become part of our regular discourse and how discourse based in fiction becomes justification for beliefs and/or actions, is very important.

Mutz (2004) argues individuals receive political information from various sources and that the “traditional distinctions between news and entertainment content are no longer very helpful” (Mutz, 2004, p. 231). Shah (1998) makes a similar argument in noting the need to look at political messages being supplied by the diverse medium of television. Several lines of political communication research are evolving that begin to focus on the effects of entertainment television in politics. Holbert, Shah, and Kwak (2003) have begun a systematic study of the influence of various forms of prime-time entertainment television viewing on individual-level socio-political attitudes/behaviors (Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2003). Holbert and others argue the use of different types of prime-time entertainment television programming have a distinct set of effects relative to the use of television news. For example, following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington D.C. on September 11, 2001 the United States citizenry was presented an enemy with which it was largely unfamiliar, namely Islamic fundamentalists. The news media followed closely how political elites described this new enemy to the general public. George Bush for example

"This new enemy seeks to destroy our freedom and impose its views. We value life; the terrorists ruthlessly destroy it. We value education; the terrorists do not believe women should be educated or should have health care, or should leave their homes. We value the right to speak our minds; for the terrorists, free expression can be grounds for execution. We respect people of all faiths and welcome the free practice of religion; our enemy wants to dictate how to think and how to worship even to their fellow Muslims." ¹

¹ President George W. Bush Addresses the Nation. World Congress Center, Atlanta, Georgia November 8, 2001.

However it was the entertainment media through television shows such as *24* that placed in full view and context the actual faces, plots, ambitions, inner workings of this “new enemy,” as well as unveiling their views on the United States and its citizenry (Mayer, 2007).

There has also been work regarding the relationship between prime-time entertainment television use and trust in democratic institutions, finding that various forms of prime-time entertainment television viewing affect individual-level trust in political institutions (Moy, 2000). Such lines of research are just beginning to provide a better understanding of the relationship between entertainment television and American politics (Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2003; Niven, 2003; Moy, 2000).

Gamson (1999) distinguishes categories of television content and contends that prime-time entertainment television may be “particularly influential” in constructing and maintaining political attitudes. Entertainment television can do so because program content can engage the audience on an emotional level, with truth claims within the program, and can ultimately treat the audience as if it were physically present in the program (Gamson, 1999). Holbert claims “these unique characteristics of prime-time television dramas allow for the creation of a unique set of effects relative to those found in the traditional study of news” (Holbert, et al., 2003, p. 508). Williams and Delli Carpini (2002) have gone so far as to argue that “the political relevance of a cartoon character like Lisa Simpson is as important as the professional norms of Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw, or Peter Jennings” (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2002). Holbert argues if this is the case, then it is all the more important that political communication scholars focus their attention on shows that blur the line between fact and fiction. Where does the regular army interrogator stop and Jack Bauer begin in the minds of citizens exposed to *24*?

D. Entertainment Media in Influencing Opinion

Delli Carpini and Williams (1996) emphasized the importance of entertainment television and its relationship to public opinion by arguing that “viewers interact with television in ways that are more similar to conversing than to other commonly used metaphors” (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1996, pp. 150-151). These researchers presented findings based on focus group data stemming from viewings of fictional entertainment-based docudramas as well as more traditional public affairs content. Their studies reveal that the distinctions between entertainment and public affairs content are not clear-cut and that there is strong evidence for “the political relevance of fictional media” (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1996, p. 160). The research reveals audience members actively engage the sociopolitical messages offered via entertainment content and that individual-level selectivity influences what entertainment-based sociopolitical messages are attended to when watching a program and how these messages are interpreted in a political context (Holbert, 2005, p. 438).

The television series *The West Wing* has provided fertile ground for research on how entertainment media can influence public opinion of government officials. Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (2002) argue *The West Wing* presents a “humanized version of our heroic president” and that this “romantic rendition of presidentiality may restore a sense of idealism to politics” (Parry-Giles, 2002, p. 223). Further analysis of *The West Wing* reveals the program offers a diverse set of images concerning the role of women in politics; revealing both a new feminism and the complex power dynamics between men and women in various political settings (Holbert, 2005).

Holbert (2005) found *The West Wing*’s positive images of the American Presidency primed viewers toward positive thoughts about the office of President in general. This type of priming

resulted in audience members thinking more positively of both Democratic and Republican chief executives (Holbert, 2005). Holbert further found that *The West Wing* unveils the American presidency to audiences through the performing of three different roles by the fictional President Bartlet (i.e., chief executive, political candidate, and private citizen) (Holbert, 2005) and that the show's framing of the presidency is distinct from the frame types typically found in news media. All of which point to the unique influences a fictional program like *The West Wing* can have relative to regular news media (Holbert et al., 2004).

The research by Holbert and others have revealed various forms of entertainment television viewing serve as strong predictors of a broad set of sociopolitical attitudes and/or behaviors. Holbert further claims the predictive value of entertainment-based forms of media use is often greater than what can be attributed to traditional public affairs media consumption (Holbert et al., 2004). The research provides further support for the uses of entertainment television as a tool of political communication. New emerging research is attempting to link reality based entertainment television to those features of fictional entertainment television with political implications (Nabi, 2003). Eschholz (2002) revealed that the viewing of reality based crime programs leads to a greater racial divide when assessing attitudes toward police (Eschholz, 2002). The broad range of potential ramifications on public opinion concerning a multitude of issues resulting from the use of various types of reality-based programming is very much evident as more and more researchers begin to examine the implications of entertainment media (Holbert, 2005).

Entertainment media can also influence the way in which political elites deliver policy messages to the public, and subsequently influence how public opinion is informed. Nightly talk/political satire shows such as *The Tonight Show*, *Conan O'Brian*, *The Daily Show*, *The*

Colbert Report and *David Letterman* all often feature political candidates openly engaging the audience and the shows' hosts on issues of foreign and domestic policy. The movement of political campaigns into the realm of entertainment television led several researchers to devote attention to the effects stemming from the viewing these programs.

Researchers have found that attention paid to these types of talk shows was a positive predictor of candidate issue knowledge, and that the viewing of these shows had distinct effects on those with high versus low education levels (Holbert, 2005). McLeod (1996) found these talk shows to be particularly effective for Ross Perot in 1992 and that these programs produced higher levels of campaign interest in voters (McLeod, 1996).

Political satire is prevalent within entertainment television and those viewers who come into contact with televised political satire are often not consuming a great deal of news (Holbert et al., 2004). Young (2004) argues late-night monologues tend to focus more on candidates' personal qualities than actual policy stances and, late-night TV viewing patterns tend to interact with general political knowledge in determining when a given set of effects takes hold (Young, 2004). Young asserts only those who are low in political knowledge shift perceptions of a presidential candidate in line with the themes of the political satire discussed on late-night entertainment television monologues. Young also argues even strong partisans can be influenced in unique ways by the consumption of late-night entertainment media monologues (Young, 2004).

Holbert, Young and others focus not only on the satire of late-night talk shows but also other satirical subgenres that may be influential in producing political outcomes. The subgenres within entertainment media the researchers highlight represent programming ranging from fictional to reality based entertainment media where either the central focus of the program or a very specific portion of the program is devoted to politics and/or political satire. *The Daily Show with Jon*

Stewart is a program that embodies the fake news subgenre. This program uses satire to reveal the artificiality of both elected officials and the journalists who cover them (Holbert, 2005, p. 440).

Entertainment media has the power to provide frames of context and reference unavailable anywhere in the news media, because entertainment media can literally create a representation of whichever government office/officials it wishes. Furthermore, entertainment media has a vastly larger viewership among a larger segment of the population than does the news media. A recent study released by the Council for Excellence in Government and its Partnership for Trust in Government (2001) claims entertainment media portrayals of government officials have also been shown to be received as factually accurate by the public. Thus entertainment media has huge potential power to inform and shape public opinion.

E. 24

The television series *24*, gives viewers an inside look at both the inner-workings of the United States intelligence community and executive branch of government. Who government officials such as the President take counsel from in times of crises, how the government releases information to the public about pending or looming danger, and the role of partisanship in making or implementing policy regarding “national security” are only a few of the backstage contexts the show provides to viewers across a variety of issues. The show also portrays how former Presidents can be involved in his (or her) successor’s administration to aid or hinder decisions on “unorthodox” approaches for resolving conflict.. The show relies on the threat of terrorism (often in the form of nuclear or biological attacks) as the catalyst for the debates, discussions, political power struggles, and, often, decisions involving the use of physical

violence and/or the threat of violence within government agencies, and within the ranks of terrorists or enemy governments. A cornerstone of such violence is the use of aggressive torture.

Besides blurring fiction and reality, the show is also potentially influential in terms of its viewership. In addition, the picture of the executive branch (specifically the president) and the United States intelligence community offered on the program is distinctive from the messages citizens confront in news content because it provides backstage access to these offices. Goffman (1959) discusses how humans constantly perform front- and backstage activities as they attempt to perfect and perform various roles on a daily basis (Goffman, 1959). The front stage is defined by rules of decorum, and these are instances when individuals use their energies “to create socially meaningful impressions.” The backstage is where an individual need not engage in the act of impression management. Goffman (1959) states that these two stages are usually divided by some type of physical barrier, but Holbert (2005) and Meyrowitz (1985) note that one effect of television as a form of mass communication is to break these physical barriers and allow audience members access to the backstage events (Holbert et al., 2005; Meyrowitz, 1985).

The public duties performed by political actors and reported by news organizations are extreme examples of front stage performances (Holber et al., 2005). As Ben Karlin, executive producer of *The Daily Show* points out, “what’s interesting and disheartening is that politicians are the most stage-managed and image-conscious guests we see, even more so than actors or celebrities” (Green, 2004, p. 37). *24* is a structured and well scripted presentation of politics and the inner workings of the intelligence community. However, the fictional storylines on *24* reflect executive and intelligence community actions performed outside the glare of the public eye. Real-world reporters and citizens are witness primarily to the front stage roles performed by an American president and the intelligence communities (Holbert et al., 2005), while *24* invites

audience members to the backstage elements of both. Because the message type delivered in *24* is distinct from that offered in news media, it is important to gain some understanding of what is being communicated about the executive branch of government and the intelligence community to the audience through this entertainment-based program.

The roguish lead character, Jack Bauer of the US counter terrorism agency “CTU”, readily tortures suspects both physically and emotionally for what is most often portrayed as necessary to serve a “greater good.” Bauer is a model of the traditional American hero. His unquestioned loyalty to his agency and to the United States government is displayed through a willingness to accept every assignment and, without hesitation, sacrifice himself for the lives of his countrymen (Knapper, 2006).

Bauer’s decisions to employ aggressive methods of torture are often a personal choice not supported by the government. However, on many occasions the implementation of torture is government sanctioned. The focus on government institutions within the show are both Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) and the executive branch. CTU is a mock government intelligence agency and employs several personnel exclusively to torture suspects, with methods varying from, non-invasive methods such as sensory disorientation torture to the invasive use of chemicals to induce pain and physical abuse of suspects.

The executive branch of the government also uses aggressive torture as a means to gain vital information, with orders to torture often given directly by the President of the United States then passed on to lower non-ranking officials. One such aggressive torture method was the repeated use of defibrillator paddles on the forehead of the US Secretary of Defense to gain information. The aggressive method of torture used on the Secretary of Defense in the show was not only

approved, the President (David Palmer) actually personally solicits the interrogator in a private meeting. The torture methods used by the lead characters of the show are almost always effective in obtaining the desired outcome. The terrorists or antagonists of the show are most often of foreign nationality, specifically Russian, Chinese, Mexican and Middle Eastern. The show gives “backstage” insight into how the intelligence community operates in times of national emergency and crisis, and how methods of interrogation and torture are employed and/or approved at the highest levels of government.

F. Framing Torture on *24*

Gamson and Lasch (1983) identify eight elements of frames used by media: metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, visual images, roots, consequences, and appeals to principle. The first five (metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, visual images) are described as “devices that suggest a framework” from which to view a particular situation, while the latter three (roots, consequences, and appeals to principle) “provide justifications or reasons for a general position” concerning a social situation (Gamson & Lasch, 1983, p. 399).

Holbert argues, in general, political communication-based framing research has focused on how news influences individual-level justifications for the stances people take on a given issue, or what Gamson calls “consequence promise.” This focus on consequence frames has grounded political communication-based framing research in the concept of attribution. Much less focus has been given to the framing devices that provide a broader framework from which to understand a given political situation (Holbert et al., 2005).

As with studies on *The West Wing*, *24* adds context and reference to U.S. government officials through the depiction of “backstage” reactions and handlings of crisis events. However, unlike the *West Wing*, *24* can also serve to provide justification for one’s personal view on the

uses of torture, about the tortured, and torturer. For example if the audience is given indisputable clarity through backstage information on the guilt or innocence of a detainee, the audience may be more or less likely to approve or disapprove of more aggressive torture methods.

G. Defining Torture

Miller (2005) argues defining what constitutes torture is important for three primary reasons: “First, governments must be bound by a clear and constant standard that cannot be manipulated in times of crisis. Second, public officials need guidance as to the lawfulness of their tactics. Lastly, the international community must be able to hold governments accountable for torturous acts” (Miller, 2005).

The most widely accepted definition of torture is found in the United Nations Convention Against Torture or (CAT), which was adopted to law as a general consensus on the international definition of torture on June 26, 1987 (CAT, 1984). The CAT defines torture as:

“any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.”

(CAT, 1984, p. Art. 7 (2))

Miller argues CAT’s definition is thus comprised of the following elements: (1) an act; (2) severe pain or suffering; (3) physical or mental pain; (4) intent; (5) particular purposes; (6) involvement of a public official; and (7) the absence of pain or suffering from lawful sanctions. However because Article 2 requires each country to establish its own internal legislation to prevent torture, translating these principles into national or local laws has been subjective. Many signatories have adjusted the definition of torture, redefining the term through slight alterations

in each of the seven elements included in the original definition. Consequently, “implementation of the CAT has resulted in the emergence of numerous definitions of torture, rather than a unitary, uniform definition” (Miller, 2005). On April 18, 1990, the United States signed the CAT and on October 27 of the same year it was ratified by the Senate. The ratifying documents were deposited to the U.N. on October 21, 1994 (Congress, 1995). The U.S. adoption cleared up much of the vague wording of the original document, and Miller argues, narrowed the definition of torture.

In July 2003, the Department of Defense promulgated rules that provide guidance for crimes that may be tried by military commissions, including torture. The regulation provides the military’s own definition for what constitutes torture, which varies by degrees. The rules allow for the incidental infliction of pain or suffering associated with the legitimate conduct of hostilities,” but the regulation does not define what constitutes “incidental infliction” or “legitimate conduct of hostilities.” (Defense, 2003) . Miller claims the United States is a prime example of the lack of uniformity in the definition of torture, illustrating not only that the definition of torture differs among countries, but at times within a single country, and that such failure provides the space for justifying torturous conduct (Miller, 2005).

The presence of multiple subjective and interpretative definitions of torture places significant importance on the individual(s) deciding on what methods of “interrogation” are acceptable towards which combatants, and adds context in which such events occur. The subjective nature of classifying acceptable methods of interrogation, torture, or “legitimate conduct of hostilities” would require a full assessment of the complete context in which the event occurs, which is a virtual impossibility for the news media. While the news media can provide pictures, video, and run stories on incidents of torture, as in the case of detainees at Abu Ghraib, it cannot provide a

complete understanding of the context in which the events occurred. This is not in any way to argue for a validation of torture by the ambiguity of law, but rather to point out the ambiguity allows entertainment media to provide the “backstage” context of events leading to torture. This understanding of entertainment media created context can serve as a reference to citizens attempting to make sense of real-world issues on torture, and potentially lead to dangerously misguided justifications of the use of torture and abuse by the government.

H. Philosophical Debate on the Uses and Justifications of Torture

The issue of torture and its practical applications are not only debated by government officials, but scholars as well. The body of literature arguing for acceptable uses of torture or “coercive methods” often features an instant need for information that can be obtained only through direct interrogation of a subject. The literature portraying torture in a more universally negative and abhorrent light often calls into question the moral authority from which the directive to torture is given.

Bufacchi and Arrigo (2006) argue torture is most often presented by government officials in what is known as the “ticking-time bomb scenario.” The ticking time bomb argument is when “a terrorist is tortured in order to extract information of a primed bomb located in a civilian area, is often invoked as one of those extreme circumstances where torture becomes justified” (Bufacchi, 2006). Wolfendale (2006) argues against the notion of the ticking time-bomb claiming, “for the ticking bomb argument to work, there would have to be in place a premeditated, state sponsored program for the training of torturers. This puts the state in the position of creating ‘crimes of obedience,’ which are by definition state sponsored acts of violence” (Wolfendale, 2006). Shue (2003) and Parry (2004) further argue against justifying torture using the ticking time bomb scenario claiming, “scholars also use the ticking time bomb

argument as a means to rationalize the use of torture by the state” (Parry, 2004). Shue claims the notion of the ticking time-bomb is more theoretical than practical and that “justifications for torture thrive in fantasy” (Shue, 2004).

Jeff McMahan (2006) claims a moral case can be made for state torture when the extraction of information is necessary to prevent a serious wrong. McMahan argues torturing can be a necessary and proportionate defense of potential victims of an unjust harm inflicted by a terrorist would be,

“Because the terrorist is morally responsible for the threat of unjust harm that our defensive action is intended to avert, we will not wrong him, nor will he have any justified complaint against us, if we torture him. For he has acted in a way that makes him morally liable to our necessary and proportionate defensive action.”

(McMahan, 2006)

Uwe Steinhoff (2006) argues the ethical decisions behind when and who to torture are justified more easily than most scholars would care to admit and that such easy manipulation of justification for torture should serve as a warning against institutional torture by a state (Steinhoff, 2006). Patrick Lenta (2006) cautions against treating torture as though it were a single phenomenon, susceptible to moral justification or condemnation independently of the purposes for which it is used. Lenta claims justifications for torture on singular or case by case analysis has allowed for widespread abuses to occur in facilities such as Guantanamo Bay, and that torture in any form should not be allowed (Lenta, 2006).

The evident split in the literature deals primarily with the “ticking time bomb” argument or “scenario of high consequence,” as Kull would call it, as being the most easily justifiable situation in which to employ methods of torture. Once again, the news media have difficulty in

providing context to the “ticking time bomb” argument because any such information would be highly sensitive and, even if reported, is difficult to confirm.

The context the news media can provide, often leans more toward speculation than clarity. Noting the emergence of more and more nuclear capable nations, the U.S. state department has reported to the media “the United States believes that the longstanding, massive and covert Iranian effort to acquire sensitive nuclear capabilities make sense only as part of a nuclear weapons program. Iran is trying to legitimize this effort as "peaceful and transparent" pursuit of nuclear fuel cycle capabilities (Bolton, 2003). The New York Times, on the same issue, reported “The U.S. maintains that Iran's nuclear power program is a cover for developing weapons and has called for further sanctions, while Tehran denies the charges and insists it just wants to master the technology to meet future power needs under the provisions of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty” (Karimi, 2007). Consider also the recent incident of six nuclear warheads “mistakenly flown on a B-52 bomber from Minot Air Force Base, N.D., to Barksdale Air Force Base, La., on Aug. 30, 2007” (Hoffman, 2007). It is only the event and the subsequent fallout of rhetoric and condemnation by politicians and military officials that is reported. The response by government officials, presumably, is only presented because the event became public. The news media thus leave open the question of how often such scenarios occur, and can, at best, speculate on the context of the event on which they are reporting. Thus the entertainment media can provide some insight and context to the viewer (be they representative of reality or entirely of fiction) of the frequency in which such “ticking time bomb” or “scenarios of high consequence” occur, and thus give justification to the necessity of maintaining legal “options” for the state to exercise torture.

I. Public Opinion on Torture in the United States

To uncover how Americans view issues of detention and torture, especially in the context of the war on terrorism and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, PIPA and Knowledge Networks undertook a survey of a nationwide sample of 892 American adults July 9-15 2004. The survey had a margin of error +/- 3.3% (Kull, 2004). Though the study had many major, specific, findings concerning the treatment of detainees in American custody, this research is concerned primarily with public opinion on the uses of torture in various interrogation scenarios. These findings provide insight into U.S. public opinion on the use of torture.

Three of the eight key findings of the PIPA and Knowledge Networks survey dealt with US public opinion of torture directly and are of particular importance here (PIPA-Knowledge Networks Poll:Americans on Detention, Torture, and the War on Terrorism, 2004):

- US Public Opinion of International Laws on Torture and Abuse

As shown in Table 1, Kull's public opinion survey found a majority of Americans support complete bans on physical torture. Though the public is divided on completely banning the threat of torture, modest numbers are opposed to mental torture and humiliating treatment. Kull argues there is evidence that these number would increase to full opposition of all forms of torture if the public believed other countries would not use torture on American detainees (Kull, 2004, p. 5).

- US Public Opinion on Use of Torture and Abuse in Interrogations Related to Terrorism

Kull argues a majority of Americans are more likely to oppose exceptions to laws regulating the use of torture, even when these exceptions are carried out as part of the war on terrorism. As shown in Table 2 Americans are against most forms of physical torture even when the detainee is very likely to have vital information. Identifying the detainee as a member of a terrorist group

does not increase the readiness to use coercive methods (Kull, 2004, p. 6).

Table 1: Norms Restricting Interrogation Practices for All Governments.				
Category	Never Use Physical Torture	Never Threaten Physical Torture	Never Use Mental Torture	Never use Humiliating Treatment
Favor	66	48	55	52
Too Restrictive	30	48	41	42
Accept Against U.S.	5	16	16	19

- US Public Opinion on Individual Responsibility for Torture and Abuse

Large majorities of Americans view the responsibility for using torture as resting on the individual. Public opinion favors the trial and punishment of those who order and those who carry out torture, even if directly ordered to carry out torture by a superior (Kull, 2004, p. 9).

The survey shows a majority of Americans are opposed to most forms of torture in most scenarios, with the exception of the scenario of high-confidence, high-consequence. Though still opposed to most forms of physical torture, the scenario of high-confidence, high-consequence is the most justifiable scenario for torture for Americans. Americans are also more likely to reject torture if they believe foreign/enemy combatants would obey international laws prohibiting it. Political elites wanting to present the most justifiable argument to the American public on the viability of torture would need to establish a discourse meeting two primary requirements: torture in the scenario of high-confidence, high-consequence, and foreign/enemy combatants using torture on American captives.

For the fictional presentations of torture on *24* to enter the political discourse of elites wanting to justify the use of torture, the presentations of torture would have to meet the before mentioned criteria. *24* would have to portray torture most frequently in the scenario of high-confidence, high-consequence, as well as show American being tortured by foreign/enemy

combatants. 24 would also have to provide a seemingly realistic, or potentially realistic, portrayal of these criteria. Based on how 24 is described by many political elites, one would expect to find these traits in 24’s portrayal of torture. It is also possible that the frequent use of physical torture on the show, which has low public approval ratings, further provides elites a way of condoning the “less” physical types of torture that occurred at the U.S. prison facility at Abu Ghraib.

Coercive Method	Modest Consequence		High Consequence	
	Modest Confidence	High Confidence	Modest Confidence	High Confidence
Sleep Deprivation	55	55	56	65
Hooding	47	49	50	56
Loud Noise	43	47	48	56
Stress Positions	39	40	44	52
Threaten Dogs	36	30	37	41
Deny Food And Water	33	30	34	44
Threaten Shoot	27	30	36	34
Heat	28	23	31	34
Naked	21	19	28	25
Threaten Family	20	18	24	28
Electrics Shocks	14	11	20	19
Kick, Punch, Physically Abuse	17	9	18	18
Water-Boarding	12	8	16	17
Sexual Humiliation	10	7	11	10

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

A. Coding Torture in Entertainment Media

The television series *24* was chosen for its vast viewership, primetime airing, and contextualizing of torture by intelligence community officials and the executive branch of the US government. *24* has increased its ratings for each year the show has been aired, moving from number seventy-six to twenty-five in five years in U.S. television ratings for overall viewership numbers. Compared to the 2005 season, *24*'s ratings in 2006 were up 16% in overall viewers and 14% in viewers of the advertiser-friendly 18-49 age demographic. At one point in 2006, ratings peaked at 16.3 million viewers (Mahan, 2007). Content analysis was chosen because the method allows for large amounts of data to be reviewed over an extended period of time. All episodes of the series are coded as part of the content analysis; each representation of torture will be recorded individually in categories mirrored after Kull's public opinion model on methods of torture (Kull, 2004).

The various kinds of coercive methods that might constitute "torture" are broken down into fourteen categories based on Kull's 2004 study (Kull, 2004, p. 9): sleep deprivation, hooding of the individual, use of loud noise against the individual, stress positions (included in this category are psychologically stressful positions), threatening with dogs, denying food or water, threatening to shoot the individual, exposure to extreme temperatures, made to go naked, threats to harm the individual's family, use of electric shocks, punching or kicking the individual, waterboarding (simulated drowning), and sexual humiliation. This study adds the category of positive incentive as a "coercive method" to be potentially used in place of other interrogation techniques. The category was added due to the mention of positive incentives as a variable by Kull in his survey of public opinion on the uses of coercive methods (Kull, 2004). Because

positive incentive is the antithesis of torture and argued by some researchers to be more effective than torture, the addition of the positive incentive category helps better understand how torture is portrayed in entertainment television. Whether or not positive incentives are used in urgent situations, shown to be effective in place of torture, or shown to be utterly ineffective are all central ideas in understanding how torture is presented in entertainment media. More broadly, torture is differentiated from other forms of interrogation, blackmail, and/or coercion by physical detention of the subject. This is done to ease confusion in coding “what” torture is and “when” it occurs. Furthermore, scenes of torture were also coded to capture the reasoning behind the use of torture. The rationale for using torture can be a combination of several personal, situational, and motivational factors. Specifically scenes were coded to capture if torture was motivated by: the need for information, the want or desire for immediate retribution, and sadistic reasoning that satisfies no morally justifiable needs other than those specifically held by the torturer.

The coercive methods portrayed in the show are placed in one of two mutually exclusive categories: Modest consequences facing the state if information is not obtained, and High consequences facing the State if information is not obtained. High consequences are differentiated from modest consequences on the basis of verbal information provided to the audience. A scenario featuring high-consequence would, for example, mention multiple “lives being at stake” or in immediate threat versus a scenario of modest consequence where “protection of office” or “security” interests are mentioned but not clearly defined in terms of consequence. The levels of consequence are also distinguished in terms of individual confidence in two mutually exclusive subcategories. Individual confidence refers to the confidence given to the audience that the person being tortured has information vital to the resolution of some greater conflict, potential conflict, or threat facing the state. For example, a scene of high-confidence

may have an actor torturing another actor who has only been revealed to the audience as having information. Audience perception is the basis for determining confidence. Each individual scene of torture, on a basis of occurrence, is coded and counted separately as a unit of analysis. The actor(s) involved in interrogating subjects and the subjects being tortured are coded within one of the following categories: United States executive branch officers/delegates, United States intelligence community officials, foreign/enemy combatants, and civilians. The approval of the torture methods are coded on a basis of: United States executive branch approval, United States intelligence community approval, foreign/enemy combatant's approval, or actions independent of any political/military affiliation. The complete coding instrument is included in Appendix B.

Two independent coders coded a random selection of 10 percent of the sample. The overall intercoder reliability for the 21 variables on the code sheet was .92 with the Holsti's formula. Intercoder reliability scores varied from .80 to 1.00 on individual categories with the Holsti's formula. Coders were unaware of the purpose of the assignment.

Following the coding and evaluation of results, three focus groups were conducted assessing reactions to torture portrayed in entertainment television. The first focus group was shown a selected episode of *24* depicting federal agent Jack Bauer using extremely violent methods of torture on a detainee in order to gain vital information. Agent Bauer is successful in obtaining the desired information, but only after brutally beating the man and threatening to kill his family. The second focus group was shown a selected episode of *The Shield*, a television show noted and acclaimed for its more realistic portrayals of torture (Gross, 2007). The selected episode of *The Shield* depicts police officers torturing a suspect for information. The police officers' motives for torturing the suspect are more for revenge than needed information. After beating the man with a chain for hours, the officers finally shoot the suspect in the head after he fails to provide the

information they want. The suspect is ultimately revealed not to have known the information police were seeking, but only after the suspect had already been tortured and killed. The third focus group was shown the selected episodes of *24* and *The Shield*. The goal of the focus groups is to show the influence entertainment media has on the perceptions and justifications of the use of torture. In addition the focus group participants were provided pre and post test questionnaires based on exact questions and question wording as found in Kull's study of public opinion toward the use of torture (Kull, 2004).

The study poses the following hypothesis and research questions in an effort to understand the importance of entertainment media in shaping the citizen's political consciousness:

H1: Torture on *24* will occur predominantly in the scenario of high-consequence when portraying U.S. government officials.

H2: Torture on *24* will occur predominantly in the scenario of high-confidence when portraying U.S. government officials.

H3: Foreign/enemy combatants will use torture predominantly on U.S. government officials.

H4: The use of more violent torture will be portrayed as more successful than less violent methods.

RQ1: Which actor will be most successful when using torture methods?

RQ2: Will portrayals of torture on *24* focus on methods with low approval by United States citizens based on PIPA-Knowledge Networks Poll (2004)?

RQ3: How do focus groups participants respond to televised portrayals of torture?

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

A. Overall Findings

Overall the television show *24* presents far more violent portrayals of torture than are supported by the majority of Americans. However the show presents those violent portrayals most frequently in the most justifiable scenario of torture for Americans, the scenario of high-confidence, high-consequence. The data leaves no question as to why political elites wanting to present torture as justifiable have included examples from *24* in their discourse on the subject. The “backstage” glimpses audiences are given of executive branch and intelligence community officials are not only ones conducted in a world of ever present danger, but also one of clear right and wrong, good and evil. The presentation of torture on *24* leads audiences to believe torture is necessary in order to secure the safety of Americans, and makes abuses like those at the Abu Ghraib prison seem minor. A greater discussion on the implications of these findings will come after a detailed description addressing all of the hypotheses and research questions.

B. Quantitative

24 clearly portrays torture in scenarios of high-confidence and high consequence the majority of the time. Torture is portrayed in situations of high-confidence, high-consequence 60.3% of the time. When torture involves U.S government officials in scenarios of high-confidence and high-consequence the number jumps to a remarkable 81.1% (60 of 74 total scenes). Most of the remaining 19.9% accounting for U.S government officials using torture outside of the scenario of high-confidence, high-consequence occurs during one particular scene of torture featuring the wrongful interrogation of a U.S. senator’s son. The senator’s son is subjected only to stress position torture, does not possess the information government officials believe him to, and he

refuses to cooperate with government officials. The scene is of note because it ran over the course of multiple episodes and was coded multiple times. The scene slightly alters the percentage of times government officials use torture outside of the scenario of high-confidence, high-consequence, the overall success rate of government torture, and the percentage of time violent methods of torture are used by government officials. If one removes all the scores the total scene accounts for, U.S. government officials are even more successful at torturing and torture only in scenarios of high-confidence, high-consequence roughly 90% of the time.

United States government officials are constantly portrayed using torture extremely effectively and most often only on confirmed detainees and known enemies. Foreign/enemy combatants are portrayed in the scenario of high-confidence and high-consequence only 15.5% (5 of 33 total scenes) of the time as opposed to the 81.1% (60 of 74 total scenes) when torture is carried out by U.S. government officials.

The implications for such presentations of torture are immense. *24* provides a backstage pass to view the most secretive inner-workings of governmental affairs, depicting to the audience a world of unimaginable consequence and danger that is kept hidden from regular citizens at all costs. *24* couples this ticking-time bomb scenario with a backstage view of U.S. governmental officials overcoming obstacles of legality and morality to ultimately do what is right for the greater good. The show implies to the audience that the very freedoms which allow individuals to hold lofty ideals of morality and rule of law are provided to them by those few brave men and women willing to go beyond those rules for a cause greater than any one individual's rights.

Though scholars argue the ticking time bomb scenario is a rare (Parry, 2004; Shue, 2004), *24* presents what is (according to the PIPA-Knowledge Networks Poll) the most easily justifiable

reasoning to torture foreign/enemy combatants in a strikingly high percentage. There is a constant reminder to the audience that circumstances of a highly consequential nature are frequently occurring and intentionally kept from the general public. This is coupled with the fact that those individuals responsible for keeping those consequences from manifesting must sometimes use methods that might not otherwise be appropriate (e.g. physical, mental torture) in order to protect such unaware citizens. On the show *24*, government officials are very good at finding the exact individuals they should torture (confidence of 85.1%). Through H1 and H2 one can clearly see that *24* provides two easy rationalizations for individuals to support the torture of detainees, or at least oppose any laws restricting the government’s power to use torture if need be. One, torture cannot be banned because there are frequent times of extreme circumstance (high-consequence) that the public is largely unaware of. Two, government officials, by and large, only torture those who are deserving of such treatment (high-confidence).

H1 postulates portrayals of torture by U.S. government officials on *24* will be predominantly in the scenario of high-consequence. As shown in Table 3, the hypothesis was supported. The study found that of 74 scenes portraying U.S. government officials torturing captives, 68 (91.2%) were conducted in scenarios of high-consequence.

Actor	Consequences	
	Modest	High
U.S. Executive Office Officials	0	11 (100%)
U.S. Intelligence Community	6 (9.5%)	57 (90.5%)
Foreign or Enemy Combatants	26 (78.8%)	7 (21.2%)
Civilians	1 (25%)	3 (75%)
Total	33 (29.7%)	78 (70.3%)

U.S. government officials on *24* are portrayed carrying out methods of torture in order to gain vital information needed to resolve a conflict of far more devastating consequence 95.2% of the time. U.S. government officials are portrayed on the show as virtually always conducting torture with “good” moral intentions. Even foreign/enemy combatants are portrayed as regularly conducting torture in order to gain vital information, though not nearly as high a percentage of the time (45.5% of the time). The show helps eliminate an abuse of power argument against torture from arising by portraying U.S. government officials as reluctant torturers who only employ such methods with the “best” of intentions for society at large. The portrayal of enemy combatants using torture as a means to their own ends helps further rationalize to audience members U.S. governmental officials use of torture. As shown in Table 4, the study found that of 74 scenes portraying U.S. government officials torturing captives, 71 (95.9%) were conducted in order to gain vital information necessary to save the lives of civilians/non-combatants.

24 presents torture as a viable means to gain information in times of severe consequence. Very rarely in the show are the methods of torture employed questioned by individuals carrying any weight on the show of position or status/credibility. The few credible individuals shown questioning the morality of using torture to gain information are often demonized or portrayed as ignorant of dangers in the “real-world.” In one such example Jack Bauer is forced to quit his job at CTU so that he can recapture and torture a suspicious individual the agency is forced to set free because of the meddling of an Amnesty International attorney. Bauer, the ultimate patriot, quits his job under the premise that he may then apply whatever means necessary to gain the vital information required without any consequences befalling the State. After the bumbling attorney is out of sight Bauer recaptures the just released suspicious man. Bauer repeatedly punches, threatens to shoot, and finally breaks the man’s fingers one by one until the gentleman

begrudgingly gives Bauer the information needed to stop terrorist from detonating a nuclear bomb on U.S. soil. Bauer then proceeds to pistol whip the man unconscious as an offering of “something to help with the pain” of the broken fingers.

Moral high ground and rule of law are presented in the show as a constant nuisance to those like Bauer who simply want to do what is “obviously” right in the face of constant terror and tyranny. Furthermore, such morality and obeying the rule of law is portrayed on the show as only carried out by the weak, the wicked, or both. Potential abuse of power, the ineffectiveness of torture, or the torturing of innocent suspects are virtually non-existent topics. Torture and the use of torture by U.S. government officials is debated within the realms of morality only, and it is most often a one sided debate with the argument of moral high ground seeming almost absurd in the face of extreme consequence and evil.

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of Reasons for Actors Employing Methods of Torture, by Count.

Actor	Reason for Torture		
	To Gain Vital Information	Direct Retribution	Ego Satisfaction
U.S. Executive Office Officials	11 (100%)	0	0
U.S. Intelligence Community	60 (95.2%)	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.2%)
Foreign or Enemy Combatants	15 (45.5%)	8 (24.2%)	10 (30.3%)
Civilians	4 (100%)	0	0
Total	90 (81.1%)	9 (8.1%)	12 (10.8%)

H2 postulates portrayals of torture by U.S. government officials on 24 will be predominantly in the scenario of high-confidence. As shown in Table 5, the hypothesis was supported. The study found that of 74 scenes portraying U.S. government officials torturing captives, 63 (85.1%) were conducted in scenarios of high-confidence. Table 6 shows the combined categories of confidence and consequence in modest and high scenarios. Torture occurs overall in the scenario of high-confidence, high consequence 60.3% of the time.

Table 5: Cross-tabulation of Confidence under Which Actors Employ Methods of Torture, by Count.

Actor	Confidence	
	Modest	High
U.S. Executive Office Officials	1 (9.1)	10 (90.9%)
U.S. Intelligence Community	10 (15.9%)	53 (84.1%)
Foreign or Enemy Combatants	6 (18.2%)	27 (81.8%)
Civilians	1 (25%)	3 (75%)
Total	18 (16.2%)	93 (83.8%)

Table 6: Cross-tabulation of Actors and Scenario Depictions of Torture Methods on 24 by Scene

Actor	Modest Consequence		High Consequence		Total
	Modest Confidence	High Confidence	Modest Confidence	High Confidence	
All Actors	5 (4.5%)	27 (24.3%)	12 (10.8%)	67 (60.3%)	111
All U.S. Government Officials	1 (1.3%)	4 (5.4%)	9 (12.1%)	60 (81.1%)	74
Foreign or Enemy Combatants	4 (12.1%)	22 (66.6%)	2 (6%)	5 (15.1%)	33
Civilians	0	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)	4

As shown in Table 7, U.S. government officials are primarily portrayed torturing known foreign/enemy combatants. Though foreign/enemy combatants are almost twice as likely to be tortured as citizens by U.S. government officials (48.6% for foreign/enemy combatants compared to 25.6%), the torturing of civilians 25.6% of the time still seems rather high. One must keep in mind that the proportionally large numbers of civilians being tortured on the show by U.S. government officials are still being tortured on the same merits of high-confidence, high-consequence. The citizens, whether knowingly or not, have information needed to resolve a conflict seen as more important than their own individual liberties. On each of the noteworthy occasions which U.S. government officials were portrayed having captured and tortured innocent suspects, enemy combatants had corrupted information that led U.S. government officials to those innocent citizens.

Actor Conducting Torture	Recipient of Torture				Total
	U.S. Executive Office Officials	U.S. Intelligence Community	Foreign or Enemy Combatants	Civilians	
U.S. Executive Office Officials	4 (36.4%)	5 (45.5%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (9.1%)	11
U.S. Intelligence Community	0	10 (15.9%)	35 (55.6%)	18 (28.6%)	63
Foreign or Enemy Combatants	4 (12.1%)	17 (51.5%)	2 (6.1%)	10 (30.3%)	33
Civilians	0	0	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	4
Total	8 (7.2%)	32 (28.8%)	41 (36.9%)	30 (27%)	111

H3 postulates foreign/enemy combatants will use torture predominantly on U.S. government officials. The hypothesis was found to be correct. As shown in Table 7, foreign/enemy

combatants torture U.S. government officials 63.5% of the time. U.S. intelligence community officials receive torture 51.5% of the total 63.5%.

H4 postulates the use of more violent torture will be portrayed as more successful on *24* than less violent methods. There is mixed support for this hypothesis. Some violent torture methods (those with less public approval according to the PIPA-Knowledge Networks Poll (2004)) were portrayed with relatively high success rates. As shown in Table 8, threats to harm the individual's family were portrayed successful 35.3% of the time, punching, kicking, and physical abuse of the individual were portrayed successful 42.6% of the time, and threats to shoot the individual were portrayed successful 61.5% of the time.

However, portrayals of stress positions were found to be successful 34.6% of the time, hooding of the individual was successful 50% of the time, and the portrayal of positive incentives had the highest success rate of any method with 66.7%. These methods are considered to be less violent and there is far more approval for such methods in scenarios of high-consequence, high-confidence according to the PIPA-Knowledge Networks Poll (2004).

RQ1 asked which actor would be portrayed as most successful when using torture methods. As shown in Table 9, the percentage of successful portrayals of torture was 75% when civilians tortured others, 50.8% when intelligence community officials tortured others, 48.5% when foreign or enemy combatants tortured others, and 18.2% successful for when U.S. executive branch officials used torture on others.

H4 and RQ1 show the success and failure of torture on *24* seem to carry little relation to the violence of the method employed or the actor employing the method of torture. U.S. intelligence community officials were portrayed with slightly higher success rates than foreign or enemy

combatants (50.8% as opposed to 48.5%) when shown using methods of torture. The astoundingly high success rate of 75% for the portrayals of civilians using torture is perhaps due to the very low number of scenes depicting civilians using torture (4 scenes of 111 total scenes). Surprisingly portrayals of positive incentives are more successful than any method of torture. Though threatening to shoot, harm the individuals family, and physically punching or kicking the individual had relatively high success rates as well. One possible reason for the unpredictable success/failure rate is that the episodes of torture were coded by scene. Meaning that one scene of torture was separated into multiple scenes depending on how many times the scene was broken up by commercials or transitions into another aspect of the show. Therefore, one “complete” scene of torture may be successful, but not until the scene is interrupted multiple times and those multiple times being subsequently coded as failures.

RQ2 ask whether portrayals of torture used most frequently on *24* would focus on methods with low approval by United States citizens.

The PIPA-Knowledge Networks Poll (2004) found that even in scenarios of high-confidence and of high-consequence American citizens disapproved of torture methods beyond that of stress positions, loud noise bombardment, hooding of the individual, and sleep deprivation. As one can see in Table 8, the television show *24* depicts torture most frequently in methods of threats to harm the individual’s family (10.8%), stress positions (16.6%), threats to shoot the individual (16.6%), punch, kick, and physically abuse (30.1%).

Table 8: Success and Failure of Torture Methods on 24.

Torture Method	Outcome (Percentage by Total Torture Scenes With Each Variable)		Total (Percent by Total Torture scenes)
	Failure	Success	
Positive Incentive	3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)	9 (5.7%)
Sleep Deprivation	3 (100%)	0	3 (1.9%)
Hooding	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	2 (1.2%)
Loud Noise	3 (100%)	0	3 (1.9%)
Stress Positions	17 (65.4%)	9 (34.6%)	26 (16.6%)
Threaten Dogs	0	0	0 (0%)
Deny Food And Water	0	0	0 (0%)
Threaten Shoot	10 (38.5%)	16 (61.5%)	26 (16.6%)
Heat	3 (100%)	0	3 (1.9%)
Naked	6 (85.7%)	1 (14.3%)	7 (4.4%)
Threaten Family	6 (64.7)	11 (35.3%)	17 (10.8%)
Electrics Shocks	7 (77.8%)	2 (22.2%)	9 (5.7%)
Kick, Punch, Physically Abuse	27(57.4%)	20 (42.6%)	47 (30.1%)
Water-Boarding	0	0	0 (0%)
Sexual-Humiliation	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	4 (2.4%)

Table 9: Cross-Tabulation. Outcomes of Torture Based on Actor Conducting Torture by Scene.

Outcome	Actor Involved in Torture Scene				Total
	Executive Branch Officials	Intelligence Community Officials	Foreign or Enemy Combatants	Civilians	
Failure	9 (81.8%)	31 (49.2%)	17 (51.5%)	1 (25%)	58 (52.3%)
Success	2 (18.2%)	32 (50.8%)	16 (48.5%)	3 (75.0%)	53 (47.7%)
Total	11	63	33	4	111

C. Focus Group Reactions

Research question 3 is answered through focus group discussion in an attempt to add context to the previously listed results. Though descriptive statistics were run on pre and post test survey responses, the number of participants in each focus group was too small to draw any statistically relevant conclusions from their survey responses.

Taken as a whole there were 30 completed surveys by 15 individuals (15 pre and 15 post) in three separate focus groups. The first focus group had six individuals who watched only *24*, focus group two had four individuals who watched only *The Shield*, and focus group three consisted of five individuals who watched both shows. Participants were asked to assume the scenario of high-consequence and high-confidence for all survey questions. Taking all the statistical data as a whole, subjects were far more likely to be in favor of virtually all forms of interrogation than what was found in the PIPA study. As shown in Table 10 there are only two categories that receive more opposition than support: made to go naked (43.3% in favor and 56.6% opposed) and sexual humiliation (20% in favor and 80% opposed). However, it should be of note that even these “low” numbers are still a higher percentage than approved in the

nationwide survey for the two categories. Virtually all of the other more extreme forms of interrogation receive majority support with the lone exception of harming the individual's family to gain information. One of the participants of the *24* and *The Shield* watching focus group commented on that very scenario after seeing on the show Jack Bauer employs that tactic successfully on a detainee:

“To me that is never right under any circumstance. Children should not have to suffer for what a parent has done. Even if that is the only vulnerability a person or terrorist has, there has to be another way. Torture him all you want, but not his kids.”

Focus Group 3 Respondent

The largest shifts of opinion pre and post test concerned whether or not government should be restricted from inflicting cruel and unusual punishments and whether or not there should be exceptions to rules restricting torture. Pretests on whether or not government should be restricted from inflicting cruel and unusual punishments showed 9 opposed to restrictions and 5 in favor of restrictions. Post tests of the same question showed 13 opposed and only 2 in favor of restrictions. Pretests on whether or not there should be exceptions to rules restricting torture showed 9 supporting exceptions and 5 in opposition to them. Post tests of the question showed 13 supporting exceptions and 2 in opposition to them. Participants in all of the focus groups spoke on these shifts and on the themes of balancing a necessary evil with potential abuses of power, the overall morality of such actions, and whether or not torture is ultimately a successful practice or not.

Table 10: All Survey Responses to Methods of Interrogation by All Group Participants.		
Method of Interrogation	Favor	Oppose
Sleep Deprivation	22 (73.3%)	8 (26.7%)
Hooding	22 (73.3%)	8 (26.7%)
Loud Noise	24 (80%)	6 (20%)
Stress Positions	28 (93.3%)	2 (6.7%)
Threaten Dogs	27 (90%)	3 (10%)
Deny Food And Water	19 (69.3%)	11 (36.7%)
Threaten Shoot	25 (83.3%)	5 (16.7%)
Heat	20 (66.7%)	10 (33.3%)
Naked	13 (43.3%)	17 (56.6%)
Threaten Family	15 (50%)	15 (50%)
Electrics Shocks	21 (70%)	9 (30%)
Kick, Punch, Physically Abuse	24 (80%)	6 (20%)
Water-Boarding	22 (73.3%)	8 (26.7%)
Sexual-Humiliation	6 (20%)	24 (80%)
Positive Incentive	23 (76.7%)	7 (23.3%)

All of the focus groups were asked if the show(s) had altered their perception of how and when torture is used and/or should be used. Members of focus groups 1 and 3 wrestled more with potential abuses of power and the success of torture and only briefly touched on the question of morality.

“I don’t think a show can change my opinion of something like this, maybe on something less important or on something I don’t have an opinion on already it could. But for me, it [torture] is like abortion or something like that, my mind is made up. I see it as an issue of power, no matter what someone has to have way too much power to be allowed to torture someone like these guys do. And once someone has power like that it’s not going to go away. I see in a situation like with a bomb or something you have to allow this to go on, but it doesn’t mean there should be laws for allowing it.”

Focus Group 1 Respondent

“The show didn’t change my opinion of torture, people know that horrible stuff goes down that the most people don’t want to know about and as far as it being too much power it is not like government is just grabbing random people off the street. I am for torturing the hell out of someone if they are planning something or even if they may be planning something; break whatever you have to break man. Guys like Jack Bauer know how to handle those kinds of people. I can see where it can get, I see where you can get in trouble allowing people to do that, but I think it is worth it”

Focus Group 1 Respondent

“I think that torture works, in some way shape or form it will work. Like when Jack Bauer had his agents shoot that guy’s [a detainee] son. At some point some amount of pain is going to make you crack. You can’t tell me if someone was ripping out your fingernails or something horrible like that, that you wouldn’t tell them what they want to know. But who are you going to put in charge of that?” Focus Group 3 respondent.

“I am not saying it is right or wrong, but if you have lives on the line and some jerk needs to have his bell rung to save them, you do it. Nobody can take everything, at some point everyone breaks”

Focus Group 3 Respondent

Viewers of The Shield only, members of focus group 2, had more difficulty with the morality of torture and used the show itself to validate some of their claims.

“It’s weird being questioned on stuff like that because you don’t really know what you are supposed to say. I mean obviously [stressed] you don’t think it is cool to go around torturing people all the time, and sometimes the wrong people are going to get caught up in it all, but ultimately you can’t really be against it unless you are just an idiot. That Mexican guy [the detainee] was the wrong guy, but it sends a message whether it is the right person or not”

Focus Group 2 respondent

“It was a very graphic scene [police officers torturing a detainee] and a horrible way for a person to die, but it is not like the person was ‘innocent’ innocent. He was involved in some pretty shady stuff---he was a drug dealer and murderer, and the cops killed him but it was not as if he had not done other crimes to deserve being punished...I am not saying he deserved all that, but he deserved something.”

Focus Group 2 Respondent

Final pre and post test results for the individual focus groups were very similar in most all categories. All groups considered favorably the use of stress positions, threatening to use dogs on

the individuals, and threats to shoot the individual. There was moderate support for physically beating a detainee, electric shocks, hooding, and stress positions. As mentioned earlier there was noticeably low support for harming the detainee's family and several of the participants commented on the subject. The general agreement in all of the groups, but specifically group 3, was that children should not have to pay for the sins of the father.

“Going after someone's family is pretty harsh, even the way it was on the show where they just kidnapped them. I wouldn't want someone coming after me for something my dad or mom did.”

Focus Group 3 Respondent

There was a stated opposition to sexual humiliation and noticeably low scores for favoring depriving an individual of clothing. Though some of the comments on this topic were sensitive, and others quite colorful, the participants seemed to have little understanding how these practices could manifest as torture or how such torture would be carried out. Of note is that neither programs watched by focus group participants contained any sexual humiliation or deprivation of clothing. Neither sexual humiliation nor deprivation of clothing was found to be common as methods of torture on 24. Sexual humiliation occurred only 4 times (2.4%) and deprivation of clothing/made to go naked occurred 7 times (4.4%). As a result the only conceptions of these forms of torture for audience members were the news media presentation of the Abu Ghraib prisoner scandal.

“How do you sexually humiliate someone for torture? Is that like Abu Ghraib kind of stuff?”

Focus Group 1 Respondent

“Made to go naked doesn't even seem like torture, that and putting a sack over their heads [hooding] are what some people consider a good night. I don't see how that is torture, like when they made those prisoners [Abu Ghraib detainees] stack up in a pyramid naked on each other, some of them might have liked that. But seriously that is not torture, at least to me.”

Focus Group 3 Respondent

As shown in Table 11, shifts in pre and post test results concerning the various methods of torture showed the most dramatic changes in the categories of: sleep deprivation (from 60% in favor to 86.7% in favor), hooding of the detainee (from 60% in favor to 86.7% in favor), punching and kicking the detainee (from 66.7% in favor to 93.3% in favor). Only stress positions (93.3% in favor of) and water-boarding (73.3% in favor) remained constant through pre and post testing. Most respondents were adamant in their support of punching and kicking and various forms of physical abuse towards detainees in the scenario of high-confidence, high consequence.

“It’s not abuse when there is a bomb about to go off, I’m sorry, it is just what has to be done.”

Focus Group 3 Respondent

“I think it is all horrible, and even though they killed that guy [police killing the detainee in The Shield] I am more for beating someone and you know, punching, than for the psychological tactics that may have later affects on you later on. At least a bruise or broken bone will heal.”

Focus Group 2 Respondent

“I am for all that, I checked yes on all that stuff, they [presumably enemy combatants] would do it to me in a second if they thought I knew something or one of their towns were at stake.”

Focus Group 2 Respondent

Overall in 9 of the 15 (60%) categories the overall post test scores moved to more favorable views of torture methods, 4 (26.6%) categories moved to more negative views of torture methods, and 2 (13.3%) categories had no change. With the exception of the category of sexual humiliation, all the categories that moved to more negative views of torture had only one net change in response. 6 of the categories moving to a more favorable view of torture methods had multiple net response changes. The net results seem to suggest visual exposure to violent

torture methods and questioning on a multitude of methods within the circumstance of high-confidence, high consequence shifts respondents to more favorable views of torture.

Whether through pre and post test opinion change or concretely held belief, it was obvious through discussion in the focus groups that the visual representations of torture on the entertainment programs played a role in the audience's understanding of how tortured was carried out. In most cases the scenes of torture added validation and context to an already held position. If one was against torture there were obvious breaks of conduct on both shows, in one scene agent Jack Bauer defies a direct order by the President telling him not to torture someone. The show provides through that portrayal of lack of regulation and rules a way for audiences to construct an argument against using torture. However, if one is supportive of torturing detainees the show provides ample opportunity for such an argument through the scenario of high-confidence, high consequence.

Entertainment television can not only inform one of supportive information for a belief, but also frame the way in which the arguments itself is debated. In this case, entertainment media debates torture on the grounds of morality for the individual (for those opposed to torture) versus obligation to a greater good (for those supportive of torture). Through this presentation many other potential frames are left out (e.g. capturing the correct suspect, low consequence, and/or low confidence scenarios). When asked if they believed the presentation of various methods of torture in the varying contexts where accurate, almost everyone conceded that at least on some occasions these entertainment media presentations were realistic.

“I mean, I guess it is real in some ways, some of this stuff has to happen...so long as you break Jack Bauer down into about 4 or 5 different people.”

Focus Group 1 Respondent

“I believe the portrayals are realistic enough on shows like this. I don’t think they can be resolved in 24 hours or even 24 days, but there is a basis for it somewhere.”

Focus Group 1 Respondent

“You hear all the time on the History Channel or Discovery Channel how 20 or 30 years ago we were like 3 seconds from WWII because there was a paper jam on the sub or something stupid like that, and that is the stuff they admit to. I can imagine stuff like this happens way more than I want to know about.”

Focus Group 3 Respondent

Method of Interrogation	Pre-Test Reactions		Post-Test Reactions	
	Favor	Oppose	Favor	Oppose
Sleep Deprivation	9 (60%)	6 (40%)	13 (86.7%)	2 (13.2%)
Hooding	9 (60%)	6 (40%)	13 (86.7%)	2 (13.2%)
Loud Noise	11 (73.3%)	4 (26.7%)	13 (86.7%)	2 (13.2%)
Stress Positions	14 (93.3%)	1 (6.7%)	14 (93.3%)	1 (6.7%)
Threaten Dogs	14 (93.3%)	1 (6.7%)	13 (86.7%)	2 (13.2%)
Deny Food And Water	9 (60%)	6 (40%)	10 (66.7%)	5 (33.3%)
Threaten Shoot	13 (86.7%)	2 (13.2%)	12 (80%)	3 (20%)
Heat	9 (60%)	6 (40%)	11 (73.3%)	4 (26.7%)
Naked	5 (33.3%)	10 (66.7%)	8 (53.3%)	7 (46.7%)
Threaten Family	7 (46.7%)	8 (53.3%)	8 (53.3%)	7 (46.7%)
Electrics Shocks	11 (73.3%)	4 (26.7%)	10 (66.7%)	5 (33.3%)
Kick, Punch, Physically Abuse	10 (66.7%)	5 (33.3%)	14 (93.3%)	1 (6.7%)
Water-Boarding	11 (73.3%)	4 (26.7%)	11 (73.3%)	4 (26.7%)
Sexual-Humiliation	4 (26.7%)	11 (73.3%)	2 (13.3%)	13 (86.7%)
Positive Incentive	11 (73.3%)	4 (26.7%)	12 (80%)	3 (20%)

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of entertainment media in influencing public opinion and providing “backstage” context from which opinions may be formed. The study examined the portrayal of torture on the television series *24* in order to show how entertainment media can provide context for certain issues to be evaluated by audiences. The show presented torture in a very specific and consistent manner throughout the years evaluated. The show presents torture most often in the scenario of high-confidence, high-consequence where the individuals being tortured by U.S. government officials are tortured in order to extract vital information. The show’s portrayal of torture in such scenarios coupled with backstage context helps explain why many political elites use examples from the show as justifications for torture in their political discourse. Seeing horrifying dangers around every corner and looming terrorist attacks thwarted in the last seconds individuals willing to put aside all questions of individual freedoms and rule of law for an obvious “greater good” has consequences to the viewer. It presents and places a fictional world of dangers and consequences at the viewer’s doorstep in the packaging of reality. The viewer is left to question whether or not such a world exists. If the viewer acknowledges that such a world does in fact exist and such events do occur, even occasionally, then the viewer’s evaluations on the uses and appropriateness of torture are subject to alteration. The show and those like create more justifiable scenarios for the use of torture through backstage event presentations.

Through the focus group responses one can see those audience members using the very justifications for torture presented in the show. Participants felt the presentations of torture on the shows to be at least somewhat representative of reality. Participants repeatedly referred to the scenario of high-consequence, high-confidence, though they did not necessarily use that

terminology, as a way to validate their support for various methods of torture. This is not to argue that participants formed these opinions solely from exposure to fictional representations of torture. Instead, this research postulates that such portrayals of torture give further context and examples to existing beliefs. For example an audience member might be supportive of torture only in scenarios of high-consequence, high-confidence. If that audience member is exposed to repeated examples of such scenarios and given “backstage” context portraying these scenarios as realistically possible, the audience member may become more supportive of torture overall. The audience member becomes more supportive because the most descriptive discourse he/she has available on any subject relating to torture comes from *24*. As a result, the very debate regarding torture is given set parameters.

Even if the scenario of high-consequence, high-confidence never occurs in reality, viewers of *24* are given a front row seat to the potential for such a scenario every Monday night. The show blatantly portrays government as suppressing information of the high-consequence, high-confidence scenario in order to “protect the public” or prevent mass hysteria therefore providing rationalization for viewers as to why the public never hears about scenarios of high-consequence, high-confidence. It is not because they do not occur, but rather because government will not tell the public.

This is not to argue portraying the scenario high-consequence, high-confidence in entertainment media serves as reality for all audience members or that audiences are not savvy enough to distinguish fiction from reality. Rather it implies that fictional representations in entertainment television can enter into discussions and serve as examples alongside actual events. In the example of torture, reasoning against torture supported by factual evidence displaying how the United States carried out torture on detainees at Abu Ghraib prison is pitted

against images of Jack Bauer beating vital information out of a terrorist to prevent a nuclear holocaust. The potential for entertainment media to inform, reinforce, and perhaps even alter public opinion is rooted on a few basic premises. One, the entertainment must have at least some basis in reality. Two, the entertainment media must present context to the reality it represents that is unavailable through other traditional media. Three, the presentation of that context must be consistent so that the fictional representation may find its way into the dialogue and debate surrounding reality. Upon satisfying these criteria entertainment media can be used as a reference point on a host of events and circumstances.

The question of how entertainment media through fictional presentations of politically charged issues such as torture can influence, inform, or alter political discourse is a difficult one to answer. It would be foolish to assert that entertainment media is somehow completely independent in its formulation of a presentation of such an issue. Certainly there are influences from the news media, from already existing political dialogue, and from general public opinion on the issue. The degree to which any or all of these factors influence how entertainment media chooses to portray an issue is highly subjective and debatable. Whether government officials are swayed in their opinion by an entertainment media portrayal of an issue, or they choose an entertainment media portrayal of an issue that fits into their existing belief system is not the point. The point is that entertainment media portrayals can be and are used alongside factual evidence at the highest levels of government as a way to validate opinion and spur on debate.

This research is an attempt to shift away from classic thoughts on how entertainment media can influence behavior towards seeing entertainment media as a viable vehicle for bringing forth, informing, and reinforcing political discourse. Therefore the question of whether or not violence in video games may make a child more aggressive may not be nearly as important as how an

entertainment television show such as *Law and Order* depict a jury's verdict on the same topic. How the argument is formed within the show, what facts are brought to light, and which elements are added and/or exaggerated to give an audience member context may perhaps how future laws and/or policies dealing with the subject are formed.

Entertainment media may also influence how the actual events they portray fictionally are carried out. One example already mentioned in the text is that of army interrogators using tactics displayed on *24*, another such example could be what is known as the “*CSI* effect.” The entertainment program *CSI* provides viewers with a portrayal of how crime scenes are investigated, what processes should be carried out in which circumstances, and how much technology such as DNA/RNA spectral analysis should be relied on. Not only are jurors more receptive of information conforming to the fictional portrayals they see on *CSI*, those entering the field and those already in the field of forensic science are influenced by *CSI*. Police departments have stated that, in an effort to increase their student numbers, universities are offering unsuitable courses based on the expectations of *CSI* type crime solving that has left graduates unprepared for real-world forensic work (BBC, 2003). Entertainment media has this effect because the fictional portrayal of an issue, in this case forensic science, enters into the discourse surrounding forensic science as a reality or alongside other realities. Therefore policies and laws concerning such an issue carry with it effects from entertainment media. Not all so dramatic as these examples listed, but very real and consequential nevertheless.

Future research should focus on how entertainment media and news media cover the same subject and how such coverage conflicts or conforms to one another. From there researchers can construct a model of how entertainment media and news media can aid and/or hinder one another. Does conflict between news media and entertainment media on a given subject allow

elites to control how the dialogue on a subject is constructed? Is the opposite true when entertainment media and news media reinforce one another in opposition to elite discourse?

As with all research, study does not definitively answer all these questions about the effects of entertainment media on public attitudes. However, this research is one attempt in a growing body of literature devoted to furthering our understanding of the potential of entertainment media on public opinion.

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APPENDIX A: THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

PIPA-Knowledge Networks Poll:

Americans on Detention, Torture, and the War on Terrorism

Questionnaire

[The following are the questions posed to focus groups for this study. It represents only a partial of the total PIPA/Knowledge Networks Poll]

Q1. The US has signed a number of treaties establishing international laws governing how a country, in the context of armed conflict, must treat an individual it has detained—that is, has captured and is holding. These rules limit what the US can do to detainees and what other countries can do when they detain Americans. Do you favor or oppose having such laws?

Q2. STATEMENT: Here are some legal requirements for the treatment of detainees that are part of international laws the US has agreed to. Please say whether you favor or oppose having these legal requirements.

2a. The names of all detainees must be registered and made available to the detainee's government.

2c. An international humanitarian organization like the Red Cross should have access to the

2d. Detainees have the right to communicate their whereabouts to a family member.

Q8. Please just give your impression. What percentage of the people being held at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq were terrorists or insurgents who had attacked US troops or Iraqi civilians?

Q11. As you may know, the Eighth Amendment of the US Constitution forbids the government from inflicting cruel and unusual punishments. Do you think that:

a. The government should be restricted from inflicting cruel and unusual punishments in all cases

b. It is too restrictive to say that the government can never inflict cruel and unusual punishments

c. (No answer)

Q14a. Governments should never use physical torture

Q15a. If another government were to use physical torture against an American it was detaining, would you find this acceptable or unacceptable?

Q14b. Governments should never threaten physical torture

Q15b. If another government were to threaten physical torture against an American it was detaining, would you find this acceptable or unacceptable?

Q14c. Governments should never use mental torture (such as making someone think that they or their family members will be killed)

Q15c. If another government were to use mental torture against an American it was detaining, would you find this acceptable or unacceptable?

Q14d. Governments should never use humiliating or degrading treatment

Q15d. If another government were to use humiliating and degrading treatment against an American it was detaining, would you find this acceptable or unacceptable?

Q16. Given what we learned from the September 11 attacks, we cannot afford to tie our hands by declaring off limits any method for getting information that could be useful in the war on terrorism.

Q17. Whenever possible, military interrogators should limit themselves to methods that are humane and consistent with international conventions. However, at times, military necessity may call for making exceptions to these rules.

Q21. Research says that torture and abuse is not an effective way to get information out of people because people will lie just to get the torture to stop. Rather, it is better to use positive incentives.

SC-4. STATEMENT: Let's say that the US is holding someone prisoner and intelligence sources say that there is a strong chance that this person has information about a possible terrorist attack on the US that may prove critical to stopping the attack, but this person denies having such information. Please select whether you would favor or oppose using each of the following methods as a way of trying to get the prisoner to reveal the information he may have.

Q26a. Not allowing the detainee to sleep

Q26b. Keeping a hood over the detainee's head for long periods of time

Q26c. Bombarding the detainee with loud noise for long periods of time

Q26d. Threatening to shoot the detainee

Q26e. Exposing the detainee to extreme heat or cold

Q26f. Withholding food and water

Q26g. Punching or kicking the detainee

Q26h. Making the detainee go naked

Q26i. Holding the detainee's head under water

Q26j. Threatening to harm the detainee's family members

Q26k. Applying electric shocks to the detainee

Q26l. Sexually humiliating the detainee

Q26m. Using threatening dogs to frighten detainees

Q26n. Offering detainees a positive incentive for giving information

Q26o. Forcing detainees to remain in a physically stressful position for an extended period

Demographic data

APPENDIX B: CODING GUIDE

Consequences:

1. Modest consequences
2. High consequences facing the State if information is not obtained. High consequences are differentiated between modest consequences on the basis of verbal information provided to the viewer by the interrogators (an example of a scenario featuring high consequence would mention multiple “lives being at stake” or in immediate threat versus a scenario of modest consequence where “protection of office” or “security” interests are mentioned but not clearly defined in terms of consequence).

Confidence:

1. modest confidence the individual has vital information
2. high confidence the individual has vital information to the resolution of some greater conflict, potential conflict, or threat facing the State. Confidence is determined by examination of the portrayal presented to the viewer on the guilt or innocence of the actor being tortured.

Actors:

The actor(s) involved in interrogating subjects and the subjects being tortured are coded within one of the following categories:

1. United States Executive branch Officers/delegates,
2. United States Intelligence Community Officials,
3. Foreign/Enemy Combatants,
4. civilians.

Approval of Torture Methods:

The approval of the torture methods are coded on a basis of:

1. United States Executive branch approval,
2. United States Intelligence Community approval,
3. Foreign/Enemy Combatants approval,
4. Actions independent of any political/military affiliation.

Categories of Torture coded as used: 1 or unused: 0

1.sleep deprivation, 2.hooding of the individual, 3.use of loud noise against the individual, 4.stress positions, 5.threatening with dogs, 6.denying food or water, 7.threatening to shoot the individual, 8. exposure to extreme temperatures, 9. made to go naked, 10. threats to harm the

individual's family, 11. use of electric shocks, 12. punching or kicking the individual, 13. water boarding (simulated drowning), 14. positive incentives, and 15. sexual humiliation

Success

- 0. Unsuccessful
- 1. Successful

Reason/Justification

- 1. To gain vital information
- 2. To gain direct retribution (specific to the actor being tortured as retribution for a previous direct action taken against the torturer)
- 3. Personal motivation/ego satisfaction

VITA

Skye Chance Cooley was born in March 21st 1983 in Lake Charles Louisiana. He graduated from Denham Springs High School with honors. He was published in the book Teen Ink: What Matters, the article received award in National High School literary competition. He completed his undergraduate degree in Political Science from Louisiana State University in May of 2005 with a concentration in international affairs. He received a minor in international studies. During his undergraduate studies he participated in the LSU in Ireland study abroad program for two summer semesters where he was enrolled at Trinity College in Dublin and the University of Galway, in Galway Ireland. He will receive his master's degree in communications from Louisiana State University in May of 2008. Following the completion of his Master of Mass Communication, he will pursue his doctorate.

Skye received Honorable Mention for the J. William Snorgrass Memorial Award for Outstanding Paper on a Minorities Topic at the American Journalism Historians Association in Richmond, Virginia on October 14, 2007. He was a recipient of a graduate assistantship stipend and tuition waiver for graduate school from the Manship School of Mass Communication. He was admitted into the Undergraduate Excellence Program at Louisiana State University. Skye is a member of the American Journalism Historians Associations, AIESEC international student worker exchange program, and a volunteer for the Red Cross.

He was a graduate assistant with Dr. Jinx Broussard researching and writing on the evolution of the minority press. He is co-Author of "*Henry Perry*" with Dr. Broussard: Presented at the Symposium on the 19th Century Press, the Civil War, and Free Expression on November 10th, 2007, at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He is co-Author of "*Ebony's Era Bell Thompson Travels the World to Tell the True Story*" with Dr. Broussard: which was presented at

the American Journalism Historians Association in Richmond, Virginia on October 13th, 2007.

He is co-Author of “*Ebony Magazine Covers Africa*” with Dr. Broussard: which was submitted for publication to the American Journalism Historians Association on October 5th, 2007.

He was an editorial consultant for Pennington Biomedical Research Center developing marketing concepts for technologies patented in the Center’s technology transfer office under Dr. Anne Jarrett. His research interests include advertising development in emerging media, entertainment media’s role in shaping public opinion, and historical studies concerning the minority press.

His current research projects examine how entertainment television programs can help shape public opinion and public discourse on topics/events through “backstage” presentations. He also researches how notable figures in the black press presented perspectives far different than those of the mainstream media on a host of issues: civil rights, foreign news and events, imperialism, communism and other political ideologies.