

Abstract

Title of dissertation: TEXTUALIZATION OF PAT TILLMAN:
 UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
 PERSON, DISCOURSE, AND IDEOLOGY

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This project is a critical examination of the ways in which the life and death of Pat Tillman were shaped into a discursive *Pat Tillman*. This is not a project that examines the life led by the person Pat Tillman. The discursive *Pat Tillman* can be found in the pages of magazines, on television, invoked by politicians, and even memorialized in song. It is *Pat Tillman*, the discursive creation, that is my focus. In this project I take for granted that *Pat Tillman* only existed in places like the pages of books or on film. What is not lost on me and should not be lost on the reader of this project is my own participation in this process. With this project I have entered into the very discourses that I seek to critique. This is an analysis of the existence of a *Pat Tillman* that many people still know and the ideas that help shape how that existence is communicated.

My critique focuses on the existence of a discursive *Pat Tillman* as a rhetorical phenomenon, drawing upon scholarship that can inform an understanding of how the life

of Pat Tillman became the material for public discourse. My analysis interconnects Michel Foucault's (1972) work on knowledge and discourse with Michael Calvin McGee (1990) referred to as rhetorical fragments, in order to provide a foundation for understanding the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman*. Using how discourse producer connected various facts, stories, and images with conceptions of heroism, masculinity, and the American Dream, I reveal how the life and death of Pat Tillman was used as the material to represent political and cultural positions that exist external to that life. Through an analysis of the various news reports, books, documentaries, blogs, and other mediated texts that were produced in response to the life and death of Pat Tillman, this study presents a clearer picture of what is meant by "fragmentation" in critical analysis.

THE TEXTUALIZATION OF PAT TILLMAN:
UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
PERSON, DISCOURSE, AND IDEOLOGY

by

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Preface

The impetus for this project comes from a very personal place. My father once told me that nothing makes your own mortality more apparent than the death of your contemporaries. No single event in my life has made those words ring truer than the death of my childhood friend Pat Tillman. My relationship with Pat Tillman dates back to a soccer team I played on when I was just three years old. From there, Pat Tillman became a person I knew as a friend, a teammate, and at times a rival (among other things). However, as is the case with many childhood relationships, Pat Tillman and I took different paths. Like most Americans, I experienced his decision to serve in the Army and his subsequent death through its public mediation. In the time since his death, I have found myself in a liminal space having two different types of experience. On one hand, there were memories of a person called Tilly, PT, or (often immediately after some childhood indiscretion) Patrick. That person comes up in conversations with my mother or while reminiscing with a friend about days that I thought I had long since forgotten. On the other hand, there are biographies, television specials, and documentaries that have created a *Pat Tillman* foreign to me. I use italics to distinguish the constructed *Pat Tillman* from the Pat Tillman I knew because *Pat Tillman* is not so much a person as a product of public discourse. *Pat Tillman* is based on the life led by Pat Tillman, but the person I knew is not *Pat Tillman* and *Pat Tillman* is not the person that I knew.

My instincts about this *Pat Tillman* were confirmed by my discussions with family and friends. They were particularly validated by my conversations with Pat Tillman's mother, Mary (or Dannie as my mother calls her, but always Mrs. Tillman to me), and his brother, Kevin. As we talked, I began to find myself looking for ways to

discuss the distinction between the person that I had admired, feared, loathed, and respected at different points throughout my childhood and the vaunted figure that was all around me. To be certain, Pat Tillman was never perfect, but he was someone that I could always count on even when we did not see eye to eye. He was a person of great strength and substance that has given way to an existence without any substance at all. Both Mrs. Tillman and Kevin discussed a similar feeling, a sense that these people talking about Pat did not really “know” the person that had been a part of our lives. It was with this in mind that I set out to study the existence of *Pat Tillman*. Drawing upon my training as a rhetorical critic, I began to see *Pat Tillman* as a rhetorical creation.

It is safe to say that the exigence of this project was a personal necessity, but I believe that the product is of public benefit. Out of my desire to understand my experience came the opportunity to talk about the public existence of public figures. This is by no means a study of celebrity. That work is a vast and important field that has contributed to my examination, but this criticism is about something distinct from a person. Just as discussions of George Washington or Babe Ruth would seem trivialized by simply labeling them as a celebrity, Pat Tillman grew to be something different. While Pat Tillman may never achieve the level of acclaim of those figures, what puts him in the same discussion is that since their passing they have spurred investigations and mythologies that often have very little to do with the life of a person. The discourses that have been produced have more to do with how that life can speak to the culture that person left behind. In fact, *George Washington*, *Babe Ruth*, and *Pat Tillman* still exist in contemporary U.S. culture despite the fact that the people they represent have died. So, instead of discussing Pat Tillman as a celebrity, I have chosen to focus on *Pat Tillman* as

a product. *Pat Tillman* is a creation of the many journalists, politicians, pundits, celebrities, and various other public figures who chose to employ the life of Pat Tillman as means to comment on U.S. culture.

To analyze the rhetorical existence of *Pat Tillman*, I have drawn upon scholarship that rang true with my experience of how the life of Pat Tillman became the material for public discourse. Building from Michel Foucault's (1972) work on knowledge and discourse, the approach to criticism I have employed in this project is consistent with my experience of *Pat Tillman*. It also offers some insight into how Foucault's discursive approach can provide a basis for understanding the distinction between a person and a characterization. By focusing on what Michael Calvin McGee (1990) referred to as rhetorical fragments, I have shown that the building blocks of *Pat Tillman* were used to link the life of Pat Tillman to political and cultural beliefs that exist external to that life. Their works formed the basis for my analysis.

I go into greater detail about how these and other works inspired my analysis in my introduction, but here it suffices to say that this is not a project that examines the life led by the person Pat Tillman. *Pat Tillman* can be found in the pages of magazines (Lacayo 2004; Smith 2004), on television (Discovery Times 2007), invoked by politicians (McCain 2004e), and even memorialized in song (Pearl Jam 2006; Madden 2006). It is *Pat Tillman*, the discursive creation, I examine. In this project I take for granted that *Pat Tillman* only existed in places like the pages of books or on film. What is not lost on me and should not be lost on the reader of this project is my own participation in this process. With this project I have entered into the very discourses that I seek to

discuss. This is an analysis of the existence of a *Pat Tillman* that many people still know and the ideas that help shape how that existence is communicated.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to all who serve,
either in the military, in the community, or at home.

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Any time you embark upon a project of this nature, there are bound to be numerous people that provided support along the way. This project is no different. I owe a debt of gratitude to a great number of people, not all of which I will mention here. However, it needs to be said upfront that my deepest and sincerest thanks go out to all the people that helped make the completion of this project possible.

To begin with, I would like to thank my wife. I began this project a single man, and never would have thought that someone would have the patience and understanding to marry me during this tumultuous period in my life. She did, and I am forever in her debt. I would also like to thank my parents, Art and Pat Herbig. They have been there from the beginning and have always thought more of me than I could ever live up to. Thanks also to my brother, Scott Herbig, who often pretended to be interested in the ramblings of an incoherent graduate student and wanted to be supportive. To my wife's family, Dianna, Michael, Claire, Ben, Leticia, Jess, and Anna, thank you for your caring and concern. Your influence helped to keep both of us sane.

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Introduction

“I don’t believe it!” conservative commentator Ann Coulter (2005a) exclaimed.¹ After hearing that the man she once described as “an American original – virtuous, pure and masculine like only an American male can be” was her political opposite (Coulter 2004, para. 15), all she could muster was disbelief. To understand Coulter’s moment of doubt, one has to look back to an article she published entitled “2004 Highlights and Lowlifes” (2004). In her article, Coulter described Republican George W. Bush’s victory over Democrat John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election as a win for “‘moral values’ over an America-bashing trophy husband” (para. 1). She rejoiced in blows struck against the credibility of “liberal” media outlets CBS News and the *New York Times* (2004, para. 2–3). She mocked attempts by Democrats such as San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom to advocate for the right of same-sex couples to marry. Coulter also celebrated the efforts of American soldiers who had “risked their lives to liberate 50 million Iraqis and Afghans” (para. 19). From the presidential victory to the example set by soldiers who were fighting the War on Terror, Coulter recounted the events of 2004 as a series of Republican successes that represented validation of “what is best about America” (2004, para. 21).

In that same article, Coulter took particular note of the passing of a special soldier who she described as an “American hero” (para. 14). She singled out this soldier’s sacrifice because of “his decision to leave pro football in the prime of his career and join

¹ As is the case in this instance, many of the texts that are analyzed throughout this project represent transcriptions of recordings of audio-visual materials. When possible, I have produced those transcriptions based on recordings of the actual program (many of which were graciously provided by Amir Bar-Lev and the makers of the film *The Tillman Story*). In some instances, however, I have used the transcripts that were distributed via LexisNexis. As per Gaines (2010), I have given preference to the audio-visual material whenever possible.

the Army Rangers” (para. 16). Coulter contrasted the patriotism of this soldier, who was awarded one of the military’s highest honors, the Silver Star, with protests lodged by John Kerry against the Vietnam War.² She distinguished the fact that he “wanted no publicity and granted no interviews” from “Democrats” who would have exploited their military service for political gain (para. 16). According to Coulter, “there is not another country in the world – certainly not in continental Europe – that could have produced a Pat Tillman” (para. 18). Coulter’s descriptions of the life and death of Pat Tillman cast him as a war hero that she positioned as the antithesis of her rivals and an exemplification of her perspectives.

Then, on September 27, 2005, less than a year after Coulter published her article, she appeared on the television program *Hannity & Colmes* to promote a book entitled *How to Talk to a Liberal (If You Must)* (2005b). During her appearance, liberal commentator Alan Colmes confronted Coulter (2005a) with revelations from Tillman’s mother that he “was a Noam Chomsky fan, was going to vote for John Kerry, [and] was against the war in Iraq.” Colmes wanted to know if Coulter wished to retract her previous statements about Tillman based on “what you [Coulter] say about liberals and Democrats.” All she could respond with was “No. But I don’t believe it” (2005). Despite the fact that Ann Coulter never met Pat Tillman, she repeatedly asserted her doubts about the veracity of Colmes’s claims and thus the description of Tillman by his own mother.

² John Kerry had also been a U.S. soldier, but he survived his service and had gone on to become a Massachusetts Senator. During Kerry’s campaign for the presidency, a group called the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth accused Kerry of lying about the actions that led to him being awarded a Bronze Star, a Silver Star, and three Purple Hearts and accused Kerry of betraying the “men and women he served with in Vietnam” by demonstrating against the war after returning home (Swift Boat, 2004). Despite the fact that the claims of Swift Boat Veterans for Truth were widely discredited, their television ads had a profound impact on the 2004 presidential election (Reyes, 2006; Dionisopoulos, 2009; Rieder, 2004). The fact that these claims were publicly refuted did not stop Coulter from taking space in her article to thank them for the public’s distrust of Kerry (2004, para. 5).

She refused to accept that Pat Tillman was anyone other than the person that *she* described.

Coulter's disbelief is a clear example of the distinction between Pat Tillman and *Pat Tillman*.³ There was an actual person Pat Tillman who lived a life. That person played in the National Football League (NFL) and joined the military, just as Coulter discussed in her article, but that person had also discussed America's presence in Iraq as illegal and expressed a desire to vote for John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election (Collier 2005). Then there was *Pat Tillman*. *Pat Tillman* could take different forms based on how people like Coulter and Colmes chose to characterize the actions of Pat Tillman. Coulter pieced together her *Pat Tillman* using such evidence as his decision to enlist (2004, para. 15) and an interview in which Tillman claimed that he had not "done a damn thing" in reference to the insignificance of his football career (para. 17). These moments were presented as the actions of a war hero who Coulter aligned with the agenda of a party that had been responsible for the decision to fight. In response to Coulter's characterization, Alan Colmes discussed an alternative *Pat Tillman* that contradicted Coulter in order to challenge her on her positions regarding liberals. He employed information about Pat Tillman that was brought to light following Robert Collier's (2005) interviews with members of Tillman's platoon and his parents. Both Coulter and Colmes based their versions of *Pat Tillman* on the life led by Pat Tillman, but each employed different aspects and events from that life as a means to promote their own political perspectives.

³ For the purposes of this study, Pat Tillman (Roman font) will refer to the actions of the actual person and *Pat Tillman* (italics) will refer to the rhetorical phenomenon that is the focus of my criticism.

Their exchange is just one example of how bits of information about Pat Tillman became the material for the creation of various, and at times competing, versions of *Pat Tillman*. Distinct from the person who was born in 1976, the origins of the *Pat Tillman* at the focus of this project can be traced back to when the actual person, Pat Tillman, chose to leave his professional football career to become an Army Ranger. As a linebacker at Arizona State University, and then as safety for the Arizona Cardinals, Tillman enjoyed limited fame as an athlete who had battled against the underestimation of his abilities throughout his career (Layden 1997; Smith 2004). Following his enlistment, however, the attention paid to his decision created a *Pat Tillman* that was more than just an overachieving athlete. Television host Bill Maher (2002) discussed Tillman's decision as an example of a "real hero." CNN correspondent Casey Wian (2002) traced the historical roots of Tillman's decision and argued that he was "the lone [modern] example" of a past tradition of athletes who took up arms in defense of their nation. Radio host Steak Shapiro (2002) raved that "He's a true American. He's a true gentleman. He's a man trying to represent his country." In response to the actual Pat Tillman's willingness to leave millions of dollars and an enviable career, the public discussion of his actions by Maher, Wian, Shapiro, and others (i.e., Olson 2002; Boeck 2002; Kindred 2002) created a mediated *Pat Tillman* born out of the public reaction to his enlistment.

The veneration of *Pat Tillman* was only amplified following Tillman's death while fighting in Afghanistan (Jennings 2004; Walters 2004; McCain 2004e), but it was also complicated by the military's handling of his death (Coll 2004a 2004b; Collier 2005; White 2005). Tillman's service to his nation lasted nearly two years, but it ended abruptly when he was the victim of friendly fire on April 22, 2004. The next day, the news that

Tillman had died was released to the press (Lumpkin 2004). Many of the reactions to Tillman's death were similar to the one delivered by NBC Nightly News anchor Tom Brokaw (2004):

More than 400 Americans have been killed in Iraq since the end of so-called major combat a year ago. American casualties in Afghanistan have been much lighter, but the fighting there is hard and dangerous. And tonight, news of another American death has refocused attention on the meaning of sacrifice and service. Pat Tillman, who gave up a multimillion-dollar contract in professional football, has been killed, the latest and most conspicuous death in Afghanistan.

The initial accounts of how Tillman died told a story of a heroic soldier who was killed rescuing the other members of his platoon (White 2004). Later, it was revealed that the initial information distributed by the military about Tillman's death was false (Cohen 2004). In the weeks, months, and even years that followed, details emerged that revealed the extent to which the military lied about how Tillman died (Krakauer 2009a). Over time, Tillman's death became more than just a symbol of sacrifice and service; it also became fuel for the zeitgeist toward opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the policies of then President George W. Bush (Olbermann 2007i; Zirin 2005c; McCracken 2007). The irony became that the death of Pat Tillman gave life to the diverse and sometimes conflicting characterizations of *Pat Tillman*.

The ability of *Pat Tillman* to take different forms and represent contrasting political viewpoints makes the continued existence of *Pat Tillman* even more critically interesting than understanding the story of Tillman's life or death. My critique focuses on how facts, stories, and images from the life and death of Pat Tillman became the basis for a complex discourse. The term discourse has taken on a variety of connotations, but for the purposes of this study, I draw on the performative sense of the word discussed by Michel Foucault (1972): discourse represents "practices that systematically form the

objects of which they speak” (49). Through public discussion of Pat Tillman’s life and death, various perspectives on *Pat Tillman* were formed that were systematically connected through shared ideological commentaries and pieces of evidence. *Pat Tillman* was used to demarcate what it means to be a “true hero” (Grogan 2004, para. 5). *Pat Tillman* was said to be “the man we all want to be” (Rome 2004). *Pat Tillman* also “lived the American Dream” (Associated Press 2004a, para. 22). These descriptions promote perspectives on the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman* that allow for insight into the ways in which ideologies become intertwined with the life of a person.

Examining how the life of Pat Tillman was employed in characterizations of *Pat Tillman* requires an approach to criticism that manages the distinct existences of *Pat Tillman* and Pat Tillman. The continued shaping and reshaping of the life of Pat Tillman represents a rhetorical process I discuss as **textualization**. Textualization is the transformation of lived experiences into rhetorical material that can be used by discourse producers to create individual characterizations that together constitute a formation. Through how various discourse producers characterize particular facts, stories, or images of a person’s life, those moments become a part of a textual existence that is distinguishable from a person. What distinguishes the life and death of Pat Tillman from the discursive *Pat Tillman* is that the discursive *Pat Tillman* only exists in the rhetoric of discourse producers. Discourse producers depict a moment such as Pat Tillman’s decision to enlist in the military or an image of Tillman stoically posed in his Army uniform as the means accomplish goals such as promoting a political position or negotiating what it means to be a man. Their distinct characterizations became the basis for a discursive *Pat*

Tillman that was separate from the thoughts, wishes, and actions of the person they were said to represent.

With this study, I examine the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman* as it circulated through different media and from different voices. The discursive *Pat Tillman* never took a literal breath, but did become a powerful figure in U.S. culture. Depending on how the events of the actual person Pat Tillman's life were pieced together, people were able to craft often conflicting perspectives on such issues as what constitutes a hero or whether Americans were fighting a just war. These discourse producers both drew upon prior public knowledge of Pat Tillman and contributed to the diversity of perspectives on *Pat Tillman*. Specifically, my critique focuses on how discourse producers employed moments or actions from the life of Pat Tillman to create characterizations that were connected to notions of heroism, masculinity, and the American Dream. In this introductory chapter, I provide a foundation for my analysis of the textualization of Pat Tillman. I begin with a review of some critical approaches to understanding discursive characterizations. I then discuss my approach to criticism, and finish by discussing the basis for my examination of *Pat Tillman*.

Characterization as a Rhetorical Phenomenon

When people such as politicians and reporters discuss the lives of real people in speeches, television reports, and blog entries, they create characterizations of those people that are rhetorical by their very nature. These characterizations present audiences with a perspective on the people discussed and present critics with an opportunity to examine the rhetoric produced in response to those people's lives. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton argue that

representative characters are essential to understanding abstract cultural constructs. They discuss a character as “a living reenactment that gives cultural ideals their power to organize life” (1986, 40). Just as a child desires to be “like Mike” instead of just a basketball player, characters such as athletes or historical figures become cynosures that discourse producers use to lead people to certain types of understandings. From the enduring nature of the example set by Martin Luther King, Jr., to the fleeting public existence of Captain Chesley ‘Sully’ Sullenberger (who enjoyed his fifteen minutes of fame after safely piloting an airplane into the Hudson River), characterizations of people are the means by which people communicate their perspectives on such abstract concepts as equality and bravery. This section discusses three approaches to the use of characterizations. By examining what Bellah and his fellow researchers have to say about the use of characters as representations of ideologies, S. Paige Baty’s (1995) work on how an individual’s life can lead to distinct characterizations, and Trevor Parry-Giles’s (1996) examination of the rhetorical nature of characters, I hope to provide greater insight into the use of characters as a means for expressing ideological perspectives.

One of the most difficult aspects of this area of research is the distinction between the person, the characterization, and the ideology because these three concepts are woven tightly together. In their examination of American culture, Bellah et al. (1986) equate character with “symbol” and discuss how Americans try to emulate the examples set by particular types of characters (39). Whereas I examine the rhetorical crafting of particular characters, Bellah and his fellow researchers are more concerned with the ways in which particular character types are emulated and discussed as a standard for living. They argue that characters function as “a public image that helps define, for a given group of people,

just what kinds of personality traits it is good and legitimate to develop” (39). An important byproduct of their research is a discussion of the relationship between how a character is discussed and the ideologies that person is said to represent. Based on their interviews with individual Americans, Bellah and his compatriots concluded that the centrality of individualism to the experience of being “American” is expressed using stories that characterize representative standards for success. Their findings reveal the importance of examining how characters are enacted by people as a means for perceiving their lives in conjunction with particular ideological traditions.

Building on the work of Bellah et al., Baty (1995) analyzes how one specific character, Marilyn Monroe, came to represent many different ideological perspectives. Using Bellah and colleagues’ conception of a representative character, Baty reorients their perspective to study how a particular person’s life and image were employed to create distinct characterizations. The various and often divergent interpretations of Marilyn Monroe’s life, along with actions that were ascribed to Monroe that may or may not have ever taken place, allowed for “a host of representational possibilities for political cultural meaning” (40). Baty discusses representative characters as a means to depict “authority, legitimacy, and power in a culture through the vehicle of their lives and persons” (8). In her discussion of Monroe, Baty points out that representative characters do not live lives; instead, they “exist at the intersection of cultural production and consumption, circulating in specific times and places where they are made to mediate values to a given community” (9).

Distinct from what Baty discusses as a “re-membering” that represents a “material process between person and texts” (18), I examine as a textualization that which

represents a discursive existence removed from a person. Baty acknowledges a distinction between representative characters and the lives they are said to represent, but also discusses how Marilyn lives on as an icon (57–84) or lives as memory (87–88). It is not my contention that Pat Tillman lives on as *Pat Tillman*; in fact, I distinguish between the two. Approaching characters as a re-creation of a person’s life presumes a connection to that person that may not necessarily exist. When a discourse producer employs facts, stories, and images in reference to the life of a person, they are not “re-membering” or re-creating that person. They are assembling bits of discourse in order to create something new that pertains to a position that discourse producer wishes to promote. Texts claiming to depict how Pat Tillman lived are representations of *Pat Tillman*, not Pat Tillman. Even when new information is discovered pertaining to the life and death of Pat Tillman, it is recorded as a text that comments on previous and future understandings of *Pat Tillman*. When discourse producers assemble particular facts, stories, or images of a person’s life, they create a characterization that is imbued with interpretations that must be viewed as rhetorical.

Textualized entities can come in many distinct forms and can be found across media. In fact, Baty argues that the predominance of characters in contemporary U.S. culture is an outgrowth of the fact that “American citizens dwell *in medias res*, inhabiting a political–cultural landscape comprising representational and representative characters, figures, and languages, and participating in a community organized around the forces and forms of simulation as world-making” (25). Characters are mediated using facts, stories, and images as the pieces of a person’s life that speak to something that person is said to represent. A story about a woman who refused to ride in the back of a bus can obscure

the fact that Rosa Parks had been a civil rights activist before that day (Chappell 2006). A picture of President George W. Bush standing in front of a “Mission Accomplished” banner can come to represent an entire political party (i.e., Kengor 2008). These facts, stories, and images are reproduced and recollected in what Baty describes as “competing ‘whole, real, true’ rememberings” (34). While the depictions are presented as complete, Baty observes that the vast and often conflicted interpretations of a person’s life mean that the mediation of that life “gives birth to the fragmented subject” (34). The fragmented subject is a series of representations of a single person reproduced through mediation. It is my contention that the characterizations that employ the lives of Rosa Parks, George Bush, or Pat Tillman must be seen as participating in the creation of the fragmented *Rosa Parks, George Bush, or Pat Tillman* that “has no single history, no point of origin, no final end” (Baty 1995, 34).

Bellah and colleague’s findings regarding the ideological function of characters and Baty’s assertions about how a particular character can be characterized in distinct ways helped lead me to the conclusion that characters are a product of the rhetorical crafting of particularly chosen facts, stories, and images that pertain to the life of a person in conjunction with various and often conflicting ideological positions on those bits’ meaning. Unfortunately, there is no recipe for how many parts person and how many parts ideology go into making a characterization because characterizations are, by their very nature, discursive. In an attempt to investigate the rhetorical nature of characters, Parry-Giles reasoned that characterizations “compel continued questioning not only of the American ideology, but how such ideology is expressed, and embodied, by the characters who inhabit our public life” (1996, 377). I agree with Parry-Giles and believe

that, as an object of analysis, characterizations present opportunities to investigate both how ideologies are put into practice and the rhetorical existences of public figures.

My position on the relationship between the person, the characterization, and the ideology is that the rhetoric that discourse producers generate in response to the life of a person creates a **characterization**. Characterizations exist only as textualized entities distinct from the life that person led. Characterizations, by their very nature, are rhetorical and have the capacity to shape potential understandings of the ideologies linked to that life. Using the lives of individuals as a basis for their positions, discourse producers such as political pundits and internet bloggers craft characterizations that may have very little to do with the original person whom they reference. Despite the fact that the stories they circulate may have little to do with the life that person led, by invoking that person's name and attributing their perspectives to that person's life, discourse producers create a characterization that contributes to public understandings of that life.

In this project, I will explore rhetoric that was produced in response to the life and death of Pat Tillman as characterizations that participated in the creation of a discursive *Pat Tillman*. The *Pat Tillman* that is the focus of this project was discussed as a guy who "got what was coming to him" (Gonzalez 2004), "a G.I. Joe action figure on steroids" (Arthur, n.d.b, para. 18), and "the real American Dream" (Shriver 2004). In each instance, *Pat Tillman* meant something different. Even after the person in reference has died, the discursive existence of characters can be challenged, altered, or extended. One has only to point to characters that have faded from the public consciousness to see that, without discourse, characters can die as well. In this study, I add to our knowledge of characters not only by critiquing the discursive implications of the rhetoric produced in

response to the life of Pat Tillman, but examining by the fragmented, discursive existence of *Pat Tillman*.

Characterizations, Formations, Fragmentation, and Convergence

An example of the separate existences of *Pat Tillman* and Pat Tillman can be seen in how discourse producers discussed the motivations behind Tillman's decision to enlist in the military. Pat Tillman's decision to turn down an offer of millions of dollars to play a game in order to join the Army thrust *Pat Tillman* into the national spotlight despite the actual person Pat Tillman's attempts to avoid publicity. The person Pat Tillman repeatedly turned down requests for interviews and chose to not to speak about his motives (Roberts 2002; Connelly 2004; Smith 2006, Littlefield 2007), but his decision to not comment on his actions publicly gave the discourse producers an opportunity to attribute their own motives to their individual characterizations of *Pat Tillman*. For example, author David Zirin credited Tillman's choice to a commitment to "freedom and justice" (2007, 172). Senator John McCain depicted it as an act of devotion to his nation (2004e). Former NFL player and Vietnam War veteran Rocky Bleier speculated that in a "me"-based society Pat Tillman distinguished himself by becoming the person he wanted to be through a choice to serve others (2004, 22). Unlike many who claimed to know why Pat Tillman chose to join the Army, Bleier acknowledged that there was no way to know exactly why he did what he did. Pat Tillman chose not to reveal those details. The various rationales that were given were based on interpretations of Tillman's actions. Depending on which details were chosen and how they were pieced together, people came to different conclusions about why Pat Tillman made his decision. While Pat Tillman did become an Army Ranger, the belief that he did it, as President George Bush described,

because “he felt called to defend America” needs to be treated as a **characterization** that is distinct from the person (cited in U.S. Congress 2008, 25). That distinction requires an approach to criticism that attends to the ways that individual characterizations both rely on and contribute to public understandings of *Pat Tillman*. In this section, I discuss my approach to examining the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman* as a product of the characterizations that were created in response to the life of a person.

In order to account for how a single characterization draws upon preexisting public knowledge of a person while also contributing to the textualization of that life, I have chosen to examine *Pat Tillman* as an example of Michel Foucault’s **discourse formation** (1972, 31). Foucault defines a discourse formation as “a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations)” (38). Scholars have provided a variety of perspectives on what exactly constitutes a formation (i.e., Gemin 1997; Hearn 2008; Foss and Gill 1987), sometimes without even citing Foucault (e.g. Dallimore 2003). According to Stuart Hall there are three factors that must be considered when examining a discursive formation:

1. A discourse can be produced by many individuals in different institutional settings (like families, prisons, hospitals, and asylums)....
2. Discourses are not closed systems. A discourse draws on elements in other discourses, binding them into its own network of meanings....
3. The statements within a discursive formation need not all be the same....

(2007, 56)

In his exploration discursive formations, Hall equates “discourse” with ideology and defines a discourse as “a set of statements or beliefs which produce knowledge that serves the interests of a particular group or class” (56). Based on Foucault, Hall’s rationale for the use of discourse instead of ideology as means for understanding these statements and beliefs is that it changes the focus of our understanding of them from whether these ideas are true or false to an examination of the vested interests which produce certain types of knowledge. By focusing on them as discourse people are forced to grapple with the ways in which power produces knowledge.

My reason for analyzing *Pat Tillman* as a discourse formation – instead of as a representation of a person or as a character – is that I believe the textualized existence of the person, like the ideologies with which he was associated, must be treated as a product of discourse producers with vested interests in how *Pat Tillman* is perceived. Just the example of the many different motives attributed to Tillman’s enlistment reveals that Pat Tillman could not have been the many people that *Pat Tillman* has been discussed as. Therefore, characterizations of *Pat Tillman* must be examined both as distinct individual perspectives and interrelated contributions to a formation. As a discourse formation, *Pat Tillman* represents the many characterizations that became a part of a system of dispersion that employed the life and death of Pat Tillman to comment on various contexts and ideologies.

Despite the fact that individual discourse producers often arrived at vastly different conclusions about what *Pat Tillman* symbolized, their characterizations were interconnected by their use of certain stories, issues, and themes. Because *Pat Tillman* only exists in the rhetoric produced in response to the life and death of Pat Tillman, not

all facts, stories, and images from the life of Pat Tillman became a part of the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman* and not all of the characterizations encompassed the entirety of the formation. To facilitate my examination of how particular elements of *Pat Tillman* are reproduced by discourse producers, I have chosen to appropriate Michael Calvin McGee's **fragment** metaphor (1990, 279). Foucault argues that "discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things" (49). Similarly to Foucault's use of "signs," McGee argues, "rhetors make discourses from scraps and pieces of evidence" (279). McGee ascribes that a critic approach a finished text as "a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made" (279).

Fragments allow discourse producers to craft positions on a variety of topics by drawing upon prior knowledge and ways of relating to a concept or – in the case of *Pat Tillman* – the life of a person. In order to understand how *Pat Tillman* functioned as a discourse formation, we must first look at the fragments that allowed discourse producers to create their diverse and often contradictory characterizations. Ironically, a good example of a fragment can often be found in the use of an example. Many discourse producers discussed Tillman's college grade point average as an example of how he stood out from other athletes and other soldiers (i.e., Elfin 2004; Lacayo 2004; Lyon 2002; Smith 2004). An examination of how that particular fact circulated across characterizations exposes how it functions as a fragment of *Pat Tillman* as well as how *Pat Tillman* was used to comment on public understandings of what it means to be an athlete or a soldier. By adopting McGee's belief that texts such as speeches or television programs exist as collections of fragments of personal, contextual, and ideological

discourses, I can critique the ways in which particular facts, stories, and images became the discursive material for the characterizations of *Pat Tillman*.

Part of the difficulty of this type of analysis is defining the nature of a fragment. There is often a tendency to dismiss attempts to break ideas down into smaller parts using a reductionist slippery-slope argument similar to: It can be said that words are merely combinations of letters, thus letters are the fragments. I agree that letters can be treated as fragments if a person is trying to study how letters are used to compose words. In that instance, a focus on letters as fragments is appropriate. However, when examining characterizations, the critic must examine the pieces that allow a discourse producer to create a perspective on a person's life. McGee discusses how Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech is fragmented by critics who seek to comment on its influence (279). Similarly, I argue that the life and death of Pat Tillman were divided into fragments that allowed people to comment on their symbolic significance. The dual nature of fragments as an element of both a text and a discourse formation adds a layer of complexity to my discussion of their function. Within a given text, fragments must be seen as situated elements of that piece of discourse. Each fragment within that text contributes to the creation of a characterization. However, I also intend to examine how that fragment also circulates outside of a single characterization. The reproduction of certain fragments across characterizations provides an opportunity to examine how those characterizations preserve, extend, or critique particular aspects of the formation. The fragments I am studying are the specific facts, stories, and images that allowed discourse producers to create the *Pat Tillman* characterizations.

The belief that characters are fragmented is not unique, but accounting for the specific fragments is less common. In her work on Marilyn Monroe, S. Paige Baty promotes the belief that “the matrix of media gives birth to the fragmented subject” (1995, 34), but nowhere in her work does she account for what a fragment is. In his examination of how Thurgood Marshall came to represent civil rights, Trevor Parry-Giles argued that “fragmentation, though, may be the very nature of politics, ideology, and rhetoric” (1996, 377). However, his analysis lacks a clear sense of the nature of fragments. While McGee asserts that a text “is a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made” (1990, 279), very little work has been done to account for those bits. In chapter one, I discuss the facts, stories, and images that I have identified as fragments of *Pat Tillman* as well as some of the ways that those fragments have been accounted for in various characterizations throughout the formation.

Just as the fragments varied in nature, the communication of those fragments did not come in monolithic forms. It is therefore impossible to study *Pat Tillman* as a product of just words or stories. Each characterization is governed by the rules and norms of the mediated context for which it was created. *Pat Tillman* circulated in images, in words, in statues, in audio recordings, and in video tributes. Of course, recognizing that these characterizations circulated in these “texts” requires the recognition that mediation and text are related constructs, and that understanding discursive fragments and their manifestation within texts demands an engagement with the medium through which each was presented. *Pat Tillman* crosses the boundaries of any specific medium, from films and television to written news articles, from commemorative oratory to audience-generated YouTube videos.

Henry Jenkins (2006) defines this phenomenon as **convergence** and discusses how the interconnectedness of media systems influences their content. Convergence signifies an approach to media that recognizes that the blending of media forms enhances the ability of media to function as a forum for public discourse. In Jenkins's words:

Convergence represents a paradigm shift – a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward the increased interdependence of communications systems, toward multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture. (243)

This paradigm shift requires the critic to consider meaning and texts as they shift and change across media while also seeing how different forms of mediation are interconnected by the content they circulate. Mediated artifacts are not static entities that exist solely as finished texts. A television news report can be reconfigured as an internet news clip accompanied by a written story that was also published in a newspaper. The medium through which these reports are communicated changes, but the content can remain the same. Each of these texts is different, but their use of particular fragments reinforces the notion that they exist within the same discourse formation. They abide by different norms and are experienced differently by their audiences, but they are connected together by their shared content and commentaries.

Convergence allows for a particular fragment of a discourse formation to be constituted in a number of forms. A story of Pat Tillman's charge into battle on a hillside in Afghanistan can just as easily be dramatically recreated by actors as it can be told in a eulogy. In order to critique the discursive *Pat Tillman*, one must examine how discourse producers reconstituted particular fragments into characterizations that could suit their rhetorical purposes. When Pat Tillman's September 12, 2001, interview with NFL Films

is played, the choice to show particular parts of that interview and not others represents a strategy that connects the life of Pat Tillman with the issues being ascribed by the creators of that text. In chapter one, I provide a detailed account of the fragments that composed the discursive *Pat Tillman*. By attending to how facts, stories, and images were employed as fragments in finished pieces of discourse in varying forms, this study can provide an understanding of the role of a specific characterization in preserving, extending, or altering a discourse formation.

In this project, I have chosen to examine each individual instance in which moments from Pat Tillman's life and death were discussed in representations such as news reports, congressional hearings, and films as distinct – but interconnected – characterizations that comprised the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman*. The various and often competing ways in which Pat Tillman's life and death became a subject of public admiration, speculation, and criticism provide an opportunity to interrogate both the public existence of characters and the symbolic dimensions of *Pat Tillman*. In my analysis, I have taken for granted that characterizations are not simply recollections of a life. They are social, political, and cultural products that are created through the rhetorical shaping of fragments that employ the life of a person as the material for a characterization. The textualization of Pat Tillman created a fragmented public discourse formation that was changed and shaped by how various and often competing discourse producers created characterizations using particular facts, stories, and images. In this instance, there is an irony to thinking of discourse as “taking on a life of its own;” *Pat Tillman* lives on after the death of Pat Tillman through the discourses of American

culture – discourses that are comprised of fragments and expressed via many different media.

The Contextual and Ideological Influences on *Pat Tillman*

Following the unforgettable events of September 11, 2001, war seemed like the inevitable response to the first foreign attacks on U.S. soil since World War II. The seeming inevitability of war had a powerful influence on the politics of the time. In the immediate months and days following September 11th, nationalist rhetoric masked complexities and silenced dissent in favor of support for U.S. foreign policy (Reese and Lewis 2009; Sahar 2008; Talbot 2001; Zelizer and Allan 2002). In an article published in *Salon* on September 29, 2001, David Talbot documented “the calls to herd-like conformity” that undermined opposition in the wake of a flood of national pride (para. 4). In Talbot’s words, “Truth is not the only casualty of war. So is rational thought” (para. 1). In the midst of this nationalist zeal, Pat Tillman left his career in the NFL to become an Army Ranger, an elite division of the Army that was sure to see combat. During this time, the idea that an NFL football star would forego his career to serve his country added fervor to a pro-America, pro-war, pro-George W. Bush rhetoric that sometimes made these three positions seem synonymous. The role that Pat Tillman’s life and death have played in these discussions revealed the complexity of the *Pat Tillman* characterizations as “a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made” (McGee 1990, 279). This section of the chapter focuses on some of the contextual and ideological influences that contributed to characterizations of the discursive *Pat Tillman*.

President Bush's rhetoric leading up to his decisions to send U.S. soldiers into Afghanistan and Iraq shifted the focus from a war with a particular enemy to a war on an idea, *terror*. That rhetorical turn allowed the president to redefine war and how it would be fought. Douglass Kellner chronicled how Bush's administration seized the opportunity to define the September 11th attacks to suit a political agenda:

In the hysteria following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, they passed with the support of a compliant Congress the USA Patriot Act, through which they could suspend constitutional rights, imprisoning people without legal representation or trial, tapping phones, breaking into houses, and even summoning lists of books checked out of libraries In their wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Bush Administration and Pentagon put aside decades of military law, proclaimed the Geneva Conventions irrelevant, and allowed harsh interrogation procedures that created one of the biggest scandals in U.S. military history when the Abu Ghraib prison abuse pictures from Iraq circulated globally. (2005, x)

Scandals such as the photographs of U.S. soldiers committing acts of torture at Abu Ghraib prison and the deceptions that were perpetrated about the death of Pat Tillman provided contexts for the reemergence of criticism in U.S. politics. In the almost two years that Pat Tillman served in the military from 2002 to 2004, support for the wars waned considerably. In an article published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* the day before Pat Tillman died, polls revealed that "about half the respondents said going to war in Iraq was the right thing to do, though the number who said it was a mistake has tripled in the past year" (Sandalow 2004, para. 14). One week after Tillman died, the *New York Times* reported that "support for the war in Iraq has eroded substantially over the past several months, and Americans are increasingly critical of the way President Bush is handling the conflict" (Stevenson and Elder 2004, para. 1). The dissatisfaction over how the wars were being conducted would only continue to get worse for President Bush over his second term. According to a *CBS News/New York Times* poll, President Bush left

office with a record low 22 percent approval rating due to what they concluded to be “assessments of Mr. Bush’s handling of two critical issues – the war in Iraq and the economy” (CBS News/N.Y. Times 2009, para. 21).

A series of inconsistencies and deceptions that had come from the Bush administration also helped to connect military misconduct with government misconduct. Beginning with the inability to find the “weapons of mass destruction” and the lack of any Iraqi ties to the terrorist group Al-Qaeda, President Bush’s call to send troops to dethrone Saddam Hussein was hard to understand (Shenon and Marquis 2004). Despite the claim that the hunt for Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was the administration’s top priority, bin Laden had evaded capture in Afghanistan and videos that depicted him continuing to lead terrorist efforts underscored how White House strategies to apprehend him had failed (Mitchell 2004). In the midst of these and still other political scandals, Pat Tillman was killed in Afghanistan. The friendly-fire circumstances of how Tillman died were concealed from the public and a cover story was created that attributed his death to an enemy ambush.

As elements of the actual story of how Pat Tillman died became available, questions arose about why the public was deceived. These questions extended the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman* well beyond the death of Pat Tillman. The details about how Pat Tillman was killed were seemingly pried out of an uncooperative military over the years following his death (Krakauer 2009d). Seven separate military investigations into what happened left the Tillman family dissatisfied with the Army’s ability to police itself. On their insistence, Congress launched an investigation in 2008 (Rieckhoff 2008). The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform was

unable to make the link between the cover-up and the Bush administration, but their report did note, “the key issue of what senior officials knew ... was frustrated by a near universal lack of recall” (U.S. Congress 2008, 1). Although there were no official connections between the actions of the Bush administration and the death of Pat Tillman, editorial writer Frank Rich hypothesized about the possible motivation for George W. Bush to conceal how Tillman had died:

Tillman’s death followed the worst month of bad news for the country and, more pertinently, for the Bush–Cheney reelection campaign, since the start of the Iraq war. Against this backdrop, it would not do to have it known that the most famous volunteer of the war might have been a victim of gross negligence or homicide. (2006, 129)

Rich’s comments about the Bush administration’s handling of Pat Tillman’s death were echoed by Kevin Tillman who testified before Congress that his brother’s death was “a terrible tragedy that might have further undermined support for the war in Iraq was transformed into an inspirational message that served instead to support the nation’s foreign policy wars in Iraq and Afghanistan” (cited in U.S. Congress 2008, 8–9). Their perspectives on the handling of Tillman’s death became part of a growing belief that either the military or the President had manipulated Pat Tillman’s death in order to create positive or sympathetic press coverage of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (i.e., Guarisco 2009; Nimmo 2008; Vanden Brook 2007; Watson 2007; Zirin 2005c).

Along with questions about how the Bush administration had conducted the war, the apparent cover-up of Tillman’s death raised questions about how journalists had covered it. The press coverage of Tillman’s death ranged from acceptance of the military’s lies to in-depth investigations of its cover up (Coll 2004a, 2004b; Fish 2006; Krakauer 2009d). News editor Greg Mitchell used the deceptions perpetuated in the name

of Pat Tillman to attack the resistance of news media to “look more deeply, and with more skepticism” (2008, 1). Stephen D. Reese and Seth C. Lewis (2009) discussed how the patriotic frame that was employed to characterize Pat Tillman as a hero was one among many pieces of evidence suggesting that journalists had “uncritically accepted (us versus them) as a way of viewing the world” (781). Jan Nederveen Pieterse calls this phenomenon an outgrowth of the “American Bubble” and argued that the cover-up of Tillman’s death was evidence that “the nation is tangled up in doublespeak and treats vaudeville as if it is high drama” (2006, 996). Sociologist Carl Stempel asserted that in particular ESPN’s coverage of Tillman’s death created a nationalistic frame that promoted the belief “that sports are, after all, just games that ‘play’ at this courage and heroism stuff. Tillman was the ‘real hero’” (2006, 91).

Equally as important to how *Pat Tillman* has been interconnected with contextual discussions of war, politics, and journalism is how the formation has provided an opportunity to study aspects of such ideological conceptions as heroism, masculinity, and nationalism. In their study of the unusual ways in which Jessica Lynch was depicted as hero despite the fact that “she was, to a large extent, a victim” (2007, 74), Gregory C. Gibson, Richard Hogan, John Stahura, and Eugene Jackson use Tillman as an exemplification of a typical hero. Gibson and his fellow researchers create a characterization of *Pat Tillman* that serves to illustrate the types of heroes who “serve as role models for others by virtue of their status, honor, and reflection of cultural values” (74). They depict *Pat Tillman* as a contrast to Lynch that represents a more typical depiction of a hero who transcends the mediocre and whose “title [is] bestowed upon the person who performs these extraordinary acts” (74). Gibson et al. accept the position that

Pat Tillman is a hero based on how others depict his actions as virtuous, honorable, and extraordinary.

To this point most studies have focused on specific aspects of the discursive *Pat Tillman* or how discussions of *Pat Tillman* contribute to a larger investigation; these studies help make the case that *Pat Tillman* needs to be a focus of analysis. Phillip J. Chidester examined the life of *Pat Tillman* for what it has to say about the connections between sport and mythmaking. The hero myths that are the subject of Chidester's study represented what he called a "rhetorical battle for the mythic supremacy" (354). In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, celebrations of athletes were "subordinated to the life-risking efforts" of soldiers and firemen. Because of Tillman's decision to enlist in the Army, Chidester argues, "Tillman embodied an actual, applied heroism that the rest of his compatriots simply could not match" (359). Despite the fact that Chidester recognizes that "life-risking efforts" were seen as more heroic in comparison to athletes, in the end, he concludes,

Far from easing an American obsession with sport as myth system, Tillman's story – along with other examples of media coverage post-9/11 – seems to have only bolstered for some the value of America's sports stars as mythic heroes, figures far too valuable to a contemporary society to sacrifice on the altar of a suspect foreign war. (2009, 367)

Chidester suggests that the recasting of athletes as heroes in the years since 9/11 suggests that the role of athletes as heroic figures has changed and merits questioning, but has not been erased. By focusing on one particular discursive object – *Pat Tillman* as athlete – Chidester presents an important investigation into the connection between athletes and heroism, but he also leaves much of the formation unexamined. In chapter two, I examine

the various ways in which *Pat Tillman* was characterized as a hero and an anti-hero for what they say about the textualized existence of *Pat Tillman*, as well as about heroism.

Much as Chidester offers insights about what *Pat Tillman* could reveal about heroism, Kyle W. Kusz examines the racial and gendered characterizations of both the NASCAR Nation and *Pat Tillman*. In his section on Pat Tillman, Kusz examines what he calls “the racial and gender politics organizing Tillman’s media spectacle in the post-9/11 America” (2007, 85). Kusz’s “media spectacle” is a reference to the ways that “Tillman was eulogized and valorized across American media culture” (84). Kusz argues that the media response to the death of Pat Tillman reinforced connected nationalist rhetorics of patriotism, bravery, and citizenship with a virtuous white masculinity. He argues that Tillman is characterized as a contrast to self-centered black athletes and his actions are discussed as the epitome of U.S. citizenship. Noting how *Pat Tillman* comes to represent what it means to be an American, Kusz concludes,

This twin celebration of virtuous White male athletes such as Tillman (or Agassi or Lance Armstrong) and demonization of self-centered Black male athletes such as Terrell Owens (or Tyson or Kobe Bryant) is a discourse of White anxiety and resentment, where White fans’ anger and discontent over a loss of White dominance on America’s national sport stages silently echoes through a seemingly nonracial discussion of the deficient values, honor, and morality of contemporary ballplayers compared to players from “the good ole days.” (86)

Kusz’s analysis critiques the ways gender and race came to represent power and prominence. Kusz labels this type of rhetoric “American White masculinity” and his examination beckons a questioning of the discursive connections between sex and ideology in the *Pat Tillman* characterizations (87). Building on Kusz’s examination of masculinity and power, in chapter three, I critique the ways in which masculinity became a distinct undercurrent of the textual existence of *Pat Tillman*.

Michael Butterworth's (2008) examination of the use of *Pat Tillman* as part of the Super Bowl XLII pregame show reveals how the death of Pat Tillman was employed as a mythic example of American patriotism (2008, 321). Prior to Fox Television's February 3, 2008 broadcast of the Super Bowl, Tillman's widow Marie was shown in front of a statue of her deceased husband as part in a video celebration of what Butterworth called the "American Civil Religion" (319). During the montage, football players, coaches, politicians, and other notable public figures took turns reading lines from the Declaration of Independence. As a reflection on "the war on terror," Butterfield argues that two aspects of this short video connected it to "the sacrifice required to justify it" (321). The first aspect was the use of the imagery of the World Trade Center and the New York skyline that was filtered in among the words as a reminder of the tragedies of September 11, 2001. Butterworth argues that the use of imagery from 9/11 was an implicit sanctioning of the "war on terror," but the film's links to Pat Tillman "made such an argument explicit" (321). According to Butterworth,

No sporting narrative of the past 6 years better symbolizes the contradictions of the Bush administration's wartime policies than the death of Pat Tillman. Despite the considerable evidence that suggests the details of Tillman's death were intentionally distorted and the revelations that Tillman himself questioned the war's purpose, his death remains a condensed symbol of American heroism and sacrifice. (321)

Butterworth's treatment of *Pat Tillman* as the epitome of the connection between the rhetorics of nationalism and sports is an example of the ways in which the life and death of Pat Tillman served as a means to use *Pat Tillman* as symbol of American ideologies. Through the use of particular events and actions from the life and death of Pat Tillman, *Pat Tillman* was connected to something that is mythologized as uniquely American. Butterworth's analysis begs for more work on the ways in which Pat Tillman was

associated with the ideological conception of being American. In chapter four, I examine how the discursive *Pat Tillman* was connected to the various rhetorics of the American Dream.

Depictions of *Pat Tillman* often contrasted the actions taken by Pat Tillman with the actions of those who were portrayed as manipulating his death. In his work on fear and politics, David L. Altheide contends that Tillman's story was distorted by those who wished to perpetuate a belief that America was in need of saviors. In his analysis, Altheide reinforces my belief that "Tillman was constructed through news reports to reflect dominant values about cultural symbols (e.g., patriotism and "God Bless America"), masculinity (e.g., sports), and the war with Iraq" (188). However, he chooses to focus on the political strategies that were used to promote *Pat Tillman* as a role model for a political perspective. Altheide critiques how the interconnection of these values was used to promote a belief that "individuals can join forces to defeat the latest threats to moral and symbolic order" (205). The contributions made by critics such as Chidester (2009), Kusz (2007), Butterworth (2008), and Altheide (2006) importantly examine a link between the rhetorics produced in response to the life and death of Pat Tillman and ideological conceptions of heroism, masculinity, and nationalism. These examinations of what I discuss as *Pat Tillman* highlight issues that I believe require further research.

The recognition of the importance of studying the role of *Pat Tillman* in contemporary discussions of heroism, masculinity, and nationalism reinforces my belief that much of the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman* is still in need of analysis. Chidester acknowledges that "Coverage of Tillman's 'sacrifice' (the fact that he had traded a \$3.6 million NFL contract for a monthly salary of \$1,800 with the Rangers was widely

reported) was effusively superlative” (2009, 366), but does not have the opportunity to examine how those reports changed following the many investigations into how Tillman died. Kusz calls Pat Tillman “America’s most prominent hero of the war on terror” (2007, 84), but has not provided a full account of the implications of that statement. Butterworth (2008) views *Pat Tillman* as a part of a national discussion pertaining to conceptions of sport and war, but only touches on how Tillman played that role. According to Altheide, “the construction of Tillman as a hero invites some reflection on the changing meanings and criteria of the ‘heroic,’ including such questions as whether heroism is a feature of an individual act or of general courage or its aftermath” (2006, 202). In this project, I not only reflect upon what *Pat Tillman* has to say about heroism, I critique how the discursive *Pat Tillman* was interconnected with ideological constructions of masculinity and how characterizations as an ideal American were linked to the American Dream. Each of these scholars recognizes the importance of examining the rhetorics that were produced in response to the events and actions of this person, but I take up where they have left off.

***Pat Tillman* and the Discursive Influences of Heroism, Masculinity, and the American Dream**

The remainder of this project focuses on the textualization of Pat Tillman as it relates to three ideological constructs that are prominent in U.S. culture: heroism, masculinity, and the American Dream. According to Bernard L. Brock, Mark E. Huglen, James F. Klumpp, and Sharon Howell, “ideology provides the structures of understanding that unite disparate citizens in effective political action” (2005, 30). Brock et al. offer a perspective that accounts for shifts and changes in ideologies. They contend,

“emotionally laden terms, phrases, and slogans are useful as abbreviations and summations at the level of generalization, but they are inherently imprecise and problematic at the level of particularization, creating ideological confusion” (30). Taking my lead from Foucault (1972), I believe that this confusion can be analyzed through discourse. In my study, I argue that the discursive *Pat Tillman* allowed various discourse producers to shape characterizations that were structured using three ideological constructs: heroism, masculinity, and the American Dream. The various and often conflicting ways in which *Pat Tillman* was characterized provide an opportunity to understand how these ideologies are put into practice.

The discursive *Pat Tillman* can be seen in how particular images, stories, and events allowed discourse producers to create diverse and even contradictory characterizations of the life of Pat Tillman. These fragments acted as points of interconnection within the discursive *Pat Tillman* and as a way of discussing interpretations of Pat Tillman’s life. Each individual fragment could take on multiple accounts of its meaning. For example, discourse producers employed the fact that Tillman decided not to leave the Arizona Cardinals despite the fact the he was offered more money by other franchises as evidence of *Pat Tillman*’s loyalty (Towle 2004; 101–126), individuality (Rand, 2004; 85), and determination (Jabber Head 2010, para. 11). How fragments such as this are employed within characterizations may be incongruous or inconsistent, but their recurrence in various characterizations makes understanding them important to understanding how *Pat Tillman* functioned as a discourse formation. My job is to critique how that discursive existence was shaped. I begin by showing how the life and death of Pat Tillman were represented by discursive fragments; then, chapter by

chapter, I expose how those fragments were pieced back together in characterizations connected to heroism, masculinity, and the American Dream.

The purpose of chapter one is to identify and discuss the particular stories, images, and actions of the life of Pat Tillman that became the discursive fragments of *Pat Tillman*. From discussions of a five-year-old Tillman clinging to a tree in a windstorm to a picture of Tillman in his Ranger uniform calmly sitting in front of an American flag, the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman* was defined by how discourse producers were able to create characterizations based on familiar facts, stories, and images of the life and death of Pat Tillman. The list of fragments that I lay out in chapter one should not be seen as final, but instead represents a work in continual progress. As characterizations continue to be produced and more information is discovered about Tillman's life and death, more fragments are shaped as pieces of the discursive *Pat Tillman*. My discussion of these fragments traces them back to their discursive origins and examines some of the ways in which they have been discussed since. Chapter one sets the scene for my analysis of how these fragments circulated in finished texts as of the completion of this project.

Next, chapter two presents an examination of how discourse producers employed those fragments to characterize *Pat Tillman* as a hero. Following his death, the idea that Pat Tillman was a hero became almost universally taken for granted. However, what these characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero meant as a symbol of American values became a point of contention. Moments such as Tillman's public memorial stand out for the ways in which different orators attempted to grapple with Pat Tillman's symbolic legacy. In moments such as this, the diverse and competing characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero were complicated by how they were contrasted to other

characterizations of heroes. Questions like “Are athletes really heroes?” and “Does how Pat Tillman died change how we perceive his sacrifice?” confronted discourse producers with the symbolic dimensions of heroism as a means to comment on social and cultural values. Chapter two focuses on specific instances where discourse producers connected their characterizations of *Pat Tillman* to notions of heroism and what those characterizations reveal about the cultural existence of heroism itself.

In chapter three, I turn my attention to the reproduction of the two photographs that served as images of *Pat Tillman*. The images that were selected to represent Tillman’s sports and military careers became the primary visual characterizations of Tillman’s life and they participated in the reproduction of *Pat Tillman* as an ideological embodiment of masculinity. These photos connected the discursive *Pat Tillman* with the belief that a person’s physical sex creates a gendered set of expectations for how that person is predestined to behave. Tillman’s “square-jaw” became linked to his integrity (Towle 2004, 72) and his “determination” was symbolized by his wildly flung limbs (Maximum Cardinals 2006a). The use of these photographs as visual representations of *Pat Tillman* moralized a belief in masculinity that blends together patriarchal social structures with the physical characteristics of individual men. These images acted as visual symbols of the belief that “Pat is the man I want to be. Pat is the man we all want to be. Pat’s the man we should all aspire to be” (Rome 2004), while allowing for distinct possibilities for what being a man can mean.

Finally, in chapter four, I examine how biographies of Tillman’s life were shaped as stories of the American Dream. Given the familiarity of the “bootstraps” myth that is often attributed to Horatio Alger, it should come as no surprise that stories of Pat

Tillman's rise to prominence echoed familiar sentiments of how hard work and determination lead to the fulfillment of a person's dreams. Yet, as a characterization of the American Dream, the story of *Pat Tillman* was complicated by the death of the person while serving his country. Chapter four presents a critique of how biographical retellings of the life of Pat Tillman were complicated by his death serving the nation that had provided him the opportunity to live out his dreams. In this chapter, I confront the narrative influence of the American Dream while also examining the role of *Pat Tillman* as a characterization of contemporary insecurities about the promise of the American Dream in post-9/11 U.S. culture.

Overall, this study reveals the ways in which facts, stories, and images from the life and death of Pat Tillman were made into a powerful discourse formation called *Pat Tillman*. Unfortunately the politicians, critics, journalists, pundits, bloggers, editors, eulogists, friends, and family members did not clearly demarcate Pat Tillman from *Pat Tillman*. However, by focusing on the circulation of certain fragments of the discourse formation and exposing their connections to political and cultural discourses, I can examine the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman* as distinct from the life of Pat Tillman.

Chapter One

The Discursive Fragments of *Pat Tillman*

Even if someone does not recognize the name Pat Tillman, just a short description, “the NFL player who died in Afghanistan,” often stirs the memory. In fact, in 2006, the band Pearl Jam released a song entitled “World Wide Suicide” that the band’s lead singer, Eddie Vedder, claimed is about Pat Tillman despite the fact that Tillman’s name is never mentioned in the lyrics. Vedder told *Relix* magazine that:

It’s about him and a bunch of the guys who didn’t get as much coverage – the guys who barely got a paragraph instead of ten pages ... The thing about Tillman was, he got ten pages but they were all lies. His family is being blocked by our government in finding out what really happened. (quoted in Donnelly 2006, 71)

While the song presented an overtly critical stance on war, the narrative of the song “World Wide Suicide” was an implicit retelling of the story of Pat Tillman. In the song’s opening verse, Pearl Jam depicts a recollection of a reaction to the news of Tillman’s death:

I felt the earth on Monday. It moved beneath my feet. In the form of a morning paper laid out for me to see. Saw his face in a corner picture. I recognized the name. Could not stop staring at the face I’d never see again.

In this song, *Pat Tillman* is described as a recognizable face and name, but never as Pat Tillman. This song is not an account of Pat Tillman’s life or death. It is not a typical tribute song. It is a characterization used to comment on the U.S. government and its war policies. The fact that Pearl Jam believed that *Pat Tillman* could be identified without the name of the person underscores the need to account for the fragmented nature of characterizations like this one.

In accordance with my discussion of the relationship between formations, characterizations, and fragments from my introduction, this chapter looks at the facts,

stories, and images from the life and death of Pat Tillman that allowed discourse producers to create characterizations of *Pat Tillman*. Through my analysis, I have been able to account for thirty-three distinct facts, stories, and images that acted as fragments circulating in characterizations across the formation. My examination of these specific fragments reveals three dimensions of discursive fragments:

1. The perpetuation of specific facts, stories, and images in characterizations that connect those fragments with the ideas they are used to represent is what allows those facts, stories, and images to function as fragments.
2. The different configurations of fragments that are voiced by various and sometimes competing discourse producers allow them to be used to both preserve and challenge existing conceptions of the discourse formation.
3. Each time discourse producers employ these fragments, they create a distinct characterization that also extends the discursive existence of both the fragments and the formation itself.

The ideological associations connected to the discursive *Pat Tillman* resulted from the ways that discourse producers employed fragments in characterizations as a means to comment on contextual and ideological conceptions that, in turn, influenced the shape of the formation. The three dimensions of fragments that I have listed are a basis for understanding how particular facts, stories, and images enabled discourse producers to comment on the symbolic dimensions of *Pat Tillman* using information that was readily accessible to people familiar with the formation. Before I move on, I must discuss these three dimensions of fragments in relation to my critique of *Pat Tillman*.

Using Fragments to Discuss the Implications of a Characterization

To understand how the perpetuation of specific facts, stories, and images as fragments relies on how discourse producers create characterizations that connect those fragments with the ideas that they are used to represent, we must first accept that fragments are discursive in nature. Not every piece of information about Pat Tillman became a fragment. For example, Alex Garwood (2004) told many stories in his eulogy at the public memorial for Pat Tillman. He talked about friendship in his story of a trip to Ireland in which Tillman made a special effort to celebrate Garwood's birthday. He exemplified Tillman's dedication to family by mentioning Tillman's determination to be at the birth of Garwood's first child. As Tillman's long-time friend, Garwood lived experiences with Pat Tillman that were unique to their relationship. In response to Garwood's words, *San Jose Mercury News* columnist Mark Purdy described how the memory of Pat Tillman "did not become real Monday until his hometown buddies from San Jose's Leland High School opened their mouths" (2004, 1A). In chapter two, I will go into greater depth about the role that Garwood's eulogy played within the context of that public memorial, but here I would like to note that not all of the stories or facts that Garwood described that day were fragments of the discursive *Pat Tillman*. Despite the fact that Garwood discussed these stories as examples of Tillman's commitment to friendship and family, these stories were not perpetuated outside his rhetoric. These were stories about Pat Tillman and not fragments of the discursive *Pat Tillman*, and the distinction between the two is important.

What distinguishes a fragment from any other bit of information about Pat Tillman are the ways in which it is accounted for across characterizations. For instance,

in this chapter, I discuss the announcement of Tillman's death as a fragment. This announcement has meant different things at different times throughout the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman*. The implications of military spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Beevers' announcement of the death of a soldier in Afghanistan were changed when the Pentagon later confirmed that the soldier was Pat Tillman. At first glance it seemed like a simple acknowledgement of a soldier's death. Then it became the announcement of the death of the Army's most famous soldier. Later, as more information came to light about Tillman's death, many began to point to this moment as proof of a military conspiracy (some even hypothesized that the Army was hiding something even more sinister).

Difference or evolution is not the only way to identify how a fact, story, or image functioned as a fragment; sometimes the same piece of information is recounted over and over again in order to evidence the same type of characterization. As I discuss in my descriptions of these fragments, the brawl (#18) and marrying his high school sweetheart (#33) often acted as a means to discuss loyalty. Tillman's proclivity for climbing trees (#16) and his hair (#21) were frequently employed as proof of an independent spirit. The revelations that he was killed by friendly fire (#6) and the three bullets (#9) he took to the head became the evidence for a military conspiracy. The interpretations of these fragments were by no means static, but they did provide a foundation upon which future *Pat Tillman* characterizations could be built.

Preserving and Challenging the Discursive *Pat Tillman*

The second observation about fragments that I need to discuss before moving forward is that the different configurations of fragments that are voiced by various and

sometimes competing discourse producers have the capacity to both preserve and challenge aspects of the discourse formation. The unique combination of service and celebrity that was a result of Pat Tillman's enlistment in the military led to an interesting engagement with the meaning of a soldier's sacrifice. On the day after Tillman's death was announced, Barbara Walters (2004) discussed the symbolic significance of the loss:

He isn't the first soldier to die in the war on terror and sadly, he won't be the last. But when former NFL football star Pat Tillman was killed in action last night, he became the symbol of all who have gone before him. More than 800 families have quietly buried sons or daughters, husbands or fathers. And now, as Chris Connelly reports, another fallen hero is bringing new meaning to their sacrifice.

The notion that the death of a famous soldier had the capacity to bring "new meaning" to the sacrifice made by U.S. soldiers who were fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan became a complicated aspect of the discursive *Pat Tillman*. Some, like John McCain (2004c), were careful to point out that "many American families have suffered the same terrible sacrifice that the Tillman family now suffers. The courage and patriotism their loved one exemplified is as fine and compelling as Pat's. Their loss should grieve us just as much." While still others, like Joe Scarborough (2004a), marveled at the fact that Tillman sacrificed more than other soldiers:

You know, I've seen a lot of grumpy cynics out there saying, "You know what? There have been a lot of people that have sacrificed a lot of people that died over in Iraq. Don't make this guy out to be a huge hero."

But you know, the difference is, I don't know how many of those guys that are over there, I know there are a lot, but how many of them would have turned down a \$3.7 million career. A yearly annual salary. That's just remarkable.

The status of *Pat Tillman* as a public figure allowed for a symbolic existence that could simultaneously represent the sacrifices of soldiers and invoke scrutiny about why the person stood out from others who had also died in service of their nation. The contention about whether Pat Tillman's death in Afghanistan could stand for sacrifices being made

by soldiers provided an opportunity for discourse producers to discuss the role of fame in the characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero.

The conflict over what Pat Tillman's death meant as a reflection of the sacrifices made by soldiers was just one example of how a fragment could be used to both challenge and preserve existing notions of *Pat Tillman*. In the chapters two, three, and four, my analysis relies on how the fragments that I discuss in this chapter were used to create characterizations aligned with ideological positions. Just as the varying characterizations called *Pat Tillman* contributed to our understandings of the formation, their connection to ideological constructs like heroism, masculinity, and the American Dream relied on how discourse producers were able to craft their positions using these fragments. Each time a fragment was discussed, it was a piece of a characterization that had the capacity to preserve or challenge how those connections are made and what they say about the discursive *Pat Tillman*.

Reconstituting *Pat Tillman*

The last point I need to discuss before examining the fragments themselves is that each time discourse producers employ these fragments; they create a distinct characterization that also extends the discursive existence of both the fragments they employ and the formation itself. The symbolic interpretations of these fragments are not free floating or unanchored to preconceived notions of their own. Discourse producers reconstitute these facts, stories, and images often in response to how they have been associated with a particular idea or as evidence for an argument that also has a history. It is important to note at the outset that the use of "fragment" as a metaphor can be misleading. Fragments are not puzzle-pieces that are simply put together to create a

whole. Fragments can come in a vast array of forms including dramatic reenactments and visual imagery. They can be intertwined with one another in complementary forms such as when an image accompanies the words of a newspaper article. Often these fragments are densely connected within a single sentence. In other instances a single fragment could be the focus of an entire text. Therefore, in this chapter I will not be examining finished texts; instead, I will be providing an inventory of fragments that were significant in multiple characterizations of *Pat Tillman*.

By themselves, these fragments are just pieces of information, anecdotes, or photographs. Together with the interpretations of discourse producers, these facts, stories, and images became the material that allowed people to create characterizations that engaged the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman*. The format I employ to present these facts, stories, and images in this chapter highlights my belief that their existence as fragments is perpetuated by how they are reproduced across characterizations. That format is worth taking a moment to discuss before I begin. For each fragment I identify in this chapter, I have attempted to find a discursive point of origin that has more to do with its circulation as a fragment than it does with its source. For example, one of the fragments I discuss is a story from when Tillman was playing high school football. During a game in which Tillman's team had clearly blown out their opponents, coach Terry Hardtke directed Tillman that he was no longer to play on offense or defense. Tillman proceeded to head out onto the field on special teams and return a kickoff for a touchdown. Tillman's literal interpretation of Hardtke's orders was something that Hardtke later reflected on for Tim Layden's December 8, 1997 article in *Sports*

Illustrated.¹ Hardtke recalled that he had to take away Tillman's helmet and shoulder pads in order to prevent any further confusion. The source for this story is Terry Hardtke, the person who first told the story, but what is important for my analysis is that it was published as part of Layden's article. After this story was published in *Sports Illustrated*, it became a part of the discursive *Pat Tillman* and was employed to illustrate qualities like determination and intellect in subsequent characterizations. John McCain described this event as "one of the stories you always heard when someone was describing the larger-than-life legend that Pat Tillman has become" (2005a, 55).

While the discursive origin of stories like Terry Hardtke's recollection of Tillman's high school football exploits are easy to pinpoint, some of the fragments included in this chapter simply do not have a clear starting point. In those instances, I focus on a text that exemplifies the emergence of that particular fragment as a means to characterize *Pat Tillman*. One such fragment is Tillman's hair. The length and color of Tillman's hair has been employed in *Pat Tillman* characterizations as a means to discuss his California style (e.g., Carter 2005) and distinction from other football players (e.g., Emmons and Wilner 2002); it has even been characterized as Tillman's trademark (e.g., Jabber Head 2010). Tillman had both long and short hair as a child and continued to bounce between the two styles into adulthood (Biography Channel 2006). In this instance, it is difficult to point to a moment in which Pat Tillman's hair became a fragment in *Pat Tillman* characterizations, but much was made of his hair in the lead up to the 1997 Rose Bowl in which Tillman's ASU Sun Devils lost to the Ohio State

¹ In fact, many of these discursive fragments can be tied back to Layden's article from before Tillman was an NFL star. At that time, Layden tabbed him as "the best player you've never heard of" to justify a full four-page profile on an athlete that most thought would never make it in the NFL (86).

Buckeyes (i.e. Hlas 1997; Ludwig 1996; Magruder 1996). Because of the national prominence of the Rose Bowl and the brief treatment of Tillman as a celebrity in the buildup to the game, I have chosen to highlight a text from this time as an example of when Pat Tillman's hair became a part of the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman*. In these cases, there may be opportunity to quibble over which text deserved to be featured; in my assessment, I have chosen a text that best represents the precursor to future characterizations of *Pat Tillman*.

How the fragments on my list are positioned has little to do with a ranking system and more to do with their relationship with one another. Despite the fact that I have assigned a number to each fragment, that number should not be considered an indication of that particular fragment's relative importance. Instead it should be seen as a means to identify where that fragment is placed on this list so that readers can return to this chapter and easily find a fragment if they would like to refresh their memory as they move forward. I have tried to group related fragments together by related content. I begin with the fragment that I consider to be the foundation for the vast majority of characterizations of *Pat Tillman*, his decision to enlist in the Army. I then move through fragments pertaining to his life as a soldier and his death in Afghanistan. After dealing with the fragments pertaining to Tillman's military career, I explore the fragments about his life prior to his military service. There are thirty-three (33) fragments on the list and each somehow relates back to the life or death of Pat Tillman. Each fragment is discussed with a corresponding number and title (e.g. 1. Decision to Enlist). Following the title is a quote that – as I have discussed – best represents the discursive origins of the fragment. That quote is followed by a short description of some of the ways in which that specific fragment became a part of the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman*. Not all of these

fragments hold the same significance, but each became the material for *Pat Tillman* characterizations. The remainder of this chapter is an exploration of the fragments that became the material for those characterizations.

1. Decision to Enlist

Arizona Cardinals safety Pat Tillman is giving up the NFL for the Army... “This is very serious with Pat,” (Former Coach Dave) McGinnis said. “It’s very personal, and I honor that. I honor the integrity of that. It was not a snap decision he woke up and made yesterday. This has been an ongoing process, and he feels very strongly about it.” (Reisner 2002, para. 1–3)

Tillman’s decision to sacrifice the riches that accompany being a successful professional athlete to join the military turned an athlete with limited local fame into a national topic for discussion. Tillman left a multi-year, multimillion dollar contract offer behind when he decided to enlist, causing speculations about why Tillman would do it. Diane Sawyer commented when Tillman enlisted that “it says something for America that a lot of people think he must be crazy, but Pat Tillman has never worried about what people might say about him” (Roberts 2002) . Tillman’s enlistment was often characterized as a more authentic brand of heroism than that represented by other athletes. In an article composed as a letter to Tillman, sports journalist Sally Jenkins wrote: “Actually, I was tempted to start my letter this way, for laughs, seeing as how you might need some, what with all you’re going through: Dear Pat, You think you’ve got it tough, crawling through mud and climbing up rope ladders? Tiger Woods has it tough, too. Every day there’s another story about how tough it is to be him – knowing, that any moment, someone else might ask him about Augusta. Always having to bite his nails, and wonder what lies ahead, around the next dogleg. Or Dear Pat, Don’t be afraid. You think you have fears? Allen Iverson has fears, too. He’s afraid to live in Philadelphia. Or Dear Pat, I know you’re tired and hurting. Shaq is, too. We all hope his big toe will be healed

in time for the next Olympics” (2002, D1). Very few people ever openly criticized Tillman’s decision (and those criticisms are part of my analysis in chapter two), but characterizations of people thought Tillman was crazy for leaving the NFL were often similarly framed as a commentary on those who questioned Tillman instead of a criticism of Tillman himself.

2. Choosing to Stay Silent

Tillman... talked to Cardinals owner Bill Bidwill, McGinnis and defensive coordinator Larry Marmie in separate interviews Wednesday. He could not be reached for comment. (Reisner 2002, para. 4)

While Tillman’s decision brought him national attention, he refused the spotlight and instead chose to allow his former coach, Dave McGinnis (2004b), and his agent, Frank Bauer (2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d), to attempt to manage the public scrutiny. Dave McGinnis recalled the meeting where Tillman told him of his decision for a section of the book *Pat Tillman: He Graduated Life with Honors and No Regrets*: “After Pat had decided to end his football playing and enter the military, Pat came into my office, pulled his chair around and said, ‘We need to talk.’ He went through it all. It was his wish that this not draw a lot of attention... I said to him, ‘Pat, this will be quite the storm here. How do you propose to deal with it?’ He said, ‘Mac, I’m not going to. You are’” (2004b, 119). Pat Tillman’s humility and silence were often offered as evidence of his merit. Announcements of Tillman’s decision were often accompanied by comments like “as for his stunning career change, Tillman clearly is not doing it for the publicity. He has refused all interview requests – including those from national TV networks, *Sports Illustrated* and the *New York Times*. He is even requesting that the Army not use him as a poster boy. And he has asked family members not to comment” (Emmons and Wilner 2002, A1). According to journalist Dave Kindred, “maybe the best way to make sense of

Tillman's decision to move from celebrity to silence is to believe that Sept. 11 made it possible to think the very best about people, to think that in this undeniably self-absorbed culture there yet are people whose selflessness is inspirational" (2002, 15A). Discourse producers often depicted Tillman's silence as an example of how *Pat Tillman* represented the difference between celebrities and heroes, a reoccurring theme in characterizations of *Pat Tillman*.

3. Becoming a Ranger

Cardinals coach Dave McGinnis said Tillman, a two-year starter at free safety, wants to go through boot camp and join the elite Rangers program with his younger brother, Kevin, an infielder who spent last year with the Cleveland Indians' organization. (Reisner 2002, para. 3)

Tillman's enlistment was not just a decision to fight for his country; it was the pursuit of becoming one of the Army's elite warriors. Tillman's decision to join the Rangers became a means to signify determination and a desire to be the best. *New York Times* reporter Mike Freeman wrote: "The greatest compliment once paid to Tillman came from the Cardinals' coaches, who raved about his toughness... Compared with what he is doing now, such praise seems almost trivial. What (Carol) Darby (news media chief for the Army Special Operations command) said might be more fitting. 'The Rangers are a tight-knit group,' she said. 'They trust each other with their lives. The fact Tillman is a Ranger says a lot about his character'" (2003, D1). During the 2003 ESPY Awards Kevin and Pat Tillman were presented with the Arthur Ashe Award for service to the community. The video voiceover described the Army Ranger ethic of being the first to act in a situation and the last to receive recognition as the "ideal ethic for the Tillmans." Pat Tillman's decision to strive to become an elite soldier was frequently discussed as something masculine and added credibility to his decision to enlist.

4. The Announcement of the Death of Pat Tillman

Lt. Col. Matt Beevers, a spokesman for the U.S. military in Kabul, said a soldier was killed by anti-coalition militia forces about 25 miles from a U.S. military base at Khost, the site of frequent attacks.

The Department of Defense confirmed Tillman's death Friday night, stating in a news release that he was killed in Afghanistan "when his patrol vehicle came under attack." It did not provide details. (Baum 2004a, para. 5-6)

One of the main discursive fragments that influenced characterizations of Tillman's life was his death. The announcement was complicated by a number of factors including how he died, who knew, and what information could be released. Tillman died April 22, 2004 and it was made public April 23, 2004. Military spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Beevers was the first to report on a soldier's death in Afghanistan and that soldier was later confirmed by the defense department to be Tillman. The original description of Tillman's death was that he was killed by enemy-fire and that account persisted despite the fact that a P4 (personal for) message that warned Tillman had been killed by friendly-fire had circulated throughout the Department of Defense (Department of Defense 2007). In an official report released by the Inspector General of the Department of Defense, Colonel James Nixon documented that he made the call to prevent even other members of Tillman's Ranger Unit from knowing that a friendly-fire investigation had been initiated. Nixon expressed concern that any information that was disseminated beyond a small group of people in the chain of command could be "leaked to press" before the Tillman family had been notified (Department of Defense 2007, 43). Over time, not only was the Tillman family kept in the dark about what had happened, but the lies about how Tillman died grew bigger. Soon, the how, where, and why Tillman died and what was covered up during the hours and days that followed became central to

discussions of *Pat Tillman* as a reflection of the politics of the Bush administration and the treatment of soldiers as heroes in U.S. culture.

5. The Official Account

If you are the victim of an ambush there are very few things that you can do to increase your chances of survival. One of which is to get off that ambush point as fast as you can. One of the vehicles in Pat's convoy could not get off. He made the call. He dismounted his troops taking the fight to the enemy uphill to seize the tactical high ground from the enemy. This gave his brothers, in the downed vehicle, time to move off that target. He directly saved their lives with that move. Pat sacrificed himself so his brothers could live. (White 2004)

The official account of how Tillman died was not released to the public until almost two weeks after he died. On May 3, 2004, Navy SEAL and Tillman friend Stephen White delivered the official account of former NFL star's death defending his nation. During White's eulogy, he told the story of a soldier who fell victim to an enemy ambush and sacrificed his life in defense of his brothers in arms. Three years after delivering his eulogy, White was seated before the House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform testifying that the story that he told that day in San Jose was false and that the military had betrayed both him and Tillman. White lamented that "I am the guy that told America how he died basically at that memorial, and it was incorrect. That does not sit well with me" (U.S. Congress 2008, 16). The story that White delivered in his eulogy was the official story given to him by the Army and proved to be a deception of White, Tillman's family, and the public. The version of Tillman's heroic attempts to save his fellow Rangers delivered by White first circulated as a fitting end to the life as a heroic figure, but became a piece of evidence in the case against the military's handling of Tillman's death and point of discussion on whether heroes have to have died heroically. This moment is still one of the clearest indications of a distinction between the person Pat Tillman and the discursive *Pat Tillman*. While the public may

never know what actually happened on that hillside in Afghanistan, the variety of theories continues to expand.

6. Friendly Fire

“While there was no one specific finding of fault, the investigation results indicate that Corp. Tillman probably died as a result of friendly fire while his unit was engaged in combat with enemy forces,” Lt. Gen. Philip R. Kensington Jr. said in a statement released by the Army Special Operations Command. (Cohen 2004, para. 3)

Less than a month after White delivered the first description of Tillman’s death, it was revealed that friendly fire was a “probable” cause of his death. While this original report misattributes the statement to Phillip R. Kensington instead of Kensinger, Kensinger’s report was actually a matter of intense scrutiny on the part of the military. During Jon Krakauer’s investigation of the military’s handling of Tillman’s death for his biography on Tillman, he discovered there were many people involved in how that announcement would be made including conscious decisions about how to best protect anyone inside the Bush administration from the fallout (2009d, 306–309). When General Kensinger was chosen to make the announcement, he was selected because he was the highest-ranking Ranger within the Defense Department. It was concluded that his presence would help to contain the political ramifications of this announcement. Kensinger was directed deliver the message outside of Washington DC at the Ranger training facilities in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He was told to deliver the message on a Saturday during the Memorial Day holiday weekend in hopes that the message would stay off the radar of the popular press. He was also advised not to answer questions. According to Krakauer “at the insistence of his superiors, the statement Kensinger had been given to read declared that ‘Tillman *probably* died as a result of friendly fire,’ even though the official investigation was unequivocal in its determination that fratricide was

the cause of death” (emphasis in original, 308). Kensinger’s announcement made major news during that first weekend (Cohen 2004; Hattori 2004; Callaway 2004) and then reemerged as part of several subsequent investigations into the Army’s mishandling and deceptions regarding Tillman’s death (Krakauer 2009d; Coll 2004a; 2004b; White 2005; Mendoza 2007). The Army’s attempts to cover up the fact that Tillman had been shot by his fellow soldiers influenced how the discursive *Pat Tillman* would function as a hero and a representation of the values that he was mythologized as trying to defend.

7. The Army Knew

The first Army investigator who looked into the death of former NFL player Pat Tillman in Afghanistan last year found within days that he was killed by his fellow Rangers in an act of “gross negligence,” but Army officials decided not to inform Tillman’s family or the public until weeks after a nationally televised memorial service. (White 2005, A3)

On May 3, 2005, exactly one year after the original account of Tillman’s death was delivered, U.S. Army officials acknowledged that the Army was aware that the official story of Tillman’s death was a lie *before* it was delivered at his memorial. At the behest of the Tillman family and Senator John McCain, Brigadier General Gary M. Jones completed a series of interviews with the soldiers who were present when Tillman was killed and the soldiers who had conducted the investigations into his death in order to provide a clearer picture as to what happened (White 2005). According to *Washington Post* writer Josh White, “the documents also show that officers made erroneous initial reports that Tillman was killed by enemy fire, destroyed critical evidence and initially concealed the truth from Tillman’s brother, also an Army Ranger, who was near the attack on April 22, 2004, but did not witness it” (2005, A3). Jones requested that the Pentagon review his findings, but in the end concluded like those before him that there was no “intent” to conceal the truth (Brown 2006). The acknowledgement that the Army

had in fact deceived the Tillman family as well as the public about what had happened in Afghanistan triggered a fourth Army investigation into the events and perpetuated the role of *Pat Tillman* as a symbol of government misconduct. Mike Fish described that “the people who were close to Pat Tillman, both as a civilian and as a soldier, paint a picture of a complicated man who questioned authority to understand it, who challenged his friends to defend their beliefs and who sought as many points of view as possible to make sense of an issue. They describe a person with no tolerance for dishonesty or incompetence, who would have countenanced neither the manner in which he was killed nor the way his death was handled” (2006, para. 9). The misinformation that was distributed following Tillman’s death also called the stories of how other soldiers had died into question. Journalist Rhonda Chriss Lokeman wrote “Given that we now know what really happened in the death of Pat Tillman in Afghanistan, is it any wonder the Italians dispute the U.S. government’s version of how Nicola Calipari died in Iraq?” (2005, para. 1). Her article cast a shadow on the information that the military reports about all combat deaths.

8. Criminal Probe

The Army said Saturday it will launch a criminal investigation into the April 2004 death of Pat Tillman, the former NFL player who was shot to death by fellow soldiers in Afghanistan in what previous Army reviews had concluded was an accidental shooting.

Col. Joseph Curtin, an Army spokesman, said the Defense Department office of inspector general had reviewed the matter at the Army’s request and concluded that a criminal probe was warranted. (Burns and Baldor 2006)

Until March 5, 2006, the Army had maintained that the death of Pat Tillman was an accident. Then Colonel Joseph Curtin announced that those findings were inconclusive. Col. Curtin also suggested that the investigation would be an attempt to

“answer the family’s questions” (Burns and Baldor 2006). Following this announcement, news reports focused on how the Army was now prepared to admit that Tillman’s death could have been negligent homicide (i.e. White 2006; Nichols 2006; Starr 2006). The admission that Tillman’s death could have been the result of negligence fueled speculations that Tillman’s death could have been the result of something more intentional. Sports historian and blogger David Zirin (2006c) wrote about all the lies and deliberate attempts to cover-up the circumstances surrounding Tillman’s death that were perpetrated by the Army. His column suggested that there is more to be found than simply an accident.

9. Three Bullets

Army medical examiners were suspicious about the close proximity of the three bullet holes in Pat Tillman’s forehead and tried without success to get authorities to investigate whether the former NFL player’s death amounted to a crime, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press. (Mendoza 2007, para. 1)

Many believed that their suspicions about how Pat Tillman had died were confirmed when Associated Press writer Martha Mendoza reported on the cluster of bullets that killed Pat Tillman. Just type the words “Pat Tillman” and “Murder” into a Google search and endless blogs about the death of Pat Tillman will appear on your computer. Radio host Jeff Rense posted a blog on his website that claimed “TILLMAN WAS ASSASSINATED. He was shot in the forehead, THREE TIMES, and the ‘official’ story, which changes faster than the wind, is that he was shot with an M-16. THIS IS UTTERLY IMPOSSIBLE. On fully automatic, from just about any distance, almost anyone with an M-16 can hit a solid target three times in a close proximity. But the FIRST bullet out of an M-16 into Tillman’s head wouldn’t have left anything else for the other two bullets to hit” (emphasis in original, Rense.com 2007, para. 3–5). YouTube

user Greenback001 posted a video entitled “MURDER: Pat Tillman 3 Shots to the Head” that accused the Bush administration of assassinating Tillman. Blogger, radio host, and writer for *The Huffington Post*, Rob Kall described this evidence as a “huge story (that) is not being given the attention it deserves by the lamestream media” (2007 para. 3), but internet bloggers were not alone in their suspicions. Noted liberal pundit Keith Olbermann discussed the findings on his MSNBC program *Countdown* against the backdrop of the words “Motive for Murder?” (2007c).

10. Congressional Hearings

A U.S. House committee scheduled hearings Tuesday on the string of misleading statements by the military following the friendly fire death of Pat Tillman in Afghanistan and the kidnapping and rescue of Pvt. Jessica Lynch in Iraq...

It will “examine why inaccurate accounts of these two incidents were disseminated, the sources and motivations for the accounts, and whether the appropriate Administration officials have been held accountable,” the committee said Tuesday in a brief announcement on its Web site. (Lindlaw 2007, para. 1)

When the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform of the House of Representatives (U.S. Congress 2008) took up their investigation of the circumstances surrounding the death of the NFL Football Star turned Army Ranger the issue had already been politicized. The implications of the circumstances surrounding Pat Tillman’s death had become a subject of scrutiny and speculation. However, these hearings were not designed as a means for uncovering what happened to Tillman, instead “the purpose of this investigation has been to determine what the top officials at the White House and the Defense Department knew about Corporal Tillman’s fratricide, when they knew this, and what they did with their knowledge” (1). The committee called nine witnesses to testify including Stephen White, Kevin Tillman, Mary Tillman and Specialist Bryan O’Neal who was with Tillman when he died. The hearings culminated in the testimony of

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who clearly stated that he could not recall when he was notified of Tillman's death despite recommending to the Secretary of the Army that "we might want to keep our eye on him" (cited in U.S. Congress 2008, 3). Unable to prove that there were political motivations behind the cover-up of the events that led to Pat Tillman's death, this public investigation used inference and innuendo to craft suspicion about links between *Pat Tillman* and the Bush administration. These hearings were a political performance that received a great deal of coverage from the press (e.g. Alfano 2007; Greenwald 2007; Coile 2007).

11. Calculated Lies

In the days leading up to Pat's memorial service, media accounts, based on information provided by the Army and the White House, were wreathed in a patriotic glow and became more dramatic in tone. A terrible tragedy that might have further undermined support for the war in Iraq was transformed into an inspirational message that served instead to support the nation's foreign policy wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. (Kevin Tillman, cited in U.S. Congress 2008, 8–9)

As part of Kevin Tillman's testimony before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, he critiqued the political and national interests that were attempting to manipulate the memory of his brother. In turn, Kevin Tillman added new dimensions to the already growing discursive formation of *Pat Tillman*. Under headlines like "Pentagon Used Soldiers for Public Relations" (Vanden Brook 2007) and "Brother Accuses Military of 'Deliberate and Calculated Lies'" (White 2007), Kevin Tillman's words were recounted as a commentary on the role of *Pat Tillman* in crafting perceptions of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

12. The September 12, 2001 Interview

I think, you know, it's like anything, you kind of take it for granted, especially in the country we live in. We are such a free society and, you know, we look at that flag, and I do, I've always had a great feeling for the flag, but even someone who considers themselves that way. You just don't think about it all the time. You

don't realize what it gives. You don't realize how great a life we have over here. Even as athletes, we bitch and moan every now and again about this or that and if we ever just, you know, times like this you stop and think about just how, not only how good we have it, but what kind of a system we live under, what freedoms we're allowed. And that wasn't built over night. And it's kind of the flag is a symbol of all that. The symbol of, you know, my great grandfather was at Pearl Harbor and a lot of my family has given up, has gone and fought in wars and I really haven't done a damn thing as far as laying myself on the line like that. So, I have a great deal of respect for those that have and what the flag stands for. ("The ESPY Awards" 2003)

Though Tillman was still under contract as a football player and would not enlist for eight more months, the closest Tillman ever came to publicly explaining his reasons for joining the Army was in an interview with NFL Films on September 12, 2001. His words in this interview foreshadowed the decision to come. This interview was often used as an explanation for Tillman's actions. Especially when Tillman expressed that as an athlete he felt as if he hadn't "done a damn thing," these words echoed loudly following his death across news networks that employed his words as an explanation of his actions (i.e., McIntyre 2006; Schaap 2007; Couric 2008; Roberts 2009). The responses Tillman gave in this interview allowed people to extrapolate his motives. President George W. Bush "Friends say that this young man saw the images of September the 11th, and seeing that evil, he felt called to defend America," a line that was carefully crafted by his staff because of Tillman's silence following his decision to enlist (U.S. Congress 2008, 25). After Tillman's death, *New York Times* editorial columnist Frank Rich wrote that "the casualty was Pat Tillman, twenty-seven, who had been a starting safety for the Arizona Cardinals football team and had walked away from a \$3.6 million NFL contract to enlist and fight terrorism in the aftermath of Al Qaeda's attacks on America" (2006, 123). These reactions to Tillman's death equated his decision making with his own call to action.

13. Tillman's Private Beliefs

Interviews also show a side of Pat Tillman not widely known – a fiercely independent thinker who enlisted, fought and died in service to his country yet was critical of President Bush and opposed the war in Iraq, where he served a tour of duty. (Collier 2005, para. 7)

Tillman's anti-war stance was something that remained private for over a year after his death largely because Tillman's family and friends had observed the same code of silence that Tillman had in life. The Tillman family had maintained that silence out of respect for Tillman's wishes both before and after his death, but in the face of another government investigation Tillman's mother Mary and father Patrick Sr. accepted an interview with Robert Collier of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. In the corresponding article, Collier described Mary and Patrick, Sr.'s knowledge of Tillman's privately held beliefs: "Throughout the controversy, the Tillman family has been reluctant to cause a media stir. Mary noted that Pat shunned publicity, refusing all public comment when he enlisted and asking the Army to reject all media requests for interviews while he was in service. Pat's widow, Marie, and his brother, Kevin, have not become publicly involved in the case, and they declined to comment for this article. Yet other Tillman family members are less reluctant to show Tillman's unique character, which was more complex than the public image of a gung-ho patriotic warrior. He started keeping a journal at 16 and continued the practice on the battlefield, writing in it regularly. (His journal was lost immediately after his death.)... She said that although he supported the Afghan war, believing it justified by the Sept. 11 attacks, 'Pat was very critical of the whole Iraq war'" (para. 60). Many, like Ann Coulter (2005a), found this information incongruent with their characterizations of *Pat Tillman*. Others grasped at the moment to create a characterization of *Pat Tillman* that aligned a political position (Coulter 2004; Olbermann

2007b; 2007c; Nimmo 2008; Farley 2009). Still others cited Tillman's beliefs as motive for murder (McCracken 2007; DBurn 2007; Roland 2009). In each instance, the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman* was burdened with new implications and a greater diversity of characterizations because of the involvement of contemporary politics.

14. Meeting With Noam Chomsky

Mary Tillman said a friend of Pat's even arranged a private meeting with Chomsky, the antiwar author, to take place after his return from Afghanistan — a meeting prevented by his death. (Collier 2005)

Pat Tillman never met with Noam Chomsky, but rumors that he had intended to meet with the noted peace advocate created some dissonance amongst characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as an American warrior. Author David Zirin cited Tillman's desire to meet with Chomsky as proof of the fact that Tillman was not afraid to let his feelings about the war in Iraq be known. In an article for CommonDreams.org, Zirin wrote that his desire to meet with Chomsky was a slice of "the real Pat Tillman" (2005b, para. 8). Some bloggers went as far as to suggest that Tillman's desire to meet with Chomsky was enough to be the motive for the Bush administration to have him killed (Buchanan 2005; Watson 2007; Guarisco 2009).

15. The Military Image

(Photography Plus 2003)

Following his death, much like many of the soldiers who have died in combat, Tillman's military portrait became a standard means for representing his life. Unlike most other soldiers though, this photograph also became a means for representing the controversy surrounding his death. This portrait featured a quiet, stoic Tillman whose life was defined by the decisions he made and symbols with which they were associated. Seated in front (or in defense) of the flag and adorned in his Ranger uniform, this

photograph visually connects many of the other fragments on this list. Yet, this photo did more than just visually connect other fragments of the discourse. This portrait represented Tillman in a manner that connected his physical presence with the symbols that surrounded him. Mike Towle described the Pat Tillman in this image as a “square-jawed, chiseled countenance in an official army photo would someday, posthumously, enhance his image as a real-life version of comic book hero Sgt. Rock” (2004, 72). On the website Arthur’s Hall of Viking Manliness, Tillman is listed as the manliest man of modern times with this description: “What can you say about this piece of pure masculine perfection? First of all, look at him!! He looks like a G.I. Joe action figure on steroids. That jaw line can only be explained by an absolutely inhuman amount of male hormone, and as you will soon know, testosterone is the key to manliness” (Arthur, n.d.b, para. 1). This image became a discursive fragment that linked together the actions of Pat Tillman with a brand of masculinity that *Pat Tillman* came to symbolize. It acted as a discursive fragment in the discussion of the impact of Tillman’s death on national politics and his life on cultural ideologies.

16. Climbing Trees

When he was five, he climbed onto the porch roof of his family’s two-story house during a windstorm, wrapped himself around a slender tree trunk and swayed in the wind for fun, until his mother, Mary, coaxed him back onto the roof. (Layden 1997, 91)

In Tim Layden’s 1997 article about Tillman for *Sports Illustrated*, he recounted Tillman’s penchant for climbing as an example of how he stood out even during childhood. In his profile on Tillman following his death, *Sports Illustrated* writer Gary Smith employed Layden’s story to compare the terrain Tillman faced in Afghanistan to his childhood home, “Growing up on a country road on the edge of San Jose in a house

that abutted a wooded park, he'd always loved trees, even when they bristled with danger. As a five-year-old, he climbed on to the porch roof of the Tillmans' two-story house during a wind storm, wrapped himself around a frail tree trunk and oscillated until his mother, Mary, talked him back on to the roof" (2004, 43). In an interview for CNN, ESPN the magazine writer Gary Belsky recalled that "this was a guy of great physical courage and great commitment. You know, when he was a kid growing up, he used to play in the trees around San Jose. He would sort of hold on to branches during wind storms just so he could swing with them." Filmmaker Chris Valentine (2004a) used this story as the opening words to a video tribute that he created in Tillman's memory: "As the windstorm arrived, whipping its full fury, the boy snuck out of the house, climbed onto the roof of the porch and wrapped his body around a shaking tree. The boy held tightly, his face feeling the storm's strength, his mind taking notes. Pat Tillman was five and already pushing the limits of life." This story reoccurred as representative of the person that Pat Tillman would become. The childhood version of *Pat Tillman* was often described as a "curious infant" (Pat Tillman Foundation 2008b, para. 1) or "built for action" (Biography Channel 2006). Tillman's willingness to face his fears was employed as part of the foundation for characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a person who would sacrifice his life to face a challenge.

17. Keeping Him Out of the Game

As a senior safety-tailback-kick returner at Leland High School in San Jose, Tillman so detested leaving the field that once, after his coach pulled the starters at halftime of a first-round playoff romp, he took the field for the second-half kickoff and ran it back for a touchdown. The coach, Terry Hardtke, confiscated Tillman's helmet and shoulder pads and put them under a bench lest Tillman get the urge to score again. (Layden 1997, 88)

As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, one particular story from Tillman's days as a high school football player that has been repeated in several incarnations but was most notably linked back to Tillman's coach Terry Hardtke. While in some circumstances this story would be seen as an example of insolence, arrogance, or even cruelty to the other team, in Tillman's case it became an example of intelligence, determination, and will that was repeated in biographies and eulogies as an example of his distinct character and abilities.

18. The Brawl

In the fall of Pat's senior year, he went to the aid of a friend in a fight outside a pizza parlor and, in Pat's words, "beat the s---" out of his friend's assailant, who was in his early 20s. Several weeks after the incident Pat was arrested and charged as a juvenile (he was 17) with felony assault. Before the case was resolved, he accepted a scholarship to Arizona State (Brigham Young and San Jose State were the other schools that offered) but desperately feared it would be revoked. Pat quietly pleaded guilty to the charge. In the summer of '94 he served 30 days in a juvenile detention facility, and his conviction was reduced to a misdemeanor upon his release. (Layden 1997, 91)

Tillman was quoted in Layden's article as saying that "I am proud of that chapter in my life... I'm not proud of what happened, but I'm proud that I learned more from that one bad decision than all the good decisions I've ever made" (91). The story of Tillman's incarceration evolved from this first account in *Sports Illustrated* to become evidence of his loyalty (Biography Channel 2006), his straight-forwardness (McCain 2005a), and his principles (Krakauer 2009d). John McCain repeated the story in his book of stories that "every young person should know and every adult should remember" because "No one outside his family and Leland High School need ever have found out about it. But he didn't hide it from anyone. He regretted the mistake" (2005a, 57). The Biography Channel documentary on Tillman's life equated this fight with the events of September 11th as moments that shaped the character of Pat Tillman. Their characterization of *Pat*

Tillman relied on how this story was a turning point in Tillman's life. This story was depicted as, a mistake that helped him to become the person that he was, an example of his loyalty, and the Tillman's discussion of the story (despite the fact that it was part of his sealed juvenile record) was characterized as an exemplification of his candor and honesty.

19. "It Stinks, Nobody Tells the Truth"

On his recruiting visit to Arizona State... Tillman was asked by Sun Devils coach Bruce Snyder what he thought of the recruiting process. "It stinks," Tillman shot back. "Nobody tells the truth." (Layden 1997, 88)

Coach Bruce Snyder listed Tillman's response to his question amongst the reasons for why Tillman eventually received the 25th out of 25 scholarships ASU awarded that year (Layden 1997, 88). Under the heading "A Real American Hero," blogger davidmcraney (2009) employed the quote as evidence of Tillman's exceptional character. Tillman biographer Jonathan Rand described Tillman's answer to the question as "hardly the kind of blunt response a coach expects from a high school senior" (Rand 2004, 73). When Bruce Snyder and Pat Tillman were inducted into the Arizona State University Athletic Hall of Fame, the story resurfaced as a commentary on how Tillman was different than most players Snyder had recruited and coached. Tillman's honesty and straightforwardness were touted as fundamental characteristics of his personality and were celebrated aspects of *Pat Tillman*.

20. "I've Got Things to Do with My Life"

He (Arizona State coach Bruce Snyder) remembered it (Tillman's response to his question about the recruiting process) the following August when he sat Tillman down to discuss – as he does with all freshmen – the concept of redshirting. "I'm not redshirting," Tillman said. "I've got things to do with my life. You can do whatever you want with me, but in four years, I'm gone." (Layden 1997, 88)

The next line in Layden's description of Tillman is "Snyder thought, *This Kid is Different*" (emphasis in original). Normally coupled with the quote of Tillman's recruiting trip to Arizona State University, this story also reflects how Coach Snyder was struck by Tillman's candor. According to Snyder, "life was not a red-shirt option for him" (2004, 104). As evidenced by these stories, Tillman's candor and unflinching self-confidence came to be essential elements of characterizations of him as both an extraordinary athlete and exceptional person. Robert Alt of the *National Review* used this quote as an example of the type of character that would eventually "surprise and amaze us all" (2004, para. 1). Blogger Raymond Pierotti (2004) discussed this moment from Tillman's life as evidence of what made him unique from other soldiers and other athletes. This quote eventually became the title of Mike Towle's (2004) *I've Got Things to Do with My Life – Pat Tillman: The Making of an American Hero*.

21. His Hair

ASU linebacker Pat Tillman was attempting to downplay his importance to an Arizona State defense that went from worst to first in the Pac-10 this season. 'I'm just an average Joe,' Tillman said. 'With longer hair,' a passerby said. 'Just an average Jane,' Tillman said, smiling. (Magruder 1996, 1C)

Much was made of Tillman's appearance during his collegiate and professional football careers, specifically his hair. Jack Magruder of the *Arizona Daily Star* described Tillman in an interview he did with before 1997 Rose Bowl. Chick Ludwig of the *Dayton Daily News* began his Rose Bowl profile on Tillman by remarking that "the first thing you notice is the hair – shoulder length, brownish blond and scraggly" (1996, 3). However, when Tillman made it to the NFL, he eventually cut his signature long hair. Tillman's hair became a part of characterizations of him as distinct. Alex Garwood (2004), Tillman's brother-in-law and the original director of the Pat Tillman Foundation,

echoed a sentiment that became common in descriptions of *Pat Tillman* “when it was cool to have it short, he wore it long. When it was cool to have it long, he wore it short.” Phoenix area sports reporter Brad Cesmat recalled how “It amused me how people would make such a big deal of his physical appearance, by that meaning the length of his hair. He let his mane grow and then he got it cut short. It was just hair and I think he was amused that it was always such a topic of conversation” (Biography Channel 2006).

22. Light Poles

The kid who used to dive off bridges now likes to sit and read, or just hide out, on the light tower overlooking Sun Devil Stadium. (Layden 1997, 87)

Spread across pages 86–87 of *Sports Illustrated*, and accompanied by the title “A Cut Above,” was an image of Tillman high above Arizona’s Sun Devil Stadium in a light standard, which he had climbed in his signature flip-flop sandals. The image of Pat Tillman seated on the light standards above Arizona’s Sun Devil Stadium became an important fragment (Gero 2010); but unlike some of the other images on this list of fragments, the fragment in this case was the fact that Tillman used to use the light towers as a place to escape. Photographer Paul Gero described the thought process that went into taking this photo in a recollection of Tillman after he died: “I first proposed the ideas to Pat while we were talking on the cell phone after he had spent the day with the reporter. He politely said something along the lines, ‘Mr. Gero, I don’t mean to be difficult or a prima donna, but that doesn’t sound like me. Would you mind if we did something else?’ I didn’t want to make him uncomfortable so I told him we could. I asked his idea. He thought for a minute and then told me how he sometimes climbed up the light tower at Sun Devil Stadium to meditate. As soon as he said that, my jaw dropped. It was a photographer’s dream” (Gero 2004, 38). The photograph itself was the lead image from

that 1997 Layden article and is often discussed but seldom reprinted. Characterizations of *Pat Tillman* often included his predilection for climbing the light standards 200 feet above the stadium as evidence of an intelligent, reflective individual. In 2002, just after Tillman enlisted, Troy Johnson described how “his weekly communion with nature came after a perilous climb up a stadium light tower. He made his ascents without a safety harness or company, except for the birds that occasionally buzzed him on his way up the narrow ladder. Tillman’s football coaches at Arizona State would have been aghast if they had known their star defensive player was risking his life every Thursday night for a panoramic view of the nearby buttes, airport and twinkling lights of Tempe and Phoenix. For Tillman, however, the reward far outweighed the danger. He selected his secret meditation spot because nobody else would visit it unless, of course, a light bulb needed to be changed.” According to Richard Lacayo of *Time*, “At school he got into the habit of climbing at night up the narrow ladder of a 200-ft. light tower at Sun Devil Stadium. He would perch at the top, look at the stars and wonder where he was headed” (2004, 39). Arizona State University’s Baseball coach Pat Murphy recalled “He’d be up at the top of the stadium hanging his legs over the edge and reading. It was like he was a wise man going to do some thinking” (Bane et al. 2004, 68). The content of Gero’s photograph was often employed in characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as unique from other athletes, other soldiers, or even just other people.

23. Graduated College in 3½ years with a 3.84 GPA

He is a walking, talking contradiction: a little guy who plays linebacker, a dedicated student who looks like a slacker, a serious 21-year-old who converses fluently in surf speak... a marketing major who will graduate in 3½ years with a GPA of 3.82. (Layden 1997, 88–89)

Often joined with discursive fragments about Tillman's self-reflective nature was discussion of his academic achievements. In that same article in which Richard Lacayo discussed Tillman's penchant for climbing light towers, he described how "he had the brains to get his marketing degree in 3½ years—and with a 3.84-grade-point average" (39). References to Tillman's grade point average and his early graduation were folded into descriptions of his character and dedication (Lyon 2002; Reisner 2002; Baum 2004b; Casstevens 2004; Elfin 2004; Lumpkin 2004). Tillman's intellect was again something that characterized *Pat Tillman* as different from the typical football player and soldier.

24. Reading and Arguing

He was well read. Here is a man who read voraciously and read anything and everything that he found interesting. He read. He read the economist. He read the Bible. He read the Koran. He read *Mien Kompf*. He read *The Communist Manifesto*. He read Thoreau. And as he read, he would underline passages that he found interesting. And in fact, the Emerson quote that is on your little programs was one that he had underlined. You would often get letters from him, very eloquent letters, but you would often get articles that he had cut out with something highlighted that said "Hey, let's discuss." (Garwood 2004)

Connected to depictions of his intellect, the fact that Tillman was well read became evidence of the fact that he was a critical thinker. In a Gary Smith profile, he created a comparison of Tillman to other college athletes he had encountered: "Who else showed up in a college assistant coach's office at 1 a.m., asking what he thought of Mormonism with such zest that both ended up reading the Book of Mormon so they could discuss it in detail? Who else in the NFL or the U.S. Army took a book everywhere, even on 10-minute errands, read *The Communist Manifesto*, *Mein Kampf*, the Bible and the Koran, so he could carve out his own convictions... then bought you the book and picked a philosophical fight just to flush out some viewpoint that might push him to revise his, push him to *evolve*?" (2006, 90). Blogger Stan Goff argued that "it is

something essential about Pat Tillman that needs to be out there ... that sense of ethics that will not substitute words for deeds. And he hated idealizations. He was 26 when he fell. Pretty thoughtful for 26, in this culture especially” (2007, para. 8). In Collier’s 2005 article that was produced after his interview with the Tillman family, he described Tillman’s penchant for reading as something that informed his anti-war stance: “He was an avid reader whose interests ranged from history books on World War II and Winston Churchill to works of leftist Noam Chomsky, a favorite author” (2005, para. 7). The fact that Tillman was well read became a common fragment in discussions of why he enlisted and what *Pat Tillman* could tell us about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Tillman’s memory, the U.S. Army erected a USO center, which included a library for its soldiers in Iraq aptly named the Pat Tillman USO Center (Tate 2009).

25. Too Small and Too Slow

Tillman understood from the start that he was a marginal recruit – too small to play linebacker, too slow to play running back or defensive back, the coaches figured, but too intense to pass up. He would have to establish himself every day. (Layden 1997, 91)

Tillman’s football career was marked by the contrast between his performance on the field and how talent evaluators judged his efforts as the basis for his ability to compete at the next level. Layden (1997) narrativized the achievements of Tillman’s high school career as a struggle against his own physical limitations and the perception of those limitations as insurmountable obstacles. According to Layden, college football scouts thought of Tillman as “a 5’ 11”, 195-pounder classified by many colleges as a too-slow, too-small tweener” (88). His senior year, Tillman was the California’s Central Coast Section co-player of the year and Victor Chi of the *San Jose Mercury News* called him Leland High School’s “Mr. Everything” (1993, 1D). However, Tillman completed

his high school football career without having received a scholarship to play in college and only toward the end of his senior year did he receive the 25th of Arizona State University's 25 available football scholarships (Smith 2004, 43; Towle 2004, 44). At the end of his college career, Tillman was awarded the Pacific 10 conference's defensive player of the year award (Layden 1997, 88), but even the accolades that Tillman received were attributed to the efforts of an overachiever. Tillman's play at ASU was also mostly unheralded until that final season when he was one of the major factors in his team playing for a potential national championship against the perennial college football powerhouse Ohio State. In an article from the local paper of ASU's opponents in their national championship bid, *The Columbus Dispatch*, Bob Baptist observed that "he has found the strength during that time to start at linebacker for the second-ranked Sun Devils (ASU) despite standing 5 feet 11 and weighing 204 pounds" (1996, 6H).

Tillman's NFL career became a story about the rise of a player through the sheer force of individual will. His steady climb from football obscurity to prominence can be followed in the coverage of the Arizona Cardinals from the national sports publication *The Sporting News*. On April 27, 1998, Cardinals columnist Lee Shappell examined the strengths and weaknesses of players selected by the Arizona Cardinals in the 1998 draft, Tillman's name was only mentioned to identify that he was drafted. Then, on July 6, 1998, the *News* reported that the team signed him for two years for the meager wage of \$375,000. On July 27, 1998, Tillman was simply listed among six people competing for the position of safety. Things then began to change on August 3, 1998, when it was reported that two of the primary candidates for his position were hurt and the pool had been reduced to four. On August 24, 1998, the *News* noted that the primary starters were being "pushed" for their job by Tillman (47). Finally, on November 9, 1998, the Shappell

exclaimed how startling it was that Tillman was the starting free safety. From there, Tillman would go on to set a franchise record for tackles, and after his enlistment *The Sporting News* columnist Bob Baum (2004b) would label him “an overachiever who lived life to its fullest.” *Pat Tillman* was characterized as an athlete who was unwilling to accept personal limitations. Arizona Cardinals team vice president and general counsel Michael Bidwell recalled that “He had uncommon determination and when he made up his mind, he would get it done. He didn’t care what people had to say. People said he wasn’t big enough to play linebacker in college. They said he wasn’t fast enough to play any position in the NFL, and we switched him to safety. What occurred was that he took a starting position, and then a year or two later, he not only had the starting position, but broke a team record that had stood for many, many years” (2004, 112).

26. The Tryout

When Larry Marmie and I (Arizona Cardinals coach Dave McGinnis) went out to work Pat out before we drafted him, over there on the practice fields at Arizona State University, a fifteen minute session turned into a forty-five minute ordeal, because he would not let us leave. He said, “Coach, you know damn well, I can do it better than that. So, let’s do it again.” (McGinnis 2004a)

His ability to overcome his physical limitations and compete in the NFL was exemplified by a story from former coach Dave McGinnis’s eulogy. McGinnis, then head coach of the Arizona Cardinals, decided to give Tillman a tryout. Journalist David Elfin (2004) described McGinnis’s surprise at Tillman’s unwillingness to settle as an example of Tillman’s dedication and work ethic. According to McGinnis, “It was intended to be a 15-minute workout, but it turned into 45 minutes because Pat wouldn’t stop until he executed every drill perfectly” (C1). Elfin went on to quote McGinnis recollection that “That was the type of drive, passion, commitment that Pat had. He did everything full speed. We had to gear him down sometimes in practice because Pat only knew one speed.

That's how he pursued every goal in life. I don't know if I've ever met a more dedicated person" (2004, C1). This story became a part of characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as unwilling to settle for less than the best.

27. Chosen Last

Sel #	Player	Position	School	Team
226 (NFL.com 1998)	Pat Tillman	FS	Arizona State	Arizona Cardinals

Tillman's relentless pursuit of perfection impressed McGinnis enough to give Tillman a chance at a professional career and he was selected in the seventh round of the NFL draft. Before his tryout with the Cardinals, many doubted that Tillman would make it to the NFL. Layden commented that "just as he was told that Division I-A (NCAA Football) was beyond him, he is being told that the NFL is out of his reach" (1997, 91). With all the respect and admiration he was receiving in the press and from the fans, he was still seen as too small and too weak to make it at the next level. In Bill Lyon's discussion of Tillman's path toward the military he mention that "the Cardinals, who had promised him they would, took him in the seventh round of that draft" (2002, C1). *New York Times* writer Mike Freeman observed "The Cardinals selected him in the seventh round of the 1998 draft – the 226th pick overall – and the odds were against him making it" (2002, 1). The last man chosen in the NFL draft is playfully referred to as Mr. Irrelevant because the chances of that player ever actually seeing the field in an NFL game are remarkably slim. So, the fact that Tillman was chosen just fifteen picks before the last pick of the entire draft did not speak highly for his chances of a career in the NFL. Tillman's ability to overcome those perceptions were factored into characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as an example of living the American Dream and achieving even the loftiest goals.

28. Injuring His Teammate

The first impression Arizona Cardinals rookie safety Pat Tillman made on his new team was not only unforgettable, but almost unforgivable.

On the second day of training camp, Tillman flattened 250-pound fullback Cedric Smith with a train wreck of a hit. The drill was supposed to have been run at half-speed. Smith, who outweighs Tillman by almost 50 pounds, wound up with a season-ending knee injury. (Farmer 1998)

During Tillman's first practice with the Cardinals, he left an indelible impression on his teammates and coaches when he injured fullback Cedric Smith going full-speed in what were supposed to be half-speed drills. In an article about Tillman's first NFL experiences for the *San Jose Mercury News*, staff writer Sam Farmer wrote that his coaches "scolded Tillman for turning a relaxed drill into a war zone... but teammates and coaches quietly marveled at Tillman's ferocity" (1998, 1D). ESPN's Bob Carter (2005) marked this moment amongst the significant in Tillman's career. In his biography of Tillman, Mike Towle described that "Tillman angled in and blasted Smith at full-speed flush, knocking the ball loose and smacking Smith down to the ground. Stunned and shaken, Smith slowly arose from the seated position and proceeded to limp away with what would be a season-ending injury" (2004, 71). Tillman's work ethic was evidenced by this story as well as his intensity, characteristics that would become important in the formation of *Pat Tillman*.

29. Riding His Bike

While teammates roll up in BMWs and Range Rovers, he pedals his green Schwinn beach cruiser to practice every day. (Farmer 1998, 1D)

The story of his decision to ride his bike to his first training camp with the Cardinals became a part of characterizations of how *Pat Tillman* was humble or hard working. In the same article where sports writer Sam Farmer described Tillman's "train

wreck of a hit” on Smith, he underscored the difference between Tillman and his teammates by declaring that “this much is clear: Tillman is no ordinary rookie. His spirit is as free-flowing as his shoulder-length hair” (1D). Later incarnations of this story often simply recalled how Tillman “arrived at training camp on a bike, sneakers dangling from his handlebars, pedaling behind his teammates’ Mercedes and BMWs” (Smith 2004, 44). The rationale for Tillman’s decision to ride his bike ranged from not making as much money as other players to a desire to remain grounded, but most characterizations that invoked this fragment employed it to characterize *Pat Tillman* as unique from other athletes and celebrities.

30. The Sports Image

(Lower 2002)

This image was first used to commemorate Tillman’s life on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, but also appeared on the cover of biographies (Wolfe 2004), in tributes (Valentine 2004a, 2004b), as well as his memorial statue (Amrany 2006). And while there were many photographs of Tillman that were employed across varying contexts, this one became one of two primary images that were used to portray *Pat Tillman*. Sculptor Omri Amrany used this image as the inspiration for his statue that sits in Pat Tillman Freedom Plaza outside the Arizona Cardinals stadium because it “best represented Pat, the person” (Maximum Cardinals 2006a). According to the web archive of visual images by the photographer Gene Lower, this is a photograph of “Arizona Cardinals defensive Back Pat Tillman runs to the sidelines in jubulation after making a bone jarring hit that knocked his helmet free. (Although this picture was taken a few years ago, it received its first notice and publication this past season, used widespread by the NFL in memory of Pat Tillman.)” (sic, 2002, para. 1). In the photographer’s

description, physicality is foregrounded in the descriptions of “bone jarring” tackle that Tillman executed and the “jubilation” on his face. This image became a way of using Tillman’s physical appearance to embody characteristics that were attributed to *Pat Tillman* as an athlete and a soldier.

31. Marathons and Triathlons

Pat Tillman, the rugged Arizona Cardinals safety, has developed quite the knack for adding twists to spice up his offseason workout routine. Last year, Tillman ran in a marathon for the first time in his life and finished the 26.2-mile course in less than 4 hours.

This offseason, Tillman’s trained like an Ironman – literally.

Tillman will compete Sunday in the Blackwater Eagleman Triathlon at Cambridge, Md. Officially, it’s a “half-Ironman” event – 1.2-mile swim, 56-mile cycle and 13.1-mile run – that serves as a qualifier for the Oct. 6 Ironman World Championship at Kona, Hawaii. (Bell 2001, 3C)

Tillman’s off-season training regime of a marathon in 2000 and a triathlon in 2001 also drew particular focus to the distinction of *Pat Tillman* from other professional athletes. In 2001, columnist Jarrett Bell wrote about Tillman’s participation in the Blackwater Eagleman Triathlon. Bell claimed that Tillman’s training “gave him a greater appreciation for the ‘real’ Ironmen” (3C). Tillman’s participation in these events was characterized as an example of his toughness. Reporter Robin Roberts of ABC’s *Good Morning America* later compared the challenge of military boot camp to Tillman’s unique off-season training, “Oh, it is a test, but he is someone also who was bored before the 2000 season, so he ran a marathon. He was a little bit bored before last year, so he [completed] a 70-mile triathlon. So this is nothing for him.”

32. Not Leaving Arizona

Safety Pat Tillman, who turned down a chance to play with the St. Louis Rams for more money, signed a one-year contract with the Arizona Cardinals. (Associated Press 2001, para. 1)

In 2001, after one of Tillman's best seasons in the NFL, Tillman had the opportunity to take financial advantage of his status as one of the game's elite safeties. On April 30, 2001, the *Arizona Republic* reported that Tillman had turned down a multi-million, multi-year contract deal with the St. Louis Rams in order to remain with the Cardinals (Associated Press 2001). The deal became a footnote alongside other NFL stories at the time, but it would become a significant part of characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as loyal. In Mike Towle's biography of Tillman, he retold how this fragment became an important part of Tillman's legacy: "Tillman, who three years earlier had had to put out a super-human effort just to make the roster, now was one of those hot commodities drawing interest from other teams. The St. Louis Rams, one year removed from a Super Bowl victory yet still shaky on defense, came on strong in going after Tillman. In April 2001, they reportedly showed him an offer sheet for five years at \$9 million, which he would ultimately wave off to stay with the Cardinals – for yet another one-year deal, this time for just over half a mil" (2004, 118). The idea that Tillman would turn down almost \$2 million dollars for the season and play for a little more than a quarter of that was portrayed as befuddling, but that the Rams contract was guaranteed for five seasons made it even more so. Jonathan Rand claimed that "we shouldn't begrudge the right of anyone to leave a team for more money, especially if he's stuck with a chronic loser. But too many people refuse to think they might be part of the problem" (2004, 2). This moment in Tillman's career became an example of how he stood out in a world full of athletes obsessed by greed.

33. Marrying His High School Sweetheart

Tillman married his high school sweetheart two weeks ago, and agent Frank Bauer said when the couple left on a honeymoon for Bora Bora, he expected some kind of decision on the Cardinals' multiyear offer to retain their free agent – but not that decision.

“He called me as soon as he got back from Bora Bora and said, ‘Frank, I’m going in the military. I want to get into special forces.’” (Reisner 2002, para. 8)

Just before Tillman enlisted in the military, he married his longtime girlfriend, Marie Ugenti. Stories of his commitment to Ugenti were threaded throughout characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as loyal. Mark Emmons and Jon Wilmer wrote an article for Tillman's hometown paper, the *San Jose Mercury News*, which announced Tillman's decision to enlist. In that profile they connected the two, “Tillman is praised as a down-to-earth, fiercely loyal guy. On May 4, he married his San Jose high school sweetheart, Marie Ugenti” (2002, A12). Sports commentator Jim Rome (2004) observed in his eulogy of Tillman that “marrying and sticking with your high school sweetheart says something about you. It says you're loyal, you're trustworthy, you're a lifer. Pat had the maturity and integrity to invest in deepening the relationship that was already so important to him.” Tillman's marriage became a component in characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as loyal and dedicated.

Discursive Fragmentation and *Pat Tillman*

As can be seen from this list, the fragments used in characterizations took various forms, originated from a variety of sources, and were employed to comment on a range of issues. These fragments appeared in magazines, on television news reports, in blogs, and on film; through their use in these different media they emerged as the material that allowed discourse producers create *Pat Tillman* characterizations. By identifying these fragments, I have attempted to account for the ways that the life and death of Pat Tillman

were textualized so that I can critique that textual existence. To review, I treat the many ways in which *Pat Tillman* was discussed by various discourse producers as a discourse formation. For example, when journalist and editor Greg Mitchell (2008) wrote about how journalists covered the controversy surrounding Pat Tillman's death in his book, *So Wrong for So Long*, he was participating in the same discourse formation as Tillman's former teammate, Simeon Rice, who discussed Tillman's choice to enlist over remaining in the NFL as a means to denigrate the Arizona Cardinals franchise. Many different discourse producers created *Pat Tillman* characterizations and sometimes the same discourse producer created many different characterizations. These distinct characterizations shared elements, such as facts, stories, and images, which I refer to as fragments.

How a discourse producer employs a particular fragment in a characterization helps to shape how that characterization contributes to the larger formation. Through the emergence of particular facts, stories, and images as fragments, discourse producers were able to create textualized characterizations based on a shared knowledge of *Pat Tillman*. Not all of these fragments had the same level of resonance, but each became a way of characterizing *Pat Tillman*. Most people could identify the soldier who left a career in the NFL (#1), but it was much less widely known that Tillman used marathons and triathlons (#31) to challenge himself during the NFL off season. Despite the fact that Tillman's use of marathons and triathlons was less prevalent than other fragments, it still functioned as a means to characterize *Pat Tillman*. Journalist Greg Boeck (2002) discussed Tillman's participation as a way of testing himself to prove his mettle. Columnists Dirk Johnson and Andrew Murr discussed it as an illustration of his toughness. In a reflection upon Tillman's legacy, sportswriter Andrew Brandt wrote:

Tillman participated in triathlons in the offseasons. NFL players have an offseason that is longer than the season and are afforded loads of time to make of it what they wish. Few, if any, would even think of competing in a triathlon, chalking it up to training that would not help their functionality as a football player.

Perhaps true, perhaps not. Having done a few triathlons, I can attest to the fact that these athletes are not the rail-thin, concave-chested athletes that some images conjure up; rather, many are built much in the way the Tillman was and as finely tuned athletes as any around. (2009, para. 8–9)

Tillman's off-season training regimen may seem insignificant to some, but the fact that it was perpetuated by discourse producers who sought to comment on *Pat Tillman* as an ironman and became a means for talking about how Tillman was distinct from other athletes is important to my analysis.

In order to demarcate when these fragments are being discussed and to create a means to reference back to this list, when I discuss these fragments throughout the rest of this project, I accompany them with their number from this list, for example: decision to enlist (#1). How discourse producers employed these fragments can be dense and complicated at times and being able to return here for some clarification may be helpful. In each instance, what should not be forgotten is that these fragments allowed discourse producers to create characterizations that operated from a shared base of knowledge about Pat Tillman and each individual characterization contributes to the discourse formation *Pat Tillman*.

Chapter Two

The Discursive Influence of Heroism

Many citizens volunteered to defend the United States following September 11th, but few have received as much attention as Pat Tillman. In 2005, *USA Today*'s Rick Hampson wrote an article about Corporal Kevin Mincio and other soldiers like him who had left behind lucrative careers and families in order to join the military after 9/11. Hampson pointed out in the article that the most famous of these recruits was Pat Tillman, but the article focuses on the fact that "there were others" (2005, para. 12). The distinction between these others and Pat Tillman was that foundations for *Pat Tillman* already existed. As a public figure, Tillman's decision to enlist (#1) drew a public spotlight. Despite Tillman's attempts to avoid it, that spotlight created a public hero. Characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero began with that decision. After he enlisted, Lisa Olson of the New York *Daily News* proclaimed that he was "the only professional athlete who truly deserves to be hailed a hero" (2002). Tillman's former coach Lyle Setencich was quoted as saying "guys talk about heroes and stuff like that. Pat Tillman is my hero" (Boeck 2002). In an article about Tillman for *USA Today*, Dave Kindred (2002) declared, "we treat our heroes well. Real heroes treat us well." Tillman's decision to enlist (#1) became the pivotal fragment in the elevation of *Pat Tillman* to the status of hero, but, as these quotes reveal, these heroic characterizations were contrasted to others who could and have been discussed as heroes as well. This chapter calls into question the belief that heroism is a function of an individual's actions and portrays heroism as an outgrowth of how those actions are employed as a means for the creation of a discursive characterization of a value or set of values.

Heroes are widely recognized as characterizations of the aspirations of the culture (e.g., Campbell 2004; Drucker and Cathcart 1994; Boorstin 1962), but the implications of those characterizations and how they are established continue to plague critics and cultures alike. One has only to look up heroism in the most ubiquitous information source in U.S. culture, Wikipedia, to read that “stories of heroism may serve as moral examples” (2010a, para. 2), but further reading reveals that “one potential drawback of the necessity of hero identification means that a hero is often more a combination of symbols than a representation of an actual person” (para. 22). Insecurities about the role of heroes stem from the fact that heroes are not living, breathing people. Drucker and Cathcart observe that “what constitutes the heroic and who becomes the hero is a function of cultural priorities and values, and, most significantly, is related to the communication medium utilized for presenting and preserving information about heroes” (2). In order to understand the relationship between *Pat Tillman* and heroism, we must first encounter an important tension that exists within contemporary characterizations of heroism: the difference between fame and accomplishment.

My analysis in this chapter will be conducted in four parts: I will first argue for the discursive nature of heroism, and then I will look at three sets of characterizations that attempted to negotiate the heroism of *Pat Tillman*. After discussing the discursive nature of heroism, my critique of these three characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero begins with an investigation of the public memorial that was held following Tillman’s death. On May 3, 2004, over three thousand fans, dignitaries, and friends came together in downtown San Jose to pay their respects (ESPN 2004). Among the thousands in attendance were such notable public figures as journalist and First Lady of California Maria Shriver, singer Darius Rucker, and Senator John McCain as well as Tillman’s

widow and his family. Over twenty eulogies were offered, including speeches from McCain, Tillman's father, and his friends. From the perspectives of those who had never met Tillman to emotional tributes from those who had literally known him all of his life, all the words spoken that day created public characterizations of *Pat Tillman*. I have chosen to focus on two eulogies delivered at that memorial service that directly confront the existence of a discursive *Pat Tillman*. The first is that of sports talk-show host Jim Rome (2004) who contrasted a difference between "Tilly" and the other athletes that he had met in his career. After that, I look at the eulogy given by Tillman's brother-in-law Alex Garwood (2004) who distinguished between the grief of those who mourned *Pat Tillman* as a public figure from "the people in the front" who were grieving for a friend and family member. Both of these eulogies addressed the role of publicness inherent to the textualization of *Pat Tillman* and provide insight into characterizations of him as a hero in future incarnations.

The second section in my analysis focuses on the reactions to those who attempted to subvert characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero. While Tillman's death was mourned by many Americans, the celebration of Tillman's decision to enlist in the military and the attention given to his demise did not go without some questioning. On April 28, 2004, just days after Tillman's death was announced, University of Massachusetts graduate student Rene Gonzalez wrote an article criticizing characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as hero for the editorial page of his school newspaper. He argued that the open acceptance of *Pat Tillman* as a hero was an example of what is wrong with the nation, the media, and the military. His commentary traveled well beyond the walls of the UMass campus and was broadcast on television networks and featured in newspapers throughout the country. The negative reaction to his words became so intense

that Gonzalez was forced to hold a press conference to publicly apologize (Associated Press 2004b). Characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero were again challenged on May 3, 2004, when syndicated editorial cartoonist Ted Rall drew *Pat Tillman* as an ignorant victim who was fooled into fighting a war by his government and a complicit media. As a syndicated cartoonist, Rall's cartoon usually was published throughout the nation, but it was so widely panned that it was removed from places that routinely published his work ("Why We Pulled" 2004). Rene Gonzalez and Ted Rall directly contradicted characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero, but what was more interesting was the type of attention that was paid to them. Gonzalez and Rall called Tillman's motives and intellect into question; but through a process of shaming the critic, the belief that *Pat Tillman* was a hero was reaffirmed. These discourse producers sparked controversies that revealed a discursive bond that had been established between *Pat Tillman* and heroism that was strong enough to reflect their criticisms back onto their legitimacy as critics.

Characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero were fortified by the belief that his enlistment was motivated by a call to national service, but the symbolism of that heroism would continue to evolve even after the Pat Tillman's death. In my third section, I analyze characterizations voiced by two commentators who exemplified the divergent ways in which *Pat Tillman* functioned as a symbol in post-9/11 U.S. politics. As the senator from Tillman's adopted home state of Arizona and a man who was a prisoner of war for seven years in Vietnam, John McCain was one of the primary discourse producers asked to comment on the life and death of Pat Tillman. Through interviews (e.g., 2004a; 2004c; 2004d), speeches (e.g., 2004c; 2004e), and even a book chapter (2005a) on Tillman's life, McCain created characterizations of a war hero that were in line with the politics of his own political party. In contrast to McCain, the controversy

regarding Tillman's death resulted in *Pat Tillman* recurring as a topic on host Keith Olbermann's MSNBC program *Countdown*. The investigations into the fabrication of the official account (#5) of Tillman's death and the resulting cover-up (#s 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11) were frequently topics of discussion for the columnists, politicians, and pundits who served as guests on the show (e.g. 2005b; 2006; 2007a; 2008; 2009). Olbermann used the cover up of the events that led to Tillman's death to question whether "good publicity might have been placed ahead of telling his family the truth about how he died" and employed *Pat Tillman* as an example of the Bush administration's deceptions (e.g., 2005a). The characterizations of *Pat Tillman* by both John McCain and Keith Olbermann exemplify conflicting interpretations of the implications of *Pat Tillman's* heroism.

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between heroism and *Pat Tillman*. I have chosen to focus the majority of my chapter on the veneration of *Pat Tillman* that occurred after the death of Pat Tillman. There were many who celebrated *Pat Tillman* as a hero prior to the person's death, but following his death the memorials that were arranged and the reactions to the almost canonizing characterizations provide fertile ground for the examination of the relationship between *Pat Tillman* and heroism. The recognition of Pat Tillman's actions as heroic led to questions about the role of athletes in culture, the anonymity of soldiers, and the political implications of the wars the United States was fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. These questions involved the discursive *Pat Tillman* as part of both a political struggle between Republicans and Democrats and an ideological struggle about the nature of heroism. Characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a truer or more authentic version of heroism than other athletes or celebrities reflect a belief that heroes are created by the actions of an individual. However, the challenges that were raised regarding heroic characterizations of athletes and celebrities by those who

commemorated *Pat Tillman* as a hero reveal how heroism acts as a discourse formation with its own regularities. Ultimately, characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero function as a fragmented means for discussing political and cultural values in contemporary contexts.

Viewing Heroism as a Contemporary Discursive Formation

Discussions of what constitutes a hero have taken on a “chicken or egg” type conflict. Joseph Campbell has defined a hero as “someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself” (Campbell with Moyers 1991, 151). While such actions are often described as heroic, it is easy to think of examples of public figures who are exalted as heroes that do not fit Campbell’s criterion and even more people who fit Campbell’s definition but are not. In contrast to Campbell’s definition, Joe McGinniss theorized that the type of individual action that Campbell ascribes to heroes has given way to a conception of heroism that requires an audience member “construct his own mosaic; will have to build his own myth, slowly, painfully, piece by piece” (1990, 176). McGinniss calls his version of the hero “a temporary useful illusion” that allows him to cope with changes in society and the loss of people he once revered (176). McGinniss’s definition of heroism is distinct from Campbell’s because it uses interpretations of actions, instead of the actions themselves, to define what constitutes a hero. These two different approaches to heroism suggest two different points of origin for what defines a hero that create a dissonance about the nature of heroism itself: One is presented as a product of a person’s deeds; the other is a product of the interpretation of those deeds.

The tension caused by these two distinct approaches to heroism can be found in scholarship about heroism. Similarly to Campbell, James Monaco boiled heroism down

to one singular characteristic: “They have *done* things” (emphasis in original, 1978, 5). Echoing a criticism crystallized by Daniel J. Boorstin – “we have willingly been misled into believing that fame – well-knownness – is still a hallmark of greatness” (1962, 47) – critics like Monaco have often attempted to distinguish heroes from the bounty of famous figures in a media-saturated culture (i.e., Gamson 1994; Rojek 2001; Parry-Giles 2008). The belief that heroism is a function of the actions of an individual imbues the hero with a distinctiveness that is often portrayed as missing from celebrities. In the words of Boorstin, “the hero was distinguished by his achievement; the celebrity by his image or trademark. The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero was a big man; the celebrity is a big name” (61). Comparable to Boorstin’s positions on celebrity, Susan Drucker claims that U.S. culture is afflicted by “the illusion that real heroes emerge from professional sports” (1994, 83). Drucker refers to athletes as “pseudo-heroes” (83). She argues that celebrification of the athlete has allowed “hero” to serve as “a misnomer for the sports celebrity” (93). In a similar fashion, Garry Whannel claims, “hopes are still invested in the ability of sport to produce heroic role models, and the frustration of these hopes feeds into a critique of sport as having become corrupted” (2002, 40). The belief that heroic characterizations of athletes and celebrities undermine a *truer* version of heroism accepts that heroism is a function of an established set of values that are embodied by a person who engages in certain types of action.

Distinct from the perspectives of Monaco and Boorstin, cultural critic Lance Strate argues, “culture heroes are not actual human beings. The two are often confused, probably because so many culture heroes are based on real people” (1994, 16). Strate advocates the position that the heroes of a culture are products known “only through stories, images, and other forms of information” (16). In his conception of heroes, they

are characterizations that shape the lives of people as a reflection of cultural values and priorities. They exist through the use of particular events or actions as fragments that allow for heroic characterizations. Strate's definition accounts for a perceptual issue that undermines positions like Monaco's. The belief in heroes who are created through their own actions masks the very characteristic that defines their heroism: the use of their lives as symbols of values. Heroes do not elevate themselves to their exalted status. Using the hero's deeds as the material for their interpretations, rhetors craft documents like speeches, news articles, radio interviews, and television commentaries that have the power to elevate the life of a person to an example of heroism. By acknowledging that heroes are cultural products that are created through the interpretation of having "done" something, critics can approach specific characterizations of heroism as discursive objects that beckon analysis.

If we treat characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero as a discursive contribution to public understandings of the meaning of heroism and the values associated with it, these characterizations allow us to examine how cultural insecurities about the role of heroes as "athletes" and "celebrities" were discussed by discourse producers. Many contrasted the actions of athletes and celebrities to the heroism represented by "soldiers" in these characterizations. In a profile on *Pat Tillman* after Tillman's death, Fred Bowen of *The Washington Post* wrote, "everyone makes a big deal out of athletes. We think they are great and call them heroes without really thinking about it" (2004, C12). Bowen celebrated *Pat Tillman* as a "Real Sports Hero" distinct from the typical characterizations of sports stars. In a time where patriotism was being celebrated as a devotion to the nation and its institutions, *Pat Tillman* emerged as a national war hero. According to Sociologist David Altheide (2006), unlike many others who joined the military after

September 11, 2001, Tillman's decision to enlist (#1) added legitimacy to America's military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan and promoted dominant conceptions of patriotism and silence as a service to the nation as a whole. In each of these characterizations, the fame Pat Tillman had achieved as an athlete and a celebrity was subordinated to his enlistment, but the public celebration of his enlistment was facilitated by his fame. The connections forged between Pat Tillman's service in the military and heroism allowed for characterizations of a post-9/11 war hero that were integral to the establishment of a discursive *Pat Tillman*.

Characterizations of Heroism at the Public Memorial

On what was a clear and bright May afternoon in downtown San Jose, over three thousand fans, dignitaries, and friends came together to pay their respects in memory of Pat Tillman (ESPN 2004).¹ The event featured a bagpipe-led funeral procession and an elevated stage adorned with twenty-one American flags interspersed with photographs of Tillman. From that stage, admirers, friends, and family with different perspectives on Tillman's life came together to voice distinct points of view on *Pat Tillman*. Tillman's friends and family sat side by side with public figures who had never met him. During the memorial, individual speakers stepped to the microphone and delivered eulogies that varied in both form and content, but in particular addressed the symbolic existence of the discursive *Pat Tillman*.

The use of eulogies as an engagement with the transition to understanding a person as a representative figure after his or her death is not unique to this memorial. All

¹ The quotes from the Pat Tillman Memorial in this section are transcribed from the ESPN broadcast from May 3, 2004. Any emphases or alterations to the quotations in this section are an interpretation based on the footage from that day.

eulogies act as a means for publicly acknowledging a person's symbolic legacy. Edward S. Casey argues that, specifically, a eulogy is "pronounced before others and is meant to direct their attention to the character and accomplishments of the departed" (2004, 18). Though memorials are a time to remember the past, they also craft a vision of the present and future. According to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "the very act of eulogizing acknowledges the death. In so doing, it necessitates a juxtaposition of past and present tense which recasts the relationship to the deceased to one of memory" (1978, 20). In the case of Pat Tillman, this function is complicated by a phenomenon Joshua Meyrowitz refers to as "media friends," in which people form "a direct, one-to-one tie to a media friend that exists apart from, and almost in spite of, how widely known the person is" (1994, 63). The experience of a public figure through mediation creates a perception of "knowing" that person. This phenomenon allows for different types of knowing that can generate conflict over the authority of characterizations defined by mediated experience as opposed to interpersonal interaction. As a public figure, this meant that *Pat Tillman* had existed as a symbolic form *before* the memorial.

During this memorial, those who only knew the discursive *Pat Tillman* were given the same stage as those who had known Pat Tillman from birth. Despite the fact that their experiences were different, because the memorial was televised, each was forced to confront the symbolic nature of *Pat Tillman*. I have chosen to address the two eulogies, speeches given by Jim Rome and Alex Garwood, that best exemplify how the public *Pat Tillman* was discussed during the memorial. These eulogies typified how the various orators at the memorial attempted to manage the distinction between Pat Tillman and *Pat Tillman*. Jim Rome was the master of ceremonies for the memorial, and during his eulogy he distinguished the example set by *Pat Tillman* from the other athletes that he

had encountered in his time as a sports commentator. Alex Garwood was Tillman's brother-in-law and long-time friend. He was there to speak about "our Pat," or the *Pat Tillman* that he had known in his own experiences. These speakers drew upon their knowledge of the life and actions of Pat Tillman to craft unique heroic visions of *Pat Tillman*. By piecing together a variety of fragments from the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman* with stories from their own interactions with Tillman the person, both Rome and Garwood produced eulogies that attempted to manage the role of Pat Tillman in characterizations of *Pat Tillman*.

Jim Rome

As host of the ESPN program *Rome is Burning* and the radio show *The Jungle*, Jim Rome has a long history of interaction with athletes. Rome has a history of blunt commentary. According to the *Museum of Broadcast Communications Encyclopedia of Radio*, Rome is "known for his aggressive, 'in-your face' style" that at one point landed him in a fistfight with NFL quarterback Jim Everett on live television (2004, 1223). While Tillman was still an athlete, Rome had Tillman on his radio show on several occasions. Their relationship was founded in a mutual respect, but Rome also confessed in his eulogy that "I wish I had known Pat better. I wish I could have spent more time with Pat" (2004). As his eulogy revealed, most of his knowledge was of *Pat Tillman*. Using Tillman's decision to enlist (#1) as the fragment that defined his characterization of *Pat Tillman* as a hero, Rome created comparisons to the actions of other athletes, regular individuals, and even Rome himself. In Rome's eulogy, a denial of fame is a criterion for heroism, yet he spends his speech discussing Pat Tillman in the present tense where he exists only as a discursive *Pat Tillman*. In his eulogy, Rome created a

characterization of *Pat Tillman* that relied on a belief that heroism is an outgrowth of a person's actions that is distinct from even those who are often referred to as heroes.

Jim Rome established the first theme of his eulogy with a clear statement: "There are no heroes in sports" (2004). Rome stated that "athletes today are often referred to as heroes or warriors when in reality they're neither." He claimed that athletes can be "clutch" or "competitive," but not heroic:

Athletes are urged to sacrifice, to go the extra mile, to pay the price, all in the name of winning. Because winning isn't everything, it's the only thing. As it turns out, winning isn't everything and winning isn't the only thing but risking your life for a belief is, for a set of beliefs. Pat Tillman risked and ultimately lost his life because he wanted to make a difference.

Rome's characterization contrasted Tillman's decision to enlist (#1) to the type actions that are celebrated in characterizations of athletes as heroes. His pejorative assessment of "winning" as a standard for evaluating heroism played upon the idea of athletes as "pseudo-heroes." Rome asserts that the actions of athletes do not merit the label hero. In proving his point, Rome invoked Tillman's own words from his September 12, 2001 interview (#12) that he had not "done a damn thing" as evidence of how shallow the accomplishments of an athlete are in comparison to those of a soldier.

Despite the fact that he characterized athletes as a shallow comparison, Rome invoked Tillman's athletic career as evidence of the fact that *Pat Tillman* is a hero. In his characterization, Rome downplayed the physical prowess that Tillman displayed and characterized his athletic career as an outgrowth of his exceptional character:

It's not necessarily about being the fastest or the strongest or the most athletic, because Pat was never any of those things. But nobody graded higher in those intangible qualities that you could develop: hunger, desire, courage, competitive spirit, integrity, honesty, selflessness. The things that make you a great athlete *and* a great man.

Rome engages the common fragment that Tillman was too small and too slow (#25) to have made it in the NFL to create a contrast between “athletes” and the athletic career of Tillman. His inflection made it clear that one does not have to be a “great man” to be a “great athlete,” but obviously he held *Pat Tillman* as both. While other athletes are physically gifted, he characterized *Pat Tillman* as succeeding because of the sheer force of his will. Rome reaffirms a sense that real heroes are made from their own actions and not just handed fame and fortune, but in his characterization he relies on the fact that Tillman achieved fame in the NFL as evidence of merit.

Rome extends his critique of fame by arguing that Pat Tillman was not just different from other athletes, but different from “the rest of us” (Rome included). He draws his comparison in a characterization of *Pat Tillman* that imagines Tillman’s inner monologue:

Pat was not like the rest of us. Pat didn’t see the world like the rest of us. When everybody else was asking, “why is life so hard?” Pat asked, “why is life so easy?” After it was announced that Pat would give up playing in the NFL to join the rangers with his brother Kevin, everybody asked, “how could he do that?” Pat thought, “how could I not?”

In this part of his eulogy, Rome engages other characterizations that were produced following Tillman’s decision to enlist (#1) by setting up a straw-man character who questioned Tillman’s decision to join the Army. Rome was able to describe the difference between *Pat Tillman* and “the rest of us” based on what he discussed as a different way of seeing the world. According to Rome, Pat Tillman achieved his hero status through his unique mindset.

Rome presents explicit knowledge that “Pat Tillman is a hero.” It is important to note his use of the word “is” in this statement. Rome attempts to navigate a liminal space in his eulogy between heroism as a public phenomenon and merit as an individual

achievement. During his speech, Rome references fragments like being too small and too slow (#25), his September 12, 2001, interview (#12), marrying his high school sweetheart (#33), and his enlistment in the Army (#1) and discusses how these actions are evidence for a characterization of the discursive *Pat Tillman* as a hero. By choosing to highlight certain moments from Tillman's life in order to contrast those actions against other type of hero characterizations, Rome blends the existence of Pat Tillman with such values as personal will, devotion to principle, loyalty, and exceptional character that he depicts as a true hero. That hero is a *Pat Tillman* that *is*, not a Pat Tillman that *was*. By contrasting *Pat Tillman* against celebrities and athletes, Rome relies on a belief that Tillman's decision to enlist (#1) distinguished him from others who represented a shallower or emptier version of heroism.

Alex Garwood

Tillman's friend and brother-in-law, Alex Garwood (2004), confronted the distinction between the person Pat Tillman and the discursive *Pat Tillman* more directly. Garwood divides the audience for Tillman's memorial into two groups "the community" and "those of us up in the front." Garwood's boundary in the audience could be literally drawn in the audience based on those who were seated in chairs and those who were not, but figuratively this boundary was drawn based on what it meant to "know" Pat Tillman. The eulogies from "the people in the front" varied from poetry to letters to simple tributes, but they all reflected a desire to maintain the memory of Tillman as a person that was distinct from the public symbol. The words spoken by Alex Garwood are a characterization of a "war hero" who lived the life of a son, brother, and friend as well as a soldier and a football star. Garwood attempted to distinguish Pat Tillman from *Pat*

Tillman despite using common fragments of *Pat Tillman* in his speech. In the end, Garwood's attempts to distinguish Pat Tillman from *Pat Tillman* created another distinct characterization of *Pat Tillman* as a hero.

Alex Garwood began his eulogy by pouring a Guinness (Tillman's favorite beer) and leaving it at the front of the stage area. He then stepped to the microphone and stated:

There have been some extremely eloquent and powerful words said today about Pat Tillman the war hero, Pat Tillman the football player, and Pat Tillman the public figure. You know what? They are awesome words and they are very, very much appreciated, but I have got to tell you, for those of us up at the front, his close family and friends, you know what, this fucking sucks.

Garwood went on to explain that, while the memorial and the support that the family had received from "the community" was welcome and appreciated, the loss of "our Pat" far exceeds the loss of the symbol. Garwood spoke of the people in the front as distinct from those who grieve for a football player or a soldier. In the words of Garwood, Pat Tillman "spent his life filling that heart with friends and family like all of us" and the loss of that relationship was more significant than the loss of a soldier or even a hero. According to Garwood, "he touched lots of people, but touched these people in the front in an unbelievable fashion And I will tell you this; you will never find a finer group of people than his family and friends." For Garwood, the Pat Tillman he (and the people in the front) knew was distinct from *Pat Tillman*.

For Garwood, the reasons that Pat Tillman was a hero were distinct from the public perceptions of *Pat Tillman*. Garwood believed that his "Pat" was a hero because of the way he conducted his interpersonal relationships. According to Garwood, "Pat surrounded himself with vast relationships, both broad and deep. And for those of us privileged enough to know him, we knew that our relationship with him was special." Garwood remembered Tillman as friend who "accepted absolutely nothing less than

100% from you” and “absolutely listened to what you had to say.” Garwood went on in his eulogy to recount a birthday he spent with Pat in Ireland, the arrival of Pat at the birth of Garwood’s first child, and his choice of Pat as the godfather of that child. These qualities not only made “Pat” unique, they distinguished Pat from *Pat Tillman*. Garwood argued, “Pat Tillman was a war hero. Pat Tillman was a football star. And he was a larger than life person. He was absolutely all of those things. But those are not the best things about Pat.”

Despite the fact that Garwood sought to distinguish between the publicly known *Pat Tillman* and Pat Tillman, he also participated in the perpetuation of certain fragments of *Pat Tillman*. Garwood chose to focus on Tillman’s choice to stay silent (#2) as an exemplification of something unique about the person, “He is a war hero, did not talk about it. He is a football player, did not talk about it.” He covered Tillman’s training using marathon and triathlons (#31) as an example of personal strength. Garwood perpetuated common characterizations of Tillman’s hair (#21), “You know, when it was cool to have it short, he wore it long.” He chose to talk about his marriage to his high school sweetheart (#33) as an example of devotion:

The biggest place in that heart was for Marie. She owned it. And Pat knew, Pat knew that she was a champion and she was a baller. He knew it and those are his words. He knew that about Marie. And make no mistake, Pat felt absolutely lucky to have her. He knew she completed him. Marie humbled Pat. And their partnership and as you watched them go through their lives together, was a thing of beauty, and it is something we should all aspire to.

Garwood drew a distinction between the *Pat Tillman* experienced by the public and the Pat who shared his personal experiences. Repetition of phrases like “This was before Pat was a war hero, before Pat was a football player, when he was just Pat” contrasted his version of *Pat Tillman* to what could be found in other public characterizations. With his

words, Garwood attempted to differentiate himself and those in the front from others in order to argue for a more authentic version; however, in the end, he created a textualized version of *Pat Tillman* that he called “Pat.”

Garwood’s characterization of *Pat Tillman* reflects an anxiety about the use of the lives of humans as symbolic representations: They cannot capture the life of the person. Even while creating a characterization that was differentiated from common interpretations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero, Garwood engaged the discursive formation in ways that connected his characterization with others. While portraying the existence of a symbolic *Pat Tillman* as a distortion, Garwood perpetuated the use of certain fragments that had guided previous characterizations. He admits that Pat Tillman was all of those things, but the person he knew was more than just those things. Heroes are fragmented characterizations, and Garwood’s experience of *Pat Tillman* displays the dissonance that is created by people’s resistance to seeing heroes as such. Garwood articulated a characterization that was a rebellion against the symbolic existence of *Pat Tillman*, but ironically also participated in the perpetuation of the discourse formation.

Crafting a Characterization of Heroism

In their eulogies, Garwood and Rome confronted the public nature of characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero; using different strategies, they created distinct characterizations that were interconnected by their use of similar fragments. Rome employed many of the fragments that have been used to characterize *Pat Tillman* as evidence to support his claims. Garwood contrasted the types of characterizations that were based on those fragments to the stories of his friend. The speeches of Jim Rome and Alex Garwood show how Tillman’s decision to enlist (#1) became a basis for

characterizations of the discursive *Pat Tillman* as a hero that discourse producers built upon using their own experiences, other conceptions of heroism, and other fragments.

The name Pat Tillman meant something different spoken by Jim Rome than it did spoken by Alex Garwood, yet they both agreed that *Pat Tillman* was a hero. As was evidenced in both eulogies, these characterizations often presented a belief that heroism is an outgrowth of a person's actions. However, both orators created characterizations that were unique to their own interpretations. These two eulogies present different perspectives on why Pat Tillman should be considered a hero that contribute to our understandings of the discursive *Pat Tillman*. Rome saw *Pat Tillman* as something more than an athlete or a citizen. Garwood presented *Pat Tillman* as a heroic family member and friend. In both of their eulogies, though, Rome and Garwood confronted the fact that the heroism represented by *Pat Tillman* has been translated into a symbol of social, political, and cultural values that he is said to represent.

The Role of Heroism in Marginalizing the Voices of

Rene Gonzalez and Ted Rall

The very few instances in which characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero were questioned provide a unique opportunity to examine the bond that was created by the belief that Pat Tillman's actions were heroic. Tillman's decision to enlist (#1) became a defining fragment for many who characterized *Pat Tillman* as a hero. As Pat Tillman's actions came to represent the heroism of all American soldiers, it also shielded *Pat Tillman* from criticism. The strength of that connection was only amplified when Tillman ultimately gave his life in service to his nation. Just as President George W. Bush was portrayed as a villain in response to the manipulations in the reporting of Tillman's death,

those who contradicted characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as hero found themselves playing the villain. After critiquing the soldier who had become the face of military sacrifice following the 9/11 attacks, Rene Gonzalez and Ted Rall faced harsh backlashes and even death threats.

This section is not so much an analysis of the characterizations voiced by Gonzalez and Rall as an examination of the responses to their characterizations. After September 11, 2001, the word soldier became synonymous with hero. Throughout the country one finds news reports about the “fallen heroes” of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (e.g., Copeland 2001; Hervis 2003; Stewart 2006; Fraga 2009). Pages and pages of YouTube tributes stream music and images designed to pay homage to soldier-heroes (e.g., Teelow 2007; kelikala 2008; palmbaymick 2008). A website designed to help military families stay connected was named Websites for Heroes (Caliber Media 2010). The military handbook for the transition of servicemen back into everyday life was titled the *Hero Handbook* (Soldier and Family 2010). The interconnection between *Pat Tillman* and heroism can be best understood through the reactions to those who chose to violate the script. Rene Gonzalez and Ted Rall had different reasons for undermining the perception that Tillman’s actions were heroic, but the reactions to their words were remarkably similar. The repetition of interpretations of Tillman’s decision to enlist (#1) as a heroic act to defend his nation created a discursive connection that allowed the critics of Tillman’s critics to vilify those who undermined the belief that *Pat Tillman* symbolizes strength of patriotism and service as heroic values in post-9/11 U.S. culture.

Rene Gonzalez

Just days after Tillman's death, Rene Gonzalez (2004), an International Relations graduate student at University of Massachusetts at Amherst wrote an editorial for the University of Massachusetts school newspaper, *The Daily Collegian*. Gonzalez's editorial was entitled "Pat Tillman is not a hero: He got what was coming to him." In the article, Gonzalez questioned Tillman's motives for his decision to enlist claiming that:

Tillman, in the absurd belief that he was defending or serving his all-powerful country from a seventh rate, Third World nation devastated by the previous conflicts it had endured, decided to give up a comfortable life to place himself in a combat situation that cost him his life. This was not "Ramon or Tyrone," who joined the military out of financial necessity, or to have a chance at education. This was a "G.I. Joe" guy who got what was coming to him. That was not heroism, it was prophetic idiocy.

Gonzalez's commentary struck at the core of characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero. He contradicted the notion that Pat Tillman's decisions to enlist (#1) represented the heroic ideals of selflessness and sacrifice. Rene Gonzalez later discussed that he had intended to use his university newspaper as a forum and *Pat Tillman* as a means to critique the connection between celebrity and heroism, but his article had already drawn the ire of people across the country (Associated Press 2004b). People and pundits throughout the nation condemned Gonzalez as representative of the type of "liberal" mindset that was undermining the efforts of the troops (Ireland 2004, para. 4; Young 2004a, A15).

Within 24 hours of when his article was published, Gonzalez's words traveled from the University of Massachusetts school newspaper to the rest of the nation through news outlets like CNN (Carlson and Begala 2004), the Associated Press (DeFalco 2004), and ESPN (ESPN.com 2004). CNN commentator Paul Begala went on the program *Crossfire* and called Gonzalez's position "an outrage" and then published the editorial

email address of the school newspaper. The virulent reactions to Gonzalez's position sparked the newspaper to disavow his viewpoint and the President of the University of Massachusetts characterized his commentary as "a disgusting, arrogant and intellectually immature attack on a human being who died in service to his country" (Gorlick 2004). The character attacks on Gonzalez struck a racist, petulant, and personal tone on the *Daily Collegian's* blog. Al Trask of Missouri wrote "Rene Gonzalez is cowardly, Pat Tillman had more courage in his little finger than Rene has in his whole family. You are a sorry excuse for an American if indeed you are an American. Walk away from your cushy life and walk a mile in any soldier's shoes before you condemn any of them!" (2004, para. 1). Washington DC's Dan Spar commented that "the world needs fewer insensitive, self-serving critics like Rene Gonzalez, who present nonanalytical arguments that infer motives, attack unstated individual personal and political beliefs, and show an intellectual and personal immaturity that is hard to fathom from a student of any age" (sic, 2004, para. 1). *Daily Collegian* editor Jennifer Eastwood watched as thousands of people from around the nation logged on and crashed their internet site (Bombardieri 2004). According to Eastwood's estimation, 98 percent of those responses were negative and some even included death threats (Bombardieri 2004). From all over the nation, people logged in to read and comment on Gonzalez's editorial.

On Thursday, April 29, 2004, only one day after the editorial was published, Rene Gonzalez apologized "for all the pain that my article has brought" the Tillman family (Associated Press 2004b), but that apology could not stop the continued vilification. Gonzalez argued that he "felt that his [Tillman's] celebrity had been a factor in American society calling him a 'hero,' and I felt American society had arrived at that conclusion without much thinking, but rather as some sort of patriotic 'knee-jerk' into hero

worship,” but resigned himself to the fact that “I did it in such an insensitive way, that the article was not worth publishing” (Associated Press 2004b). *GOPUSA.com* contributor Jan Ireland continued the defamation of Gonzalez beyond his apology stating that “racism and envy were part of the reason Gonzalez called Tillman a ‘pendejo’ (idiot) and a ‘Rambo’ soldier who deserved to die. But the biggest reason of all was the personal cowardice of America hater Rene Gonzalez” (2004, para. 3). *The Boston Globe*’s Cathy Young argued, “while Gonzalez’s rhetoric is extreme, his ideology may not be that far out of the ‘mainstream’ on New England’s college campuses” (2004c, A15). Her editorial focused on the ways in which “a hate-America mindset on the left is not just a right-wing slander.” John McCaslin (2004) of the *Washington Times* wrote that Gonzalez’s comments exemplify a growing trend in left wing criticism. In her article in the *Boston Globe*, Marcella Bombardieri referenced English professor and former Vietnam War draft counselor John Nelson who witnessed “demonstrations that burned Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara or Secretary of State Dean Rusk in effigy” who claimed that “Gonzalez’s comments were more troubling” (2004, B1). The troubling nature of Gonzalez’s article stemmed from the ways that he had deviated from characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a war hero. In making his comments, Gonzalez did not change the perception of *Pat Tillman*; he created a national characterization of a graduate student named *Rene Gonzalez*.

Ted Rall

While Gonzalez criticized Tillman as a man swollen with machismo who brought on his own untimely death, cartoonist Ted Rall (2004c) crafted a characterization of *Pat Tillman* as a victim of a deceptive government and a complicit media. Unlike Gonzalez,

Ted Rall's politics are matter of public record. He is the author of a book entitled *Wake Up... You're Liberal: How We Can Take America Back from the Right* (2004d) and has been a guest on political talk shows as a liberal commentator (2002b; 2003). His own biography from his website contains this description:

Rall is a neo-traditionalist who uses a unique drawing style to revive the approach of Thomas Nast, who viewed editorial cartoons as a vehicle for change. His focus is on issues important to ordinary working people, such as un- and underemployment, the environment and popular culture, but also comments on political and social trends. (TedRall.com 2009)

One of the political and social trends that Rall chose to comment on was characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero, but Rall encountered the anger of everyday people in response to his drawing (Rall 2004c). Rall's nationally syndicated cartoon was originally featured, among other places, on the MSNBC Web site, but was officially pulled because "MSNBC.com Editor in chief Dean Wright concluded Monday's Rall item did not meet MSNBC.com standards of fairness and taste" ("Why We Pulled" 2004). Fairness and good taste were not the only critiques leveled at Rall and quickly the controversy shifted from the cartoon he had produced to his place as a voice for social critique. This cartoon has both subtle and overt messages that signaled a critique of Tillman's decision to enlist (#1) as well as the actions of the United States government and popular journalism. In this characterization, *Pat Tillman* was the unwitting "sap" who believed the government propaganda.

The response to Rall's cartoon was similar to Rene Gonzalez's editorial. He received over 6,000 email responses to his cartoon, with some including threats on his life (Associated Press 2004c). Columnist Greg Pierce called Rall an "idiot cartoonist" (2004). Cathy Young (2004b) of the *Boston Globe* lumped Rall in with a series of "ideologues" that she found repulsive because they were rooting "against their own

country in a war.” On the television program *Scarborough Country*, host Joe Scarborough (2004b) characterized the cartoon as a “smear” of Pat Tillman and GOP strategist Jack Burkman responded by saying that “I could not imagine – if you said something more repulsive, I could not do it.” Even the liberal columnist on the program, Mario Giardiello, called the cartoon “distasteful” as he attempted to reframe the cartoon for Scarborough.

Rall defended his position despite its unpopularity. In a posting on his personal blog, *Search and Destroy*, Rall argued, “my cartoon is a reaction to the extraordinary lionizing of Mr. Tillman as a national hero” (2004a, para. 2). According to Rall:

It’s time for troops who signed up post-9/11 to take a little personal responsibility. It’s one thing for a career soldier to go where the politicians tell him or her to go, but quite another to join the military when the “president” is an illegal usurper occupying the White House, he’s an out-of-control warmonger using the deaths in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania to promote a partisan political agenda and his wars are nothing more than grabs for control of oil and gas resources and pipeline routes. Liberals tend to let volunteer soldiers off the hook, but let’s not forget the hard, cold truth:
If no one had enlisted after 9/11, we wouldn’t be fighting these immoral wars based on lies and greed now. (para. 4)

Rall’s use of *Pat Tillman* as a vehicle for his critique could be seen as a type of attack that struck Vietnam era chord of blaming soldiers for the actions of governments or attempt to make soldiers accountable for their actions, but most of the reactions tended to focus on Rall. In the midst of the angry response to his cartoon, Ted Rall (2004b) appeared on the FOX News program *The O’Reilly Factor* where conservative host Bill O’Reilly questioned Rall’s ethics and his intellect in response to his drawing. O’Reilly asked the question “for a guy who died fighting for his country, you don’t think you crossed an ethical line here?” and after peppering him with questions about newspapers that refused to run the cartoon O’Reilly simply claimed that “there is something the

matter with you, Mr. Rall. There's something the matter with you." O'Reilly then ended the interview with "You should be ashamed of what you did to Tillman, and that's the final word here."

This cartoon continued to follow Rall as a statement on his character for years after its publication. Almost two years later, Rall (2006c) appeared on *Hannity & Colmes* only to receive the same treatment. When host Sean Hannity began his line of questioning, Rall claimed that a producer promised him that the topic of *Pat Tillman* would be off the table. Hannity continued, in spite of Rall's comments that "you're unbelievable," to ask "are you ashamed of what you said about Pat Tillman?" And while Rall did not defend his drawing, he did say he was not ashamed. As the interview continued, Hannity continued to push his characterization of Rall claiming that he does not have a conscience, is without a soul, and is a disgrace. It was not just on *The O'Reilly Factor* and *Hannity & Colmes* that this cartoon followed Rall. Joel Mowbray used it as an attack on Rall's (2006b) character on CNBC's *Kudlow & Company*, and Rall immediately responded "Oh, there we go. Typical Republican personal attack." In 2007, Conservative Pundit Michelle Malkin called Rall beyond contempt for his Tillman cartoon among others (*Editor & Publisher* 2007). Using his experience, Rall (2006a) composed an article for *commondreams.org* in which he outlined the hypocrisy of the United States and its citizens for their outrage to the Danish-Muslim political cartoon scandal. Rall was readily aware of what outrage over a political cartoon looked like.

Ted Rall's characterization of an "idiot" who had been duped contradicted the idea of *Pat Tillman* as a war hero and allowed Rall's critics to perpetuate a politically partisan belief that Republicans are the only party that supports the troops. It struck at the core of characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero and challenged the notion that

Tillman's decision to enlist was a heroic sacrifice. These criticisms were met with anger and disdain from conservative commentators and silence and disassociation from liberal ones. Ted Rall's cartoon did not undermine the connection between characterizations of *Pat Tillman* and heroism, but instead became a means for discussing the merit of *Ted Rall* as a cultural commentator. In an era where the service of the soldiers has been distinguished from the decisions made by their superiors, Rall created a characterization of *Pat Tillman* that made Rall the focus of anger and dissention.

Seeing the Hero through Villains

Despite Pat Tillman's attempts to avoid the public spotlight *Pat Tillman* became a symbol that sociologist David Altheide argues became a means for affirming that America was participating in a just war. Following 9/11, the passing of the Patriot Act and the fear instilled by a "War on Terror" were evidence of that the attacks in New York, Washington DC, and Pennsylvania were enough to disorient a nation that had not been a victim of a foreign attack over half a century. There was an important difference between this attack and the one perpetrated by the Japanese: The enemy was not so clearly defined. The ambiguity that was created by a "War on Terror," allowed for the passing of laws that restricted freedoms in favor of safety that would surely be enough to stir the grave of Benjamin Franklin. While principles were being put to the test at home, American soldiers were sent throughout the world by "a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom" and asked to "bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies" (Bush 2001). Characterizations of American soldiers as the instruments of a just cause were reinforced by the decision of an NFL star to enlist in the Army (#1) and

the belief that “our country will never forget the debt we owe ... [to] all who gave their lives for freedom” only fortified a characterization of that person as a hero (Bush 2001).

The responses that were produced to the perspectives articulated by Rene Gonzalez and Ted Rall reveal how norms and regularities had formed in the discourse formation that connected the textualized *Pat Tillman* with heroism. Gonzalez and Rall, as critics of the lionizing of *Pat Tillman* as a hero, contradicted characterizations that had been connected to the belief that soldiers are the protectors of the nation’s freedoms. In so doing, they risked characterizations of their own authorship as stupid and immoral. Mario R. della Cava contrasted the perspectives articulated by Gonzalez with those who “say all soldiers who give their lives should receive such attention” (2004a, para. 14). Ben Johnson of *FrontPageMag.com* took the opportunity afforded by Rall’s cartoon to describe how “such noble service would qualify Tillman as a national hero, but it has unleashed a torrent of hatred on the left” (2004, para. 1). Tillman’s decision to enlist (#1) in the Army became the defining fragment for those who sought to characterize Tillman as an idyllic war hero fighting for his nation. The contrasts that were created between the characterizations voiced by Rene Gonzalez and Ted Rall and characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero reveal how the norms of a formation can be used to marginalize certain perspective or even silence discourse producers.

Divergent Rhetorical Trajectories for *Pat Tillman* as a Political Hero Following the Scandal Surrounding His Death

The belief that Pat Tillman was an idyllic war hero was put to the test in the months that followed his death. As details emerged about how Tillman died and what Tillman felt about the wars he was fighting, more government officials were implicated

in the cover-up and more investigations were launched in order to discover how Tillman was killed. The pundits and politicians on the right who had accused people like Rall and Gonzalez of leftist points of view became the subject of scrutiny themselves for their oversimplifications and misrepresentations of a person who privately held beliefs (#13) that questioned the wars he came to symbolize and had planned to meet with peace advocate Noam Chomsky (#14). In a time when President George W. Bush was experiencing falling approval ratings largely due to an unpopular war, the fabrication of the story of Tillman's death brought new political and ideological implications to characterizations of his heroism. As Tillman's story became interconnected with discussions of military misconduct and government improprieties, *Pat Tillman* the character also functioned as *Pat Tillman* the topic. The divergent trajectories within the formation taken after the controversies surrounding how Tillman died became public revealed that, depending on how the fragments of the discursive formation were assembled, *Pat Tillman* could simultaneously be employed to exemplify competing political ideologies while remaining a hero.

The two perspectives that I have chosen to examine for this section represent the divergent trajectories taken by the emergence of *Pat Tillman* as a topic in U.S. politics. The characterizations voiced by John McCain and Keith Olbermann display the ways in which *Pat Tillman* was employed as a site of political contest. As representatives of competing political philosophies, McCain a conservative politician and Olbermann a liberal pundit, the perspectives of these two men provide insight into how *Pat Tillman* was intertwined with discussions pertaining to war, nationalism, and the Bush administration following Tillman's death. While McCain continued to perpetuate a characterization of *Pat Tillman* as a war hero, Olbermann produced a characterization

that highlighted fragments such as Tillman's private beliefs (#13), the fact that Tillman's death had been the result of friendly fire (#6), and the congressional inquiry into his death (#10), while still discussing Tillman as a hero. These different trajectories represent how *Pat Tillman* simultaneously functioned as a symbol of both the best and the worst aspects of the American military and the U.S. government while extending two different perspectives on national values.

John McCain

Senator John McCain was an influential voice in shaping a vision of *Pat Tillman*'s heroism as well as a powerful political figure within the Republican Party who eventually earned its nomination for the presidency. The fact that Tillman had played both his collegiate and professional football careers in McCain's home state of Arizona and had left that career in the NFL to enlist drew particular attention from McCain. McCain's status as an American war hero himself allowed him the ethos to speak about Tillman's service to his nation. In response to Tillman's death, McCain held a press conference (2004e), was called on to do interviews (2004a; 2004d; 2004f), and wrote a biographical chapter about Tillman for his book, *Inspiring Stories Every Young Person Should Know and Every Adult Should Remember* (2005a). McCain interconnected fragments such as the brawl (#18) that landed Tillman in juvenile hall and his marriage to his high school sweetheart (#33) with his decision to enlist (#1) and his choice to remain silent (#2) in order to create a characterization of a *Pat Tillman* that lived the life of a hero beyond just his decision to serve his country. His *Pat Tillman* centered on his ability to infer Tillman's motives from those fragments and portray Tillman as an exemplary person.

When the news of Tillman's death became public, it was often John McCain that was called on to make sense of it. In an interview conducted before Tillman's death, McCain (2004i) discussed his admiration of *Pat Tillman*:

He gave up over a million dollars a year as a safety for the Arizona Cardinals to enlist in the Army as a ranger after 9/11 and fought in Iraq. And it wasn't a moment of crisis and strife that motivated Pat Tillman. It was the recognition that the United States was under attack and he volunteered to defend it.

Much like others who sought to characterize Pat Tillman after his enlistment, McCain employed Tillman's decision to join (#1) the Army as a defining fragment. Unlike many of those characterizations, however, McCain sought to separate Tillman's enlistment from the events of 9/11. McCain discussed a *Pat Tillman* who was not motivated by a single moment, but a loyalty to the nation. This slight alteration of "why" Tillman enlisted was more in line with the perspective of a politician who believed that "all Americans must share a resolve to see this war through to a just end" (McCain 2004h). McCain touted Tillman's motives as an example of loyalty, a loyalty that would be important to keeping his party in power if he was going to be elected president.

McCain's esteem for Tillman's actions existed, much like many fans, despite having never met him, yet McCain routinely made claims about why Tillman chose to serve and how Tillman thought. The basis for his claims came from inferences based on fragments of the discursive *Pat Tillman*. In the press conference he gave on the day Tillman's death was announced, McCain (2004e) discussed Tillman's unwillingness to do interviews (#2) "because he viewed his decision as no more patriotic than that of his less fortunate, less renowned countrymen" and on May 10, 2004, John McCain (2004b) claimed that "And, by the way, Pat Tillman would say, I'm no different than any of those others (soldiers)." During a commencement speech before the 2004 graduating class at

UCLA, he used Tillman's ability to overcome the fact that he was too slow and too small (#25) for the NFL and his intellect (#s 23, 24) as evidence that Tillman's decision to enlist (#1) was more than just a reaction (2004h). McCain argued that it was a deliberate act of "real courage" (2004h). In a November 3, 2005, interview with Larry King, McCain again touted Tillman's intellect (#s 23, 24) as part of his decision to enlist (#1): "He thought a lot. Pat Tillman was a real thinker and a reader. And I think that he felt this sense of duty." McCain's ascriptions of Tillman's motives and thought processes created a characterization of a soldier who sacrificed his life out of deference to the ideals of a nation.

Using his ability to surmise Tillman's motivations from fragments of the discursive formation, McCain characterized a *Pat Tillman* who could stand for the sacrifices of all the soldiers who were serving in these conflicts. At the public memorial for Tillman, McCain (2004c) spoke of *Pat Tillman* as a reminder of the values of the nation and the sacrifice of all soldiers:

Pat's best service to his country was to remind us all what courage really looks like and that the purpose of all good courage is love. He loved his country and the values that make us exceptional among nations and good. And he worried after the terrible blow we were struck on September 11th, 2001 that he had never done a damn thing to serve her. Love and honor oblige us. We are obliged to value our blessings and to pay our debts to those who sacrificed to secure them for us.²

McCain elevated *Pat Tillman* as an example for all people of how the ideals of the nation are exemplified by a soldier's commitment. This characterization of duty and debt is an example of the type of turn that positioned *Pat Tillman* within rhetorics that promoted loyalty and support as acts of patriotism and subordinated criticism. The silence of Pat Tillman before and after his death was replaced by John McCain telling us

² This quotation was also transcribed from the ESPN footage of the memorial.

what Tillman “worried about” using Tillman’s quote that he had not “done a damn thing” from his September 12, 2001, interview (#12). Using the fragments from a discursive formation, John McCain began acting as *Pat Tillman*’s voice.

Nowhere is McCain’s tendency to extrapolate Tillman’s thinking more evident than in McCain’s (2005d) biography of Tillman from his book, *Character is Destiny: Inspiring Stories Every Young Person Should Know and Every Adult Should Remember*. “Wealthy, famous, loved, and happy. It was a lot to put at risk. But he did risk it, all of it, because he knew he had obligations that could not be ignored without feeling ashamed of himself” (58). McCain’s story of *Pat Tillman* was a characterization that was motivated by a belief that “America is dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, and have equal right to freedom and justice. That is our cause: to prove the truth of that proposition. And that cause is far more important than the ambitions of any individual” (58–59). Despite having never spoken with Tillman, McCain spoke for *Pat Tillman*. McCain reflected on this tendency in his chapter, “I have used his life as an example of patriotism that I admire and encourage others to admire. I doubt he would approve. He didn’t brag or, I suppose, like to hear others brag about him” (60). Tillman’s decision to choose actions over words and to not seek the spotlight allowed McCain to shape the motivations and meaning of Tillman’s actions.

McCain’s tale of the silent, dutiful hero was not left unchallenged. When Tillman’s mother Mary revealed Tillman’s political views (#13) in the interview with Robert Collier (2005) from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, she created a competing characterization of *Pat Tillman* with a different-sounding voice. While listed in the article as an ally, John McCain’s assertions about how Tillman felt and acted were contradicted by Tillman’s mother’s assertions that he was against the wars and considered the nation’s

actions illegal. Revelations that Tillman was critical of America's presence in Iraq and resisted being used as a political prop were antithetical to characterizations of *Pat Tillman* from a politician who had ascribed that we all follow the same path of service, a service that Pat Tillman died for despite his reservations.

The tensions that had developed in his characterizations came through when McCain (2005f) was asked by television host Bill O'Reilly about how "the antiwar people... exploited" Tillman's positions:

I don't think that's right. I think that Pat Tillman's case, an American hero, should be left out of the debate as to whether we should have gone to war in Iraq or not. It's not fitting. It's not fitting for his memory, because he's an example to young people all over America.

McCain's objections to *Pat Tillman's* place as a political symbol seemed at the very least insincere seeing that he had employed Tillman's life and sacrifice for political gain numerous times. At a military rally while introducing President George W. Bush at Fort Lewis, Washington, Tillman's life and heroism are detailed in the same speech where McCain (2004g) asserted political positions like "we will survive; our enemies must not." The heroic soldier *Pat Tillman* characterized by John McCain in his speeches, in his biography, and in his interviews was representative of a type of rhetorical trajectory of *Pat Tillman's* heroism. "The larger-than-life legend that Pat Tillman has become" was evident in the ways in which John McCain (2005d) chose to characterize Tillman's motivations.

Keith Olbermann

In a recent profile in *The New Yorker*, Peter J. Boyer (2008) called Keith Olbermann "a political polemicist" who assumes "that the labored pretense of neutrality in the news business is a fruitless exercise." From his pointed attacks on his Fox News

counterpart Bill O'Reilly (or Bill-O as Olbermann refers to him) to rants in which he once ordered then-President George W. Bush to "shut the hell up" (Boyer 2008), Olbermann has gained notoriety for his often brash voice as a liberal commentator. Olbermann had very little to say about Tillman before his death, but after his death he employed *Pat Tillman* as a way to tell Americans what "lies about the death of Pat Tillman" revealed about the Bush administration (2007j). As an issue of particular interest to Olbermann and a frequent topic on his show, Olbermann employed the handling of the death of Pat Tillman as an example of the worst aspects of the U.S. government and military. Olbermann's discussions of *Pat Tillman* did not question whether Tillman was a hero. He took that for granted. He was more concerned with how that hero became a symbol of political abuse. Beginning with a tribute (during which he interviewed John McCain) on April 23, 2004, Olbermann has memorialized, criticized, and hypothesized all in the name of *Pat Tillman*.

The theme for Olbermann's characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as the public face of the costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan first took root in his first report on Tillman's death. Standing in front of a screen with a picture of Tillman under the words "True Patriot," Olbermann explained, "Tillman's death will bring the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, not just to the front pages, but to the sports pages." During that episode, Olbermann confronted McCain on the symbolic dimensions of Tillman's death. McCain characterized Tillman's sacrifice as something that can put "a certain pride in us, that we have young Americans like Pat Tillman" while Olbermann pressed questions like "Do you think that his loss, in Afghanistan, has just brought the real meaning of these conflicts in Afghanistan, in Iraq, to a sizable portion of the public with whom it had not previously registered?" and "has Pat Tillman just become the American face of these

conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan?” From the first moments of his coverage of Tillman’s death, it was clear that Keith Olbermann would be focused on how *Pat Tillman* would provide insight into the political implications of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Bush administration.

As the story of Tillman’s death evolved and the military cover-up of how Tillman died became public knowledge, Olbermann seized the opportunity to employ it as an avenue for a critique of the Presidency. Using fragments like the first official account (#5) delivered by Stephen White and the successive changes to that account (#s 6, 7, 8, 9), Olbermann employed *Pat Tillman* as a topic of controversy. The day after the public was made aware that the Army knew (#7) Tillman had died as a result of friendly fire before the first account of Tillman’s death had been delivered, Olbermann confronted the news on *Countdown*. During the May 4, 2005 broadcast, he commented that the delays in reporting Tillman’s death were “presumably to shield the unit from embarrassment.” Then, on March 6, 2006, after the Army announced that a criminal probe (#8) would be initiated, Olbermann conducted an interview with *Washington Post* reporter Josh White. In that interview, Olbermann began to speculate about the political motivations for why the story of Tillman’s death was altered:

And, Josh, to be clear, when we hear criminal negligence, the first thought I think that probably jumps into a lot of people’s minds is somebody shot him on purpose. That’s not what we’re talking about here; it’s about a cover-up right, and an embellishment perhaps to try to sell the death of Pat Tillman as a heroic self-sacrifice when it was a horrible accident. Is that the worst-case scenario, or is there something worse in here?

This quote represented the first time that Olbermann insinuated that there was more than just a cover-up of mistakes being concealed by the military, but it would not be the last.

The findings of the criminal probe (#8) into Tillman's death were released over a year later. In response to the lack of accountability discussed in those findings, the Tillman family called for a congressional investigation. Olbermann discussed the conclusions of the probe in an interview with Jon Soltz of *votevets.org* from March 26, 2007. During that interview, Olbermann asked,

But the last point, Jon, the thing I really don't understand is if there's a crime here, whether it's literally a crime or just figuratively one. If there was a cover-up, why was it undertaken? It seems it was unnecessary, pointless, panicky, stupid. I mean, Pat Tillman volunteered from obviously the purest motives of patriotism, gave up as much as anybody could. He died from friendly fire, accidental, happens in every war, good or bad, justified or not. Why would the fact that he died of – from that, of that as the cause, why would that, in the slightest, diminish what he did?

The emergence of contrasting reports of how Tillman died within the discursive formation *Pat Tillman* became fragments that allowed Olbermann and his guests to hypothesize about the motives behind the cover-up. In this interview with Soltz, Olbermann questioned the integrity of Donald Rumsfeld, the officers who were at Tillman's memorial, as well as the veracity of an investigation that was completed by those in the Army and the Pentagon. Like McCain and others before him, Olbermann used Pat Tillman's enlistment as evidence of his heroism but he contrasted that heroism against other fragments that would shape his version of what that heroism exposed about the military.

Accusations of a "cover-up" and "worse," were not the end of Olbermann's insinuations about impropriety. In an interview with Tillman's mother, Mary, and sportscaster Dan Patrick, Olbermann walked both his guests through the report of friendly-fire and Tillman's personal beliefs as fragments of a story as it was known on March 27, 2007. He skillfully asked questions about the Bush administration's use of *Pat*

Tillman as a sales tool for the war and the military conspiracy that prevented knowledge about his death. Then Olbermann asked Tillman's mother point blank about "the possibility that someone deliberately shot him." Her response was simply "I'm not excluding that." On July 26th and 27th of 2007, Olbermann took the story as far as it could go. In an interview with MSNBC political analyst Richard Wolffe and Retired General Wesley Clark, Olbermann asked:

Well, we have assumed from the beginning that that (the Bush administration used Tillman as a symbol to sell the war) was exactly the scenario, that this possibility that his death from friendly fire would somehow affect in some way that neither of us have ever been able to understand, somehow affect people's appreciation for his patriotism and his sacrifice.

Does it not begin to look more and more like that we're going in the wrong direction in this? That they were not trying to protect something slightly negative from coming out, but in fact protecting the accusation that his mother has made and has not gotten a lot of attention to that perhaps he was indeed murdered? Were we actually underestimating what was being covered up here? (2007i)

Wolffe responded to Olbermann's question with "It's very possible" and, for the second time on *Countdown*, it had been insinuated that Pat Tillman was murdered. The next day, in another interview with veteran Jon Soltz, Olbermann employed fragments such as Tillman's personal views (#13), his desire to meet with Noam Chomsky (#14), and the Associate Press report on the three bullets (#9) that killed Tillman to paint this picture against the backdrop of an image of Pat Tillman beneath the words "Motive for Murder?:"

Corporal Tillman held a number of personal views that were unpopular within the context of the Bush administration, perhaps also within the Army. He reportedly favored John Kerry in that election that year. We know he opposed the invasion of Iraq. He thought it illegal. He had plans to meet with Noam Chomsky. The Associate Press told us in a report last night that during the firefight a fellow soldier was hugging the ground, crying out to God and Tillman said, let me quote this directly, "Would you shut your (EXPLETIVE DELETED) mouth, God is not going to help you. You need to do something for yourself. You sniveling - ." And that's all the quote was. Apparently at the last moment of his life. Explain how all

of those details intensify the need for openness here that we are not getting now?
(2007j)

Olbermann's insinuation that Pat Tillman was deliberately killed to suit a political agenda fueled conspiracy speculations that had emerged on the internet. *DailyKos* blogger DBurn (2007) cited General Wesley Clark's appearance on *Countdown* and claimed that "the orders came from the very top as Tillman was a political symbol. It was well known he was against the war in Iraq. No indication if orders were to murder him, but at the least to cover it up (Burned clothes – lost evidence etc)." Also referencing Olbermann, Paul Joseph Watson of *InfoWars* wondered "how can any sane and rational individual weigh this evidence and not come to the conclusion that Tillman was deliberately gunned down in cold blood?" Blogger Ken McCracken (2007) posted the Olbermann/Clark interview underneath the headline "Pat Tillman Murdered Because He Was About To Become Anti-War Hero?" Fragments like the fact that the army knew before the memorial about how Tillman died and the three bullets that led to his death became pieces of evidence that Tillman's death was more than just a friendly-fire accident.

Keith Olbermann's accusations about the lack of truth being distributed by the Bush administration exemplified how the cover-up of Tillman's death allowed for divergent rhetorics for characterizations of *Pat Tillman*. Olbermann relied on the discursive relationship between heroism and *Pat Tillman* as a contrast to those he depicted as exploiting his death for their own gain. He even went as far as to argue that the fact that *Pat Tillman* was already a hero before his death was evidence of his theory of a military cover-up: "He was a hero enough as it was. Nobody had to embellish it. It didn't detract from it in the slightest" (2007b). Olbermann's discussion of *Pat Tillman* was representative of a rhetorical trajectory that employed *Pat Tillman* as a political topic

instead of just a man of heroic actions. The acknowledgment of Tillman's actions as heroic allowed Olbermann to portray officials involved in the cover-up of his death as villains.

A Polemic Political Language

The discourse formation *Pat Tillman* encompassed contrasting characterizations that spoke to varying aspects of heroism in contemporary U.S. culture. In the cases of John McCain and Keith Olbermann, two distinct viewpoints emerged on what the discursive *Pat Tillman* could reveal to Americans about the wars being fought in Iraq and Afghanistan and the decisions being made by their government. McCain chose to characterize *Pat Tillman* using his decision to enlist (#1) as an example of a war hero who represented the loyalty and service that the nation required following the September 11, 2001 attacks. Distinct from McCain, Olbermann chose to focus on Tillman's private beliefs (#13) and the many fragments about the manipulation of Tillman's death (#4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11) in order to craft a characterization of a soldier whose story had been manipulated by those who placed politics over values. Their two competing rhetorical trajectories demonstrate how the values and significance that are attributed to heroes function as a means for discourse producers to engage in meaningful conflict over what those heroes are said to symbolize without even having to address each other.

The conflict between these two trajectories eventually became intertwined with criticism of the increasingly unpopular wars of the Bush administration. Over time, characterizations of *Pat Tillman* often focused on the political implications of the controversy surrounding Tillman's death. When the military confirmed that the Army knew (#7) the circumstances surrounding the shooting of Pat Tillman, critics like

Olbermann jumped at the chance to accuse both the military and George W. Bush of manipulating the events of Tillman's death. McCain (2007b) described the fact that the Army withheld the information as a "travesty." But as he emerged as a candidate for the presidency, he avoided the controversies that had become associated with Tillman's memory. Including on March 27, 2007, when McCain did not comment on the situation surrounding Tillman's death during an interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer. McCain's interview directly followed a story about the need for congressional inquiry into what had happened. Despite the fact that he had been one of Tillman's most vocal proponents, he never reacted to or discussed how these events had changed his version of what *Pat Tillman* symbolized. In this instance, his silence spoke just as loudly. As the alternative trajectory began to gain prominence, John McCain avoided the ways in which *Pat Tillman* was associated with the political failures and manipulations of the George W. Bush presidency. Unlike McCain, Olbermann embraced the controversy that had surrounded Tillman's death, but not as a means to talk about Tillman. Beginning on the same date where McCain avoided a discussion of *Pat Tillman*, March 27, 2007, Olbermann began a five month period where he discussed issues pertaining to why and what happened to Tillman in Afghanistan almost twice a month. Olbermann discussed *Pat Tillman* as a "subject touching tonight on the president and the war" (2007c) and as a representation of "the almost unbelievable" (2007g) manipulations of the Bush administration. Three years after Tillman's death, the topic of *Pat Tillman* was as present as it had ever been for Olbermann.

The differing characterizations that were created by these discourse producers affirm the presumption that *Pat Tillman* as a discourse formation could shift and change based on how discourse producers assembled the various fragments into

characterizations. Hero characterizations function as ideological embodiments that allow for a public examination of values. By creating distinct characterizations from a similar set of fragments, a politician and a pundit from differing political orientations engaged in a discourse formation that allowed them to comment on politics, war, and heroism. By carefully selecting fragments from the discourse formation *Pat Tillman*, both McCain and Olbermann each found a means to promote his own perspectives on the political realities of the times, but their interaction with contextual and ideological influences helped to shape how those perspectives were received.

Pat Tillman: Characterizations of Heroism

In the first of a two-part HBO series entitled *Assume the Position*, host Robert Wuhl (2006) defines what he refers to as the “Liberty Valance Effect.” Based on a conversation from the climax of the 1962 film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* starring Jimmy Stewart and John Wayne, Wuhl describes how Jimmy Stewart’s character revealed to his biographer that he was not the man who shot the outlaw Liberty Valance. The biographer’s response was short and simple “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” Characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero were grounded in a belief that, much like the story of Jimmy Stewart’s character in the film, even a single fragment of a person’s life can come to define that person’s legend. Pat Tillman’s act was being the athlete who volunteered to defend his nation in a time of crisis, but acceptance of this fragment as why *Pat Tillman* was a hero perpetuates a notion that heroes are created by an individual’s actions. Characterizations of heroism often make it seem like heroes are a product of their personal achievements, but the case of *Pat Tillman* is an excellent example that that belief is a misconception. I began this chapter by pointing out that there

were many soldiers who had enlisted after 9/11 who are not publicly commemorated as heroes just as there are athletes who are discussed as heroes who are also portrayed as not living up to Tillman's example. By setting *Pat Tillman* apart from others who had distinguished themselves on the same merit and other heroes who had not, it becomes apparent that public heroes are defined by "the printing of the legend."

In this chapter, I discussed how different people went about printing their legend about Pat Tillman. Jim Rome discussed a noble athlete who excelled in sports, life, and patriotism. Alex Garwood talked about a friend and family member who could be counted upon in any circumstance. Rene Gonzalez wrote about the nature of that legend and criticized how it was formed. Ted Rall drew the legend as story of an unwitting sap. John McCain presented the legend as a tribute to his nation and others who serve it. Keith Olbermann broadcasted an account of the legend that commented on the implications of those he saw as undermining the true nature of the story. These different discourse producers created characterizations that in some way commented on the role of *Pat Tillman* as a hero in U.S. culture. Each of these different characterizations spoke to the discursive nature of both *Pat Tillman* and heroism.

One of the most significant lessons that can be learned from an examination of how Pat Tillman's life and death were textualized is that what defines a hero is the perpetuation of a discursive bond between certain fragments of an individual's life and values that are considered heroic. The rhetoric through which *Pat Tillman* was characterized as a hero employed his decision to enlist (#1) as an example of loyalty, bravery, and patriotism that aligned with post-9/11 conceptions of terror and safety. Distinct from other athletes and celebrities as more patriotic or braver, *Pat Tillman* also revealed cultural insecurities about what is valued as heroic in U.S. culture. As an athlete,

it was only sensible that *Pat Tillman*'s brand of heroism be compared to representations of the heroic actions of other athletes. Based on Pat Tillman's fame, the same can be said about celebrities. Through the articulations of the heroism of *Pat Tillman*, a hierarchy was created that placed success, fame, and fortune below service to the nation, but also employed success, fame, and fortune to distinguish the value of that service. *Pat Tillman* was more heroic than a celebrity because of his willingness to sacrifice his fame. *Pat Tillman* was more heroic than other athletes because of his choice to serve his nation. *Pat Tillman* was more famous than other soldiers because of the successes he chose to leave behind. The use of contrasts formed the basis for how various discourse producers characterized the brand of heroism represented by *Pat Tillman*.

The basis for these characterizations was a commentary on whether or how Tillman joining the military represented an action of an authentic hero. Characterizations which employed Tillman's decision to enlist (#1) as the fragment that defined Pat Tillman as a hero often employed that fragment as a means to contrast their characterizations to other types of hero characterizations. For instance, a MySpace profile that memorialized *Pat Tillman* included a description of him written as if it were the first person voice of Tillman himself challenging that reader's ill-conceived notions of heroism:

Some may remember me causing havoc to offenses in the NFL, but I was not a football player. I was a soldier. Some of you may have no clue who I am. Most of you have overlooked me as a Hero and Role Model. Most of you have posters of actors and athletes on your walls. Most of you idolize musicians and entertainers. Most of you have yet to know who I am. ("Pat Tillman November" 2004)

According to Tillman biographer Jonathan Rand, "celebrities or unknowns, you don't find many people who give up a life of fame and glamour to serve their country in miserable deserts and mountains" (2004, 1). Rand's biography begins with an exploration

of how Tillman was different from both the typical celebrity and the typical soldier in order to position *Pat Tillman* as someone who has “reminded me I have some work to do. When you take a closer look at the life he led, I’m betting you’ll feel the same” (4). Characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a hero blended his decision to enlist (#1) with ideological interpretations that allowed them to comment on both social and political values.

As can be seen through the various and sometimes contrasting characterizations of *Pat Tillman*, heroism reflects a position taken by a discourse producer that is blended with the life of a person. Public heroes are not people, they are compilations of fragments that, when pieced together, reveal a symbolic distinction. For *Pat Tillman*, this meant representing service and friendship. It also meant that those characterizations would be involved in a discussion of what it means to be an athlete and what it means to be a soldier in U.S. culture. Creating these characterizations required that discourse producers draw upon more than just the actions of Pat Tillman. The interpretations of the actions of Pat Tillman that were produced to create *Pat Tillman* revealed that lionizing someone as hero involves that person’s life and, in many instances, death in a discourse formation that turns facts, stories, and images into fragments that allow for the articulation of personal, ideological, and political perspectives.

Put very simply, not even Pat Tillman could be the hero *Pat Tillman*. In the end, the attention paid to Tillman’s decision to enlist (#1) is what allowed *Pat Tillman* to function as a hero, not the decision itself. The use of fragments obscures the life of person in order to create a characterization that is consistent with the value being embodied. Pat Tillman could not have lived the lives attributed to him if for no other reason than those lives have taken on different and at times competing forms. Instead, his actions became

the material for heroic characterizations that could be changed or altered to suit a commentary on U.S. culture. ABC News anchor Peter Jennings acknowledged this point in his reaction to Tillman's death:

It makes a difference when someone well known to the public dies. The White House said today that he will be remembered as a man who put aside celebrity to serve. By which they likely mean that in contrast to some high-priced athletes today, Tillman was a special example to his family and to his country. (2004)

Discourse producers employ heroes as a means for discussing an individual as an embodiment of a positive characteristic of public life. How those characterizations are discussed is a function of the value being ascribed as much as it is the life a person led. Heroes are complicated characterizations that, based on how their stories are told, reveal the concept of heroism as fragmented as well. Heroism itself functions as a discourse formation that is a product of different hero characterizations as well as the many ways in which heroes are reconstituted as embodiments of public values.

Chapter Three

Masculinity

When Jim Rome (2004) exclaimed in his eulogy, “Pat is the man I want to be. Pat is the man we all want to be. Pat’s the man we should all aspire to be,” he took for granted that being a man is something that we should all aspire to. When John McCain wrote, “he was quite a man, tough, honest, overachieving, intense, colorful, daring” (2005a, 55), he equated being “quite a man” with adjectives reminiscent of an approach to masculinity espoused by President Theodore Roosevelt (1899) over a century ago. When Rich Wolfe, the editor of *Pat Tillman: He Graduated Life with Honors and No Regrets*, nostalgically described *Pat Tillman* as “a difference-maker on an indifferent planet ... a man the way men used to be in an America that is not the way it used to be” (2004, 10), he connected his characterization of *Pat Tillman* with a belief that being a “difference maker” is part of being a “man” in U.S. culture. These characterizations employ “being a man” as a standard for the evaluation of the actions of a person. However, that standard does not represent a genetic inheritance.

The distinction between being masculine and being male is central to my examination of *Pat Tillman* in this chapter. In her work on the intersection of masculinity and war, Carol Cohn discusses a distinction between “gendered individuals” and “gendered discourses” (1993, 228–229). She argues that gender refers to “a symbolic system, a central organizing discourse of culture, one that not only shapes how we experience and understand ourselves as men and women, but that also interweaves with other discourses and shapes *them*” (emphasis in original, 229). According to Cohn, gendered discourses employ a series of binaries that are largely based on perceptions of

value. Cohn claims that gendered discourses structure talk about events or actions using masculine terms to denote positive or active characteristics and feminine terms for characteristics discussed as negative or passive. Cohn is careful to point out that her observations are not a reflection of a biological phenomenon. It is a discursive phenomenon that couches discussions of power and influence in gendered terminology. Gendered discourse is a way of discussing issues such as war, which is the focus of Cohn's work, using terminology that perpetuates what she calls a "constellation of meanings that a given culture assigns to biological sex differences" (228).

Similarly to Cohn, R. W. Connell (2005), Gail Bederman (1996), and historian George L. Mosse (1996) argue that one of the main reasons given for why gender influences discourse is the metaphorical influence of the physical male body. According to Connell, "true masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body" (45). Connell argues that the male body is seen as the initiator of action and that perception has led to "a [social] structure that involved the state, the economy, culture and communications as well as kinship, child-rearing and sexuality" (65). In her historical analysis of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century U.S. culture, Bederman defines "manhood" or its modern counterpart "masculinity" as "the process which creates 'men' by linking male genital anatomy to male identity, and linking both anatomy and identity to particular arrangements of authority and power" (8). Bederman also notes, "Logically, this is an entirely arbitrary process. Anatomy, identity, and authority have no intrinsic relationship" (8). While the relationship may not be intrinsic to male biology, Mosse posits in his treatise on *The Image of Man* that the interconnection between the social force of masculinity and the male body is perpetuated through masculine imagery. He maintains

that modern masculinity is defined by “an ideal of manly beauty that symbolized virtue” (5).

One of the most important aspects of any investigation of masculinity is the distinction between masculinity and masculinities. Recent scholarship has challenged notions of a single, static conception of masculinity in favor of an examination of the differences between multiple masculinities. Difference has become an essential component of the study of masculinity, so much so that Harry Brod claims that “the pluralized ‘masculinities,’ coined to reflect the significance of difference, has been an important development in contemporary theory, and is by now well-established usage” (1995, 17). Accordingly R. W. Connell argues, “terms such as ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and ‘marginalized masculinities’ name not fixed character types but configurations of practice Any theory of masculinity worth having must give an account of this process of change” (2005, 81). The importance of the term masculinities reflects the changing nature of both social conceptions of how to be a man and the evolution of characteristics associated with masculinity as an aspect of gendered discourses. It is my contention that the imagery that was predominantly used to characterize *Pat Tillman* perpetuated the use of gendered discourses in discussions of cultural values, but also reflected how the conflation of gender with those values lacked the consistency of a single static form of masculinity. Instead, *Pat Tillman* came to represent competing masculinities that reveal how masculinity itself functioned as a discourse formation dependent on how discourse producers crafted their interpretations using gendered constructs.

In this chapter, I examine how the two primary images that were used to characterize *Pat Tillman* functioned as fragments that made gender an unavoidable aspect of the formation. I argue that characterizations in which these images served as fragments

perpetuated a belief that the social dimensions of masculinity can be symbolized by the male body, but they varied in what those symbols represented. The first photo, which I refer to as the sports image (#30), shows Tillman running across a football field with his mouth in mid-scream and seemingly his helmet ripped from his head in hand (Lower 2002). During his lecture on manhood, artist Willem de Rooij (2006) referred to this photograph as “the strongest image that will remain of Pat Tillman.” The second image in my analysis, the military portrait (#15), became the most prominent depiction of Tillman’s decision to become a soldier (Photography Plus 2003). He is placed between the viewer and the American flag, a visual representation of his desire to defend his nation. Together, these images circulated on the covers of biographies (Towle 2004; Wolfe 2004), in print (Smith 2004; Lacayo 2004), on television (Lewis 2004; Biography Channel 2006), through internet news sites (“Pat Tillman November” 2004; LabontePDA 2007), and in memorial commemorations (ESPN 2004). The circulation of these two images in characterizations of *Pat Tillman* reinforced their role as symbolic representations.

Connell also contends, “because gender is a way of structuring social practice in general, not a special type of practice, it is unavoidably involved with other social structures” (2005, 75). These photographs of Tillman were often used in characterizations that stressed *Pat Tillman* as a virtuous example; but these images of Tillman should stand out for how much he does not represent the norm. As a representative of both a sport and a war populated mostly by African Americans – 66% of NFL players (University of Central Florida 2008) and 60.7% of enlisted soldiers (Department of the Army 2007) – Tillman was typical of neither. Critic Dave Zirin, who examines the intersection of sports and politics, wrote that “the late Pat Tillman is in no way representative of the typical

dead U.S. soldier. And pretending otherwise is – like so much of Bush’s global conquest – a bloody lie” (2005c, 132). Sally Robinson (2000) has argued that seeing a white male as typical is more ideological than representative of the true nature of a situation.

According to Robinson, traditionally, white men have been “conflated with normativity in the American social lexicon” in ways that have allowed their status as the dominant class to go unquestioned (2). However, Robinson also points out ways that recent scholarship has begun to call that status into question. Those questions have resulted in both a discussion of the role of white men as a class and depictions of white men as endangered. Discourse producers rarely addressed race and class as dimensions of their characterizations of *Pat Tillman*. Instead those aspects of Pat Tillman were subsumed into characterizations of masculinity that perpetuated the use of gendered discourse as a means to discuss his actions. Race definitely played a role in distinguishing him from other athletes and other soldiers. Class definitely played a role in how those who stood in awe of Tillman viewed his “sacrifices” of his career and millions of dollars. Yet, the fact that he was a “man” became a focal point of the rhetoric about what *Pat Tillman* symbolized.

One of the difficulties of this type of analysis is that images rarely function alone. Therefore, my critique is not just about the images themselves. It is instead about how those images functioned as fragments within finished pieces of discourse. For each image, I examine two texts, texts that illustrate two different approaches to the use of these images. One text situates the image as a fragment of a characterization that relies on Tillman’s physical presence as emblematic of the qualities that made him special. The depiction of Tillman’s physical presence in these characterizations forged a direct link between the physical male form and the values that *Pat Tillman* was characterized as

representing. The second text I examine for each image folds the image into a characterization that connects his physical presence with a discussion of heroism or politics. In these characterizations, the image is subsumed into a commentary connecting masculinity to the focal issues. Because of the attention paid to each of these images, it was important to discuss what discourse producers had to say about them as well as their role as the predominant visual representations of the discourse formation. In each instance, I believe the use of Tillman's physical presence as a symbol of values and ideas connects these characterizations to discursive notions of masculinity.

Rhetorical Approaches to Imagery

In contemporary scholarship, the clearest examples of the examination of fragmentation can often be seen in analyses of the relationship between photos and texts. According to photographer John Berger, "in the relation between photograph and words, the photograph begs for an interpretation, and the words usually supply it" (1982, 92). Like Berger, those who have taken on the task of critiquing the use of photos have been forced to grapple with how they are introduced as pieces of finished texts. The words accompanying a photograph alter its content by connecting it with ideas that exist outside of its frame. Roland Barthes suggests, "the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination" (1978, 26). For W. J. T. Mitchell, acknowledging the power of photographs as a reflection of cultural traditions and values "helps to remind us that culture itself is a fractured concept" (1994, 123). Employing the work of Mitchell and others, Cara Finnegan examines how photos create "internal dialogues" with the text that accompanies them and "external dialogues" with the era in which they are produced (2003, xvi–xvii). To engage the ways in which a photograph functions as a fragment, it

must be examined in relation to both the finished texts in which it appears and the discourse formations in which those finished texts participate.

W. J. T. Mitchell argues that critical awareness of the prevalence of imagery and the power of visual representations has led to a “pictorial turn” in academia (1994, 11–34). That turn represents an acknowledgment of the need for an approach to visual literacy that can account for our exposure to imagery on a daily basis. Mitchell presupposes that “the challenge is to redescribe the whole image/text problematic that underwrites the comparative method and to identify critical practice that might facilitate a sense of connectedness while working against the homogenizing, anaesthetic tendencies of comparative strategies and semiotic ‘science’” (87–88). Just as S. Paige Baty (1995) argues about characters, Mitchell advocates that critics treat images as representations:

Culture-as-representation helps to remind us that culture itself is a fractured concept, a suturing of convention and nature and not a homogeneous terrain. It also provides an analytic model for cultural forms, one which emphasizes semiotic, aesthetic, epistemological, and political relationships embedded in these forms. (423)

The implications of an image go beyond the moment captured, and the examination of how a picture functions as a discursive fragment allows for a critique of the role that particular image plays as part of a larger whole.

Through the use of framing, photographs have the power to decontextualize the object being viewed and recontextualize it as a piece of a rhetorical text. An image’s ability to recreate the physical world in ways that words cannot makes imagery a very potent rhetorical tool – especially when that image is accompanied by a story. The manner in which an image is invoked as part of a particular newspaper article or internet blog helps to shape the perception of the story being told and the story also recreates a context for the interpretation of the image. According to Roland Barthes,

On the one hand, the press photograph is an object that has been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, treated according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms which are so many factors of connotation; while on the other, this same photograph is not only perceived, received, it is *read*, connected more or less consciously by the public that consumes it to a traditional stock of signs. (1978, 19)

As with words on a page, the reading of a photograph within a “traditional stock of signs” is a convergence of cultural and individual experience that influences the messages conveyed by the image. Unlike words, Barthes contends, an image is read as a unified whole made up of parts, whereas words are read one by one and the sum then creates the whole (16–31). Because written messages represent a summation of words, it is easier to acknowledge that written messages are composed of fragments. That does not mean that images are immune from the fragmented associations of discourse formations. Seeing these images as fragments allows a critic to pay particular attention to their discursive implications and how they are influenced by other fragments.

In order to understand how an image functions as a fragment, the criticism of imagery must be envisioned as intertwined with the examination of words. Cara A.

Finnegan outlines five principles to consider when examining visuals:

1. documentary photographs are not merely “evidence,” but are by their very nature rhetorical;
2. photographic meaning is not fixed or univocal, but neither is it relativistic;
3. photographs cannot productively be separated from the texts they accompany, nor should they be viewed as mere supplements to those texts;
4. photographs created for public purposes are best studied in the contexts of print culture through which they circulate; and
5. all images, including photographs, are the products of a particular visual culture that values and privileges certain forms of visual expression over others. (2003, xv)

Finnegan's guidelines focus on the ways in which images are interconnected with the contextual and ideological circumstances in which they are invoked. The framing of images and the material that accompanies them provide insight into how they function as rhetorical expressions. As important as the need to see images as situated within a text is the recognition that, in an age of convergent media, images are not bound by a single context. According to Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, "Popular images disseminated, promoted, and repeatedly reproduced by large-scale corporations ... whether documenting victory or disaster, surely these images exemplify ideology at work" (2007, 2). These types of images function as fragments that provide insight into the discursive influence of their subject matter. The two photographs that became the most prevalent images of *Pat Tillman* were disseminated, promoted, and repeatedly reproduced, exposing how the life of Pat Tillman was connected to gendered discourse.

Understanding Masculinity as Gendered Discourse

Carol A. Stabile (2009) argues that since the September 11, 2001, attacks characterizations of masculine heroes have seen a resurgence. The return of superhero tales of comic book characters like Superman, Spiderman, or the aptly named television series *Heroes* is a reflection of a trend toward the stories of men that "represent a desire for secular saviors, for men whose powers do not come from god, but are nonetheless sufficient to the task of saving the world from some kind of apocalypse" (2009, 87). Stabile argues that the gendered desire for masculine heroes is a response to the perception of feelings of insecurity and fear as feminine. In a time where fear is used as a common political tactic (Stabile 2009; Altheide 2006; Robin 2004), one of the results of that strategy has been a reinvigoration of rhetorics that characterize safety and security as

an outgrowth of a masculine approach to the world. Much like the powers possessed by superheroes, however, R. W. Connell has argued that masculinity “is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same” (2005, 76). Over time characterizations of what masculinity means have been adapted to social and cultural circumstances. Those changes have allowed it to maintain its privileged place in what R. W. Connell describes as “a massive structure of social relations” (2005, 65).

Connell (2005) and Pierre Bourdieu (1998) have similar perspectives on the interconnection between gender and social values. They have both examined the ways in which the rhetorics of masculinity are conflated with a natural world order. Bourdieu claims,

The strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it dispenses with justification: the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it. The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded. (1998, 9)

Bourdieu’s observations about the nature of the connection between masculine ideologies and patriarchy are echoed in R. W. Connell’s observations about masculinity as social phenomenon. Connell believes that the male body acts as a justification for masculine ideologies. According to Connell, “gender politics is an embodied-social politics” and perspectives on the body treat masculinity as the natural outgrowth of the existence of males in relation to females (66). Similarly, Bourdieu asserts that the rhetoric of modern masculinity is based on the perception of “the active male and the passive female” in sexual relations, which has influenced social practice (21).

By conflating social ideology and the metaphorical dimensions of the masculine body discourse producers give each image of a male a dual purpose, a representation of a person and a symbol of an ideological practice. Bourdieu writes that the symbolic power

of the male body “legitimizes a relationship of domination by embedding it in a biological nature that is itself a naturalized social construction” (23). Jim Perkinson describes the male body as “not so much a ‘person’ or ‘subject’ as an ‘archetype’ or ‘hieroglyph,’ an embodied enactment that is pre-scripted so well, it could be said to stand as the quintessential postmodern form of possession” (1992, 175). That hieroglyph is translated as a means for understanding power that, in the words of Mosse, is “one of the most important and lasting symbols of modern life” (1996, 194). As symbolic forms, images of males often create the impression that masculinity needs no words: The symbolism is treated as self-evident.

The connection between social ideologies and the male body is perpetuated by the perception of social spaces where physical feats are a focus celebration as masculine. One such space, sport, has received a great deal of attention for how it allows for the unveiling of gendered practices. Connell argues that “the institutional organization of sport embeds definite social relations: competition and hierarchy among men, exclusion or domination of women. These social relations of gender are both realized and symbolized in bodily performances.” (54). Sport creates a venue for controlled conflict where achievement does not have to end in death while retaining the possibility of victory. Donald Sabo and Sue Larry Jansen describe, “mediated sport as a cultural theater where the values of larger society are resonated, dominant social practices are legitimized, and structured inequalities are reproduced” (1992, 173). Michael Messner critiqued the role of sport in the perpetuation of masculine ideologies:

Both on a personal-existential level for athletes and on a symbolic-ideological level for spectators and fans, sports have become one of the “last bastions” of traditional male ideas of success, of male power and superiority over – and separation from – the perceived “feminization” of society. It is likely that the rise of football as “America’s number-one game” is largely the result of the

comforting clarity it provides between the polarities of traditional male power, strength, and violence and the contemporary fears of social feminization. (1987, 196)

Distinguished by slogans like “winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing” and “win or go home,” sport is a place where physical dominance is connected with social practice through the oversimplification of victories of masculine champions and the defeats of feminized failures. Sport presents the viewer with an idealized vision of competition where strength is celebrated and winning can be decided in simple contests. According to Sabo and Jansen, “this valorization of a highly stylized version of traditional masculinity in sports media also expresses and reinforces hegemonic models of manhood while marginalizing alternative masculinities” (1992, 179).

Phillip J. Chidester claims that “glowing coverage of Pat Tillman’s decision to leave the NFL and to join the war effort in Afghanistan suggested that his was an ultimate sacrifice, well beyond the public’s expectations for any professional athlete” (2009, 359). The masculinity signified by Tillman’s career in the NFL was subordinated to his decision to fight in the Army. Particularly in contemporary U.S. culture, John W. Howard III and Laura C. Prividera argue that “militarism is privileged in the national ideology, and hegemonic masculinity experiences its most intense expression and reinforcement in the form of militarization” (2006, 135). David H. J. Morgan argues that in military images, “the uniform absorbs individualities into a generalized and timeless masculinity while also connoting a control of emotion and a subordination to a larger rationality” (1994, 166). Photographs of soldiers become images that promote nationalized ideologies. From the raising of a flag to a sailor’s exuberant kiss in New York’s Times Square, the soldier is presented as both a conqueror and a defender. Soldiers “provide our

freedoms” and “defend our ideals” in ways that privilege military conquest and superiority as a means for alleviating our fears.

While alleviating the fears of a nation, soldiers are placed in situations that simultaneously confirm and challenge their masculinity. Jon Robert Adams’ book on masculinity and war heroes identifies “war’s contradictory function in the American imaginary as both a guarantor of and threat to manhood” (2008, 1). According to Adams, war has simultaneously functioned as a defining venue for characteristics like “courage, suppressed emotion, strength, and cleverheaded decisiveness,” which have come to define a man, all while individual soldiers’ experiences of war have left them to manage the social and psychological impacts of war on individuals. These characteristics are used to define a soldier through power over circumstance, power over emotion, physical power, and intellectual power, all while creating a situation where men are threatened with what they are powerless to control: death. Adams’ work on soldiers highlights the difference between the life of an actual soldier and a cultural stereotype of a soldier, a distinction that is mirrored by the difference between being a man and being masculine.

Criticisms of the social dimensions of masculinity that have focused on the role of white, heterosexual, middle-class as characterizations of a normative standard for masculinity have led to the perception of a “masculine crisis” that threatens the vaunted place of masculinity in U.S. culture (Robinson 2000; Ashcraft and Flores 2000; Horrocks 1995; Kimmel 1987). Scholarship has begun to examine how that crisis has been addressed by a resurgence of characterizations of masculine heroes since September 11, 2001 (Courcoux 2009; Stabile 2009; Kusz 2007). In one such article, Rebecca A. Adelman examined the photographic representations of soldiers fighting in the post-9/11 Iraqi war and concluded that these images represent a “need to see American masculinity

made whole again” (2009, 261). The perception of a broken masculinity is not just a function of the perceived masculine crisis that was gaining strength before the 9/11 attacks. It is also a response to the threats those attacks pose and the conflation of safety and security with the gendered discursive function of masculinity. Adelman discusses how the combination of the 9/11 terrorist attacks with the perceived masculine crisis has led to a need for masculine-hero characterizations.

Connell (2005) claims that the hegemonic aspect of masculinity is its ability to be adapted to manage changes in culture in order to incorporate them into present structures. For Connell, “hegemonic masculinity embodies a ‘currently accepted’ strategy. When conditions for the defense of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded. New groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony” (77). *Pat Tillman* exposes how discussions of individual men both are influenced by and contribute to perceptions of what it means to be masculine. The intersection of visual representations of the male body, masculine ideology, and *Pat Tillman* was recently put on display by de Rooij’s (2006) lecture on “manhood.” As the focus of his project, De Rooij created a characterization of *Pat Tillman* that employed narrative fragments such as being too small and too slow (#25) for the NFL, the brawl (#18) that led to Tillman’s incarceration, and his decision to enlist (#1), along with a slide show of photographs that he retrieved through an online search. De Rooij’s presentation featured visual imagery that had been used to promote the perception of *Pat Tillman* as masculine. His lecture highlighted how photographs of Pat Tillman had played an important role in characterizing *Pat Tillman* as an expression of manhood.

The two images at the center of my analysis were the two most widely circulated photos of Tillman, and they became interconnected fragments of the discursive *Pat*

Tillman. Kyle W. Kusz (2007) highlighted the use of these images in his exploration of the influence of masculine ideologies on representations of Tillman:

The postmortem descriptions and male referents used to inform the public about the identity of this fallen American hero are also telling about the racial and gender politics organizing Tillman's media spectacle in the post-9/11 America. The photo on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* issue that marks his passing showcases Tillman in his Arizona Cardinals uniform as an intense "wild man" with helmet off, long hair flowing uncontrollably behind him as he undoubtedly celebrates some sort of team success that just took place on the field. The inset is a head shot of him in his Army Ranger uniform, sitting proudly in front of the American flag. (85)

Kusz goes on to discuss how Gary Smith's (2004) article accompanying these images – which I will discuss in greater depth in the next section – created a masculine myth that obscured the fact that Tillman was a privileged white male in a characterization of a person who was "his own man" (85). As Kusz's analysis demonstrates, these two photographs promoted a connection between the positions being espoused by a discourse producer and public conceptions of masculinity.

Depictions of Masculinity through the Sports Image (#30)

The sports image (#30) first circulated as the primary photograph on the cover of the May 3, 2004, issue of *Sports Illustrated*, one of the most important venues for the circulation of sports imagery over the last half century (Rowe 2004). Accompanied by the epitaph, "An Athlete Dies A Soldier" (Smith 2004), this depiction of *Pat Tillman* connected Tillman's physical presence with the commemoration of the life of the person. In this photograph, Tillman is depicted as alone on the field, distinct from a team, breaking free from the constraints of his own protective gear. Beginning from his head, this image reinforced the belief that Tillman's hair (#21) was an important window to his character. Characterizations often recalled the sentiment that he "wore his blonde hair

long when short hair was in fashion and short when long hair was in fashion” (McCain 2005a, 55). While Tillman’s hair was blowing freely, this photo shows his body in the tension of celebration. With his eyes squinting, his face seems to release a scream that forces his mouth open to its widest and pushes his face in front of the title of the magazine. In his hand, he is clutching his mouthpiece as if he has just ripped it from his mouth seemingly because it would be in the way of his powerful yell. His protective helmet seems torn from his head obscuring Tillman’s team membership and revealing the face that identifies him as an individual. Every muscle in his body is taut in the action of running across an open field, unencumbered by teammates or opponents. Between the cover’s border and his team’s colors, he is adorned in patriotic red, white, and blue, as if to accent his place as not just an athlete, but an American hero.

From the pages of *Sports Illustrated* to the bronze statue that was erected in Pat Tillman Freedom Plaza, my critique focuses on how this photograph functioned as a fragment in characterizations of *Pat Tillman*. The use of this photo in commemorations of his life links the celebration of the qualities that he came to represent with his male physical body. As my analysis shows, this image was even said to reveal a Tillman that words were insufficient to articulate. The first text I examine is the article from the *Sports Illustrated* issue that originally accompanied this image. Gary Smith’s (2004) corresponding profile depicts an idealized version of a man. The story of *Pat Tillman*, as told by Smith, is a discursive characterization of how individuality, loyalty, and strength (both physical and even more so of masculine character) are the true nature of a man: “anytime a man listens to his inner voice, refuses to wall it off with all the mortar and bricks that his culture can possibly offer, it’s a moment to stand in wonder as well as to weep” (46). The second text I have chosen to analyze is the documentary that was

produced following the placement of a statue based on this image in Pat Tillman Freedom Plaza in Glendale, Arizona. This documentary discusses the evolution of this image into the statue and provided the opportunity for the participants to reflect on what this image said about Pat Tillman's legacy. The narrator of this documentary described the sports image as "a pose ... that best represented Pat, the person" (Maximum Cardinals 2006a). These two texts recontextualized this image (#30) and presented distinct characterizations of *Pat Tillman* that celebrated the values they associated with his life as intrinsic to masculinity.

Memorializing Tillman in *Sports Illustrated*

Writer Gary Smith (2004) published his article on Pat Tillman on the same day as the public memorial, May 3, 2004. Because of when it was published, this article could not discuss much of how Tillman died, but instead focused on how Tillman lived. Smith characterized *Pat Tillman* as a lone, individual hero who eschewed the comforts of modern life and was defined by a personal standard of action. He described *Pat Tillman* as a man "governed by a personal code of honor, a machismo that he defined and no one else, a Hemingway character out of the 1920s in Spain transplanted seven decades later to California soil that produced surfers and cyber-boomers and seekers of the next trend" (43). Evidenced by descriptions like he "did not need plush pillows" and "did not play at pretend war," the machismo that Smith characterized in his version of *Pat Tillman* was defined by such traits as the rejection of comfort or a loyalty to principle. These traits are tied together around an idea central to the discursive function of masculinity: action.

One of the themes in Smith's descriptions of *Pat Tillman* highlighted Tillman's rejection of the material trappings of wealth and fame. Smith discussed how Tillman rode

his bike to practice (#29) as a contrast to his teammates: “he arrived at training camp on a bike, sneakers dangling from his handlebars, pedaling in behind his teammates’ Mercedes and BMWs” (44). Smith equated a desire for material goods with weakness and convenience with a lack of action: “He [Tillman] lacked one thing that *everyone* there had – a cell-phone. He despised the convenience and designer doodads craved by all those around him. ‘Life’s too f-----’ easy,’ he muttered to a friend at ASU” (emphasis in original, 44). Smith employed discursive fragments such as Tillman’s rejection of the St. Louis Rams’ contract offer (#32) as a statement about a belief in fairness over wealth (44). He depicted Tillman’s decision to become a ranger (#s 1, 3) as a “pay cut from the \$1.2 million a year the Cardinals would have paid him to \$17,316” (44). In Smith’s essay, wealth and material goods are depicted as something contrary to masculine action.

According to Smith, the same drive that led *Tillman* to forego the conveniences provided by material things also empowered him to achieve his dreams in the NFL. Smith reveled in facts like “he’d show up early for off-season conditioning drills and run sprints on bare feet” (43). Despite the appearance of physical strength on the cover of the issue, Smith carefully notes in his profile that Tillman’s strength was not located in his muscles (#25). In fact, a central element of his characterization of *Pat Tillman* is that what Tillman lacked in muscle, he made in sheer will: Tillman achieved his successes despite being a “5’ 11”, 195 pounder” (43). Smith described action as Tillman’s on-field philosophy, “Long hair [#21] flying from beneath his helmet, he hurled himself at receivers and running backs, striking them like lightning. In games. In practices. Damn the fist fights he caused. Every moment of life was *live*” (emphasis in original, 43). He used stories like Tillman’s pre-draft tryout (#26) for the Arizona Cardinals as an example of “one thing that no one else there had – bottomless desire” (44).

Like his refusal of material comforts and his relentless drive to succeed, Tillman's loyalty to others was also described as an expression of his will. *Pat Tillman* was characterized as loyal to his country (#1), to his team (#32), and to his high school sweetheart (#33), Marie, but that loyalty was depicted as an example of principled action. As an example, Smith explained how Tillman's decision to enlist (#1) put his three loyalties into conflict. Smith hypothesized about Tillman's motivations in a description of what he might think about lying in bed awake at night:

He'd envision the American flag and the blood that had been spilled for it and utter the words that football players didn't, *shouldn't*, just hours before entering battle. "There's more to life than football," he'd say. "I want to contribute to society and help people." (emphasis in original, 42)

Smith explained that it was not enough for this man to be loyal to his wife and his team, *Tillman* had to be loyal to his individual standard. Smith explained Tillman's decision to enlist (#1) by arguing that "he couldn't do what every other pro athlete did – keep playing ball and leave it to others to do what had to be done? *Talk* about it?" (emphasis in original, 44). Smith juxtaposes "talk" with the actions taken by Tillman as means for explaining why a successful athlete would go to war.

As the primary visual symbol of the content in this article, this issue's cover image (#30) is interconnected with a story that moralizes individualism and action as masculine. Tillman would not succumb to the comforts indulged in by "surfers and cyber-boomers and seekers of the next trend" (43). He also could not stand by like "every other pro athlete" and not step forward to defend his nation (44). Smith's characterization of *Pat Tillman* is an affirmation of "a machismo that he defined and no one else" (43). It is defined by his ability to control his own impulses, his own way of living, and the circumstances of the world around him. *Pat Tillman* was characterized as a person who

had “no reason now to dig at himself in the dark, wondering what right he had to live off the sacrifice of relatives and strangers who’d fought in American wars” (41). The origination of the circulation of this photograph bears the words “An Athlete Dies a Soldier” (cover) and celebrates how, in both roles, *Pat Tillman* exemplified what it means to be a man.

Re-Embodying Tillman’s Spirit by Embodying *Pat Tillman*

The statue that was placed outside of the Arizona Cardinals’ stadium in Glendale, Arizona, could be considered the most permanent tribute to Pat Tillman. Sculptor Omri Amrany created an eight-foot-tall bronze *Pat Tillman* using the sports image as his inspiration (Maximum Cardinals 2006a). The Arizona Cardinals placed the statue in an area aptly named Pat Tillman Freedom Plaza. Along with the statue is a 42-foot-long wall symbolizing his number from his time playing football at Arizona State, 40 oak trees for the number Tillman wore for the Arizona Cardinals, and a pond surrounded by walls that bear his name and other biographical information. Arizona Cardinal vice president Michael Bidwell explained, “Pat loved the water, you know. He grew up around the water. His ashes were spread in the water” (Maximum Cardinals 2006b). Weaving together these symbols of Tillman’s life and career with the physical characterization that was its centerpiece reinforced the symbolic nature of the image itself (#30). By choosing this image to physically embody *Pat Tillman*, the sculptor and the Cardinals organization indelibly linked the memory of Pat Tillman to his masculine physique. The story behind the statue’s creation and its purpose were the topic of a documentary report, “The Making of the Pat Tillman Statue,” released following its unveiling (Maximum Cardinals 2006a,

2006b). This documentary discussed the statue and the image that it depicts as an embodiment of the qualities *Pat Tillman* represented.

The beginning of the documentary (2006a) explores the process involved in creating the statue and introduces Omri Amrany. Amrany came to prominence as a sculptor of sports icons like Michael Jordan, Harry Caray, and Vince Lombardi. According to the documentary, Amrany's first step in the process of building the sculpture "was to find out what Pat Tillman was really like so that he could truly capture Pat's spirit in his sculpture." He pursued this goal through encounters with Tillman's widow Marie as well as others from Tillman's life. Amrany explained that this image was chosen because "when you look at the history, the short history, of Pat you're looking at true personality, a true spirit of a person that nothing would stand in his way on a very, very high moral level." Connecting the selection of this image with ideas like "personality," "spirit," and a "high moral level" with a physical depiction perpetuates a belief that these qualities are embodied.

Throughout the documentary on the statue, there was a recurring theme of how this image and statue represented qualities that *Pat Tillman* stands for. In the midst of the narrator's explanation of the actual forming of the statue's mold from clay, Amrany's words explain what the statue means:

I think the sculpture is going to represent pride. It's going to represent huge spiritual energy. I think it's going to represent determination. I think it's going to represent the leadership. And if I look at the elements as we studied about Pat, it's a onetime shot everybody remembers and that makes it tough. And we hope to succeed. Time will tell.

By selecting an image that depicted Tillman screaming wildly while running across a football field as the basis for his statue, Amrany connected determination and leadership

with the action that was shown in his statue. Qualities like pride and energy are subsumed into the actions of Tillman's body.

The second part of this documentary (2006b) was about the statue's reception and its significance as a part of the area surrounding the stadium. Former teammate Zach Walz describes how the statue captures "his exuberance, his passion, his zeal for life and the game of football." Former head of the Pat Tillman Foundation and brother-in-law Alex Garwood reacted:

It's pretty powerful. It's kind of one of those things where I feel like when you look at it, it speaks for itself. And that is Pat's scream and as Marie has said, symbolic of how he lived his life. You look at it and we don't have to say anything. It's saying it right there.

Garwood's observation is an exclamation point to this documentary. Using the sports image (#30) to memorialize *Pat Tillman* emphasized that the qualities symbolized by *Pat Tillman* can be seen without words. The action shown on Tillman's face, in his arms, through his legs, is emblematic of qualities such as "spiritual energy," "leadership," and "high moral value" that made Tillman worthy of a public statue. Throughout this presentation is the open acknowledgment of the ways in which Tillman's character can be seen through his physical action. This is not an image of Tillman carefully reflecting on the world. This is not a statue (which might even make more sense given its placement at the new stadium in Arizona) meditating on a light standard high above the field at Sun Devil Stadium. Garwood's belief that the statue needs no explanation reflects a sense that the action represented in this particular pose captures something distinct about Pat Tillman. Subsumed into this image is a connection between the person that Pat Tillman was and how that person could be characterized using a depiction of his physical male body.

Depictions of Masculinity through the Military Image

Subordinated to the sports image (#30) on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* was Tillman's military portrait (#15). In the weeks following Tillman's death, Tillman's military portrait graced the cover of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *People* magazines and also turned up on CNN's *Anderson Cooper 360* (Cooper 2004), the *CBS Evening News* (Gonzales 2004), and MSNBC's *Countdown* (Olbermann 2004a). In this photograph, Tillman is depicted in front of the American flag wearing his Ranger uniform. This image suggests a time when the military proudly celebrated its soldiers as an "Army of One" (Garfield 2001). Photographs like this one are sometimes seen on local newscasts when a soldier from that area dies in combat. The connection between this type of image and a soldier's death was perpetuated by the connection between reports of Tillman's demise and this image. It became so connected to the controversies surrounding Tillman's death that political cartoonists parodied it for political commentaries on the war and the Bush administration (Benson 2007; Kurtzman 2010). Without a smile or a roar of jubilation to distract from the symbols around him, the military image focuses the viewer on the relationship between Tillman and the nation he chose to serve.

The role of this photograph as an image of *Pat Tillman* was complicated by how it was used to comment on issues that undermined his connection to the symbols with which he was surrounded. In Rebecca A. Adelman's work on military photographs, she argues, "Americans have been invited to return to trustworthy signifiers – flags, yellow ribbons, and other symbols whose meanings we could never forget" (2009, 260), but this image also became associated with the lies and deceptions perpetrated about Tillman's death. When it was discovered that the circumstances of Tillman's death were withheld

from the public, this photograph was most often employed by journalists and news outlets to report on the cover up. For that reason, this image had the dual role of simultaneously representing the values associated with the service of U.S. soldiers and questioning how those values are represented by the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman*.

The two different types of characterization that are the focus of this section employ Tillman's military portrait in their attempts to grapple with the lasting impact of Tillman's death as a reflection of his military service. The first, from *Arthur's Hall of Viking Manliness* (n.d.a), is a hyperbolic exploration of masculinity that presents masculinity as an endangered ideology. The author of this website is depicted as "Arthur, a modern Viking" (n.d.a, para. 1). According to Arthur, men "are under attack on all sides" and "our society hates masculinity, and disregards responsibility" (n.d.a, para. 1). Arthur's characterization of *Pat Tillman* is a vulgar, crude, and exaggerated perspective on both masculinity and patriotism, but what is important to my analysis is that he anoints *Pat Tillman* as the standard bearer for that type of masculinity and patriotism. The second characterization I examine in this section is Steve Coll's two-part investigation into Tillman's death for *The Washington Post* (2004a; 2004b). Coll provided the first in-depth explanation of how Tillman "really" died, who was involved, and how it was handled. These articles exposed the events that led to Pat Tillman's death and the resulting cover-up, and within them Coll described how "myths shaped Pat Tillman's reputation, and mystery shrouded his death" (2004a, A1). In Coll's articles, *Pat Tillman* is characterized as a contrast to the soldiers he served with and the superiors who lied about how he died. These two instances in which discourse producers employed the military image (#15) speak to the ways that gendered discourses were perpetuated in distinct, but related characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as a warrior and a soldier.

Pat Tillman as a Characterization of Viking Manliness

While masculinity has been woven into the stories of Tillman's life and sacrifice, it is by no means the subtext of Tillman's characterization on the website *Arthur's Hall of Viking Manliness* (n.d.a). Michael S. Kimmel has argued that the belief "that masculinity is in 'crisis' – has become a cultural commonplace, staring down at us from every magazine rack and television talk show in the country" (1987, 121). As I noted before, characterizations of the need for masculine men saw a resurgence following September 11, 2001. Arthur (n.d.a) addresses the crisis using 9/11 as part of a rationale for why men must engage in a struggle that pits them against culture, women, and even other men. Tillman's military portrait is an integral part of Arthur's characterization of *Pat Tillman* as the ultimate example of manhood on his list of the "Ten Manliest Men of Modern Times" (n.d.b). In his hyperbolic and often repulsive way, Arthur characterizes *Pat Tillman* as one of the last remaining examples of a brand of masculinity that he depicts as under siege. Arthur overtly creates a characterization of *Pat Tillman* as a depiction of a hypermasculinity that redefined Tillman's actions using a mixture of violence and nationalism.

Arthur's Hall of Viking Manliness is composed of a series of posts in which Arthur and guest contributors discuss masculinity with forum participants as it is reflected in politics and movies, as well as other issues related to men being men. In particular, there are several top-ten lists in which Arthur ranks "The Top 10 Wrestlers Ever" or the "The Ten Greatest Albums." The most prominent of those lists, however, is the list that ranks *Pat Tillman* as the "manliest man in modern times" (n.d.b, para. 1). There is no criterion provided for how the men on this list are ranked, but through a reading of the descriptions of the other people who made the list it is clear that varying

degrees of physical prowess, independence, celebrity, and American exceptionalism were used to rank this list (Arthur. n.d.b). Number six on this list is Mariusz Pudzianowski whose sole qualification was his status as the world's strongest man; as described by Arthur "You had to know that the World's Strongest Man had to be one of ten manliest men in modern history, and you are right" (n.d.a, para. 16). But to crack the top five on this list physical prowess was not enough, number four on the list is professional football player Bill Romanowski who is celebrated as a "true madman" for his willingness to take steroids, his racist comments, and his unsportsmanlike action (n.d.b, para. 4). In a blend of the physical strength of Pudzianowski with the exaggerated action symbolized Romanowski, positions two and three on this list are occupied by entertainers turned politicians, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jesse "the body" Ventura, respectively. Their high rankings are linked to the ways in which their physical abilities were a rationale for their service to their states and nation. In his celebration of Tillman's life, Arthur employed fragments of *Pat Tillman* as expressions of how Tillman embodies "pure masculine perfection" (para. 18).

Included with the description of the rationale for *Pat Tillman*'s place atop the list is a picture that weaves together Tillman's military portrait (#15) with pictures of such traditional Americana as a Budweiser beer, an American flag, an eagle, a mountain range, and a Ford pickup truck (n.d.b). The image itself is an adaptation of the original military photograph, having replaced the original background with a new backdrop. Tillman's portrait is cropped down until just his face and shoulders remain and then his image is placed in front of a waving American flag that fades into a dramatic image of snowcapped mountains. Coming up over those mountains is a heavy-duty Ford pickup truck, complete with dual rear wheels and an extended front bumper. In the center of the

image is a very phallic Budweiser beer bottle that dwarfs even the mountains in the picture. This collage interconnects *Pat Tillman* with symbols that recontextualize *Pat Tillman* as the connection between national pride and masculine power that could easily be the subject of a Country music song. Arthur's characterization of *Pat Tillman* needs to be viewed in conjunction with Sally Robinson's (2000) perspectives on how depictions of heterosexual, white masculinity have attempted to reassert its position as a normative standard through victimization. Arthur presents his depiction of masculinity as endangered and *Pat Tillman* as its martyr. How this depiction of the military image of Tillman was constructed emphasizes how white (with the exception of basketball player Charles Barkley) and heterosexual Arthur's list is.

Arthur's portrayal of *Pat Tillman* as ideally masculine represents a blend of physical heterosexual male prowess and undeterred action. He begins his characterization with how Tillman's visual image (#15) represents that physical prowess:

First of all, look at him!! He looks like a G.I. Joe action figure on steroids. That jaw line can only be explained by an absolutely inhuman amount of male hormone, and as you will soon know, testosterone is the key to manliness. This guy shits more testosterone than any of you soft-bodied pussies have flowing through your soymilk-laden veins. (n.d.b, para. 18)

Arthur's often ridiculously exaggerated characterization of *Pat Tillman* is crafted by connecting physical potential and an ideal masculinity. In contrast to what Arthur refers to as "most of you, limp-wristed pencil-pushing desk jockeys" (para. 19), the person for whom it "wasn't enough to be big, look like a Marvel superhero, and crush guys on the football field" is celebrated because of what he was able to achieve through his body (para. 19). Muscles, jaw line, and hormones become the evidence for Arthur's characterization of *Pat Tillman*'s manhood. They are also physical signifiers that represent the antithesis of the type of feminine weakness that is represented by "pussies"

(para. 18). His perspective is built out of a belief that a superior social status should be granted to men on the basis that they are superior biologically.

When this characterization of *Pat Tillman* turns to his military service, it crafts a vision of a primeval hero driven to express a warrior bloodlust. Arthur attributes Tillman's decision to turn down his NFL contract to a need to "go kill the wife beating chronic masturbators otherwise known as the Taliban" and his choice to forego a promotion in order to "get some real fucking blood on his hands" (para. 20). Arthur commemorates Tillman's death with an even more epic tale than the one composed by the military:

He most likely died in the midst of some incomprehensible feat of heroics. With the details sketchy [#5, 6], I think it's safe to assume Tillman went down amongst a pile of hundreds if not thousands of dead Taliban soldiers. Many of these dead soldiers no doubt suffered broken arms, legs, necks and other grotesque blunt force trauma as Tillman probably at some point spent the last of his ammunition and had to confront the enemy army with his bare hands. One can only imagine how many bullets it must have taken to bring him down. (para. 20)

The fact that the exact number of bullets it took to bring Tillman down (three) was eventually disclosed and that those bullets were fired by other soldiers who had avoided desk jobs and enlisted in the U.S. military is never acknowledged on Arthur's list. The description of Tillman's death stands in defiance of the information that has been produced since it was written. This depiction of Tillman's final moments took masculinity so far into hyperbole that it could prolong life, but it also demonstrated that it cannot avoid death. Tillman's death served as the metaphor for the message of *Arthur's Hall of Viking Manliness*: that masculinity is slowly perishing.

Following his characterization of Tillman's life and death, Arthur issued a warning based on *Pat Tillman's* example:

Just remember, as you die poor and alone, it's men like Tillman who rule this world and exert their power and influence on everyone. ESPECIALLY YOU! This was a man who would have almost certainly been President one day had he wished it. Tragically, as Americans, we may never understand what we lost. (emphasis in original, para. 21)

It might be easy to dismiss this characterization of *Pat Tillman* as the rantings of some fringe lunatic who does not speak for the vast majority of Americans. However, the man in this characterization was an exaggerated version of a masculinity that is a reflection of masculinity's privileged position in gendered discourse. Taking the use of gendered discourse to exaggerated ends, Arthur's characterization of *Pat Tillman* through notions of physical prowess, public success, power, and conquest employed physical dominance as the ultimate expression of masculinity. The qualities celebrated by these rantings represent an overstated stereotype, but the characteristics are not unfamiliar to how masculinity is sentimentalized as the antithesis of weakness. Susan Jeffords has argued that this type of "Reagan era" masculinity (Reagan shares position number five with George W. Bush on Arthur's list) is a narrativization of national unity that allows the audience to relate to the story of a hero who masters his surroundings (1993, 27–28). Arthur promotes the link between gender and nationalism by discursively connecting the dominance he associates with being male with something that defines cultural practice.

Masculinity, Action, and the Death of Pat Tillman

On the front page of *The Washington Post* just above the military image of Pat Tillman (#15) read the headline "Barrage of Bullets Drowned Out Cries of Comrades" (Coll 2004a, A1). The image itself was depicted on the front page of part one of this two-part series. Then, in the second installment, author Steve Coll portrayed the military image as emblematic of what *Pat Tillman* came to symbolize: "a charismatic former pro

football star whose reticence, courage and handsome beret-draped face captured for many Americans the best aspects of the country's post-Sept. 11 character" (2004b, A1). On Sunday, December 5th, 2004 and Monday, December 6th, 2004, the *Washington Post* used a total of five pages of the A section to deconstruct the death of Pat Tillman. In these articles, Coll crafted a characterization of *Pat Tillman* that is unmistakably tied to the military image, and in so doing treated Tillman's physical appearance as an emblem of his characterizations of *Pat Tillman*. What makes these articles particularly relevant to my analysis was how they distinguished the actions taken by Tillman from those taken by other members of his regiment and his superiors. Coll positioned *Pat Tillman* as a lone hero amongst ill-prepared or incompetent soldiers and a deceptive or manipulative chain of command. Unlike the barbaric and exaggerated *Pat Tillman* characterized by Arthur, the brand of masculinity depicted in Steve Coll's investigation into Tillman's death promoted a controlled and honest action as the ideal.

The first article of this two-part series focused on the series of actions that culminated in Tillman's death. One of the striking elements of Coll's depictions of the people involved is how they are introduced. Coll describes Tillman's superior officer, Lieutenant David A. Uthlaut, as "a recent graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point" (A14) and portrays Sergeant Greg Baker – who was in command of the vehicle that was firing upon Tillman when he died – as "a young and slightly built ranger nearing the end of his enlistment" (A14). Coll's focus on the youth and physical capacities of the other members of Tillman's regiment set the tone for actions that he refers to as "undisciplined" and "confused" (A15). As a basis for comparison to those actions, Coll also recounted a comparable event before discussing how Tillman died:

In Pat Tillman's first firefight during the initial months of the Iraq war, he watched his lead gunner die within minutes, stepped into his place and battled steadfastly, said Steve White, a U.S. Navy SEAL on the same mission. 'He was thirsty to be the best,' White said. (A14)

Despite being older, stronger, and – based on Coll's depiction – better than the other soldiers around him, “Tillman accepted his ordinary status in the military and rarely talked about himself” (A14). Coll went on to make it clear that despite that fact that Tillman was inferior in rank, he was a superior soldier.

In contrast to the soldiers around Tillman, Coll described Tillman's actions in his first firefight and his actions on the day that he died as exactly what he should have done. Coll began his explanation of the events with the disagreement between Lieutenant David A. Uthlaut and the A Company commander over what to do about a broken down Humvee. Lieutenant Uthlaut's orders were to take his ranger regiment and “kill or capture any ‘anti-coalition members’ that he and his men could find” (2004a, A14), but towing the vehicle during their mission left them vulnerable to enemy ambush. The Humvee and its technology were deemed too valuable to be abandoned, but the base could not send a helicopter to airlift it out. Under a subheading of “Orders to Push Ahead May Have Led to ‘Friendly Fire,’” Coll highlighted how conflicts between people in the chain of command led to Tillman's platoon being put in danger:

While Uthlaut tried to develop other ideas [about how to move the broken down Humvee back to base], his commanders at the base squabbled about the delay. According to investigative records, a senior officer in the Rangers' operations center, whose name is redacted from documents obtained by The Post, complained pointedly to A Company's Commander, Uthlaut's immediate superior. (2004a, A14)

According to Coll, A Company commander and his superiors overruled Lieutenant Uthlaut's strong objections and ordered him to split the platoon, sending one group (serial 2) to tow the Humvee to a main road so it could be picked up while the rest of the platoon

continued to carry the mission (serial 1). When serial 2 came under attack, Pat Tillman was dispatched from serial 1 to assist. Lieutenant Uthlaut may have had the best idea for the safety of the platoon, but the orders in the military come from positions of power not from those in the trenches. The military superiors, as characterized by Coll, did not have to execute their plans. This made their decision to split up the platoon easier.

Coll's reconstruction of this story recognized how the decisions that were being made back at the base contributed to Tillman's death, but he also examined the role of Tillman's fellow soldiers' reactions to pressure. When serial 2 came under attack, Sgt. Baker was in charge of their half of the platoon. Baker originally thought that one of the vehicles in their convoy "had struck a land mine or a roadside bomb" (2004a, A14). Baker's initial assessment was wrong; they had traveled into an ambush. After they realized they were under attack, panic ensued. The truck being used to tow the broken down Humvee stalled and Baker had to move it out of the way of the other vehicles. Coll described Baker as screaming and yelling until he was able to free up his Humvee to leave the area, "finally freed, Baker's heavily armed Humvee raced out of the ambush canyon, its machine guns pounding fire, its inexperienced shooters coursing with adrenaline" (A14). According to Coll,

Rangers are trained to shoot only after they have clearly identified specific targets as enemy forces. Gunners working together are supposed to follow orders from the vehicle's commander – in this case, Baker. If there is no chance for orderly talk, the gunners are supposed to watch their commander's aim and shoot in the same direction. (A15)

Baker's guns were aimed right at Tillman and continued to be as they left the canyon.

Eventually, Tillman thought it was safe to move, but unfortunately Baker had ordered the

Humvee into a better firing position. When they arrived, they began again. This time killing Pat Tillman.

In Coll's portrayal of the events, Tillman was depicted as the only ranger who acted appropriately and it was Tillman's bravery that led to his death. Tillman immediately offered to assist his endangered fellow rangers after the sounds of explosions filled the air, even offering to shed his armor in hopes that he could get to them sooner and do more to protect them. Once he arrived on the scene, Tillman waved his arms and released a smoke grenade in order to signal to serial 2 that he was a friendly soldier. While the other ranger who was sent with Tillman to assist hid behind a rock, Tillman continued his attempts to signal until he was shot in the head by the very people he was attempting to help. Coll explained that Tillman and the other Rangers on the ridge "tried everything they could" (A15), but in the end their efforts were not enough.

While Coll depicts the actions taken by the Rangers in the field with Tillman as incompetent, he discusses the actions taken by Tillman's superiors after his death as deceitful. Coll described the first official account of Tillman's death (#5) as "a distorted and incomplete narrative" (2004b, A1). In his investigation, Coll discovered that the Army had reported that Tillman's death was the result of enemy fire despite the fact that "investigators in Afghanistan had already taken at least 14 sworn statements from Tillman's platoon members that made clear the true causes of his death" (A1). On top of deceiving Kevin Tillman, who was in the same firefight, Coll describes how "Commanders also withheld the facts from Tillman's widow, his parents, national politicians and the public" (2004b, A14). The article finished with a section entitled "Deciding Accident or Crime" (2004b, A14). In this section Coll detailed the types of

charges that could be filed, who they could be filed against, and the ramifications of those charges. Inaction was used to characterize what has gone on since the cover-up of Tillman's death and that inaction even left some of those involved in Tillman's death still fighting as rangers.

In Coll's story of Tillman's death, either incompetence, actions motivated by fear, or selfishness led to Tillman being gunned down by his own platoonmates on a hill in Afghanistan. In contrast, "Army records show Tillman fought bravely during his final battle. He followed orders, never wavered and at one stage proposed discarding his heavy body armor, apparently because he wanted to charge a distant ridge occupied by the enemy, an idea his immediate superior rejected" (2004b, A1). Whether the order came from Lieutenant Uthlaut, Company A commander, or from further up the chain of command and whether it was the soldier behind the machine gun or behind the rock, the other people in this scenario are viewed in contrast to the actions that were taken by Tillman. Coll's contrast of Tillman's actions to those of his fellow soldiers and superiors created a characterization of masculinity that contradicted the perspectives on Tillman exemplified by Arthur (n.d.b).

Gendered Discourse as an Interpretation of Action, Not an Action

When discussing gendered discourse, Carol Cohn writes, "to be manly is not simply to be manly, but also to be in the more highly valued position in discourse" (1993, 229). She also argues that "whether we want to or not, we see ourselves and others against its templates, we interpret our own and others' actions against it" (229). Similarly, in a contribution to the book that accompanied the photographic exhibition entitled "Masculinity as Masquerade," Harry Brod wrote, "we are being invited to consider

masculinity *itself*, in any and all of its forms, as a masquerade” (emphasis in original, 1995, 13). Thinking of masculinity as a masquerade reveals the nature of masculinity as something produced by masking individuals. These discourse producers employed photographs of Pat Tillman as the masks for their characterizations of *Pat Tillman*. By presenting these particular images as something that “speaks for itself” (Maximum Cardinals 2006b) or arguing that all we have to do is “look at him!!” (Arthur, n.d.b), discourse producers perpetuated a belief that the values they were ascribing to *Pat Tillman* were embodied in Pat Tillman’s physical features. As fragments, these photographs of Pat Tillman allowed discourse producers to create characterizations that promoted a connection between the positions being ascribed and masculinity. However, their distinct and even contradictory characterizations of *Pat Tillman* reveal that the masquerade is that masculinity is not something embodied, it is assessed.

The two images that came to represent *Pat Tillman* focus viewers on different aspects of Pat Tillman’s life. It is not just the focus on Tillman’s physical presence that made the sports image (#30) important; it is the ways in which it became emblematic of what culture values about his story. Discourse producers that employed the sports image in their characterizations of *Pat Tillman* perpetuated the belief that this image of Tillman expressed something about who he was as a person. His loyalty, intellect, and determination are subsumed into his physical image as a representation of his personal “character,” reinforcing the idea that the physical male body can represent a “personal code of honor” (Smith 2004, 43) or a “high moral level” (Maximum Cardinals 2006a). In this image, *Pat Tillman* is symbolized by the person’s strength and exuberance, not his thoughtfulness or reflective nature. It is a characterization that sets Tillman apart from his teammates, his coaches, and, as the articles and featurettes that accompanied it revealed,

other men. Tillman's intellect and his compassion are subsumed into the actions of his muscles.

The sharpest contrast between the military image (#15) of *Pat Tillman* and the sports image (#30) is the lack of physical action portrayed in the military photograph. Criticisms of Tillman's place as a hero sometimes drew comparisons to the fictional character Rambo as a means for comparison (Gonzalez 2004; Towle 2004). As a characterization of a soldier, Tillman seemed to both invoke and defy comparisons to the brand of masculinity embodied by Rambo. The two characterizations that comprised my analysis of the military image fell on opposite sides of this issue. Arthur chose to embrace the perception of Pat Tillman as a Rambo-style soldier who recklessly charged into combat with little concern for life or limb. Arthur's often grotesque, patently sexist and homophobic, and genuinely ridiculous characterization may seem out of touch with more common characterizations of *Pat Tillman*, but underneath his hyperbole is a belief that being masculine is a genetic inheritance. Distinct from the position offered by Arthur, Steve Coll presented a characterization of a careful and diligent soldier who was surrounded by people who could not measure up to his example. In Coll's discussion of the "disaster" that occurred that day in Afghanistan (2004b, A14), the contrasts he describes between Pat Tillman and the military undermine how a "beret-draped face captured for many Americans the best aspects of the country's post Sept. 11 character" (2004b, A1). The masculinity that existed in Arthur's characterization was called into question by Coll's, but the formation *Pat Tillman* encompasses both as characterizations of values.

Despite the fact that these discourse producers clearly presented distinct characterizations of *Pat Tillman*, their characterizations perpetuated the social binary

proposed by Cohn in her definition of gendered discourse. By embodying the values in the images used to characterize *Pat Tillman*, these photographs became a visual affirmation of the connection between those values and masculinity despite the variety of masculinities they support. In a post-9/11 context where “terror” and “fear” are featured as political tools, the celebration of an athlete who chose to serve his nation over his own personal good fortune is unsurprising. What should be surprising is how these images allowed discourse producers to comment on a range of dichotomies that, at times, were contradictory. The primary images employed in characterizations of *Pat Tillman* helped to perpetuate a belief that qualities and values discourse producers associate with masculinity are inherent to men. The fact that Pat Tillman engaged in actions that could be perceived as both masculine and feminine is irrelevant to their discursive characterization, but characterizations of his actions using gendered terms perpetuated a connection between sex and social virtue. The ways in which *Pat Tillman* was characterized as masculine reinforce an important aspect of the study of masculinity: Being male is determined by biology, being masculine is determined through discourse.

Chapter Four

The American Dream

Discourse producers often depicted *Pat Tillman* as a characterization of the American Dream. Recollections of Pat Tillman's decision to enlist in the military often included statements similar to "Pat's story, Pat's life, his journey – that's the real American Dream" (Shriver 2004). Characterizations of Tillman's life frequently included sentiments such as "he was living the American Dream: fame, wealth, and health and he was doing it all while playing a game for a job" (Cunningham 2008). Brady (2004) explained that "Tillman, like it or not, became a national Icon when he set aside the American Dream." Characterizations of the American Dream story that could be characterized by *Pat Tillman* as more "real," something he did while "playing a game," or something he "set aside," reveal the complexity of the connection. One such instance, Arizona Congressman J. D. Hayworth's reaction to Tillman's death, exemplified the complication of depicting *Pat Tillman* as a characterization of the American Dream: "He lived the American Dream, and he fought to preserve the American Dream and our way of life" (DeFalco 2004). Hayworth divides his characterization of *Pat Tillman* into two parts. The first part is the life that Tillman lived before he enlisted in the Army. That part was marked by a flourishing career in the NFL and a seemingly successful life. The second part is after he decided to enlist in the Army. That second part was marked by his service in the military and eventually his death. With this single sentence Hayworth has tapped into the complexity that is inherent to the connection between *Pat Tillman* and the American Dream as both a story of success and a representation of a national ideology. In his first description of the dream, Hayworth depicts the life of an individual as an

exemplification. The second presents the American Dream as part of a national belief system that individual citizens like Tillman are entrusted to defend. In this chapter, I examine how characterizations of *Pat Tillman* provided a unique opportunity to explore the American Dream as a both a narrative and an ideology.

The dual functions of the American Dream as both a story of an individual's life and a means for discussing national values has made it the focus of both commemoration and critique of American ideologies. One need only look at the titles of the story compilations produced by Dan Rather (2002) and Studs Terkel (1980) to see how the narratives of individual citizens are used to epitomize the American Dream. Critical scholar Jennifer L. Hochschild claims that the emphasis that the dream places on individuals as evidence for the existence of social equality "leads one to focus on people's behaviors rather than on economic processes, environmental constraints, or political structures as the causal explanation for social orderings" (1995, 36). In her critique of the American Dream, she posits that the American Dream obscures injustice "under a cloak of individual agency, thus giving people unjustified hopes and unwarranted feelings of failure" (259). Hochschild's analysis of the impact of the American Dream envisions it as an outgrowth of democratic and capitalist ideologies and critiques the social implications of the dream as a narrative retelling of individual success, but she concludes resigned to the belief that the dream can provide a standard of accountability for the nation that alternatives cannot.

By discussing the American Dream in terms of the history of the nation, Historian Cal Jillson (2004) depicts a much more optimistic outlook on its role in U.S. culture. He portrays the history of the American Dream as an ongoing cycle that has wavered between eras of exclusion and inclusion. The result of these slow but steady changes has

been a greater level equality for people who have been subjugated. Jillson argues that the American Dream represents a pursuit of a national goal of equality of opportunity that has never been fully realized but continues to be the motivating force behind great social progress. In contrast to Jillson, Wilber W. Caldwell describes the American Dream as “the saga of the persistent forces of liberty and democracy and their labors to withstand gales of America’s reckless, preemptive, acquisitive appetites” (2006, ix). Caldwell argues that “the American Dream has mirrored our national experience and our collective character as well as reflected our national mood, which has run a parallel course all the way from idealism through realism and skepticism to cynicism” (ix–x). Whether or not one chooses to adopt the perspectives promoted by Jillson or Caldwell, their connection of the American Dream to the history and ideologies of America perpetuate a belief that the individual stories that are used to embody the dream are connected to the nation’s ideologies. In the first section of this chapter, I examine various perspectives on the rhetorical dimensions of the American Dream and in particular how characterizations embody the promise of success that makes these stories uniquely American.

In the next section, I critique how the American Dream was employed by discourse producers to create characterizations of Pat Tillman’s life. In previous chapters, I have focused my analysis how a particular text was representative of themes within the discursive *Pat Tillman*. In this chapter I would like to establish how the American Dream influenced a series of biographical retellings of Tillman’s life before examining how those characterizations differed. Nowhere were the discursive fragments that were used to characterize *Pat Tillman* more prominent than in biographies, but these stories had more in common than just fragments. So, instead of examining the stories one by one, I have chosen to look at persistent themes in these biographies that perpetuate a type of

storytelling. The biographies I have chosen to analyze vary in length and type and show the influence of the story of the American Dream across accounts of Tillman's life. By examining biographies, the influence of the American Dream on the story of *Pat Tillman* is easier to identify.

Tillman's death on the battlefield while defending national principles like the dream left discourse producers with a narrative twist to resolve – how did Pat Tillman's choice to leave his American Dream and his eventual death change his American Dream story? Cullen argues that the American Dream can be both “a passive token of national identity” and “a powerful instrument of national reform and revitalization” (2003, 189), and I believe that in the case of *Pat Tillman* it was both. In their essay on the American Dream, Rowland and Jones contend that Barack Obama's address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention “reflects a fundamental recasting of the dream narrative toward a greater focus on community values and potentially a fundamental recasting of American politics as well” (2007, 443). I contend that both Obama's address and characterizations of *Pat Tillman* were part of a post-9/11 shift in the focus of the American Dream – just as Rowland and Jones discussed – toward a focus on the impact of a person's life on the nation as a whole. By coupling a distortion of Pat Tillman's life with the sacrifice that could be represented by his death, *Pat Tillman* was characterized as an affirmation of how the tale of an individual can represent a national ideology.

The Story of the American Dream

I begin by posing a question – what is the American Dream? Ask that question to one hundred different people and you are likely to get one hundred similar, yet distinct answers. Despite the centrality of the dream to characterizations of the American

experience, cultural critic Jim Cullen concluded, “it’s as if no one feels compelled to fix the meanings and uses of a term everyone presumably understands” (2003, 5). According to Cullen, that lack of clarity is essential to the rhetorical influence of the American Dream: “ambiguity is the very source of its mythic power, nowhere more so than among those striving for, but unsure whether they will reach their goals” (7). Todd Gitlin posits that some of that ambiguity can be attributed to the metaphor itself: “A dream may be evocative, illuminating, fascinating, or frightful, but one thing it is not is a *fait accompli*. It is incapable of verification. It invites revision. Intrinsically ambiguous, it begs for interpretation and reinterpretation” (1995, 47). Framing a political philosophy in terms of a shared dream metaphorically creates a sense of a shared consciousness. In the case of the American Dream, this shared consciousness has been discursively constituted as a schizophrenic belief that the dreams of an individual are the dreams of a nation. In particular, the American Dream creates a perception that the nation is invested in the happiness of its citizens. The intertwining of the goals and aspirations of a person with those of the nation relies on characterizations of individuals that together form a discourse perpetuating a belief that America is a nation founded on equal opportunity to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

James Truslow Adams (1931) first defined the notion of an American Dream in his narrative history of the nation, *The Epic of America*. Jim Cullen discovered in his research on the American Dream that Adams was rebuffed by his publisher when he proposed *The American Dream* as the title for his book. The publisher argued that “no one will pay three dollars for a book about a dream” (Jillson 2004, 1). So, instead of using the phrase that would become the book’s legacy as the book’s title, Adams chose to use it as the book’s lesson. Adams envisioned the American Dream as America’s

“distinctive and unique gift to mankind” (404). He described this gift as “not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of fortuitous circumstances of birth or position” (404).

In the midst of the Great Depression, Adams wrote about the dreams of individuals as the motivating force behind America’s success as a nation. He defined the history of the U.S. as an attempt to realize the dream. He also described the dream as the force behind America’s ability to emerge from what he called an “extreme depression” (405). As part of his characterization of America, Adams claimed:

We have a long and arduous road to travel if we are to realize our American dream in the life of our nation, but if we fail, there is nothing left but the old eternal round. The alternative is the failure of self-government, the failure of the common man to rise to full stature, the failure of all that the American dream has held of hope and promise for mankind. (416)

Adams’ explanation of the dream places the responsibility for the life of the nation with the life of its citizens. While it may seem melodramatic, equating the failure of individuals to pursue their dreams with the failure of a social system imbued the dream with a fundamental tension that persists in the American dream to this day; it is through the work of individuals that this nation persists, but it is the job of the nation to provide the opportunity for individuals to do their part.

Adams’ vision of the American Dream begins with an ordinary, individual citizen. He envisioned the American Dream as a journey attainable for all Americans who seek its promise, but it is a promise that is only fulfilled for those who are truly devoted to the pursuit. Since that time, the American Dream has been used as a means to measure

the efforts of individuals and the opportunities provided by the nation. According to contemporary political scientist Cal Jillson:

The American Dream has clear expectations both for the individual and the nation. At the individual level, as Penn, Franklin, Alger, and so many others knew, the Dream demanded character – preparation in school and shop, honesty, hard work, frugality, and persistence. At the national level, the Dream demanded that society stand for opportunity and provide an open, fair, competitive, entrepreneurial environment in which individual merit could find its place. (2004, 266)

Never was the relationship between the collective and the individual aspects of the American Dream more evident than during the 1960s in the rhetoric of the U.S. civil rights movement. The lack of opportunities provided in the institutionalized practice of segregation reflected an inequality that was confronted using the American Dream as rhetorical standard for the evaluation of the actions of the government. Just months after Martin Luther King Jr. exclaimed that his dream was “deeply rooted in the American Dream” (1963, 842), Malcolm X exclaimed, “I’m speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don’t see any American dream; I see an American nightmare” (1964, para. 10). Their discussions of the American Dream reflect a recognition that the burden of proof is placed on the discourse producer when arguing that inequalities exist in U.S. culture.

How the American Dream operates as a standard for evaluating the opportunities available to Americans is largely dependent on how a discourse producer portrays the fulfillment of the dream. While Malcolm X depicted a very personal dream in which he framed himself as the victim, King’s dream was a social dream about an idealized society. Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones (2007) build on Walter R. Fisher’s (1973) observations about the American Dream to argue that at its core, the American Dream represents two different orientations:

America is a place of opportunity and challenge, where every individual who is willing to work long and hard has the possibility of producing a better life. Thus, the values defining the agency at the heart of the American Dream are both personal (hard work, responsibility, determination, and so forth) and societal (freedom, potential for upward mobility, inclusiveness, community cohesion, and empowerment). America is the place where people with strong personal values can attain great ends because of shared societal values. (431)

The interconnection of the dreams of an individual with the aspirations of a nation often leads to characterizations that have to account for both within their narratives. Using the principles of a romantic narrative outlined by Northrop Frye, Rowland and Jones contend that “the particular actions of the hero in stories enacting the American Dream do not provide models to be emulated ... but they do provide a kind of rhetorical proof that commitment to the values inherent in the American Dream will lead to its achievement” (431).

What makes the American Dream distinct from other ideas like democracy and liberty is that the American Dream is an idea grounded in personal aspirations of ordinary people. The “America” in the American Dream story is a context distinct from a person, but that context is mythologized to be a unique home where individual people can live out their dreams. According to critic Leroy Dorsey,

Discussions of the American Dream perpetuate the myth. Advocates choose moments from history to define the Dream, moments that exemplify a way of life – an origin – that supposedly gives a person an individual and a group identity. Even when the inequities in the American Dream are revealed, they unknowingly fuel its hold on the imagination by simultaneously acknowledging the historical precedents that supposedly give the Dream its mythic foundation. (2008, 136)

The belief in America as a home to boundless opportunity is reinvigorated every time a tale of a successful American is told. However, as Dorsey states, the tension between this tale of individual success and the needs of the nation requires a “coherence that affirms the better nature of its [America’s] heroes and the community” (154).

According to Cullen, at its core the American Dream relies on a sense of agency: “The Dream assumes that one *can* advance confidently in the direction of one’s dreams to live out an imagined life” (2003, 10). Hochschild defines the American Dream as “the promise that all Americans have a reasonable chance to achieve success as they define it – material or otherwise – through their own efforts, and to attain virtue and fulfillment through success” (1995, xvii). The personal nature of the American Dream has also allowed critics to use it as a means to attack the American people, Caldwell described the current status of the American Dream as “a dream characterized by fixations on get-rich-quick schemes, on a growing litigiousness, and on the ‘money for nothing’ rewards of sport, pop music, media, and popular culture” (2006, 163). In some instances, characterizations of the American Dream even allow Americans to confront inconsistencies in the nation’s ability to live up to its ideals. However, those inconsistencies are often depicted as resolved through the affirmation of a particular character’s ability to overcome them (Cloud 1996; Hochschild 1995).

Dana L. Cloud (1996) discusses three features of the American Dream that give the stories their ethos. The first is that they are presented as real stories. By using the lives of real people as exemplifications of the dream, these stories give the impression that they are a real story, despite the fact that they are, as Cloud notes, products of “editing, selection of narratives, framing, chapter organization, and so forth” (119). Cloud argues, “as a realist form of narrative, biography naturalizes its rhetorical strategies and ideological motives” (119). Second, Cloud argues that the people depicted in these biographies should be more aptly approached as personas, similar to what I would discuss as a characterization. These personas are as much ideology as they are personal story. Finally, there are perceived public expectations, from which the person is allowed to

deviate, making the story and the persona more real. These factors allow for the perception of a person as a representation of an ordinary citizen, or what Cloud refers to as a “token” (119), which can be used to reassert the position of dominant social groups or reaffirm ideological traditions. She concludes that “tokenist biography serves to blame the oppressed for their failures and to uphold a meritocratic vision of the American Dream that justifies and sustains a more troubling American reality” (134).

Whether you agree with Mike Bianchi’s (2004) perspective that Tillman “sacrificed the American Dream to defend it” or take a position like that of Michael Prysner (2007) of The Party for Socialism and Liberation – who said, “the bourgeois press rallied around Tillman; he represented the military as an affluent, white college graduate, who was prepared to sacrifice the ‘American Dream’ to preserve ‘freedom’ for the United States” – there was a striking familiarity about the ways in which the story of *Pat Tillman* was told. Several critics have tried to pin down the narrative features of the dream in their work. Cullen (2003) examines the dream as six distinct outcomes. His version of the dream originates with the dreams of those who seek a better life or to own a home. Hochschild discusses how the dream provides “a framework for success” (1995, 38). She discusses the American Dream as a force for evaluation. Dorsey discusses two defining features of the dream, an avatar to follow and a story that is ordinary, but somewhat grander. Rowland and Jones claim that there are three characteristics that define the dream narrative: “a scene defined by opportunity, agency defined by personal and societal values that allow for the opportunity to be fulfilled, and a protagonist who enacts the personal in order to achieve a better life” (2007, 431–432). In my estimation, the vision of the dream discussed by Rowland and Jones comes closest to outlining narrative of the American Dream; however, because their perspective is based on how the

American Dream is invoked in political rhetoric instead of as a narrative, I would like to reorient some of their parameters in order to address how those ideas play out as a way of retelling the life of a person.

Rowland and Jones base their argument about the nature of the American Dream on Kenneth Burke's (1969a, 1969b) discussion of the pentad and Northrop Frye's discussion of a romance where the hero is "superior in degree to other men and to his environment ... [and] moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended" (1990, 33). I can see how the hero who is commemorated in political speeches could be seen as equivalent to what Frye describes as a "legend" (33), but American Dream stories emphasize equality of opportunity and access. Just after his discussion of romance, Frye discusses a hero who is "superior neither to men nor to his environment" (34). This hero is defined by "the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience" (34). I believe that Frye's description here is what is missing in Rowland and Jones's (2007) account of the American Dream.

To begin with, what they discuss as "a scene defined by opportunity" (430) orients that focus of the story toward the scene. In American Dream stories, what is presented as opportunity in terms of the scene is a series of obstacles for the agent. In stories of what Cullen defined as the dream of "upward mobility" (2003, 59–102), the successes that people attain are a result of their ability to overcome the challenges that present themselves. Equality of opportunity is central to the role of America in narratives of the American Dream, but opportunity is not considered analogous with assistance. The America that is characterized in stories of the American Dream is framed as a passive character with an active role to play. By this, I mean that America is framed as providing the context for opportunities to Americans. America is an environment that fosters

growth (which is framed as competition). That does not mean that these stories depict easy paths to success. Whether it is framed as a story of an individual who has struggled against inequality or as a tribute to hard work, American Dream stories rely on a belief that individuals can meet and overcome the challenges they face in their life without outside assistance. For this reason, I intend to examine how “a scene defined by opportunity” is translated into a story fraught with obstacles.

The focus the dream puts on the relationship of what Adams referred to as “opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement” (1931, 404) means that there has to be a reason why one person has greater success than another. The last two aspects of the dream presented by Rowland and Jones have to do with why one particular individual is able to live out their dreams instead of another. Rowland and Jones present the first part of their rationale as an “agency defined by personal and societal values that allow for the opportunity to be fulfilled” (430). There are many different kinds of American Dream story. The hero in an American Dream story lives out a personal dream while enacting a social belief. The final characteristic that Rowland and Jones describe is “a protagonist who enacts the personal in order to achieve a better life” (431). Rowland and Jones describe this as an essential component of the dream because these heroes “provide a kind of rhetorical proof that commitment to the values inherent in the American Dream will lead to its achievement. The victory of the hero in the American Dream romance is proof of the validity of the American Dream itself” (431). My analysis follows these three characteristics of the dream narrative – opportunity as defined by obstacles, agency defined by values, and enacting the personal – in order to examine the stories that were produced in response to the life and death of Pat Tillman.

Following that analysis, I will also show the ways in which the decisions made by Pat Tillman enabled discourse producers to comment on the individualistic nature of the American Dream. The America depicted in American Dream stories is an environment where citizens can flourish, but rarely are those citizens asked to sacrifice their own dreams in order to contribute to the nation as a whole. As biographer Jonathan Rand proclaimed, Tillman's life is "an inspiring patriotic story" (2004, 12). This is true not only because Tillman's life could be formed to fit into the narrative of the American Dream (#s 18, 19, 22, 25, 26, 27), but also because he walked away from his dream to defend his nation (#1). The relationship between these two ideas would complicate the story of *Pat Tillman* as an exemplification of the American Dream, but together they were used to support a belief that his actions, as the Biography Channel (2006) described, "proved just how special he really was." Biographies of *Pat Tillman* created an American Dream narrative that distinguished *Pat Tillman* from other versions of the American Dream based on a unique devotion to the nation itself. Using the discursive fragments of Pat Tillman's life as the building blocks for characterizations of American values, *Pat Tillman* represented an American Dream that balanced the ordinariness of opportunity afforded by America with his extraordinary devotion to its principles.

Characterizations of *Pat Tillman* and the American Dream

The five biographies I have examined for my critique circulated in a variety of formats. The two book-length treatments on Tillman's life take different routes to describe a person as an example for a nation. The first is Mike Towle's *I've Got Things to Do with My Life – Pat Tillman: The Making of an American Hero*. Towle described *Pat Tillman* as "an all-American hero on the gridiron and in the grunge of the Middle East,

but he was not your prototypical all-American guy” (2004, 1). I have also included sports journalist Jonathan Rand’s *Fields of Honor: The Pat Tillman Story*. Rand wrote about character that had “a Boy Scout’s ideals and a warrior’s bravery” (2004, 1). Rand’s biography functioned slightly differently from Towle’s because Rand told Tillman’s story as reflection of his decision to join the military (#1). Rand then weaves the rest of the stories of Tillman’s life through the perspective of him as a story of American success. An important note about these biographies is that they were both published soon after Tillman’s death. Thus, they do not reflect the many changes that were made in the story of how he died or the political implications that entangled *Pat Tillman* following their discovery.

Depictions of Tillman’s life story were not only circulated using the written word. Towle and Rand used the quotes of friends and family to fill out their narratives, but the Biography Channel (2006) created a documentary film simply entitled *Pat Tillman* in which they were able to allow those who knew Tillman to tell the story of his life. In their hour-long, made for television film, the Biography Channel employed a three-act storytelling structure (Bernard 2007, 69–72) using Tillman’s juvenile incarceration (#18) and the events of September 11th, 2001 as defining events in their version of *Pat Tillman*. Interspersed with the interviews of Tillman’s friends were narrated recollections of Tillman’s life that highlighted the lessons to be gleaned from *Pat Tillman*. Like the visual story told on the Biography Channel, characterizations of *Pat Tillman* can also be found across the internet in short video tributes. One has only to type the words “Pat Tillman” into the search box on YouTube.com to get hundreds of search results. In one specific example, *Pat Tillman Salute*, Chris Valentine (2004a) posted a short tribute to Tillman on his own website that has circulated through MySpace.com (2006), Youtube.com

(Biggerpapi 2006), and other video sharing sites like break.com (BIG-BOYS.com 2006). The video was Valentine's second attempt at the tribute, he claimed that the first was "a bit sappy and Pat Tillman would gag if he saw it, I'm sure." Valentine's final video blended fragments like Tillman's penchant for climbing (#s 16, 22) and video highlights of his football career with images of the World Trade Center attacks and Theodore Kennedy's eulogy of his brother Robert F. Kennedy to implore viewers to "Live It Like Pat."¹

The final story of *Pat Tillman* that I analyze is the original biography that was published on the website for the Pat Tillman Foundation. This version of *Pat Tillman* calls attention to the actions of Tillman and set the context for the programs promoted by the foundation. The foundation's website (2008d) claims that its "mission is to carry forward Pat's legacy by inspiring people to make positive changes in themselves and in the world around them" (para. 1). Through their *Leadership Through Action* program, the foundation supports students "with the tools to identify and evaluate social problems, provide potential solutions to those problems and assist with the implementation of a student designed program to bring positive resolution" (para. 1). The Pat Tillman Foundation biography depicts Pat Tillman's actions as a pursuit of goals that they help others to emulate.

In the tradition of the dream described by James Truslow Adams (1931), these biographies represent examples of how characterizations of *Pat Tillman* were interconnected with the narrative influence of the American Dream. According to

¹ Both the Biography Channel documentary and Chris Valentine's video represent audio-visual materials that I have transcribed. As per Gaines, I have selected the versions of these texts that I employ in my analysis based on "the version of the text that is most closely associated with the rhetorical phenomenon of interest in the particular study at hand" (2010, 141). The Biography Channel documentary was viewed from a DVD that was distributed after the original program aired and the Valentine tribute video is the version downloaded directly from his website.

Jennifer L. Hochschild, the phrase “the American Dream” has its own mythological force that signifies “a new world where anything can happen and good things might” (1995, 15), this is not to say that America is grounded in a belief that good things *must* happen. The American Dream is also grounded in a capitalist, competitive belief that good things will come to those who work for them. The rhetorics of working hard and of working smart have both been used to rationalize these American success stories, but what drives these stories is the belief that something this particular person has done justifies the fulfillment of their dreams. In this section, I examine the influence of the American Dream on stories of *Pat Tillman* beginning with the creation of “opportunity as defined by obstacles,” then moving to a sense of “agency defined by values,” and finishing with a look at “enacting the personal.”

Opportunity as Defined by Obstacles

According to Mike Towle, while Pat Tillman was still in college, he told a *Los Angeles Times* reporter that “There’s a lot of opportunity out there in this country, and I’m going to reach for the sky” (61). The five biographies in my analysis all depict Pat Tillman’s successes as an outgrowth of an approach to life that maximizes the opportunities afforded Americans. These successes are narrativized through specific obstacles that the protagonist in these stories is said to have faced. There are two ways of looking at these obstacles. The first is as a reflection of challenges that a person had to endure in order to achieve his or her successes. The second is a reflection of the many opportunities that are afforded to American citizens to live out their dreams. In stories of *Pat Tillman*, despite the fact that many talent evaluators judged his skills to be inadequate; their assessments were insufficient to prevent Tillman from achieving his

dreams. By looking at the ways that Tillman's football career was characterized using fragments that emphasized his ability to exceed expectations (#s 25, 26, 27), I can examine how the obstacles that were narrativized as standing in the way of Tillman's success were presented as an opportunity for Tillman to prove that he could live out his dreams.

One of the central discursive fragments in these biographical characterizations of *Pat Tillman* was the belief that he was too small and too slow (#25) to play football at an elite level. Essential to each of these descriptions was the fact that despite the perception that Tillman was not qualified for college or NFL football, he was given the opportunity to face these perceptions and overcome them. The narrator in the Biography Channel (2006) documentary discussed Pat Tillman's struggle to make it in football with a contrast: "On or off the football field, Pat was larger than life. Yet his physical size was an issue. At 5' 11" and 195 pounds, most experts thought that Pat wasn't much of a contender for a spot on a college team. Those who took the time to meet with him discovered otherwise." Characterizations of *Pat Tillman* depicted an overachiever who took advantage of opportunities presented by those who gave him a chance.

The belief that Pat Tillman was able to overcome even the inadequacies of his own body through his ability to make the most out of every opportunity was essential to all of these characterizations of *Pat Tillman*. The Pat Tillman Foundation website discusses how "many people questioned his ability to make the opening-day roster" for the Arizona Cardinals and commemorated Tillman's ability to prove them wrong (2008a). Chris Valentine (2004a) asked people to imagine Tillman's ability to overcome obstacles from "Considered too small for major college football ... Tillman was voted PAC-10 defensive player of the year in 1996." In Mike Towle's book on Pat Tillman, he

recalled that “most coaches had him pegged as too slow for defensive back and too small for linebacker” (2004, xiv), but through perseverance and determination he proved them wrong. In each of these instances, the belief that Pat Tillman was too small and too slow (#25) was transformed into a discursive fragment that revealed that *Pat Tillman* could overcome the physical deficiencies of his own body in order to live out his dreams.

Tillman’s tryout (#26) and the fact that he was drafted last (#27) by the Arizona Cardinals were also repeated as evidence of the opportunities afforded to him. Jonathan Rand described how Tillman’s tryout (#26) for the Arizona Cardinals became a “45 minute ordeal” because Tillman would not let the coaches leave until “he was satisfied he’d performed the drills as well as he could” (82). That “ordeal” was also recounted in a quote from Dave McGinnis in Towle’s book. In response to the fact that Tillman had used the tryout as an opportunity to impress McGinnis, Towle recalled a quote made famous by the always quotable baseball player Yogi Berra, “déjà vu all over again,” to denote Tillman’s ability to overcome expectations again (69). The belief that Tillman was too small and too slow (#25) was used in conjunction with these stories to create a character who took advantage of opportunities as they appeared.

In these stories, Tillman’s successes on the football field were not described as the feats of an extraordinary athlete. Instead, the fact that Tillman had succeeded in both college football and in the NFL was defined as an outgrowth of his ability to take advantage of every opportunity that was granted to him. Pat Tillman was not forced to overcome poverty, racism, or sexism, but depictions of his ability to overcome perceptions of his own body and achieve his goals allowed discourse producers to create an American Dream story that was defined by his ability to overcome obstacles. *Pat Tillman* was characterized as someone who was able to overcome what were depicted as

insurmountable obstacles to live out his dreams. These moments become the focus of the story. Facts such as that Pat Tillman grew up in a largely affluent suburb of San Jose and had access to distinguished schools are subsumed into the back story of his life, while the struggle to exceed expectations gets center stage. Tillman never experienced the powerful forms of oppression that have undermined the dream's accessibility for many, but his story reinforces the belief that success in one's dream is dependent on that person alone (Hochschild 1995; Cloud 1996).

Agency Defined by Values

As Rowland and Jones (2007) point out, the successes of those that are depicted as having lived the American Dream stem from an individual's approach to capitalizing on the opportunities they are afforded. In these characterizations of *Pat Tillman*, Pat Tillman is described as someone who could meet any challenge and had an individual will. The introduction to the Biography Channel documentary states that Pat Tillman's "legendary perseverance was demolishing the odds." According to Jonathan Rand, *Pat Tillman* would "always overcome skepticism with a tenacious work ethic" (90). The Pat Tillman Foundation website attributed his successes to an "intense focus and sheer determination" that distinguished him from those around him (2008b). In the previous section, I discussed some of the obstacles that *Pat Tillman* was depicted as overcoming; in this section, I examine the characterizations of how *Pat Tillman* overcame those obstacles. Stories of *Pat Tillman* equate having "the agency to succeed" with hard work and dedication.

One of the fragments used to describe Tillman's willingness to put in effort beyond his contemporaries was a story from his high school football days (#17). In the

Biography Channel documentary, the narrator described how this story revealed Tillman's "tendency to push the limits" of both his teammates and his coaches. Jonathan Rand described this story when discussing Tillman's drive to test himself and how he "stuck out in a crowd" (64). Mike Towle used this fragment to characterize how difficult it was to stop Tillman from going at full speed at all times. While some might view Tillman's actions as insolent, within these characterizations it is morphed into evidence for the belief that Pat Tillman was unable to be deterred. This story became part of characterizations of *Pat Tillman* as having a dedication that went beyond a common commitment to being the best.

Much like Tillman's success on the football field, Tillman's intellectual pursuits (#s 23, 24) were seen as an outgrowth of his desire to be the best. Jonathan Rand quoted Tillman himself as saying "I'm proud of the things I've done, my schoolwork because I'm not smart, I just worked hard" (sic; #23; 73). The idea that Tillman's intellect was another result of his tireless work ethic fit the narrative of the American Dream and it became a common aspect of his story. Even in his short, online video Chris Valentine made the fact that "Tillman graduated summa cum laude in 3½ years with a 3.84 GPA" (#23) a highlight of his tribute. Tillman's intellect was depicted as a skill that he acquired through persistence and confrontation. During the Biography Channel documentary, Tillman's friend Brian Willis argued that "Pat's attitude towards academic was: 'I absolutely have to be intelligent. I have to have a take on every single issue.' If somebody comes to me and says 'Hey, you know, do you know this about this part in history?' He wants to have an opinion on it. He wants to be able to talk back and forth with a scholar on it" (#24). Arizona State media relations director and friend of Tillman, Doug Tammaro, told a story of how Tillman's intellect translated to his football career, "We

heard the story about how he would sit in the back of the room. And if one of the seniors would answer a question and it wasn't right, Pat would just blurt out 'Wrong! Wrong!' And this is an 18 or 19 year old kid that was saying this to older guys, so you knew he was pretty confident in what he was doing" (Biography Channel 2006). Jonathan Rand discussed Tillman's conversation with Bruce Snyder at ASU where Tillman refused to be redshirted because "I've got things to do with my life" (#20) as part of a desire to constantly rise to the occasion. In another part of Tamarro's interview from the Biography Channel documentary, he described this story as "one of the stories that everyone loves" and commented that Tillman was "always moving faster than everybody else." Whether it was a game of Trivial Pursuit or reading the opposition's strategy, Tillman was depicted as a competitor with both his mind and his body.

What becomes clear as one examines *Pat Tillman* as an example of success is that success is narrativized as an outgrowth of his work and dedication. As Chris Valentine's use of the song Renegades of Funk reinforces, "no matter how hard you try you can't stop us now." It was not that he beat someone else out for a scholarship; it was that he earned it through his actions (#25; Valentine, 2004a; Pat Tillman Foundation 2008b). These discourse producers did not characterize how he beat out someone else for a spot on the NFL roster; it was that he deserved it (#27; Towle 2004; Biography Channel 2006). Instead of focusing on how Tillman was specifically better than a particular athlete or another student, Tillman's competition was with himself. The Biography Channel documentary employs Tillman's own words to talk about his philosophy, "I think you've got to get out of your comfort zone. If you're kind of comfortable all the time, you know? It's like if you're skiing: if you're not falling, you're not trying. I kind of want to push myself a lot." Through Tillman's story, these words become a challenge to the audience.

These characterizations of *Pat Tillman* present his achievements as attainable to normal people who put in enough effort, but exceptional because most people do not. Peter Roby, the director of Northeastern University's Study of Sport in Society Center is quoted by Mike Towle saying Tillman "earned everything he got. He was a superb college player who had to work for everything, and then he got to the NFL and overproduced again" (129). In an interview for the Biography Channel documentary, Benjamin Hill described how others viewed Tillman:

I think the reality is that Pat was a very disciplined, focused person and he had a great amount of confidence in himself and his own abilities but always had a deep sense of humility and that's what helped him continue being focused on what he was trying to achieve.

The relationship characterized in these stories – between the idea that Pat Tillman was not the typical athlete and his determination to achieve his goals – reinforces the notion that the American Dream is available to all who are dedicated enough to achieve it. The description of these challenges as being met and overcome by the individuals themselves also reinforces the idea that success is an individual endeavor and that all individuals can achieve this type of success. Together these two ideas are needed to perpetuate the competitive nature inherent to stories of the American Dream (Hochschild 1995).

Enacting the Personal

When discussing the American Dream, there are two distinct dimensions to how a dream represents something unique to a person. The first is the dream itself. Not every person dreams of playing football or becoming president; not every dream is for fame and fortune. The second aspect of this dimension of the American Dream narrative is that it often downplays the achieved successes of wealth and fame and focuses on a rationalization for why a character achieved his or her personal aspirations. Because the

dream is discussed as available to all Americans, there has to be a rationale for why *this* particular person has succeeded that is disconnected from natural talent and good fortune. In the Biography Channel documentary, Arizona Cardinals Vice President and Co-Owner can be seen describing how Pat Tillman was able to overcome being drafted last, “Maybe other players had a little more height, a little more weight, a little bit more speed. He would make up for it with smarts and determination.” *Pat Tillman’s* American Dream stories are marked by the people (e.g., talent evaluators who underestimated him, #27), circumstances (e.g., an attempt to save a friend in trouble that left him in jail, #18), and even his own body (e.g., being smaller than the typical football player, #25) that worked against his successes, but these stories also tended to downplay the assistance that Tillman received along the way. In these characterizations, it was not destiny or coaching but something unique to Pat Tillman that allowed him to live out his dreams. The Biography Channel documentary employed Tillman’s own words in order to reveal his approach to challenges:

You make your own luck. So, um, which I am a believer in that. I mean, I think that a lot of people that say they have bad luck or “things never go my way,” well you’re not putting yourself in a position to allow it to go your way, you know? If you’re in the right position a lot of times nothing is going to happen, but every now and again it is.

Tillman’s characterization of luck in this quote is important because of its pronouns. Words like “things” and “it” are substituted for concrete objectives and aspirations. Biographer Jonathan Rand attributed Tillman’s ability to overcome his own physical shortcomings to “intangibles” that he then characterized as an outgrowth of Tillman’s willingness to work hard and give more of himself than other players (81). Discourse producers depicted the hard work and determination that they characterized as unique to *Pat Tillman*.

These characterizations of what made Pat Tillman unique are a blend of his goals and aspirations with the agency of hard work and determination that are required to live the dream. The Biography Channel documentary described Pat Tillman as “a man that had his own plan. On or off the field, he had no intention of letting anything or anyone get in the way of where he wanted to go.” Biographer Mike Towle employed the words of sport psychologist and columnist Dr. Donald Beck to characterize Tillman’s approach to life, “What you are seeing here with Pat is something quite different from that [religious sacrifice]. You’re seeing an expression of self-principle, where a sense of duty or challenge or obligation has developed in him beyond the materialistic ... It appears to me that he was driven by this internalized system, the young drummer within” (120). Fragments of Tillman’s narrative, such as turning down more money from the St. Louis Rams (#32) to remain with the Cardinals and joining the military rather than staying in the NFL (#1), are framed as stories of a success that can only be measured by the individual. According to Jonathan Rand, “Tillman never stopped pushing himself to the limit. Or to what anybody else might have thought was his limit. Then he’d push himself some more” (89).

Tillman’s academic successes were also seen as an example of Tillman’s singular approach to life. In these biographies, Tillman’s intelligence was depicted as an outgrowth of an intellectual curiosity that was counterintuitive to his role as an athlete. The Biography Channel Documentary claimed that “in every way, Pat Tillman defied categorization. A Socrates in surfer dude packaging.” According to Mike Towle, “He might have been a late bloomer in football, but Tillman was an instant classroom success at ASU” (64). The Pat Tillman Foundation explicitly linked his success on and off the football field to his will: “His intense focus and sheer determination led him to three

consecutive selections to the Pac-10 All-Academic Football Team, a 1st team Academic All-American honor, as well as the NCAA's Post-Graduate Scholarship for academic and athletic excellence" (2008b). His intellect was characterized as something that made him different from other athletes, but the difference was depicted as an outgrowth of Tillman's work ethic. In the Biography Channel documentary, Doug Tammaro claimed, "It's safe to say that there was no other athlete in the history of Arizona State that accomplished on the field and off the field what he has."

These characterizations distill what is unique to Pat Tillman down to a personality trait. He was not gifted as an athlete or talented as an intellectual, yet he excelled in both areas because of a personal code that drove him to be better. Behind images of Tillman leaping to make tackles and interceptions on the football field, Chris Valentine incorporated the exaltations of the game announcers who proclaimed Tillman's strength and determination with voice after voice declaring sentiments like "Pat Tillman is all heart" and "Pat Tillman, talk about a guy with a lot of heart." Characterizations of Tillman's ability to exceed expectations were not limited to his exploits on the football field. One of the themes of the Biography Channel documentary was Tillman's need to "challenge himself:"

Narrator: What Pat did do was never miss an opportunity to challenge himself.

Benjamin Hill: Pat was never afraid of failure. I mean, that's what made him so great. He was always going after things that were challenging and troubling and tough things to do.

Narrator: Stories about Pat quickly became legends. Like the time he warmed up for the Cardinals training camp by competing in a 70.2 mile triathlon.

Using fragments that framed Pat Tillman as unique (i.e. #31), *Pat Tillman* is characterized as driven by something internal. In his biography, Mike Towle quoted

Tillman's friend, "'That's what gets him going,' said Leland High School buddy Jeff Hechtle, back home in San Jose. 'He won't take no for an answer, and [he] gets what he wants'" (91).

The brand of competitive success that *Pat Tillman* came to represent is even evident in how the Pat Tillman Foundation framed Tillman's legacy:

To honor Pat and young people like Pat, the Pat Tillman Foundation inspires others to create positive social change through its *Leadership Through Action*TM programs and scholarships for veterans, active service members, their families, and college students across the country. (2010)

This scholarship challenges people to live a life modeled after *Pat Tillman* by promoting individual action as social contribution. When Chris Valentine beckons his viewers to "Live It Like Pat," there is an implicit understanding that he is not simply beckoning people to play in the NFL or join the military. There is a sense that leading through action and being a renegade means living your own unique dream that also contributes a positive story for those who seek to use your narrative as inspiration.

Pat Tillman and the American Dream as a Reflection of Communal Values

The biographies that characterized *Pat Tillman* not only employed the narrative associated with the American Dream, they created a *Pat Tillman* that they used as example for others to follow. Jonathan Rand argued that Tillman's life and sacrifice "doesn't mean we should place him on a pedestal. But we should view him as an example" (2). Rand's distinction between revering Tillman and using him as a model is central to discussions of *Pat Tillman* as a characterization of the American Dream. Within these characterizations of *Pat Tillman* is a connection that links a person's life with a way of living. Rand concluded, "He's reminded me I have some work to do. When you take a closer look at the life he led, I'm betting you'll feel the same" (4). According

to the Biography Channel documentary, “Pat Tillman’s legacy is in the quality of his life: passionately experienced, generously shared, richly remembered.” Mike Towle was right when he wrote, “The Pat Tillman story is one of conviction and complication” (xi). These biographies depict a version of the American Dream that reconstitutes the protagonist in the story as more than just an individual living out his or her own aspirations and the American Dream as a story of devotion to a nation.

In a time where national interests were threatened by a war with “Terror,” *Pat Tillman* became a symbol of how national and individual dreams were intertwined. In these characterizations of *Pat Tillman*, the American Dream is redefined through its interconnection with qualities such as loyalty and commitment to others. In his book, Jonathan Rand quoted Bob Ferguson, a member of the Arizona Cardinals front office who was partially responsible for the choice to draft Tillman, as saying “In today’s world of instant gratification and selfishness, here is a man that was defined by words like loyalty, honor, passion, courage, strength and nobility. He is a modern-day hero” (14). Chris Valentine juxtaposed Pat Tillman’s September 12th, 2001 interview (#12) with Theodore Kennedy’s eulogy of his brother Robert F. Kennedy. The Biography Channel documentary lauded the fact that “he walked away from a 3.5 million dollar contract to join the war on terror and prove just how special he really was.” These biographies created characterizations celebrating Tillman’s decision to serve his country as part of what could be gleaned from his example. In that example, I examine how loyalty is characterized as an extension of individual principle and distinction is merited by how much it is shunned. These ideas became lessons that shift the focus of the American Dream away from the dreamer and onto the nation to which it was depicted as a

contribution. In this section, I examine how characterizations of *Pat Tillman* transformed the individuality of the American Dream into a contribution to the collective good.

Loyalty as Evidence of Individual Principle

As was discussed in previous chapters, loyalty was a common component of characterizations of *Pat Tillman*. The narrator of the Biography Channel documentary described, “Pat combined passion with charisma, empathy, and an unshakable commitment to those he held dear.” Mike Towle claimed, “Almost everyone who met Pat Tillman has a story to tell. This was true even before he was killed. His impact on the lives of others was quick and indelible. He didn’t suffer fools and he didn’t open up his world to just anyone. To those to whom he did, he showed himself a trusted and loyal comrade” (177). One of the important dimensions of the type of loyalty discourse producers characterized with their versions *Pat Tillman* is that, like the descriptions in these quotes, that loyalty said more about the individual’s principles than it did about his relationships. There are numerous examples the fragments of *Pat Tillman* that characterized him as a loyal. I have chosen to focus on three of them: his relationship with his wife Marie (#33), his altercation to rescue Jeff Hechtle (#18), and his decision to stay with the Arizona Cardinals (#32). These three episodes represent loyalty as a form of self-denial to characterize *Pat Tillman* as a person of unflinching principles and to promote a vision of the American Dream narrative that translated into service to the nation.

Tillman’s relationship with his high school sweetheart and eventual wife (#33), Marie Ugenti was routinely employed to evidence of his loyalty. The Pat Tillman Foundation website characterized Ugenti as someone Tillman had been “devoted to since

high school” (2008a, para. 4), and Rand highlighted the fact that Ugenti was Tillman’s “high school sweetheart” (11). Mike Towle employed the words of Tillman’s former roommate at ASU, Paul Reynolds, “one word I think of when I think about Pat is loyalty. It was amazing” (62). According to Reynolds:

He was so loyal and faithful to Marie, and that really made an impression on me, with my being such a strict Mormon. Pat and I would have conversations about that, too, late at night. He never went out on Marie or went after any other girl. Pat was a great-looking guy, and even in college he would get stuff in the mail, like bras or panties sent by young women wanting him to autograph. Pat never made any attempts to contact any of the women, but he would sign the things and return them... He was loyal to his country, to his teams, and to Marie. It was just amazing. (62)

Reynolds also characterized Tillman’s loyalty to Marie as an expression of individual principle that left him in awe. He even questioned how “anyone could be as driven and self-motivated as Pat without believing in God” (62). Reynolds anecdote about his relationship with Tillman intertwines loyalty with a faith or devotion. Not a faith in a God or a devotion to a religion, but instead a faith in the people he cared about and a devotion to those relationships. Their relationship was characterized as evidence of something unique about *Pat Tillman* and had very little to do with her role in his life. Similar to characterizations of Tillman’s relationship with his widow, Marie Ugenti (#33), the type of loyalty portrayed in descriptions of the brawl (#18) that resulted in Tillman’s incarceration reflected his devotion to other people as a devotion to principle. During Tillman’s senior year of high school, Jonathan Rand described how Tillman found himself in serious trouble after “he came to the aid of a friend in a fight outside a pizza parlor” (#18; 65). Mike Towle noted that Tillman was involved in the brawl because “the guy had a run-in with one of Tillman’s friends” (34). From the perspective of Jeff

Hechtle, the friend that Tillman was trying to defend, the Biography Channel documentary presented this version of the story:

Narrator: Seventeen year-old Pat was hanging out with friends at a pizza parlor close to home. He'd been drinking at a party earlier that night. When someone shouted that his buddy Jeff had been jumped outside the restaurant, Pat shot out the door to rescue him.

Jeff Hechtle: I had, um, one guy up against the wall and I was getting hit by five or six of his buddies from behind and I knew that if I looked up, you know, I would definitely get knocked out. And I remember glancing over and I saw all of my friends come running and just took everybody off of me.

Narrator: Pat laid out one guy on the sidewalk next to several of the man's teeth. True to his own personal code of honor, Pat handed over his name and phone number. Several weeks later, Pat was arrested and charged as a juvenile with felony assault. If word got out, Arizona's scholarship offer could be jeopardized or rescinded. Quietly, Pat pled guilty to the charge. In the summer of 1994, Pat and his classmates held their graduation at San Jose Municipal Rose Garden, but instead of celebrating Pat served thirty days in a juvenile detention facility. Years later, in an interview with *Sports Illustrated*, Pat would say that he learned more from that one bad decision than all the good decisions he'd ever made.

Depictions of this incident end with the notion that Tillman "learned more" from this one mistake than all the other good choices that he ever made (Rand 2004, 66; Pat Tillman Foundation 2008b, para. 3), but what he learned from this mistake is left unclear. The Pat Tillman Foundation claimed that "The experience was one that Pat chose to learn from, and it served as a turning point in his life" (2008c, para. 3) and Jonathan Rand quoted Tillman as saying "It made me realize that stuff you do has repercussions. You can lose everything" (66). There was no sense of what, if anything, he would have (or should have) done differently. Instead, this chapter of Tillman's life served as another reminder of his allegiance to his principles.

Tillman's loyalty extended outside of his friends and family to his job as well (#32). After establishing himself as one of the best safeties in the NFL, Tillman's services were highly sought after. In his tribute video, Chris Valentine described his decision to

stay with the Cardinals (#32) very plainly: “offered a 1.8 million dollar contract by the Rams, he turned it down for the Cardinals \$500,000 contract ... a statement of loyalty.” The narrator of the Biography Channel documentary proclaimed, “to Pat, loyalty had value greater than dollars.” According to Jonathan Rand, “In the modern NFL, that decision was extraordinary. Not only did Tillman turn down a pile of money but he elected to stay with a losing franchise. Other stars could not wait to bolt” (85). Mike Towle quoted Tillman as explaining, “One simple reason is they [the Rams] are already good and we’re crap. I’d like to be part of building something. I felt loyalty to the coaches. I’ve come a long way and it’s because of them” (118). This single idea, loyalty, seemed to be guiding the decisions that Tillman made to guide his life.

Pat Tillman was characterized with an allegiance to both people and ideas that was discussed as something that reinforced individuality instead of connection. This singularity reinforced the individuality of the American Dream myth while in turn framing that individuality as a contribution to the nation. This lesson of *Pat Tillman* also allowed these biographers to explain the motivation behind Tillman’s decision to serve in the military (#1). In Jonathan Rand’s biography, Joseph Bush, an Air Force staff sergeant who met Tillman while deployed, was quoted as saying that Tillman enlisted “For the love of my brother. And for the love of my country” (38). Chris Valentine recalled “After serving one tour of duty in Iraq, Tillman was offered an ‘early out.’ He refused it, wanting to fulfill his 3 year commitment” and replayed the entire interview in which Pat Tillman discussed the fact that he “really haven’t done a damn thing” (#12) in regards to his pro football career alongside Senator Theodore Kennedy’s eulogy at his brother Robert’s funeral. Mike Towle also printed an extended piece of that same interview leading into an extended history of athletes who had gone to war, a history that he

emphasized was carried on by Tillman alone. As Brian Willis characterized Tillman in the closing of the Biography Channel documentary, “I’m going to tell my grandkids about a man that stood behind his principles, his integrity, his loyalty, and his loyalty to this country.” Tillman’s loyalty was something that made *Pat Tillman* unique and made Tillman’s willingness to defend his nation part of a characterization of the American Dream.

Unique in a Desire to Be Common

Within the story of *Pat Tillman*, celebrity is treated as something to be shunned, but Tillman’s avoidance of the spotlight only served to enhance its intensity. The rationalization of the celebrity of *Pat Tillman* using Tillman’s denial of the attention allowed discourse producers to create characterizations that distinguished the characterization as unique because of a desire to remain common. According to the Pat Tillman Foundation, “The decision [#1] shocked many and garnered national media attention despite his refusal to speak publicly [#2] about the choice” (2008a, para. 4).

Their main page introduces Tillman’s memory with a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson:

What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think ... you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude. –Emerson (2008e, para. 1)

This Emerson quote was first linked to Tillman on the memorial card that was distributed at his public memorial and it is integrated into this biography under the page’s title “Scholar, Athlete, Leader, Hero, Friend” (2008e) as well as scrolled onto the screen in the closing moments of Biography Channel documentary. Descriptions of Tillman’s actions as proof of a personal code that he enacted were combined with his silence about his

enlistment (#2) as well as fragments like his decision to ride his bike to training camp, his loyalty to the Cardinals (#s 29, 32), and his commitment to knowledge (#s 23, 24) to create characterizations that reinforced a belief that *Pat Tillman* was worthy of distinction.

The idea that Tillman shunned the trappings of the material world fit the characterization of a hero who admired the writing of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. In the words of Rand, “Tillman was as nonmaterialistic as he was patriotic” (41). According to Mike Towle, Tillman’s decision to ride his bike to his practices after he had made the NFL (#29), “wasn’t trying to send some counter-culture message. Those were the only wheels he had at his disposal” (87). The picture of Tillman weighted down by bags of athletic equipment trying to ride the bike made it into Valentine’s tribute video, The Biography Channel documentary, as well as Rand’s book. It became a symbol of Tillman’s resistance to the trappings of celebrity and his disdain for conformity. Towle went on to discuss how this philosophy translated into Tillman’s decision to remain with the Cardinals (#32) with Tillman’s own words: “‘I try not to make decisions based on money,’ said Tillman, whose frugality was evident in the Volvo station wagon he drove, his aversion to cell phones, and his living in a modest home in Chandler, a Phoenix suburb” (118).

Tillman’s interpersonal relationships also became more than just evidence of his loyalty; they were characterized as part of his commitment to remaining grounded. In the Pat Tillman Foundation biography, they applaud Tillman’s need to engage others through debate (#24). These pursuits are discussed as an attempt to better himself as well as those around him. In an interview for the Biography Channel documentary, friend and former teammate Jake Plummer talked about how:

I was going through a pretty tough time in my life, a pretty big change in my life, and he was on his way back to go fight in the war and he called me to see how I was doing. Right then I'm thinking, God what jerk I am. I should be calling him when he's home just to say Hi and see what's up with him, but that's just the kind of guy he was.

Interconnected to the loyalty shown by his willingness to take less money to remain a Cardinal and his marriage to his high school sweetheart, *Pat Tillman* was portrayed as being grounded and distinct from other celebrities through his interpersonal relationships. Jonathan Rand grouped together Tillman's career accomplishments with his willingness to sacrifice for others as a sign that "he was the real deal" (9). Characterizations of *Pat Tillman* that connected his interpersonal relationships with his intellectual pursuits helped to create a characterization of a person who was both distinct and common at the same time.

This characterization also followed Tillman into his military service. According to Jonathan Rand, "he declined not only interviews [#2] with the media but also the chance to cash in on book, television, and movie deals. He and his brother also made it clear they wanted no preferential treatment while in the military" (15). Mike Towle also wrote about Tillman decision "to not comment publicly on his rationale for leaving football to fight for Uncle Sam [#2]" (127). According to Towle, "He did this, we must conjecture, because he didn't want to be singled out for performing the same act of arms-bearing patriotism that millions of young men and women of his generation had been doing for years" (127). While Tillman did not seek out the fame that accompanied his decision to enlist (#1), he did stand out from other soldiers. As the narrator of the Biography Channel documentary declared:

To Pat, the soldiers in his platoon were his teammates. He encouraged one to pursue his ambition as an amateur poet and created a make-shift base library of classic novels, so his platoon mates would have literature to read and to discuss in

their down time. Like players throughout Pat's football career, the Rangers quickly grew to love and respect their comrade in arms.

Tillman was said to have wanted to blend in and become just another soldier, but these characterizations of *Pat Tillman* depict him as someone special just by singling him out as meriting a book, a film, or a foundation in his honor. This type of characterization was evident in Chris Valentine's use of the song "Renegades of Funk." To emphasize the message, Valentine flashes the lyrics across an image of Tillman running down the football field "Now renegades are the people with their own fill-las-O-fees [philosophies phonetically displayed across the screen]. They change the course of history," followed by the words "everyday people like you and me." These characterizations of *Pat Tillman* reinforced the belief that while Pat Tillman may have wanted to blend in, that desire was part of what made him so unique.

Moving Forward with His Memory

In reaction to Tillman's death, Arizona Congressman J. D. Hayworth stated, "He chose action rather than words. He just wanted to serve his country. He was a remarkable person. He lived the American Dream, and he fought to preserve the American Dream and our way of life" (cited in DeFalco 2004, para. 22). Hayworth's statement that Pat Tillman both "lived the American Dream" and "fought to preserve the American Dream" highlights how the discursive *Pat Tillman* was characterized as both an exemplification and an affirmation of the American Dream. His interconnection of Tillman's decisions to choose "actions rather than words" or "serve his country" with the American Dream recasts the life of an individual in terms of the story of a nation in ways that both distorted the life of Pat Tillman and reconfigured the nature of the American Dream. The death of Pat Tillman while serving his nation allowed discourse producers who chose to

characterize *Pat Tillman* as an exemplification of the American Dream to create a dream distinct from the typical story because it addressed one fundamental question: How does an individual's dream represent a nation?

These stories of *Pat Tillman* represent an American Dream that was connected to service to the nation. The American Dream is a distinct and recognizable way to tell the stories of individuals who have achieved greatness or done great things, and in so doing distorts their deeds to the point where their accomplishments come to represent a brand of individualism that is a reflection of the "opportunities" that are present in America. In these characterizations of *Pat Tillman*, however, the American Dream represents a commitment to a national ideology that requires sacrifice. In his book, Mike Towle wrote "the question becomes not why Tillman left football to join the army, but why there haven't been more like him" (128). Chris Valentine cautions that "This life is more than a read through, live it like Pat." In the Biography Channel documentary, Tillman's life long friend Brian Willis can be seen saying "Pat had the patriotism in his heart and when the time came to arise to show that patriotism, he stepped up to the plate." The Tillman Foundation purports to be promoting the type of life Pat Tillman led. The ways that *Pat Tillman* was characterized promoted a version of the American Dream requires individuals to see their dreams as a product of a nation that is in need of defending. The American Dream celebrates the individual person as a lone hero-citizen while masking the roles of good fortune, personal assistance, and even relationships with others. It does so by framing the successes of individuals as expressions of national ideals while reinforcing the idea that the fate of an individual is theirs alone to determine. By framing *Pat Tillman* as a characterization of the American Dream, it adds service to the vision of the dream and makes it a product of sacrifice.

Cal Jillson called the American Dream “the spark that animates American life” (2004, 7) and part of that belief comes from the use of the stories of heroes as exemplifications a tale that is unique to the United States. Through individual characterizations, the American Dream is reinvigorated. Because opportunity exists external to the individual in the story, the narrative of the dream focuses on the work required to accomplish it. The clichéd sense that individuals must “pull themselves up by their boot straps” has come to represent the idea that individuals alone are responsible for their fate. As Associated Press reporter Ron Fournier said about Tillman, “The Lord creates men and women like this all over the world. But only the great and free countries allow them to flourish” (Linkins 2008). The idea that America allows great men and women to flourish gives America a persona and a role to play in the lives of its citizens. The protagonist in these stories acts as a reminder of this shared vision of America, one rooted in the traditions that have been cultivated since it was colonized (Cullen 2003; Jillson 2004). The narrative of the American Dream is a romantic vision of the nation through narrativizing ideas like “opportunity,” “individuality,” and “hard work.” It is a narrative that perpetuates the ideals of the nation through its continual discursive representations in biographies of individuals, especially when those biographies represent someone who was willing to die to protect them.

Afterword

In a 2009 episode of the television drama *NCIS: Los Angeles* (CBS), Special Agent Sam Hanna (portrayed by actor and hip-hop artist LL Cool J) explained why a wealthy businessman would decide to join the military after 9/11, “the same reason Pat Tillman left the NFL to join the Army: Patriotism.” In contrast, during an episode of the Showtime program *Weeds*, character Andy Botwin (portrayed by Justin Kirk) claims that he is being hunted down by the U.S. military just like Pat Tillman (Showtime 2007). In the world of politics, Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal was questioned about his role in the cover-up during the confirmation hearings for his appointment to take over as the commander of the U.S. and NATO troops fighting in Afghanistan (ESPN.com 2009).¹ During his testimony, McChrystal called awarding Tillman the Silver Star and signing off on the official account a “mistake” but claimed, “I didn’t see any activity by anyone to deceive” (Bronstein 2009). In an article for *The Nation*, David Zirin responded to the nomination by stating that Tillman “may not have known what he was fighting for, but it’s now clear what he died for: public relations. Today, after five years, six investigations and two Congressional hearings, questions still linger about how Tillman died and why it was covered up” (2009, para. 1). In 2010, filmmaker Amir Bar-Lev brought renewed focus to discussions of how Tillman died with his celebrated documentary, *The Tillman Story*, that was promoted using the tagline “a mystery, a cover up, a crime, one family will risk everything for the truth.” While much has changed, the reach of *Pat Tillman* as a discourse formation in U.S. culture persists to this day.

¹ The now infamous McChrystal was confirmed to that position, but later resigned after making embarrassing public comments about how President Obama and the White House was approaching the conflict (Hastings 2010).

For me, this project began as an attempt to understand the completely textual existence of *Pat Tillman* and evolved into so much more. As a contribution to the study of how the lives of individuals are employed as representations or symbols, I believe that this study represents a distinct approach to how lives become textualized. This project began with a discussion of the differing ways in which critics have approached the examination of characters, but what becomes clear as one begins to familiarize oneself with *Pat Tillman* is that the name has come to represent so much more than a person. The discursive *Pat Tillman* can simultaneously represent both a hero and a scandal, but does not stop there. In order to grapple with the diversity of perspectives on *Pat Tillman*, I employed an approach that allowed me to critique both how a discourse producer creates a specific characterization and how that characterization represents a contribution to the textualized existence of a person. I chose to employ Foucault's (1972) notion of a discourse formation as a means to examine this discursive entity as a chorus of voices that each contributed to or commented on that discursive existence. Discourse producers who produced texts that invoked the life and death of Pat Tillman engaged in the creation of a characterization that contributed to that discourse formation.

The formation must be viewed as a textualized entity in the broadest sense: *Pat Tillman* was just as easily characterized through an image as through a speech, but *Pat Tillman* only existed in textualized forms. These characterizations were connected by their use of particular facts, stories, and images that I discuss as an example of what Michael Calvin McGee (1990) referred to as fragments. As I discussed in the introduction, seeing characterizations as "fragmented" (i.e., Baty 1995; Parry-Giles 1996) is not revolutionary, but by attempting to account for those fragments, I have been able to analyze how they have been used as the material to characterize a life. The fragments of

Pat Tillman functioned as bits of discourse that were continually reshaped and reformed by those who sought to create characterizations as a means to comment on issues ranging from the contemporary notion of heroism to specific policies of the Bush administration. This type of approach provides the critic with the tools to examine how that life was turned into text by distinct discourse producers who often created divergent perspectives on that life.

The breadth of commentaries that were the subject of this project were not only distinct in perspective, but varied in format. In the introduction to his book on *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins wrote about a world “where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (2006, 2). I have attempted to make those unpredictable ways more predictable by showing how these fragments were employed by both traditional and nontraditional media. There should be no doubt that the scope of this project was vast. By looking into *Pat Tillman* characterizations that ranged from national news reports to personal blogs, I have sought to account for how a range of voices contributed to the formation. These characterizations became a means for an interaction that spanned across forms of mediation and was accessible to a variety of audiences.

Theoretically, I believe that this dissertation represents a first step in the examination of the relationship between discourse formations, characterizations, and fragments that will continue to evolve. To begin with, much of Foucault’s discussion of discourse formations is left out of my analysis. Down the line, I believe that Foucault’s conceptions of unities (1972, 21–30) and objects (40–49) would be especially helpful for understanding how specific themes were developed in these characterizations. McGee

discusses structural relationships of fragments (280–282) that might allow critics to go deeper in their analysis of how particular fragments are represented. It might also be helpful to examine how a particular fragment was changed or reshaped through its mediation, therefore examining a discursive convergence that engages the role of mediation in the crafting of certain fragments. These tasks are made possible by a belief that rhetorical characterizations exist as accumulations of fragments that can be accounted for in discourse producers' finished texts. My examination of *Pat Tillman* represents a beginning, but I could not even hope to comment on all the different dimensions of the ways in which just *Pat Tillman* has been characterized.

Instead, I have provided a critical examination of the ways in which *Pat Tillman* allowed discourse producers to create characterizations of heroism, masculinity, and the American Dream. It is nearly impossible to find a *Pat Tillman* characterization that is not in some way connected to at least one of these ideas, but what is also intriguing is how these characterizations brought these three constructs together. One such examination, writer Jon Krakauer's (2009d) *Where Men Win Glory: The Odyssey of Pat Tillman* presented a new characterization of *Pat Tillman* complete with excerpts from Tillman's personal diaries and new interviews with friends and family. In this book, Krakauer presented Tillman's life as entangled with the cultural and historical forces that continue to influence public perceptions of Pat Tillman. In the first week after its release, Krakauer's book became a New York Times Best Seller and Krakauer himself was interviewed on Comedy Central's *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (2009c), NBC's *Meet the Press* (2009b), and on CNN's *The Situation Room* (2009a). This book represented another Tillman biography that used gendered discourse to characterize *Pat Tillman* as an American hero.

Krakauer's book is another instance in which the life and death of Pat Tillman was used to create a characterization of *Pat Tillman*; in fact, I would argue that his book should be more aptly considered *The Odyssey of Pat Tillman*. Krakauer treats his version as a context for discussing war, philosophy, and politics, but equally as important is his extension of the connection between *Pat Tillman* and ideologies of heroism, masculinity, and the American Dream. Krakauer ties together these ideas as a part of the lessons that can be learned from Tillman's story:

Because Tillman's story conforms in some regards to the classic narrative of the tragic hero, and the protagonist of such a tale always possesses a tragic flaw, it might be tempting to regard Tillman's resounding alpha maleness as his Achilles' heel, the trait that ultimately led to his death.

A compelling argument can be made, however, that the sad end he met in Afghanistan was more accurately a function of his stubborn idealism – his insistence on trying to do the right thing. In which case it wasn't a tragic flaw that brought Tillman down, but a tragic virtue. (344)

In this conclusion, Krakauer rebels against the notion of Pat Tillman as a "tragic hero," instead creating a characterization of *Pat Tillman* that links together idealism with "alpha maleness." Krakauer describes this idealism as something "Archetypically American" (343), a description that reinforces the narrative that he has put together. Once again, in this biography, the influence of the American Dream can be seen in descriptions like those of how Tillman overcame the fact that "he was small for his age" (4) and "learned to trust in himself and be unafraid to buck the herd" (16). Through an examination of Krakauer's descriptions of how and why Pat Tillman was able to succeed in the NFL, one can identify the tale of a person who took advantage of the opportunities that were afforded him, showed the hard work and dedication that mark the agency to succeed, and enacted a personal code that led him to success. Krakauer summed up that story as something both American and masculine. The heroic alpha maleness that Krakauer

describes represents an extension of the relationship between *Pat Tillman* and the ideological discourses of heroism, masculinity, and the American Dream.

As Krakauer's book shows, the role of *Pat Tillman* as a discourse formation commenting on issues of heroism, masculinity, and the American Dream persists even without Pat Tillman. While continuing to provide a basis for interpretations, the life and death of Pat Tillman have been subsumed into the discursive existence of *Pat Tillman*. *Pat Tillman* is not the same as it was the day Pat Tillman enlisted in the military or even the day he died, but many of these same fragments remain. Pat Tillman was a person, an athlete, a celebrity, and a soldier; but *Pat Tillman* is a hero. Pat Tillman was a man; but *Pat Tillman* is masculine. Pat Tillman lived a life; however, the story of *Pat Tillman* is a tale of an American Dream. *Pat Tillman* represents a discourse formation that continues to be shaped by the characterizations that were produced in response to Pat Tillman's life, but those characterizations represent contributions to a discourse formation that has established regularities.

My journey to understand the relationship between fragment, ideology, and person and the influence they have on one another has strengthened my understanding of the interconnectedness of discourse. What emerges out of this detailed examination of the discursive formation *Pat Tillman* is that the use of particular facts, stories, and images of a person's life as the material for public characterizations creates a discursive existence that forms its own rules and associations. Those rules and associations are built based on connections to other discourse formations that allow people to manage information that is being circulated. Pat Tillman was not just characterized as a hero. He was characterized as hero for an act of patriotism in the wake of a terrible national tragedy. He was not just characterized as masculine. He was characterized as masculine in an era where masculine

saviors were shown rushing into a building to save victims of a disaster on live television instead of just scoring touchdowns. Pat Tillman did not just live out his dreams. He gave up his dreams to defend ours. Each of these ideologies also has its own past that is negotiated in the present through how it is characterized by *Pat Tillman*. They also functioned as discourse formations that were enacted by how discourse producers created their characterizations. The confluence of context and ideology together helped to shape *Pat Tillman* and revealed that discourse formations are public, fragmented, ideological, and ever evolving.

Moving forward from this analysis, we must begin to see that this is not an isolated phenomenon. Beyond just what this study reveals about discursive characterization and *Pat Tillman*, it also shows how interconnected heroism, masculinity, and the American Dream are. The belief in work and dedication, essential to stories of the American Dream, is reinforced by reproductions of hero stories that focus on an individual's journey as distinct from a community and the individuality that is ascribed to masculinity. Gendered discussions of power are reinforced by the veneration of masculinity as heroic and the characterization of success using values that are deemed masculine. These three ideologies are interconnected by more than just *Pat Tillman*; together they perpetuate discursive practices used to reshape the lives of individuals into affirmations. Acknowledging public characterizations as contributions to a discourse formation means embracing the fact that they have ideological implications. This type of analysis can allow for some important insights into how public figures come to structure public understandings.

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