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The Noble Cause Corruption of Frank Castle

Aryeh Halevy
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Jonathon A. Cooper, PhD
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Abstract

The use of comic books in scholarly research is a relatively recent phenomenon. Though often understudied, comic books can also be successfully examined as a way of better understanding the contemporary/dominant zeitgeists of American culture. This is especially true given the proliferation of comic books into mainstream television and film over the last ten years. In this study, our interest is the perceptions of justice, specifically ends-justify-the-means justice, as theorized by Crank and Caldero (2000) in their discussion of "noble cause corruption." To this end, we consider images of noble cause corruption as seen through the lens of Marvel Comic's grittiest vigilante: The Punisher.

Introduction

Our goal in this study is to better understand popular notions of noble cause corruption through a specific medium, namely: comics and graphic novels. *Noble cause corruption* is achieving licit goals via illicit behavior. The term itself was coined in the late 1980's by DeLattre (1989) in his volume *Character and Cops: Ethics in Policing* (now in its sixth edition), but popularized in policing literature by the work of Crank and Caldero (2000). The ideas undergirding noble cause corruption were first described by Hopkins (1931) early in the 20th century, but most clearly expressed by Klockars (1980) in his seminal article "The Dirty Harry Problem", where he employed imagery from the fictional Detective Calhoun to

discuss the nature and etiology of noble cause corruption. Klockars explained the “Dirty Harry Problem” as being a moral dilemma: the police officer wants to achieve a good and noble end, but the constitutional constraints of procedural justice can impede this goal. For example: When Calhoun illegally enters the suspected serial killer Scorpio’s dwelling, shoots him, and then tortures him until he reveals information about a missing girl’s location – all to find the missing girl. When the ends become so noble that they are compelling and unquestionable, an officer may opt to forgo due process. This behavior is therefore *corrupt* in the sense that procedural safeguards are being ignored; but it is also noble in the sense that it is moral. Expressions of noble cause corruption can be seemingly small (eg., claiming evidence is in “plain view” after dumping out the contents of a suspect’s backpack), larger (eg., committing perjury), to very serious and egregious (eg., planting evidence).

To date, there is very little research on noble cause corruption, in part because researchers are using disparate methodologies to study this concept without necessarily maintaining a scholarly dialog. Thus, there are philosophical dialogs (Kleinig, 2002; DeLattre, 2006), policy-oriented studies (Harrison, 1999; Punch, 2000; Sunahara, 2004); anecdotal observations (Miller, 1999); and tentative attempts at quantifying noble cause corruption (Porter and Warrender, 2009). While authors may acknowledge one another, we have yet to see a “unifying theory” of noble cause corruption (Cooper, 2012). Our study does not attempt to provide such a unifying theory; rather, we propose to “return to basics” and, in the spirit of Klockars, employ cultural imagery to re-evaluate what noble cause corruption is, how it is perceived, and why it matters.

Police corruption, in general, is a popular topic for cultural imagery, particularly in media. From the less-than-noble cause corruption in *Serpico* and *Princes of the City* to the occasionally noble cause corruption in *The Wire* (Cooper & Bolen, 2013), civilians are awash in images of “cops behaving badly” – even if for a “good reason.” Such media serve to both communicate and inculcate messages about the administration of justice. Whereas most will agree that the behavior of the NYPD as depicted in both *Serpico* and *Princes of the City* is despicable, some of the behavior of the police in *The Wire*, while cringe-worthy, may still be laudable. Thus, the entire series *The Wire* revolves – eventually – around a wiretap illegally obtained by the officers to arrest a violent drug dealer. Such moral ambiguity speaks to viewers. For example, Sykes (1986) discussed noble cause corruption in terms of “street justice”, which he defined as the “informal distributive and retributive justice in situations where individuals violated community norms and impinged on the personal and property rights of others” (p. 497). In this same article, Sykes supported this sort of street justice, going so far as to express the hope for more officers with the moral fortitude to engage in what one might call “soft” noble cause corruption. Although Sykes’s article was not met with silence or strong support from within the academy (cf. Klockar’s opposing response in the same issue of *Justice Quarterly*), his romantic view of the police as defenders of the innocent “at all costs” may resonate at a societal level.

Our study reconsiders such images of noble cause corruption with an appeal to cultural criminology. Specifically: we observe comics taken from *The Punisher* series to analyze behavior characteristic of noble cause corruption in light of contemporary literature and theory. In doing so, our study follows a methodological path laid down by Klockars (1980), and revisits an incomplete discussion on a specific form of police behavior.

Literature Review

Comics and Crime and Justice

The idea of using comic books as a research site for criminologists is relatively recent. According to Ferrell (1999), the use of comics in such a manner falls under the banner of cultural criminology. According to Ferrell, the purpose of cultural criminology is to explore, through various intellectual pathways, “the convergence of cultural and criminal processes in contemporary social life. More broadly, the notion of cultural criminology references the increasing analytic attention that many criminologists now give to popular culture constructions, and especially mass media constructions, of crime and control” (pp. 395-396). This approach can apply to various forms of popular media portrayals of crime, such as newspapers, television shows, movies, and comic books. In doing so, cultural criminology not only addresses these cultural artifacts, which are often overlooked by mainstream scholars as serious academic pursuits, but also attempts to place them “at the heart of criminological inquiry” (Bevier, 2015; Ferrell, Hayward and Young, 2008, p. 158). Granted, the ideology behind of cultural criminology lacks structural cohesiveness, but, as Bevier (2015) indicates, this lack of cohesion was purposely done in order to keep the field of cultural criminology open “for continued theoretical and methodological engagement” (Bevier, 2015, p. 45). Indeed, through this theoretical and methodological openness, comic books can provide a wealth of scholarly information, especially on the subcultural, symbolic, and news media characterizations of crime and justice (Ferrell, 1999). Thus, in examining comic books, specifically *The Punisher* comic books, through a cultural criminological lens, we are attempting to understand how this particular cultural medium promotes the argument to their readers that engaging in illicit behaviors for the sake of justice is acceptable.

In one of the earliest studies on comic books from a cultural criminology framework, Vollum and Adkinson (2003) examined how crime and justice are portrayed in the fictional worlds of two superheroes, Batman and Superman, and how those portrayals reflect crime and justice in America. Originating in the late 1930s during a post-Depression America, Batman and Superman both reflect the realism of urban crime and the American ideal of justice, a trend that has remained consistent even after decades of character development. In their work, Vollum and Adkinson (2003) point out that even though the worlds of both heroes maintain a similar social structure (e.g., both heroes live in and protect major metropolitan cities and each is *the* champion for justice in their city), the types of crime both Superman and Batman fight, as well as their crime fighting methods, are drastically different from one another. For example, Superman is more likely to fight villains or outsiders, such as space aliens, while Batman is more likely to fight thugs, organized criminals, and super-villains who are the products of Gotham City. In addition, Superman is willing to fight alongside the law, advocating the optimism of one’s faith in the American criminal justice system, while Batman distrusts the police and willingly breaks the law in order to enforce his own values of what he considers “justice”. In spite of their differences, Batman and Superman are perceived as champions of justice for the common folk as they fight against a large variety of criminal forces. What’s more, both superhero franchises strongly advocate law and order and argue implicitly that those who break the law must be punished. Thus, regardless of their individual motives or methods, Batman and Superman fight for the traditionally conservative *status quo* since good must inevitably triumph over evil (Vollum & Adkinson, 2003).

Similarly, Phillips and Strobl (2006; 2013) also explore the realm of fictional superheroes and vigilantes from the viewpoint of cultural criminology. In essence, the authors broadly explored some of the hidden cultural and subcultural meanings and symbolism found in numerous comic books and graphic novels in terms of how they portray crime and justice as well as how those portrayals contribute to the use of vigilante violence

as a means of fighting crime and enforcing justice. Across their works, Phillips and Strobl (2006; 2013) found that the use of extra-legal force through vigilantism is a justified method of enforcing justice since the “legitimate authorities” (i.e., the police and the courts) as they are perceived in comic books and graphic novels are often portrayed as either ineffective or corrupt in their attempts to enforce law and order through normal means. In fact, they argue that some heroes are willing to go so far as to kill in the name of justice based on whether or not they (the recipients of a hero’s violent actions) meet a hero’s particular standards for being considered “death worthy”. This aspect of comic book research is particularly salient as it relates to our focus on noble cause corruption and will be discussed presently.

Following this vein of cultural criminological research into comic books, Stoddart (2006) examined drug use in comic books as they relate to certain “hardcore” drugs such as heroin and cocaine. Stoddart also explored the role of the drug dealer and the drug abuser. He found that heroin was the predominant illicit drug of choice in his comic book sample and that themes of *drug overdosing* and *withdrawal* were featured regularly as they related to drug addiction. In addition, Stoddart found that there is a distinct dichotomy between drug dealers (who are primarily white, aggressive, and predatory villains) and drug users (who are often multi-ethnic, poor, and portrayed as victims of the drug trade). The superhero vigilante of the comic book is featured as a way of stopping the drug trade. Ultimately, Stoddart (2006) concluded that the portrayal of drug use and abuse in comic books parallels the mass media portrayal of America’s ongoing war against the illegal drug trade.

Yet comic books did not always take such a realistic portrayal of drugs. In Adkinson’s (2008) seminal work, a case study approach was used on three separate issues of the comic book, *The Amazing Spider-Man*. Here, Adkinson (2008) argued for the importance of cultural criminology in how various popular media formats (in this instance, comic books) serve as a way to interpret and transmit information to the general public regarding societal perceptions of crime and justice. In particular, Adkinson explains how the Comic Code Authority (CCA), an organization concerned about how crime, criminals, heroes, and law enforcement officers are portrayed in comic books, largely censored how crime and illegal drug use is portrayed in fictional comic books when compared to crime and drug use in real life. However, in issues 96, 97, and 98 of *The Amazing Spider-Man*, the antiquated nature of the CCA was exposed when the titular hero is put in the center of a story involving substance abuse (Adkinson, 2008). Specifically, Spider-Man helps rescue a young African American male from overdosing and confronts a drug dealer who sold to his best friend, Harry Osborn, hallucinogenic drugs. Afterwards, Spider-Man confronts his arch-nemesis, the Green Goblin, who is also Norman Osborne, Harry’s father, about Harry’s drug problem. While this storyline was initially rejected by the CCA due to its graphic and complex representation of the physical and emotional damage that drug abuse causes, it was nevertheless published without the CCA’s approval. These three issues sold extremely well in comic book stores and prompted a revision of the CCA’s standards to allow for more accurate portrayals of crime, law enforcement, and drugs in comic books in order to reflect the intricacies of real life (Adkinson, 2008). However, it should be noted that while the CCA is now obsolete, the revisions to their portrayal standards were instrumental in changing how the general public viewed the complexities of crime in comics. Indeed, if not for these revisions, the world would never have been introduced to the Punisher, who, incidentally, was introduced in *The Amazing Spider-Man* just three years after the CCA revisions (Adkinson, 2008).

Similarly, there is Garland, Branch, and Grimes’s (2015) work on the reinforcement of cultural rape myths in comic books. Using a convenience sample of several popular comic book storylines, Garland and colleagues (2015) analyzed numerous comic depictions of rape. What they found was that the comic books they examined generally reinforced negative cultural stereotypes concerning rape myths, centered especially on victim blaming. The authors suggested that the graphic images and stories portrayed in these comic books could

be internalized by the (predominantly) male reader to mean that it is acceptable to engage in sexually-aggressive behaviors that lead to rape. In addition, the perpetrators of these rapes are often portrayed as mentally unstable individuals who cannot control their sexual urges, which sends the wrong message about what rapists in real life are like. Thus, comic books present a very narrow definition of rape that could be interpreted the wrong way by impressionable male. However, the authors are quick to indicate that the actual effects of such material on the minds of the readers remain unknown (Garland et al., 2015).

Finally, there is the work of Scully and Mooreman (2014) to consider. Here, the authors examined several mainstream comic books from the 1980s that address vigilante themes that also reflected public attitudes towards vigilantism at the time. Specifically, the authors looked at the comic book series *Vigilante*, *Punisher*, and *Green Arrow* as reflections of the public's growing fear over rising violent crime rates and one's willingness to resort to vigilantism in order to combat crime. For each comic book series, they found a different interpretation of vigilante justice as it relates to the public's mindset (Scully and Mooreman, 2014). For the series *Vigilante*, the titular character serves as an example of the dark side of vigilantism in how the Vigilante kills criminals who escape prosecution, yet the Vigilante struggles with the morality of his actions to the point where he kills himself out of guilt. In this sense, the Vigilante reflects the moral quandary many Americans at the time were facing: "Was it better to trust in the legal system, with all of its faults, or were the citizens the ones who would ultimately set society straight" (Scully and Mooreman, 2014, p. 644)? The Punisher, while like the Vigilante in that he also kills criminals, does not face any moral or ethical difficulties in doing so. Rather, his methods are quick, brutal, and indicative of an attitude of 'fighting back' against the criminal element that many Americans in the 1980s held. He does not feel sorrow or remorse for his actions. Finally, the authors point out that the Green Arrow, a super hero with a Robin Hood persona who uses trick arrows, was a more relaxed vigilante who rarely employed lethal methods in order to ensure justice was carried out. In this sense, the character of the Green Arrow was meant to suggest that one does not to be dark or brooding to become a vigilante. Ultimately, all of these characters, while originating in different decades, were reimagined in the 1980s in a cultural climate of fear and anger so that they reflected the general public's desire and acceptance for a harsher brand of justice (Scully and Mooreman, 2014).

While the character of the Punisher is briefly mentioned in some of these works, he is not given any in-depth examination. Nor was there any specific mention of noble cause corruption by name in any of the above literature. However, it is clear that the cultural significance of comic books and the messages they convey about standing notions of crime and justice make them a worthy subject of criminological study. In particular, the idea of examining comic book characters through the lens of cultural criminology with regards to themes and subtext by way of content analysis and narrative analysis were essential to almost every scholarly work examined. It is with this perspective in mind in which the Punisher will be examined.

The Punisher and Noble Cause Corruption

Originally debuting as an occasional foe and sometime-ally for Marvel's Spider-Man in 1974 (supposedly inspired by the Charles Bronson film *Death Wish* (p. 216)), the Punisher acquired enough popularity with comic book fans that he was given his own series in the 1980's (Morrison, 2011). The Punisher is the alter ego of Frank Castle, who was once an average American family man. He had a career as a decorated captain of the U.S. Marine Corps, a loving wife, and two children. While picnicking in Central Park, The Castles accidentally stumbled onto a mob execution; consequently, the mob gun down Frank and his family, thus eliminating any witnesses. While Frank miraculously survives the slaughter, the rest of his family was not so lucky. The police are unable to bring the mob to justice, leaving

Frank believing that the criminal justice system is ineffective. In response, he decides to take matters into his own hands by going outside the law through the use of vigilante violence in order to punish the men responsible for his family's deaths. With his considerable experience as a Vietnam war veteran and an arsenal of state-of-the-art weapons at his disposal, Frank dons a skull-faced outfit and launches a one-man war against crime as the Punisher (Abnett, Lanning, and Eaglesham, 1994; Goodwin, Dezuniga, & Rival, 1977).

Yet, even after killing all the mobsters responsible for his family's deaths, the Punisher continues to pursue and kill any and all criminals involved in organized crime, in addition to street crime. He is driven by a sense that killing the mobsters – and other criminals – will never be enough to avenge his family's death (Goodwin et al., 1977). Even so, the Punisher is not so naïve as to think that he can end all crime by himself. On the contrary, he is well aware that as time goes by, he will get progressively slower and that crime will always exist (Grant, Zeck, & Vosburg, 1986). But the Punisher will never stop for two main reasons: he is obsessed with ridding the world of crime and, by his own logic, if he dies in his pursuit of vengeance then he will have atoned for his failure to protect his family (Potts, 1988). The Punisher can therefore be understood as an embodiment of just desserts, and as an individual driven by an ideal and not by a bureaucratic or pragmatic duty. These themes are important in our analysis of the Punisher and noble cause corruption.

One of the core principles of noble cause corruption is that the end justifies the means (Crank & Caldero, 2000). Without a doubt, the Punisher clearly believes that the means of using lethal force is more than justified in order to both punish the guilty and protect the innocent (i.e. the noble cause). Furthermore, while past noble cause corruption research focuses on noble cause corruption as it is used by police officers (see Cooper, 2011; Crank and Caldero, 2000; Klockars, 1980; or Muir, 1977 for further reading), it is important to bear in mind that, as stated earlier, the Punisher is *not* a police officer. Nor is he entirely a civilian either since, as Worcester (2012, p. 333) indicates, Frank “jettisoned his civilian identity” and immerses himself in his Punisher persona on a full-time basis in order to carry out his war against crime and enforce his own violent brand of justice. However, if police officers were to engage in noble cause corruption, they essentially become the Punisher themselves in their drive to act outside the law for the sake of pursuing justice. Moreover, from his first appearance to the present day, the Punisher purposely goes out of his way to make sure that he does not harm any police officers as he sees himself on the same side of justice as them.

Thus, our study considers the degree to which noble cause corruption is a dominant theme in Punisher comics. To that effect, we now turn to how we will examine noble cause corruption within the context of Punisher comics. We then present our results, and conclude with a discussion that contextualizes our findings in terms of the legitimacy of law enforcement and the classic due process model.

Methods

We employed narrative analysis in this study. Narrative analysis focuses on analyzing the structure of an overall story (Stokes, 2003). From a sociological standpoint, narrative analysis can be used to describe stories centered on whole groups, societies, and cultures (“Narrative Analysis”, 2008). However, it is certainly possible to extend such an analysis to cultural artifacts, such as television, movies, or comic books (Stokes, 2003). In examining a story's narrative, we are looking at how the ideology of a culture is presented to the target audience. Therein lies the greatest strength of narrative analysis. In this instance, we are examining how cultural ideology projects the notion of noble cause corruption onto the American *status quo*.

When using narrative analysis though, one must be careful not to get too involved in the story under analysis. In other words, one must not engage in the suspension of disbelief people normally fall into when enjoying a good story. Instead, one must separate themselves from being fully engrossed in the story in order to better dissect the structure of the story as it relates to the ideological concept under analysis (Stokes, 2003). This can usually be achieved through the use of effective tools such as functional analysis or discourse analysis.

Functional analysis is the process of identifying specific characters in the narrative and determining what their function is in relation to the rest of the narrative. Through their function, one is able to determine how the character of the narrative portrays the ideology of a culture. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, is when the researcher analyzes the structure of the story itself rather than looking at its individual characters (Stokes, 2003). Here, narrative analysis through the tool of functional analysis was used to examine the Punisher. We choose to utilize functional analysis rather than discourse analysis in our broader narrative analysis approach because functional analysis allows us to examine how the actions of stand-alone characters in our selected Punisher narratives, such as Frank Castle, are viewed within the context of noble cause corruption, which can then be tied back to the overarching narrative. In doing so, descriptive notes were used to document the overall plot of each story arc.

It should be noted though that our use of narrative analysis in conjunction with cultural criminology in this context is not that dissimilar from Aspden and Hayward's (2015) argument that narrative criminology is linked with cultural criminology. Specifically, narrative criminology examines how offenders construct their identities through a series of first-person narratives, which are used to "make sense of the world and their [the offenders'] surroundings" (Aspden and Hayward, 2015, p. 236). In this sense, narrative criminology and cultural criminology share an interest in the symbolic cultural artifacts left in the wake of an offender's actions, thereby providing insight into not only the life of the offender, but the nature of human behavior in general (Aspden and Hayward, 2015).

Within the context of the current study, the *Punisher* comic books we chose to examine reflect the type of first-person narrative as described in narrative criminology. That is because, while comic books are typically read from a third-person point of view, the *Punisher* comics examined here, as well as most comic books, utilize a special literary device known as caption boxes. Caption boxes are often used to show the reader the inner thoughts of the comic book protagonist (similar to an internal monologue) as the visual story unfolds, transforming the protagonist into the narrator of their own story. Thus, this study might serve as a prime example of the link between narrative criminology and cultural criminology.

Punisher Comic Inclusion Criteria

The number of comics associated with the Punisher precludes analyzing *all* comics in the franchise. Indeed, the Punisher, as with many comic book heroes, has undergone numerous character changes over the years, resulting in different versions of the character (e.g. a fascist-oriented Punisher in the series *Punisher 2099* or the Punisher in the *Secret Wars 2015* crossover event who possess the magical powers of Marvel's Doctor Strange) as well as slightly different origin stories (e.g. in the 2004 *Punisher* movie, Frank Castle was an FBI agent before his family was murdered). Regardless of variations both major and minor, all versions of the Punisher share the same willingness to engage in noble cause corruption using lethal measures. To this end, we narrowed our sample down to the following criteria: First, the comics came from the first *Punisher Max* series. We chose this particular series because the *Punisher Max* series provide a more restrictive comic universe, since comic universes tend to be extremely nebulous with flexible borders. That is, because the narratives and violence contained within the *Punisher Max* are more grounded in reality compared to the rest of the Punisher franchise, it presents a more believable foundation for

the Punisher's actions as he engages in noble cause corruption. This is because some of the series' narratives, as discussed below, address serious crimes and ethical issues that can — and do— occur in real life; thereby making them more relatable to readers. Furthermore, the *Punisher Max* series is the most recently completed series with the most issues from which we can draw a sizable sample at the time of this writing ($N=75$ issues with eight separate crossover stories). It is therefore both timely (and therefore more salient) and provides a broader sampling¹.

Second, The Punisher comics we examine must portray noble cause corruption in some manner. This portrayal can be seen in one of two ways. First, the Punisher comics we examined must feature some sort of monologue or dialogue in which the idea of the noble cause of justice justifies the use of violent means as the primary topic of conversation (either overtly or through subtext). While it was preferred that these separate characters be police officers or agents of a law enforcement agency in order to provide a proper foil for the Punisher's noble cause corruption ideology, this requirement was not mandatory; when law enforcement officers are not part of the dialog, we provide further justification for its inclusion. Secondly, characters had to show, at the bare minimum, a willingness to go above the law and kill another person (via shooting, stabbing, etc.) in their pursuit of what they consider to be justice. The Punisher, being by design especially violent, had to demonstrate, either through dialogue or action, a willingness to use extraordinarily violent means as a way of enforcing justice. To further qualify: For the Punisher himself, violence is the modus operandi. To distinguish between his "normal violence" and violence designed to procure a particular brand of justice he had to demonstrate a willingness to use brutally violent methods because he believes such methods were needed in order to ensure justice is carried out. In other words, the Punisher had to utilize tactics equivalent to torture.

Based on these criteria, we went through all 75 issues of the *Punisher Max* series, compiled together as fourteen separate trade back graphic novel volumes, in order to find those storylines that best dealt with instances of noble cause corruption as part of their narratives. Additionally, we excluded the crossover stories of this series in order to focus our analysis on the main storylines. Finally, we wanted to include a purposive sample of at least three story arcs from the main series in order to provide a sizable sample that represented the *Punisher Max* series as a whole. Subsequently, our analysis of the series revealed three story arcs ($n=19$ individual issues), as presented in their trade paperback formats, which met the above criteria. These story arcs are:

1. *Punisher Max Volume 1: In the Beginning* (issues #1-6)
2. *Punisher Max Volume 5: The Slavers* (issues # 25-30)
3. *Punisher Max Volume 8: Widowmaker* (issues # 43-49)

Noble Cause Corruption

As explained above, noble cause corruption applies to agents of the state, especially but not limited to law enforcement officers. This begs the question, how can we use Frank Castle, the Punisher, to explore social expressions of support for noble cause corruption. This is a fair criticism, but one that is ultimately a red herring. Our interest is in understanding how noble cause corruption is expressed in the comic book medium, using the Punisher franchise as a venue for this exploration. Superheroes have traditionally stood in as the embodiment of justice (Philips & Strobl, 2006). Indeed, *justice* is part of the Superman motto. Further, any iteration of Batman expresses a need and a desire for justice in one form or another. In this sense, then, these superheroes represent expectations of justice. This will bear out in our results and discussion below numerous times: Frank Castle is often an ersatz agent of the state. To this end, the comic franchise associated with the Punisher is a

reasonable and, we submit, useful venue for exploring how concepts such as crime control, due process, noble cause, and corruption are understood and expressed.

Results

In the Beginning

The first major story arc of the series, *In the Beginning*, is pivotal to the rest of the *Punisher Max* series for several reasons. First, its level of violence and political undertones help set the tone for the rest of the series to follow. Second, and more importantly, there are several instances of noble cause corruption present in this story arc that help complement the overall narrative. Additionally, these instances of noble cause corruption help the reader relate to the nature of the Punisher's character.

The overall plot of the arc is thus: The reader is given a brief overview of the Punisher's backstory via flashbacks before returning to the narrative's present, where the Punisher shoots and kills 42 mobsters during a mafia don's birthday party. Meanwhile, the Punisher is under CIA surveillance. The CIA is working with the Punisher's former ally, David Lieberman (variously called "Microchip" or simply "Micro"), to bring him in for reasons that are yet unknown to the reader. At the same time, the surviving members of the mafia bring in outside help from the notorious gangster Nicky Cavella, to help them rebuild their organization. However, before anything can be done, Cavella decides to take down the Punisher. The Punisher, meanwhile, has been captured by the CIA and is being held for questioning when Cavella storms the CIA's hotel base of operations, resulting in the Punisher's escape. A final showdown takes place between the mob and the Punisher at an isolated warehouse where Cavella escapes and the Punisher kills Microchip (Ennis, Larosa, & Palmer, 2013).

The first instance of noble cause corruption in this story arc comes shortly after the CIA captures the Punisher and they let Micro talk to him. Micro admits that he stopped helping Castle with his war on crime because the war will always go on and what they do will not make any difference. Furthermore, Micro accuses the Punisher of enjoying killing people and as using the deaths of his family as a flimsy excuse to justify his actions. At that point, Micro tells the Punisher that he believes there is some humanity left in him [the Punisher] and wants to provide Frank a way to leave the Punisher behind him. Specifically, Micro offers Frank the chance to hunt down terrorists and do some "real" good, rather than wasting time on small-time gangsters (Ennis et al., 2013).

Noble cause corruption becomes apparent here when Micro goes on to explain that Bethell, the CIA agent who wants Frank, needs the Punisher because if he tries to recruit assassins outside of the U.S. Armed Forces then he will end up before a senate subcommittee. Indeed, according to Micro, Bethell has no choice in this matter because he needs killers who do not "screw up" and he does not have the funding or the legal room to maneuver in order to get what he wants (Ennis et al., 2013). In this instance, the subtext of the narrative implies that the noble cause is hunting/killing terrorists while the Punisher is the means by which Bethell – and by extension the CIA – are supposed to achieve this cause. Stated otherwise, this rant implies that the goal of eliminating terrorists justifies the hiring of vicious killers for the sake of national security (i.e. protecting the *status quo*) without regard to either due process or the rules of engagement.

Frank's response introduces another instance of noble cause corruption: the Punisher refuses the offer, as he does not want to work for or with anyone since "eventually they let you down" (Ennis et al., 2013, p. 79). Additionally, the Punisher states that fighting for the people who run the world will get you "stabbed in the back" since the only "noble"

cause that one would be fighting and dying for is increased profit margins (Ennis et al., 2013, p. 79). To that effect, the Punisher, in a moment of acute irony, uses the Vietnam War as an example of how the end does *not* justify the means.

- Punisher: I'm not going back to war so Colt can sell another million M-16s. I had enough of that in Vietnam.
- Micro: That's not the way it is...!
- Punisher: There are sixty thousand guys in D.C. who'd say different. Except they can't say anything, because they're nothing but names on a black wall (Ennis et al, 2013, pp. 78-79).

The Punisher further presses the issue when he questions Micro about where Bethell gets his funding. After the final shootout, Micro tells the Punisher that Bethell's funding comes from Afghani heroin that is smuggled into the U.S. in the body bags of dead soldiers. Micro tries to justify the funding source by saying that he [Bethell] needed money that could not be traced back to paying for mercenary killers. Micro further argues that taking Bethell's money is no different than when the Punisher takes money from the mafia and that people will always want drugs. The Punisher counters that he kills the people he takes money from and that Micro has now joined the enemy (that is, he has become a criminal) in his willingness to participate in the heroin trade, even if it is in the name of national security. Afterwards, the Punisher kills Micro, just like does with any other criminal (Ennis et al., 2013).

The Slavers

The Slavers story arc is, without question, possibly the most brutal story arc in the entirety of the *Punisher Max* series. And this brutality ties-in with our search for instances of noble cause corruption. The story arc begins with the Punisher tracking a drug dealer in Brooklyn, NY. During his pursuit, the Punisher comes across a young woman who tries to kill the drug dealer first. After killing the dealer and rescuing her from his men, the Punisher brings the young woman, an Albanian immigrant named Viorica, back to his hideout after she tells him about how the drug dealer and others killed her baby. Her story leads the Punisher to seek out the slave traders who kidnapped her, killed her child, and forced her into prostitution. Meanwhile, the traffickers use a corrupt New York Police Department officer on their payroll, Detective Westin, to jumpstart a citywide Punisher manhunt by lying to the press that the Punisher brutally attacked two NYPD patrolmen. At the same time, the Punisher turns to a social worker, Jen Cooke, who specializes in sexual slavery cases, to provide him with information on the group he is now after. From there, the Punisher goes about systematically killing and torturing members of the slaver group in order to work his way up the group's hierarchy. Along the way, the Punisher meets with Jen Cooke and the two officers he has been accused of attacking; they offer him a deal that he can do what he like with the slavers, so long as they get to bring in the corrupt detective. After finally killing the head of the group, and dealing with the detective, the Punisher and everyone else go their separate ways (Ennis and Fernandez, 2011).

The first instance of noble cause corruption in this story arc comes from the NYPD. Specifically, when Detective Westin – the corrupt police officer - meets with a precinct captain, Captain Price, about getting the Punisher manhunt underway, Captain Price is reluctant to do so. This is because Captain Price, and many other NYPD officers, supports the Punisher's behavior partly because he makes life easier for the NYPD by keeping the criminal element frightened and because he always goes out of his way to ensure that no police officers or civilians are harmed. Eventually, though, Captain Price decides to start the manhunt because Westin introduces the idea that whoever brings in the Punisher will really

help their career along (a point we'll come back to in a little bit) (Ennis and Fernandez, 2011).

The desire to climb the career ladder is not corrupt. However, in stating this viewpoint, Captain Price is essentially saying that the Punisher is favored by the NYPD because he is unburdened by police procedures and is able to do what the police cannot do but want to do. That is, the police favor the Punisher because he is free to act however he likes in the noble cause of justice. This notion fits well with the general notion in noble cause corruption that there are times when unquestionably good officers are faced with the choice of crossing a legal line in the pursuit of justice. However, the Punisher circumvents the red tape in performing a sort of wish-fulfilling role in the stead of the police.

The next instance of noble cause corruption in this story line comes when the Punisher meets with Jen Cooke in order to gather information on the slavers. Initially reluctant, Jen talks herself into it; even though by doing this she believes she is going against her personal beliefs as they relate to due process. These beliefs conflict, however, with her desire to see the slavers receiving "real" justice. Jen goes on to explain how, through her research into human trafficking, she has become fed up with the evil of the world and wishes that she could cleanse the world of its evil.

Yet, the Punisher is quick to tell Jen that she should not hold any delusions in that what he's about to do will not stop the trafficking of women altogether, just this one group (Ennis and Fernandez, 2011). Later on, Jen explains to a police officer that she knows the Punisher's way of doing things would not help things in the long run. Instead, she just wanted him to end this specific slaver group because she was tired of not getting anything accomplished through her own work (Ennis and Fernandez, 2011). This scene is nearly identical to the discussion between Detective Westin and Captain Price in terms of how both Jen and the captain view the Punisher as a tool for fulfilling their own agendas that they could not otherwise accomplish because of legal red tape. In essence, Castle is their ersatz noble cause corruption made manifest.

Finally, torture permeates this story arc. While the Punisher, throughout his entire comic book run, has generally used threats of force to get information and serve the cause of justice, rarely does he resort to torture. Here though, we see three very graphic scenes of torture: the Punisher tortures one of the slaver group leaders by disemboweling him; he throws another leader against shatterproof glass repeatedly until the frame breaks and she falls several stories onto the street below; and he sets the main group leader on fire while he is still alive (Ennis and Fernandez, 2011). Such "over the top" torture is deliberate: the Punisher states he would have to resort to more brutal methods in order to garner information because of how hardened by the Serbian conflict the slavers in fact are (Ennis and Fernandez, 2011). These actions go beyond the Dirty Harry strategy, that is, torture for the sake of gaining information, and are employed additionally as a means to exact justice. The subtext of the dialogue and imagery in each torture scene suggests the Punisher is willing to use any means necessary in order to enforce the noble cause of justice.

Widowmaker

In this final story arc, the Punisher is not as featured as he is in the other two narratives discussed above. Instead, the central focus of this particular narrative is on five widows whose husbands were connected to organized crime. The Punisher killed each of the widows' husbands at one time or another. Gathering their resources, the widows decide to take down the Punisher for killing their husbands. Meanwhile, two separate subplots arise in the form of a mysterious woman who appears to bear a grudge towards the widows and Detective Paul Budiansky of the NYPD, a citywide hero for ending a school shooting on his own. Once the widows arrange a trap for the Punisher, in which one of the widows poses as a "damsel in distress", he is lured in and shot. Luckily, the mysterious woman, revealed to be

Jenny Cesare, sister to the leader of the widows, Annabelle Gorrini, saves the Punisher. From there, Detective Budiansky is brought in to investigate the shooting and slowly starts to connect the dots. Meanwhile, Jenny reveals to the Punisher how her sister and the other widows tricked her into marrying an abusive man (whom the Punisher eventually killed) and then tried to have her killed when she threatened to go to the FBI. Jenny exacts revenge by killing the other four widows (Ennis and Medina, 2012). While this particular narrative does not focus on noble cause corruption as heavily as the other two narratives, it deserves to be mentioned here because of the Detective Budiansky subplot. Specifically, how Detective Budiansky's actions, as an officer of the law, compare to the actions of the Punisher, a rogue vigilante, within the narrative context of noble cause corruption.

The first instance of noble cause corruption takes place once the reader is introduced to Detective Budiansky and we are given the details concerning the school shooting as he talks to a therapist. After responding to a report of a school shooting nearby, Detective Budiansky arrives at the scene but is told by his higher ups to hold his position and wait for tactical to arrive since they have the firepower. However, with two dead children on the front step and more shooting going on inside, Detective Budiansky decides to ignore his orders and heads inside. Eventually, Detective Budiansky confronts and kills the shooter (a teenage boy) (Ennis and Medina, 2012). However, while Detective Budiansky clearly states that he was not trying to be a "rogue" or "maverick" in stopping the shooter, his therapist thinks otherwise (Ennis and Medina, 2012, 35). To that effect, the two engage in a tit-for-tat about whether or not the detective was right in his actions:

Miss Gordon:	But you took it upon yourself to do their [the tactical units'] job.
Budiansky:	I already told you why.
Miss Gordon:	You decided: Only I, Paul Budiansky, can do this thing. In your mind, your judgment superseded ordinary protocol. The same judgment that deemed the life of a child to be forfeit...the point remains that you held yourself above regular authority.
Budiansky	...It's not what I told myself. It's what I saw with my own eyes. My judgment was not--only I can do this. It was <i>someone has to</i> . And no one else will.

This dialogue presents perhaps the best example of a police officer exhibiting an "ends-justifying-the means" attitude within all three *Punisher Max* narratives. Indeed, Detective Budiansky's logic falls very much within the Punisher's own line of reasoning that the criminal justice system is ineffective and that sometimes, in order to ensure that the course of justice is carried out unimpeded, one has to sometimes operate outside previously established laws, policies, and regulations. In fact, in the very next scene, Detective Budiansky discusses the shooting with his wife in terms of how easy it was to carry it out (eerily similar to the Punisher's own reminiscing about torturing the slavers with ease). In addition, he wonders out loud if what he did was not that different from what the Punisher does on a regular basis. To which Budiansky's wife reassures him that his is nothing like the Punisher (Ennis and Medina, 2012, p. 40), suggesting that Budiansky has a conscious that, apparently, the Punisher lacks.

Throughout the rest of the story arc, the Punisher and Budiansky's respective narratives converge at different moments in ways that are nearly identical to each other in terms of how they portray similar noble cause corruption viewpoints. For instance, when talking with Jenny about whether or not he is acting out of revenge, the Punisher simply states that he lives so that he can do what has to be done without regard to the rules; this mirrors Budiansky's sentiments about doing what has to be done since no one else will do it.

Furthermore, after Budiansky's wife is shot by a criminal who was hired by the widows to kill Budiansky once he got too close to discovering the truth of their conspiracy, the Punisher overtly sympathizes with him. (Ennis and Medina, 2012). Ultimately, the parallel narratives between Budiansky and the Punisher come to a head at the end of the story arc when the detective runs into the Punisher after tracking down the widow group leader, Annabelle, to Jenny's apartment. Here, Budiansky threatens to shoot the Punisher if he does not tell him where Annabelle is because he is looking for justice for his wife and claims to be "too far gone to care" about killing someone (Ennis and Medina, 2012, p. 161). To this, the Punisher simply asks Budiansky: "You want to be me?", causing the detective to stop as he realizes that his wife was right, he's nothing like the Punisher (Ennis and Medina, 2012, p. 161). Nevertheless, the parallels between the detective and the Punisher are important insofar as they tell us something about what Frank Castle stands for: a noble cause that uses any means necessary to be achieved. Although Frank is a private actor, his actions, which are mirrored in that of the detective, indicate that he [the Punisher], indeed, is a metaphorical "stand in" that speaks volumes about what we'd like our state actors to do, or, in the language of Klockars (1980), it speaks volumes about the kind of moral fortitude many would like to see in our law enforcement officers. It is to a detailed discussion of this and other ideas that we now turn.

Discussion and Analysis

Each story arc conveys the message that *noble cause corruption* is desirable not only by the Punisher and the story arc's supporting characters, but by society as well. For *In The Beginning*, there were at least three separate occurrences of noble cause corruption. While these instances were few, they were all particularly insightful not only on how the Punisher demonstrates noble cause corruption in his own right, but also how a government can demonstrate it. Indeed, the underlying message throughout this story arc is that the U.S. government is trying to justify their willingness to resort to unsavory, if not criminal, means in order to achieve total victory in the 'war on terror'. To cement this point, near the end of the arc, Bethell gives a mini-tirade about how he needs the Punisher – or some *ad hoc* killer - to eliminate terrorists, a job given to Bethell by his government superiors. But the job was rendered impossible by a multitude of procedural rules he was forced to follow (Ennis et al., 2013). However, the Punisher's conversations with Microchip in the later part of the story arc can be seen as a reflection of the mindset of Americans who believe that such tactics, which are supposedly done in the name of national security, are not worth the effort because they only benefit the people behind the scenes rather than the status quo. To that effect, it is worth noting that the heroin angle in this story runs parallel to real life allegations of the CIA trafficking in narcotics during the Iran-Contra affair and even more recently during the war in Afghanistan (Grim, 2011; Martin, 2014). Thus, the examination of noble cause corruption in this instance suggests serious political undertones, which go far beyond the local police infrastructure discussed in past literature; we expand on this observation below.

We also see noble cause corruption used as justification for the application of aggressive interrogation (read: torture) techniques in the Punisher's use of torture on the three human trafficking group leaders. Here, the graphic imagery and supporting dialogue clearly sends the message that the use of torture tactics, when necessary, is acceptable in the pursuit of justice. However, based on the Punisher's logic mentioned earlier, as well as the nature of the crimes committed by the traffickers, the subtext in this story arc suggests that torture should be reserved only for particularly heinous crimes and criminals, or else we would see far more instances of it within the *Punisher Max* series. That is, the theme of noble cause corruption as justification for torture in *The Slavers* could be viewed as a possible argument in favor of using torture tactics on certain real life criminals deserving of it, as indeed it often is (see below).

This is reminiscent of Phillips and Strobl (2013), who indicated in their work that fictional vigilantes, especially superhero vigilantes, are granted the luxury of not having to worry about due process when a greater evil is at hand, so they are able to do “what has to be done” in order to save society, even if it means going against some of their moral principles and violating a few individuals’ civil rights (i.e., noble cause corruption). Granted, Phillips and Strobl (2013) spend more time focusing on super-powered, unrealistic heroes such as Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman, along with the many fantastical threats they face on a regular basis, from ancient gods to alien invaders, rather than heroes without any superpowers such as the Punisher. Still, their point stands when they indicate that the use of torture in popular culture media could be seen as a reflection of how torture is used by the U.S. government in real, society-threatening situations (Phillips and Strobl, 2013, p. 125).

Lastly, in *Widowmaker*, noble cause corruption again remains the dominant theme throughout the story arc. However, unlike *In the Beginning* and *The Slavers*, *Widowmaker* presents noble cause corruption in the context of a cautionary tale to readers regarding the fine line between noble cause corruption and strict vengeance. This view of noble cause corruption can be seen prominently in both Detective Budiansky and Jenny Cesare’s subplots as they revolve around the Punisher in the larger narrative. That is, as the story progresses, the reader sees both Budiansky and Jenny’s descent into sorrow, rage, and ultimately vengeance as they each desire to exact their fury upon the group of widows who harmed them and/or their loved ones. Both of these supporting characters reflect on how much they are like the Punisher, albeit in different ways: Budiansky’s reflections cause him to question the actions he took as a police officer and consider whether or not he is going down the same road as the Punisher. Jenny, on the other hand, openly admits that she and the Punisher share the same kind of pain in their souls but, rather than question her actions like Budiansky, embraces her connection to the Punisher to the point where she even dons the Punisher’s iconic black-and-white skull shirt and kills the widows herself. Additionally, by the end of the story arc, Budiansky decides that the end does *not* justify the means, as he does not want to become like the Punisher. By the opposite token, Jenny does what Budiansky cannot do by killing all the widows. However, she cannot bear to live with all the sadness and death surrounding her and concludes by ending her own life (Ennis and Medina, 2012). By the end of the narrative, the Punisher himself comes to contemplate what one could ultimately

Punisher: It had given me pause for thought. How easy it was to do what I did. What she [Jenny] said, that no one else but me can bear the weight of it, that made me wonder more...If I could, I’d kill every single one of them. I’d wipe them out. And you’d [Jenny] never have to exist at all (Ennis and Medina, 2012, pp. 163-164).

Throughout the *Punisher Max* series, we see numerous examples of noble cause corruption, including the sort of moral dilemma it places law enforcement officers – ersatz or actual – in. We submit that these dialogs are indicative of society’s complementary yet opposing desires to be protected by the police, yet protected from the police; that is, that we want our police to have the moral fortitude to engage in noble cause corruption, yet “only so far.” How far is so far appears to be a contextualized, moving target that, in hindsight, may or may not be justified, after all.

Theoretical Implications

From our observations, we conclude that any attempt to theorize noble cause corruption must consider at least three spheres of influence: moral, organizational, and societal. Each of these three areas are both exogenous to and endogenous of the others. By *moral* we mean the values, and their ethical expression, that the law enforcement officer brings to bear. By *organizational*, we mean both the organizational ethos and procedural constraints that influence, frame, or otherwise guide the behavior of the officer. Finally, by *societal* we mean all those things that define expectations of society at large in regards to the administration of justice. Societal necessarily subsumes the government. Understanding how these three spheres relate to one another in a developmental etiology of noble cause corruption is a necessary next step if the study of noble cause corruption is to make any meaningful advancement in criminology.

We also recommend that future theorizing consider the work of Tyler (2006) on procedural justice and, more broadly, that of Max Weber. Muir (1977), for example, explicitly borrowed from Weber in his theory of police behavior. For Muir, an officer's behavior was predicated on a tension between their ability "to grasp the nature of human suffering...and achieving just ends with coercive means" (pp. 3-4). Tyler has extended this logic to the following conclusion: to the degree that the police achieve these just ends *fairly*, even if coercively, the police will be viewed as legitimate. If the police are perceived as legitimate administrators of justice, then by extension, so too is the law. And to the extent that the law is seen as legitimate, it is followed by civilians. Noble cause corruption may only seem noble to those *not* on the receiving end. Thus, a community may applaud an officer who beats a suspected child abuser into a coma; that accused child abuser will not, however. If Tyler (2006) is correct, the officer's actions may, in the long run, do more harm than good for the community.

Practical Implications

Based on the findings from this research, we found several important implications as they relate to the perception of noble cause corruption in the *Punisher Max* series for both law enforcement agencies and the general public. First, the audience is shown images and dialogue suggesting there that there are both officers who abide by the rule of law as well as officers who are willing to carry out justice by way of noble cause corruption if the letter of the law jeopardizes their mandate. The implication here is that there is not only a perception but also an acceptance of officers in real life who both think about justice in this manner as well as officers who act on their thoughts (Sykes, 1986). Whether this perception is a reflection of society's true views is impossible to determine with our current methodology; but if media are indeed, in some part, reflections of a societal ethos, then the general sense is that we *like noble cause corruption and believe police who espouse it are necessary*.

As for the general public, it is important to recall the work of Scully and Mooreman (2014), who noted that the Punisher was given his own comic book series (independent of his team-up appearances with other Marvel heroes such as Spider-Man, Daredevil during the 1970s) in the 1980s, a time period that many Americans, especially those living in large metropolitan cities, felt had become overruled by criminals. Their feelings were in some part vindicated insofar as the violent crime rate was the highest it had ever been since the inception of the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports (Zimring, 2006). This led many people to adopt a "war against crime" in ways that the police could not. For example, when Bernhard Goetz was considered a hero for standing up to the crime problem facing NYC, or the evolution of Guardian Angels from a local group of good Samaritans protecting people on their subway rides to a vigilante force that fended off unsavory characters in NYC's Restaurant Row (Lyall, 1988; McCombs, 1985; Purdum, 1988; Scully and Mooreman, 2014; and Terry, 1988).

Although such actors are not bound by state rules of procedure, *per se*, they are engaging in their own noble cause corruption by dismissing their responsibilities under the social contract.

In fact, many of the superhero comics of that era, including the Punisher, reflect this sentiment (Scully and Mooreman, 2014). The *Punisher Max* series shows that, while crime has certainly gone down since the 1980s, there are still people who have the same thoughts regarding noble cause corruption as they did back then. Indeed, the *Punisher Max* series provides a mature, uncensored viewpoint of why the Punisher is needed to do what the police “cannot do”, because of due process, in order to protect the rest of society from criminals, even in this day and age. Specifically, the Punisher is portrayed within the confines of these narratives as a character worthy of emulation since he is not an agent of the state and is therefore able to fulfill a cathartic role for a society that desires to see criminals punished, by any means necessary, when established criminal justice institutions have failed. In doing so, the Punisher circumvents the rule of proper police proceduralism/due process that the state actor characters in the narratives, such as Agent Bethell (a CIA operative), Jen Cooke (a social worker) or Detective Paul Budiansky (an NYPD detective), normally abide by. However, all these secondary characters, as discussed above, engage in noble cause corruption, either by themselves or through the proxy of the Punisher, because they already tried to pursue the noble cause of justice through more legitimate avenues and failed. In their failure to achieve justice, they turn to extralegal measures because they still believe that the noble cause of justice is worth pursuing by any means necessary. This viewpoint does not show any signs of disappearing as the Punisher continues to be published; the most recent series being *Marvel Now’s The Punisher*, which just recently completed its run with issue 20 in 2015. Undoubtedly though, there will be another Punisher title out before we know it.

Limitations

Chief among the limitations to our study was our relatively small sample size. However, this was unavoidable as the number of comics that made up the *Punisher Max* series ($N=74$) were too few and could in no way afford us a larger sample. We note, however, that aside from the *Punisher Max* series, most Punisher titles series run for about 20 issues or so. The only other lengthy Punisher series we could find was *The Punisher* (2nd series), which ran for 104 issues from 1987-95. Given this, we decided to go with the *Max* series because it was more recent and because of its uncensored approach in telling its narratives. Along those same lines, this study suffered from the fact that it did not include samples of Punisher comics from different points in time in order to provide a comparative analysis in terms of whether or not the theme of noble cause corruption was present in those comics as well or if the theme of noble cause corruption has changed over the years. Finally, we reiterate that our study was exploratory in nature. Knowing this, our discussion and analysis were at times vague and speculative. However, this could be corrected in time with future research.

Future Research

This study opens up several possible avenues for future criminological research, especially as they relate to comic books. The first recommendation is that a more comprehensive study, possibly a content analysis, be conducted on the Punisher with regards to how the perception of noble cause corruption has been portrayed from his first appearance to his latest issue. A similar study should be conducted that explores the Punisher’s “ends-justifies-the-means” approach when compared to other heroes known to be

occasional adversaries of the Punisher, both in terms of their differing philosophies and attitudes in favor of due process (such as Spider-Man or Daredevil). Additionally, a more cross-media approach should be considered to see how well the Punisher's philosophies regarding justice are carried over to other formats such as film, television, or even video games.

Another recommendation is that some line of research be conducted on the role of torture in superhero comics as a way of carrying out justice. This issue is addressed to some extent by Phillips and Strobl (2013), but we suggest that a more thorough study be carried out. Furthermore, given the significant influence of movies and television programs that advocate noble cause corruption in popular culture, such as *Dirty Harry* or *The Wire*, we suggest that future research examines these particular pop cultural phenomena in further detail, as they relate both to the philosophy of noble cause corruption as well as their accuracy when compared to the actions of real life police officers. Indeed, future research on comics should consider life-action films as these are far more popular than the comics, themselves. Lastly, given the connotations of revenge present in *Punisher Max*, there should be some research in the future that explores the intertwining of vengeance with noble cause corruption.

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⁴Additionally, it is worth mentioning that while there is a second *Punisher Max* series that came out shortly after the completion of the first series, it was not included so that we could keep our sample within a completed story arcs.