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Pain

► Suffering of the Hero

Pandemic Heroes

► Heroism and Healthcare Workers in Epidemic Films

Paradoxes of Heroism

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Synonyms

Counterintuitive truths; Nonobvious truths; Seeming inconsistencies; Truthful contradictions

Definition

Heroism paradoxes refer to counterintuitive truths about heroism. These truths reveal the surprising richness and complexity of phenomena related to heroism's antecedent conditions, typologies, manifestations, and consequences.

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Heroism is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. It implicates experiences that engage perceptions, thoughts, motivations, and behavior at the individual level of analysis. And it involves social, organizational, cultural, political, and historical processes at the collective level. A true understanding of heroism will require sophisticated theory and research from every academic discipline, including all of the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Joseph Campbell (1990) once remarked that if he had to base an entire university curriculum on one subject, it would be the study of heroism and hero mythology.

Given the richness of heroism, it should not be surprising that a study of the topic has given rise to many varied and intriguing puzzles and paradoxes. This chapter explores the importance of paradoxes in understanding heroism, and it describes many of these paradoxes – but certainly not all of them. The study of heroism is in its infancy and will no doubt reveal far more mysterious truths than are reviewed in this chapter.

Paradoxical truths are important to learn because they challenge our understanding of reality, encourage deeper reflection, and offer insights into the complexity and interconnectedness of various phenomena. Paradoxes expose contradictory aspects and how they relate to each other. These counterintuitive truths invite contemplation, questioning, and reflection on commonly held views. They highlight flaws in logic or reasoning and encourage more considered responses

to complex issues. Considering paradoxes broadens intellectual curiosity and encourages exploration beyond familiar frameworks. In doing so, new ways of approaching problems emerge. Embracing paradoxes requires a degree of cognitive flexibility. It helps us adapt to ambiguous or complex situations and find innovative solutions to problems. Paradoxical truths often transcend binary thinking, leading to a more holistic and nondualistic worldview. This perspective recognizes the interconnectedness of all things and promotes a sense of unity and oneness.

The following sections review the major paradoxes of heroism described by Joseph Campbell and several modern-day scholars.

Joseph Campbell's Paradoxes of Heroism

In his iconic book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell (1949, 18) identified four essential paradoxes of the hero's journey:

> We have only to follow the thread of the hero-path.
> And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god;
> where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves;
> where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence;
> and where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.

Campbell's first paradox – an abomination being revealed as a god – refers to the idea that the painful trials of the hero's journey can produce positive consequences. Campbell (1991, 24) wrote, "It is by going down into the abyss that we recover the treasures of life. Where you stumble, there lies your treasure." In mythology, the dragons faced by the hero often represent the hidden shadow areas of personality that must be illuminated and conquered for heroic transformation to occur. This idea connects to the second paradox, namely, that in slaying our enemies we are symbolically slaying inner demons that are holding us back from becoming our best selves. Similarly, the third paradox tells us that the "outer" hero journey is necessary to shed light on the more important "inner" journey of the hero.

The fourth paradox points to two essential truths about heroism. First, there is the truth of heroic autonomy (Allison 2023), pointing to the importance of the hero to be independent and operating alone at certain crucial moments of their journey. In contrast to heroic autonomy is the truth of the hero needing social support and guidance from friends, companions, and mentors. Moreover, at journey's end, the hero returns home with the "boon" to help transform the community from which they came. This may be the most heroic work that the hero does. The journey is not just about mere survival; it is about reconnection with the community and revitalizing it.

Franco, Blau, and Zimbardo's Three Paradoxes

In a seminal article that helped to establish heroism as science, Franco, Blau, and Zimbardo (2011) laid out the conceptual landscape of heroism as distinct from altruism. In doing so, these scholars proposed three paradoxes:

Paradox 1: Elevation and Negation. This paradox describes the tension between the desire to elevate and the desire to derogate heroes. A whistleblower who turns against an organization might seem admirable to outside observers, but her colleagues within the organization may view her as a traitor. A person who runs into a burning building might seem like a hero to some but a fool to others. Heroism is subject to vastly different interpretations.

Paradox 2: Public Stage Versus the Interiority of the Heroic Decision. Franco et al. (2011, 5) describe this paradox as follows: "While heroism is generally considered to be a prosocial behavior and the act must be witnessed or evaluated by spectators to receive acclaim, the decision to act in a heroic manner does not necessarily emanate from prosocial motivation, nor does it require an audience. In fact, the decision to act is almost always a private, interior process that occurs before and in the absence of public

knowledge about what is about to unfold." Thus, behaving heroically may reflect a deeply held standard and may have nothing to do with any public veneration or fanfare that is typically associated with heroism.

Paradox 3: Altruism Versus Heroism. Franco et al. (2011) argue that on the surface, altruism and heroism appear to be nearly identical, as they both involve selfless prosocial action. Below the surface, however, altruism is revealed to be qualitatively different from heroism in many important ways. For example, research shows that altruistic intervention in an emergency is more likely when psychologically exiting the situation is made difficult. In contrast, heroes take action even when clear paths to exit the situation are present. Altruism, moreover, does not necessarily involve risk, whereas heroic action is always a risky endeavor.

Allison and Cecilione's Six Paradoxes of Heroism

In their analysis of heroism and heroic leadership, Allison and Cecilione (2016) proposed six paradoxical truths:

Paradox 1: True Heroes Are Fictional Heroes
Studies have shown that fictional heroes are rated more favorably that nonfictional heroes, and fictional villains are rated more unfavorably than nonfictional villains (Allison and Goethals 2011). In short, people make extremitized evaluations of fictional heroes and villains. Creators of fiction draw from classic prototypes of good and evil when constructing their characters. In a way, heroes of fiction are thus "truer" heroes.

Paradox 2: Abundant Heroes Are the Most Invisible
An important type of hero is called the *transparent hero* – the person who does their heroic work behind the scenes, outside the public spotlight (Goethals and Allison 2012). Transparent heroes include teachers, coaches, mentors, healthcare workers, law enforcement personnel, firefighters, and military personnel. Although these heroes are found in abundance, they largely go unnoticed and are our most unsung and invisible heroic leaders.

Paradox 3: We Do Not Choose Heroes; They Choose Us
Carl Jung (1954) argued that our psyches harbor unconscious images called *archetypes*, reflecting common experiences that humans and their ancestors have shared over millions of years of evolution. One such archetype is the hero. Because our minds are innately equipped with images of the looks, traits, and behaviors of heroes, our choice of heroes may be an illusion of choice. Our heroes may be choosing us as much as we choose them.

Paradox 4: We Love Building Heroes, and We Love Destroying Them
People are thirsty for stories about underdogs who transform from unknowns into renowned, accomplished heroes. But the reverse is also true. We appear to crave the undoing of heroes as well. Research suggests that our greatest heroes cannot get away with anything less than near-perfect moral behavior (Allison and Goethals 2008). For this reason, many heroes are bound to fall from grace. We seem to believe in, and relish, a perverse law of heroic gravity: What goes up must come down.

Paradox 5: We Love Heroes More When They're Gone
The results of many studies underscore the role of death in shaping our affections toward heroes. Research shows that as much as we love our heroes when they are alive and well, we love them even more when they are dead. This phenomenon is called the *death positivity bias* (Allison et al. 2009). Research has also shown that getting assassinated truly helps political leaders gain stature as stirring legends (Simonton 1994).

Paradox 6: Sometimes Darkness Produces Light
Research has shown that psychopaths and heroes may have several traits in common (Murphy et al. 2017). Psychopaths possess a fierce boldness, fearlessness, and calmness under pressure – three attributes that are linked to success in

business, politics, and even professional sports. Paradoxically, personality traits associated with human pathology can sometimes be useful – if harnessed toward a noble end – to achieve heroism.

Other Paradoxes of Heroism

Here are several additional paradoxes that are associated with heroism:

1. **Fear and Courage:** Heroes are often portrayed as courageous individuals who fearlessly confront danger and adversity. However, true heroism often involves acting courageously despite experiencing fear and uncertainty.
2. **Vulnerability and Strength:** Heroes are depicted as strong and invincible figures, capable of overcoming immense challenges. However, true heroism often emerges from a place of vulnerability and compassion, where individuals recognize and empathize with the suffering of others.
3. **Ordinary and Extraordinary**: This is the paradox of the banality of heroism (Franco and Zimbardo 2006), which refers to the idea that heroes can emerge from ordinary individuals who can perform extraordinary acts of bravery and altruism. The potential for greatness resides within seemingly ordinary people.
4. **Conflict and Peace**: Some heroes may be known for their prowess in conflict and battle, but true heroism can also be found in those who promote peace, reconciliation, and nonviolent solutions to conflicts.
5. **Individual Agency and Circumstances:** Heroic actions are often seen as resulting from an individual's agency and decision-making. However, external circumstances and situations may also play a large role in shaping opportunities for heroism.

Conclusion

English philosopher G. K. Chesterton described paradox as "a truth that stands on its head to gain attention" (Douglas 2001). The paradoxes of heroism in this chapter have begun to attract the attention of social scientists, but clearly much more research is needed to unpack the complexity of heroic phenomena. These paradoxes derive from the fact that the concept of heroism has proven to be slippery, mysterious, and surprising. Allison and Cecilone (2016) introduced the term *intuitive heroism* to describe people's naïve beliefs about the way heroism operates. Zimbardo (2008) has lamented the fact that laypeople often hold the default belief that heroic status is reserved only for icons like Gandhi or superheroes like Wonder Woman. This is a form of hero illiteracy (Allison and Beggan 2023). Our naïve intuitive beliefs may lead us to underestimate our own capacity of heroism, miscalculate the role of certain situations in producing heroism, or confuse celebrity status with heroism. Thus a greater awareness of the paradoxes of heroism can serve to stimulate research on heroism and heighten our appreciation for the rich and complicated genesis of true heroic action.

Cross-References

▶ Constructions of Heroism
▶ Definitions and Descriptions of Heroism
▶ Ethics and Heroic Leadership: Paradoxes and Implications
▶ Hubris, Paradox
▶ Metaphors of Heroism

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Paradoxical Hero

▶ Absurd Hero

Paramedic Heroism

▶ Medical Heroism

Passing Heroes

▶ Transitory Heroes

Pastoral Leadership

▶ Clergy Heroism

Pastoral Theology

▶ Clergy Heroism

Path to Awakening

▶ Spiritual Journey's Similarity to the Hero's Journey

Peak Performance

▶ Flow in Heroism and Leadership

Pedagogy of Hope

▶ Heroic Pedagogy of Love for Digital Era

Pedagogy of the Heart

▶ Heroic Pedagogy of Love for Digital Era

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

▶ Heroic Pedagogy of Love for Digital Era

Peer Intervention

► Bystander Engagement with Bullying

Peer Pressure

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Synonyms

Conformity; Normative influence; Social pressure

Definition

A process through which members of a relevant social group (e.g., similarly aged peers, friends, coworkers) exert social influence on others to conform to norms specifying appropriate thoughts, feelings, or actions. Peer pressure often involves the explicit or implicit threat of punishment if group norms are ignored or rejected.

Normative Influence and Heroism

Humans are social animals. We pay special attention to the thoughts, behaviors, and feelings of other people – especially people who are close to us or with whom we share important group memberships. Further, social groups often have formal and informal prescriptions about acceptable ways to think, act, or feel; these are known as social norms. Social norms can influence behavior relatively formally: for example, when norms discouraging violent behavior are codified into legal proscriptions against physical assault. However, a less formal type of influence occurs through **normative social influence**, the process by which individuals conform to group norms in order to be considered a "good" group member, accrue or maintain status within the group, and avoid punishment or social derogation.

Peer pressure is a form of normative social influence. More specifically, peer pressure is a colloquial term referring to the process through which people encourage adherence (i.e., conformity) to norms, as well as punish individuals who deviate from these norms. Although peer pressure is often viewed pejoratively, conformity is essential for social cooperation; it is a normal part of group life. Indeed, social norms can effectively promote cohesion and cooperation between group members and orient them to shared group goals (Van Bavel and Packer 2021).

Definitions of heroes and heroism focus on bravery, courage, and often self-sacrifice. The relationship between social norms and heroism is complex and can take different forms. In what follows, we will discuss two cases in which an individual's deviance from norms can be considered heroic and in a third in which conformity to norms can promote heroism.

First, resisting peer pressure can be considered heroic when the consequences of doing so are likely to be negative, thus requiring a degree of courage and self-sacrifice. Deviating from norms can indeed result in negative outcomes, including social, material, or even physical costs. In general, people enforce group norms – for example, by ridiculing, rejecting, and shunning individuals who deviate from them – quite strongly. The presence of someone who deviates from ingroup norms (i.e., rejects peer pressure) can be perceived as a threat to collective efficacy or, by calling into question the merits of normative patterns, the very value of the group's identity (Jetten and Hornsey 2014). Individuals who deviate from norms in ways that dilute the boundary between the ingroup and an outgroup are likely to be evaluated particularly negatively (i.e., the black sheep effect; Marques et al. 2001). As such, norm enforcement helps groups maintain cohesion, cooperation, and restore perceived threats to group value.

Despite the potential personal costs associated with difference, people may be motivated to deviate from norms because they are animated by broader, more prosocial concerns. Research on

the normative conflict model of dissent, for example, finds that strongly identified group members can be motivated to dissent from group norms in pursuit of collective interests, such as a desire to change their group for the better (Packer 2008; Packer and Chasteen 2010; Ungson and Packer 2018). Whereas the personal consequences of dissent may deter weakly identified group members from dissent, strongly identified members may be willing to sacrifice their own individual interests for what they believe to be the good of the group.

Deviance may also be motivated by less parochial moral concerns with justice and fairness. When people are concerned about the moral value of fairness beyond the boundaries of their group (e.g., an organization), for example, they are more likely to engage in whistleblowing, revealing unethical group behavior to third parties. In contrast, concern for the moral value of loyalty may be associated with less reporting of problematic group behaviors (Dugan et al. 2019; Waytz et al. 2013).

A second potential relationship between social norms and heroism involves an important distinction between descriptive and injunctive norms. Descriptive norms capture how most people actually think, feel, or behave, whereas injunctive (or prescriptive) norms refer to how most people believe people *should* think, feel, or behave (Cialdini et al. 1990). Prescriptively, people may believe that the proper thing to do if you observe someone being bullied is to step in and challenge the bully (e.g., Kollerová et al. 2018), but in actuality most people may fail to do so when confronted with this situation in real life. In this case, a person who acts in accordance with the injunctive (but not the descriptive) norm may be perceived as having acted with courage because of the potential costs of intervening in a dangerous situation. Thus, in contrast to common perceptions of deviance more generally, this would likely be regarded positively – indeed, as heroic – by others.

Third, heroism may not always require a person to resist social norms at all. Some groups have strong norms of courage and self-sacrifice. Take the example of firefighters, first responders, and rescuers whose duties are to intervene in dangerous situations to rescue civilians (and animals), often at great risk to their own personal safety. The willingness to put yourself at risk to save others is a central norm that defines these groups, around which they coordinate their identity and behavior. Indeed, this form of heroism is associated with risks not just to physical health, but also mental health; firefighters are more likely to suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder than the general population (Stanley et al. 2019). A firefighter who rushes headlong into a burning building to rescue an infant may be acting at odds with norms among the general population, but fully in accordance with expectations for how firefighters should behave.

Perceptions of Deviance: Who Is a Hero Anyway?

When it comes to perceptions of people who resist peer pressure and refuse to conform, their heroism is very much in the eye of the beholder (Jetten and Hornsey 2010). One person's estimable hero is another person's dastardly traitor. Public reactions to whistleblower Edward Snowden's exposure of the American government's widespread surveillance activities ranged from admiration for his stand against violations of privacy to disgusted condemnation of his betrayal of his country. More recently, Republican Senator Liz Cheney has been derided as a traitor by fellow Republicans for her outspoken criticism of Donald Trump. However, many Democrats might judge her as heroic for breaking through the parochial peer pressure of party loyalty to instead support a broader set of national norms (e.g., democratic principles). How are we to understand these divergent reactions?

Normative influence is group bounded. People are more inclined to conform to norms of groups they belong to and identify with (Terry and Hogg 1996), and similarly are motivated to defend and enforce the norms of their own groups. Research on the aforementioned black sheep effect finds that ingroup members violating a group norm are sometimes evaluated more negatively than outgroup members behaving in the same way because only the former threatens the validity of the ingroup's identity.

More generally, reactions to deviance vary as a function of intergroup and intragroup dynamics. Group leaders and higher status members are afforded greater latitude for deviance (Abrams et al. 2018). Criticism of the ingroup is tolerated if it is perceived to be constructive for the group – and the sorts of people who are perceived to be constructive include long-standing members, rather than newcomers (Hornsey 2005). Criticism is perceived as less acceptable, however, when the ingroup is competing with an outgroup (Ariyanto et al. 2010) or when critique is public beyond group boundaries (Packer 2014).

Conclusion

The relationship between normative influence or peer pressure and heroism is complex. Sometimes resisting peer pressure is an act of courage in that it requires a willingness to incur personal costs. Whether such resistance is regarded as heroic, however, depends on the vantage point of the perceiver and how they interpret its implications for group identity. In other cases, group norms may themselves encourage bravery – and as such, represent a means of increasing the odds that people will respond with heroism in situations that call for it.

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Perceiving Heroes

► Frozen in Time Effect and Heroism

Perceptions of Heroes

► Cross-Cultural Representations of Heroes

Perfect Alignment

► Perfect Storm, Perfect Confluence, and Heroism

Perfect Coincidence

► Perfect Storm, Perfect Confluence, and Heroism

Perfect Crucible

► Perfect Storm, Perfect Confluence, and Heroism

Perfect Storm, Perfect Confluence, and Heroism

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Synonyms

Convergence of events; Heroic confluence; Perfect alignment; Perfect coincidence; Perfect crucible; Rare combination of circumstances

Definition

The "perfect storm" is a term often used metaphorically to describe situations where a convergence of multiple factors leads to a particularly significant or catastrophic outcome. The perfect confluence refers to any convergence of circumstances that results in a particularly positive or heroic outcome.

The phrase "The Perfect Storm" originated from the title of a non-fiction book written by Sebastian Junger, published in 1997. The full title of the book is *The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against the Sea*. The book tells the story of the Andrea Gail, a commercial fishing vessel, and its crew who faced a severe and destructive storm off the coast of New England in October 1991. The term "perfect storm" in this context refers to a rare combination of meteorological factors that resulted in an exceptionally powerful and devastating storm. In the case of the Andrea Gail, the convergence of a hurricane, a cold front, and other atmospheric conditions created a massive and extremely dangerous storm system. The popularity of Junger's book and its subsequent film adaptation contributed to the widespread use of the phrase "perfect storm" in everyday language to describe situations where a combination of various factors leads to a particularly challenging or dire outcome. The term has become a metaphor for any rare convergence of circumstances that results in disaster.

This chapter explores perfect storm scenarios that involve dire circumstances involving bad actors, or villains, as well as situations that involve the perfect alignment of positive events involving heroes. There is no term in the common vernacular that describes the perfect confluence of positive circumstances, and thus, this chapter uses the term *perfect confluence*, a neutral term, to describe the perfect alignment of desirable events. While it might not be as commonly used or widely recognized as "perfect storm," the notion of perfect confluence conveys the idea that various positive events can come together in a harmonious and beneficial way, leading to an especially favorable outcome.

Examples of Perfect Storms

A perfect storm of events can be the combination of bad events in many different contexts. For example, it could refer to inclement weather, a mechanical failure, and human error that leads to a plane crash. Or it could be the convergence of economic, political, and social factors that create a financial crisis. Often a perfect storm includes an act of violence, selfishness, cowardice, or incompetence from individuals who could be construed as a villain. World events have witnessed many such perfect storms, described below.

French Revolution (1789–1799)

The French Revolution can be characterized as a perfect storm of events due to the convergence of multiple factors that led to its outbreak and subsequent course. The French society of the time was marked by significant inequality and class divisions. Most of the population lived in poverty, while the nobility and clergy enjoyed vast privileges and exemptions from taxes. France was facing economic challenges, including a heavy national debt incurred from wars and extravagant spending by the monarchy. Poor harvests and high food prices exacerbated the plight of the common people. The enlightenment had promoted ideas of individual rights, liberty, and equality. These ideas were influential in shaping public opinion and inspiring calls for political and social change. The monarchy's financial mismanagement and resistance to fiscal reforms led to tensions with the bourgeoisie and other educated classes. Louis XVI, the monarch at the time, was weak and indecisive. His inability to address the country's problems and make necessary reforms further eroded his authority. The success of the American Revolution demonstrated that it was possible to overthrow a monarchy and establish a republic. Radicalization intensified the revolutionary fervor. Bread shortages, rising food prices, and anger at perceived abuses of power fueled public discontent. Riots and demonstrations became more frequent and intense. As the revolution unfolded, violence escalated with the Reign of Terror, during which perceived enemies of the revolution were executed. Overall, the French Revolution unfolded amidst a complex web of societal, economic, political, and intellectual factors.

Assassination of Abraham Lincoln (1865)

The assassination of US President Abraham Lincoln can be considered a perfect storm of events as multiple factors converged to create a tragic and historically significant event. The assassination occurred just days after the end of the American Civil War, a conflict that had deeply divided the nation and left many unresolved tensions and issues. John Wilkes Booth, the assassin, was a Confederate sympathizer who strongly opposed Lincoln's policies and the Union cause. He saw the end of the war as a personal defeat and sought to avenge the Confederacy by targeting Lincoln. The post-war political climate was tense and fraught with disagreements over the best course of action for rebuilding the country. The assassination took place at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., a venue providing Booth with an opportunity to approach Lincoln relatively easily and covertly. Lax security measures allowed Booth to gain access to the theater and approach the president without significant hindrance. These various factors, along with Booth's determination and willingness to resort to violence, created a perfect storm of events that resulted in a tragedy with far-reaching implications for the nation's recovery from the Civil War and the shape of its future.

World War I (1914–1918)

One of the most famous examples of a perfect storm involves the events leading up to World War I. At the time, there was a complex web of alliances between the European powers, rising nationalism, simmering rivalries, and a growing arms race. One relatively minor incident – the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand – set off a chain of events that led to the perfect storm of major world conflict. Ferdinand was killed by Bosnian Serb student Gavrilo Princip. This act of violence shows that perfect storms involving human events are often triggered by the behavior of a single villain. A unique set of interconnected

factors culminated in a devastating global conflict that reshaped the political and social landscape of the twentieth century.

The Great Depression (1930s)

The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic crisis that originated in the United States and had far-reaching global effects. It resulted from a combination of factors, including the 1929 stock market crash, widespread bank failures, agricultural droughts, and the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, which triggered a trade war. The convergence of these factors led to a prolonged period of economic downturn, mass unemployment, and social upheaval. There was no single act of villainy that triggered the Great Depression, but rather several challenging situations combined with flawed, incompetent decisions made by leaders in several sectors of the US economy.

Assassination of John F. Kennedy (1963)

The assassination of John F. Kennedy can also be seen as a "perfect storm" of events. The early 1960s was a period of intense political and social change. Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, the civil rights movement, and the struggle for equal rights created a charged atmosphere. Kennedy's presidency was marked by his charisma, aspirations for progress, ambitious goals, and a push for civil rights legislation and space exploration. The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 had heightened tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. The assassination took place in Dallas, Texas, a city with a politically divided atmosphere and poor security arrangements. The lack of protective measures and an open-top car made Kennedy more exposed to potential threats. The assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, was a complex figure with a history of political radicalism, erratic behavior, connection to the Soviet Union, and ties to extreme ideologies. It was a perfect storm of multiple factors contributing to an assassination that had profound effects on the United States and the world.

Perfect Confluence as a Positive Perfect Storm

The perfect confluence refers to a unique combination of events necessary to create a great, miraculous, and heroic outcome. The perfect confluence captures the idea of things coming together in a way that is ideal or optimal. Just as a perfect storm refers to a situation in which a variety of negative factors lead to a negative outcome, a perfect confluence refers to a variety of positive factors leading to a positive outcome. There are two phenomena that are often involved in producing a perfect confluence: The Matthew Effect and the notion of the perfect crucible. These phenomena are described below.

The Matthew Effect

The "Matthew Effect" is a concept coined by sociologist Robert K. Merton in 1968. It is named after a verse from the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament: "*For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath*." In a sociological context, the Matthew Effect refers to the phenomenon where initial advantages or opportunities lead to further accumulation of advantages, while those who start with disadvantages find it difficult to catch up. In other words, individuals or groups that are already ahead tend to receive more opportunities, resources, and recognition, creating a cycle of success. Conversely, those who are behind may struggle to overcome their initial disadvantages. In short, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

The concept can be applied to various domains, including education, career advancement, scientific research, sports, and more. The Matthew Effect underscores the importance of considering systemic factors and historical circumstances when analyzing success and achievement. It also highlights the potential for inequality to perpetuate itself over time. In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell (2008) described perfect confluences of heroes and situations that allowed for their great achievement. He explores the idea that success is often not solely a result of individual talent, hard work, or innate ability, but rather a

unique interplay of various factors, many of which are beyond an individual's control.

Regarding exceptional individuals such as Bill Gates, Gladwell (2008) emphasized the role of the Matthew Effect in helping Gates with his success. Gates' success was shaped not only by his innate talents and hard work but also by the unique opportunities granted him. Gates was fortunate to have access to computers at a time when they were relatively rare. This allowed him to develop programming skills at a young age, which was a distinct advantage. Timing for Gates was everything; he was in the right place at the right time, namely, the infancy of the computer industry. He took advantage of opportunities as the technology landscape was rapidly evolving. Gates had the opportunity to log a significant number of hours in computer programming during his teenage years, well before the personal computer revolution took off. Gates also had a supportive and encouraging family environment that allowed him to explore his interests. Gates had access to valuable resources, including coding manuals, due to his proximity to the University of Washington.

While Bill Gates certainly possessed talent and worked hard, his success was also influenced by external factors that aligned in a way that allowed him to capitalize on his talents. In essence, Gladwell's (2008) thesis in *Outliers* challenged the notion of "self-made" success and underscored the importance of considering the broader context and opportunities that contribute to exceptional achievements. Other exceptional people beside Gates who benefited from the Matthew Effect include Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Tiger Woods, Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, and Mark Zuckerberg.

The Perfect Crucible

Ironically, there are times when the perfect confluence of positive events is only made possible by a perfect storm of negative events. The ability of heroes to convert tragedy into triumph is called the *perfect crucible*. This phenomenon describes how dire circumstances often bring out the best in people. If people fail the test or if the test is unresolvable, it is a perfect storm scenario. Often, though, the pressure of circumstances causes a breakthrough of some kind. When heroes rise to the occasion and overcome the challenge, it is a perfect confluence made possible by a perfect crucible. This idea resembles the phenomenon of "post-traumatic growth," where people who go through severe trauma can end up stronger, wiser, and more resilient on the other side. It is a powerful idea that speaks to the human capacity for overcoming adversity and transforming suffering into something positive. The perfect crucible is a situation that demands heroic action to bring about positive change. A crucible is the ultimate test of heroism. Heroes can be the deciding factor in tipping the balance between a crisis leading to progress or one leading to disaster.

Miraculous and heroic events often unfold in the aftermath of emergencies, tragedies, and disasters. A perfect storm confluence of events often highlights the resilience, compassion, and strength of individuals and communities during challenging times. During the Cold War, the world came dangerously close to nuclear conflict when the United States and the Soviet Union faced off over the placement of Soviet missiles in Cuba. The tense situation could have led to a catastrophic nuclear war. Diplomatic efforts and negotiations between leaders, including President John F. Kennedy and Premier Nikita Khrushchev, helped defuse the crisis and averted a potentially disastrous outcome. The Apollo 13 mission to the moon encountered a life-threatening crisis when an oxygen tank exploded, jeopardizing the lives of the astronauts on board. The NASA mission control team, led by Flight Director Gene Kranz, worked tirelessly to develop creative solutions, guiding the spacecraft safely back to Earth and saving the lives of the crew.

After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, countless acts of heroism and courage were witnessed. Firefighters, police officers, and other first responders risked their lives to rescue people trapped in the burning buildings. Ordinary citizens also displayed heroism by assisting others and providing aid. During Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when many people were stranded due to flooding, a group of private

boat owners from Louisiana, known as the "Cajun Navy," launched their boats to rescue people from rooftops and flooded areas. Their volunteer efforts saved countless lives. Following the bombing at the Boston Marathon in 2013, bystanders and first responders rushed to provide aid to the injured. Ordinary citizens, medical professionals, and emergency personnel worked together to help victims and prevent further harm. In 2009, Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger successfully executed an emergency water landing on the Hudson River after both engines of US Airways Flight 1549 failed due to bird strikes. All 155 passengers and crew on board were safely evacuated, showcasing the skill and composure of the flight crew and the efforts of first responders.

During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare workers around the world have demonstrated incredible dedication and heroism by caring for patients at great personal risk. Their selfless efforts to save lives have been widely acknowledged and celebrated. The Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 was triggered by a massive earthquake and tsunami in Japan. While the event itself resulted in significant damage to the reactors and release of radioactive material, the efforts of emergency responders and workers helped prevent an even greater catastrophe and limit the spread of contamination. The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–21 involved heroic efforts from healthcare workers, scientists, researchers, and essential workers. Their dedication to treating patients, developing vaccines, implementing public health measures, and keeping essential services running has helped mitigate the impact of the pandemic and save lives.

These examples highlight the capacity of individuals to pass the test of the perfect crucible, rise above adversity, and show exceptional courage and resourcefulness during times of crisis. Franco, Blau, and Zimbardo (2011, 100) would call these individuals "physical-risk, duty bound heroes." Although perfect crucible challenges often feature immense pressure and human suffering, they also reveal the best of humanity's response in the face of adversity. The perfect crucible makes heroism possible.

Examples of Perfect Confluence and Heroism

The perfect crucible describes heroic responses to emergency or crisis situations. There are times when a perfect confluence emerges from a non-emergency storm of circumstances. A combination of unfavorable events can inspire heroes to step up to create a perfect resolution. Franco et al. (2011) might call them *social-sacrifice heroes*, and Allison and Goethals (2013) would call them *transforming-global heroes*. Here are a few historical examples:

The Renaissance (~1300–1700)

A global example of a positive perfect confluence is the Renaissance period of human history. The Renaissance was a time of cultural and intellectual rebirth that began in Italy in the fourteenth century. It was caused by a confluence of factors including the rediscovery of classical Greek and Roman texts, the development of humanist philosophy, and advances in trade and commerce. This perfect confluence of factors led to incredible advances in art, science, and literature. In the Renaissance, exceptional individuals such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Galileo were the heroes who turned the crucible of the medieval world into the flourishing world of art, science, and culture.

Creation of the United States Constitution (1787)

A striking instance of a perfect confluence involved the creation of the United States Constitution. The events leading up to the Constitutional Convention were the result of a perfect alignment of factors. First, there was the failure of the Articles of Confederation, which had created a weak central government. Second, the 13 United States were engaging in serious argument with each other over economic issues. Third, there was growing sentiment among many leaders that the young country needed a stronger central government. Finally, this combination of events was dealt with by a group of incredibly talented and visionary leaders who were able to put aside their differences and hammer out the Constitution.

Without the perfect confluence of all these factors, the US Constitution might not have been crafted. The Founding Fathers were the heroes who turned the crucible of the American Revolution into the opportunity to create a new and better system of government.

Industrial Revolution (1750–1850)

Another prominent example of perfect confluence is the Industrial Revolution. This upheaval featured a period of rapid technological and economic change that began in England in the eighteenth century. It was caused by a perfect alignment of factors including advances in technology, new energy sources like coal, and improvements in transportation such as the steam engine. This perfect confluence led to the growth of cities, improvements in living standards, and the rise of the middle class. The heroes of the Industrial Revolution were the inventors and entrepreneurs who drove the technological advances that transformed society. These individuals included James Watt, who invented the steam engine; Eli Whitney, who invented the cotton gin; and Henry Ford, who pioneered the assembly line. These exceptional people transformed human civilization from an agricultural society and to the modern industrial world.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how villains can play a role in perfect storm events, and how heroes play an important role in the resolving problems or crises in a perfect confluence scenario. In crisis situations, individual heroes or groups of heroes, through their courage, compassion, ingenuity, or determination, have been able to intervene and avert disaster even in the face of daunting challenges and seemingly insurmountable odds. The perfect storm can be applied to various historical events, encompassing both natural and human-made disasters that arise from a combination of complex and interrelated factors. Often these factors can include the unethical, immoral, or incompetent actions of individuals who may be considered villains.

In non-crisis social situations, the adage "necessity is the mother of invention" suggests that new ideas and innovations often arise out of the need to address practical problems or challenges. Throughout history, there have been numerous real-world examples that illustrate this concept. The invention of the wheel is often cited as a classic example of necessity driving innovation. The space pen, designed by Paul C. Fisher, was developed to solve the problem of writing in zero-gravity conditions. The development of prosthetic limbs and assistive devices was driven by the need to enhance the quality of life for people who have lost limbs from injury or medical reasons. These examples demonstrate how necessity and practical challenges can inspire innovative solutions that have a significant impact on various aspects of human life, from technology and medicine to transportation and communication. The perfect confluence involves presence of both a deficit situation and the availability of heroic individuals willing and able to remedy those situations.

Cross-References

- ▶ Circles, Spiral Dynamics, and Heroism
- ▶ Dynamic Negotiated Exchange Model of Heroism
- ▶ Heroic Lag
- ▶ Heroism, Good Luck, and Bad Luck
- ▶ Home and the Hero's Journey
- ▶ Matthew Effect and Heroism
- ▶ Obligation to Greatness
- ▶ Red Bike Moment
- ▶ Time, Timing, and Heroism

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Perpetual Adolescence

► Puer Aeternus Phenomenon: An Obstacle to Hero Development

Persecution

► Bullying and Heroism

Perseverance

► Resilience and Heroism

Persistence

► Grit and Heroism

Personal Excellence

► Heroic Life Pursuits and Eudaimonia

Personal Hero Identification Technique

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Definition

Personal hero identification is a therapeutic strategy rooted in existential-humanistic psychology that builds upon and practically applies the heroism science literature. Individuals are asked to identify a hero/heroine, five characteristics that they admire in that person, five ways in which they see themselves as similar to that person, and five things they can do to become more like that person. During debriefing with a therapist or educator, individuals engage in reflective dialogue regarding how they may enact insights gleaned from the exercise in the interest of promoting self-awareness via self-reflection and developmental maturation as well as other-awareness and relational connectedness.

Introduction

Personal hero identification (PHI) is a therapeutic strategy developed by existential-humanistic (EH) psychologist Andrew Bland in 2006. The strategy was formally introduced in the article, "The Personal Hero Technique: A Therapeutic Strategy that Promotes Self-Transformation and Interdependence" (Bland 2019). It also can be adapted for use in educational settings. Individuals are asked to identify a hero, followed by five characteristics that they admire in that person, five ways in which they see themselves as similar to that person, and five things they can do to become more like that person (For the sake of brevity, "hero" is employed throughout this entry in lieu of "hero/heroine." However, it is to be assumed that "hero" refers to all sexes/genders, including non-binary.). During debriefing with a therapist or educator, they engage in reflective dialogue regarding how they may enact their insights in their everyday lives. Outcomes of PHI include enhanced self-awareness via self-reflection and developmental maturation as well as other-awareness and relational connectedness.

Theoretical Foundation of PHI

Bland (2019) reviewed central tenets of EH theorizing that undergird PHI and identified parallels with themes in the heroism science literature. First, PHI promotes *second-order change* (Bland 2013), also known as *existential liberation* (Schneider and Krug 2017), a deep restructuring of self that arises out of a dialectic between

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constraints and possibilities and which results in long-term, core-level shifts in and expansions of clients' perspectives of their presenting concerns, their world, and themselves – contrasted with conventional therapeutic interventions that emphasize problem-solving and symptom reduction (first-order change). Second, the relevance of hero metaphors for fostering personal growth and therapeutic change has been proposed by EH psychologists for almost a half-century (May 1977; Yalom 1980). Third, characteristics of heroes (Zimbardo 2007) mirror those of Maslow's (1971, 1987, 1999) self-actualizing people. Fourth, consistent with EH theorizing, heroes inspire reflection on one's sense of purpose, how one prefers and chooses to live, and one's contribution in life (goals, values, morals, motivations, and limitations) as well as cultivation of respect, humility, compassion, and harmonious interpersonal relations (Kinsella et al. 2019).

PHI and Heroism Science

Bland (2019) also reviewed contemporary heroism science literature that further solidifies the theoretical and linguistic bases of PHI and, in several cases, provides empirical support thereof.

Personal Heroes Versus Heroic Action

Most of the heroism literature to date has focused on the cultivation of *heroic action* aimed at improving or saving the lives of others while also involving significant risk and self-sacrifice (Allison and Cairo 2016; Kohen et al. 2019; Zimbardo 2015). In contrast, *personal heroes* can be defined not only by outstanding action but also by the fact that others simply wish to further develop these qualities in themselves (Sullivan and Venter 2005). Accordingly, heroes provide a motif for individuals' possible selves that can become incorporated into their self-concepts (Sullivan and Venter 2005, 2010) and can be enacted via behavioral changes in attempts to converge with their hero's affirmative social values (Kinsella et al. 2019).

Heroes Versus Role Models

Comparable to Waterman's (2022) construct of *maldaimonia*, which "differentiates ethical from unethical conduct when striving for personally-expressive well-being" (p. 14), Kinsella et al. (2015b) distinguished between *heroes* and *role models*. While both can have a positive impact on others, role models also can have a negative impact. Importantly for today, they can propagate immoral and/or destructive behavior that contributes to others' ethical disengagement and that becomes rationalized as acceptable (Bandura, as cited in Scott and Saginak 2016; Bonner et al. 2016). In contrast, only heroes can *inspire* others. They embody self-transcendence, courage, healthy risk-taking, and exceptional behavior that stirs others to make incremental changes in their own lives (Kinsella et al. 2019).

Lay Conceptualizations of Heroes

Kinsella et al. (2015a) collected data on how laypeople conceptualize heroes via online questionnaires and by literally asking people on the street. Comparable to the EH perspective surveyed above, heroes were described as able to inspire others to shift focus away from individual concerns, to redirect their attention toward a world-focus perspective, and, accordingly, to develop self-responsibility. In addition, heroes generate a sense of hopefulness and motivate people to become both less misanthropic toward others and more creative. Arguably, these lay conceptualizations provide a rationale for the identification of a hero in PHI – versus a *role model* or a *self-actualizing person* – insofar as the term *hero* is universal and understood to provide important physical, psychological, and social benefits (Kinsella, in University of Limerick 2012).

PHI as a Therapeutic Technique

PHI introduced systematic focus upon clients' identification of and dialogue regarding personal heroes *of their choosing* as an element of evidence-based therapeutic practice. This stands

in contrast with *cuento therapy* (Constantino et al. 1988), an evidence-based technique rooted in social learning that incorporates storytelling about folk heroes to address Puerto Rican adolescents' need for constructive adult role models and to promote self-esteem, pride in their ethnic heritage, and adaptive coping with poverty and discrimination. In context, the predetermined heroes are part of a respected lineage within the community and who embody and sustain its collective identity and collective actualization (Ortiz 2020).

While antecedents of PHI have been included in EH clinical and educational literature, they have been presented only briefly and in incomplete form. Importantly, these variations also did not incorporate the language of heroes, but, rather, they espoused parallel principles. For example, in *Psychosynthesis*, Assagioli (1971) included the question, "Which men and women (of the past and the present) do you appreciate and admire most? Why?" in a structured interview schedule (p. 82). Similarly, Frick's (1991) personality theories workbook featured reflective writing prompts that encouraged students to consider people they know who represent the self-actualizing personality as well as characteristics of self-actualization that are best and least developed in themselves. Further, Shumaker (2017) discussed the general relevance of the hero metaphor in therapeutic practice with adolescent clients but did not provide a specific practical strategy. Meantime, no research has been conducted that formally appraised the effectiveness of these techniques. Bland's (2019) article began to fill that gap by providing practical suggestions for implementing PHI in therapeutic practice and pinpointing beneficial outcomes for individuals in various clinical/counseling contexts. Included are two case analyses involving middle-adult-aged men in individual outpatient therapy who were negotiating Erikson's (1959/1994) *generativity* versus *stagnation* as well as existential givens (Greening 1992). PHI also helped the clients confront and work toward overcoming Maslow's (1971) *Jonah complex* and Schneider's (1990) *hyperconstriction*.

Research on PHI and Suggestions for Future Inquiry

Bray (2019) recommended utilizing PHI to assist professional helpers as they work through their own struggles and, thus, enhance their vocational and personal lives. Further, PHI can be effective for inspiring self-determination, emancipatory values, and community connection when working with people of color (Nathaniel Granger, personal communication, August 2019; see also Jones 2020). Moreover, PHI was employed in Dharani et al.'s (2021) mixed methods study on the relevance of hero identification for curbing boredom in the workplace. Consistent with extant literature that emphasizes the banality of heroism (Zimbardo 2007), their findings suggested that participants favor qualities like honesty, humility, leading by example, and passion for work in their workplace heroes more so than achievement values. Importantly, these characteristics are synonymous with those of Maslow's self-actualizers that have been empirically demonstrated to promote sustainable workplaces and communities (Bland and Swords 2021). They also parallel Maltby et al.'s (2012) proposal of *honesty-humility* as an indicator of healthy personality – as distinct from achievement values being reflective of a status-focused stance (Prinstein 2017) reminiscent of Fromm's (1947) *marketing* character orientation that reflects deficient fulfillment of Maslow's (1987, 1999) need for esteem.

Further case studies and qualitative analyses are suggested to provide additional empirical support for PHI to demonstrate its effectiveness in multiple settings – including not only therapy but also education – and with a variety of populations. These include adolescents (given the aforementioned relevance of hero metaphors as they negotiate identity during that developmental phase, Constantino et al. 1988; Shumaker 2017), emerging adults (for whom a principal developmental task is self-authorship – transitioning out of uncritically following external formulas learned during childhood and toward making internally based decisions to meet the demands of complex roles and interpersonal intimacy, Baxter Magolda and Taylor 2016), and individuals negotiating

crises of self during adulthood (Robinson and Smith 2010).

Given that the case studies involving PHI published to date have focused on men, attention also should be given to the nuanced dimensions of how girls and women respond to PHI as they navigate their unique processes of development (Belenky et al. 1997; Sommers-Flanagan and Roscoe 2008) and transformation (Ross 2019) – as well as of gender- and sexual-diverse individuals. Researchers could further focus on PHI's ability to help clients negotiate existential givens (Greening 1992), especially in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic (Bland 2020). Further, narrative analyses could explore the adaptation of PHI to Kinsella et al.'s (2019) suggestion that reflection on who one's personal heroes have been at various life stages can promote a sense of coherence in one's life story – especially with attention given to enduring characteristics in participants' heroes that resonate with themselves as well as themes in how they could become more like their heroes.

Additional case studies could explore and demonstrate the utility of PHI as situated within the greater context of the hero journey motif (Campbell 1973) – particularly for individuals recovering from traumatic events (Bray 2018) as a means of fostering post-traumatic growth. Future research also could clarify how PHI can facilitate *mental contrasting* of a desired future with the present reality (Feinstein et al. 1988), which has been demonstrated as effective for constructively dealing with setbacks (Oettingen and Reininger 2016), promoting selective goal pursuit by changing the meaning of individuals' reality (Kappes et al. 2013), and, accordingly, reducing disproportional anxiety regarding a negative future (Brodersen and Oettingen 2017). Finally, research could further explore the employment of PHI in conjunction with mindfulness-based practices to potentially facilitate "heroically relevant qualities such as increased attentional functioning, enhanced primary sensory awareness, greater conflict monitoring, increased cognitive control, reduced fear response, and an increase in loving-kindness and self-sacrificing behaviors" (Jones 2018, p. 501) – all of which Maslow (1971, 1987, 1999) conceptualized as attributes of self-actualization.

Summary

PHI is a therapeutic strategy rooted in EH psychology that builds upon and practically applies the heroism science literature. Individuals are asked to identify a hero, five characteristics that they admire in that person, five ways in which they see themselves as similar to that person, and five things they can do to become more like that person. During debriefing with a therapist or educator, individuals engage in reflective dialogue regarding how they may enact insights gleaned from the exercise in the interest of promoting self-awareness via self-reflection and developmental maturation as well as other-awareness and relational connectedness. PHI's theoretical roots in EH psychology parallel themes in the heroism science literature. These include second-order change, the relevance of hero metaphors for fostering personal growth and therapeutic change, parallel characteristics of heroes and self-actualizing people, and the role of heroism in promoting meaning-making and harmonious interpersonal relations. Additional theoretical and empirical support for PHI in the heroism science literature includes personal heroism (versus heroic action alone) and identification of heroes (versus role models and self-actualizing people). As a therapeutic strategy, PHI is unique in its focus on inviting clients to choose and reflect on their own heroes (versus advancing an agenda by preselecting heroes). Given its relative newness, to date, the appearance of PHI in scientific and professional literature beyond Bland's (2019) article (which included two case illustrations) has been somewhat limited. On the other hand, its utility for working with specific populations has been acknowledged in the heroism science literature, and PHI also has been employed in a research study that yielded findings which are consistent with PHI's theoretical basis. Additional research

on PHI is recommended to explore its effectiveness in a more nuanced manner.

Conclusion

Zimbardo (2007) remarked that heroes forge human connection by forming essential links among individuals. During the current era characterized by uncertainty, rapid change, and isolation, PHI encourages engagement in an active meaning-making process that is conducive to transformative, sustainable change that can facilitate one's conscious participation as part of a lineage (*being in the world in relation to others*). "Personal meaning integrates individuals' ideas about who they each are, the kind of world they each live in, and how they each relate to the people and environments around them" (Kinsella et al. 2019, p. 478).

PHI contributes to heroism science not only as a practical application for helping professionals and educators but also as a conduit of research data. It heeds Sullivan and Venter's (2005) call for identification of "qualities that make individuals others' heroes ... to better understand the different ways that heroes are considered and the different effects that they have on people" (p. 110). Likewise, PHI contributes to an emerging body of literature that legitimizes the effectiveness of relationally based EH therapies (Bland in press) as an alternative to the limitations of the medical model and therapies based thereupon (Bland 2022).

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Personal Heroes Versus Cultural Heroes

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Synonyms

Individual heroes; Private heroes; Social heroes; Societal heroes; Traditional heroes

Definition

Personal heroes and cultural heroes represent two different categories of individuals who are admired and celebrated for their contributions or qualities, but they differ in scope and impact. Personal heroes are those who hold a special place in an individual's heart and life. They are people who have had a significant positive influence on an individual, often in a one-on-one or close relationship, such as a family member, mentor, or friend. Personal heroes may inspire personal growth and offer support in various life situations.

On the other hand, "cultural heroes" are figures who hold a broader and more collective significance. They are celebrated on a societal or cultural level, often for their achievements, values, or contributions that resonate with a larger community or a specific culture. These figures can be historical or contemporary, and their impact extends beyond personal connections to influence a wider audience, inspiring social change or embodying cultural ideals. Examples of cultural heroes can include famous leaders, artists, scientists, or activists who have made profound contributions to society and left a lasting legacy (Allison and Goethals 2013).

The distinction between person and cultural heroes was first made by Allison and Goethals (2012). These scholars highlighted the difference between these two hero categories while also making the important observation that surveys of people's heroes can be influenced by how surveyors measure heroism. Specifically, Allison and Goethals noted that when asked to "list your heroes," participants list their personal heroes – that is, their family members and mentors who influenced them individually. But when asked to "list the names of heroes," participants list more famous, larger-than-life, cultural heroes such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. In short, the wording of the question can determine which type of hero, personal or cultural, is activated in people's memories. Wrote Allison and Goethals (2012): "Apparently, we have two separate mental reservoirs of heroes, one that contains the names of people who heroically made a difference in our own personal lives, and another that contains the names of society's most heroic legends" (p. 1).

Examples of Personal Heroes

Personal heroes are unique to each individual and can be someone who has had a profound and positive impact on their life. Here are five examples of specific personal heroes that people report having, according to a large survey conducted by Allison and Goethals (2011):

1. **Parent or guardian**: Many individuals consider their parents or guardians as personal heroes for their unwavering love, support, and guidance throughout their lives.
2. **Mentor**: A teacher, coach, or mentor who has provided valuable wisdom, encouragement, and life lessons can become a personal hero.
3. **Friend**: A close friend who has been a source of emotional support, understanding, and shared experiences can hold a special place as a personal hero.
4. **Sibling**: For some, a brother or sister may serve as a personal hero, particularly if they have shown remarkable strength or support during their challenging times.
5. **Grandparent**: Grandparents often play a significant role in people's lives, imparting wisdom, family values, and cherished memories.
6. **Role model**: A public figure or celebrity who embodies qualities or values that deeply

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resonate with an individual, such as a favorite author, athlete, or humanitarian, can also be a personal hero.

Examples of Cultural Heroes

Cultural heroes are people who have made significant, positive contributions to humanity. Here are six examples of specific cultural heroes with international recognition:

1. **Nelson Mandela**: The former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, is celebrated worldwide for his leadership in the anti-apartheid movement and his role in promoting reconciliation and human rights.
2. **Mahatma Gandhi**: Known for his philosophy of nonviolent resistance, Mahatma Gandhi was a key figure in India's struggle for independence from British colonial rule, and his ideas continue to inspire movements for peace and civil rights around the globe.
3. **Mother Teresa**: Mother Teresa, an Albanian-Indian nun, dedicated her life to serving the poor and sick in the slums of Calcutta (now Kolkata) and became an international symbol of selflessness and humanitarian work.
4. **Martin Luther King Jr**.: An iconic figure in the American civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr. is recognized worldwide for his advocacy of nonviolent protest and his pursuit of racial equality.
5. **Albert Einstein**: The renowned physicist Albert Einstein reshaped our understanding of the universe with his theory of relativity and became an enduring symbol of scientific genius and innovation.
6. **Malala Yousafzai**: Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani education activist, gained international recognition for her advocacy of girls' education. She survived a Taliban assassination attempt in 2012 and continued her activism. Malala became the youngest-ever Nobel Prize laureate in 2014. Her unwavering commitment to promoting education for girls and gender equality has made her an inspiration to countless individuals worldwide, highlighting the importance of education as a means of empowerment and positive change.

Conclusion

The distinction between personal heroes and cultural heroes is important for several reasons. First, personal heroes are deeply personal and subjective, while cultural heroes have a more widespread and collective significance. Recognizing this distinction helps individuals understand and appreciate that the people they admire or look up to may not hold the same significance for others. Second, cultural heroes often play a significant role in shaping the identity and values of a community or society. Understanding these figures helps individuals connect with their cultural heritage and history. Third, cultural heroes often embody and promote certain values and principles, which can be important for education and character development. Personal heroes may represent values that resonate with an individual's personal journey. In summary, recognizing the difference between personal heroes and cultural heroes allows for a more nuanced understanding of how individuals and societies are influenced, inspired, and shaped by the people they admire, both on a personal level and within the broader cultural and historical context.

Cross-References

► Constructions of Heroism
► Definitions and Descriptions of Heroism
► Folk Heroes and Heroines
► Heroization
► Images of Heroes
► Movie Heroes

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Personalistic Rule

► Charisma and Heroism

Personality

► Cultural Heroes

Personality of the Hero

► Video Games and Heroism

Personality, Individual Differences, and Heroism

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Synonyms

Big Five traits and heroism; Character; Disposition; Heroic personality; Heroic traits; Nature; Temperament;

Definition

Research on individual differences in heroism reveals that certain psychological traits and dispositions are more common in those who engage in heroic acts (Fagin-Jones 2019; Oliner and Oliner 1988). Some heroism is characterized by impulsiveness (Rand et al. 2012) and a natural inclination toward altruism (Haidt and Joseph 2004). These spontaneous heroic acts suggest that heroism is immediate and intuitive rather than thoughtful and reflective (Rand et al. 2012). Other types of heroism, characterized by a lifelong commitment to a noble cause, suggest dispositional traits such as a deep sense of purpose (Bronk and Riches 2017), moral justice (Kim and Prevost 2024), and commitment to a noble cause (Farley 2013).

Empathy occupies a significant space in the personality of a hero. Heroes demonstrate an expansive capacity to empathize with others, including those perceived as different from oneself (Kohen et al. 2018). Studies indicate that heroes tend to possess traits such as an expanded worldview (Friedman 2017) and a strong sense of efficacy (Condren 2023). Compared to passive bystanders, heroes have more intelligence (Allison 2014), stronger motivation to protect others (Kinsella et al. 2015), greater courage (Sanderson 2024), and more humility (Swain and Dykhuis 2024). Although both men and women show all types of heroism, men tend to be more drawn to physical heroism and women to social, emotional, and spiritual heroism (Hoyt et al. 2020). Furthermore, research suggests that while some aspects of heroism, such as courage, can be cultivated through training (Kohen et al. 2018), other traits might be more innate (Kafashan et al. 2017), underscoring the complex interplay of individual predispositions and learned behaviors in heroic acts (Allison 2024).

Individual Differences in Heroism

Individual differences in tendencies to perform heroic acts can include aspects of moral character, levels of empathy, types of social values, prosocial personality, variations in intended heroic behaviors, and traits that overlap with psychopathy. Below are brief descriptions of these trait differences.

Moral Character and Exemplars

Larry Walker and Jeremy Frimer conducted research on *moral exemplars*, delving into the

multifaceted nature of moral heroism (Frimer and Walker 2009; Walker and Frimer 2007). Their work aimed to understand the personalities and motivations of individuals who exhibit exceptional moral behavior. Walker and Frimer examined the personalities of moral heroes by studying dozens of national awardees for moral action and comparing them to non-awardees. Through personality inventories and life-review interviews, they identified moral exemplars as scoring high on the trait of *communality*. These exemplars possessed qualities such as nurturance, sensitivity to the needs of others, cooperativeness, and emotional expressiveness. Frimer and Walker also identified moral exemplars as high on the trait of *deliberative*. This group demonstrated sophisticated epistemic and moral reasoning, along with heightened self-development motivation. Frimer and Walker's data also revealed that individuals equipped with certain virtues respond to opportunities evoking moral heroism. Moral exemplars were distinguished from comparison groups by themes embodied in their life narratives. These themes reflected the personological core of the moral domain, emphasizing the interplay between dispositional traits, adaptations, and integrative self-narratives. By studying moral exemplars, Walker and Frimer have illuminated the psychological traits, motivations, and developmental histories that drive exceptional moral conduct.

Empathy

Kohen et al. (2018, 619) define a hero as "a person who knowingly, and voluntarily, acts for the good of one or more people at significant risk to the self, without being motivated by reward." The motive underlying the heroic act is very important to Kohen et al.'s formulation of heroism. If a prosocial action is motivated by a desire for recognition, then it is by definition not heroism. Kohen et al. also use the term *expansive empathy* to describe the sense of one-ness that a hero feels for all other people, even those who are dissimilar to the hero. In their analysis of the heroes' responses in emergency situations, Kohen et al. (2018) concluded that real-world heroes plan for the moment when others might need their help. In short, heroes are mentally and physically prepared for heroic behavior because "heroism is, in some very real sense, predetermined by a series of choices made long before the heroic action takes place" (629). The average person can and should receive training in heroism that focuses on acquiring specific life-saving techniques, and heroic qualities such as situational awareness and empathy. Such training should heed several cautions about the risks of teaching people to be heroic (Riches et al. 2020). It is important to note that Kohen et al.'s work on empathy is consistent with research on empathy as a driver of altruism. The *altruism-empathy* hypothesis, developed by Daniel Batson (1991), posits that our capacity to empathize with others, even those perceived as "other," is a key motivator for altruistic actions.

Social Values

People differ in the social values they possess, with some values correlating with heroism more than others. Allison and Beggan (2024) proposed that there are three types of social values – those that can be considered heroic; those that may be villainous; and those that are context-dependent on the hero-villain dimension. Two heroic social values are *altruism* and *cooperation*. Altruism refers to an individual's preference to forego positive outcomes to the self in favor of positive outcomes to others. The altruist's intent is to maximize the gains of others. The second heroic social value is cooperation, referring to a person's preference to maximize the positive outcomes received by everyone in the collective, including oneself. Because this social value focuses on maximizing the well-being of everyone, it is arguably the most heroic of all the social values. Three context-dependent social values that may be considered heroic include *individualism*, *martyrdom*, and *competition*. Because they demonstrate the heroic traits of courage and resilience, survivors of horrible ordeals are examples of individualist heroes. Joan of Arc is an example of a martyr hero, and Serena Williams is an example of a competitor hero.

The Prosocial Personality Model

The Prosocial Personality Model posits that prosocial behavior, including actions that benefit

others or society as a whole, can be predicted by certain personality traits. Developed by Louis Penner and his colleagues, the model identifies two main dimensions: other-oriented empathy and helpfulness (Penner et al. 2005). Other-oriented empathy refers to the emotional component, where individuals can understand and feel the emotions of others, thereby driving them to act in a caring manner. Helpfulness represents the behavioral tendency to provide assistance and is influenced by past experiences and the belief in one's effectiveness in aiding others. This model suggests that individuals with high levels of these traits are more likely to engage in consistent prosocial behaviors, including heroic acts.

Intended Heroic Behavior Scale

Brian Riches (2022) recently developed the Intended Heroic Behavior Scale (IHBS), an innovative 8-item survey instrument designed to reliably capture an individual's proclivity for heroic action. The IHBS has shown promise in predicting heroic acts, providing researchers with a means to empirically investigate heroism and evaluate hero training initiatives. To develop the IHBS, Riches had experts in the field rate the content of potential scale items and recommend changes and additions to the scale. Laypeople then assessed the face validity and content validity of the items by rating how realistic the heroic scenarios were. Riches found that the IHBS had both discriminant and convergent validity. Confirmatory analysis validated the structure of the scale and differentiated between a general factor of intended heroism and two specific factors: social and civil heroism. The scale's ability to distinguish heroes from nonheroes was confirmed by comparing responses from a group known for heroic actions with those of a control group. The IHBS has proven effective in generating accurate data on heroism and has great potential for predicting heroic behavior. In addition, the scale can improve the efficaciousness of hero training programs.

Psychopathic Traits and Heroism

Scott Lilienfeld and his colleagues identified significant overlap between traits attributed to heroes and those associated with psychopaths (Murphy et al. 2017). According to these scholars' studies, both heroes and psychopaths share the trait of fearlessness, which can manifest as either commendable acts of bravery or dangerous psychopathic behavior. Researchers pointed out that this fearlessness, when combined with other traits such as boldness and charm, can result in positive social behaviors, like heroism, especially when individuals are inclined to take risks and make quick, confident decisions in dangerous contexts. Such traits might lead individuals with psychopathic tendencies to perform actions that could save others from harm. Lilienfeld warned against glorifying psychopathic traits, as the preponderance of evidence shows that psychopathy typically results in damage to individuals and society. He emphasized that despite the occasional emergence of heroic actions from psychopathic characteristics, these two are fundamentally different, with distinct impacts. Yet, Lilienfeld acknowledged a nuanced relationship between psychopathy and heroism, suggesting that they might share a closer genetic relationship than previously thought.

Heroism and the Big Five Factor Model of Personality

The Big Five model, also known as the Five-Factor Model (FFM), is a widely accepted framework in psychology that describes human personality based on five broad dimensions (McCrae and Costa 1999). These dimensions are Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. The Big Five model provides a comprehensive and widely used framework for understanding and measuring personality traits, offering valuable insights into individual differences in behavior and temperament.

Openness to Experience

Openness involves creativity, curiosity, and adaptability. It reflects an individual's receptiveness to new experiences, ideas, and unconventional thinking. People high in openness tend to be

imaginative, curious, and open-minded, embracing diversity and novelty with enthusiasm. They are often creative, appreciative of art and beauty, and inclined toward intellectual pursuits. On the other hand, individuals low in openness may prefer routine, familiarity, and established traditions, displaying a more practical and conservative approach to life. Openness captures the spectrum of cognitive flexibility and a willingness to explore the richness of the world, influencing how individuals engage with and respond to the complexities of their environment.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness relates to organization, responsibility, and self-discipline. In the context of the Five Factor Model of human personality, "conscientiousness" is a trait that encapsulates an individual's degree of organization, responsibility, and goal-directed behavior. People high in conscientiousness are typically characterized by their reliability, self-discipline, and a strong sense of duty. They are often organized, detail-oriented, and diligent in their work, exhibiting a proactive approach to achieving their aspirations. Conscientious individuals tend to set and pursue long-term goals with perseverance, displaying a commitment to excellence and a mindful consideration of their responsibilities. On the contrary, individuals low in conscientiousness may be more spontaneous, flexible, and less inclined toward structured planning and disciplined execution of tasks. Conscientiousness plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's work ethic, reliability, and overall success in pursuing their ambitions.

Extraversion

Extraversion refers to sociability, assertiveness, and enthusiasm. In the context of the Five Factor Model of human personality, "extraversion" refers to a dimension that captures the extent to which an individual is outgoing, sociable, and energized by social interactions. People high in extraversion are typically characterized by their assertiveness, talkativeness, and enthusiasm in group settings. They thrive on social engagement, seek excitement, and are often perceived as energetic and expressive. Extraverts are inclined toward seeking external stimulation and are generally more comfortable in the company of others. Conversely, individuals low in extraversion, or introverts, tend to prefer solitude or small-group interactions, may be more reserved, and often require time alone to recharge. Extraversion influences how people approach and engage with the external world, impacting their social behaviors, communication styles, and preferences for activities that range from lively social gatherings to solitary pursuits.

Agreeableness

Graziano and his colleagues (e.g., Graziano and Tobin 2009) have conducted research indicating that agreeableness, a key aspect of the Big Five personality traits, is crucial for prosocial actions. This trait encompasses tendencies like sympathy, generosity, a forgiving nature, and a willingness to assist others, all of which contribute to peaceful interactions and being well-liked. It's logically assumed that agreeableness would correlate with a propensity to assist others, and studies by Graziano and colleagues confirm this, showing that people with high levels of agreeableness are more inclined to aid not just those close to them like family and friends, but also strangers and other groups. People who are agreeable tend to believe that others will act cooperatively and generously, which leads them to engage in helpful behaviors that foster positive social exchanges.

Neuroticism

Neuroticism refers to emotional stability and resilience. In the context of the Five Factor Model of human personality, "neuroticism" is a trait that reflects the tendency of an individual to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness, and irritability. People high in neuroticism often exhibit emotional instability and heightened reactivity to stressors. They may be more prone to worry, mood swings, and self-doubt. Neurotic individuals may find it challenging to manage their emotions effectively and may perceive threats in situations where others might not. Conversely, people low in neuroticism tend to be more emotionally stable, resilient in the face of adversity, and less likely to experience intense negative

emotions. Neuroticism influences how people cope with life's challenges, manage stress, and navigate emotional ups and downs, playing a crucial role in shaping their overall emotional well-being and responses to various life events.

Speculating on the Big Five personality profile of a typical hero, based on contemporary positive psychology research, we can make some educated assumptions. Heroes are often characterized by high levels of agreeableness, reflecting traits like empathy, altruism, and cooperativeness, which are crucial for engaging in selfless and prosocial behaviors (Graziano and Tobin 2009). High conscientiousness is also likely, as it encompasses qualities like responsibility, persistence, and a strong sense of duty, enabling heroes to commit to their cause and follow through with their actions (Allison and Goethals 2011). Extraversion may be moderately high, given that many heroic acts require social engagement, assertiveness, and often, leadership skills (Kinsella et al. 2015).

However, the levels of openness to experience and neuroticism might vary more widely among heroes. Openness to experience could be high in most heroes, manifesting as creativity, curiosity, and a willingness to explore novel or challenging situations. But some heroes might exhibit lower levels of openness, focusing more on traditional values or established methods to guide their actions. Neuroticism, which involves emotional stability, may also range widely. Some heroes might have low neuroticism, contributing to their ability to remain calm and effective under pressure. Yet, others might have higher levels of neuroticism, with their actions driven by strong emotional responses to injustice or suffering.

Habashi, Graziano, and Hoover (2016) explored the roles of personality traits, emotional responses, and clear prosocial actions. These scholars examined how the Big Five personality traits correlate with prosocial behavior. Their results showed that agreeableness is most strongly linked to emotional responses when confronted with individuals requiring assistance, and to the ensuing choice to offer aid. Neuroticism, too, was found to influence how people respond to those needing assistance, aligning with earlier findings that it is associated with self-centered negative reactions, like personal distress, in situations where help is needed. These reactions, however, did not correlate with the actual decision to provide help. Habashi et al. concluded that the Prosocial Personality Model, which includes only agreeableness and neuroticism, offered the clearest and most straightforward link between personality traits and prosocial behavior (Penner et al. 1995). While openness had some connection to prosocial emotions, it did not significantly affect the relationship between these emotions and prosocial behavior. Moreover, when analyzed individually, agreeableness emerged as the trait most significantly influencing the decision to help others.

Habashi et al.'s (2016) results suggest that personality influences helping behaviors not just through empathy-driven prosocial emotions but also via contextual prompts. Specifically, how personality traits correlate with empathic concern – a compassionate emotional reaction to those requiring aid – is influenced by whether an individual is encouraged to adopt another's perspective. In practical terms, people with lower agreeableness might not be inherently lacking in empathy, but they may need external cues to feel and act on empathic concern. This phenomenon aligns with cognitive-development theory and is akin to what is termed a "production deficiency problem," where the potential for empathy exists in less agreeable people but remains dormant until triggered by specific situations or events.

Perceptions of the Heroic Personality

Elaine Kinsella and her colleagues (2015) conducted prototype research suggesting there is a shared understanding about the heroic personality. These researchers found that the central features of heroes are perceived to be *bravery, moral integrity, courage, conviction, honesty, altruistic, self-sacrificing, selfless, determined, willingness to protect and save others*, *inspiring*, and *helpful*. Peripheral features of heroes include *proactivity, strength, leadership, compassion, risk-taking, exceptionality, humility, fearlessness, caring, powerful, intelligent, talented,* and *personable*. Allison and Goethals' (2011) surveys showed that heroes are perceived to

be smart, strong, reliable, charismatic, caring, resilient, selfless, and inspiring.

In an unpublished study, Scott Allison and Greg Smith noted that three of the Great Eight traits of heroes – *smart, reliable,* and *caring* – correspond to three of the Big Five traits of heroes – *openness, conscientiousness,* and *agreeableness* (*Allison* 2014). Allison and Smith arranged for research participants to watch dozens of the greatest movies of all time. Half the movies were chosen from the *American Film Institute*'s list of the top 100 most critically acclaimed movies; the other half were selected from among those that had earned the highest box-office revenues of all time. Participants independently coded the degree to which the hero of each movie possessed each of the five traits in the Big Five model. Allison and Smith's results revealed the personality profile of a movie hero:

1. *Heroes are* **open to experience**. They possess above-average intelligence and are open to novel ideas and activities.
2. *Heroes are* **conscientious**. They are dependable, dutiful, and disciplined.
3. *Heroes are* **extroverted**. They prefer the company of others and are energetic and sociable.
4. *Heroes are generally* **agreeable**. They are warm, compassionate, and cooperative. However, when their heroism requires them to disrupt the status quo, heroes can be disagreeable.
5. *Heroes are* **generally secure and confident**. They are emotionally stable people with few neurotic tendencies. At times, however, heroes can harbor some doubts about whether their heroic path is the right path.

Conclusion

The role of personality in heroic action has garnered considerable attention in psychological research, with many aspects of human individual differences being linked to heroism. Studies indicate that traits such as agreeableness and openness may predict the propensity for heroic acts, emphasizing the role of empathy, courage, and resilience. The Prosocial Personality Model further elucidates this connection, proposing that a combination of other-oriented empathy and personal helpfulness informs one's likelihood to engage in heroism. The Intended Heroic Behavior Scale (IHBS) shows great promise in predicting who is most likely to emerge as a hero. Moreover, the trait of impulsiveness has been linked to immediate, risk-laden heroic behaviors, suggesting an instinctual component to acts of heroism. Yet it is also clear that heroism can be nurtured and cultivated through socialization and training processes.

Looking to the future, research on personality and heroism could benefit from a more nuanced approach that includes longitudinal studies to track the development of heroic traits over time. Investigations could also expand to include biological and cultural variables, providing a more holistic view of the antecedents of heroism. The interplay between situational factors and personality suggests that heroism is not solely a function of innate traits but a complex phenomenon influenced by a dynamic environment. Continued exploration will enhance our understanding of how ordinary individuals can perform extraordinary acts of heroism, ultimately contributing to the cultivation of a more compassionate and courageous society.

Cross-References

▶ Actor-Observer Differences in the Perceptions of Heroism
▶ Biology of Heroism
▶ Dark factor of Personality (D) and Heroism
▶ Definitions and Descriptions of Heroism
▶ Evolution of Heroism
▶ Evolution of Peacefulness

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Persuasion

▶ Leadership and Heroism
▶ Rhetoric of Heroism
▶ Storytelling and Meaning

Peter Pan Syndrome

▶ Puer Aeternus Phenomenon: An Obstacle to Hero Development

Philanthropic Heroes

▶ Volunteerism and Heroism

Philanthropy

▶ Altruism
▶ Charitable Giving

Philanthropy and Heroism

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Synonyms

Altruism; Charity; Generosity; Humanitarianism

Definition

Philanthropy refers to "love for humanity" (Greek) expressed by promoting the common good through giving and volunteering.

Wealthy philanthropists regularly appear in popular culture either as heroes or villains with often global ambitions. Tony Stark in the *Iron Man* franchise seeks heroic redemption after making billions as an arms dealer in his previous life. The 2008 James Bond movie *Quantum of Solace* features Dominic Greene, a wealthy environmental philanthropist, who serves as a new villain challenging Bond actor Daniel Craig. In the 2021 Netflix series *Lupin* and Showtime's *Billions* series, philanthropists appear as main characters using their generosity for questionable goals. At the same time, contemporary philanthropists regularly garner public praise for their giving. In November 2011, *Forbes* magazine names Bill Gates one of *7 Most Influential Vaccine Heroes* (Forbes 2011). Other generous donors are regularly featured in annual lists, including *Forbes* magazine's *America's Top Givers* (Forbes Wealth Team 2022) and *Asia's Heroes of Philanthropy* (Forbes 2022a). As it is increasingly expected for the ultra-rich to give away their wealth (Soskis 2021), these philanthropists are becoming powerful agenda-setters and policy makers in global and domestic affairs (Hägel 2020; Kumar 2019).

Are Philanthropists Heroes?

Heroism studies can contribute to a better understanding of large-scale philanthropy as an activity claiming to improve the lives of others. A hero is a particular type of leader; someone who chooses voluntarily to take substantial physical or social risks to help others (Allison et al. 2017; Franco et al. 2016; Jayawickreme and Di Stefano 2012). Using this definition, wealthy philanthropists certainly aim to help others and often do so at a very large scale, although they rarely take personal risks and exercise substantial power through their generosity. In addition, individual actions are typically perceived as heroic only after a success changes the minds of initially skeptical observers. In contrast, large-scale philanthropy is well-accepted social behavior with much more predictable reputational rewards. In this sense, the real heroes in the world of philanthropy are not the wealthy, but the much poorer sections of society. Research has long established that the poor are relatively more generous than the wealthy because they have "greater sensitivity to other's welfare" (Piff and Robinson 2017) causing them to share their limited resources with those in need.

Philanthropy and the Hero's Journey

While most well-known philanthropists are not classical heroes, heroism studies offers useful

analytical instruments, including the idea of the hero's journey (Campbell 1949). It describes in broad terms a path of individual self-discovery also observed among philanthropists moving from the world of accumulating awesome resources to a new world of philanthropy. Although Campbell's hero's journey has been criticized for its ethnocentrism (Korte and Wendt 2019), it does provide one useful approach to exploring contemporary wealth philanthropy dominated by many white and male protagonists (Schmitz and McCollim 2021).

The hero's journey begins with a departure from the ordinary world, often taken by philanthropists when they leave their corporate careers behind and declare their intentions to now "give back" to society (Schmitz and McCollim 2021). For example, Bill Gates stepped away as CEO of Microsoft in 2000 to then shift his attention to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) launched during the same year. The hero's journey involves taking on a new adventure dedicated now to the common good, which may take the individual through stages of self-doubt, ordeals, and roadblocks often requiring superhuman bravery and courage. Wealthy philanthropists may occasionally experience self-doubts, including sometimes expressing a desire to learn from others (Schmitz and McCollim 2021: 128). However, a majority of wealthy philanthropists are much more confident that their business acumen makes them uniquely qualified to address major global problems. Bill Gates has declared the eradication of polio as one of goals, among solving other global health problems. Mark Zuckerberg focused his initial philanthropic forays on fixing schools in the United States (Russakoff 2015). Such ambitious goals may be a required part of a redemptive hero's journey.

Consciously or subconsciously, these individuals often seek substantial reputational benefits or at least atonement for possible ethical transgressions in the past. In some cases, philanthropy may even serve as a means to generate a protective aura to manipulate elite and public perceptions of past or current business practices. Until the Opioid scandal broke, the Sackler family's generosity was very welcome at major cultural institutions and explicitly instrumentalized the nonprofit sector for protecting profits (Rendon 2022). In this sense, the script of the hero's journey can help everyday villains to hide behind seemingly altruistic actions and manipulate public perceptions.

Debates About Philanthropy and Its Role in Society

Attempts by prominent philanthropists to portray themselves as saviors, if not heroes, have been met with widespread skepticism from the time ultra-wealthy individuals, such as Andrew Carnegie or John Rockefeller, emerged in public view. As more and more wealthy individuals discovered philanthropy as an attractive "second act," a number of persistent questions about the legitimacy of ultra-wealthy giving have been regularly raised. Those include tensions between practices of wealth acquisition and philanthropic activities and how to balance the freedom to give away one's fortune with demands for accountability to affected populations.

Tensions Between Wealth Acquisition and Philanthropic Action

In 2022, Forbes counted 2668 billionaires in the world and estimated their combined wealth to be around $12.7 trillion (Forbes 2022b). This amount matches the combined 2021 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Japan, Germany, and India – the third, fourth, and fifth largest national economies, respectively. In recent years, wealth accumulation even for some of the most generous billionaires has often outpaced their giving. For example, Warren Buffett has given away approximately U.S.-$37 billion to date, while his wealth more than doubled in the past decade from an estimated $47 billion in 2010 to about $105 billion in early 2023.

As the wealth of many philanthropists has continued to grow, they face regular questions about their investment and tax avoidance strategies (Gelles 2018). Critics regularly point out that a capacity to portray oneself as a major benefactor

to society often relies on not paying taxes commensurate with one's wealth or on investing in highly profitable, but also harmful industries. Most philanthropists aren't former arms dealers like Tony Stark, but many have faced questions about the ethics of their past or current investments. For example, the investment portfolio of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) was subject to a *Los Angeles* Times investigation in 2007 because it featured substantial holdings in oil companies, including Royal Dutch Shell, Exxon Mobil, Chevron, and Total of France (Piller et al. 2007). While the Foundation pledged to adopt a more socially responsible investment strategy, gaps between wealth acquisition strategies and philanthropic commitments remain common. In 2023, Bill Gates invested about US-$950 million in the Dutch brewery group Heineken (Reuters 2023), although the harmful use of alcohol is a major global contributor to non-communicable diseases (Schmitz 2016).

A regular criticism of philanthropy is that massive wealth acquisition is responsible for the social problems it claims to address (Giridharadas 2018). As wealthy donors proclaim to improve health and educational outcomes (Schmitz et al. 2021a, b), inequalities in those areas are not diminishing significantly and philanthropy is said to become simply a part of maintaining societal inequality (Eikenberry and Mirabella 2018; McGoey 2016). Tax policies can also directly contribute to this problem. In the United States and many other countries, donors can receive generous tax deductions as part of their philanthropic activities. These resources are then no longer available for equality-focused government policies but are privatized and can be directed to preferred causes of the wealthy (Reich 2018). While many wealthy donors claim to be committed to social change, evidence suggests that giving "goes to large institutions – such as universities, hospitals, and cultural institutions – that are vital to a healthy society, but may not make progress against donors' stated priorities" (Ditkoff et al. 2018). Fundamentally, large-scale philanthropy rarely supports social justice issues or targets the problem of perpetual wealth inequality. Large investments in health or education are valuable, but they were already on top of Andrew Carnegie's list of preferred causes more than 100 years ago (Carnegie 1889/2017). This enduring emphasis of philanthropists on issues of opportunity rather than focusing more directly on equality can be perceived as wanting to preserve a status quo of extraordinarily wealthy and powerful individuals with wide-ranging portfolios of "heroic" philanthropy.

Another contemporary example of the problematic link between wealth acquisition and philanthropy is the YouTube personality MrBeast. MrBeast regularly links "charity" to the generation of more online attention and personal brand building, even if he claims that philanthropy is the ultimate end, not a means. MrBeast's business model makes large-scale philanthropy an essential part of wealth acquisition because it serves as a tool to draw in audiences celebrating well-rehearsed "heroic" actions. For example, a 2023 video about basic cataract surgery prominently features MrBeast explaining to a celebratory audience how 1000 formerly blind individuals can now see again (MrBeast 2023). The video features helpless victims and a single "savior" in the context of a type of medical intervention neither complicated nor particularly costly. MrBeast simultaneously uses his status to draw attention to a worthy charitable cause, while also exploiting a system of inequalities incapable of ending the underlying harmful conditions (Wade 2023). Many in the audience undoubtedly see MrBeast as a hero, although the problem he solves is entirely avoidable under more equitable global conditions.

Philanthropic Freedom and Control Versus Democratic Accountability

A key debate about the influence of philanthropy centers around the tension between the freedom to give away one's fortune and the accountability for the effects of donations. This tension has become increasingly prominent as many philanthropists have ratcheted up their ambition to not just be charitable in a traditional sense (Soskis 2015)

but to address and eliminate the root causes of major social issues. With the rise of strategic philanthropy (Kania et al. 2014) as well as the emergence of the effective altruism movement (Greaves and Pummer 2019), philanthropy has increasingly adopted corporate terminologies, including impact, scaling, or return on investment. As philanthropy is increasingly betting on legitimating itself by claiming to solve poverty and other social ailments, it does very little to enhance its input legitimacy by being responsive to those it serves or the general public. A major sign of this shift toward even greater secrecy and unaccountability is the rise of donor-advised funds (DAFs) or limited liability companies (LLCs) as philanthropic vehicles. These include the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative (CZI), the Omidyar Network, the Open Philanthropy Project, or the Emerson Collective. Just like many superheroes on the big screen, wealthy philanthropists frequently create separate and parallel worlds to leave the public in the dark about their motives and capacities.

There is substantial evidence that shifts in wealth distribution have substantial effects on the nonprofit sector and public policy. As fewer individuals control relatively larger amounts of overall wealth, they have more power over how major social issues are addressed and under what conditions large sections of society live. Existing research has tracked the power of philanthropy in shaping global development, including the economic policies in India (Kumar 2022), the Green Revolution in agriculture (Nally and Taylor 2015), or the power of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) in reshaping the global health field (McGoey 2016). The BMGF today defines much of what is happing in global health, and its principals have asserted personal control over this agenda. At the scale of the BMGF's annual spending of US-$9bn, it is a given that it has a major impact, but this also includes limiting the emergence of dissent or alternative perspectives on a given global health issue (Harman 2016). In return for pledging to give away most of their wealth, the Gateses and many other wealthy individuals exert today an unrivaled sense of personal power (Horvath and Powell 2020), which regularly generates public commentary projecting heroic motives onto their actions.

The global growth in wealth inequality gives very few individuals increasing influence to shape the nonprofit sector and public policies (Callahan 2017). While the public is becoming increasingly aware of ultra-wealthy philanthropy, the percentage of US households giving to charitable causes dropped from 66% in 2000 to 55% in 2014 (Rooney 2018). These developments may lead to an increasingly plutocratic philanthropic sector (Saunders-Hastings 2018) driven by ever fewer individuals experiencing unprecedented levels of privilege shaping their perspectives on the rest of the world. With extremely wealthy individuals shaping public policies at global and national levels, public debates constantly oscillate between hero-worship and demands for greater attention to, and accountability for these private actors (Skocpol 2016). For many analysts, much of large-scale philanthropy relies heavily on projecting altruism and good intentions, while frequently perpetuating inequality and excessive consumption visible in asserting control over invaluable assets, including nature and the wilderness (Farrell 2020).

In Closing: Where Are the Antiheroes in Philanthropy?

Although the hero theme is frequently used when discussing the influence of wealthy philanthropists, there are also self-styled philanthropic antiheroes. In recent years, this role has been prominently occupied by MacKenzie Scott, who built Amazon with Jeff Bezos until the couple divorced in 2019. In a 3-year period from 2019 to 2022, Scott then gave away more than $14bn. Unlike many of her peers, she adopted a hands-off approach and claimed to "want to de-emphasize privileged voices and cede focus to others" (Scott 2021). Her philanthropic portfolio explicitly targeted groups with minority leadership, focused attention on social justice issues, and did not require grant proposals or impose (major) reporting obligations (Schmitz et al. 2021a, b). Benefitting groups could use the resources

however they deemed most useful. With support from Melinda Gates and others, Scott sought to avoid the spotlight associated with her level of generosity, although she agreed recently to be more transparent about how she chose the past 1600 beneficiary organizations. On a website titled Yield Giving, centering the idea of "giving up control," Scott explains a need to act as "privately and anonymously as we can in order to limit burden on non-profits and avoid diverting them from their work" (Yield Giving 2022).

Of course, Scott herself has become a hero to many, simply because she seems to be rejecting long-standing expectations about what constitutes appropriate behavior for a wealthy philanthropist. But Scott also shares a number of long-standing practices with her peers, including a preference for operating in secrecy and relying on elite philanthropic institutions and consulting firms. While she took some steps of the hero's journey by stepping into a new world of large-scale philanthropy, Scott tried to steer away from the typical dilemmas of the field, including questions about having ulterior motives and exerting undue and unaccountable influence on civil society and democracy. It remains to be seen if others will view her as an attractive model for their own philanthropic giving or if she remains an outlier who explicitly rejected the hero expectations often associated with major philanthropists.

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Philosophy of Heroism

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Definition

Theoretical consideration of heroism and heroic action from Western philosophical perspectives.

Philosophy of Heroism

Heroism has never been a major theme in Western philosophy – philosophical interest in heroism has been sporadic and marginal, and it remains the case today that "the philosophy of heroism" does not designate any identifiable and coherent subfield. Recent scholarly work on heroism has thus largely been done in the context of social psychology, with no particularly noteworthy contribution from philosophy (Franco et al. 2018). Indeed, even in those areas of contemporary moral philosophy where philosophical interest in heroism is most explicit, it is still taken up largely as a paradoxical problem. But this work may ultimately yield insights that prove helpful in resolving

certain conceptual ambiguities that limit the potential impact of heroism research.

Historical Background

Heroism has been addressed by numerous philosophers across the history of the discipline, but it has typically been understood in terms specific to their respective philosophical projects rather than as a substantive theme in its own right. Plato, for instance, reinforced his ethical and metaphysical principles by valorizing as heroic, in contrast to classical (Homeric) heroic figures such as Achilles and Odysseus, the self-sacrificial other-regardingness exhibited by Socrates in dutifully following his philosophical calling (Kohen 2013). This portrayal of Socrates left an indelible mark on the Western philosophical imagination, finding echoes in Augustine's heroic valorization of Christian martyrs (1998, X.21, 423), and more generally in Christian hagiography where the lives of saints, lives taken as having in some way been lived in *imitatio Christi*, were similarly construed in heroic terms. This post-classical view of heroism in terms of self-sacrifice in the name of a higher universality retains considerable currency today, although echoes of classical conceptions continue to reverberate as well.

With the advent of modernity, however, when enlightenment ideals of secular egalitarianism and democratic sovereignty gained wide acceptance, it became unclear whether there could still be a meaningful place for heroism understood in terms of exceptional excellence or superiority of any kind. In a short text written in the middle of the eighteenth century (Rousseau 1994), Rousseau wrestled with the tensions between classical and post-classical conceptions of heroism in an effort – ultimately unsuccessful – to make it relevant to his own emerging vision of citizenship within a system of autonomous and popular self-government (Cameron 1984; Jackson 1989). In effect, he tried to reconcile the idea that heroism "has only the felicity of others as its object and only their admiration as its reward" with the contrary observation that "public felicity is far less the end of the Hero's actions than it is a means to reach the one he sets for himself, [which] is almost always his personal glory" (Rousseau 1994, 2–3). Rousseau tried to iron out this tension by redefining what is essential to heroism, not in terms of any particular virtues or forms of action, but rather in terms of what he called "strength of soul" [*la force de l'âme*] (1994, 9). For him, the "glory" of heroism is now to be understood as a kind of spiritual autonomy. "To be great, it is necessary only to become master of oneself." And this can be achieved through any sort of action and in all circumstances: "all events honor the strong man, happiness and adversity serve equally for his glory, and he rules no less in chains than on the Throne" (1994, 10). While this might fit well with a robust vision of democratic citizenship, it threatens to strain traditional conceptions of heroism beyond the breaking point. Indeed, Rousseau's own dissatisfaction with this text – which he never disavowed but which he did preface with the blunt warning: "This piece is very bad" (1994, 1) – reflects the genuine difficulty of reconciling the exceptional superiority of premodern heroic archetypes with modern egalitarian ideals.

Writing in the early nineteenth century, Hegel effectively resolved this problem by rethinking heroism in terms of "world-historical individuals," that is, individuals (e.g., Socrates, Caesar, Luther, Napoléon) who play foundationally constructive roles in the necessary dialectical unfolding of world history, but who ultimately do so as the unwitting agents of the *Weltgeist* [World Spirit]. Viewed retrospectively, such heroes are in a sense literally ahead of their time, "the next species which was already formed in the womb of time" (Hegel 1956, 30). But they exist *only* in the past – for Hegel, the system of modern "ethical life" [*Sittlichkeit*] which, in transcending the abstractness of "morality" [*Moralität*], represents the concrete culmination of the providential world-historical process, no longer has either a place nor a need for heroes. A similar "great man" view of history, albeit with a more distinctly Whiggish inflection, was also expressed by Thomas Carlyle (1841).

In contrast, toward the end of the nineteenth century Nietzsche regarded the whole period of

Judeo-Christianity as having carried out a "slave revolt in morality" (Nietzsche 1994), that is, the establishment and institution of a moralized sense of "good" that valorized altruistic self-sacrifice over egoistic self-affirmation, which correspondingly became associated with the disvalue of "evil." Although this certainly had in his view an impressive historical run, Nietzsche thought that the creative energy of morality so construed had been exhausted, leading to a problematic situation of nihilism. But this also thereby opened up the possibility of a new, *post*-moral conception of heroism which, rather than looking backwards to history, is oriented forward to the so-called *Übermensch* [Overman] as portending a higher stage in the future evolution of the species (Nietzsche 2006). Albeit more in the form of a negative cautionary tale about threats to democracy (based largely on the case of Lenin and the Russian Revolution), the account of the "event-making individual" defended by Sidney Hook (1943) has certain affinities with the Nietzschean perspective (cf. Bentley 1957).

On the surface, the Hegelian and Nietzschean views initially appear quite remote from one another. But inasmuch as they both connect heroism with overcoming morality in some way, they might not be so far apart. A recent exposition of what a Hegelian account of fully self-conscious Spirit would be proposes a "magnanimous" account of human agency which, by situating it within a robust structure of social recognition, synthesizes key features of classical, pre-moral heroism with moral universalism on the grounds that normative responsibility for action is now spread out and shared by all (Brandom 2019a). Such an account could be seen as realizing the Rousseauian vision of "strength of soul" at the societal level by reconciling the Hegelian emphasis on substantive ethical life with the Nietzschean emphasis on self-affirmation through a new and expanded conception of heroism as "the genuine bindingness of norms on actuality" (Brandom 2019b, 627). Such a post-moral outlook remains marginal in contemporary philosophy, although it may foreshadow the direction of future research.

Heroism in Contemporary Moral Philosophy

Neither Hegel nor Nietzsche, and a fortiori neither of their respective views of heroism, were widely taken up in mainstream twentieth-century philosophy, and by and large philosophical consideration of the axiological and deontic issues of ethical life continued to be carried out within the terms of "morality" as conventionally understood. With regard to heroism, this meant that the ambiguity with which Rousseau had grappled remained essentially intact.

Heroism was thus not a major theme in early twentieth-century philosophy, but it did emerge explicitly at least as a subtheme in the late 1950s in connection with what came to be known as *supererogation*, that is, actions which (roughly speaking) "go above and beyond the call of duty." In a classic article, James Urmson (1958) challenged the conventional classification of action as falling into one of three moral categories: the obligatory (actions that we are duty-bound to do), the prohibited (actions that we are duty-bound to *not* do), and the permissible (actions that we may do, or not, and which are thus matters of moral indifference). Urmson argued that a further category was needed in order to capture actions that are morally praiseworthy and yet not morally obligatory, that is, optional actions that are considered good on axiological grounds, even while their omission is not considered morally blameworthy. Urmson was confident that there are such actions, henceforth described as supererogatory, and in his mind the category was epitomized by the outstandingly altruistic actions of "saints and heroes."

Urmson's article gave rise to years of simmering debate, which continues to this day, over the precise status of supererogation. Some aspects of this debate have direct implications for heroism. There are, first of all, questions concerning the very coherence of the notion of supererogation. Here, the worry is that there is something fundamentally paradoxical in claiming that a certain possible action may be morally superior and yet not morally required – this is sometimes called the "good-ought tie-up," or simply "the paradox of

supererogation." The idea is that moral normativity is inconsistent with there being a minimum threshold that we may freely opt to go beyond (or not). Rather, we are always morally required to do the best we can, and hence the category of supererogation must be empty. If such is the case, then the ordinary intuitive significance of heroism and heroic approbation would be drastically undermined.

Such denials of supererogation aside, there have also been questions over its categorical scope, whether it is to be conceived relatively narrow in accordance with the seeming extraordinariness of "saintly and heroic" actions, or else whether it is actually a much wider category populated by innumerable minute acts of everyday civility and politeness – in which case further conditions would need to be identified in order to account for the unusually strong approbation that "saintly and heroic" actions tend to receive. However, it has been shown that there is in any case no necessary connection between supererogatory action and moral praiseworthiness (Archer 2015a) – the approbation of heroic action cannot simply be a function of how far it goes "above and beyond duty." Further, it has been convincingly argued that the supererogatory style of "moral saints," while surely impressive in certain respects, by no means offers a compelling model of a fulfilled and balanced human life (Wolf 1982). If this negative assessment applies to heroic behavior as well, then once again it may be difficult to make sense of even our strongest intuitions concerning what sorts of actions qualify as heroic, and of the judgments we ordinarily make about such actions.

These problems all stem from the paradox of supererogation. A possible solution to them aims to defuse the paradox by drawing the axiological and deontic aspects of morality together in terms of specific agents rather than focusing on particular actions (Flescher 2003). This approach proposes a "developmentalist" view focused on individual striving for moral maturation and growth that retains the general sense of supererogation, and even Urmson's original valorization of "saints and heroes," while at the same time going beyond the standard view of supererogation (Heyd 1982) by construing it in terms of virtue and character. This has the result of narrowing the gap between supererogation and "ordinary morality," which is entirely salutary from the egalitarian (and in effect neo-Rousseauian) perspective of the "banality of heroism" (Franco and Zimbardo 2006). But Flescher's view remains premised on the normative priority of other-regardingness, and it only "resolves" the paradox of supererogation by effectively replacing it with a new one, namely, the paradox of a virtue-based imperative to supererogate, in other words, a moral duty to develop one's moral capacities beyond the call of duty.

Although this approach is more consistent with certain key intuitions about heroism, it is still caught up on the assumption that heroism exhibits a specifically *moral* imperative. This assumption may be false. In many cases of apparent supererogatory action, agents' own testimony reports that they did what they did not so much as a result of any felt moral obligation, but rather of a practical necessity that is fully bound up with their character and which could be understood as an existential incapacity to do otherwise (Archer 2015b; Fruh 2017; Raters 2020; cf. Williams 1981, 1993). This perspective is especially important on account of how it shows that in such cases, that is, cases of action that appear to be supererogatory but which in fact issue from a practical necessity of this sort, the action is not truly optional (since it is deemed existentially necessary) and therefore cannot count as supererogatory (since this is optional by definition), and nor can it be construed as self-sacrificial (Archer 2015b), since there is not a more self-interested option available to decline. These considerations in particular suggest a possible conceptual clarification which could serve to remedy some of the paradoxes that may be impeding the development of contemporary heroism research.

Looking Ahead: De-moralizing Heroism?

The problems that follow from attempting to understand heroism in terms of supererogation highlight the need to undo the persistent

conflation – inherited from Urmson, but which traces back to the ambiguity inherited by Rousseau – between saints and heroes (Smyth 2017; cf. Biancu 2021). Both of these figures are extra-moral in the sense of transcending morality narrowly construed. But rather than running them together, it may prove more illuminating to pry them apart and take them as representing two forms of ethically outstanding action with very different motivational and intentional structures: saintly action would refer to supererogation proper in the sense of optional self-sacrifice that issues from a reflective other-regarding choice, whereas heroism would refer to actions which, while possibly (but not necessarily) outwardly resembling acts of supererogatory altruism, would in fact issue from a nonselfsacrificial existential necessity, and which as such could be understood as positively self-affirming in a way that need not be any less – and which could turn out to be a great deal more – pro-social than saintliness (Smyth 2018). Disambiguating heroes from saints in this way reflects how the deontic and axiological aspects of ethically outstanding action can diverge. Rather than an intensified sense of altruistic moral obligation, heroism in this conception would represent an extra-moral sense of good with a distinctly *de*-moralized sense of approbation (Smyth 2020).

Further philosophical research into the nature of the existential necessity involved in heroism so construed, including its embodied, habitual, and socially embedded dimensions, could help to arrive at a clearer conceptual definition of heroism, in particular one that renders the egalitarian "banality" idea – the ordinariness of heroism – fully consistent with the extraordinariness of heroic approbation. Whether this will involve recognizing some kind of special "moral depth" (Archer and Ridge 2015) or rather something like the post-moral "magnanimity" announced by Brandom (2019a) is unclear, but a fuller philosophical analysis of heroism can be expected to show that and how it may be taken as a model of ethical exemplarity that is positively bound up with human happiness and flourishing (Franco et al. 2016).

Cross-References

- ▶ Banality of Heroism
- ▶ Heroic Supererogation
- ▶ Heroism and Embodiment, Embodied Intelligence, and Epigenetics
- ▶ Heroism Motivation
- ▶ Moral Conviction
- ▶ Moral Judgments
- ▶ Nietzschean Heroism in Popular Culture
- ▶ Paradoxes of Heroism
- ▶ Sacrifice
- ▶ Sainthood
- ▶ Self-Actualization and Heroism
- ▶ Social Heroism
- ▶ Social Justice

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Physical Characteristics of Heroes

▶ Appearance of Heroes

Physical Intelligence

▶ Heroism and Embodiment, Embodied Intelligence, and Epigenetics

Physician Burnout

▶ Physicians' Heroism During COVID-19

Physician Heroism

▶ Medical Heroism

Physician Trauma

▶ Physicians' Heroism During COVID-19

Physicians' Heroism During COVID-19

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Synonyms

Emotional exhaustion; Physician burnout; Physician trauma

Definition

Physicians and other healthcare personnel experienced unprecedented rates of mental health breakdowns and burnout during the 2020–2021 COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis illuminated physicians' heroism and how this label contributes to their compromised well-being.

The seriousness of physician burnout and mental illness is reflected in statistics showing that physician suicide rates in the United States are currently the highest of any profession and twice that of the general population (Danhauer et al. 2020). Additionally, the Association of American Medical Colleges (2020) estimate that, by 2032, the United States will have a deficit of physicians (from 46,900 to 122,000) across all specialties. Prior to COVID-19, this was driven by a rapidly aging population, a stagnant rate of new physicians, and an alarming rate of turnover. Problems with burnout have been compounded in light of COVID-19, which has led many doctors to retire early or change professions (Abelson 2020). During the early days of the pandemic, the public witnessed stark deficiencies in resources (e.g., a lack of personal protective equipment [PPE] and ventilators) and practices (e.g., overwhelmed emergency rooms and long hours). Rather than the tools needed to carry out their work, physicians were largely offered symbolic (rather than material or policy-based) support.

In this entry, we highlight and interrogate the public celebrations of physicians, during the COVID-19 pandemic, as "heroes" in light of ongoing threats to their work quality and personal well-being. Rather than supernatural beings (as is suggested by the hero frame), physicians are employees who – under normal circumstances – attempt to carry out their work despite limited resources, rigid schedules, and recurring trauma.

Not All Heroes Wear Capes

During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global conversation placed the label of "hero" on the professions of physicians and healthcare workers. Historically, the view of physicians has waned between being characterized as "quacks," inept individuals focusing more on financial gain than the well-being of their patients, to the more recent view of the profession as heroic that emerged in the nineteenth century and continues today (McLellan 1996). Despite the general lack of consensus to the meaning of the word *hero*, scholars have created typologies to describe heroism that depict how a given type of hero is perceived and treated (Allison et al. 2017; Franco et al. 2018). The type of heroism typically ascribed to physicians is one that is duty bound, much like military members, and associated with the risk of physical harm or even death. The issue that arises from this labeling is the expectation of sacrifice and implications of moral failings should the hero not accept this willingly. This labeling was in stark contrast to medical workers perceptions of just trying to do their jobs and wanting sufficient support. It is important to note that many heroes do not self-identify with this label but rather it is foisted upon them by others (Allison and Beggan 2022).

In the early days of the pandemic, everyday citizens wanted to show their support for medical heroes. Their intentions were wholesome. They felt helpless knowing the sacrifices being made by these individuals without adequate protection and resources. As seen in Table 1, across the United States individuals and communities engaged in acts of support, though most can be viewed as being merely symbolic. While this movement had wonderful intentions, and certainly served a cathartic function for the people at home howling or singing or banging their pots and pans together, it did little to help the physicians working in dangerous and overwhelming conditions.

Although it was more helpful than singing, efforts to donate personal protective equipment (PPE) to healthcare workers (Diaz and Taylor 2020) had only a modest impact at best in addressing the challenges they faced. And these efforts ignored the preexisting levels of burnout that physicians faced before COVID-19. Thus, while hospitals and other organizations were erecting billboards and signs to salute the heroism of doctors and other healthcare workers, such as in Fig. 3, their already dysfunctional working

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Physicians' Heroism During COVID-19, Table 1 Public acts of support for physicians during the COVID-19 pandemic

	Description
#Solidarityat8 (Scheier 2020)	In March a hashtag surfaced called #Solidarityat8 that was used to encourage people to go outside every night at 8 pm and cheer, shout, clap, honk their horns, ring bells, or turn on lights to show support for frontline healthcare workers and other essential workers. The Twitter feed for #Solidarityat8 shows people dancing for them, singing for them, showing their appreciation with words, photos, and video. By April, #Solidarityat8 had even given birth to howling as a way to honor doctors and other first responders. See Fig. 1 in appendix.
Kansas Farmer (Spector 2020)	In a now viral story, a farmer in Kansas sent an N95 mask to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo to help protect a nurse or doctor. Along with the masks, he wrote a letter with his request. See Fig. 2 in appendix.
Billboard	Billboards with the message "Not all superheroes wear capes" sprang up throughout the San Francisco Bay area as a tribute to frontline workers. See Fig. 3 in appendix.

conditions deteriorated to intolerable (Abelson 2020). The American Medical Association acknowledged this severity of the problem and underscored how physicians' basic needs were not being met (Berg 2020):

> In times of crisis and stress, sometimes basic needs go out the window, including food, water, safety and sleep. For example, when physicians work 14- or 16-hour days they may not think about these basic needs. . ..

Additionally:

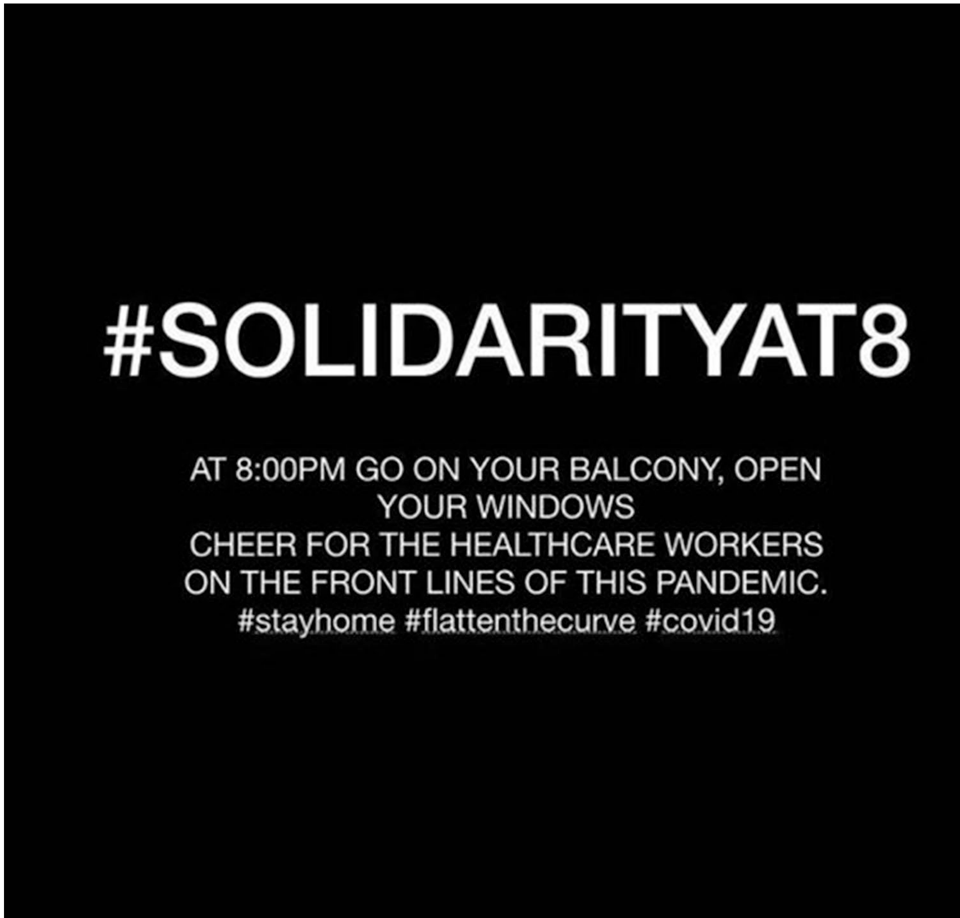
> There is a common fear of acquiring COVID-19 and giving it to family members, loved ones or colleagues. . .a lot of physicians are unsure about "what is required and doing things that are not easy to understand, and the consequences of not getting it right feel pretty severe."

Among the suggestions made to address these stressors was to watch the number of hours worked and to focus on mental health resources – although how to do so was unclear.

A local Austin, Texas news station (KVUE) ran a story featuring Dr. Natasha Kathuria who likened her experience to a war and explained that the lack of PPE was untenable: "If we can't protect ourselves, there's no way we can (treat patients) – it's like sending our army out to fight with no guns and saying 'Good luck!'" (Marut 2020). Dr. Kathuria's interview showed her visibly distraught and begging for help to do her job. Physicians' poor working conditions contributed to acute trauma (because of the daily fear for their lives they described) as well as cumulative trauma (given how long the pandemic lasted). Both this acute and cumulative trauma exacerbated the already existing issue of high burnout in the field of medicine. While most individuals experienced the horror of the pandemic from a personal perspective, physcians faced the loss of millions of lives worldwide as part of their professional landscape as well.

Physician Burnout and Recovery During COVID-19

Burnout has been identified as a significant issue in healthcare workers, particularly in physicians. According to Maslach and Jackson (1981), "Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do 'people-work' of some kind" (p. 99). National studies have indicated that both physicians-in-training and practicing physicians report higher levels in all dimensions of burnout when compared to their non-physician counterparts (Dyrbye et al. 2014), with specialties such as emergency medicine, general internal medicine, and neurology reporting the highest frequency of burnout (West et al. 2018). In addition to increasing the likelihood of voluntary departure, burnout has been associated with reduction in patient satisfaction, greater likelihood of malpractice lawsuits, longer patient recovery times, mental and physical health issues for physicians, and reduced work satisfaction among various other issues (Hamidi et al. 2018; West et al. 2018). Results of a survey



Physicians' Heroism During COVID-19, Fig. 1 #Solidarityat8 Hashtag

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conducted on behalf of The Physicians Foundation in 2018 found that 78% of the 8,774 physicians who responded indicated that they sometimes, often, or always experience feelings of burnout (The Physicians Foundation 2018).

Of particular relevance to pandemic-era burnout, Abedini et al. (2018) describe two types of burnout: *circumstantial* and *existential*. Circumstantial burnout comes from "self-limited circumstances and environmental triggers" (p. 26). It can be addressed through practices such as nurturing personal lives, resolving workplaces challenges, and taking time off work. Among the three means of resolving circumstantial burnout, none were available to physicians during the early days of the pandemic. First, the human toll and fear associated with COVID-19 as well as shelter-in-place mandates and closures of many public spaces (i.e., restaurants, bars, movie theatres, recreational facilities) made it challenging for physicians to nurture their personal lives. Second, the lack of PPE and ventilators made it difficult to resolve workplace challenges. Third, taking time off work was not easy because of the rise in patients needing to be seen.

Existential burnout, on the other hand, stems from a loss of meaning in medicine and an uncertain professional role. It requires other methods of resolution including recognition of burnout, forming connections with others in their workplace, finding meaning in medicine, feeling validated, forming a professional identity, clarifying

March 26, 2020

Dear Mr. Cuomo,

I seriously doubt that you will ever read this letter as I know you are busy beyond belief with the disaster that has befallen our country. We currently (as of March 26, 2020) are a nation in crisis. Of that there is no doubt. Your approach has been spot on correct. I commend you for that & for especially for telling the truth, something that has been sorely lacking as of late.

I am a retired farmer hunkered down in N.E. Kansas with my wife who has but one lung and occasional problems with her remaining lung. She also has diabetes. We are in our 70's now & frankly I am afraid for her.

Enclosed find a solitary N-95 mask left over from my farming days. It has never been used. If you could, would you please give this mask to a nurse or doctor in your city. I have kept four masks for my immediate family. Please keep on doing what you do so well, which is to lead.

Sincerely, Dennis & Sharon

Physicians' Heroism During COVID-19, Fig. 2 Letter from Kansas Farmer donating an N-95 mask to a Nurse or Doctor in New York

professional roles, and focusing on career development. It would be comforting to imagine that the hero narrative allowed doctors to find the validation, meaning, and identity formation they needed to resolve existential burnout caused by the COVID-19 crisis. However, the toll of the trauma and the lack of recovery were more highly documented than any stories of how being called a

Physicians' Heroism During COVID-19, Fig. 3 Not all Superheroes Wear Capes Billboard

hero helped them to cope. To the contrary, Dr. Lorna M. Breen, the medical director of New York Presbyterian Allen, one of Manhattan's hardest hit hospitals, died by suicide while home recuperating from COVID-19 because of the work conditions she faced (Watkins et al. 2020).

> (Her father) said his daughter had contracted the coronavirus but had gone back to work after recuperating for about a week and a half. The hospital sent her home again, before her family intervened to bring her to Charlottesville, he said. . ..
>
> Dr. Breen, 49, did not have a history of mental illness, her father said. But he said that when he last spoke with her, she seemed detached, and he could

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> tell something was wrong. She had described to him an onslaught of patients who were dying before they could even be taken out of ambulances.
>
> "She was truly in the trenches of the front line," he said.
>
> He added: "Make sure she's praised as a hero, because she was. She's a casualty just as much as anyone else who has died."
>
> In a statement, New York-Presbyterian/Columbia used that language to describe her. "Dr. Breen is a hero who brought the highest ideals of medicine to the challenging front lines of the emergency department," the statement said.

Note that the war metaphor (that ran on a local radio station) resurfaced in this story and the hero metaphor was prominent and embraced. Our argument is not that their work was not heroic, but that sometimes this metaphor is invoked by institutions to sidestep the issue of personal safety and recovery. Key to war metaphors is a short-term time frame wherein individuals must continue, without relief, until the enemy retreats. There is also the moral implication that if the hero (physician) doesn't continue to fight, make sacrifices, and overcome the obstacles they face, they are in part responsible for suffering endured by the general population (Allison and Beggan 2022).

By all accounts, Dr. Breen was engaged in the routine recovery behaviors touted as solutions in the resilience literature. The story of her death made it clear to anyone who was paying attention that she had all the personal and social tools to thrive in her chosen profession, but that the insurmountable institutional structures she faced were too high. This hero narrative placed the onus of solving the issue of burnout squarely on the individual rather than on the medical and governmental institutions that did not provide adequate support and created a culture that permeated burnout.

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Physiology of Heroism

▶ Biology of Heroism

Pity

▶ Compassion and Heroism

Pivot Point

▶ Red Bike Moment

Pleasure

▶ Freudenfreude and Heroism

Poetry and Heroism

▶ Songs, Poetry Lyrics, and the Hero's Journey

Poise

▶ Equanimity and Heroism

Political Communication

▶ Empathic Leadership Postdisaster

Political Community Heroism

▶ Heroism and Political Community

Political Heroes

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Synonyms

Government heroes; Political leaders; Presidents; Senators; World leaders

P

Definition

Political heroism is the conduct taken by a leader who seeks to advance the greater good of a community, society, or state in foundational periods or at times that require critical change. Political heroism is publicly recognized in symbols, monuments, and stories about the epic achievements of great leaders who have made a profound difference.

The study of political heroes runs broad and deep, and involves theoretical, biographical, and historical analyses. Heroes can be found in the earliest works of classical political theory, with comparisons of great leaders in Greek and Roman antiquity. Modern political theory

complements classical forms of heroism but deemphasizes the hero's moral virtue.

Political theory distinguishes political heroes from other political actors by their personal qualities (e.g., courage, wisdom, moderation, selfless commitment to the public good), outstanding accomplishments, and inspiring examples. Political heroes, at some point, must advance collective or public interests, whether they act out of selfless motives or for personal glory or recognition. Political heroes are often portrayed as larger-than-life figures with legendary qualities and mythical storylines that symbolize the highest goals or greatest aspirations of their constituents and admirers. Some are martyred for their actions. Ultimately, the political hero needs to be recognized, validated, even worshipped, ideally as someone to emulate.

Yet, while politics provides opportunities for leaders with ambition and virtue to act on principle to advance a cause, politics can create uncertainty. Successful leadership often requires compromising with opponents or selecting from limited choices. In addition, politics fundamentally involves the pursuit, maintenance, and exercise of power, which puts leaders in competition with ignoble characters. In pursuit of those goals, at times political leaders sometimes make poor judgments; other times they are compelled to make choices and take actions that offend or even harm others. Thus, in spite of their outstanding character or extraordinary deeds, political heroes typically have personal flaws or experience political failures. A hero's flaws may be disguised by mythology or lost to history, but once revealed, the hero's character or accomplishments may be reevaluated in particular contexts. Some flaws can be explained or accounted for; others may tarnish or even undermine a hero's reputation and legacy.

Although political heroes share some general characteristics, their personas and their actions may also reflect unique or peculiar norms of distinct political cultures, organizations, or historical eras. For example, in centralized governments political heroes may be valued for wielding power, though history will judge those who make excessive or unjust use of power. In democratic systems, political heroes must relate well to normal people and still stand above them. They must act out of shared sense of civic duty, but they also must be capable of strong leadership.

Hero status was originally reserved for men seeking to create or lead a government or a state. Over time, leaders of social movements, including women, earned hero status, in spite of evidence of a male bias in public opinion about heroes (Danilova and Kolpinskaya 2020). To account for the range of hero types, after describing the hero in political theory, this entry classifies political heroes into three broad categories: (1) founders and monumental figures, (2) path breakers and change makers, and (3) conditional and controversial characters.

Heroism in Ancient and Modern Political Theory

The characteristics and outstanding feats of political heroes are of men who did something great or noble in the origin or maintenance of the state, or on behalf of the greater good of their people. Political heroes in classical political theory are known by their innovation, accomplishment, and statesmanship. Ideally, political heroes embodied the character and qualities of the regime—the government and society—of which they were a part.

The notion of a political hero may well begin with Plato's idealistic caricature of the philosopher king in *The Republic*—a wise, courageous, and selfless leader of the city-state. A more comprehensive account of examples of ancient heroes can be found in *Plutarch's Lives*—48 in total—which offers insights into the personal backgrounds, careers, accomplishments, and characteristics of heroes through biographical accounts of famous men from Greek and Roman antiquity. Heroes are distinguished by way of comparison—all have both positive and negative attributes, virtues, as well as flaws. Nonetheless, Plutarch favored great men with moral virtue—those who exercised moderation and reason—over those with deep character flaws who practiced unsavory or unethical methods. While no leader is perfect, Plutarch suggests that people in city-states like

Athens and Sparta admired leaders who were courageous, moderate, noble, and reasonable.

The concept of political heroism is modified by political realism in modern western political philosophy. Political realism assumes that people desire safety and security, politics can be a blood sport, and leaders are valued as much for their transactional ability as for their transformational skills. In this context, the political leader is more concerned with reputation and image than with moral virtue. For Niccolo Machiavelli, author of the much-acclaimed book *The Prince*, the ideal prince would be moderate and rational, but since other men cannot be trusted, his quest to gain and maintain power will depend on other skills: cunning, military acumen, decisiveness, and erudition.

Machiavelli derives his insights about leadership from the reading of ancient philosophy and history and observing powerful men in Florence, Italy, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Machiavelli holds up to the aspiring prince the examples of four heroes from ancient times—Theseus, Romulus, Cyrus, and Moses (the first three of which were subjects of Plutarch's biographies)—each of whom exhibited public virtue by taking advantage of an opportunity to found a principality. Yet those heroes were mythical. In reality, a prince cannot afford to act morally in all things because his opponents do not always follow a moral code. Thus, Machiavelli disagrees with Plutarch that great leaders are distinguished from others by their moral virtue. Rather, Machiavelli's hero—a leader worthy of praise, emulation, and lasting fame—is, above all else, prudent. He knows when to do good and when not to.

Categories of Political Heroes

Studies of heroism typically assign categories, taxonomies, or ideal traits to differentiate between types of heroes (e.g., Allison and Goethals 2013). Building from the foundations of ancient and modern political theory, and recognizing the range of possible types of political heroes in different contexts, as noted, political heroes can be organized into three broad categories: founders and monumental figures, path breakers and change makers, and conditional or controversial characters. Founders and monumental figures share similarities with classical forms of heroes, whereas conditional or controversial characters relate to modern political theory and, in some cases, are drawn to excess that challenges their status as heroes. Path breakers and change makers, as well as controversial characters, may blend theoretical forms with novel tactics or identities. Heroes may fall into more than one of those categories.

Founders and Monumental Figures

Classical theory preserves a place for heroes as founders of states. For example, Plutarch describes Lycurgus, the lawgiver, an aristocrat who established the constitution of Sparta and then, in an act of unusual moderation, declined to serve as its king. Prominent founders of the American republic, most notably John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington, are heroes in this classical sense for establishing the United States Constitution and along with it the first republican form of government over a large territory.

They were also distinguished in other ways. Four of the five were also elected president, the only exception being Hamilton, the nation's first Secretary of Treasury. Hamilton, of Broadway fame, and author of most of the essays that comprised the *Federalist Papers* perished at a much younger age than the others when he was killed in a duel with Aaron Burr. Washington also is heroized for leading the colonial army to victory against the British and begin elected unanimously as the nation's first president in 1789. He limited himself to two electoral terms, a precedent that lasted until 1940 and was later formalized in the Twenty-second Amendment to the Constitution (ratified in 1951). Madison is regarded as the "Father of the Constitution," and Jefferson is the primary author of the *Declaration of Independence*.

As a testament to the problem of heroizing founders, the legacies of three of these men—Jefferson, Madison, and Washington—are tarnished by having also been enslavers on their Virginia plantations. In Jefferson's case, human frailty reached further, as he fathered numerous children of Sally Hemmings, an enslaved woman at Monticello. Nonetheless, their virtues seem to have outlasted their vices. All three are American political heroes for articulating principles of liberty, equality, and self-governance that have inspired movements for social and political changes and for crafting a constitution that established a republican government of limited powers that has adapted to those changes.

A sample of heroes as founders in other countries in recent history would include Charles de Gaulle for his role in the creation of the French Fifth Republic and David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir, founders and the first and second prime ministers of the State of Israel.

Monuments are a way to validate heroes. Among American presidents, for instance, Mount Rushmore in Black Hills, South Dakota, completed in 1925, portrays the heads of Washington, Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. By then there had been 30 presidents of the United States, but those 4 were distinguished as heroes for the creation (Washington and Jefferson), the preservation (Lincoln), and the development (Roosevelt) of the United States.

Three of these American heroes—Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln—are memorialized with majestic monuments in Washington, DC. The fourth—Roosevelt—was lionized by a bronze statue of him riding a horse and flanked by two bare-chested men: one an African American and one a Native American. Roosevelt's statue illustrates the unforeseen risks of holding up a hero as a symbol of time-bound practices or values; the statue notoriously exemplified colonialism and racism and was removed in 2022.

Had Mount Rushmore been built 25 years later, it most certainly would have included Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the nation's 32nd president, for his prominent role in expanding the national government during the Great Depression. Roosevelt is memorialized, among other places, in a national park in Washington, DC.

Lincoln, who has more monuments than any other president (McIntyre 2021), is routinely rated by presidential historians as the greatest president based on a survey of ten leadership characteristics (Presidential Historians Survey 2021). Lincoln is a hero for his role in ending slavery and preserving the union, acts for which he lost his life. George Washington, often ranked second in the rankings of presidents, has the second highest total of monuments.

Martin Luther King, a political hero for his leadership as the nation's foremost civil rights leader, a cause for which he also gave his life, is listed as having the fourth highest number of monuments. King is memorialized by the *Stone of Hope*, a statue in Washington, DC, that references King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. The statue is located near memorials for Lincoln, Jefferson, and Roosevelt. King is the rare hero for whom Congress made a national holiday, which has been celebrated as a day of service in his memory. Lincoln, Roosevelt, and King also had personal flaws and faced criticism for some of their tactics, but they are among the nation's most celebrated heroes.

Path Breakers and Change Makers

The monuments to both Franklin Roosevelt and Martin Luther King are attributed to their leadership as path breakers and change makers: Roosevelt for his New Deal policy and success in helping to end World War II and King for his extraordinary leadership in civil rights. Three of the most prominent change makers among those who joined King as political heroes for challenging white supremacy and racial discrimination and working toward freedom for African Americans are Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglass.

Parks was famous for her bravery in the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 and for inspiring others to join her. She was later recognized by Congress as the "mother of the civil rights

movement." A century earlier, Harriet Tubman, known as the "Moses of her people" for ushering slaves to freedom through the Underground Railroad, was a hero for her innovation and courage in undermining the political establishment that protected slavery in the nineteenth century South. Douglass was the nation's most formidable abolitionist, a hero for courage in the face of white supremacy, outstanding oratory skills, fearless defense of freedom, and extraordinary statesmanship. Douglass gave a voice to the enslaved and educated the world about the human degradation and violence of chattel slavery.

Meanwhile, several female abolitionists served as prominent path breakers and change makers through the Women's Suffrage Movement. Lucretia Mott, regarded as the founder of the movement, was a mentor to many other reformers, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who joined with Mott to plan for and organize the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. Stanton was the principal author of the *Declaration of Sentiments*, a document inspired by the *Declaration of Independence*, which articulated the basis for women's rights, including voting rights. Both Mott and Stanton inspired Susan B. Anthony to join the cause; Anthony was arrested in New York for attempting to vote for Ulysses S. Grant in the 1872 presidential election.

Although they dedicated their lives to women's suffrage, Mott, Stanton, and Anthony would never live to see the day when women had the national right to vote. Yet they created the resources to propel the movement and established the principles and foundations for reform. Stanton and Anthony, leaders of the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), allied with Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, and Julia Ward Howe of the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) to found the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1890. The NAWSA played a critical role in organizing efforts to pass the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which guarantees women the right to vote.

In addition to Franklin Roosevelt, four other American presidents are heroes for their records as path breakers or change makers: John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Ronald Reagan, and Barack Obama.

Kennedy, the nation's 35th president, advanced the cause of public service and of civil rights. Young and idealistic, Kennedy urged Americans to think of how they could make a difference for the country. Kennedy's hero status is owed in part to his tragic assassination while riding in a top-down convertible in Dallas, TX, on November 22, 1963. The entire nation, from coast to coast, mourned the loss of President Kennedy, who is memorialized by the Eternal Flame, which burns continuously in Arlington National Cemetery.

Lyndon Johnson, Kennedy's successor, is also a political hero as a change maker for his role in the advancement of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act and for addressing inequality with the War on Poverty, including two pieces of major health care legislation—Medicare for the elderly and Medicaid for the poor—and social programs like Food Stamps and Head Start. Johnson compiled an unprecedented record of legislation that reshaped the role of the national government.

Ronald Reagan, the 40th president, is a political hero at the other end of the political spectrum from Johnson. A conservative Republican, Reagan was elected president during a time when the economy was ravaged by the twin evils of high unemployment and inflation, and the United States' role in the world was doubted in the midst of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Reagan helped to spur economic growth with tax cuts and deregulation and laid the ground work for the collapse of the Soviet Union by rebuilding the national defense and standing strongly against communism.

Barack Obama, the nation's 44th president, the first African American President campaigned on a message of hope and change. Obama inspired a new generation to commit to political change and community service. As president, Obama's greatest policy achievement was healthcare reform, which had eluded Democratic presidents since Harry Truman. The Affordable Care Act, known simply as Obamacare, significantly reduced the number of uninsured Americans.

Reagan and Obama also lifted up citizens as American heroes. In an ironic twist for a political hero, Reagan in his first inaugural address spoke of the actions of ordinary people and of the political force of "We the People" as the true heroes of democracy. Obama celebrated the 50th Anniversary of King's "I Have a Dream" speech and like Reagan pointed out the "quiet heroes." Obama referred not only to the millions of heroes who keep the country moving but also to those in particular who worked to advance civil rights, face down violence, and overcome odds against success.

As with the nation's founders, the presidents as path breakers and change makers had legendary personas: Kennedy's Camelot, Johnson the Great Persuader, and Reagan the Great Communicator. Each also had personal laws and experienced major public policy or leadership failures: Kennedy in the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Johnson and the disastrous conduct of the Vietnam War, and Reagan with the Iran-Contra scandal. Political events are hard to predict and control, even for heroic presidents.

A sample of path breakers and change makers in recent history in particular countries outside of the United States would include such heroes as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Margaret Thatcher. Gandhi is a hero of India for his advocacy for human rights, anti-colonialism, Indian independence from Great Britain, and the practice of non-violent resistance. Mandela was perhaps the ultimate path breaker and change maker of the twentieth Century. Mandela, who fought a long and arduous battle against apartheid that included 26 years in prison, was ultimately elected President of South Africa. Thatcher, the first female and long-serving Prime Minister of United Kingdom was a hero, particularly among conservatives, for restoring economic growth by implementing policies of privatization and deregulation and cracking down on unions.

Conditional or Controversial Characters

The realities of politics make it hard for leaders to avoid opposition or criticism, but some misdeeds are more forgivable or accounted for than others. Political heroes, recognized for certain great accomplishments, especially in the eyes of or on behalf of their followers, have also engaged in highly controversial acts or experienced major failures. Some leaders fit in the category of conditional heroes because their legacies have mixed reviews; their supporters excuse the misdeeds or failures of conditional heroes, whether deliberately taken or ambiguously assigned to them, but their detractors do not. Mikhail Gorbachev and Winston Churchill are highlighted as examples of conditional heroes, though others might include such leaders as Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar and President Woodrow Wilson of the United States.

Other leaders are controversial heroes because even though they spearheaded historic political changes, they engaged in unambiguous or notoriously evil actions that resulted in great costs to their people and others. Two examples of controversial heroes are featured here—Vladimir Lenin and Mao Zedong—though other dictators in this category would include Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Joseph Stalin.

Mikhail Gorbachev, former General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and President of the Soviet Union, gained hero status in the Western world for pulling troops from Afghanistan, negotiating an end to the Cold War, and presiding over the collapse of the Berlin Wall and reunification of Germany. He had introduced reforms to Soviet society and government—perestroika (restructuring) for loosening centralized control on business and agriculture and glasnost (openness) for sharing information and open discussion of political, social, and economic issues. But Gorbachev proved more effective in dismantling the totalitarian regime than replacing it with a stable economy and government. His goals for reforming the Communist Party and maintaining the Soviet Empire failed as the economy collapsed, Soviet bloc nations disbanded, and dissention grew among Russian elites and the general public. After surviving an attempted coup, he was forced to resign, and ultimately Russia retreated from Gorbachev's vision of peaceful social and political order.

Winston Churchill, who took over as British Prime Minister in 1940 at the outset of World War II, is a hero for standing up to Hitler. But Churchill's hero status has been called into question for, among other things, holding white supremacist views and, critics argue, for causing the deaths of millions by blocking food aid during the Bengal famine in India. Those shortcomings were grave enough so that Black Lives Matter protestors defaced a statue of Churchill outside of Parliament in 2020. In spite of Churchill's courageous stand against Hitler and leadership in World War, the debate over his hero status breaks along generational and party lines. A recent poll showed that Churchill, once universally regarded as a hero in Britain, is favored by Conservatives and people over 65 years of age, but disfavored by Labour voters and people between the ages of 18 and 24 (Henry 2022).

Vladimir Lenin was considered a hero for his leadership of the Bolshevik revolution during the Russian Civil War of 1918–1921, in the wake of the overthrow of Czar Nicholas II and the creation of a Russian republic. The Bolsheviks prevailed, and Lenin was the head of government for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Like founders of other governments, Lenin was memorialized with monuments. For a time, St. Petersburg was named Leningrad in his honor, and after his death his body was embalmed and laid in mausoleum in Moscow's Red Square. But Lenin's legacy is controversial. His vision of a worldwide revolution led by the working class that promised equality and freedom from exploitation failed to materialize and may have been a ruse to gain political power. Through his leadership of the Communist Party Lenin seized power and executed the Red Terror campaign, which squashed dissent and suppressed, jailed, or assassinated opponents. Lenin died a few years after establishing an authoritarian dictatorship. Lenin's tactics laid the foundation for a much more brutal campaign of terror under his rival and successor, Joseph Stalin. Lenin is also implicated as a contributor to the Russian famine of 1921–1922, which resulted in the deaths of five million people. The people of the USSR paid a heavy price for Lenin's successful overthrow of the Czar and elimination of political competition.

Mao Zedong, the Chinese revolutionary hailed as the founder of the People's Republic of China, adopted a version of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of leadership referred to as Maoism. Mao seized control after a civil war that ended the Second Republic of China and created a one-party, dictatorial state, which he led as Chairman of the Communist Party of China from 1949 until his death in 1976. A hero for his opposition to capitalism and promise of equality, Mao was the dominant force behind China's political, military, and economic policies, and has been credited with turning China into a world power and with improving literacy and health care. But Mao's centralized economic planning, including the Great Leap Forward, and purges of intellectuals and opponents, including the Cultural Revolution, led to the starvation, imprisonment, and executions of at least 40 million Chinese. Thousands of statues of Mao were built throughout China; some were torn down in the wake of reforms, but many remain, as does China's one-party state. Thus, Mao's legacy as a hero is controversial.

The Contemporary Challenge

Although political heroes have been essential to many nations throughout history, some scholars worry that we have lost our capacity to recognize political heroes at a time when we could probably use them (Edwards 1979; Triffitt 2015). As politics have become more transparent, contentious, and polarized, and as holding public office has become less admirable, the public has become a more skeptical and discerning judge of political heroism.

According to this perspective, hero status in contemporary politics is, at least, conditional and possibly unattainable. Lynne Cheney, the Wyoming Republican representative who roundly criticized Donald Trump, the president of her own party, for the infamous January 9, 2021, raid on the US Capitol, is regarded by some as a hero and others as an opportunist. (Trump himself is regarded as a hero by his most ardent followers

and a villain by his most critical opponents.) Bernie Sanders, a socialist and Democrat nominee for President in successive elections, is a hero to those who admire his courageous fight for equality against the corrupt "special interests," whereas some critics regard him as a deranged populist or an anti-American radical.

Yet, hope for political heroes in the twenty-first century is not completely lost. Volodymyr Zelensky, the Ukrainian president, a former actor and comedian, stood bravely and rallied much of the world against Russian invasion of his country led by Vladimir Putin (Ferguson 2022). Zelensky was named Person of the Year by *Time Magazine* for 2022. All that remains in Zelensky's case is the judgment of history.

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► Television Heroes

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Political Leaders

► Political Heroes

Political Leadership

► Empathic Leadership Postdisaster
► Presidential Heroism

Politics

► Revolutionary Heroes in Chinese Propaganda Posters

Poor Get Poorer

► Matthew Effect and Heroism

Popular Culture

► Black Heroes in Cinema
► Journalism Heroes

Popular Culture and Heroes

► Dog Heroes

Popular Culture and Heroism

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Definition

Popular music videos and digital images have hit screens in cities and mountains more frequently in recent years than ever before. Every 4 years, the elderly and youngsters and children and women keep on watching the Olympics and the World Cup games on television and mobile phone screens. Japanese Sony sells television sets and Korean Samsung company supplies electronic items to meet a larger demand during these sports events than other seasons. Likewise, the US-based multinational company Nike secures a greater space for its commercials of products during these sports events. Collaborating the sports world and business gives sports stars opportunities to become brand ambassadors of those companies, and thus making those corporate houses more popular. With a rapid upgrade in media and electronic technologies, many of folklores have become more popular in recent decades than ever before. Abraham Lincoln as the statesman, Nelson Mandela an embodiment of resilience, Mahatma Gandhi an advocate of non-violence, Neil Armstrong the NASA frontier astronaut, and Japanese Junko Tabei the female mountaineering pioneer, among others, are in the list of the popular modern heroes. We need myths and heroes to live by, and concepts of heroism in popular culture have significant space in the scholarship of arts and humanities. People always tend to connect themselves to the heroes of the real world as well as the fictional one. Heroes and legends immensely spark influence upon and affinity with individuals across cultures. Precisely, the hero and popular culture, complementing each other, bring individuals from diverse backgrounds together with respect to shared values of love and service to the humanity.

Ray Browne conceptualizes popular culture as "the culture of people collectively and singly"

(xi). In a similar line, Marshall Fishwick admits that "*demos* are the common people, *heros* the uncommon," in *Seven Pillars of Popular Culture* (60). Joseph Campbell defines the hero as "the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms" (18). Popular representations of the hero and the icon enhance human relationships in the cultural diversity of an increasingly globalized economy. On an account of the hero role, Campbell further explicates that "the hero-deed to be wrought is not today what it was in the century of Galileo. Where then there was darkness, now there is light; but also, where light was, there now is darkness. The modern hero-deed must be that of questing to bring to light again the lost Atlantis of the coordinated soul" (359). Artistic manifestations of courage and actions, the hero exemplifies the best that humanity can offer. Everyone has potential to become the hero. In the PBS Series, Campbell highlights the hero's extraordinary deeds for the greater purpose of humanity. Originally a Greek term, the "hero" refers to the courageous person and the demigod (Boon 302). The Sanskrit term for the hero is *vira* (Hodous and Soothill 41) which implicates to a brave warrior loyal to the authority, such as king or prophet. The Latin *virtue* meaning "true" or "pure" shares an etymological root to the Sanskrit *vira* with connotation to an ideal person with nobility. In *Plato and the Hero*, Angela Hobbs considers Achilles the hero for his relentless efforts from the side of the Greek army during the Trojan War (1194–1184 BC) (214). As Homer's hero is a man of courage like Achilles, Plato's hero is the philosopher-king. Similarly, Stephen Halliwell reviews the Aristotelian hero as a preeminent figure, a tragic agent in a tragedy (148). Similarly, Leeming remarks a miraculous birth of the hero, who undergoes an initiation during his childhood, indicative of extraordinary labor and quest for something beyond a normal range (83). The Greek term *arête* connotes virtue and nobility and courage and excellence (S. Miller 240) that characterize the hero.

The hero appears in multiple forms. In *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Northrop Frye illustrates five fictional modes based on representations of the hero. First, in a mode of myth, the lead character is superior to other men and environment in kind – a divine figure like God, Angel, Goddess, or Prophet. Secondly, someone who is superior to other men and environment in degree is in a mode of romance (33). In this mode, the protagonist remains somewhere between the divine and human and sacred and profane like the medieval saint and chivalry hero. Thirdly, the hero is superior to ordinary men in a high mimetic mode. In this mode, the fictional character in epic or tragedy accomplishes tasks larger than himself (34), such as Portia in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and Ulysses in Homer's epic. Unlike these heroes, chief characters in fictional works perform actions of those ordinary people in the everyday world. Fourthly, these heroes are of a low mimetic mode since they act like ordinary individuals in the real world (34), such as Willy Lowman of *Death of Salesman*. Lastly, the principal character's actions embody everyday works, and thus, falling below the status of ordinary folks. Frye's major figure in an ironic mode is "inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, absurdity, the hero belongs to ironic mode" (34). The anti-hero of an ironic mode stands somewhere between the heroic and the villainous spheres, going down the ordinary people: Alex in Anthony Burgess's *Clockwork Orange* and Gregor Samsa in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. The anti-hero like Murphy in Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* is different from the hero in a normal concept of the same because his suffering results from his inaction and the interwar Europe. Different from a villain, he alienates himself from the domain of ordinary humans in the public sphere. Eventually, the anti-hero falls into intricacies of the society he lives in because of problems of his own.

The hero responds to people's need of their role models. In the real world, humans need heroes to direct them to righteousness, maintain balance and order in the world. In fiction, the hero represents reformers and champions of progress and prosperity. In *Heroes of Popular Culture*, Browne locates mysterious places where heroic actions

take place: “This described the Holy Land in the thirteenth century, the brave new world in the seventeenth century, and the American frontier in the nineteenth century. Today, mystery dwells in outer space and on other planets” (13). When people are mostly guided by divinity, the hero is God or God’s man. With progress in science and technology, the human hero takes a position of God, navigating to the frontier. In Browne’s recourse, the frontier of the heroic action shifts from a medieval holy site to the outer space after the mid-twentieth century.

In the modern world, technology has taken the place of spirituality, directing people to the cyberspace. At this point, digital technology has further revolutionized the media industry in recent years. The fictional geography approximates the physical space of the hero where he performs exceptional tasks, pursues a boon, and accomplishes the desired goals. Audiences experience the mystical places by watching movies or television serials because other traditional settings and symbols have already been stereotyped. Moreover, the scientific invention and empirical knowledge after the Renaissance have already demystified mystery and miracle of gods, replacing them with reason and technology.

Further, Fishwick examines the changing image of the hero over the course of history: “In classic times, heroes were god-men; in the Middle Ages, God’s men; in the Renaissance, universal men; in the eighteenth century, gentlemen; in the nineteenth century, self-made men. Our century has seen the common man and the outsider become heroic” (61). Prophet Mohammed and Prometheus are god-men in their connection with the divine and human, and Beowulf and Arthur god’s men in their support to humans. In the nineteenth century, heroes are elevated from a level of ordinary people to superhuman figures through their persistence and individual enterprises.

In *Seven Pillars*, Fishwick exposes underlying connection between the icon and the hero. To support to a perpetual conversion of history into *mythos*, *mythos* into *logos*, and *logos* into *eikons*, Fishwick cites Plato ideas, Christ’s parables, Kant’s categories, Jung’s archetypes, and McLuhan’s media. In Fishwick’s affirmation, the heroic figure with an iconic power enters consciousness, individual and collective, and the idea drives the image (132). Surpassing lexical representations, an image of a public figure or an industrial product converts into an icon in the marketplace. In the culture industry, an iconic figure establishes connection between the hero and myth and history and fiction.

Aesthetics of Popular Culture in the New Humanities

Popular culture is a vital part of the humanities. The hero with his service to the humanity becomes increasingly popular when he responds to people’s needs and expectations in changed contexts. Images of the heroes and icons in billboards in crossroads and television commercials traverse through cities and buildings, and thus, motivating people to market products and popular stars simultaneously.

The hero appears in different forms, ranging from folklore to popular culture. An individual with exceptional abilities, the warrior hero or an athlete appears in film and fiction. Both ways, we have narratives of the hero in forms of myth and legend. Richard Dyer’s *Stars* presents a semiotic analysis of the pop star as a sign with its denotations in a fictional work. In Dyer’s perception, movie stars not only denote something else but also himself or herself. Moreover, the actor represents something else beyond his dramatic performances on-stage or on-screen (79). Izod considers artist a sign with multiple meanings.

In real life, the actor in her attire, food habit, and leisure performs in the public sphere. In other words, popular stars not only perform on the screen but also in the real world. Spectators not only in theater but also in street consider the performer a spectacle for fun. In that sense, audiences consume images and actions, and thus, blurring the divide between the real stage and the public street. Spectators convert those performers into cultural objects.

Audiences perceive the hero as a reconciliatory figure. In *Stars*, Dyer supports his claim of a

special relationship between an individual in real life and a star on-screen through stardom, citing a case of Marilyn Monroe. In private life, she undergoes a tremendous suffering with violence and break ups, whereas in the public she persistently sustains aspiration of stardom (35). Pop culture star integrates the private and the public sphere. In that sense, Monroe's private life is inseparable from her starship in the public space since audiences consume her images at the real performance as well as the private sphere of family and domesticity.

John Storey, in *Cultural Studies and Popular Culture*, underscores an inherent bond between popular culture and the marketplace, embodiments of the human-technology interface. He examines an interactive contour between the human and non-human, a spectacle in a cultural space between romantic celebration and recognition of ideological power (227). In *Inventing Popular Culture*, Storey unravels aesthetics in things without looking intrinsic properties in objects (311) in his conviction that popular culture integrates people and ideologies. In that sense, popular culture in its interactive processes turns the heroes into icons by means of media, business, and technology.

Popular Culture Hero and Icon in Sports

The hero worship cult can be retraced to the 776 BC Greek Summer Olympics organized in Athens. Those games were organized every 4 years in the honor of Zeus, the king of the gods, in Olympia, a valley near a city of Elis. The modern Olympics, which started from 1896, have been rooted in those ancient Greek Olympics that continued through the Hellenistic period in 393 CE. The Greek athletes in the ancient Olympics competed naked, and the victors in the Olympiads were warmly received back home in their city-states as the heroes. In the Hellenic Age, Greeks used to worship the heroes, considering them gods.

In the Greek world, spectators used to visit Olympia to honor Zeus when athletes, who were basically prepared as warriors, played for pride of their city-states. Whereas games were organized for political purposes, athletes competed with champions from other city-states. In those championships, they could get opportunity to realize their prowess and sportsmanship, connecting men to the divinity. Further, Stephen Miller establishes relationships between gods and heroes. In modern time popular culture, sports heroes secure position of gods with their athletic performances and appreciations of the public. Unfolding the sacred space of the ancient Olympics, Stephen Miller's analogy integrates the hero and god comes the mortality and immortality and humanity and divinity:

> The hero could then use his intimate connection with the underworld to provide a point of contract for his worshipers, who needed it for, among other things, cursing enemies. . .. The hero also acquired an aura of magic and the supernatural and was considered especially adept at curing health problems. This is the standard we must use in order to determine whether ancient athlete was rated a hero. (160)

The Olympics would have religious and political connotations. That time, the city-states would develop their political alliances by displaying their athletic performances. More often, games not only brought together athletes from the Greek world but also their leaders to promote their international relations.

Popular culture includes games people sport, dresses they wear, food they eat, movies they watch, music they listen to, and magazine they read during their leisure. Any cultural practice becomes popular when the majority of the population accepts it for a significant part of life.

Popular culture icons, including athlete heroes and ethno bodies, appeal to men and women of all the age ranges, from early childhood to adulthood, irrespective of their geographic locations and ideological affiliations. Audiences consider these icons their heroes, and they idealize them into gods. In today's globalized world, pop culture icons and heroes from stadiums to movie theaters and museum to the marketplace move with electronic media and commercials faster than those in the past.

With the advent of television (1927) and internet (1983), people have got opportunities to watch sports events not only from the stadium itself but also from their living rooms. When these games are hosted in Europe and America, a large number of audiences from different parts of the world watch them on the television and colloid phone screens.

People of any age range and community can live in harmony with sports. They would express their inner psychic energies through sports and arts, so popular representations are the voice of people. In "The Generalities of Cultures," Ray Browne and Pat Browne excavate the philosophy of popular culture, juxtaposing the traditional and new humanities:

> Historically, people who treasure the humanities have insisted that teach us how to live life most fully. The humanities are those attitudes and actions that seem to make us different from other animals and superior to them in our love for and treatment of other animals and human beings in compassion and empathy. Often traditional humanists have treated the humanities as though they were to be denied to the ordinary taxpayer as being above his or her understanding appreciation or not possibly a part of their nature. But the New Humanists believe that this traditional elitist point of view is tunnel visioned and short sighted and not acceptable in a democracy. (23)

The heroes are makers of history, and the history is subject to change. New things emerge, and redundant practices extinct in the course of time.

With their fascination with popular stars, people change their lifestyles and worldviews, adapt to new social structures and political regimes. In that sense, receptive minds invent new things in response to change in taste and preferences.

Retracing Popular Culture: The Journey from Myths to Popular Media

In the USA, people use the term "folks" to address close friends from their local communities. In general, the term "folk" refers to innocent, honest, and humble people with modest backgrounds. Moreover, the term "folklore" connotes inherent relationships between "folk" and "lore" in the New Humanities. In that sense, folklore implicates to primary artworks of the locale in its revelation of common people's feelings and experiences in visual or non-visual forms. People are connected to their folklore through popular images and icons. Some of the folklores, including fable and fairytale, are popular in regions they are originated from, and these real-life narratives in recent years have become more popular with immense involvements of digital technology and visual media. In that sense, the folk and popular exist together and work side by side, one complementing the other. Along with this folkloric experience, the following section retraces myths and archetypes that reverberate on-stage and on-screen.

Myth, Archetype, Psychoanalysis

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud relates dreams and folk narratives with references to creation of myths (1). In support to this argument, Freud draws a remarkable analogy between the primitive man and modern man in the level of psychic energy in *Totem and Taboo* (1). We have now perceived similar characters and psychic impulses in modern men, and thus, sharing the same myths and legends through popular media. In their wilderness, inherent impulse, and personal tendency, modern man and primitive man invoke the same source of energy. Further, Freud credits the unconscious as the originating point of myth and dream of men, both primitive and modern in support to the folkloric undertone of the Oedipus myth. He considers the Oedipus myth a folk memory of events in some primeval horde, in which sons of an oppressive father rose up against their oppressor, whom they killed or expelled, in order to take possession of his consort themselves (15). Once Andrew Von Hendy reveals people's secret tendency to look up to myth for rescue:

> The confidence that tips the balance from longing for this power to affirmation of its presence arises in the larger context of what we know as the romantic movement, that profound revision of a network of related concepts such as "ego," "author," "artist," "art," and "literature." This movement appears as an effort, in certain respects reactionary, in others radical, to legitimate modernity by asserting, in

> defiance of certain Enlightenment thought and of Kant, that humankind can indeed attain transcendental knowledge of things as they really are.... The specific sub-genre that eventually comes to be designated as "myth" is the very template of "literature," a type of narrative that conveys insight so inexhaustible in its significance that it transcends its mere local occasion and historical situation. (25)

Examining network of related concepts, such as "ego," "author," "artist," "art," and "literature," Hendy considers myth a template of literature as opposed to association of myth with false and past in a literal sense. Myths come from templates of archetypes, and all forms of arts rework myths and archetypes. To assimilate myths and archetypes, dancing on the stage and dancing on the screen share a basic impulse to move shared equally by humans and animals.

In a process of making myth, one should explore archetype. All of the human activities outside in the real world are rooted to the unconscious in Freud's term and collective unconscious in Carl Jung's concept. Folklore comes from myth, and myth from archetype. All of human expressions are myths in different forms with the same basic psychic energies. After serious discussions on myth and folklore, Hendry reiterates the folkloric conception of myth:

> The relevant corollary – that nothing can inform us about the nature of myth like the practice of traditional storytellers – has enabled the investigation of folkloristic myth to survive its religious definition by romantic folklorists, the limitations of its collectors, its nineteenth-century armchair analysis by theorists of "primitive" religion, its manipulations by various neo-romantic theorists, and the biases of its anthropological interpreters themselves. (338)

All of the songs and parables are myths with their close affinities with archetypes, which originate from the unconscious. Whether they appear on-stage or off-stage, they share the same psychic energy. In that sense, men acquire folklore, such as dance and song from localities they are raised in. People grow up with their folk practices, imitating their elders in their communities.

Myths of the hero and the journey are basically archetypal. People share values of love and quest in a similar approach even if they live poles apart. In *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, Heinrich Robert Zimmer juxtaposes the western and eastern intellectual tradition through motifs and symbols:

> Like a river winding its way, the serpent creeps along the 74 ground; it dwells in the earth and starts forth like a fountain from its hole. It is an embodiment of the water of life issuing from the deep body of Mother Earth. Earth is the primordial mother of life; she feeds all creatures out of her substance, and again devours all; she is the common grave. She clasps to her bosom the life she has brought forth, denying to it the unbound freedom of celestial space. In contrast, the infinity of heaven denotes the free sway of the unbound spirit, freely roaming as a bird, disentangled from the fetters of earth. The eagle represents this higher, spiritual principle, released from the bondage of matter and soaring into the translucent ether, mounting to its kin, the stars, and even to the supreme divine being above them. On the other hand, the serpent is life-force in the sphere of life matter. The snake is supposed to be of tenacious vitality; it rejuvenates itself by sloughing off its skin. (74–75)

Zimmer draws an analogy of the river and the snake based on their structure and movement in linear order. Drawing parallels between the mother earth and the primordial mother, Zimmer points to the original source of energy.

In the way a fetus is nourished in the mother's body, men and animals totally depend upon the material world to grow and survive. In the way a plant germinates from the mother earth, a human comes from the mother's body. After the birth, the baby is physically detached from the mother, but he or she is still breastfed.

Myth, Folklore, Popular Representations

Folklores are people's performances, embodiments of their distinctive worldviews. Originated from the common people in their indigenous life, folk song and folk dance reflect everyday life. Folk narratives, including dance and theater, come from their daily household chores and economic activities for their recreation.

Folk also refers to common, and lore means narrative. Moreover, people have their folk circles or communities to live with shared values and ideals despite certain differences. In *Greek and Roman Folklore*, Graham Anderson unfolds distinct implications of folklore and folk culture.

Anderson credits technology to the conversion of the folk life into the pop life, claiming popular practices in the rural setting in the form of folklore (4–5). Folklore incorporates myths and legends, jokes and riddles, theater and narratives, and folktale and fairytale. People grow with folk song and dance, making them parts of their lives. People inherit folklore in the way they acquire their first language.

Establishing connections between people and their arts, Simon Bronner-edited *Meaning of Folklore* unfolds universal characters of folklore. Many of the exotic musical instruments and folk museums are private collections. Such practices of music and performances remain sacred and unsullied with different forces in society (80). Folklores are rooted to their indigenous contexts. Myths and folktales are handed down to new generations which ultimately reach prints, and they are digitized.

Anderson elaborates the Greek and Roman heritage of folklore. People in their rites and rituals, and feasts and festivals, such folkloric motifs are expressed:

> But there are difficulties. It is easy enough nowadays to encounter folklore either from a single informant (often about “a friend of a friend”) or at a social occasion, a family birthday party, a wedding or funeral ceremony, a christening, or a harvest or Christmas celebration; our problem with antiquity is that ancient informants can no longer be contacted in any of these ways. In some other respects, too, there is a wide gulf between the ancient and modern worlds: we do not have the legal framework of slavery, and the ancients did not have computers or cellular phones (though they had the folklore that would have accommodated easily enough to either – a latter-day Socrates would be easily enough distracted not by his famous demon or guardian spirit, but by his cellular). (4–5)

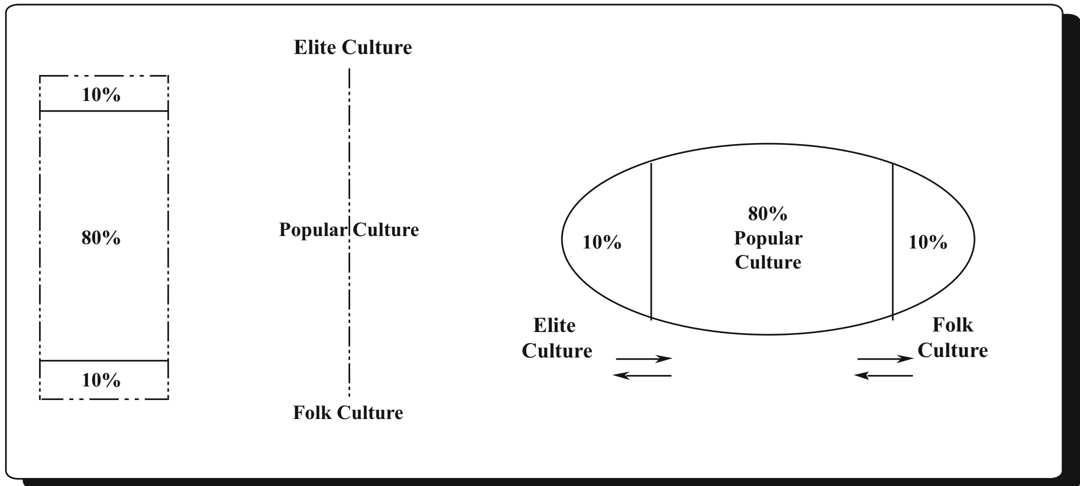
Myths are closer to folklores, and the latter themselves are myths. Men grow with their folklores. Media and technologies make arts and artifacts popular. In that sense, folklores incorporate acquired arts and sports which undergo transformations with time and space.

Ray Browne explores inherent connections between folklore and popular culture. In “Folklore and Populore,” Browne exposes a parallel trajectory of the folk and popular practices. When folklore reaches a large audience across cultures, it becomes popular. Similarly, when people make their popular culture as parts of everyday life, it becomes folklore. In support to this claim, Browne draws analogy between folklore and history: “Folklore is a yearning to return to yesteryear, yesterplace, and yesterculture” (24). Taking an instance of the formation of multicultural American society, Browne highlights the assimilation process of early settlers: “It is especially appealing when the society one finds oneself in is a polyglot of hundreds of thousands of cultures congregated from all over the world” (25). Browne retraces this link, between the folk and popular, in a larger canvas of human civilization. Later, Browne reaffirms: “Popular culture and folklore are two bodies joined at the heart and head, popular culture looking to the present and past, folklore looking reality from the past to the present” (26). The two bodies’ metaphor amplifies shared values in two disciplines. Precisely, folklore and popular culture emerge from the same myths and archetypes, irrespective of their political and ideological differences (Figs. 1 and 2).

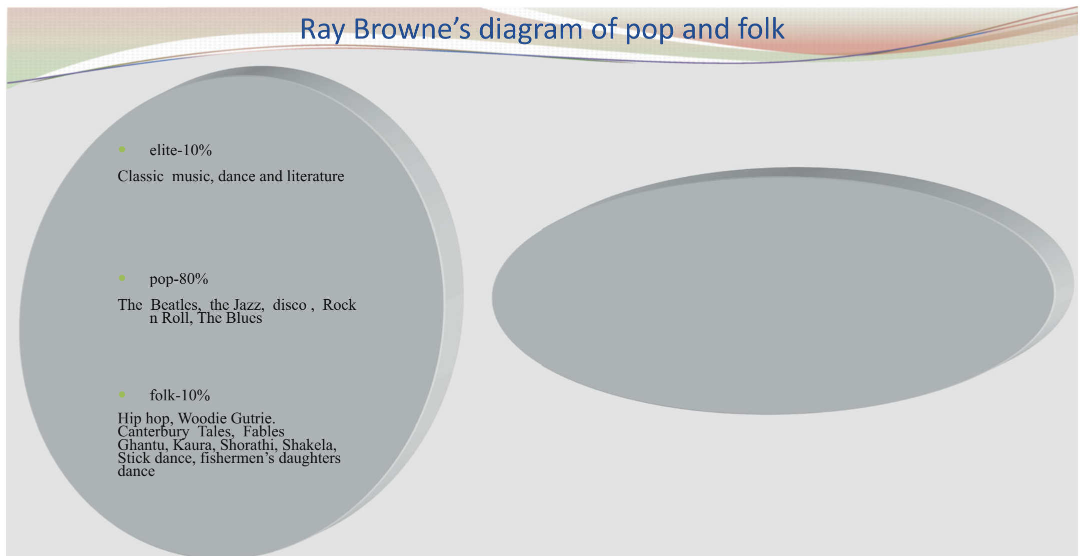
In *Popular Culture*, Isaac Sequeira constructs a postmodernist spectrum of popular culture. In Browne’s flattened ellipse, Sequeira illustrates the elite and folk with a portion of 10% each and popular with 80%. Further, he substantiates a conversion of the folk into popular, and popular into folk (46–47).

Sharon Sherman and Mikel Koven–edited *Folklore/Cinema* highlights the camera movement in relations with media and technology:

> Unceasing activity in various urban loci, combined with the images and sounds of the hustle and bustle of vehicular and human traffic, convey a spirit of energy and vitality. Movement itself – the movement of the camera, of bodies in action within the frame, and movement between the frames via montage – becomes emblematic of change. Movement as change is also expressed through the association between technology, industrial labor, and the cinema: camera movement and montage, which replicate the patterns and rhythms of construction, stress that cinema itself is a form of technology that contributes to the transformations taking place. (11)



Popular Culture and Heroism, Fig. 1 The folklore-popular dynamics: Browne's drawing. (Source: Isaac Sequeira's citation in *Popular Culture: East and West*, 47)



Popular Culture and Heroism, Fig. 2 Author's adaptation of Sequeira's diagram pop-folk transfiguration. (Source: Author's construction)

Myths and archetypes reappear in dance and cinema. An inherent impulse to move, dancing is one of the most spectacular visual arts to appear in the theater and cinema. The current faculty research exposes underlying universal patterns in dance steps.

In *Singing across Divides*, Anna Marie Stirr retraces the rural–urban connection through music and economics. Pertaining to Nepal's ethnographic journey with cosmopolitan insights, Stirr assesses collective identity, political agency, and intimate relationships in performances in

ethnographic landscape and modern corporate space. Moreover, she reposes inherent connections between the country and city through tangible folk materials and the business world's economic interest: "I focus on the places where they are most apparent–competitions and *dohori* restaurants, and to an extent, recordings, examining how *dohori* (duet) artists negotiate different regimes of value as they intersect in professional performance" (140–141). In Stirr's extrapolation, *dohori* makes possible multiple exchanges between the male and female, and industrial capital and rural youth culture. Retracing a direct link between the rural and urban, *Gaun Sahar* and *Besi Sahar* in Lamjung, Stirr explores communication between the two locations within the same Gurung and Dura cultural space of Lamjung. Indeed, she finds the mythic reworking of *dohori* in dance bars and restaurants which would eventually travel to Kathmandu, Pokhara, Bharatpur, and Hetauda. Cinema incorporates different arts, including dance, music, food, and fashion. Similarly, the film industry involves business and economics with media.

The Hero and Icon in Popular Culture Industry

Art and product are reversible. Walter Benjamin sees an industrial product in an art work converts into an industrial product. An artist becomes a cultural product at the mercy of audiences–customers, facing the camera that takes the place of audience in the theater. Acting in front of the camera is analogous to performing before the audience, the consumers that constitute the business and market (231). Evidently, the artist on-stage or on-screen performs for audiences–consumers for money in the capitalist political economy. The following section presents a process of transformation of a human-artist icon into a cultural product in the marketplace.

The film industry's adaptation of certain dance shots is directed to business purpose. This entertainment industry, reworking myths and archetypes, presents to audiences with the means of camera. Whereas this modern technology stands between artists and audiences in a cinema, artists directly perform in front of audiences in a play. Benjamin draws a clear distinction between positions of an actor of a play and that of a cinema when acting is concerned. In a play, actors directly face audiences, whereas, in a cinema, actors face camera as their audiences. Benjamin brings is camera in the place of audience in the film industry:

> Guided by the cameraman, the camera continually changes its position with respect to the performance. The sequence of positional views which the editor composes from the material supplied him constitutes the completed film. It comprises certain factors of movement which are in reality those of the camera, not to mention special camera angles, close-ups, etc. Hence, the performance of the actor is subjected to a series of optical tests. This is the first consequence of the fact that the actor's performance is presented by means of a camera. Also, the film actor lacks the opportunity of the stage actor to adjust to the audience during his performance, since he does not present his performance to the audience in person. (228)

Screen actors respect the business purpose of the industry while performing in front of the camera, considering the camera their audience. In that light, they work as a part of entrepreneurship, the businessperson's investment in the firm. Acting before the camera, artists presume their performances on the screen for which the audiences would pay for their entertainment. Further, audiences–consumers take artists in their private life in the real world for cultural objects just like dance or music. Before the camera, the hero and heroine expose their bodies not in the way they like but the way the cameraman directs, storyline demands, and producer expects.

Fictional characters in novel and cinema unfold themselves through myths and metaphors. Mikhail Bakhtin's "From the prehistory of novelistic discourse" establishes how characters in film and fiction articulate truths through dialogical intercourse of tangible entities, such as food and dress. Bakhtin, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*, credits Dostoevsky for the invention of a fictional subgenre of "polyphony" with a variety of discourses independently squaring characters'

individual consciousness at play (103). Bakhtin's carnival subverts the dominant style through humors and polyphony. In US, the holiday of Mardi Gras is celebrated in New Orleans with carnivals and parades. Such popular events bring people from diverse social classes, ideological orientations, and racial backgrounds.

In a market-operated economy, the status of art as a cultural product is one of the capitalist fundamental agenda, dance and song products, and artists professionals. Stars, directors, and managers are laborers in the manufacturing industry. However, laborers hardly survive with wages and facilities offered to them for their physical contribution to the manufacturing process. Robert Witkin, in *Adorno on Popular Culture*, exposes this defenseless condition of laborer in terms of alienation. In the culture industry, corporate houses not only convert arts and artifacts into market products but also control the entire production system. Further, they convert products of the culture industry, such as cinema and music into their chain products while popularizing them among a larger audience by using different means and media. Similarly, market products are converted into art forms to appeal audience–customers:

> Work is progressively de-skilled and each individual performs reutilized, atomized and meaningless tasks at a pace and under conditions s/he does not control. These atomized performances become the elementary particles of a system of production, external to the subject that has garnered to itself all power of initiative, design and control. Finally, workers are estranged from their fellow workers. The organic ties that should bind workers in a genuine process of social cooperation have been destroyed and with them the basis of mutual respect and a spirit of 'community.' (Witkin 3–4)

The entertainment industry, including radio program, television episode, and popular music, blends aesthetics and the corporate world. For the artists, those performances are products, and artists are professionals with designated jobs in liberal economy. Contrarily, live performances as well as music videos on-stage or off-stage are objects of entertainment for audiences. In this case in point, Theodor Adorno takes "show business for the masses and its stars fetishized and hero-worshipped" (5). Such a perpetual gaze at dance or movie parallels pleasure of shopping in mall or drinking coffee at restaurant. Precisely, arts become material objects for both producers and consumers. In the Frankfurt School Neo-Marxist perspective, an industrial product of art and artifact entertains audiences in the capitalist economic system.

Max Horkheimer amplifies the condition of a cultural product under the market control. In Antonio Gramsci's postulation, the spectacle of market product equally pleases audiences–consumers. Consideration of the American hippie culture as a renaissance of Romantic idealism, Herbert Marcuse remarks a strong bond between art and industry. Walter Benjamin investigates how vulgar aspects of pop culture allow people to release pent-up energies, the profane nature of pop culture, a means through which common people seek catharsis, pop culture a safety valve (22). The Frankfurt Institute of Social Research takes an art work, such as dance and film for a cultural product with both the monetary and aesthetic values. Under the market control, an art object not only entertains audiences but also serves the economic interest.

People should have myths and heroes to keep them intact with society and the world. The popular culture hero embodies the real-world hero who accomplishes significant missions to champion the greater purpose of humanity. The hero figure in film and fiction embodies performance artists, sports stars, and philanthropists in their representations of nobility entertain audiences. The hero performs actions larger than that of a normal range, turning himself into an icon with media, technology, and business. Such an iconic figure appears in different narratives, equally in print and visual. Heroes and icons reach larger audiences with tremendous engagements of media and technology. In the dynamics of market-operated capitalist economy, the hero appears in multiple myths, including cinema and television which become increasingly popular in changing global contexts. With popular culture, myth is historicized, and history mythologized. Legend stands somewhere between myth and history.

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Populism

► Charisma and Heroism

Pornography

► Sexuality and Heroism

Portrayals

► Art and Heroism

Portrayals of Heroism

► Definitions and Descriptions of Heroism

Positive Adaptation

► Resilience in Children

Positive Deviance

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Synonyms

Deviance; Heroic deviance; Labeling theory; Villains

Definition

Although heroes are highly valued in society and statistically rare, it seems like a misnomer to refer to them as deviant. However, to the extent that heroic behavior and the people who perform it are unusual, it would be considered appropriate to label them as deviant and their actions as deviance. One way to conceptualize heroism is as a form of positive deviance. It is also the case that heroic action may be motivated by personality traits that would also be possessed by people who engage in negative deviant acts.

Heroism is usually viewed as a scarce but highly valued behavior in society. There are at least three reasons why heroism is rare. The first is that heroism occurs in unexpected places and at unexpected times. *Civil inattention* refers to a balance between recognizing and ignoring others (Goffman 1971). Heroic behavior represents a breach in civil inattention because a hero notices and acts on some feature of the environment that others have failed to notice or made a decision to ignore.

The second is that heroism involves voluntarily engaging in potentially dangerous behaviors intended to help others. Franco et al. (2011) said that heroism involves significant risk to the self and can result in self-sacrifice. Civil, or physical risk, heroes put themselves in physical danger to help others, whereas social heroes may suffer personal loss from trying to solve social problems (Kinsella et al. 2017). Saving someone from a burning building is an example of physical risk or civil heroism. Protesting social or economic inequality illustrates social heroism. People view their heroes as possessing traits such as bravery, moral integrity, honesty, and altruism (Kinsella et al. 2015).

The third reason is that heroic action may require skills that are not widely possessed by potential helpers. As such, heroism requires a certain kind of person with a specific set of skills appearing in an unlikely location.

Competence, morality, and fame are central components of heroism (Allison and Goethals 2011; Goethals and Allison 2012, 2023). Further, high levels of competence, morality, and fame are relatively rare; possessing two or three of these characteristics – the qualities necessary to engage in heroic action – would be even rarer.

Given that heroism requires people to notice and/or act on what others do not, engage in potentially life-threatening behavior, and apply skills that may not be widely distributed among people, it is possible to classify heroism as a deviant behavior and heroes as deviant actors. The notion that heroism represents a form of deviance seems to contradict the widely held idea that heroes are noble and that deviants are immoral. It is possible to resolve this apparent discrepancy through the application of what has been termed positive deviance.

Two approaches to defining deviance are the normative perspective and the reactivist approach (Liska 1981). The *normative approach* views deviance in terms of violating norms. It is also possible that norms can be codified into rules or laws. The *reactivist approach*, which is consistent with Becker's (1963) *labeling theory*, views deviance as the outcome of the interpretation provided by a social audience. As such, the reactivist or labeling approach is a manifestation of symbolic interactionist frameworks. The two perspectives are intertwined when the negative reaction provided by others is an outgrowth of the acceptance of social norms or societal rules.

Deviance is usually equated with socially sanctioned behavior. The traditional perspective on deviance is that it refers to negative behaviors, which receive social disapproval. Some scholars have argued that the concept of positive deviance contradicts that concept of deviance as it is understood in sociology and criminology (Goode 1991). In fact, Saragin (1985) referred to positive deviance as an "oxymoron" that would confuse rather than add nuance to understanding social deviance.

However, strictly speaking, deviance refers to a degree of distance from a central tendency. In statistics, deviance refers to the distance between a score and the mean of scores included in a sample. Deviations can be either above or below the mean.

To account for the role of positive deviance in human behavior, Heckert and Heckert (2002) developed a typology that classified four types of deviance. *Negative deviance* refers to behaviors that underconforms to norms and is viewed in a negative manner by a social audience. Examples of negative deviance include criminals and drug dealers. This is what most people think of when they hear the term "deviance." *Rate busting* involves a situation where a positive deviant, i.e., someone who overconforms to positive norms, garners negative social attention (McClellan and Beggan 2017). Examples of rate busting include CEOs and lawyers. *Deviance admiration* refers to a positive evaluation of behaviors that underconform to norms. People in this category include notorious gangsters. Glamorizing serial killers is a form of deviance admiration (Hamilton 2022). Finally, *positive deviance* refers to overconforming behaviors that are positively evaluated. Individuals in this group would include religious leaders and humanitarian aid workers. From the perspective of Heckert and Heckert's typology, heroes belong in the category of positive deviants. Heroic behavior is an instance of positive deviance.

Idealized normative expectations reflect a very high standard of behavior that might exist in certain professions such as clergy (Heckert et al. 2021). Being known as a hero can have unexpected negative consequences on those individuals' well-being (Beggan 2019).

These high standards can apply to representatives of the category but also to individuals – such as family members – associated with the category (Heckert et al. 2022). Living up to idealized expectations may be especially challenging for people related to those about whom society has idealized expectations. The reason is based on the distinction between achieved and ascribed status. In the case of clergy, they have achieved a status by virtue of education, experience, and position. In contrast, family members or friends of clergy have an ascribed status based on associated or relatedness. As such, it is possible that friends and family members may experience negative outcomes from being associated with a hero.

There is a distinction between felt and enacted stigma (Heckert et al. 2021). Enacted stigma takes place when those who are not stigmatized engage in discrimination against those who are. Felt stigma refers to an internal process among those who are stigmatized wherein they internalize negative attitudes about themselves. Although we tend to think of stigma as associated with negative

deviance, it is also possible that others will stigmatize people for possessing a positive trait (Beggan and DeAngelis 2015). Thus, people may make fun of a heroic person, perhaps because they are jealous of him or her. In this instance, the hero experiences enacted stigma. It is also possible that a hero would experience felt stigma for at least two reasons. They may internalize the negative view that others express. The distinction between an achieved and ascribed status is relevant when assessing the social consequences of being labeled as a hero (Heckert et al. 2022). Despite achieving the status of hero – by virtue of an action taken – it is possible that they may feel they do not deserve the label "hero," especially if they feel they acted in a way that others would have, or that they acted heroically automatically. Another issue is that people who have helped others may suffer injuries, which might, at some level, make them regret their actions. They may, in turn, feel guilty for wishing they had not become involved.

Consistent with the model of deviance, it is possible to argue that certain forms of heroic behavior result from a kind of psychopathy that involves a willingness to take risks and traits such as fearlessness (Patton et al. 2018). Those high in sensation seeking took risks, even to the point of sacrificing their own lives, to act heroically (Neria et al. 2000). From this perspective, heroism results not from fearlessness but from the ability to overcome fears and act in a prosocial manner (Rachman 1990).

Just as Allison and Goethals (2011) have suggested that heroism is in the eye of the beholder, and labeling theorists (Becker 1963) have suggested that deviance stands in contradiction to normative beliefs about what is socially valued, heroic deviance is socially constructed as well. A deviant hero (Wolf and Zuckerman 2012) is someone who engages in nonconforming behaviors that decrease suffering, increase justice, and break oppressive rules with the intention of effecting social change that alters norms regarding appropriate behavior. At some point in the future, someone who has been labeled a deviant will be viewed as a hero who led a social transformation of society.

Cross-References

▶ Deviance and Heroism
▶ Effective Altruism
▶ Evolution of Heroism
▶ Utility Theory and Heroism

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Positive Deviants

► Moral Rebels and Heroism

Positive Life Changes

► Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) and Heroism

Positive Psychology and Heroism

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Synonyms

Happiness Studies; Human Flourishing; Resilience Theory; Strength-Based Psychology; Well-being Science

Definition

Positive psychology is a relatively young branch of psychology that focuses on understanding factors contributing to human flourishing, fulfillment, and optimal functioning (David et al. 2016; Peterson and Seligman 2004; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000).

The field of positive psychology emerged in response to traditional psychology's exclusive emphasis on mental illness and dysfunction by shifting attention towards promoting individual and collective well-being (Allison 2015). Since its inception in the late 1990s, positive psychology has rapidly grown in popularity and importance, offering valuable insights into areas like motivation, resilience, meaning, and quality of life. With widespread application across education, health care, business, and personal development sectors, this burgeoning discipline promises to revolutionize our understanding of what constitutes a satisfying and fulfilling life. This short entry will provide a comprehensive overview of positive psychology, exploring its central theories, methods, applications, critiques, and future directions. An examination of the various dimensions of positive psychology can aid in understanding the role of heroism in helping people flourish individually and collectively. In compiling this overview, the author derived much of the content from the Large Language Model, ChatGPT.

Key Concepts in Positive Psychology

Positive psychology centers around several core constructs that have been extensively studied within the scientific literature. These ideas help shape our current understanding of how individuals can achieve greater well-being, satisfaction, and flourishing. Some of the most notable include:

(a) Flow and Happiness: Flow refers to the intrinsically rewarding state experienced while performing challenging activities (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). It involves being fully immersed in the task, losing track of time, and feeling energized afterward.

Happiness, on the other hand, represents long-term subjective well-being based on emotional experiences and life circumstances. Both concepts are important in positive psychology, providing insight into how people can maximize their enjoyment and sense of purpose in daily life.

(b) Growth Mindset Theory: Developed by Carol Dweck (2008), this perspective posits that individuals possess either fixed (unchangeable) or growth (malleable) mindsets regarding intelligence, abilities, and traits. People who believe qualities can improve through effort are more likely to embrace challenges, learn effectively, persist, and show greater academic achievement and job success. Enhancing one's growth mindset can thus foster adaptability, resilience, and personal development.

(c) Well-Being Index/PERMA Framework: Martin Seligman's (2018) influential model identifies five essential elements of human well-being, which together form the acronym PERMA. They consist of:

- Positive Emotions: Engagement in pleasurable feelings like joy, interest, love, contentment, etc.
- Engagement: Feeling absorbed while pursuing goals and interests
- Relationships: Having strong connections with others
- Meaning: Finding purpose and significance in existence
- Accomplishment: Achieving desired outcomes via personal strengths and talents

Emerging Trends in Positive Psychology Research

As with any growing discipline, positive psychology continues to evolve and unearth new areas of exploration. Recently, the following trends have gained attention among scientists, influencing future directions within the field:

1. Neuropsychological studies: Advanced brain imaging techniques allow researchers to examine neural correlates associated with various aspects of well-being, including gratitude, compassion, and altruistic behavior. This interdisciplinary approach enhances our understanding of the biological underpinnings of positive mental states.
2. Digital technology and online platforms: With digital tools becoming ubiquitous, investigators explore how technologies such as smartphone apps and web-based programs may promote wellness, monitor mental health indicators, facilitate self-reflection, and deliver evidence-backed interventions to users remotely.
3. Cultural differences and universality: The cultural validity of positive psychology measures has come under scrutiny. Scientists now investigate how cross-cultural comparisons should be conducted ethically and methodologically, ensuring adequate representation of diverse populations and their unique value systems.
4. Healthcare integration: Given the importance of well-being in recovery from illness and maintaining optimal physical health, collaborative efforts between medical professionals and positive psychologists aim to integrate empirical insights into clinical practice. Integrated models address chronic conditions and patient quality of life holistically.
5. Organizational well-being: Workplace environments hold tremendous potential for promoting well-being. Positive organizational scholarship examines how companies can create cultures fostering employees' growth, meaning, and positive social interactions, resulting in increased job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and improved performance outcomes.

Positive Psychology and its Connection to Heroism Studies

Heroism represents one of the most fascinating domains within positive psychology. It involves extraordinary acts of bravery, sacrifice, and kindness (Allison et al. 2017; Franco et al. 2011; Kinsella et al. 2017). These actions often result in significant benefits not only for individuals but also communities, nations, and even humankind.

Studying heroism sheds light on what enables people to perform extraordinary feats and how these events contribute to personal well-being, societal development, and global progress (Efthimiou et al. 2018).

In recent decades, scholars have identified several key elements related to heroism, which aligns closely with positive psychology concepts (Kinsella et al. 2017). First, heroism displays many features of character strengths like courage, persistence, honesty, and teamwork. These traits are integral parts of Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's framework for optimal functioning. By leveraging their inherent virtues, individuals demonstrate remarkable resilience during trying circumstances, inspiring others to do the same (Duckworth 2016). Moreover, each heroic behavior reinforces moral excellence, contributes to personal growth, and makes future heroic action more likely (Kohen et al. 2019). People who exhibit exceptional valor often report feelings of purpose, accomplishment, and self-esteem boosts after their deeds.

Second, heroism reflects the core premise of positive psychology – focusing on what works rather than just fixing deficiencies. Rather than dwelling exclusively on problems or adversities, heroes concentrate on opportunities for constructive action. Their narratives frequently showcase instances where they capitalized on chance encounters or created novel solutions to pressing issues. Such proactive mindsets contribute to a type of heroic consciousness that generates lasting benefits for themselves and those around them (Allison 2019).

Third, heroism embodies the idea of pursuing meaningful lives. When faced with critical situations, brave individuals tend to act upon deeply held convictions about fairness, justice, love, or duty. Often, these values stem from religious beliefs, upbringing, or intimate experiences. This sense of purpose propels them forward, providing a strong foundation amid chaos and uncertainty.

Positive psychologists are interested in studying various aspects of heroism that contribute to well-being, personal growth, and positive social change. Some key aspects of heroism that are of interest to positive psychologists include:

1. Virtues and Character Strengths: Positive psychologists explore the character strengths and virtues that are associated with heroism. They examine the psychological qualities and positive traits that enable individuals to exhibit heroic behavior, such as courage, resilience, altruism, empathy, selflessness, integrity, and perseverance.
2. Moral Development: Heroic acts often involve making morally courageous decisions and taking actions that benefit others or society as a whole. Positive psychologists study the moral development of individuals and investigate the factors that influence ethical decision-making and the development of a moral identity.
3. Post-traumatic Growth: Heroic acts are often preceded by challenging or traumatic experiences often experienced during the arduous yet transformative hero's journey proposed by Joseph Campbell (1949; Allison et al. 2019). Positive psychologists are interested in understanding how individuals can experience growth and positive transformation following adversity. They explore the concept of post-traumatic growth and how heroism can be a catalyst for personal development, resilience, and finding meaning in life (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004).
4. Purpose and Meaning: Heroic individuals often have a strong sense of purpose and a deep commitment to a cause or values. Positive psychologists examine how heroism relates to the search for meaning and purpose in life. They explore the role of heroic actions in providing individuals with a sense of significance, belonging, and a connection to something larger than themselves (Igou et al. 2018).
5. Prosocial Behavior and Altruism: Heroism often involves acts of prosocial behavior and altruism, where individuals put the well-being of others before their own. Positive psychologists study the motivations, conditions, and factors that contribute to these selfless acts. They investigate the psychological and social processes that lead individuals to engage in acts of kindness, compassion, and service to others (Franco et al. 2011).

6. Positive Role Models: Positive psychologists recognize the importance of positive role models in inspiring and motivating individuals. They study how heroic figures, both real and fictional, can serve as role models and influence the development of character, values, and moral behavior in individuals and society.

By studying these aspects of heroism, positive psychologists aim to understand the psychological processes, conditions, and interventions that can cultivate heroic behavior, foster personal well-being, and contribute to the greater good. Their research contributes to a deeper understanding of human flourishing, moral development, and the potential for positive change in individuals and communities.

Cross-References

- ▶ Anamnesis and Heroism
- ▶ Authenticity, Heroism, and Humanistic Person-centered Psychology
- ▶ Definitions and Descriptions of Heroism
- ▶ Enlightenment and Heroism
- ▶ Follow Your Bliss and Heroism
- ▶ Growth Mindset
- ▶ Heroization
- ▶ Hero's Journey and Positive Transformation
- ▶ Positive Deviance
- ▶ Well-being and Heroism

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Possibilitizing and Heroism

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Synonyms

Potential creating; Solution seeking

Definition

Possibilitizing refers to ideating multiple possibilities with the purpose of creating a solution or an opportunity by intentionally getting curious and seeking out the potential within people, objects, and situations, including recognizing previously unobserved or disregarded assets.

The quest to create is perhaps as old as humankind itself. From seeing the possibility of paper within plant pulp, to seeing the possibility of silicon circuits within the sands on our shores, humans have long been heroic creators who forge new objects and processes from existing resources to meet their wants and needs. While there has been much theorizing and research on the concept of creativity, which typically refers to an individual's ability to generate something (including ideas) that are both novel and useful (Smith et al. 1989; Unsworth 2001), much of the conversation around creativity rests on the tangible product of the creative effort. There is an entire universe of possibility that exists, however, between an identified need and an articulated creative solution. Just as the possibility of a thousand stars exists within the dust and gasses of a nebulae, so too does a multitude of options exist in any situation if individuals intentionally and consistently ask themselves, "*What might be possible here*?"

Fueled in part by the creative process of divergent thinking (Guilford 1950), or the ability to generate diverse and novel approaches to a situation (Scratchley and Hakstain 2001), the concept of possibilitizing expands conversations on creativity by adding a generative, asset-seeking intentionality to the process. This entry situates the concept of possibilitizing as an overarching unique concept within the realm of creative decision-making. After tracing its conceptual underpinnings within the social sciences, implications for heroic leadership and organization development in the perpetually disrupted modern world are posited.

Conceptual Roots

Although a nascent term in the literature, the concept of possibilitizing has roots in a variety of social science fields and practices. Specifically, possibilitizing builds on the stream of strength-based social sciences that has been emerging over the past three decades. As Cooperrider and Godwin (2011) trace, there is currently an evolution of thought emerging in many of the conventions of leadership and organization development based on work emerging from the "strengths revolution" in management (Buckingham and Clifton 2001) and the mounting new database of human science research in fields of positive organizational scholarship (POS) (Cameron et al. 2003). Whereas historically these fields – from psychology to organization development – had been built upon a "problematizing" trajectory (Bushe and Marshak 2009), their focus had become a medical-like clinical practice of diagnosing what is wrong and focused on correcting ills and deficits. The legacy of these diagnostic approaches has created an implicit (and often explicit) deficit-based guiding question for leadership and change efforts: "*What is wrong here and how can we fix it?*" Implied assumptions in this approach are that the only thing of value to focus on is what is wrong, and strengths and assets are not worthy of the same consideration as problems.

Maslow's famous reiteration of the law of the instrument (Kaplan 1964) "I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail" (Maslow 1966, p. 15), summarizes the cognitive bias that occurs when we begin looking at people and organizations as problems to be solved. Individuals find what they look for. Thus, managers, leaders, and organizational change consultants have become very creative at finding, analyzing, and solving organizational problems, armed with tools such as "gap analysis," "organizational diagnosis," "root causes of failure," "needs analysis," and "threat analysis" (Cooperrider and Godwin 2011).

The rise of positive psychology and positive organization scholarship (e.g., Cameron et al. 2003; Seligman et al. 2005) has challenged the traditional deficit-based approaches in the social sciences and instead inviting "an emphasis on identifying individual and collective strengths (attributes and processes) and discovering how such strengths enable human flourishing

(goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience)" (Roberts 2006, p. 292). As summarized by Sekerka et al. (2014), "scholars across various organizational disciplines have begun to pose questions aimed explicitly at describing, explaining, and predicting what forms of thinking, feeling, and behavior are associated with the best of humankind [. . .] Work in these areas has sought to leverage and enhance effectiveness in a way that goes beyond promoting basic organizational survival, seeking instead to uncover what contributes to personal and collective thriving in the workplace" (pp. 435–436).

The shift toward strength-based approaches in the social sciences has added tools beyond the deficit-based "hammer" that had been so prevalent to date. Specifically, this work has introduced a new guiding question into the ether of leadership and change: "*What is possible and what do we want to create*?" This implicit question creates a tectonic shift in approaches to creative "problem-solving," bending the arc of change practices and interventions toward "solution-seeking." More than a semantical nuance, this evolution represents a paradigmatic shift in stance for a leader or change agent and is at the heart of possibilitizing.

Three manifestations of these strength-based, possibility-seeking approaches can be seen in the rise of Solution-Focused Therapy (at the interpersonal, psychological therapy level), Appreciative Inquiry (at the organizational and system level), and Asset-based and Community Development (at the community level). Each of these approaches, detailed briefly below, epitomizes a manifestation of possibilitizing at various levels of practice.

Solution-Focused Therapy

Defined as "a strengths-based approach, emphasizing the resources people invariably possess and how these can be applied to the change process" (Corcoran and Pillai 2009), Solution-Focused Therapy (SFT) traces its roots to the work of Insoo Kim Berg, Steve de Shazer, and their colleagues in the late 1970s. An alternative to the traditional approach to therapy at the time that focused on analyzing a patient's past to understand the "why" of their behaviors, SFT instead invites patients to focus on "how" they might develop new behaviors to create new results or solutions to challenges in their life. As such, SFT presents a future-oriented, goal-directed approach to behavioral interventions, which differs from the historical deficit-based diagnostic approach to mental health.

While there are a wide variety of techniques used today in SFT approaches, Ackerman (2017) highlights three essential techniques that are common in practice today: intentional solution-focused question asking; doing one thing different; and presupposing change. A cornerstone of SFT techniques is the leveraging of intentionally phrased questions to elicit goal-setting and problem-solving cognitions in the patient. For example, a classic SFT question is the "miracle" question that is typically some variant of: "*Imagine that a miracle has occurred. This problem you are struggling with is suddenly absent from your life. What does your life look like without this problem*?"

Appreciative Inquiry

As SFT was creating ripples in the field of therapy, so too were conversations about organizational change approaches beginning to transform in the early 1980s with the advent of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Tracing its origins to collaborative work led by Cooperrider, Srivastva, and colleagues with the Cleveland Clinic, AI came from flipping the conventional diagnostic organizational analysis search for "What is wrong within this organization?" into an intentional inquiry focused on discovering the life-giving factors that support an organization when it is at its best (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987). Defined in many ways over the years as both a philosophical approach as well as a methodology for approaching organizational change, a commonly cited inclusive definition is from Cooperrider et al. (2008, p. 3), who state:

> AI is the cooperative co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves the discovery of what gives life to a living system when it is most effective, alive, and constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves the art and practice of asking unconditional positive questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten its potential.

Traditionally, AI approaches follow a framework of four guiding questions (Stavros et al. 2015):

1. Discovery: What is giving life to this system when it is at its best; what is here to be appreciated?
2. Dream: What might we envision for the future?
3. Design: How might we co-create our ideal?
4. Delivery: How do we improve and sustain our progress? (Stavros et al. 2015.

While AI continues to be predominantly used as an approach to organizational change, over the past 30 years it has been applied across organizational sectors and levels including AI-inspired approaches to personal development, coaching, team development, evaluation, strategic planning, community development, and whole-system change (Godwin 2016).

Asset-Based Community Development

Somewhat parallel to the alternative approach that SFT provided to the practice of individual therapy, and AI provided for organizational change, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) created an alternative to the historically deficit needs-based approaches to community development. Rooted in the work of Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) at the Institute for Policy Research (IPR) at Northwestern University, ABCD was proposed as a strength-based way to counteract the negative consequences that were being observed as a result of the traditional approach to community development that "inadvertently presented a one-sided negative view, which often compromised, rather than contributed to, community capacity building" (Mathie and Cunningham 2003). For example, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) highlighted that an unintentionally, yet very real consequence of the classic development approach was that communities begin to see themselves as deficient and incapable of creating solutions to their challenges, but instead as consumers of services from external providers.

Flipping the script on the traditional needs-based community development that emphasizes the search for deficits and looks to outside resources as solutions, ABCD instead is built on the "premise that communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilizing existing (but often unrecognized) assets, and thereby responding to and creating local economic opportunity" for themselves (Mathie and Cunningham 2003, p. 5). Specific tools in ABCD include creating capacity inventories of communities (including asking AI-based questions to uplift what is working in a community), asset mapping (including the assets of individuals, associations, institutions, physical assets, and connections), and time banks for citizens to reconceptualize the exchange of goods and services with each other.

Appreciative Intelligence and the Practices of Possibilitizing

As the approaches of SBT, AI, and ABCD illustrate, possibilitizing can be practiced at any level of application, from interpersonal to communal. Individuals seeking to enhance their possibilitizing skills do so through intentional practice and cultivation of specific competencies, especially Appreciative Intelligence®. Defined as the ability to perceive positive inherent generative potential in a situation, Thatchenkery and Metzker (2006) proposed that individuals who have this ability can act purposefully to transform challenging situations into successful outcomes; a critical ability for possibilitizing. Based on their conceptualization, Whitaker et al. (2020) validated Appreciative Intelligence® as being a higher-order latent variable comprised of six discrete dimensions: positive affectivity, creativity, tolerance for uncertainty, self-efficacy, situational

awareness, and resilience. Each of these dimensions can be practiced and strengthened in a variety of ways resulting in an expanded ability for possibilitizing.

In addition to developing one's Appreciative Intelligence®, there are four core practices that an individual can exercise to strengthen their ability for possibilitizing. These practices echo across the SBT, AI, and ABCD approaches detailed above and can be enacted individually or collectively. They include:

1. **Intentionally Inquiring** – *Asking purposely generative questions*

   As detailed by the Simultaneity Principle of Appreciative Inquiry, change begins simultaneously when someone poses a question in a human system, not after an answer is found (Stavros et al. 2015). The questions individuals ask become fateful for what they find. And just as Heisenberg's (1949) principle holds true for the physical world, so it is true for social systems; new realities are created during the process of inquiry. Possibilitizing invites the asking of possibility-filled, strength-based questions such as, "*What is possible here that we have never considered before?*" and "*How might we...?*"
2. **Future Focusing** – *Cultivating images of a preferred future.*

   As detailed by the Anticipatory Principle of Appreciative Inquiry, human beings act based on their "anticipation" of future events, and this anticipation affects themselves, the people, and systems in the organization (Stavros et al. 2015). This implies the importance of leaders and even entire organization systems to ask questions that help generate a collective understanding of preferred future. Possibilitizing invites individuals to ask prospective (vs. retrospective) questions such as, "*What will success look like in the future?*"
3. **Solution Seeking** – *Discovering what is working to scale successes.*

   As detailed by the Poetic Principle of Appreciative Inquiry, individuals can study any topic related to human experience in any human system (Stavros et al. 2015). There is choice in the focus of any inquiry, for example, a leader can choose to inquire into stress or into moments of connection in their organizational system. Possibilitizing invites individuals to intentionally focus on learning from successes (vs. only studying failures) and ask possibility-creating (vs. problem-solving) questions such as, "*What is working that we can learn from and scale?*"
4. **Asset Appreciating** – *Recognizing the potential (both observable and unobserved) in people and situations.*

   Further inspired by the Poetic Principle of Appreciative Inquiry and the notion that individuals have choice in where they focus their attention and inquiry, possibilitizing invites the intentional focusing of attention toward assets, especially those that have previously gone unnoticed. Furthermore, possibilitizing invites the asking questions such as, "*What are the unique talents and capacities here that we have not fully utilized before?*"

Conclusion and Implications for Heroic Leadership in a Perpetually Disrupted World

Organizational life today faces ongoing disruptions in a world experiencing "perpetually unprecedented" challenges including escalating climate events, global health pandemics, and geopolitical turmoil. As organizations evolve to stay relevant and survive in these disrupted times, the very concept of leadership is also shifting. Successful workplaces of tomorrow will not be solely reliant on the classic conception of the individual "heroic" leader who applies known strategies from the past, but rather collective leadership, where everyone brings their best thinking to the challenges at hand and co-creates solutions together in the moment (Zhu et al. 2018). Traditional hierarchies with decision-making concentrated within specific roles will give way to distributed leadership structures with increased autonomy given to individuals and teams to make decisions on the "front lines" in response

to continually shifting contexts. Organizations of tomorrow will not be led by one heroic leader, but rather filled with a collective of heroes who rise to the challenge before them, creating real-time solutions with fellow heroes across the organization.

With more individuals acting as heroic leaders-in-the-moment, the ability to possibilitize will increasingly be a critical skill differentiating those who are able to respond to challenges from those who are not. Ideating multiple possibilities, seeing the potential in every person and situation, and recognizing previously unobserved or disregarded assets are the leadership competencies needed for creating solutions and opportunities in any situation.

Cross-References

▶ Thriving

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Post-Anthropocentrism

► Posthuman Heroes

Postheroic Leader

► Postheroic Leadership

Postheroic Leadership

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Synonyms

New models of leadership; Postheroic leader; Postheroic leadership theories; Postheroic perspectives on leadership

Definition

Postheroic leadership has been thought of as a set of leadership theories that depart from the traditionally individualistic, leader-centered, and heroic models of leadership toward a view of leadership based on a relational, collective, and plural nature of leadership practice.

Leadership is one of the most closely examined phenomena in the human sciences. Since Plato's early influential discussions on ideal political governance, in which he argues that philosophers should be the rulers of the Republic as they possess a special level of knowledge, the scrutiny afforded to leadership has been intense (although not necessarily under the term leadership since this term is a relatively recent addition to the English language). This is not surprising, given that leadership is a universal activity noticeable in the history of humankind.

From philosophical reflections in the ancient era to the body of scholarly knowledge developed throughout the industrial era, the prevailing picture of leaders resembled a hero. A person with outstanding charisma, remarkable personality traits, and virtues – integrity, decisiveness, competence, self-confidence, and vision. Someone who knows it all and has all the answers to all the problems. Research in the emerging field of heroism science (Allison and Kinsella 2019) has corroborated the parallels in the ways people think about leaders and the way they think about heroes (Allison and Goethals 2020; Goethals and Allison 2012). For example, charisma is considered one of the great eight traits of heroes as well as a central feature of most traditional conceptions of leadership (e.g., charismatic leadership and transformational leadership, Yukl 1999).

However, this heroic and to some extent romanticized figure of leader does not seem to fit appropriately the challenges and complexity of the modern world as well as the current social life, increasingly knowledge-intensive and dependent on collaboration among people (Avolio et al. 2009). As Warren Bennis (2018, 503) has said, "I doubt that the world was ever so simple that a single heroic leader, however capable, could solve its problems unilaterally." Consequently, the heroic notion of leaders has been challenged to move toward more relational, collectivistic, and plural forms of leadership (Yammarino et al. 2012; Murrell 1997). New models of leadership have been developed, under the umbrella of what scholars have called *postheroic leadership* (Fletcher 2004).

The current entry outlines the postheroic approach to leadership, with particular emphasis on the features that distinguish this new model of leadership from the traditional view of a leader as a heroic individual.

The Emergence of the Postheroic Leadership Paradigm

The traditional paradigm of leadership studies has commonly described leaders not only as the one who leads, but also as heroic individuals who

defeat all odds to achieve success and victory (Gardner 1997). This approach to leadership depicts leaders as a symbol, a source of inspiration, and the ultimate perfection of the human spirit. Descriptions of these heroic leaders are found across diverse settings (Hatch et al. 2006).

Although it is undeniable that heroism has had an enduring influence on leadership theory and practice, particularly through the so-called "great man" theory (Spector 2016), the heroic conceptualizations of leadership have been severely criticized over the last decades for romanticizing individual leaders (Collinson et al. 2018). Yukl (1999), a critic of the heroic leader paradigm, stated

> The inherent assumption of heroic leadership biases the theories toward explaining effectiveness in terms of the skills and actions of the leader. The theories should place greater emphasis on reciprocal influence processes and deal more explicitly with issues of shared and distributed leadership. (Yukl, 301)

Moreover, the challenges of today's organizational environments, whether business, religious, military, educational, governmental, or not-for-profit organizations, arising from the accelerated technological progress and increased complexity of modern society, have made it difficult for a sole person to hold himself out as a hero, providing the right answers and solutions for every single problem.

As a result of such criticisms, scholars have sought a new model of leadership that shifts away from the unique focus on one individual with exceptional attributes and characteristics to a more relational perspective that highlights leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon (Yammarino et al. 2012).

In this vein, the paradigm of *postheroic leadership* emerges, emphasizing the relational, collectivist, and plural nature of leadership (Fletcher 2004). As suggested by its name, this new model of leadership shifts away from the focus on the individual features of leaders. On the contrary, postheroic leadership theories address leadership as a product of multiperson interactions and relationships established. Although some precursors can be identified from previous decades – such as Mary Parker Follet, who states in her book The Creative Experience, published initially in 1924, that "leadership is not defined by the exercise of power, but instead by the capacity to increase the sense of power among those led" (Follet 1943, p. 3) –, most studies of postheroic leadership have emerged over the 1990s and 2000s.

Overall, postheroic leadership theories give more attention to the agency of followers and how they shape leadership practice. Likewise, they place less emphasis on the leader's extraordinariness. Scholars within this emerging field view leadership "not as a property of individuals . . . but as a collective phenomenon that is distributed or shared among different people, potentially fluid, and constructed in interaction" (Denis et al. 2012, p. 212).

Postheroic Leadership Styles

Postheroic leadership encompasses a family of leadership styles. The most prominent theories arising from this paradigm include servant, humble, shared, and distributed leadership. Although these theories have their specificities, they all place greater focus on the interpersonal dynamics occurring within the leadership process as well as on the entities involved in leadership (i.e., followers, teams, organizations, coalitions, communities, networks, systems, and other collectives), putting them at the forefront. Remarkably, these postheroic perspectives on leadership share the idea that even the most enlightened individuals do not have all the answers to the complex challenges of the modern world. This leads to the contention that postheroic leaders have the humility to recognize that the world is too complex for a single person to know very much. Hence, leadership functions should be carried out through a collective social process.

In this sense, servant leadership represents the antithesis of the Great Man model of leadership. Coined by Robert Greenleaf in the 1970s (Greenleaf and Spears 1977), it was only in the 2000s that the concept started to be studied formally in a proper and empirical way and it was developed into a significant concept in leadership

literature (for reviews, see van Dierendonck 2011 and Eva et al. 2019). Servant leadership is conceptualized as "an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self to-wards concern for others within the organization and the larger community." (Eva et al. 2019, 114). Its community-oriented side is one of the most unique aspects of the servant leadership style, as servant leaders serve the interests of others. Indeed, the servant leader's thrust is to put others' needs, interests, and concerns first before one's interests.

Humble leadership is another postheroic style of leadership that offers a substantial counterweight to heroic perspectives of leadership (Owens and Hekman 2012). This leadership perspective advocates for leaders to have the courage to show their humanness to others, including "admitting personal foibles, knowledge gaps, lapses in judgment, and bad decisions, and generally acknowledging when they did not lead well" (Owens and Hekman 2012, p. 794). Therefore, humble leadership moves away from considering leaders as demigods, heroes, and superhuman saviors.

Lastly, there are shared and distributed theories of leadership. Both perspectives view leadership as a property of the collective, not the individual, as involving multiple individuals participating in and divesting themselves of leadership roles over time. Therefore, these theories also shift away from the single-minded focus on the personal attributes of heroic leaders. Although having a lot in common, they are two different perspectives on leadership.

By assuming that today's knowledge-based environments demand interdependent and coordinative leadership practices, shared leadership emerges as "a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both" (Pearce and Conger 2003, p. 1). This process often involves peer influence and engagement from group member to group member and can shift based on the situation, status of the project, or the expertise of one person or another. Considering its emphasis on multiple individuals assuming leadership roles in various ways, shared leadership is a clear departure from the traditional understanding of a single person around whom the rest of the group circles and who is the arbiter of decisions and purpose (Yammarino et al. 2012). Zhu et al. (2018) and Döös and Wilhelmson (2021) offer recent reviews of shared leadership addressing its current state-of-the-art.

Distributive leadership, as another alternative perspective to traditional notions of leadership as an individual practice, posits that leadership functions should be distributed among different members of the team or organization (Yukl 2009). According to Gronn (2002), distributed leadership observes three main patterns: collaborative forms of engagement which arise spontaneously, emergent interpersonal synergies that solidify as part of the development of close relations amongst people, a variety of structural relations and institutionalized structures which constitute attempts to regularize distributed action (Gronn 2002). Distributed leadership is widely known and enacted in schools and school systems. Alma Harris (2013), one of the leading writers on this theme, argues

> The 'so what' of distributed leadership is the recognition that the core task of the formal leader is to support those with the expertise to lead, wherever they reside within the organisation. It is to judge when this expertise is needed for the development of the organisation and to engage this expertise in an authentic and respectful way. (Harris, 551)

The aforementioned theories of leadership are some of the most explored postheroic perspectives within leadership literature. It is worth mentioning, however, that they are not the only ones embracing a kind of postheroic leader.

Barriers to Postheroic Leadership Development

As previously highlighted, traditional models of leadership tend to overemphasize the influence of individual leaders. These leader-centered leadership theories are criticized for romanticizing

leaders, depicting them as heroes, and overestimating their influence and contributions (Collinson et al. 2018). Although critical research highlights the need for developing a leadership postheroic mindset (e.g., Collinson et al. 2018), it is not easy to abandon such a heroic image of leaders (Schweiger et al. 2020). There are some reasons for that.

First, individuals are embedded in a world that still supports the idealized "heroic image" of a leader. Heroic actions are perhaps expected and desired by followers, which contributes heroism to emerging. As argued by Fletcher (2004).

> While the rhetoric about leadership has changed at the macro level, the everyday narrative about leadership and leadership practices – the stories people tell about leadership, the mythical legends that get passed on as exemplars of leadership behavior – remains stuck in old images of heroic individualism (Fletcher, 652).

Second, research on the postheroic leadership approach is not devoid of controversy or critique. As noted by Fletcher (2004), some paradoxes are embedded in these postheroic leadership models. One of these paradoxes involves the so-called female advantage. While women would be expected to benefit from the postheroic leadership approach, since the skills and attributes needed to enact postheroic leadership – like collaboration, sharing, and teamwork – are more in line with the feminine stereotype, there are few women among representatives of postheroic leadership.

Finally, while the existing literature has articulated heroic and postheroic leadership as dichotomous and competing perspectives, there is some evidence that heroic and postheroic leadership elements may be found combined in some leadership practices (Collinson and Collinson 2009).

Conclusion

Traditional models of leadership have often portrayed leaders as heroes. According to this perspective, leaders possess some extraordinary abilities and perform heroic actions. Postheroic leadership theories, such as shared and distributed leadership, on the contrary, transcend this notion of leaders as heroes and focus instead on leadership as a relational and collective endeavor. As a phenomenon constructed by the interaction of many people, not all responsibilities need to be placed on one single person. Hence, heroic connotations, such as glorification and over-attribution of the responsibility for outcomes to individual leaders, are no longer suitable from a postheroic perspective. In practical terms, the consequences of holding such a perspective on leadership can be most important to relieve individuals of unrealistic and harmful heroic expectations. Finally, while acknowledging the importance of moving away from the hero myth or "great man" perspectives on leadership (Murrell 1997), some barriers still prevent overcoming this traditional, heroic leadership model.

Cross-References

- ▶ Great Eight Traits of Heroes
- ▶ Heroic Leadership
- ▶ Leadership and Heroism
- ▶ Romance of Heroism

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Postheroic Leadership Theories

► Postheroic Leadership

Postheroic Perspectives on Leadership

► Postheroic Leadership

Posthuman Heroes

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Synonyms

Affirmative ethics of joy; Collaboration; Hero's Journey; Hopepunk; Interconnections; Life force; Post-anthropocentrism; Transformation; Transversal alliance

Definition

While not discounting "heroine," the feminine of "hero"; the word "hero" in this entry is defined as beyond gender, and is inclusive of the life force held in all entities, human and non-human, from the micro, for example, bacteria, to the macro, the cosmos, allowing for hybrid figurations such as the cyborg (Haraway 2016); terrestrial beings; the Earth itself; extra-terrestrial beings, the alien and the imaginary, the fictional. A hero is not just an

individual; a hero is in relationship with others. Thus, a hero is not limited to a powerful male riding a white horse, prepared to use physical strength to slay the dragon, nor an "intergalactic Joan of Arc" (Braidotti 2011, 51) who brings down the alien and prevents imminent peril. The hero may be a small girl from Kansas, an animal like the lion, a machine like the Tin Man, or material like the scarecrow who is made from straw (Baum 1900). Heroes may be technophilic eco-warriors who protect the interconnectedness of our world through a posthuman attunement acknowledging the life force in bodies of water, sound, atmospheres, mountains, and forests.

Posthuman Heroes suggests a new type of hero. The term raises questions. What is posthuman? What does hero mean in relation to the posthuman? Why do we need Posthuman Heroes? In response to the first question, "what is posthuman?" the posthuman concept for this encyclopedic entry moves away from traditional Humanism to allow for a process of becoming with the planet, where humans and non-humans are part of a relational transversal alliance and difference is expected (Braidotti 2013, 2019, 2022). Braidotti explains becoming posthuman as:

> a process of redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space: urban, social, psychic, ecological, planetary as it may be. It expresses multiple ecologies of belonging, while it enacts the transformation of one's sensorial and perceptual co-ordinates, in order to acknowledge the collective nature and outward-bound direction of what we still call the self. (2013, 193)

A posthuman approach widens the lens, to include all humans, not just the traditional human: male, monied, full-citizen, able-bodied, hierarchical, and hegemonic. The human in posthuman theory is an expanded inclusive human, not limited to the Vitruvian man, the human encompasses full humanity, including the missing. The human is de-centered, no longer on a pedestal, existing in relation with non-human others, geo/bio/techno in the transversal alliance, positioning all life on an inclusive, non-dualistic continuum. Interconnections between humans and non-humans is not a new idea, within humans themselves exists the non-human-other of metals, fungi, minerals, bacteria, water, and increasingly, pollutants such as microplastics. Humans cannot exist without the Earth's atmosphere, of which oxygen is generated through photosynthesizing plants that provide nutrients to continue existence. Earth is home; without it, terrestrials have no place to stand. The posthuman approach acknowledges the dynamic relationship between human and non-human others.

Posthumanism intersects with post-anthropocentrism, a hopeful leap out of the current era of the Anthropocene which is, "when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet" (Braidotti 2013, 5). Regarding navigating the planetary damage of the Anthropocene, Braidotti refers to the wisdom of Indigenous peoples, noting that, "[R]espectful learning from the oldest guardians of the earth is a good place to start" (2019, 49). Post-anthropocentrism allows humans to act as protectors and guardians of our withering planet. Which brings us to our second question: "what does hero mean in relation to the posthuman?" The Greek meaning of "hero" is "protector" and "guardian." An example of unlikely posthuman heroes is the bacteria working together to break down the accumulated plastic of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (Kemp 2020).

The third question posed, "why do we need Posthuman Heroes?" can be answered when we consider the challenges of our times. Multi-media artist, Laurie Anderson, notes in her sixth Norton Lecture, "We're the first humans who face the possibility, some say the probability of our own extinction, and we're the first humans who are trying to find the words for this" (2021). We are living through a climate emergency. The livability of the Earth is no longer certain. A combined approach is called for:

> The livability of the earth is at stake – perhaps not for extremophile bacteria but for the many forms of life that humans and our companion species have learned to love. Mounting crises from chemical contamination, land grabs, and biodiversity loss are prompting interdisciplinary dialogues and urgent calls to action. The sheer magnitude of disruption has pushed scientists, artists, and humanists to reconsider relationships between nature and culture, subjects and objects of knowledge, heroes and

> ghosts of progress. A major challenge is how to think geological, biological, chemical, and cultural activity together, as a network of interactions with shared histories and unstable futures. There is something mythlike about this task: we consider anew the living and the dead; the ability to speak with invisible and cosmic beings; and the possibility of the end of the world. (Tsing et al. 2017, 176)

To this disruption, Braidotti notes a sense of urgency stating: "The future is literally right here and now and consequently there is no time to waste" (2019, 64) and asks that we prioritize issues linked to, "social justice, ethical accountability, sustainability and to trans-species and intergenerational solidarity" (2019, 41). We can experiment with what we are capable of becoming as a way of resisting the dystopian fear of the posthuman convergence of the Sixth Extinction (Kolbert 2014) and the technological advancements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Schwab 2016). We are caught between "the algorithmic devil and the acidified deep blue sea" (Braidotti, 2019, 2). Inquiring into the *potentia* of our becoming Deleuze notes, "we do not know what the body can do" (1988, 17). This notion of untapped bodily potential is echoed by Braidotti:

> At this particular point in our collective history 'we' simply do not know what our enfleshed selves can actually do. We need to find out by embracing an ethics of community-based experiments, which have to start with the careful composition of the transversal subjects that 'we' are, to ground and operationalize the project. (Braidotti 2019, 63–64)

We are emerging (not for the first time) out of a global pandemic. Racism and sexism exist. Conflict and war continue. Despite this, our young people want to and deserve to live in "social horizons of hope" (Braidotti, 2013, 122; 2019, 173). Braidotti notes that the posthuman subject is embedded and embodied, a figuration or conceptual personae (2018a) worthy of our complex times. "The posthuman subject is a neo-materialist, grounded thinker of dynamic and complex social and discursive processes, but with a keen eye for issues of social and political justice and a commitment to affirmative ethics" (Braidotti 2019, 46). Posthuman heroes care for the vulnerable and find allies, human, and nonhuman to work together to brave obstacles. As a response to these strange days, Posthumanism offers a line of flight out of Anthropocentrism. How? Through the possibility of transformation.

Transformation

Serendipitously, at the heart of posthumanism is the possibility of transformation held within affirmative ethics (Braidotti 2013, 2018b, 2019, 2022); transformation, too, is held within the cyclical hero's journey (Campbell 1949). Affirmative ethics allows for the possibility of transformation where entrapment can become empowerment. Within the Affirmative Ethics of Joy, we can locate and transform points of resistance through a process of defamiliarization and becoming with the support of collective solidarity.

In exploring the transformation within Affirmative Ethics, this entry leans on Braidotti's (2018b) approach; first, we map the cartography of the present state to understand the power imbalances, difficulties, and challenges. We can identify points of resistance. Cartographies differ according to various embodied locations and entangled power interplays. Second, we mobilize the subject's potential, creatively stepping outside of established norms and values by defamiliarizing them, and introducing alternative ethical flows. Third, we "create a laboratory of the new" (Braidotti 2018b, 223) where we disengage from negativity and instead turn to an "affirmative and relational vision of the self" (Braidotti 2018b, 223). In so doing, the ethics of joy allows for the possibility to **transform** obstacles and produce social horizons of hope. How? Through the fourth stage where we acknowledge life as a generative force of becoming, a means to growth and joy. Life is *potentia*: "Life is a dynamic force that unfolds through vital flows of connections and becoming. An ethics of joy taps into that flow" (Braidotti 2018b, 223). Therefore, it is important not to harm others as through our inter-connectedness harming others is harming ourselves (Braidotti, 2019). Fifth, sustain

processes that allow for connection to a network of non-human others, animal, viral, and technological, creating affirmative relations. Connection with non-human others widens the lens beyond Humanism and acknowledges that "We-Are-(All)-In-This-Together-But-We-Are-Not-One-And-The-Same" (Braidotti 2019, 52). "We" are a wider ecosystem of terrestrials on our withering planet, Earth.

Transformation is also available through the hero's journey (Campbell 1949). As noted throughout this encyclopedia, the hero's journey (Campbell 1949) is a three-act framework involving separation, initiation, and return. In Act 1, a character in an ordinary world is called to adventure. They may refuse the call, but often due to an external push, cross the threshold, and meet the mentor. An example of a reluctant hero is Luke Skywalker from *Star Wars* (Lucas 1977) whose loyalty to family commitments initially prevents him from joining the Rebel Alliance. The hero is separated from "life as usual" and faced with a large problem or ordeal. In Act 2, the character meets allies and enemies and takes tests. After facing a large ordeal, and overcoming a crisis, the character receives a reward perhaps making new alliances. In order to resolve the problem, the hero is forced to overcome a series of tests and challenges, an initiation, and by encountering the most difficult test, often with the stakes of life and death the hero is then able to return home **transformed** having tapped into an unknown potential (Allison et al. 2019).

Act 3 explores the road back to the ordinary world. On the way, the character may be resurrected from the dead, to return with the elixir, **transformed**. The hero's journey's three-act framework (Campbell 1949) has been identified in stories from different cultures through time. Heroes are various, for example, the whistle-blower hero who is prepared to speak truth to power; the underdog hero who can overcome impossible odds; and the everyday hero whose small act of hopepunk (Rowland 2017) kindness helps someone in need. Heroes in literature have an adventure and in the process increase their growth, as they discover who they are and how they can positively **transform** themselves and those around them. They are active and in a state of becoming (Campbell 1949).

By broadening the definition of what a hero may be and allowing for the interconnections of posthumanism, we may defamiliarize ourselves and change our view of life on Earth as a competitive race of survival of the fittest. A more apt approach is to consider the sustainability of *zoe*, the life force, as survival of the collaborative. Non-human agents such as forests offer an example of collaborative living. A mycorrhizal fungal hyphae network connects trees in a forest allowing for the movement of resources between species (Macfarlane 2019). We noted earlier that bacteria work as unlikely heroes to collectively break down our plastic refuse. Heroes are reliant upon the collaborative support of allies or companions to accomplish their goal. Consider Dorothy, without her companions, her dog Toto, the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Lion, she would not realize her own wisdom, compassion, and courage (Baum 1900).

Posthuman Heroes, such as the creative figurations of cyborgs or hybrid entities found in speculative fiction, may inspire readers and viewers. The transformation held within the hero's journey (Campbell 1949), and Affirmative Ethics (Braidotti 2018b) may be lifted from literary art to co-create a map for the learner's journey of our young people. Perhaps by interacting with texts, learners may build capabilities to navigate their journey(s) of growth, transformation, and becoming (Pascoe 2019). Mapping the hero's cartography allows identification of points of resistance, entrapment, *potestas* or challenges and ordeals and the possibility of empowerment, and *potentia* through the support of allies and discovering transformational rewards on the journey of becoming, before the cycle starts again; the snake's mouth opening for its tail, for "it matters wherehow ouroboros swallows its tale, again" (Haraway 2019, 10).

Cross-References

▶ Everyday Heroism
▶ Transformation

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Posttraumatic Growth

► Psychological and Physical Wounds of the Hero

Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) and Heroism

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Synonyms

Adaptive flexibility; Adversarial growth; Benefit finding; Bouncing forward; Finding positive meaning; Flourishing; Hardiness; Making sense; Positive life changes; Thriving

Definition

Post-Traumatic Growth has been described as a response whereby an individual has not only lived through a traumatic event but has also undergone significant positive changes and growth as a result. PTG is a shift beyond the previous baseline and can be a deep and meaningful experience that for some people can be life changing.

There is little doubt that trauma may result in numerous negative physical and psychological outcomes (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996). Trauma can severely impact an individual, with long-term negative mental and physical consequences (Straussner and Calnan 2014). Trauma can challenge an individual and affect their coping

abilities and sense of safety and security, which may in turn impact their physical and emotional well-being (Keck et al. 2017).

While trauma has historically been viewed as a consequence of war and armed conflict, there is now greater recognition that traumatic reactions can occur as a result of other types of traumas. Most past studies of trauma have primarily explored the negative consequences with little attention being given to the possibility of positive impacts resulting from traumatic experiences (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996a). However, historically, across various religions, literatures, and philosophies, there has been a common theme emerging that has suggested that traumatic experiences can trigger positive changes (Joseph and Linley 2005).

Since the early 1980s, researchers have sought to define positive growth resulting from trauma, using such terms as hardiness (Kobasa et al. 1982), thriving, (Carver 1998), bouncing forward (Walsh 2002), finding positive meaning (Fredrickson et al. 2003), adversarial growth, (Linley and Joseph 2004), adaptive flexibility (Bonanno 2004b), benefit finding (Helgeson et al. 2006), positive life changes (Westphal and Bonanno 2007), as well as flourishing (Middleton 2016), to name but a few.

In considering the positive and negative aftermath of trauma some researchers have suggested that it is important to view trauma holistically and not just through a negative lens (Eshan and Riaz 2016). This in turn has seen greater attention being paid to what is known as Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG), which is a term created by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996a). Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996b) described PTG as a response whereby an individual has not only lived through a traumatic experience but has also undergone significant positive change and growth as a result. PTG is a move beyond the previous baseline and can be a deep and meaningful experience that for some people can be life changing.

The Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) scale is a self-assessment measurement tool developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996a) to examine the impact of different types of traumas. The PTGI has 21 questions with response options on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (no change) to 5 (very great deal of change). The number corresponding to each response are summed to give a final score ranging between 0 and 105. PTG scores resulting from the PTGI are commonly referred to as being, low or no growth (≤50), medium growth (between 51 and 74), and high growth (≥75) (Oginska-Bulik and Kobylarczyk 2015; Moshin et al. 2016).

As well as providing an overall PTG score, the PTGI comprises five PTG domains, which allows for the scoring and delineation of growth for each of the following factors – relating to others, new possibilities, personal strength, spiritual change, and appreciation for life (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996b). The PTGI has now become the most extensively used tool to measure positive outcomes or PTG (Shakespeare-Finch et al. 2013). In a review of 70 PTG articles published in 2016–2017, 94% of studies utilized the PTGI as their main assessment measure of growth (Jayawickreme et al. 2018; Infurna and Jayawickreme 2019).

In relation to growth from trauma, PTG may result from struggling with both the traumatic event itself as well as adversity (Linley and Joseph 2004). Others have proposed a common theme or process for growth, which hypothesizes that experiencing a highly traumatic event may challenge one's basic beliefs and view of the world, which may in turn lead to undergoing some form of meaning-making process, thereby rebuilding beliefs and goals, leading to growth (Park and Helgeson 2006).

It has been further proposed that the abandonment of the old assumptive self, narrative, and sense of identity leads to the development of a new narrative and identity and that is at the heart of the process that can lead to PTG (Rendon 2015). Tedeschi and Blevins (2015) suggest that the disruption of one's assumptive world is necessary before growth can occur.

PTG, PTSD, and Resilience

Some researchers have found that those diagnosed with or suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress

Disorder (PTSD) exhibit more PTG than those without PTSD. A systematic review, including 19 studies of PTG and PTSD growth and biological variables (Schubert et al. 2016), found that those trauma survivors with PTSD report more growth and PTG than those without PTSD. Similarly, Tedeschi and McNally (2011) determined that trauma survivors who experienced growth also displayed and reported symptoms of PTSD. Shamia et al. (2015) also identified a positive and significant association between PTSD and PTG in their study of Palestinian nurses exposed to various traumatic events in the Gaza Strip. Wu et al. (2016), in their Wenchuan earthquake study involving 2080 survivors, found that the severity of PTSD symptoms was significantly and positively associated with PTG.

Some studies finding a positive relationship between PTSD and PTG have also identified that this relationship may be curvilinear in nature. Tsai et al. (2014), in studying US veterans who screened positive for PTSD, identified that an inverted "U" shape best defined the curvilinear relationship between PTSD and PTG, also suggesting that life-threatening illness or injury appeared to be most strongly linked to PTG. Tedeschi and Blevins (2015) propose that the curvilinear association between trauma and PTG may be affected by the intensity of trauma, with individuals less likely to experience growth beyond a certain threshold.

It has been suggested by some researchers that resilience may be a factor in coping with and dealing with trauma. The source of the word resilient appears to originate from the Latin word *"resilire"* meaning to jump back or recoil (Almedom and Glandon 2007; McAslan 2010). Bolton et al. (2016) described resilience as a process leading to positive changes as a result of experiencing adversity. Alternately, Connor and Davidson (2003) defined resilience as the ability/capacity to keep going despite stress and adversity.

Resilient individuals do appear to be able to better deal with trauma, sometimes only showing short-lived reactions then quickly returning back to their normal level of function (Mancini and Bonanno 2006). Among adolescents and army personnel involved in the Lebanon War, Levine et al. (2009) found resilience may be beneficial to individuals as it made them less likely to perceive threats to themselves.

Some researchers have suggested that resilience and PTG are different processes. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996b) suggest that resilient individuals report little growth as they have inherent coping strategies, which allow them to be less affected by trauma. Hutchinson and Lema (2009) suggest that resilience to trauma is different to recovering from trauma, which again is different from PTG. Levine et al. (2009), from their study exploring resilience and PTG, found that PTG and resilience are inversely related, with high levels of resilience associated with low PTG scores.

Wortman (2004) in reviewing PTG, looking at progress and problems, made a very important observation that across various types of disasters those people who believed they were going to die reported higher levels of personal growth. It is estimated that up to 90% of those experiencing trauma may experience PTG (Eshan and Riaz 2016); however, in Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) original study, up to 60% of university students reported experiencing PTG following trauma. In their review, Infurna and Jayawickreme (2019) found that 58%–83% of studies retrospectively identified PTG following adversity.

Before concluding, it is important that we recognize and acknowledge that while PTG is a model that promotes the concept of growth from trauma and adversity, it does not necessarily mean that individuals who experience trauma will not be negatively impacted by their trauma. Wortman (2004) suggests that the presence of growth does not mean that distress will also end. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996b) remind us that growth following trauma is not inevitable and that for some people continuing personal distress coexists alongside growth. Bonanno (2004a) also provides us with some caution, highlighting that not everyone is able to deal with disturbing or traumatic events in the same manner, with some experiencing acute distress that they may not be able to recover from.

Conclusion

Overall, PTG provides us with a more positive framework when looking at the impact of trauma. It appears that many individuals will experience growth as a result of experiencing a traumatic event. Those that experience PTG appear to be more likely to be impacted by their trauma and those with PTSD may experience greater levels of PTG. On the other hand, those who appear to be least affected by their trauma and those most resilient to trauma may not experience PTG. Nonetheless, while PTG may seem to be a desirable endpoint or outcome following trauma, it does not in itself lead to an absence of distress and for some, the impact of their trauma may be something that they may be unable to ever recover from.

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Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

► Psychological and Physical Wounds of the Hero

Potential Creating

► Possibilitizing and Heroism

Power and Abuse of Power

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Synonyms

Coercion; Control; Influence; Leadership

Definition

In modern usage power is understood as the ability to control people or things or the ability to act or produce an effect. It often includes the capacity to control others through both reward and coercion. In the latter case, power is abused.

Power

Power may be as old as the history of humankind, but there has been great variation in the interpretation of this word. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2015) defines it as “the ability to control people or things.” The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2022) adds several major definitions: “ability to act or produce an effect;. . . possession of control, authority, or influence over others.” The etymology of this thirteenth-century word traces back to the Anglo-French word *pouair*, deriving from the Old French *povoir*, which means “ability” or “to be able.” Its Vulgar Latin roots are from the ninth-century word *potere*, from its Proto-Indo-European root, *potis*, which means “owner, master, host, or lord.”

Political theorist Robert Dahl (1957) wrote his essay, “The Concept of Power,” in the context of

great thinkers from Plato and Aristotle to Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes to Max Weber, or the many cultural or linguistic uses, such as: "power, influence, control, *pouvoir*, *puissance*, *Macht*, *Herrschaft*, *Gewalt*, *imperium*, *potestas*, *auctoritas*, *potentia*" – to which we might add, "*dýnami* (δύναμη), *quatun* (قوة), *lìliàng* (力量), *shakti* (शक्ति), *nguvu*," etc. We take as a given Dahl's notion that power is a relation among people, and hence the variation according to context.

Dahl notes that power could be an identifiable "Thing" to be studied more or less systematically or many "Things" that have different meanings according to culture and time. Social psychologists John French and Bertram Raven (1959) go on to divide power into five distinct, practical forms: *coercive*, *reward*, *legitimate*, *referent*, and *expert*. However, both these papers make an assumption that we will take a step back to examine, in order to make a more fundamental, phenomenological distinction; for example, political theorist Hannah Arendt (1970) observes that power and violence are opposites. This notion is worth testing both at the conceptual and operational levels.

The focus of this analysis will show that power and *violence* – or power and *abuse of power* – are not only opposites but inversely proportionate to each other (Lee 2019). In other words, wherever there is greater guise of power, there is less true power, and vice versa. In this context, we will examine: (a) the distinction between power and *guise of power*; (b) the paradoxical relationship between power and violence; (c) how abuse of power manifests as violence and stunts society; and (d) how reducing abuses of power can open avenues for human growth, creativity, generativity, and *true power*.

Two Types of "Power"

To understand power, we must make the distinction between power and *guise of power*. Since guise of power is all too often mistaken for power itself – which is the aim of a "guise" – it is important to distinguish between *true power* and guise of power. Guise of power has a deceptive appearance: it is obtrusive, forceful, and ever in need to demonstrate its legitimacy through violence, often with the employment of threats, intimidation, and posturing, however "civilized" or institutionally embedded the form might be. Guise of power may employ physical force, economic advantages, or legal means to achieve its ends at the microlevel, and military might, economic sanctions, and political power at the macro level. Guise of power is what represents power for most people, whether it be protestors who engage in "speaking truth to power" or *political realists* who find comfort in a "powerful" military. However, the thesis of this entry is that guise of power is not power at all, for one is false and the other is real – and once this is recognized, the hollow guise of "power" loses its sway – indeed, power.

Hence, the two types of "power" are not types but power versus illusory *non-power*. True power, indeed, manifests in opposite ways thank those of guise of power. Not being merely a false façade, true power does not need to attract immediate attention but operates with a steady, enduring strength that is life-affirming, generative, generous, and heroic. True ability leads to a natural self-assurance and lack of need for dramatic displays, since a firm foundation in a leader allows for the fostering of a following through positive reinforcement and rewards, rather than through coercion and competition. The principles of true power are compassion, cooperation, and trust – not cruelty, coercion, and fear, which are inherent in guise of power.

A Paradoxical Relationship

True power is hence available to those who are able to rise above the noise and confusion of guise of power to recognize the inherent abundance of true power. This is often difficult and dependent on observing the paradoxical nature of the relationship between guise of power and true power. In other words, we can conceptualize the two "types" as occurring on a spectrum, where they are inversely proportionate to each other. Hence, the greater the guise of power, the less there will be of true power, and the greater the true power,

the less there will be of a guise. This is as true in the conceptualization stage, as it is in the manifestation and the expression stages.

This inverse relationship, then, brings us to another paradox: guise of power is actually *weakness*! An illustration of this is seen with *violence*, which is an extreme form of guise of power. Because violence is mimicry of animation and strength (Lee 2019), intended to compensate for a lack of power and hidden feelings of shame (Gilligan 1996), it lasts only as long as it can deceive and exploit. Violence – and abuse of power is always violence – eventually dissipates what it has hoarded and destroys what it purports to protect.

Conversely, what is often widely accepted to be weakness turns out to be true power. *Nonviolence* is an example of application of true power; it is at the source of thriving democracies, of successful campaigns against brutal dictators, and of responsible and healthy parenting. Unlike violence, which delivers relatively disappointing results and must rely on primitive notions and assumptions about effectiveness, nonviolence actually "performs" (Chenoweth et al. 2011; Orazani and Leidner 2019; Stoltzfus 2001).

Once we understand the nature of these two "types" of power, we can perceive that the paradox persists through the conceptualization stage (one aspires to seize, whereas the other aims to contribute); the manifestation stage (one exploits and squanders, whereas the other produces and replenishes); and the expression stage (one exaggerates, whereas the other is modest, since there is no need to embellish the real). Observers may immediately recognize that these two categories do not fall under the same rubric but are opposites. However, making the distinction in practical situations can sometimes be difficult, if not impossible. One person's "control, coercion, and physical force" can be another's "authority, influence, and charisma." Given the many individuals, institutions, and nations that would advance guise of power for true power – the distinction may be made not on the claims of the entities exercising "power," but on the fruit of their actions and the experience of those subject to that "power."

Abuse of Power

Abuse of power is a form of violence. Careful examination will reveal that the two notions are indistinguishable. The phrase itself is an oxymoron: true power is not possible to abuse. However, since guise of power is referred to almost universally as "power" until widespread public and personal perception changes, the working phrase is used here. In other words, "abuse of power" refers to the intentional use, threatened or actual, of "control, coercion, and physical [or any other] force." And whether readily recognized or not, the abuse of "power":

> either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (Krug et al. 2002).

These effects of abuse of power sometimes go unrecognized, when the abuse is deeply embedded within complex systems. Therefore, we can further assert that abuse of power results in "structural neglect and diminution of others" (Lee 2019) in ways that are, despite being more difficult to recognize, deeper and deadlier in its effects (Gilligan 1999). We will try to illustrate abuse of power through four examples: (a) familial abuse of power; (b) corporate abuse of power; (c) political abuse of power; and (d) international human rights abuses.

Familial Abuse of Power

Some of the most tragic cases of abuse of power occur within private homes, against the most vulnerable members of society. It can take the form of economic, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as coercively controlling behavior or, in the case of children or the elderly, neglect. Because it is abuse of a "power differential," it is best classified by the victim–offender relationship, specified according to the age or gender of the victim.

Victim reports are important for this form of abuse, even though victims vastly underreport because of shame or fear of retaliation, since abusers neither report nor condone the reporting of their own abuse as a rule. Despite familial abuse of power being hidden inside the home,

nearly 3 in 4 children aged 2–4 years are found regularly to suffer physical and/or psychological abuse, and 1 in 5 women and 1 in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child (Hillis et al. 2016). The lethality of this kind of abuse of power cannot be underestimated: every year, there are an estimated 40,150 homicide deaths in children under 18 years of age, many of which occur in the context of child maltreatment. This number is a gross underestimate, since the perpetrator often has the power to attribute these deaths to "accidental" falls, burns, drowning, and other causes. For each death, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of identifiable injuries from abuse of power, and decades of shortened life expectancy, even if the injuries do not result in immediate death (Brown et al. 2009).

Another vulnerable group is women. According to the World Health Organization (2021), a quarter of women aged 15–49 years who have been in a relationship have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner at least once in their lifetime since age 15. Globally, as many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners, and 6% of women report having been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner. A multi-country study (García-Moreno et al. 2005) challenged the perception that home is a safe haven for women, for many live in terror and at greater risk of death than outside the home. In times of societal stress, such as economic recessions, pandemic lockdowns, or war and displacement, the abuse of women increases, exacerbating existing differentials of "power," or leading to the creation of new differentials.

The elderly are also very vulnerable. A 2017 review of diverse regions around the world estimated that over the past year one in six people aged 60 years and older were subjected to some form of abuse (Yon et al. 2017). Elder abuse does not stop at the level of family but transitions into institutional abuse, as occurs in hospitals, nursing homes, and other long-term care facilities.

Whereas physical abuse and death receive the greatest attention, psychological abuse can be more detrimental and longer lasting, while more difficult to detect and to prevent. It involves the regular and deliberate use of psychological tactics with the purpose to manipulate, weaken, frighten, or injure a person mentally and emotionally; to distort, confuse, or influence a person's sense of reality and to reduce their sense of self; and ultimately to undermine their identity and well-being, so that they fall under the full control, in thought and in action, of the abuser. Such abuse, while more damaging long term (Felitti et al. 1998), is also difficult to hold accountable, for it coheres and "colludes" with abusive structures in society, such as patriarchy, racial supremacy, and economic prejudices. Psychological abuse often accompanies other forms of abuse and cuts across domains, as illustrated in the vignette below.

Vignette. Allan (the name has been changed for confidentiality purposes) psychologically manipulated a successful career woman into marrying him, in order to advance his own social, economic, and career prospects. He pressured her to give up her job to have children, isolated her from outside contact, and then gradually diminished her through emotional, physical, sexual, and economic abuse. However, when his abuse extended to their children (intimate partner abuse is one of the strongest predictors of child abuse) – almost killing their infant daughter and causing a head injury to their 7-year-old son – she confronted him, initially successfully, obtaining a temporary restraining order on him. He responded by filing for divorce, abducting the children, and financially manipulating a divorce judge to cancel his domestic violence charges as well as to endorse his abduction and detention of the children until they reached 18 years of age. The children became stunted in physical and psychological growth, and the mother debilitated for years from grief. The children may be expected to suffer from major risks of heart disease, cancer, obesity, high blood pressure, mental illness, substance abuse, crimes, suicides, and life expectancy (Petruccelli et al. 2019). Just 1 year of child physical, sexual, or psychological abuse and neglect amounts to a total lifetime estimated financial costs of an average of 1.3 million US dollars per child (Fang et al. 2012). This is an instance of familial abuse of power, unmitigated by society and compounded

by greater judicial corruption and abuse of power, as happens commonly with the family courts.

Corporate Abuse of Power

Large corporations wield unprecedented control over the economy, politics, and everyday life – including the workplace. Corporations abuse their size and "power" when they engage in wage theft, strike busting, predatory lending, unfair competition, human rights abuses, and desecration of the environment. They and the superrich are driving the inequality crisis, squeezing workers and producers in pursuit of high returns to top managers while dodging taxes that would benefit everyone (Harrington 2016). As a consequence, far from "trickling down," they are sucking up income and wealth at an alarming rate. In extreme cases, forced labor or slavery is employed to keep corporate costs down; the International Labour Organization estimates that 21 million people are forced laborers, generating 150 billion US dollars in profits each year (De Cock and Woode 2014). Africa alone loses 14 billion US dollars in tax revenues due to superrich tax havens – which would be enough to pay for the healthcare that could save the lives of four million children and to employ enough teachers to get every African child into school (Hardoon 2017). Thirty-one corporations from several sectors – finance, extractives, garment manufacturers, pharmaceuticals, and others – use their power and influence to ensure that regulations and national and international policies are shaped in ways that ensure their profitability.

Corporate crime causes more than twice as many deaths each year through preventable accidents or illnesses as "violent crime," which includes only direct, behavioral violence. Yet executives who, for profit, make concrete decisions that result in widespread suffering and death rarely receive punishment as criminals. By prosecuting and punishing only individual violent crimes and individual property crimes, the justice system abuses the poor, which is useful to those who abuse power. Such distortions deflect the discontent and potential hostility of the average person away from the classes above them and toward the classes below them (Reiman 1979). These are some of the mechanisms by which economic abuses of power can also fuel other abuses of power, such as classism (against the poor), racism (against minorities), sexism (against women), agism (against younger people), and militarism (against civilians). Creating divisions in the population allows for easier control, and therefore abuse of power, once in motion, creates a vicious circle.

Corporate abuses of power are the main drivers of global inequality, power differentials, exploitation, and oppression. Inequality is highly lethal: For 26 European nations, from 1970 to 2007, every 1% increase in unemployment indicated a 0.79% rise in suicides and a 0.79% rise in homicides (Stuckler et al. 2009). In addition, premature death rates from economic inequality are more than ten times the rate of all deaths from suicide, homicide, and collective violence combined (Galtung and Höivik 1971). Because of inequality, a child born in a Glasgow, Scotland, suburb can expect a life 28 years shorter than another living only 13 kilometers away. A girl in Lesotho is likely to live 42 years less than another in Japan. In Sweden, the risk of a woman dying during pregnancy and childbirth is 1 in 17,400; in Afghanistan, the odds are 1 in 8 (WHO 2008). Inequality also undermines population health, with increased rates of disabilities and deaths among people who occupy the bottom class, regardless of the overall wealth of a nation, as seen in the USA. Despite being the richest nation on earth, it has wider income disparities than other developed countries and, as expected, a lower average life expectancy than those countries (Kulkarni et al. 2011).

Vignette. From 1964 to 1992, petrochemical company Chevron (Texaco prior to 2001) unleashed a toxic "Rainforest Chernobyl" in Ecuador by leaving over 600 unlined oil pits in pristine northern Amazon rainforest and dumping 18 billion gallons of toxic production water into rivers used for bathing water. Local communities have suffered severe health effects, including cancer, skin lesions, birth defects, and spontaneous abortions. In Nigeria, Chevron, in a violent repression of peaceful protests against oil extraction, hired private military personnel to open fire on

unarmed protestors in the Niger Delta. Additionally, Chevron is responsible for widespread health problems in Richmond, California, home to one of Chevron's largest refineries. Processing 350,000 barrels of oil a day, the Richmond refinery produces oil flares and toxic waste that have caused local residents high rates of lupus, skin rashes, rheumatic fever, liver problems, kidney problems, tumors, cancer, asthma, and eye problems. The Unocal Corporation, which became a subsidiary of Chevron, settled a lawsuit in 2004 by 15 Burmese villagers, in which the villagers alleged Unocal's complicity in a range of human rights violations in Burma, including rape, summary execution, torture, forced labor, and forced migration (Global Labor Justice 2005). Chevron is one of the just 25 corporate and state-owned entities that have been the source of more than half of the world's greenhouse gas emissions since 1988. If these companies continue to extract fossil fuels at the same rate over the next 22 years, global average temperatures would rise by 4 °Celsius by the end of the century, which would mean substantial species extinction and catastrophic global food scarcity (Riley 2017).

Political Abuse of Power

Political abuse of power involves the deliberate misuse of a political position for the benefit of power itself, and the use of it for institutional discrimination and maltreatment of dissenting and marginalized groups (Cherepanov 2023). It may be employed for the maintenance of a political regime, for an unjust social and economic system, or for the accumulation of personal wealth for high public officials. In the worst cases, it leads to political unrest, economic instability, wars, and genocide. Psychological abuse in the form of propaganda, disinformation, manipulation, fearmongering, and intimidation almost always accompanies abuse of police, prisons, and the military to threaten a population into obedience. The most common forms of abusive leadership include dictatorships and totalitarianism.

Much like interpersonal abuse, political abuse of power occurs with abusive personalities coercively seizing greater power than they are given, much in the same way as they do within families, prison blocks, street gangs, or destructive cults. They do so with some form of defensive and overcompensating show of force, exhibiting their false capacity to "fix" any existing problem – be it political corruption, decline in living standards, or the fragmented identity of a nation because of racism or war (Lee 2022). They instinctively know how to beguile, but once in power, they institute abusive policies and worsen social crises, which in turn spawn more would-be tyrants. They are skilled at channeling collective anger, stoking divisions, stirring conflict, and creating scapegoats on whom to blame their actual failure at leadership. In order to justify their chaotic rule, they must blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy, where up is "down" and down is "up." This is the vicious circle that results from mistaking guise of power for true power.

Political abuse of power, however, is never confined to individuals. Abusive personalities rise through the ranks especially in times of a societal crisis or systemic corruption, and as more of them achieve high positions, they threaten with violence not just their own people and the nation but, in our day of weapons technology, the very survival of humankind. Abusive political personalities can also be the expression of a deeper drive for hegemony and dominance, such as through the military industry. The nuclear arms race is another end result of global dominance and guise of power. Whereas most of the world prefers to live in a nuclear-free world, the former superpowers' refusal to dispatch their arsenals, but rather refurbishing them, has created a psychological attraction – even perceived necessity – among previously non-nuclear nations of acquiring them. Such nations include North Korea, China, Israel, India, and Pakistan (Schell 2007).

Vignette. A culture of nuclear proliferation renewed under the authoritarian, guise-of-power orientations of Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. Their penchant for saber rattling has found much attraction in the civilization-destroying potential of nuclear weapons in a way that has not benefitted the world community or increased security, but only their own concepts of strength. After Putin returned to the presidency in 2012, he

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began flight-testing missiles banned by the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, violated Russia's Budapest pledge by seizing Ukraine's Crimea region, and claimed to be "ready" to use nuclear weapons in Crimea (Courtney and Herbst 2016). Trump, meanwhile, expanded America's nuclear arsenal, loosened controls on North Korea, and withdrew from the "Iran nuclear deal," as he oft threatened "fire and fury" with a nuclear attack. Trump also encouraged nuclear proliferation by pulling out of the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces, the 1992 Open Skies Treaty, and the 2010 New START. At the same time, he repeatedly praised and elevated Putin, approving his invasion of Crimea (Cohen 2020), which emboldened Putin to reinvade Ukraine in 2022 and to threaten further nuclear attacks. Together, Trump and Putin broke the taboo against discussing nuclear strikes, while Trump also bolstered brutal dictators worldwide, undermined democratic institutions, incited a deadly insurrection, and worsened a deadly pandemic that would kill 1.2 million Americans, in similar misuses of "power."

International Human Rights Abuses

International law seemed promising at first to deal with issues of human rights, war crimes, international security, and the regulation of armed conflict through the arbitration of international courts such as the European Court of Human Rights and the International Criminal Court. The idea was that international law and courts could potentially solve many common problems concerning global security, mass migrations, and economic and environmental crises, through a commonly accepted and fair legal forum, with universally agreed-upon precedents and international customs and conventions. However, like all institutions that are abused, these systems stopped at limited efficacy because, to a large extent, states have criminally harmed individuals and other states with impunity. In some cases, they may even perpetuate abuses through the sovereignty of nations in the absence of an effective enforcement authority. Therefore, while there have been successful applications of international law, member states' unwillingness to comply has rendered rulings largely moot. Movements in international law toward peace, exemplified by the United Nations and the World Health Organization, have thus been countered by corresponding pushes in the direction of greater weapons development, a lucrative global arms trade, and exploitation of military and economic might to gain greater dominance.

The same trend has hampered efforts to limit the climate crisis. The 2015 *Paris Agreement* among 193 countries and the European Union, for example, defined a long-term goal to limit global warming to "well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels," with efforts to limit to 1.5 °C. However, a lack of enforcement and profitable countermeasures portend growing heat waves, floods, mass migrations, wars over depleted resources, and the exacerbation of sectarian tensions (Zhang et al. 2007), together with profound health consequences in the form of infectious diseases, physical harm, psychological trauma, anxiety, and depression (Berry et al. 2010; McMichael et al. 2006). Major damage and displacement due to climate change disproportionately affect those who live in the Global South – defined as Africa, Latin America, and developing Asia, including the Middle East – because of climatic vulnerability as well as poorer infrastructure and emergency-response readiness. As a consequence, those who have contributed the least to the problem and have the fewest resources to deal with it will suffer the majority of the negative repercussions (Mohai et al. 2009). At the same time, there is no accountability on the part of the corporations and governments of the Global North – defined as the USA, Canada, Western Europe, developed parts of Asia, Australia, and New Zealand – that have benefited the most from a system of high consumption, export of toxic waste, and environmental damage while contributing the least to combatting human-generated climate change (Agarwal and Narain 1991).

Poor, minority, elderly, and homeless people, who have few resources or mobility to allow them to evacuate suffer the most, while government relief measures are slow to assist them (Giroux 2006). More broadly, climate change is a threat to the human species as a whole, putting our very

existence at risk. The current destruction of the natural environment, at rates never before seen on this planet (United Nations Environment Programme and GRID-Arendal 2007), is a threat to our habitat with its complex systems that provide the necessary conditions for human life. As a tragic consequence of our unchecked abuses and exploitation of nature, the majority of humans – and ultimately all – are now at risk of becoming victims of the devastating abuses by a minority.

Vignette. Flaunting international law can happen in the form of war crimes. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, against the World Trade Center, the government of George W. Bush exploited the shock and outrage of a people to implement a number of abusive practices. White House Lawyer John Yoo, for example, wrote the notorious "torture memos" to justify the brutal mistreatment of suspects, such as by waterboarding. Bush's attorney general, Alberto Gonzales, dismissed the Geneva Conventions as "quaint" and "obsolete." His Central Intelligence Agency director, Michael Hayden, secretly pushed agents' actions into illegal territory. Brutal rulers who emulated the USA's shredding of universal human rights standards targeted vulnerable populations simply by labeling them, "terrorists." The Chinese detained one million Uyghur, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt each detained tens of thousands of people, and the Israeli government closed off and periodically bombed the people of Gaza, paving the way for the Palestinian-Israeli war. The Bush administration's use of a "global war on terror" rhetoric, rather than the targeted tools of law enforcement, led to war at every corner, far beyond Afghanistan; indefinite detentions at Guantanamo Bay without due process; and drone strikes against mere "suspects" as far away as Yemen and Somalia. Ironically but unsurprisingly, these practices only fueled more terrorism: the Iraq war led to the creation of Al Qaida in Iraq and later to that of the so-called Islamic State, which played a part in the Syrian war, mass migrations to Europe, and a perception of migrants as a threat to job security and social stability (Amnesty International 2005).

Human rights abuses abroad correlate with abuses at home: the Bush administration mishandled the August 2005 Hurricane Katrina so badly, it became an infamous and tragic example of environmental injustice, whereby marginalized minority communities such as those of New Orleans are disproportionately unprotected from the effects of climate change. More acutely vulnerable and slower to receive help, casualties reached almost 1400 deaths and one million displacements (Krulewitch 2021). Bush's secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, who drove an unjustified war of aggression in Iraq, also notoriously poorly equipped and supported American soldiers, resulting in over 7000 deaths in combat and over 30,000 deaths by suicide as a result of "moral injury" (Roza 2021).

Remedy

What is the remedy for abuse of power? The answer is necessarily both operational and conceptual. Operationally, we must: urgently strengthen international laws; severely restrain corrupt leaders; aggressively curb corporate exploitation; and attentively protect human rights and individual resilience. None of these can be underestimated in the radical diligence and heroic determination they will require. However, even sweeping systemic changes will only be partial without accompanying conceptual changes.

We return to Dahl's distinction between power as a "Thing" that could be studied systematically (his conceptual definition) and "Things" that have different meanings depending on context (his operational definition). Here, we tried to merge these notions and to show how they can be applied along the lines of Arendt's assertion that power and violence are opposites. In other words, how can we demonstrate this operationally and conceptually?

Power is felt operationally not only at the level of those who exercise it but those who are at the receiving end: they can best distinguish between power that is *empowering*, and "power" that does violence. From the perspective of the recipient, whether beneficiary or victim, there will be no

mistaking between the two; one is life-affirming, whereas the other diminishes and drains life. What is often misunderstood is that, even from the perspective of the executors, however poorly recognized, guise of power is also detrimental. This is because whatever "benefit" one derives from guise of power is also a guise.

We then realize that, not only is there greater guise of power where there is less true power, and vice versa – but there is only one Power. The guise that is often referred to as "power" is not power at all but a façade, a chimera, and an optical illusion intended to mask its opposite. This is where we must also return to the conceptual for a remedy – the conceptual not only has operational value, but is the ultimate and most effective operation.

Justice

The concept that best allows for a remedy to abuse of power is *justice*. Heroic individuals and entities that embrace true power – such as through relationally and culturally collaborative endeavors – generally incline toward the sharing and the equitable redistribution of material, economic, and social resources. Because energy is not diverted toward competition, self-defense, and acquisitiveness in diminution of the other, more is available for generative and creative purposes, allowing for the pursuit of individual, familial, communal, or societal prosperity. Justice, therefore, results in the enhancement of overall health and collective thriving, including the reduction of violence (Lee 2019).

We then see that the source of the problem of abuse and violence is not operational but conceptual. We echo sociologist William I. Thomas' (1928) theorem: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." Similarly, if we take guise of power to be real, we will also have to deem scarcity and fear to be real, which will lead to abuses and therefore very real consequences. If we collectively recognize, however, that there is only one real *power*, then the guise can no longer hold, and we *give* power only to the correct source.

Power, then, is not only a relational notion but a *relationally created* one, whereby justice is the result. The great psychiatrist-thinker Judith Herman (2023) notes:

> Justice depends on the social organization of power . . . at every scale of human interaction and social structure, from the intimate realms of love and family, to the political realms of the nation-state, to the international realms of organized religion, business, and crime.

When power is based on mutuality and reciprocity, great resources are freed to foster human growth, creativity, generativity, heroism and life – and this applies to all levels, from the individual to the globe. When "power" operates on dominance and subordination – which is truly weakness – then conflict, tyranny, and mutual destruction are the ultimate results. Recognizing this distinction conceptually and practicing it operationally is the basis not only for harmonious households, thriving nations, and well-operating institutions, but the source of civilization – and ultimately survival – for all humanity.

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Power and Status

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Synonyms

Hierarchy; Social power; Social status

Definition

Social power is defined as possessing relatively more control over valued resources than another party. Social status is defined as the level of respect, admiration, and prominence a person holds in the eyes of others.

Power and status form the basis for two important types of social hierarchy. While power and status are conceptually different, they are often highly correlated with one another in practice (Raz et al. 2021). Both power and status have predictable psychological effects with implications for heroic behavior.

Defining Power

Power is held when one party in a pair has asymmetric control over valued resources (Emerson 1962). As a result, the lower-power party is more dependent on the higher-power party than vice versa. Power is a relational concept, meaning that a person's level of power cannot be assessed in isolation from other people. Power is not an attribute of the person; whether a person is powerful becomes clear only in comparison to another person. A person can depend on another for positive resources, such as knowledge, relationships, or money, or they can depend on them not to allocate negative resources, such as punishments or undesirable tasks (Magee and Galinsky 2008). Because relative level of resource control is the defining feature of power, power is a relatively objective construct.

The conceptualization of power has changed over time. Early conceptualizations of power defined it as the potential to force another party to act against their own will (Homans 1974). Considering what forms of power would enable this to happen, French and Raven (1959) recognized five types of power: reward, coercive, legitimate, expert, and referent power. These types of power refer to influence obtained by compensation, threat of punishment, a justifiable right to influence behavior, superior knowledge, and identification with the person, respectively. However, the *potential* to influence another person was a difficult construct to measure, and scholars came to see this typology as confounding power with conceptually distinct variables. Currently, variables such as legitimacy, status, competence, conflict, and influence are viewed as separate and worth studying alongside levels of power (Magee and Galinsky 2008). By defining the construct as relative control over resources, the concept has become easier to quantify and study.

Consequences of Holding and Lacking Power

A great deal of social psychological research paints a negative portrait of power. The quip that power corrupts is supported by many of social psychologists' studies, which have found that possessing power promotes selfishness (Blader and Chen 2012), objectification of other people (Gruenfeld et al. 2008), and a lack of empathy (Van Kleef et al. 2008). However, one prominent theory suggests that power simply disinhibits people, leading them to attend more closely to rewards and goals than punishments and potential losses (Keltner et al. 2003). Developing theory posits that power releases the psychological breaks on action by making failure appear less likely and less costly (Pike and Galinsky 2020). With inhibitions lower, the powerful act readily to achieve their goals, which are informed by their own personal characteristics as well as their environments (Guinote 2017). For instance, power's effect on self-interested behavior depends on whether a person's moral identity is strong or

weak (DeCelles et al. 2012) and whether they give freely in relationships or expect payback for benefits offered to others (Chen et al. 2001). With greater power, people were rated as less fair only when they were low in empathic concern or low in relational self-construal, the tendency to define oneself in terms of close relationships (Blader and Chen 2012). Overall, people primed with power act in ways that are more consistent with their self-concept.

People primed with power also show enhanced focus on goals. They more easily focus their attention on relevant information (Guinote 2017) and see the forest through the trees (Smith and Trope 2006). As a result, they are less prone to underinvesting in the future (Joshi and Fast 2013) and conforming to situational pressures (Galinsky et al. 2008). Studies have found that mentally accessible constructs influence the behavior of the powerful more than the behavior of the powerless (Guinote et al. 2012).

The effects of power also depend on levels of social status and self-perceived competence. When powerful people lack respect, admiration, and prominence in the eyes of others (i.e., status), they tend to act in less prosocial, more demeaning ways (Fast et al. 2012). For instance, people who read they possessed high power but low status communicated layoff decisions and responded to requests for help in ways that produced conflict and felt demeaning according to people who rated the responses. Similarly, when powerful people feel incompetent, meaning they feel they lack the skills to be effective in the situation, they tend to be aggressive toward others (Fast and Chen 2009). The tendency for power and status to co-exist in most situations is probably good for people, organizations, and society, given these patterns.

Notably, many social psychological studies of power utilized a recall task where participants remember a time they had control over something someone wanted or were in a position to evaluate the person (Galinsky et al. 2003). Recent advances in studies of power have acknowledged that holding structural power over others – i.e., power in a social context – typically activates stronger identification with the people who accorded power (Kennedy and Anderson 2017) and a stronger sense of responsibility toward subordinates (Tost and Johnson 2019). As a result, people with greater power in the workplace show greater effort toward unpleasant tasks (Williams et al. 2022). These findings are in line with anthropological theories of relationship types (Fiske 1992) whereby hierarchical relationships confer deference and special privileges on the higher-ranking only in exchange for guidance and protection of the lower-ranking people.

People desire power for the autonomy and control over one's situation that it affords (Lammers et al. 2016). When control over others is separated from autonomy, the interpersonal effects that accompany power look quite different. In studies with large samples, Cislak et al. (2018) found that greater control over other people positively correlated with self-reported levels of aggression and exploitation whereas greater control over one's own life negatively correlated with these variables.

Less research has been conducted on the effects of lacking power, but scholars have reasoned that relationships marked by unequal levels of power cause similar types of negative interpersonal behavior in powerful and powerless individuals. Specifically, Schaerer et al. (2018) theorized that relationships with unequal power levels promote competitive attitudes, tendencies to view others in terms of their usefulness, and tit-for-tat relationships. Their results found elevated tendencies to objectify others among both those high and low in power, as both groups tended to agree more with statements like, "I tend to contact this person when I need something," and "I think more about what this person can do for me than what I can do for him or her." Since then, the interpersonal effects of low power appear more consistently negative than the complicated story of possessing power. For instance, when people lack power, they are more paranoid and show more angry and aggressive tendencies (Schaerer et al. 2021). Lower power individuals also tell more lies to make themselves look better (Li, Chen, & Hildreth, in-press), and when men lack power relative to a female boss, they engage in more sexually harassing behaviors (Kray et al. 2022).

Lacking power is an aversive state, and it has been theorized to motivate the lower power party to generate alternative sources of resources to reduce their dependency where possible (Thibaut and Kelley 1959).

Defining Social Status

Social status is the respect, admiration, and prominence that a person holds in the eyes of others (Anderson et al. 2001). It can be thought of as the earned respect that recognizes distinguished qualities or behaviors versus the owed respect that recognizes the value of every group member (Rogers 2018). Relative to power, status is a much more subjective construct because it lies in the perceptions of other people, but groups tend to agree on who holds high levels of status (Anderson et al. 2006). Social status is theoretically distinguishable from levels of acceptance or liking and from influence, a downstream consequence of possessing social status (Magee and Galinsky 2008), but empirically, the values correlate highly (Raz et al. 2021). Objective levels of influence over group decisions are often so highly correlated with ratings of respect, admiration, and prominence that they are included in measures of social status themselves, however (Kennedy et al. 2013).

Consequences of Possessing and Lacking Social Status

More research has focused on the predictors of attaining social status than the consequences of having it. Groups generally try to accord higher status to those who help others, contribute to the group, and exhibit high levels of competence, commitment, and morality (Flynn et al. 2006; Willer 2009). However, they sometimes mistake attributes such as overconfidence or dominance for competence and social skill (Anderson and Kilduff 2009; Kennedy et al., 2013), and dominant, fear-inducing people do attract attention and achieve influence in groups, despite being disliked (Cheng et al. 2013). Conditions that undermine people's sense of control, such as economic uncertainty, promote greater support for dominant, fear-inducing leaders (Kakkar and Sivanathan 2017). Generally, groups accord higher status to the people they perceive as helping them coordinate internally, compete with other groups, and reach their goals.

When people view themselves as possessing high social status, it generally promotes beneficence toward others. For instance, Blader and Chen (2012) studied the effect of social status on two different forms of fairness. One of their studies measured how much money participants gave to another person when they could unilaterally decide how to allocate $10. Participants in the control condition gave about 30% to the other person, whereas participants in the high-status condition gave about 43% to the other person, indicating more distributive fairness. In another study, the negotiating partners of high-status people agreed more strongly that their concerns were listened to and their opinions, wishes, and needs were considered, indicating greater procedural fairness. Generally, holding higher status promotes willingness to take others' perspectives and understand their viewpoints (Blader et al. 2016). People with high status believe others have positive intentions toward them (Lount and Pettit 2012), and they perceive others as having high expectations for their performance on visible tasks, which explains why they work harder on such tasks (Lount et al. 2019). Because losing social status is psychologically painful (Pettit et al. 2010; Marr and Thau 2014), people who occupy high status positions are motivated to attend closely to their relationships and avoid a loss of esteem in others' eyes.

Problems arise for groups when people are so motivated to achieve greater status or to hold onto their status levels that they engage in behaviors that are dysfunctional for other people or the group more broadly. Many of these strategies involve, instead of creating value for the group, projecting value by misrepresenting one's accomplishments (Raz et al. 2021). Recent research has begun to clarify different motives for pursuing social status, differentiating authentic status goals, which promote autonomy, competence,

and relatedness and are rated as intrinsically rewarding, from contingent status goals, which relate to meeting others' expectations. Authentic and contingent status goals relate differently to dysfunctional behaviors such as unfairly claiming more credit for completing a task (Raz et al. 2021).

Implications of Power and Status Research for Heroism

Because heroism is conceptualized as the pinnacle of human behavior (Allison et al. 2017) and people with power and status are held by those at the pinnacle of organizations and society, the constructs clearly share a relationship. Yet the implications of power and status research for heroic behavior are not straightforward. Most of the research on power would imply that it enables people to take action when they want to, suggesting that, if the right people – those with strong moral character (Cohen and Morse 2014) – are put into powerful positions, then we should see more heroic leadership. And generally, this might be true, if not for the corrupting effects of bad barrels on the apples.

If organizational goals lack heroism in their formulation (for instance, by focusing on short-term profits, promoting destructive forms of competition, or excessively prioritizing self-interest over societal interests), then the salience of these goals and the accountability pressures to meet them might undermine heroism particularly for people with power given their greater goal focus (Guinote 2007). Similarly, when groups recommend unethical courses of action, powerful individuals' greater sense of connection to the group that promoted them can undermine their willingness to stand up to unethical practices (Kennedy and Anderson 2017). To better understand the relationship between power and heroism, researchers will need to study when salient goals trump moral character (and vice versa) in determining behavior for powerholders.

Holding higher status is likely to encourage better behavior toward others, other things equal, for the reasons cited earlier, and might also therefore promote heroism. However, the new research suggesting people might act badly to attain status (Raz et al. 2021) will need more attention before the effects of status on heroic behavior are fully understood.

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Pre-Cloak Superhero, The

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Synonyms

Pre-empowered superhero

Definition

The pre-cloak superhero is the developmental stage of the superhero *prior* to their gaining superpowers.

Introduction

The origin stories of comic superheroes are rife with adversity. Batman and Iron Man had family members murdered; Hulk was radiated; Thor's memory was erased. In an analysis of the top-20 superheroes, the authors discovered that "86% were either orphaned or abandoned; 49% had at least one parent murdered; 15% were kidnapped; 29% were bullied; and 29% endured economic limitation" (Fradkin et al. 2016, 412). While these stories bring dimension to the onscreen superhero, they also have value in the counseling domain – in particular for vulnerable children.

Vulnerable children can be defined as those orphaned and abandoned, abused and maltreated; children with absent or nonexistent role models. Studies find these children at higher risk of suicide attempts (Evans et al. 2017; Lesinskienė et al. 2022), substance abuse (Parveen 2019; Shibalika and Chileshe 2022), and a myriad of psychological disorders (Duraisamy et al. 2023; Kyaruzi 2022; Wambui et al. 2023). Thus, this demographic is a priority for intervention.

Since the early 1940s, educators and clinicians have used superheroes to instill tolerance and sharing, confidence and courage, community and resilience among children (Fradkin et al. 2017). Through superhero play, some early childhood classrooms have become repositories for capes and costumes. In the counselor's domain, and at least one cancer treatment center, the empowered superhero serves as a role model. Less frequently employed is the pre-empowered, pre-cloak superhero, which draws on the backstory of the superhero (Fradkin et al. 2020).

Superheroes as Therapeutic Tools

Superhero backstories can serve as tools for the empowerment of children with similar backstories, namely children who were orphaned or abandoned. Therapist and adoptive parent Lawrence C. Rubin (2007) uses the "superhero adoptive narrative" in his treatment of adopted patients. Under Rubin's auspices, these patients reflect on the adversities they share with several popular superheroes (Spider-Man, Batman, Superman). Rubin finds this pre-cloak narrative invaluable in his treatment of these patients.

At the Rwandan Orphans Project (2023), therapist Lisa Meaney implemented a life-skills group that used superhero origin stories to inspire its orphaned boys. "For these boys," Meaney says, "childhood trauma can be a catalyst for positive change . . . Just like it is for superheroes." As to the success of the intervention, "Over and over again," Meaney reports, "the boys have made statements such as, 'If Batman can be an orphan and be a superhero then so can I'" (Fradkin 2016).

Therapist Janina Scarlet has written extensively on "Superhero Therapy" (Scarlet 2016, 2018, 2021; Fradkin 2018, 2019, 2020). As a refugee from Ukraine, Scarlet's identification with the character Storm from the *X-Men* films

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was a turning point in adolescence. The resilience of the character, in overcoming adversities, set Scarlet on her superhero life path. When meeting clients for the first time, Scarlet asks which character from books, film, or TV they relate to, and then draws connection between the character's challenges and the client's (Langley 2014).

Therapist Cory A. Nelson (2007) uses a "What would Superman do?" technique with boys struggling with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), and anxiety issues. Nelson's technique promotes adaptive reflection in the child and alternate ways of interacting. Likewise, therapist Jennifer Mendoza Sayers (2007) uses The Hulk in her work with troubled children, transforming their destructive anger into what Sayers calls "healthy anger" (90).

A thread through the work of Rubin, Meaney, Scarlet, Nelson, and Sayers is the presence of "self-distancing." Self-distancing is the process through which the patient examines their problems from a distance. The self-regulatory benefits of psychological distance have been written about for decades (see Gross 1998; Lazarus and Alfert 1964; Mischel and Ayduk 2004). Aaron Beck (1970), the pioneer of cognitive therapy, equates "distancing" with psychological objectivity. For the orphaned or abandoned child, examining their problems from a distanced perspective is the keystone to psychosocial health.

For most therapists, superheroes are a tool used in the context of empirically tested programs. Janina Scarlet uses superheroes within the framework of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), employing such practices as mindfulness and cognitive defusion (Fradkin 2017a, b). Cory A. Nelson uses superheroes within a four-stage Adlerian framework. He begins by establishing a therapeutic relationship with the child; he assesses the child's goals and expectations; he offers alternatives to the child's maladaptive thoughts and behaviors (e.g., *In this situation, what would Superman do?*), and reorients the child, so they can use the techniques on their own with peers and family (Fradkin et al. 2017).

Superhero Stages

The superhero has two developmental stages (empowered, pre-empowered) for the therapist to draw from in their practice. Nelson's "What would Superman do?" scenario employs the empowered superhero, as a role model and guide for his young patients. This approach sends a message to the child that they, like superheroes, have superpowers. As engaging as this is, for orphaned and abandoned children, the pre-empowered stage (hereafter *pre-cloak* stage) may have more value. The pre-cloak stage is rich in adversities that resonate with these children. Bruce Wayne (AKA Batman) witnessed his parents being killed; Clark Kent (AKA Superman) was orphaned and abandoned; Peter Parker (AKA Spider-Man) grew up a sickly orphan. Adversity is a poignant and unifying thread in superhero origin stories.

Superhero Play

In early childhood settings, the empowered superhero provides inspiration and motivation for young children. Early childhood educator Kathleen I. Harris (2016) reports that "superhero play gives children opportunities to build self-confidence when they may be struggling through developmental milestones or tough situations" (206). This is consistent with Rubin's (2007) observation that superhero play reduces tension and stress among children. Rubin associates these benefits with the super-confidence that emerges when the child is engaged in superhero play (59). This confidence relates to the self-distancing the child experiences, when costumed as their favorite superhero. As fleeting as they are, these cape and costumed moments facilitate adaptive self-reflection in the child.

Resilience

The American Psychological Association (2023) defines resilience as the "process and

outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experience." The lives of superheroes are examples of resilience – their withstanding harsh adversities and adapting through the process, their transformation through pain and suffering (Yunes 2015). In the public schools of Brazil, an intervention entitled "Be the Superhero of Your Own Life" uses superheroes for resilience building and positive youth development among children and adolescents (Smith et al. 2021; Yunes et al. 2018). For vulnerable children, superheroes can be guides and role models, proxies for the parents they do not have.

Conclusion

For orphaned and abandoned children, the backstories of comic superheroes illustrate recovery and resilience in the presence of adversities, physical, emotional, and social. These pre-cloak stories have untapped power, in the classroom and the counseling domain. Programs are needed to promote the pre-cloak superhero as an intervention for vulnerable children. These programs need to target clinicians nationwide, to educate them as to the value of this resource. In the US, the American Psychological Association could serve as a promoter of this cause. In Europe, the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations could do the same. Through discussion and role-playing, these programs need to emphasize the shared adversities between superheroes and vulnerable children. To this end, the pre-cloak superhero is a valuable tool for the clinician and educator's toolbox.

Cross-References

▶ Mental Health and Heroism
▶ Origin Stories of Heroes
▶ Personal Heroes Versus Cultural Heroes
▶ Resilience in Children
▶ Superheroes

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Prediction

► Prospection

Pre-empowered Superhero

► Pre-Cloak Superhero, The

Prescient

► Genius and Heroism

Presence

► Mindfulness Training and Enlightenment

Presidential Heroism

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Synonyms

Executive leadership; Heroic leadership; Political leadership; Servant leadership

Definition

The assessment of at least some US presidents as heroic figures, fitting the archetypical hero image of a leader who is strong, active, and, most importantly, good.

Heroism is in the eye of the beholder, or so argue Allison and Goethals (2011) in their book *Heroes: What They Do and Why We Need Them.* Nowhere is this perspective more applicable in considering how presidents of the United States are appraised. At least until recently the American presidency was seen as a potentially heroic role. Years ago, political scientist James David Barber wrote that "The President is a symbolic leader, the one figure who draws together the people's hopes and fears for the political future" and that "the President is the only available object for such national-religious-monarchical sentiments as Americans possess" (Barber 1977, pp. 4, 5). People expected or at least hoped that a president would represent the best in the nation. They wanted him or her to be competent and moral and perhaps also warm and gracious. Ideally, they would fit the leader or even hero template of an individual who was strong, active, and good (Simonton 1987). A few presidents have measured up and been seen as heroic by most of the public, especially in historical perspective. Others have been seen as heroic by a much smaller portion of the population, both contemporaneously and in historical perspective. Abraham Lincoln is widely admired by people today, around the world as well as in the United States. His heroic status has endured. Donald Trump is seen as truly heroic by a significant segment of the American public, but he is also seen as a true villain by more. He is perhaps the most polarizing president in the US history. That seems unlikely to change.

In some instances, perceptions of a heroic president do not include negative beliefs about them. Their stature makes them unassailable. In other instances, people concede negative beliefs about some of presidents' personal behavior, some of their decisions, or some of their words. But their assessment holds essentially that those things do not matter in comparison to their heroic accomplishments. Students of Franklin Roosevelt recognize and condemn his extramarital relationships but hold firm that his leadership during the Great Depression and World War II was heroic and that he illustrates presidential heroism.

In what way is the presidency a potentially heroic position in our politics? People need heroes, and in the United States the White House has been where they expect or hope they might find one. We have no Buckingham Palace where Queen Elizabeth, especially in retrospect, satisfied the needs of many for a heroic figure and admired leader. The office of the president is where such a figure might be found. Fortunately for the nation, it was first inhabited by a truly heroic military and political figure, George Washington. Since then a few others have seemed heroic, at least for a time. For example, Theodore Roosevelt fit the template for many. For many people, the possibility of heroism or at least greatness in at least some presidents has been widely entertained. Presidents traditionally have been granted a "honeymoon" from the public before the grim realities of politics and governing intruded. (As the nation has become more polarized and as times have been more challenging, recent presidents have been given the benefit of the doubt to a noticeably lesser extent.) In short, given the nature of America's governmental arrangements, the presidency offers one of the best places to find a hero.

Which presidents have, for at least a time, for at least a significant number of people, been seen as heroes, and why? We will consider George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John

F. Kennedy, and Donald Trump. Each of them raises questions about the nature of heroism and heroic leadership.

George Washington. Washington is perhaps the least problematic. He was a physically impressive, indeed physically imposing individual. He was viewed as a paragon of personal virtue. At great personal sacrifice, he left home for nearly 9 years to lead the victorious Continental Army. He was not a great military strategist or tactician. In the end, he won by not losing. But he won, and that's what counts. Following the war, his heroic stature was such that just by attending the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia during the summer of 1787, he legitimized an undertaking of dubious legality and the idea of a completely new federal government. Not surprisingly he was unanimously elected president of the convention. When the Constitution had been ratified by enough states to put it into effect in 1788, Washington was unanimously elected president by the Electoral College. By serving for 8 years, he established that the new republic could survive. And then in one of his most important actions, he stepped down after two terms. While John Adams was not an inspired successor, the mere fact that the leadership of the government could be handed from one individual to another through a democratic process was a stunning achievement. Finally, though belatedly, he provided for the freeing of his slaves in his will, upon the death of his wife.

Washington achieved a great deal of lasting importance for his nation. Many specifics can be criticized. But as several historians have noted, he got the big things right, including when to retire from the military and also the government (Ellis 1996). Many of the American founders are being reassessed because they were slave owners, Washington included. But among the prominent slave-owning early leaders, he alone took a step, admittedly a modest one, to signal that slavery was wrong. He wrote in his will that on his wife Martha's death, slaves that he owned outright should be freed and that this should be done "without evasion, neglect or delay." Unfortunately, none of the other early slave-owning presidents were moved to do the same. All in all, Washington is a hero to many of his fellow Americans, past and present, because he is seen as competent and moral and as having sacrificed his personal well-being for the greater good. There were flaws, but the achievements were monumental and, in everyday terms, heroic.

Andrew Jackson. Jackson may seem like an odd inclusion in the list of American heroes, especially in today's overdue sensitivity to the continent's indigenous peoples. He pursued what was called "Indian Removal" with his usual unbending tenacity. Those actions are a stain on the country's history. Still, Jackson took other actions during his presidency that are arguably heroic in that they would be regarded by many people in the United States today, perhaps most, as heroic. First, Jackson took on the behemoth Bank of the United States. At the time, it gave banking and corporate interests in America far too much power. In the pitched battle about its rechartering, Jackson managed to cause John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster, all legendary US senators, to join in opposition. They agreed on nothing else than that Jackson was a threat to established governing arrangements (Skowronek 1997). Jackson famously told his vice president: "The Bank, Mr. Van Buren, is trying to kill me, but I will kill it." And he did.

The second arguably heroic action of Jackson's was to crush the "nullification" movement in South Carolina, led by his former vice president, John C. Calhoun. Calhoun claimed that states could nullify federal laws that they did not approve of. Jackson used the threat of force and other measures to get Calhoun to back off. Some historians argue that Jackson's strong action held off secession of Southern states for at least two decades. Both flare with which Jackson handled nullification and its rightness make his leadership seem heroic. In thinking about presidential heroism and heroism in general, we have to realize that many people can behave in both heroic and villainous ways at different times.

Abraham Lincoln. Among other things, the 16th president is seen as a martyr, a man who gave his life for a sacred cause. He saved the nation by leading the Union to victory in the Civil War, issued the Emancipation Proclamation, and oversaw Congress's passage of the 13th amendment to the Constitution, outlawing slavery. Our understanding of these substantial achievements is wrapped up in how history has shaped our memory of how Lincoln looked and how he spoke. Lincoln's appearance is part of his heroic image. He was tall and strong. But he was also somewhat awkward. Detractors called him "the original gorilla." And his face, widely seen in photographs during his lifetime, presents a puzzle. It was, to be generous, homely. One contemporary wrote: "such a face is enough to ruin the best of causes." Yet a soldier's diary noted: "Concentrated in that one great, strong, yet tender face, the agony of the life and death struggle of the hour was revealed as we had never seen it before. With a new understanding, we knew why we were soldiers" (Foote 1958, p. 803). In the time since, photographs, portraits, statues, and sculptures have created an image of a tall, strong, thoughtful, and humble man who seamlessly fits the image of Father Abraham. Daniel Chester French's statue in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC perfectly captures that image.

Also central to the heroic image of Lincoln are lyrical and memorable and enduring phrases from his speeches and writings: "the last, best hope of earth," "four score and seven years ago," "that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth," and "with malice toward none, with charity for all." In combination, an awareness of what Lincoln did (he saved the Union), of how he looked (humble, determined, strong), and of what he said (he was eloquent) has created a heroic image that is stamped into the memory of most all of who know of him.

Theodore Roosevelt. The 26th president is generally ranked as the fourth greatest after Lincoln, Washington, and his cousin Franklin Roosevelt. Much of what makes TR, as he was called, seem heroic is his manner. People remember the big smile with the big teeth and his dramatic gesticulations. The image of the Rough Rider charging up San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War is indelible. His progressive policies are seen as an important turning point in American politics, seeking to protect workers, common citizens, and children and the environment from unfettered capitalism and corporate power. Like Jackson, there is much about Theodore Roosevelt that is controversial and non-heroic, especially his backtracking in his support of African Americans. But both his persona and the substance of his leadership made him a popular hero during his time and still today in the views of most Americans, historians, and lay people.

Franklin D. Roosevelt. Along with Washington and Lincoln, FDR is ranked as one of the three greatest presidents of the United States. There are a number of salient elements in the perception of this second Roosevelt as heroic. First, he was elected four times, the only man to be elected more than twice. He died in office, in Georgia, and martyr-like images of a train bringing him home to Hyde Park, New York, are associated with the moving melody by Antonin Dvorak, "Goin' Home." Most memorable perhaps are his achievements – sustaining American spirits and optimism during the Great Depression and leading the nation through Word War II. Whatever his flaws, many people say his achievements eclipse them all. And he is known for the eloquence of his words and the deep patrician voice in which he intoned them. "The only thing we have to fear" is a defiantly optimistic exhortation in itself, but the sound of FDR speaking those words in his 1933 inaugural address is unforgettable. The same is true of the opening words of his speech asking the Congress to declare war on Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor: "Yesterday, December seventh, nineteen forty-one, a date which will live in infamy. . .." Both the words and the music contribute to his perceived heroism.

John F. Kennedy. It is remarkable that a man who served as president for less than 3 years can still be as highly ranked as he is among historians and by the general public. Somehow the

connection to Camelot, first mentioned by his widow, Jacqueline Kennedy, has taken hold. JFK is linked in memory to the words from the musical: "Ask ev'ry person if he's heard the story, And tell it strong and clear if he has not, That once there was a fleeting wisp of glory, Called Camelot." What about Kennedy makes such an association not only plausible but unshakeable? Among other things, times were good. America was at the peak of its power and moral prestige, though it had miles to go on race. Kennedy was handsome and charismatic. Photographs and press conference video clips show a smiling, confident, youthful president in full command of his powers and of the government. The phrase from his inaugural address, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country," is one of the most memorable of all presidential sayings. Kennedy looked good and sounded good. He moved gracefully. He easily activated the heroic strong, active, and good archetype. Most memorable perhaps is his deft, but also fortunate, leadership during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the moment that brought the world close to nuclear holocaust. Finally, like Lincoln, he achieved martyr status when he was shot down by an assassin. People could easily romanticize his leadership and believe that the best of him and from him, and for America, had been taken away from us. Much that is critical of Kennedy has been written over the years, but as one reviewer of a recent biography wrote, "He ensorcels us still."

Donald J. Trump. Nowhere is the perspective that heroism is in the eye of the beholder more apt than in the case of Donald Trump. Probably most people in the United States view Trump as an evil a villain as can be imagined. But for some, perhaps a third of the US population, Trump is a hero, and a very special one at that. He claims that he is the greatest of all presidents except for George Washington. Speaking at the United Nations early in his term, he said that he had accomplished more than any president since Franklin Roosevelt. Most of the world's ambassadors laughed, knocking Trump back for a few seconds, but he continued unabashed. And many of his supporters would agree with him. After all, they agree that he is "a very stable genius." Why his base loves him as much as they do is beyond the scope of this entry. But we do see the creativity that goes into the construction of heroic images based on our needs, in this case for belongingness and positive self-regard. Trump and his base provide that for each other.

In conclusion, this survey of popular assessments of presidents of the United States illustrates the many elements that are used to create heroic images of important leaders. In line with Robert Abelson's "opinion molecule theory," people's (Abelson 1968) images of heroes are consolidated from a positive evaluation itself informed by and validated by a few salient images and beliefs. In some ways, our constructions of heroes show the laziness and simplicity of humans as cognitive misers. In other ways, they reveal the ingenuity and complexity of the cognitive processes that make heroes.

Cross-References

- ▶ Diplomatic Heroism
- ▶ Heroism and Political Community
- ▶ Political Heroes
- ▶ Transforming Heroes

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Presidents

▶ Political Heroes

Prestige

▶ Honor

Prevention

▶ Resilience in Children

Prideful Heroes

▶ Tragic Heroes

Principal Features of Heroism

▶ Heroic Template, The

Principled

▶ Incorruptibility

Principled Functioning

▶ Moral Maturity and Heroism

Principled Resistance

▶ Moral Rebel Measurement

Principles

▶ Values and Heroism
▶ Virtues and Heroes

Principles Conviction

▶ Integrated Moral Motivation and Heroism

Private Heroes

▶ Personal Heroes Versus Cultural Heroes

Problem Solving

▶ Heroic Imagination

Processes

▶ Circles, Spiral Dynamics, and Heroism

Prodigy Effect

▶ Superstar Effect

Progression

▶ Evolution of Heroism

Prompts Cultivate Heroism

▶ Socratic Method Sparks Heroic Leaders

Prosocial

► Origin Stories of Heroes

Prosocial Behavior

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Synonyms

Altruism; Bystander intervention; Cooperation; Helping; Volunteering

Definition

Prosocial behavior is any action (i.e., doing something good) that benefits another. It is often heroic.

Introduction

"Go out and do something good this week." This exhortation is a call for the performance of prosocial behavior. At the most basic level, prosocial behavior is any action (i.e., doing something good) that benefits another (Dovidio et al. 2006; Schroeder and Graziano 2015a). Those behaviors come in various guises – some may be rather pedestrian and mundane, while others are extraordinary and heroic. They may include *helping* an individual in need, *volunteering* one's time and effort, *sharing* resources with another, and *cooperating* with others to achieve common goals. While all these actions are examples of prosocial behavior, to fully appreciate the domain of prosociality, it is necessary to examine the underlying processes that serve as the bases and motivations of these behaviors and to reflect upon the common features of prosocial acts.

It is useful to take a multilevel, hierarchical examination of the roots and manifestations of these prosocial behaviors, and three distinct levels have been identified to understand the mechanisms that contribute to the display of different types of prosocial behavior (Penner et al. 2005). The *micro-level* consists of the genetic, neurological, developmental, and personality factors possessed by an individual that set the stage for prosocial actions. These micro-level factors interact with situational and motivational factors operating at the *meso-level* that lead to overt dyadic, person-to-person helping. Macro-level processes affect prosociality at the group level and include volunteerism, intragroup cooperation, and intergroup cooperation; they build upon the meso-level processes to promote the common good. These three levels are interconnected and can provide comprehensive explanations for prosocial actions. Micro-level processes offer basic accounts for meso-level helping, while processes operating at both the micro- and meso-levels serve to elucidate the underpinnings for macro-level prosocial behaviors (Penner et al. 2005; Schroeder and Graziano 2015b, 2017).

In this entry, each of the three levels of prosocial behavior will be considered in detail, and the links between the levels will be examined.

The Micro-Level of Prosocial Behavior

At the most fundamental level, the micro-level is the foundational base for prosocial behavior and includes mechanisms that are the results of evolutionary processes that contributed to our survival (e.g., Dawkins 1976; Barclay and van Vugt 2015). Specifically, *kin selection* (i.e., the heightened likelihood of offering aid and resources to those with whom we share a common genetic background) and *reciprocal altruism* (i.e., helping those who have helped us) are the hallmarks of this level. Various brain structures (e.g., limbic system and prefrontal cortex) and endocrine/hormonal products (e.g., oxytocin) evolved that are specially attuned to environmental cues that signal the need for a prosocial reaction (e.g., Decety and Lamm 2006). Cognitive capacities develop and mature throughout childhood that enables observers to empathize with the plight of others in need and to understand how to best provide the

actions necessary to eliminate the problem (e.g., Eisenberg et al. 2015). Dispositional and personality characteristics (including agreeableness and other-oriented empathy) that predispose individuals to be more likely to give assistance to others (e.g., Penner and Orom 2010; Graziano and Habashi 2015) also emerge, and gender may play roles in decisions to help. Although men and women may not differ in terms of how much they help, the type of help offered may differ in important ways (Eagly and Crowley 1986). Through socialization, women are especially prone to aid others by showing compassion, caring, and nurturance. Men, however, tend to be more physically active, stronger, and willing to take greater physical risks. These differences are also revealed in the nature of the heroic acts performed by men and women. For example, Becker and Eagly (2004) reported that men's physical intervention in dangerous, emergency situations (e.g., rushing into burning buildings and stopping armed robberies) is seen as heroic, while women's heroism typically involves extreme cases of "service to socially valued goals" (e.g., organ donations, "rescuers" during the Holocaust) that also involve significant risk to life. The nature of one's social relationships with possible victims may factor into decisions to help or cooperate with others, with the closeness of the relationship being a determinant of whether to offer assistance (e.g., Clark and Mills 2012; Agnew and Le 2015). It is important to recognize that none of these factors that are operating at the micro-level are prosocial acts per se, but they represent the critical components that provide the underpinnings and infrastructure for overt acts that benefit others.

The Meso-Level of Prosocial Behavior

The meso-level includes actual acts of dyadic, interpersonal helping and explores situational factors that either facilitate or inhibit helping and the motivations that underlie those acts. The murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964 served as the impetus for much of the initial *bystander intervention* research (Latane and Darley 1970). Initial reports of the murder suggested that numerous bystanders were aware of the repeated attacks but did nothing to intervene. After public outrage from various quarters that no one offered any assistance and myriad speculations as to why no one came to stop the attack, social psychologists sought to answer the question of why no one helped using experimental investigations. That work showed that decisions to help in emergencies are not simple ones; multiple factors come into play. Emergencies by their nature are confusing and often ambiguous, and potential helpers who come upon emergencies may refrain from getting involved because they misinterpret the circumstances. As part of the interpretation process, they frequently rely on the actions of others to define the situation. If others are doing nothing because they are also trying to understand the ambiguous emergency, the inaction of other bystanders may lead potential helpers to conclude that help or intervention is not required. This *pluralistic ignorance* precludes helping.

However, if bystanders do recognize that help is needed, observers may question whether they are the ones who need to get involved and provide assistance. If others are also available to provide assistance, *diffusion of responsibility* allows a person to deny that they have any personal obligation to help. This impediment to helping is particularly strong as the number of others in the situation who might also offer assistance increases. This diffusion effect may be mitigated for individual observers who occupy roles that confer personal responsibility (i.e., first responders). For individuals whose identities are strongly defined as helpers, the presence and actions of others may have little or no effect on their actions. They are both able to define emergency situations clearly and to readily accept personal responsibility to render aid.

Even if the situation is defined as one requiring help and a bystander has accepted personal responsibility, a final factor must be considered: What costs would helping incur, and what benefits would likely be realized? Strong egoistic considerations come into play. If rewards for providing assistance (e.g., monetary rewards, social recognition and accolades, and guilt avoidance)

anticipated by a bystander exceed any costs that might be borne by intervening (e.g., physical harm, expended effort, time loss, and material resources), then help is more likely to be forthcoming. However, if the costs outweigh the benefits, help is improbable.

Although the costs of helping may be the first thing thought of when thinking about costs and helping, costs for failing to help also need to be included in the equation. For example, failures to conform to social (e.g., reciprocity, social responsibility, fairness) and personal norms that prescribe how an individual should respond in emergencies may result in costly social and personal sanctions. Adherence to internalized, personal norms of those for those filling roles conferring particular personal responsibilities for their charges (i.e., first responders, teachers, supervisors) also enters the cost–reward analysis. "Doing one's duty" allows helpful individuals to avoid the cost of guilt that would be felt for failing to behave appropriately.

Recognizing the need for intervention, assuming responsibility to provide assistance, and cost–benefit analyses play important roles in decisions to help in emergencies. A question remains as to the motivation for planned, non-emergency prosocial behavior: Why would a person offer help to others? As suggested previously, egoistic considerations are the primary factor in motivating an individual to act prosocially: What is in it for me? Three theories have been proposed that identify different and more specific reasons for acting to benefit others, including one that offers an alternative to the dominant egoistic approach.

Emotional factors may play a motivating role in helping; the *arousal: cost–reward model* (e.g., Piliavin et al. 1981) argues that observing another in need vicariously leads to an aversive emotional arousal that the observer is motivated to eliminate. One way to eliminate that unpleasant arousal is by helping the victim escape the adversity; in line with other egoistic explanations, acting to remove the source of the negative arousal terminates the observer's aversive state through negative reinforcement. Direct help may stop the arousal, but observers may also recruit others to intervene (indirect help), leave the situation and allow the feelings of distress to dissipate over time, or cognitively reinterpret the situation as one that is not actually serious. Any of these actions will terminate the aversive arousal. In accordance with the cost–reward analysis, observers will take the course of action that will most quickly and completely remove the distress, while minimizing the net costs. This theory also acknowledges that, in some cases, the arousal may be so intense and overwhelming that bystanders will perform *impulsive helping* – irrational and noncalculative helping – to bring an end to the arousal. Pulling an injured driver from a burning car may be a heroic act of impulsive helping. However, because the action may be irrational and the consequences are not always well considered, impulsive acts are not always successful. For example, a family in Louisiana was having a picnic on a sand bar in a river when a part of the bank collapsed, sweeping away a small child. Several family members impulsively jumped into the river to save the child, but none could swim. The child and the would-be rescuers all drowned.

The *negative state relief model* (e.g., Cialdini et al. 1973; Cialdini and Kenrick 1976) considers helping to be an instrumental act that people may take to make themselves feel better, that is, to eliminate a negative mood state, particularly sadness. They have learned this tactic throughout their childhood, while helping others has acquired secondary reinforcement properties. The reason for the sadness need not have any connection to a victim's plight. If an opportunity to act in a prosocial manner presents itself when a person feels bad, that person may choose to offer help in order to boost their mood. The person in need may have had nothing to do with the helper's sadness. However, if other mood-bolstering events have occurred before an opportunity to help presents itself, no increase in the likelihood of a prosocial act would be found. According to this model, helping is a mood management tactic, and if one's mood is satisfactory, there is no particular motivation to help.

Underlying both the negative state relief model and the arousal: cost–reward model is the assumption that helping is an egoistic, self-serving act. According to these formulations and the dominant

notion that all helping is egoistically motivated, helpers give assistance to the extent that it makes themselves feel better (e.g., boosting mood and relieving distress). According to egoistic motivation explanations, the primary and ultimate goal of helping is for some self-benefit for the helper; benefits realized by the person in need are simply fortunate secondary by-products of that help.

Alternatively, the *empathy–altruism hypothesis* (e.g., Batson 2011) posits that help, in some cases, might be given when the ultimate goal of the act is to benefit another person's welfare – that is, for purely altruistic reasons. This formulation argues that under certain and rather limited circumstances, a potential helper may empathize with a victim and that empathy elicits an other-oriented emotion congruent with the perceived welfare of the individual in need (*empathic concern)*. Empathic concern leads to an *altruistic motivation* for prosocial behavior, characterized by the helper's willingness to accept personal costs that would be unacceptable if egoistic concerns motivated the help.

Altruism is often used as a synonym for helping, but an important distinction between the two concepts deserves to be made. Helping is the prosocial *act* of benefiting another, regardless of the reasons why the help was given; altruism, as the term is used by Batson (2011) and others (e.g., Schroeder and Graziano 2015b), refers to a specific *motivation* for the prosocial act.

Altruism is reserved for cases in which empathic concern for the person in need motivates the prosocial act – *altruistic helping*. However, as described previously, if the primary motivation for a prosocial act is to reduce distress, to improve a negative mood, or to fulfill other self-serving concerns (e.g., guilt avoidance and seeking social praise), the prosocial act is egoistically motivated – *egoistic helping*. For example, a man rushing into a burning building to save a child may praise by observers for what they see as an altruistic act, but if the helper reports that he would not have been able to live with himself had he not tried to rescue the child, an egoistic motive of guilt avoidance can be seen as having motivated the act; it was not a case of altruism.

Bystanders in such cases are using the term "altruism" in the colloquial sense rather than in the scientific, technical sense. The inherent difficulty of determining an individual's motivation for any prosocial act lies at the heart of the problem of labeling instances of altruistic versus egoistic helping. To further complicate the matter, it is important to recognize that multiple motivations may be at work for an individual, making the task of explaining why a helper took the prosocial action even more difficult. However, regardless of the motivation that prompted the prosocial action, note that the person in need received the help that was required.

The Macro-Level of Prosocial Behavior

Interpersonal helping at the meso-level is generally considered to be the prototypical prosocial behavior. But the macro-level of prosocial behavior captures prosociality at the group level and includes volunteerism, intragroup cooperation, and intergroup cooperation. The intrapersonal and interpersonal factors that operate at the micro- and meso-levels serve as the basis for macro-level prosocial behavior. Egoistic motives and cost–benefit considerations remain most prevalent in group settings as well, but additional emergent processes will also influence group-level prosociality.

Volunteerism may be seen as a transitional prosocial behavior in terms of the multilevel perspective. That is, it straddles the boundary between the individualistic, meso-level of the volunteer and the macro-level of the group of recipients. Volunteerism is a "non-obligated" action that involves some planned, sustained, and ongoing prosocial behavior that often takes place within an institutional context (Clary et al. 1998; Penner 2002). Individual volunteers contribute time, energy, resources, or expertise and are driven by many of the same egoistic meso-level motivations that influence a person's decision in interpersonal situations. Members of groups receiving a volunteer's contributions typically have shared needs, but the recipients are often unknown to the volunteer and may be unknown to one another. Unlike interpersonal helping that is often

influenced by personal relations between those involved, prior relationships are less central considerations when volunteering. However, volunteers may be influenced by previous experiences with the interests and causes being addressed by sponsoring organizations. What motivates volunteers to make their contributions? A variety of motives have been identified (e.g., humanitarian concerns, interactions with friends, career-related benefits, and protection from feelings of guilt), and egoistic concerns lie at the center of each of these motives. While the primary beneficiaries of volunteerism are the recipients, volunteers who have long histories of volunteering and helping others realize many benefits themselves from their actions in terms of more rewarding social relations, better physical health, and enhanced psychological well-being.

Cooperation – prosociality of groups – is the primary form of prosocial behavior at the macrolevel. Cooperative behaviors are characterized by interdependent relations coordinated to promote mutually beneficial outcomes for the common good. There are two distinct classes of cooperation: *intragroup cooperation* and *intergroup cooperation*.

Intragroup cooperation involves independent individuals coming together to achieve a common goal. Studies of intragroup cooperation have frequently been conducted in the context of social dilemmas (e.g., Hardin 1968; Van Lange et al. 2014), situations characterized by the conflict between one's own best interest and the interest of the group (e.g., common-pool dilemmas and public goods dilemmas). The dilemma is that individuals must choose between acting to maximize their individual, selfish outcomes versus acting (i.e., cooperating) to improve the common good (i.e., Hardin 1968, "tragedy of the commons"). In common-pool dilemmas, cooperation is shown by group members refraining from overconsuming and overutilizing common resources to ensure that the pool shared by all is not depleted and the resource is not lost to the group (e.g., excessive energy use, wasteful water use during droughts, deforestation, overgrazing of pasture lands). Public goods dilemmas involve group members' individual decisions of whether to contribute to some common goal (e.g., contributions to charitable organizations and support for community projects) that would be enjoyed by the larger community – contributors and non-contributors alike – or withhold contributions to avoid personal loss.

If enough individuals are willing to make short-term sacrifices (i.e., foregoing personal gain by limiting one's resource use and accepting personal costs by making charitable contributions), the group as a whole will benefit in the long run. There are several ways to suppress egoistic tendencies and promote cooperation for the greater good of the group. Facilitating direct communication within the group is one of the most effective tools available to increase cooperation. Communication allows group members to share information about their situation, develop strategies to address their problems, and coordinate their actions to reach their collective goal. It promotes trust among group members, giving greater confidence that others will follow through with their plans and not exploit others. The use of behavioristic reinforcement contingencies can be effective in bringing about the desired cooperation; incentives can be offered to cooperating group members, and punishments can be imposed on those who defect from the group's plan. Selecting a group leader is a step frequently taken, designating a manager who can ensure adherence to rules and regulations, administer the prescribed rewards and punishments as necessary, and generally oversee and coordinate the actions of the group.

Intergroup cooperation considers the dynamics involved when two independent groups come together to merge their interests (e.g., business mergers, interracial relations, international tensions). Two related theories, the *contact hypothesis* (e.g., Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006) and the *common ingroup identity theory* (e.g., Dovidio and Gaertner 1999; Gaertner and Dovidio 2000), have been proposed to identify the processes that promote intergroup cooperation and reduce "us versus them" thinking and acting. According to these theories, direct and personal

interaction between the individual members of the two groups is the first necessary step in developing cooperative relations. By engaging in one-on-one conversations, members of each group begin to stop seeing themselves as solely members of their original groups and begin to consider themselves to be independent individuals. Moreover, their views of members of the other group with whom they have interacted also shift; this change in social perceptions is called *decategorization* and eliminates simplistic, stereotypical beliefs about the other group. With sufficient time to interact and to get to know one another, members discover that individuals from each of the original groups actually share numerous common attitudes and goals. They begin to consider each other as unique individuals rather than simply as exemplars of some out-group. As a result, they develop more positive attitudes and greater trust toward one another, and they begin to treat all members of both groups in a more equitable manner. This process is greatly facilitated if the two groups are of equal status at the start of the interactions.

If individual members of the original groups continue to interact with one another, new friendship patterns emerge, and relationships may form and coalesce around a new set of shared goals; this is *recategorization*, and new social arrangement may then evolve. In some cases, individuals may begin to identify themselves as members of a single, unified, superordinate group, and previous ingroup/outgroup biases are suppressed or eliminated as the distinctions between the original groups fade. In other cases, members of the original groups may retain their independent group identities, but the recategorization process leads to greater permeability of the group boundaries that had previously existed. Group representatives may therefore come to trust one another and negotiate new relations with less fear of exploitation. The willingness to compromise promotes intergroup cooperation, leading to win-win outcomes for all concerned. In each of these cases, the result is greater cooperation, as members come to trust one another, work together, and reach collective goals that would have otherwise been impossible to achieve.

Conclusion

Humans are prosocial animals, and prosociality is an essential quality of the human condition (Schroeder and Graziano 2017). Prosocial behavior is the result of the multilevel interplay among the multiple factors that have been identified. Helping, volunteering, and cooperating serve to facilitate our social interactions and promote the formation of bonds between benefactors and recipients. Prosocial behavior is the glue that holds the social fabric of society together. Because of the mutual aid and support offered to one another, all are benefited.

Cross-References

▶ Bystander Intervention
▶ Common Good
▶ Cooperation and Competition
▶ Effective Altruism
▶ Heroism and Humility
▶ Heroism Motivation
▶ Utility Theory and Heroism
▶ Video Games and Heroism
▶ Volunteerism and Heroism

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Prosocial Development

▶ Prosocialization of Heroism

Prosociality

▶ Human Mate Choice and Heroism

Pro-Sociality

▶ Selflessness

Prosocialization

▶ Holocaust Heroes

Prosocialization of Heroism

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Synonyms

Moral development; Prosocial development; The altruistic personality

Definition

Prosocialization refers to parenting with the conscious and conscientious intention of raising caring, morally courageous kids.

Parenting is considered the most impactful factor on child social development (Padilla-Walker 2014). *Prosocialization*, introduced by psychologist and Holocaust heroism scientist, Stephanie Fagin-Jones, Ph.D. in *Holocaust Heroes: Heroic Altruism of Non-Jewish Moral Exemplars in Nazi Europe* (2017) is a humanistic theory of parenting. Beginning with the conscious, conscientious intention of raising kind, morally courageous kids, prosocialization practices aim to engender secure attachments in early childhood as the cornerstone for the development of an integrated moral identity via moral parenting practices, which in turn, provides the relational psychological foundation from which both conventional and courageous altruistic action undertaken on behalf of a vulnerable "other" may spring (Fagin-Jones 2019). Paradoxically, such allocentric behavior may confer the deepest feelings of meaning, purpose, life satisfaction, and sustained well-being for the helper both across the life span and intergenerationally (Fagin-Jones 2018). In so doing, prosocialization may benefit humankind via the sustainable development of morally engaged other-oriented individuals and communities committed to embracing the common humanity of all people and to encouraging kindness, compassion, and morally courageous action both proactively and reactively against hate.

Prosocialization is based on the developmental psychology literature on prosocial and moral development (Eisenberg and Spinrad 2014; Hoffman 2000), the social-scientifically aligned research on moral exemplarity (Walker 2014), and in particular, empirical research on the upbringing and altruistic personalities of non-Jewish rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust (Ganz 1993; Fagin-Jones and Midlarsky 2007; Midlarsky et al. 2005).

Systematic research on the impact of parental upbringing on heroic altruism during the Holocaust brings meaningful ecological validity to the experimental developmental psychology literature, which typically involves lab studies and low-cost acts of helping among children and adolescents. Importantly, the research on Holocaust rescue strongly suggests that *both* the caring, morally courageous, *other*-oriented character of the rescuers as well as the passive bystanders' *self*-orientation were rooted in their upbringing, leading Holocaust rescue researchers Samuel and Pearl Oliner to conclude, "Rescuers participation was not determined by circumstances but their own personal qualities. . .chance sometimes provided rescuers with an opportunity to help, but *it was the values learned from their parents which prompted and sustained their involvement*." (Oliner and Oliner 1988, p. 142).

Moreover, the Oliners conclude that the rescuers in their large-scale study (1988) came from more "extensive," or other-oriented, committed, cohesive families; had more affectionate parents who valued inclusion; used victim-centered and inductive discipline techniques; and were prosocial role models who did not endorse stereotypes of Jews. In contrast, passive bystanders' families in the Oliners' sample were generally more "constrictive" and less cohesive. Their parents tended to be less affectionate, were more likely to use authoritarian power-based discipline and occasional nonbehavior-related aggression; and to model conventional norms and stereotypical attitudes toward Jews and other out-groups (Oliner and Oliner 1988).

Using Midlarksy's rigorously collected data set (1985), Ganz examined the combined effect of a set of family upbringing variables to distinguish

verified rescuers from bystanders and correctly classified almost 80% of subjects (1993). Consistent with the Oliners' findings, Ganz found the two strongest predictors were *family cohesiveness,* defined as the degree of commitment, help and support family members provide for one another, and *victim-centered discipline*, defined as the parents encouraging the child's concern for and reparation of the harm or hurt feelings of the victim.

These findings are consistent with psychologist Perry London's earlier work (1970) in which almost all rescuers were found to have very strong identifications with at least one parent who tended to be very strong moralists, not necessarily religious, but "*holding very strong opinions on moral issues and serving as a model of moral conduct.... Some kind of active moralism seemed characteristic of all the rescuers and usually was related to parental morality rather than to a specific kind of ideology*," (London 1970, pp. 247–248).

Furthermore, psychologist Frances Grossman (1984) worked with rescuers in her clinical practice and found that most had nonauthoritarian and communicative fathers; warm, affectionate mothers who established a trusting relationship; and that they were endowed by their parents with an acute sense of social responsibility, empathic concern, and the moral courage to act upon their feelings and values despite the legal or social consequences. Grossman concluded that "those who had experienced security, acceptance, and love could readily empathize with another human being in trouble" and "that it is not so much what a child is taught, but how it is treated which determines the kind of human being he or she will be, and the way he or she will relate to others," (pp. 202–216).

Hence, research on the upbringing of these moral exemplars consistently finds that moral parenting practices in childhood seem to be a key determinant of heroic helping during the Holocaust. Such differences in upbringing are likely associated with meaningful differences in the rescuers' and bystanders' personalities. In fact, both research and many rescue narratives consistently show the rescuers characterized by the highest levels of prosocial and proactive personality traits including social responsibility, empathic concern, autonomy, agency, risk-taking, and abstract care-based reasoning about moral dilemmas (Midlarsky et al. 2005). By contrast, in one study, passive bystanders, relative to both rescuers and a demographically similar comparison group of Europeans who emigrated to the US prior to the onset of WWII, were significantly less likely to subscribe to the norm that helping others who are dependent on you for help is the right thing to do and were more risk-averse. In a related study, both the passive bystanders and the comparison group were significantly differentiated from the rescuers on the basis of these prosocial personality variables by three standard deviations, and a set of altruistic personality variables discriminated the rescuers from the passive bystanders over and above relevant situational and demographic factors, correctly classifying 96% of participants (Fagin-Jones and Midlarsky 2007).

These robust empirical findings underscore the centrality of the altruistic personality and moral identity of the rescuers who were brought up in more cohesive family units led by more morally evolved parents. Hence the parental moral relational model once internalized by the child (Hoffman 2000) may have become a source of psychological strength which, in turn, engendered the traits of empathy, social responsibility, independence, risk-taking, decisiveness, competence (Fagin-Jones et al. 2017; Staub 2012), and, notably, an integrated moral identity.

Psychologist Eva Fogelman, who has studied the rescuers' motivations underlying their helping behavior, has labeled the rescuers' moral identity: *The Rescuer Self* (1994). Highly moral behavior critically depends upon integrated moral motivation wherein the very act is experienced as reflecting one's core self (Assor 2012). When asked why they risked their lives to help Jews during the Holocaust, rescuers often replied that they had no choice but to help, leading Fogelman

to conclude, "Through the rescuing relationship the values and inner most core of the rescuer were expressed. *That core was nurtured in childhood*, came to full expression during the Holocaust, and then continued in the postwar years as an integral part of the rescuer's identity, in essence a rescuer self," (1994). Evidence for the persistence of *The Rescuer Self* beyond WWII emerges from one study examining the health and well-being of Holocaust rescuers and passive bystanders in late-life, revealing that more rescuers despite being in overall poorer physical and financial health than passive bystanders, were continuing to volunteer into their 70s and 80s, and reported higher levels of meaning and life satisfaction (Midlarsky and Kahana 2007).

Thus, although it is impossible to generalize these findings to all acts of WWII rescue, in many cases, heroic altruism during the Holocaust can be understood as a natural extension of rescuers' integrated moral identities reflecting "deep-seated instincts, predispositions, and habitual patterns" (Monroe 2012, p. 256) established in early upbringing according to moral parenting practices, that when acted upon conferred the deepest feelings of meaning, life satisfaction, and sustained well-being across the life span. Moreover, the meaningful impact on the lives of the rescued survivors, many of whom went on to have families that extended for generations, cannot be overstated. The significance on humankind of the rescuers' heroic altruism on behalf of the vulnerable "Other" who was dehumanized and slated for genocide by the evil Nazi regime must be recognized, understood, and harnessed for good.

Prosocialization: Applications from Exemplary Moral Action to Normative Moral Development

Prosocialization harnesses this understanding and combines insight from the psychology literature on prosocial moral development, beginning with cultivating strong moral parental role models whose values are inclusive and focus on recognizing the common humanity of all people. Parents who prosocialize model voluntary helping behavior in general, and in particular, on behalf of the vulnerable "other" who may differ in some way from the family based on race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, ability, and other features of diversity. Prosocializing parents model, encourage, and reinforce healthy risk-taking behavior, especially courageous action involving morally motivated behavior incurring potential risk or cost to the self. Prosocializing parents are emotionally mature adults who are capable of emotional self-regulation (Greene and Van Tongeren 2012), differentiation, intimacy, vulnerability, and play (Gibson 2015).

Prosocialization begins with the establishment of basic safety and basic trust in infancy via empathic mirroring (Erikson 1950; Siegel and Bryson 2012; Siegel and Hartzel 2013). Parents who prosocialize establish the foundation of secure base attachments (Ainsworth et al. 1978; Bowlby 1988) and "good-enough" infant-caregiver attunement (Stern 1985; Winnicott 1965) which have been associated with prosocial behavior (Shaver and Mikulincer 2012). The encouragement of healthy separation and individuation of the child promotes a sense of autonomy and individual agency while maintaining a reliable emotional attachment to the parent and family unit (Mahler et al. 1975). Autonomy support practices such as taking the child's perspective, providing rationales for expected behaviors, and demonstrating positive valuing of modeled expected behaviors have been associated with prosocial behavior in children and teens who report feeling a stronger sense of volition, happiness, and vitality (Assor 2012; Roth and Assor 2000, 2012).

Parental teaching of emotional and self-regulation, thought by Greene and Van Tongeren (2012) to be the "master virtue" appears to have been vitally important in the choice to undertake and sustain heroic action often over a period of 2–5 years under conditions of chronic terror. Prosocializing parents adopt authoritative parenting

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practices with high warmth and high limits (Baumrind 1966) while prioritizing the *empowerment* of the more vulnerable child by the more powerful parent. Opting for victim-centered and inductive, reason-based approaches to discipline rather than power-assertive approaches, rescuers' parents modeled benign behavior by the powerful over the vulnerable, which may have been vicariously learned and internalized by the rescuers and later applied in their heroic helping of vulnerable Jews during the Holocaust. Such explanation-based discipline facilitates the moral development of social cognition and perspective taking, especially a sense of empathy for the other as well as a sense of self-efficacy, accountability, and social responsibility (Allison and Goethals 2011; Hoffman 2000).

Moral role modeling by the prosocializing parent prioritizes fulfilling commitments on behalf of the other, which promotes vicarious learning (Bandura et al. 1963) and is likely to increase prosocial behavior in the child and adolescent that can be positively reinforced. In addition to providing the cornerstone for courageous action, risk-taking, and shame resilience (Brown 2012), the development of secure attachments combined with positive parental moral role modeling and upstander intervention education at home may increase the likelihood that a child may engage in appropriate, effective compassionate upstanding behavior, such as taking morally courageous action to defend a victimized peer at some potential risk or social cost to the self (Lambe et al. 2017; Midgett and Doumas 2019).

Encouraging prosocial behavioral engagement in early life in the context of a cohesive family unit may protect against harmful outcomes associated with passive bystanderism (Rivers et al. 2009), increase a child's sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem across cultures (Gupta and Thapliyal 2015); improve social-emotional development; decrease identity diffusion; and increase the likelihood that prosocial behavior will continue over the life span. Learning to live "the good life" via self-transcendence may confer the deepest levels of meaning and life satisfaction in a human being (Walker and Frimer 2007) and may benefit humanity over time via the intergenerational transmission of prosocialization and human flourishing (Franco et al. 2015).

Cross-References

► Holocaust Heroes

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Prospection

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Synonyms

Forecasting; Mental simulation; Prediction

Definition

Prospection, or future-directed thinking, can involve short-term or long-term goals. Heroic behavior can vary in the degree to which it involves future-oriented thinking. In some instances, people report acting "without thinking" before performing a heroic action. In other cases, heroic behavior may be planned out.

Prospection describes a wide range of psychological phenomena and psychological literatures. Its coverage goes under a variety of broad terms, including prospection, mental time travel, episodic future thinking (EFT), or, just generally, future-directed thinking or future thinking. It includes short-term and long-term thinking, about personal and impersonal content, involving imagery- and verbally based thought and often involves a constellation of cognition, affect, and motivation. The present entry will concentrate on how people think about aspects of their own lives in the future, with an emphasis on that thinking's relationship to well-being.

People spend a lot of time thinking about the future. Both survey (Jason et al. 1989) and experimental data (Baird et al. 2011) indicate that we spend more time thinking about the future than we do about the past. This preference for future-directed thinking is not surprising, given that thoughts about the future are consistently rated as more important than events in the past (e.g., Berntsen and Bohn 2010). This preference for future-oriented thinking is most marked for the immediate future, declining over time to the point where thoughts about 10 years beyond the present are rare (D'Argembeau et al. 2011). A final point worth noting is that D'Argembeau et al. (2011) reported that the majority of thoughts are valanced, that is, they are either positive or negative, with almost twice as many positive as negative future thoughts.

Why Prospection Matters?

Being able to think about the future is an invaluable asset that enables a huge amount of human activity: "much of our actions are guided by the events we anticipate, their envisioned consequences, and our goals and plans in attaining or avoiding imagined states of affairs" (Jeunehomme and D'Argembeau 2016, p. 254). Such an ability has had great evolutionary value (Suddendorf and Corballis 2007). Being able to anticipate, prepare, and plan, both to avoid threat and to gain rewards, has conferred the ability to live longer and reproduce more successfully. Indeed, it has been argued that the point of memory is to help us think about the future: "Memory does not primarily exist to think about the past. It primarily exists to help us to know what to do in the present and to plan for the future" (Szpunar and Radvansky 2016, p. 209).

But living longer and reproducing are not the only things that people value. What we view as constituting a good life for us and others is much broader. Indeed, the term "adaptive" has come to mean something else in the psychological literature, something that is more akin to emotional well-being. For example, Marchetti, Koster, Klinger, and Alloy (2016) label spontaneous thoughts about the future that lead to emotional well-being as being adaptive, in contrast to maladaptive thoughts, which are those that lead to depression. So, not only is prospection important in survival, it plays an important role in human thriving in its broadest sense.

Types of Prospection

Projecting oneself into the future is a complex task. It involves a variety of cognitive processes,

including, among others, a sense of temporal orientation (the future is different from now, which is different from the past), a sense of self, and the ability to construct scenes or pictures along with the closely connected ability to simulate pathways leading to particular outcomes. Szpunar, Spreng, and Schacter (2014) proposed a scheme with four different modes of future thinking: simulation (constructing a detailed future representation); prediction (estimating the likelihood of a future outcome); intention (essentially, setting goals); and planning (thinking of organized steps that should be taken to achieve a goal).

Simulation

Being able to form detailed representations of potential future events or outcomes is key to future-directed thinking. Most studies in this area have examined the ability to bring to mind detailed and specific representations, and how this varies between different groups of people. This focus has been derived from the autobiographical memory literature where there is well-established research tradition on examining the ability to recall specific events (MacLeod 2017). Specificity is typically measured by presenting people with a cue word, such as "happy" and asking them to bring to mind a particular memory, that is, an experience that happened on a particular day. So, "at my parents wedding anniversary last year" would be a specific memory, whereas "when I see my parents" would not. The methodology has been adapted for examining future-directed thinking (Williams et al. 1996). A variety of emotional disorders (depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia) are related to greater difficulty bringing to mind-specific representations of future outcomes (Hallford et al. 2018). Such difficulty may well have motivational impacts through its impact on reducing reward-driven behavior. The parallel difficulties with bringing to mind-specific episodic memories have led the theory that having specific elements of episodic memories available is essential to generating specific future episodic thoughts (Szpunar et al. 2014).

Prediction

As well as forming representations of future outcomes, we have ideas about how likely those outcomes are to happen. Asking people about what they are looking forward to or not looking forward to or presenting them with a range of possibilities and asking them to rate how likely they think they are to happen to them are ways that prediction has been examined (MacLeod 2017). In addition, we can also predict how we are going to feel in future situations (Gilbert and Wilson 2011). Much of this research has been concerned with links between prediction and different facets of well-being. In summary, depression and low-positive affect have been found to be linked to lower expectancies for positive personal events whereas anxiety and high levels of negative affect are related primarily to increased expectancies for negative events (see MacLeod 2017 for a summary). The findings are consistent with the idea of a reward system functionally operating to move us to attain desired outcomes and an inhibitory system concerned with safety and avoiding aversive outcomes (Gray and McNaughton 2003). Clearly, both systems are valuable and need to work well independently and together. The data suggest that depression represents low activation of the future-focused reward system, whereas anxiety indicates increased activation of the inhibitory system that alerts the individual to future danger.

Intention (Goal Setting) and Planning

So far, the kind of prospection outlined – forming representations of future events and making predictions – is relatively passive, but we are also active agents in our lives. Setting goals and planning actions are among the most frequently described types of future thinking (Hallford and D'Argembeau 2022). Goals vary in content, whether they are chosen for more internally motivated reasons, such as being chosen for enjoyment or contributing to a value versus being chosen because they are expected or others want us to have them. Some goals are approach-oriented (aimed at bringing into existence new, desirable

states) while others are focused on avoiding undesirable outcomes (see MacLeod 2017). In relation to well-being, goal-directed behavior is linked to well-being, but more so the sense of progressing toward goals rather than the achievement of goals (Klug and Maier 2015). Approach, rather than avoidance, goals are related to well-being, as are goals that are chosen for more autonomous, internally driven reasons (MacLeod 2017). Plans are "the designs we construct to guide our attempts to reach a goal in a given environment" (Scholnick and Friedman 1993, p. 146). Being able to form specific plans of action (steps) to the achievement of a goal is related to well-being and important for the feeling that the goal is likely to be achieved (MacLeod 2017). Of course, causality in all these links between well-being and different facets of prospection is difficult to establish. For example, certain goal types might produce more well-being, be the result of well-being or simply be part of an overall constellation of biopsychosocial privilege with multiple elements which is very difficult to begin pulling apart in a way that ascribes causality to some elements.

Prospection and Heroism

Prospection is a term that describes any mental activity directed toward the future. It covers many different aspects of human experience. Three of the main dimensions – being able to form mental representations of future outcomes, having expectancies about those outcomes, and forming goals and plans to move toward goals – have been outlined briefly. It should be obvious from the description of prospection that it will be heavily implicated in heroism. Interesting questions remain about the extent to which heroism involves the different facets of heroism. Accounts of every day heroic actions often describe spontaneous actions that appear to involve little in the way of forethought. In such actions, prospection, certainly the more deliberative type of prospection, seems to play little part although they clearly rely on forming representations about a desired future outcome and acting on it. However, other larger scale aspects of heroism, such as Oscar Schindler's actions during World War 2, clearly involved extensive planning to achieve his goals. Future research might utilize distinctions in prospection to understand varieties of heroism.

Cross-References

- ► Emotional Intelligence and Heroism
- ► First Responders: Occupational Effects of Prolonged Trauma Exposure
- ► Frontline Heroes

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Protagonists

► Heroes and Villains in Narrative Media

Protecting

► Hero Functions Framework

Protective Factors

► Resilience in Children

Protector Champion

► Caregiver Heroes

Prototypical Features

► Central and Peripheral Features of Heroes

Prudence

► Wisdom and Heroism

Psychoanalytic Approach to Heroism, A

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Psychoanalysis includes a cluster of quite different, sometimes even contradictory concepts. For purposes here, psychoanalysis designates a tradition tracing from the circle of intellectual disciples surrounding Sigmund Freud in Vienna during the first decade of the twentieth century. Freud was convinced he had cracked the code of human psychological and emotional development and that, by making this code compatible with the emerging concepts of Darwinian natural selection, he was creating the truly scientific psychology, which would be his legacy for generations to come. During the recent century, the extent to which psychoanalysis can be seen as scientific has been hotly debated. That debate is not relevant here, but what is not debatable is that psychoanalysis as a way of seeing has had, for better or worse, an enormous influence on Western literature, politics, social hermeneutics, and culture in general. No cultural concept can be explored

adequately without at least a passing nod to a psychoanalytic perspective.

The psychoanalytic take on heroism has been buffeted by internal conflicts within the psychoanalytic movement. Freud himself had little to say directly about it, but his young protégé, Otto Rank (1909), wrote major treatises on the topic, outlining especially the stereotypical elements and sequence of life events in stories about heroic figures and their adventures, as popularized subsequently by Joseph Campbell (1988). Freud initially approved of Rank's work, but in the mid-1920s, Rank developed an independent theory of original anxiety based on his clinical experience, which Freud understood as a direct challenge to his own supremacy within the emerging psychoanalytic tradition. Subsequently, Rank was expelled from the orthodox Freudian psychoanalytic movement. From that point on, no one within that movement would cite or acknowledge Rank's work, and thus, a roundly consistent psychoanalytic theory of heroism was set back by decades.

Some forty years later, however, Ernest Becker (1973), a young academic who honed his scholarship by teaching anthropology in the Department of Psychiatry within the Upstate (NY) Medical School, did pick up on Rank's ideas and developed a theory of human motivation and behavior that contained within it very strong intimations for a theory of heroism. Ernest Becker was not himself a psychoanalyst, and he was a more generalist theorist of human behavior. However, he did interact intimately with the works of Freud and other leading psychoanalysts throughout the corpus of his writings. Although he maintained a critical view of psychoanalytic orthodoxy, the turn to Ernest Becker's work to outline a psychoanalytic theory of heroism (or perhaps better said, a psychoanalytic 'perspective' on heroism) is more than justified.

Psychoanalysis as a perspective, that is, as a way of perceiving and interpreting what may be happening in a given text or living situation, bypasses or even purposely ignores the question of whether or not psychoanalysis is itself a science. It is understood less as an approach producing repeatable cause–effect predictions and more as a hermeneutic tool yielding interesting and relevant readings of texts and life situations, thus adding to the pool of interpretative elements that would likely otherwise be overlooked. The psychoanalytic perspective on heroism brings to the discussion focus especially on the dynamic elements of unconscious motivations, projection, transference, and vicarious identification.

Following Otto Rank, Ernest Becker theorized that the deepest source of human anxiety stems directly from the fact that human beings (alone among species as far as we know) developed an intelligence fostering abstract thought. While this ability to think abstractly has obvious survival advantages, it also produces as a (perhaps) unintended consequence or byproduct the recognition of the inevitability of death, of mortality, as a condition of being human. Coming right up against the strength of what we might call our pan-species "survival instinct," this creates for human beings a potentially immobilizing pool of anxiety. To cope with this level of ongoing and potentially immobilizing level of anxiety, concurrent with the rising strength of abstract cognition, our species had to develop mechanisms for keeping the anxiety of mortality out of our front-and-center thought processes. This mechanism is what Rank and Becker understood as the *dynamic unconscious* in the psychoanalytic perspective.

This mechanism is defined as *unconscious* exactly because its function is to keep all sorts of negative, self-diminishing, fear-producing, unwanted thoughts and information (of which the inevitability of death and our mortal state is the deepest and most threatening of all) out of immediate consciousness. It is defined as *dynamic* exactly because it is only relatively successful in this function. It succeeds to the extent that it does mainly by disguising such threatening information, transforming it into dreams, symbols, and collective cultural archetypes. In good times, this allows us to call forth this information in smaller, less-threatening, and manageable doses that we can handle with relative equanimity. For this task, all of the dynamic *defense mechanisms* outlined in the psychoanalytic tradition are regularly employed as artifices to shore up our ability

to cope with such unwanted and potentially threatening information (in relation to understanding heroism, the most important of these defense mechanisms are those of transference, projection, and vicarious identification).

When at other times such information gushes forth in unmanageable doses (whether due to immediate sources in the environment – for example, the immediate death of a loved one, or a "close one" on the highway – or because the psychological makeup of the individual is less robust than that of others) we find ourselves momentarily immobilized and unable to carry on daily life activities until we "get it together" again (i.e., again push the immobilizing anxiety back out of immediate consciousness). If this time of immobilization extends to days, weeks, and years, even intermittently, this is essentially what we mean by mental "illness," nervous "breakdown," and other related maladies.

Clearly, in this perspective (since the problem of mortality itself is unsolvable) normal, conscious human existence is pictured as skating on ice of varying thickness over a pool of potentially immobilizing anxiety. To maintain "normal" mental health, to maintain a sense of forward movement, a sense of self-esteem, and simply the ability to function, human beings need all the help they can muster. Perhaps the most important insight Ernest Becker had to offer was that of seeing "Culture" itself as constructed largely to function as a major external prop in the process of shoring up human defenses against immobilizing breakdown – keeping the ice on which we skate nice and thick, so to speak, allowing us mostly to take no notice of what lies beneath. Thus, through participation in the myths and pageantry of our respective Culture, we are assured that our "story" begins and ends in immortal transcendence and that by playing our individual roles properly and in accordance with the standards, rules, and regulations communicated to us through our Culture, we may be assured that our lives also have such transcending worth, pleasing to that which is eternal as conceived within the particular cultural narrative. Maintaining "faith" in our cultural stories (myths) has tremendous value in assisting us, as individuals and as a collective, in keeping the threatening information associated with death and mortality out of immediate consciousness. Widespread loss of a strong sense of plausibility in the cultural stories is a harbinger of social breakdown, pervasive pessimism, social dissatisfaction, and malaise.

With this in mind, we have the needed contours of a psychoanalytic perspective on heroism. Each one of us, as individuals, is apt to feel ourselves as small, inconsequential, weak, fragile, and inadequate. Such feelings are the inevitable consequence of a mental capacity to recognize and symbolize death and mortality. We are in constant need of defenses that help us keep these thoughts and feelings at bay, and it would not be going too far to suggest that we are perpetually desperate to cling to such defenses.

One important insight of Ernest Becker in this regard is his outline of the dynamic of *expanded transference* (Liechty 1995). Many other clinicians both within and outside of the psychoanalytic tradition noticed that patients tend to create a totally unrealistic and inflated view of the wisdom, power, knowledge, and stability of personality possessed by their analyst or counselor. The psychoanalytic tradition has referred to this as the dynamic of transference and even developed as a key to therapy the techniques of "analyzing the transference" to see just what elements the analysand projects onto the analyst, thus yielding focused insight into just where the analysand's own sense of need and inadequacy resides.

Becker noticed that this same dynamic of projecting "fullness" onto external objects (people, places, things, ideologies, etc.) is a social dynamic in constant employment wherever we look – thus his notion of *expanded* transference. Furthermore, through vicarious identification, we employ these projections of wholeness, strength, power, beauty, and adequacy (read: transcending immortality) to aid ourselves in our struggle to shore up and strengthen our defenses against the threatening information related, ultimately, to the fact of death and mortality.

As a case example, think of the modern advertising industry in late capitalist economies (not uncoincidentally, a field pioneered by Edward Bernays, Freud's own double nephew). Far from

simply providing factual product information to allow consumers to make up their own minds about a purchase, the entire thrust of modern advertising is "selling the brand," that is, creating identification of a branded product with images of wholeness, strength, power, beauty, and adequacy, and thus instilling in consumers the sense that by consuming this product at least some of that "greatness" rubs off on them – if I just drive this car, wear this brand of clothing, shampoo with this brand, demonstrate my identity with this person or this group, belong to this club, this profession, on and on. The dynamics involved in this identification is all largely unconscious, and we may even be a little embarrassed when our consumer subterfuges are exposed to the light of consciousness. Yet, the complex pageant of subterfuge continues unabated.

Now, we can see in essence that, for us, the hero figure functions as an adequate transference object, a suitable receptor for our projections of wholeness, power, wisdom, beauty, strength (i.e., transcending qualities of immortality), which, by our identification with it, then shines back upon ourselves, and through the process of vicarious identification, we participate in and share those transcending qualities. This in turn shores up and strengthens our defenses against threatening information about who we really are (mortal = dying/diminishing beings).

In this context, we can understand why we regularly invest so much energy in adoring, defending, and maintaining our heroes, as well as why we so strongly resent anyone who persists in pointing out the clay feet our heroes may have. A tainted transference object is less able to bear up under the weight we demand it carry. As the evidence of clay feet accumulates, the adequacy or plausibility of a given transference object to actually carry its function erodes with it. This recognition enters our folk wisdom in the phrase "Better dead heroes than live ones," which may seem paradoxical alongside the claim that heroes function to allay mortality anxiety, but points toward the idea that at least a "dead hero" is finished with the task of being human and has entered the realm of idealized memory, thus is also finished with danger of exposing more evidence of clay feet and undermining its transference object adequacy. It is always easier to mythologize the qualities of one dead and gone than of one right in front of us – easier, we might say, to maintain that honest Abe Lincoln never told a lie than that any current living person never told a lie.

This psychoanalytic perspective also sheds light on some other interesting aspects of heroism. We seek out adequate transference objects to function as models for vicarious identification for ourselves, but we also know that others are looking at us as possible transference objects. Especially in roles as parents, teachers, medical, and other professionals, or any of the many roles that involve projecting authority and qualities others admire, we become aware of the pressure to "live up to" the roles we assume – that is, to carry ourselves in such a way that we project an image of fullness, power, knowledge, wisdom, and strength, an image that says to others, in effect, "You can depend on me to function as an adequate transference object for your vicarious identification needs."

In many ways, we can understand professional "burn out" as a result of an all-too-human person bending and breaking under the pressure of projecting on an extended basis the magnified image that comes with the professional role. Especially in times of extremity (floods, fires, pandemics, etc.), people *need* the assurance that there are those in charge who really know what they are doing. Leaders know people have this need and so do their best to live up to the role and project the image as demanded, but leaders are only human themselves and over time the cognitive dissonance between the demands of the role and what they know about themselves internally can result the kind of nervous exhaustion, or a feeling of being an imposture, that we associate with professional "burn out."

Also as parents, for another example, many have been aware of how true it is that "little eyes are watching," and idealizing and imitating and worshipping. This realization not only has a strong impact on how we act as parents, encouraging us to always be our best in front of the children, but may also produce a tear of sadness in knowing that eventually, our children will see our human feet of clay and that the idealized image, our children's

view of their parents as larger-than-life heroes, will all too soon come to an end.

A final aspect worth considering is that the psychoanalytic perspective on heroism might be considered to be inevitably deflating; that is, outlining the dynamics of why we positively need heroes, how we create heroes, and how we desperately work to maintain the plausibility of our heroes, for some may reduce the magical effect of the transference, thus interfering with the process itself (this is much at the core of controversy about what teaching history in the public schools should be about). Yet, this brings up a final point emphasized by Ernest Becker. While we are prone to associate heroism with the superhuman, Herculean savior figure, when we actually consider what is involved in the dynamics of heroism, it may not be the Superman who deserves the enduring image at all. In fact, we soon suspect that those who strive to continually project a superhuman image of themselves and actually see themselves this way are too often driven by an unhealthy internal narcissism and self-inflation designed exactly to mask a deeper sense of inferiority and inadequacy.

As Becker points out, when we really consider the living situation of heroism in light of the psychoanalytic perspective, we might easily draw the conclusion that the *real heroes* of this world are not the Herculean saviors, but rather the common person, who gets up every day, shoulders the burdens of mortality anxiety without unduly displacing its violence onto others, who does what needs to be done to raise and provide for the next generation, and through it all just strives to be a decent and honest person of integrity. Perhaps as we think of the type of person we associate with the concept of heroism, it is exactly this *Jedermann* who ought to come to mind first.

Cross-References

► Paradoxes of Heroism
► Psychopathy and Heroism
► Terror Management Theory and the Existential Psychological Function of Heroes

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Psychoanalytic Projection

► Transference, Heroism, and Villainy

Psychological and Physical Wounds of the Hero

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Synonyms

Adversity; Grit; Heroism trauma; Posttraumatic growth; Posttraumatic stress disorder; PTG; PTSD; Resilience; Sacrifice; Suffering of the hero

Definition

Wounds and traumas are intrinsic to the human condition and represent a significant part of the hero's journey, symbolizing the trials and tribulations that are necessary for growth and transformation. These emotional or physical wounds, often resulting from trauma, loss, failure, betrayal, or other forms of deep distress, can serve as catalysts for self-discovery and personal development. As the hero navigates through these adversities, they not only learn to heal and integrate these painful experiences but also to harness them as sources of strength and empathy. The process of confronting and overcoming such woundedness is what propels the hero forward,

fostering resilience, wisdom, and a greater sense of purpose. Thus, it is through these very wounds and the process of healing that individuals grow into their best, most heroic selves, often emerging with a renewed commitment to help others and make meaningful contributions to the world around them.

Woundedness as Necessary for Spiritual Growth

Many religions and spiritual traditions emphasize the role of suffering and woundedness in spiritual growth, viewing it as a crucial component of personal and spiritual development. Christianity and Buddhism, while different in many aspects, both place significant emphasis on suffering and woundedness as pathways to enlightenment and transformation. In Christianity, suffering is often viewed through the lens of Jesus Christ's passion and crucifixion. His suffering and death on the cross are central to Christian doctrine, symbolizing the ultimate sacrifice for the redemption of humanity's sins. This act exemplifies selfless love, obedience, and the transformational power of enduring suffering for a greater good. Christians believe that through Jesus' wounds and resurrection, believers are offered salvation and eternal life, teaching that personal suffering can also be a means of spiritual growth, empathy, and closer union with God.

In Buddhism, the concept of suffering (dukkha) is a fundamental part of the Four Noble Truths. Buddha taught that life inherently includes suffering, which originates from desires, ignorance, and attachments. The path to enlightenment (nirvana) involves understanding the nature of suffering and transcending it. In Buddhist practice, mindfulness and meditation are tools to comprehend the transient nature of life and the interdependence of all things, leading to a detachment from personal desires and ultimately to enlightenment. Suffering is thus a vital catalyst for self-awareness, compassion, and spiritual development. Both Christianity and Buddhism see suffering not as a punishment or an end in itself, but as an integral part of the human experience that, when approached with the right mindset, can lead to profound personal and spiritual transformation.

In Hinduism, suffering is often seen as a result of karma, the law of cause and effect. It is considered a part of the human experience in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (samsara). Through suffering, people have the opportunity to gain wisdom, practice detachment, and progress spiritually. It is also viewed as a means of addressing past negative karma, leading to eventual liberation (moksha).

Jewish teachings often interpret suffering as a test of faith or as a means of divine discipline to guide and correct. The concept of "Tikkun Olam" or repairing the world implies that responding to suffering with compassion and justice is a way to bring about spiritual and communal healing. In Islam, suffering is seen as a test from God. It is believed that God tests the faithful through various means, including suffering, to strengthen their faith and character. Enduring hardships with patience and humility is seen as a way to earn divine reward and spiritual elevation.

Sikhism teaches that suffering is a part of life and is due to human ego and attachment. It is through experiencing and accepting suffering that one can remember God and remain spiritually awake. The teachings emphasize enduring suffering with grace, which leads to spiritual growth and closeness to God. In Taoism, suffering is viewed as a natural part of life's cyclical pattern. It is through experiencing and accepting suffering that individuals can align with the Tao, or the natural way of the universe. This alignment leads to spiritual harmony and balance. All these perspectives reflect a common understanding across various traditions that suffering, while challenging, is an integral part of the human experience that can lead to greater wisdom, compassion, and spiritual maturity.

Wounds as Fodder for Psychological Growth

In the field of positive psychology, the idea that wounds and traumas can lead to growth and

transformation has been described in the phenomenon of post-traumatic growth (PTG). PTG refers to the positive psychological change experienced as a result of struggling with highly painful and challenging life circumstances. Rather than an outcome of the trauma itself, it is the individual's struggle with the new reality in the aftermath of trauma that leads to a greater appreciation of life, deeper relationships, increased personal strength, changed priorities, and a richer existential and spiritual life (Voigt et al. 2022).

Research by psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, who formalized the concept of PTG, and others in the field, has shown that while trauma and suffering can lead to significant psychological distress, they can also result in positive psychological changes (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996). This body of work highlights factors that may contribute to PTG, such as the level of disruption to one's core beliefs, the ability to engage in reflective rumination, and the availability of social support (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). Further investigations have explored the mechanisms that facilitate this kind of growth. Mindfulness, resilience, and the ability to construct a coherent narrative of the trauma are seen as central components in the process of transformation following adversity (Levine et al. 2009). Clinical approaches, such as trauma-focused therapy, often incorporate these elements to support individuals on their journey through and beyond their suffering.

This research is consistent with narrative theories that view the individual as a protagonist in their own life story, facing and overcoming adversities, similar to the hero's journey in mythological tales (Allison et al. 2019). This narrative framework helps individuals find meaning in their experiences, fostering a sense of agency and purpose that can contribute to their psychological growth (Allison 2024; Igou 2023). As such, wounds and traumas are not only acknowledged as intrinsic to the human condition but are also recognized as potential catalysts for profound personal change and development (Rohr 2011).

Recovery, Enlightenment, and Awakening

Rumi, the great Persian poet and Islamic philosopher, once noted that "The wound is the place where the light enters you" (Chittick 1983). With this observation, Rumi was conveying the profound idea that personal growth and enlightenment often arise from the experience of suffering and hardship. This metaphorical expression suggests that our most challenging and painful experiences – our "wounds" – are also openings through which wisdom, strength, and insight can enter our lives. These wounds force us to confront our vulnerabilities and can catalyze a deep transformation. As we heal from these injuries, we often gain a greater understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. Rumi's words imply that it is through the very process of grappling with our pain that we develop compassion, empathy, and a more profound sense of connection with others. Thus, our wounds become not just reminders of our past hurt but also beacons of our newfound inner light.

Carl Jung's (1953) notion of the shadow encompasses the parts of ourselves that we reject or deny, often containing repressed ideas, weaknesses, desires, instincts, and shortcomings. Psychological wounds often reside within this shadow realm, as they are aspects of our experience that we may find painful or difficult to accept. According to Jung, by bringing these shadow elements into consciousness – acknowledging and confronting them – we can begin the process of healing these wounds. This act of recognition allows us to integrate these repressed parts into our whole being, leading to greater self-awareness and wholeness. It is through this integration, Jung posited, that we can transform our weaknesses into strengths and find personal growth. The acknowledgment of the shadow is essential in healing because it stops these unconscious aspects from controlling our actions and leading us into repeated patterns of hurt, instead allowing us to grow from our pain and move towards a more authentic and heroic version of ourselves.

In contemporary positive psychology, this idea resonates with the concepts of authenticity and

self-compassion. Authenticity involves recognizing and accepting one's whole self, including the aspects that are not typically seen as positive. Self-compassion, a research area championed by Neff (2003), relates to treating oneself with kindness and understanding when confronting personal shortcomings or when suffering occurs, rather than being harshly self-critical. This approach encourages an accepting and nurturing attitude towards one's own struggles and imperfections, which can foster resilience and well-being. The intersection of Jung's concepts with positive psychology highlights the importance of acknowledging and working through one's difficulties, not only as a path to self-improvement but also as a cornerstone of psychological health and a fulfilling life.

Campbell once said, "Mythology tells us that where you stumble, there your treasure is. . . . And where it seems most challenging lies the greatest invitation to find deeper and greater powers in ourselves. But where the power to respond succeeds, there comes a new amplification of life and consciousness" (Toms 1988, 26). Campbell's statement aligns closely with the concept of post-traumatic growth by suggesting that the very act of confronting and stumbling over our difficulties can unveil hidden treasures, or inner strengths. The most significant challenges invite us to discover and harness greater powers within ourselves. When we successfully respond to these challenges, we experience an expansion of life and a heightened state of awareness. Similarly, post-traumatic growth involves finding personal development, newfound strength, and a richer appreciation for life following traumatic events, essentially emerging from hardship with a greater sense of vitality and a transformed perspective.

Twelve-step recovery programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, bear a resemblance to Campbell's model of the hero's journey. Both are transformative experiences that start with recognizing the need for change, similar to the hero's initial call to adventure. Participants in recovery confront their personal traumas and accept their limitations, which is analogous to the hero facing challenges during their journeys. The 12 steps involve deep self-reflection and the search for knowledge, often looking to a higher power or mentoring for guidance. Recovery programs also involve overcoming personal flaws and embracing a life of service guided by core principles, akin to the hero facing trials and receiving wisdom from allies. Ultimately, recovery journeys and hero quests lead to a rebirth, not a mere return to the start, but an emergence into a new, healthy life of deeper meaning and satisfaction.

Conclusion

Woundedness can be both a curse and a gift. Injuries and traumas are obviously painful and should be avoided when possible. Some people, moreover, are unable to recover from their wounds and never enjoy the benefits that are described in this entry. Yet for many, woundedness holds the key to redemption. The concept of woundedness as a pathway to spiritual and psychological growth is a significant theme in positive psychology, offering a transformative perspective on personal hardships and traumas. This perspective aligns with the framework of post-traumatic growth, a process wherein individuals experience profound positive changes following adversity. Such growth encompasses enhanced personal strength, deeper relationships, a greater appreciation for life, new possibilities, and spiritual development. Woundedness, therefore, is not seen merely as a detriment but as a potential catalyst for profound self-discovery and evolution. It prompts a reevaluation of life priorities, values, and beliefs, often leading to a more authentic and fulfilling life.

Research in positive psychology reveals that the journey through woundedness to growth is deeply personal and varies greatly among individuals (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). It involves not just the resilience to withstand adversity but the ability to derive meaning and growth from these experiences. Mindfulness, acceptance, and the reframing of narratives play crucial roles in this transformative process. Moreover, this journey often involves a supportive social environment and sometimes professional guidance. Ultimately,

the concept of woundedness as a pathway to growth underscores the dynamic and multifaceted nature of human psychology, highlighting that even the most challenging experiences can lead to significant spiritual and psychological development. Healing from our injuries can offer a deeper sense of connection with oneself and the broader human experience. Being wounded can be a crucible for transformation, fostering resilience and empathy, which enable a person to lead a more heroic life characterized by profound personal growth and the capacity to make impactful, positive changes in the world.

Cross-References

- ▶ Grit and Heroism
- ▶ Meaning and Heroism
- ▶ Overcoming Adversity
- ▶ Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) and Heroism
- ▶ Resilience and Heroism
- ▶ Sacrifice
- ▶ Suffering of the Hero

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Psychological Biases in Perceiving Heroes

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Synonyms

Cognitive bias; Hero illiteracy; Heroism attribution error; Inferential error; Motivated cognition; Romance of heroism

Definition

Psychological biases in heroism refer to the various ways that people distort reality and arrive at biased social judgments when perceiving heroism. Psychological biases fall under three categories: perceptual biases, cognitive biases, and motivational biases.

Psychologists have long known that people show systematic biases in arriving at judgments about their social world (Fiske and Taylor 2017). Some of these biases stem from normal ways that we perceive and process information about people and behavior (e.g., Hamilton and Stroessner 2021). Other biases derive from basic human motivations. As social perceivers, we are motivated to form accurate judgments about other's behavior (Sedikides and Strube 1997), but at times this accuracy motive is of secondary importance. Other motives with higher priorities can play a role in skewing our judgments, such as motives to self-enhance, identify with collectives,

seek meaning, and achieve efficiency in our information processing.

Drawing from the social cognition literature, this chapter reviews three major categories of bias in people's encounters with heroism. The three categories of bias involve perceptions, cognitions, and motivations that are implicated in human understanding of heroes. This chapter limits its review to psychological biases only. There are no doubt biases in judgments of heroism stemming from larger societal, cultural, political, economic, and historical sources. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to review every inferential bias that may have implications for heroism. As such, we focus on many of the major psychological biases and their implications for judgments about heroes and heroic action.

Perceptual Biases in Heroism Judgments

Gestalt principles of perceptual organization can contribute to biased judgments of heroism. We may see heroism where there may be none through the process of pattern recognition and the way our brains organize and interpret visual information (Goethals and Allison 2019). Gestalt psychology emphasizes that the human mind tends to perceive objects and scenes as whole, organized entities rather than a collection of individual parts. This can lead to the perception of meaningful patterns even in ambiguous or random stimuli. For example, the Gestalt principle of figure-ground relationship involves distinguishing between the main object of focus (the figure) and the background. In the context of seeing heroes, our minds may focus on certain individuals or actions (the figure) while downplaying or ignoring other aspects of the situation (the background). This selective attention can lead to a biased perception, making certain individuals appear heroic even when their actions might not objectively warrant that label.

In addition, the Gestalt principle of closure refers to our tendency to mentally complete incomplete or fragmented information to perceive meaningful wholes. In the case of perceiving heroes, our minds may fill in gaps in information or actions, constructing a narrative that portrays certain individuals as heroic even if the complete story might not support that conclusion. The principle of proximity, moreover, suggests that objects that are close together in space tend to be perceived as belonging to the same group. In the context of seeing heroes, our minds may bundle together certain actions or individuals based on their proximity, even if the connections between them are tenuous or coincidental. This grouping can create the illusion of heroism in individuals who may not have acted heroically at all.

The Gestalt principle of similarity can also lead us to perceive someone as heroic if they share similarities with individuals we already consider heroic. This bias of association could be based on physical appearance, clothing style, or other superficial characteristics. However, such similarities may not necessarily indicate actual heroic behavior. The *halo effect* is a Gestalt bias in which our overall positive impression of a person influences how we perceive their specific traits or actions (Nisbett and Wilson 1977). If we perceive someone positively in general, we may be more likely to interpret their behaviors as heroic, even if those behaviors are not particularly heroic on their own. The Gestalt principle of repeated exposure to certain individuals, such as through media or social media, can create a sense of familiarity and influence our judgments. If a person is portrayed as heroic in the media, we might come to accept that perception without critically evaluating their actual heroic qualities.

Cognitive Biases in Heroism Judgments

Information processing biases are endemic to social cognition (Fiske and Taylor 2017).

These biases play a role in people's mental constructions of heroism (Goethals and Allison 2012). People tend to construct heroic narratives about themselves and others based on schemas, scripts, stereotypes, biases, attribution theory, and other cognitive mechanisms. Fiske and Taylor (2017) describe many cognitive biases than can lead to skewed constructions of heroism. For example, the confirmation bias causes individuals

to seek out evidence supporting preexisting assumptions while disregarding contradictory data. Similarly, the fundamental attribution error refers to the human tendency to attribute behavior solely to internal dispositions instead of external circumstances. In addition, the recency effect increases the likelihood of recalling more recent instances over older ones even if less significant. The availability heuristic, moreover, magnifies importance of easily recalled instances over obscured incidents.

These cognitive processes shape how individuals assess heroism in ambiguous scenarios. If someone expects another person to display heroic behaviors because of gender, race, ethnicity, education, career choice, or another trait, then they might mistake everyday acts as extraordinary feats deserving recognition. Conversely, dismissing potential heroes due to negative characteristics or past mistakes prevents appreciating actual courage during crises. Therefore, understanding our natural tendencies toward bias may help us avoid premature conclusions about hero status and encourages open-minded appraisals without jumping to hasty judgments based upon limited information or presupposed qualities.

Four additional cognitive biases that affect heroism judgments include the Warren Harding error, the helping recall bias, the hero framing effect, and the negativity bias:

Warren Harding Error

In his 2005 book *Blink,* Malcom Gladwell described a phenomenon that he called *The Warren Harding Error*. In the early twentieth century, Ohio political operator Harry Daugherty became fascinated with a small-town newspaper editor named Warren Harding. Daugherty believed that Harding "looked like a Senator." Harding was tall and chiseled, and he had a bronze complexion. He moved with power and grace, and he had a booming voice. Daugherty and others were struck by Harding's charisma, charm, and physicality. In short, Harding activated people's implicit theories of heroic leadership, matching the template to near perfection. People mentally filled in the blanks, endowing Harding with other important leadership qualities, including intelligence and integrity. But Harding's "looks" belied his competence. Encouraged to enter politics, Harding became US President in 1921 and his presidency was disastrous. He presided over a corrupt administration and is often at the bottom of polls of historians' ratings of presidents. Harding is now known as a cautionary tale regarding psychological bias: Just because someone looks the part of a hero does not mean they are capable of heroism.

Helping Recall Effect

Psychology research has shown that people's memory and imagination can be used to increase intentions to help someone in need (Gaesser and Schacter 2014). In a recent study, Ford et al. (2018, 1) tested the hypothesis that remembering helping events following a traumatic event will influence subsequent prosocial behavior. These researchers examined people's recall of an emotionally charged public tragedy – the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings that killed three people and wounded hundreds of others. There were several poignant stories of heroism to remember – active bystanders consoling victims, applying tourniquets, and carrying the injured to safety. Ford et al.'s research participants were asked to recall helping-related details following the bombings. The results show that participants who were more likely to remember these helping events were also more likely to engage in helping behaviors in months following the tragedy. In addition, the study showed that merely asking people to imagine helping actions in the bombing's aftermath increased helping behavior.

Hero Framing Effect

The way that information about a situation is presented or "framed" may influence whether people interpret the situation as heroic or not. Beggan and Allison (2023) had participants read potential scenarios for addressing a disease epidemic. All participants were told that the US was preparing for the outbreak of an unusual disease which is expected to kill 600 people. Half the participants, in the *positive frame* condition, were informed that if Program A is adopted, 200 people will be saved and if Program B is adopted, there is a 1/3 probability that 600 people

will be saved and 2/3 probability that none of the 600 will be saved. The other half of the participants, in the *negative frame* condition, were told that if Program A is adopted, 400 people will die and if Program B is adopted, there is a 1/3 probability that nobody will die and 2/3 probability that all 600 will die. It is important to note that the life and death outcomes in both programs are identical; only the framing of the situation is different.

According to prospect theory (Tversky and Kahneman 1981), participants should prefer a sure gain over a sure loss, meaning they should prefer Program A over Program B in the positive frame condition. Beggan and Allison (2023) replicated this effect. Moreover, participants should prefer Program B over Program A in the negative frame condition, a finding also replicated by in the study. Of greater importance was the perceived heroism of the situation. Beggan and Allison told participants that George Martinez, the head of the CDC, decided to adopt either Program A or B. When participants learned that Martinez adopted Program A in the positive frame condition or Program B in the negative frame condition, they judged him to be a hero. When they learned that Martinez chose Program B in the positive frame or Program A in the negative frame, they judged him to be unheroic. Thus, the same situation, framed two different ways, produced very different hero attributions. The framing of the situation led to biased judgments of heroism.

Negativity Bias

Another robust psychological bias in social and cognitive psychology is known as the negativity bias. It describes the psychological truth that "bad is stronger than good". In other words, our judgments about people are more influenced by negative information about them than positive information (Baumeister et al. 2001). There are evolutionary benefits to bad behavior from others being psychologically more powerful than good behavior. Oversensitization to bad things made early humans more likely to anticipate and survive threats and thus increased their success in passing their genes onto the next generation. Our human oversensitivity to bad behavior can explain why there are so many disgraced heroes and celebrities. We may relish the failings and fallings of icons because of the phenomenon of Schadenfreude, defined as the pleasure associated with seeing others fail. We surely notice when heroes do wonderful things, but even more attention-grabbing are the mistakes or transgressions that heroes commit. The negativity bias thus explains why the heroic status of our heroes can be very tenuous.

Other Cognitive Biases

There are several other mental biases that creep into our judgments of heroes. The *naturalness bias* refers to people's belief that a hero's innate talent is seen as better than hard work. To demonstrate this bias, Tsay and Banaji (2011) had participants evaluate accomplished musicians and found that evaluations were higher when the musicians' success was believed to be due to natural talent compared to hard work. There is also an *actor-observer difference* in judgments of heroism. Klein (2020) found that heroes do not rate themselves as favorably as outside observers rate them. That is, observers of heroic action evaluate the heroes as much more heroic than do the heroes themselves. Another cognitive bias has been called the *heroism attribution error* (Goethals and Allison 2023). This bias refers to the tendency of people to assign the status of "hero" to celebrities and public figures who are unworthy of such status.

People also tend to show a *death positivity bias* (Allison et al. 2009), referring to the tendency to assign heroic status to people who have died compared to those who are still living. Once someone has died, their reputation not only rises but also becomes "frozen in time," showing more resistance to change compared to the reputations of a person who is still living (Eylon and Allison 2005).

Motivational Biases in Heroism Judgments

In addition to biases that result from the ways that people process information, there are other biases that stem from human motivational drives. It is difficult to separate cognitive sources of biases

from motivational sources, as both mental processes and motives can operate separately or in tandem to distort our social judgments. For example, consider the *charisma bias*, referring to people's tendency to be captivated by charismatic leaders. We are more likely to misconstrue the heroic qualities of a magnetic personality compared to a dull one (Flanigan 2013). Part of this bias stems from a previously learned mental schema about heroes that includes the idea that heroes are charismatic. But there is also likely to be a motivational component to the charisma bias. Charismatic leaders are able to give impassioned speeches that move us emotionally and stir up motivations to support the leader, the ingroup, and the noble cause.

There is no doubt that human beings are motivated to scan their social world and choose a small subset of people from that world to be their heroes. There are surely reasons behind the selection process that we're consciously aware of, and there may even be reasons that are buried in our unconscious (Becker 1973). People show strong motivational biases to create and to maintain their cherished images of heroism. So strong is the motivation to have heroes that American novelist Peter Beagle (1991, 87) once wrote, "Men have to have heroes, but no man can ever be as big as the need, and so a legend grows around a grain of truth, like a pearl." Below are several aspects of motivational biases associated with heroism.

The Romance of Heroism Bias

Goethals and Allison (2019) coined the phrase, the *romance of heroism*, referring to people's idealistic and quixotic notions of heroes and heroism. This romantic longing for heroes fuels romanticized ideas about who heroes are, what they are like, and when they should emerge. The romance of heroism leads to exaggerated perceptions of the heroic qualities in certain types of people, especially under conditions of stress and uncertainty. People show cognitive biases driven by intrinsic desires such as self-preservation, affiliation, achievement, control, power, stimulation, security, variety, honesty, individualization, or glamour. These biases guide attention and actions toward specific goals fulfilling deeply ingrained needs. This phenomenon explains why observers frequently imbue heroic attributes onto public figures possessing qualities matching their private aspirations for esteem, love, belonging, respect, admiration, validation, success, wealth, celebrity, and significance. As a result, individuals often idealize or idolize role models who personify their yearnings for significance in society.

Search for Meaning Bias

Emotions can also combine with thoughts to activate motivations about heroism. Studies by Eric Igou and his colleagues have shown how some emotional states can trigger the motivation to become heroic and the motive to elevate our evaluations of heroes. For example, Coughlan et al. (2019) found that feelings of boredom engendered a search for meaning in life, and this search for meaning predicted a greater appreciation for the heroes in one's life. A similar finding was uncovered by Igou et al. (2018) with the emotion of regret. When people feel regret about their past behavior, they become motivated to search for meaning, which in turn transfers into inspiration and a readiness to act heroically. Boredom and regret are thus two common psychological states that can heighten heroism judgments and behavior.

Ingroup and Social Identity Biases

Two related biases that are very apparent in everyday human behavior are the ingroup bias and social identity bias. These biases refer to our tendency to partition the world into "us" and "them" and then to evaluate our own group more favorably than other groups. Motivation plays a key role in biased forms of social identification and social comparison. Social identification is motivated by the need to feel a sense of belonging and connection, and social comparison is motivated by the desire to feel positively distinct from others and to hold a favorable self-image. From these motivations, people conclude that their group leader is a hero whereas other groups' leaders are less of a hero or perhaps even a villain. In a similar vein, Decter-Frain, Vanstone, and Frimer (2017, 121) offered a social constructivist approach to how groups create moral heroes.

These scholars argue that "groups may catapult relatively ordinary individuals into moral heroism." Groups do so by giving these ordinary people fancy titles and prestigious awards, for example. The social construction of moral heroes benefits a society by promoting ingroup identity, providing a rallying point around which to unite, encouraging cooperation, and providing moral models (Kinsella et al. 2015).

Bandwagon Effects

People are social animals who are motivated to generate group norms, conform to them, and then pressure others to conform. These are bandwagon effects, a special kind of social influence that is closely related to social identity theory. Bandwagon effects occur when people change their beliefs or behaviors because they perceive that most other people have adopted a certain belief or behavior. This phenomenon is similar to social identification in the theory, but with a specific focus on conformity and the desire to fit in with others. For example, in the realm of helping behavior, Nook et al. (2016) found that generosity is contagious in that people imitate others' prosocial behaviors. Nook et al.'s participants observed someone either make generous donations to a charity or stingy donations. Those who watched generosity donated more themselves compared to those who observed stingy donations. Interestingly, this bandwagon effect generalized across behaviors. Participants who observed generous donations later wrote more supportive notes to another participant in need. These findings offer support for the phenomenon of prosocial conformity.

Need-Based Heroism Bias

People need heroes, and so it should not be surprising that that people choose heroes who fit their current needs (Allison and Goethals 2014). If someone is diagnosed with a deadly disease, they may be likely to choose a survivor of that disease as a hero. If a child enjoys playing football, he or she may likely choose a famous footballer as a hero. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs suggests that we should be able to predict people's choices of heroes based on which set of needs people are struggling to satisfy. For example, those who are challenged in meeting basic survival needs should be more likely to attribute heroic status to people who have conquered such challenges. Theories of lifespan human development can also point the way to people's hero preferences. Erikson (1994) noted that each stage of development can be fraught with challenge or crisis. As such, a person struggling to make progress in one stage may assign heroic status to a person whom they know to have been previously successful in ascending that stage.

Trapped and Transcendent Bias

In 2018, psychologist Kurt Gray and his colleagues discovered that immortality is tied to morality, such that good and evil live on most strongly in the minds of people – though they may live on in different ways. Gray et al. hypothesized that heroic people may be perceived to have *transcendent immortality*, with their souls living forever unconstrained by space and time. In contrast, evil people may be perceived to have *trapped immortality*, with their souls bound to a particular location. These hypotheses were derived from research on mind perception and moral psychology (Wegner and Gray 2017). Our impressions of people are dominated by their moral character (Goodwin et al. 2014). According to almost every spiritual tradition, all departed souls are equally likely to persist after death regardless of how moral or immoral they led their lives. But dead heroes are believed to be capable of transcending spatial constraints whereas dead villains are believed to be trapped in haunted houses or graveyards.

Conclusion: Prescribing and Describing Heroism

This chapter has offered a brief and admittedly limited review of the ways that people show bias in their judgments of heroism. Perceptual, cognitive, and emotional factors all play a role in affecting one's proclivity to act heroically or distorting one's assessment of who is deserving of heroic status. Many scholars offer an objective definition of

heroism that features a checklist of the qualities that heroes should have (e.g., Franco et al. 2018; Kohen et al. 2017). These *prescriptive models* are important in educating a society about what heroic features are important for people to adopt and to identify in others. This chapter has described a more *descriptive model* of heroism – how people actually construct heroism in their own minds as a result of perceptual, motivational, and cognitive processes. In an ideal and perhaps even heroic world, these two models, the prescriptive and the descriptive, would merge to produce a shared, collective hero mindset that would promote the well-being of all humanity. To achieve this aim, early educational and training programs should be employed to reduce bias in heroism judgments and encourage a universally adopted hero framework.

Cross-References

▶ Cognitive Construction of Heroes
▶ Constructions of Heroism
▶ Hero Illiteracy
▶ Heroism Attribution Error
▶ Intuitive Heroism

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Psychological Contract of Heroism

► Hero Contract

Psychological Functions of Heroes

► Hero Functions Framework

Psychological Needs

► Hero Functions Framework

Psychological Transference

► Transference, Heroism, and Villainy

Psychological Wellness

► Mental Health and Heroism

Psychology of Transcendent Heroes

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Synonyms

Courage; Courageous altruism; Self-transcendent heroism

Definition

Transcendent heroism is voluntarily taking significant risks to the self on behalf of others initiated by self-transcendent (altruistic, collectivist, or principalist) motivations.

Heroic behavior enables humans to adapt, change, or confront challenging circumstances and threats in their environment. Throughout history, heroes and heroines have, for example, risked their lives to protect their relatives and communities and obtain resources for survival. Indeed, heroic actions have altered the course of history. Heroism is voluntarily choosing to take significant risks on behalf of others (Becker and Eagly 2004; Franco et al. 2011). Some contend that heroism is a subtype of altruism (Shepela et al. 1999), whereas others argue that heroism is an entirely different type of behavior (Franco et al. 2011). At a minimum, heroism falls within the broader category of prosocial, helping behavior and can also be conceptualized as a virtue (Allison et al. 2017). When helping someone requires courage to face serious personal risk, prosocial behavior becomes heroic (Jayawickreme and Di Stefano 2012). When heroic behavior is motivated by self-transcendence, it becomes virtuous.

People have different motivations for heroic behavior, not all of which are altruistic (Batson et al. 2010; Becker and Eagly 2004). For example, a person might choose to report abuse from a powerful person, understanding that such reporting would risk their career or personal safety, resulting in justice for many other victims (e.g., "whistleblowing;" Richardson and McGlynn 2021). Despite being just, brave, and helpful to others, that heroic action could be rooted in antisocial motivations such as vengeance towards the perpetrator or greed in desiring to displace the perpetrator to climb an occupational ladder.

In contrast, transcendent heroism occurs when people behave heroically due to self-transcendent motivations. Virtue theory posits that self-transcendent motivations lead to greater flourishing for the individual and society (Schnitker et al. 2019). Indeed, motivations for prosocial behavior vary and influence psychological outcomes (e.g., Hardy et al. 2022; Kong and Belkin 2019). Batson (2022) suggests that there are at least four motivations for prosocial behaviors that apply to heroism (1) egoism, (2) altruism, (3) collectivism, and (4) principalism. The last three motivations are self-transcendent. Reed (2003) offers the following definition of self-transcendence:

> [T]he capacity to expand self-boundaries intrapersonally (toward greater awareness of one's philosophy, values, and dreams), interpersonally (to relate to others and one's environment), temporally (to integrate one's past and future in a way that has meaning for the present), and transpersonally (to connect with dimensions beyond the typically discernible world. (p. 147)

Thus, transcendent heroism involves facing significant personal risk to help another due to self-transcendent motivations. For example, Rachel Denhollander sacrificed time, privacy, and reputation as the first to report sexual abuser Larry Nassar with USA Gymnastics, resulting in justice for over 300 other female survivors. In her book, *What is a Girl Worth?* Denhollander advocates for survivors and other marginalized people, contending that the answer should be *"Everything."*

Transcendent heroism is displayed when people are motivated by beyond-the-self reasons, choosing to risk personal welfare for the good of another. Virtue ethicists define virtues "as (a) dispositional (b) deep-seated (c) habits (d) that contribute to flourishing and (e) that produce activities with the following three features: they are (f) done well, (g) not done poorly, and (h) in accordance with the right motivation and reason" (Ratchford et al. 2023b). With this in mind, we define transcendent heroism as voluntarily taking significant risks to the self on behalf of others initiated by self-transcendent (altruistic, collectivist, or principalist) motivations.

Heroism and Courage

Self-transcendent motivations are relevant for both heroic and courageous behaviors. Heroism is an example of courage. Courage is willingly and knowingly acting despite risk (and often fear) for a worthwhile reason (Rate 2010). Heroism is distinguished from courage in that the risks associated with heroism are extraordinary. Heroic acts are more rare and costly (Kraft-Todd and Rand 2019). Thus, courageousness does not necessarily imply heroism, but heroism always requires courage (Staats et al. 2008).

Furthermore, heroism includes going above and beyond the "call of duty," in which actors are not necessarily morally obligated to engage but choose to do so despite personal repercussions (Franco et al. 2011). Whereas heroism involves embracing serious and significant risks to personal welfare, courage can be enacted in everyday life while facing various risks (e.g., *general* vs. *personal* courage; Pury and Kowalski 2007). For example, a person might enact personal courage (i.e., an action considered brave only for that particular actor and their specific circumstance) to introduce themselves to a new acquaintance despite the threat of social rejection and fear of embarrassment. In contrast, people who housed enslaved Africans fleeing the South via the Underground Railroad behaved heroically because they risked their families' lives and livelihoods.

Transcendent Motivations in Courage and Heroism

Motivations for behaving courageously, like prosociality, are often rooted in self-transcendent motivations. Results from research examining courage in pursuit of a person's goals suggest that generativity goals (i.e., striving to make the world a better place) are pursued with more courage than other types of goals (Ratchford et al. 2023a). Furthermore, spiritual transcendence goals (i.e., striving to connect with the divine) are pursued with more courage and less passivity than other types of goals. Further research suggests that engaging in heroic behaviors boosts meaning in life and can function as a buffer against threats to meaning (Allison 2022; Kinsella et al. 2019), and purpose and heroism share in common elements of transcendence and goal-orientation (Bronk and Riches 2017). Thus, beyond-the-self motivations are characteristic of transcendent heroes and heroines.

Research on motivations has revealed that heroism is motivated by identity and connection to others (e.g., Monroe et al. 1990; Oliner and Oliner 1992; Shepela et al. 1999). Furthermore, heroes tend to have expansive empathy that includes outgroup members (Kohen et al. 2019). For example, cross-sectional research has found that individuals higher in values of benevolence and universalism perceive unjust abuses as higher in norm violation (Brandstätter et al. 2016). Similarly, other findings have revealed that among many economic, psychological, and moral variables, only one variable was a robust and consistent predictor of courageous helping behavior: a *sense of shared humanity* with others (Monroe et al. 1990). Relatedly, people tended to pursue interpersonal goals involving others with more courage than intrapersonal goals (Ratchford et al. 2023a).

Furthermore, courageous resistance is an example of courage characterized by voluntary, intentional, and selfless behavior that involves significant risk to the actor *sustained over time* (e.g., hiding enslaved people in the Underground Railroad or Jews during the Holocaust). The most significant predictors of courageous resistance are a heightened sense of inclusiveness, shared humanity, responsibility for others, and empathy (Shepela et al. 1999). Moreover, two cross-sectional studies found that trait measures of heroism and empathy correlated positively and strongly (i.e., $r > 0.6$; Staats et al. 2008). Empathic concern for others can motivate people to adopt personal risks and enact courage.

Similarly, researchers found that rescuers of Jews in World War II Europe did not differ from non-rescuers on available information, perceived risk, or access to resources; rather, rescuers had a greater sense of the need to help, willingness to accept risk, access to supportive social networks, internal locus on control, sense of responsibility for others, and empathy for victims (Oliner and Oliner 1992). Moreover, in that same study, the most significant predictor for rescuing behavior was *inclusiveness* (i.e., seeing all people as similar to themselves and the tendency to befriend others). Thus, these findings suggest that transcendent heroism is motivated by a sense of shared humanity and connection with others that motivate people to act despite the presence of threat.

Furthermore, when asked to rate characteristics of bravery, lay people rate self-transcendent characteristics as central (i.e., self-sacrificial; Kinsella et al. 2015; Walker and Hennig 2004). Indeed, brave acts are often motivated by beyond-the-self reasons that involve helping others, even non-relative others (e.g., undirected organ donation, the rescue of persecuted persons; Rusch 2022). Self-transcendent motivations and characteristics wherein the actor views themselves as connected to others are associated with heroic behavior.

Future Directions

The psychological study of transcendent heroism is ripe for new empirical investigation. There is much to learn about motivators of transcendent heroism. Future research should examine the moral boundaries of heroism. For instance, when is an act of war heroism versus terrorism? Over the course of history the answer is often ambiguous – yet the line between terrorists acts and

heroic acts has profound implications for humankind. Along these lines, researchers should examine the different social and cultural contexts that promote the virtue of transcendent heroism. For example, religion is often a context for self-transcendent motivations and heroism. Religious martyrs such as William Tyndale, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Joseph Smith, Jr. profoundly reshaped history (Tuttle 2021). Unpacking the social and cultural contributors to the virtue of transcendent heroism is key for future research.

Other promising areas of research involve examining the various character strengths enacted by transcendent heroes. Past research has connected courage and heroism to other virtues such as patience (Ratchford et al. 2023a), justice (Sasse et al. 2020), and compassion (Zimbardo et al. 2017). Furthermore, other research suggests that empathy is particularly relevant because the ability to imagine another's suffering and desire to alleviate that suffering facilitates heroism (Staats et al. 2008). In addition, self-transcendent emotions such as gratitude and indebtedness may shape heroic actions. Specifically, transcendent indebtedness is linked to prosocial behavior (Nelson et al. 2022), and future research could determine if it also predicts heroic prosocial actions.

Conclusion

Self-transcendence involves the awareness of and connection to something bigger than the self. Transcendent heroism is voluntarily taking significant risks to the self on behalf of others initiated by self-transcendent (altruistic, collectivist, or principalist) motivations. Transcendent heroism differs from altruism and courage in that personal risks are more severe, rare, and costly. Empirical research demonstrates how altruistic, self-transcendent motivations often motivate people to embrace significant personal risks to help others. Future research should examine social and cultural contexts that develop and promote transcendent heroism, as well as other virtues enacted by transcendent heroes and heroines.

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Psychopathy and Heroism

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Synonyms

Amoral; Antisocial personality disorder; Criminal personality; Dissocial personality disorder; Sociopathy

Definition

Psychopathy is a personality disorder characterized by enduring traits such as persistent antisocial behavior, a lack of empathy and remorse, manipulative tendencies, and shallow emotional responses.

In lay discourse, the term “psychopathic” is often used to describe a highly immoral and dangerous person. For psychological scientists, the term has a more specific and nuanced definition,

but nonetheless denotes a personality disorder that often carries serious risks for those in the psychopathic person's orbit. Perhaps surprisingly, though, some scholars have argued that psychopathy may be related to various exemplary positive traits, such as a heightened capacity for heroism. Lykken (1995, p. 118; also see Lykken 1982) theorized that "the hero and the psychopath may be twigs on the same genetic branch," sharing a genetic predisposition to be relatively fearless; depending on how they are reinforced by their environments, this predisposition could end up manifesting in either socially praiseworthy or socially blameworthy behaviors. In some situations, this reduced susceptibility to fear may allow them to successfully act when others do not, even perhaps in heroic ways. In recent decades, other researchers have empirically investigated Lykken's hypothesis (e.g., Falkenbach et al. 2018) or have promoted this link between psychopathy and heroism in popular psychology literature (e.g., Dutton and McNab 2014).

Psychopathic personality ("psychopathy") encompasses a variety of behavioral, interpersonal, and emotional traits, such as severe deficits in emotional empathy, reduced capacity for guilt and remorse, manipulativeness, and reduced impulse control. The earliest systematic descriptions of psychopathy, by Hervey Cleckley (1941), portrayed the prototypical psychopath as a paradoxical figure: outwardly charming and seemingly normal, yet, inwardly, severely lacking in concern for others and moral conscience. Although the term "psychopath" is often used in ways that imply it is categorical (i.e., that there is a clear line separating psychopathy from normality), most research experts currently view psychopathy as dimensional, characterized by personality traits that range from high to low across the general population (e.g., Sellbom and Drislane 2021) and which can be studied in non-clinical samples of research participants. Furthermore, most researchers view psychopathy not as a single monolithic dimension, but instead as a constellation of multiple (at least two, perhaps as many as four) separable dimensions (e.g., Benning et al. 2003; Harpur et al. 1989); an individual may be substantially higher or lower on one dimension than on another. Being high on only one of these personality dimensions is not sufficient to say someone is highly psychopathic; instead, psychopathy is better characterized by elevated levels on multiple of these dimensions.

The triarchic model of psychopathy (Patrick et al. 2009), which has been widely (but far from universally) adopted by researchers, describes these traits in terms of three separable personality dimensions: boldness, meanness, and disinhibition. The boldness dimension comprises social dominance, a willingness to take risks or take on challenges, and emotional resiliency. Meanness comprises callousness and aggression without concern for the needs of others. Disinhibition comprises impulsivity control difficulties and distrustful hostility toward others (Patrick and Drislane 2015). These three dimensions are largely but not entirely equivalent to the three personality dimensions assessed in an earlier popular model, operationalized through the widely used self-report measure, the Psychopathy Personality Inventory – Revised (Lilienfeld and Widows 2005) and its predecessor (Lilienfeld and Andrews 1996). The three dimensions in this older model are Fearless Dominance (like boldness), Coldheartedness (partially like meanness), and Self-Centered Impulsivity (like disinhibition).

Of the three dimensions of psychopathy, boldness is most relevant to Lykken's hypothesis and the subsequent research on psychopathy and heroism. Related to the boldness dimension, substantial research has indicated that psychopathic individuals tend to have a reduced capacity for fear (e.g., Deming et al. 2020; Lykken 1957; Patrick et al. 1993; Thomson et al. 2019) and perhaps anxiety (e.g., Sandvik et al. 2015). Recent meta-analytic work, though, has observed that fear deficits in psychopathy might be specific to reduced detection of and response to threats; the capacity to subjectively experience fear (the experience of which might be more *enjoyable* for psychopathic individuals, Book et al. 2020, 2022; Hofmann et al. 2021) may be largely unrelated to psychopathy (Hoppenbrouwers et al. 2016). In any case, heightened self-confidence, and an enhanced ability to remain cool under pressure,

might allow individuals high in psychopathic boldness to jump into heroic action when others would shrink away in fear.

Yet, whereas the meanness and disinhibition dimensions are accepted as facets of psychopathy by nearly all researchers, there has been considerable debate as to whether the boldness dimension should be considered as a fundamental facet of psychopathy (e.g., Crowe et al. 2021; Lilienfeld et al. 2016). One of the main reasons scholars have questioned the relevance of the boldness construct is that it does not exhibit clear relationships with criminal behavior or aggression (e.g., Crowe et al. 2021). Some researchers have argued that boldness may be a facet of a primary variant of psychopathy (e.g., a variant of psychopathy characterized by relatively low levels of comorbid clinical symptoms, such as anxiety and depression) but not a facet of secondary variants of psychopathy, such as a potential secondary variant caused partly by experiencing high levels of childhood adversity (Sellbom and Drislane 2021). In other words, it may be that only one variant of psychopathy is on the same "genetic branch" as heroism.

Murphy et al. (2017) presented a full-fledged review of the literature relevant to Lykken's "two twigs on the same genetic branch" hypothesis. They extensively discussed not only the available empirical literature but also the broader theoretical issues involved in investigating psychopathy's relationships to heroism. This encyclopedia entry briefly summarizes only the available empirical literature directly investigating psychopathy in relation to heroism. This summary covers three domains: impulsively engaging in heroic action, engaging in heroic action in a deliberate and premeditated manner, and choosing to enter a "professional hero" occupation, such as being a firefighter or police officer.

Impulsive Acts of Heroism

Some heroic actions are impulsive, with individuals spending little or no time deliberating upon the risks and benefits of their actions. In actions such as running to pull a stranger from a burning car, the hero acts on quick impulse. These are the kinds of prototypically heroic actions that are tracked and recognized by the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission. Although research has yet to be done investigating psychopathic traits in relation to these kinds of extreme acts of heroism (with one possible exception, looking at war heroism by servicemen who went on to become US Presidents, Smith et al. 2013), a small body of research has been accumulated investigating psychopathy's relationships to less-intense versions of impulsive heroic acts, such as breaking up fights and pulling over to assist a stranded motorist (e.g., Bronchain et al. 2020; Patrick et al. 2006). The results from these studies have been mixed, but the boldness dimension of psychopathy (or closely related measurements) has been observed to correlate with everyday impulsive "heroic" acts across most studies. Yet, these studies have measured such acts of everyday heroism via self-report (which could be prone to social desirability biases) and, moreover, it is not clear whether these smaller acts have any validity as proxies for more extreme heroism tendencies.

Lykken's original hypothesis on the relationship between psychopathy and heroism most pertains to actions where the hero faces serious risks, situations where fear and anxiety are most likely to prevent a person from acting heroically. It remains very possible that psychopathic traits, especially boldness, are associated with engaging in these kinds of heroic acts; in the absence of research investigating the psychopathy correlates of engaging in extreme acts of impulsive heroism, though, we are unable to make any definitive conclusions.

Deliberate Acts of Heroism

Many heroic actions are the result of substantial deliberation about the risks and benefits, sustained commitment to a heroic course of action over time, or both. Whether sheltering Jews in one's home during the Holocaust in Germany, engaging in sit-ins at lunch counters during the American Civil Rights Movement, coming forward as a whistleblower against one's fellow police officers,

or engaging in any number of other acts of moral courage, heroism is often deliberate rather than impulsive. Although research is very limited (but for a particularly valuable study on psychopathic traits in anonymous kidney, see Marsh et al. 2014), some psychopathic traits, especially traits of not caring about the needs of others and lacking moral conscience, are likely to be negatively related to deliberative forms of heroism. Given evidence that moral courage may be related to self-esteem and self-assurance (e.g., Bronstein et al. 2007), though, there is some theoretical grounding for hypothesizing that boldness traits could be positively associated with at least some forms of deliberate heroism. Murphy et al. (2017) offered some suggestions for how to approach such research, but such research has not yet been conducted.

Entering "Professional Hero" Occupations

Some people choose to enter professions where they will be called upon to make substantial sacrifices or take serious risks in the pursuit of noble ideals, such as serving the welfare of others. Though the individual actions they might take in such professions could be "in the heat of the moment" or not, the choice to enter the profession is inherently deliberate. Thanks to excellent empirical work in the last decade, we have accrued a substantial body of data about how psychopathic traits are associated with being in *some* of these kinds of professions.

To date, such research has focused on professions which entail physical risks, such as being a firefighter or police officer. Falkenbach et al. (2018) observed that police officer recruits had higher levels of boldness and coldheartedness, and lower levels of disinhibition, than did college students, offenders, and general community research participants. McKinley (2021) observed that both police officers and undergraduates interested in law enforcement careers had higher levels of boldness and meanness, and lower levels of disinhibition, than did undergraduates not interested in law enforcement careers. Patton et al. (2018), however, found that a heterogeneous sample of first-responders (firefighters, EMTs, police officers, and military members) had higher levels of not only boldness, but also disinhibition, than did non-first responders; it may be that disinhibition is lower in some heroic professions but higher in others.

Across this existing research, it seems that boldness is a robust predictor of entering into police officer and first responder professions, but associations with meanness and disinhibition are less consistent. There is substantial room to extend research in this domain, though. For example, further research could help elucidate the extent to which individuals with higher psychopathic traits are drawn to such professions for more morally praise-worthy reasons, such as wanting to serve ideals of justice and caring for others, or for less morally praise-worthy reasons, such as wanting to have authority or social status over others.

In conclusion, a great deal, more research is needed to understand how psychopathic traits might be related to different manifestations of heroism. For instance, it would be valuable to examine psychopathic traits in samples of people who have shown extreme acts of impulsive heroism, such as participants recruited from the database of heroes collected by the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission, in comparison with non-heroic samples. Additionally, given the dearth of research exploring psychopathy in relation to deliberative heroism, such as choosing to be a whistleblower, even small initial investigations would be invaluable. Furthermore, building on the research looking at psychopathy in samples of police officers and first responders, a next step is to investigate other heroic professions, such as humanitarian aid workers in conflict zones. In sum, Lykken's intriguing hypothesis that heroes and psychopaths are "twigs on the same genetic branch" merits substantial further investigation.

Cross-References

▶ Badass Heroes
▶ Deviance and Heroism

▶ Good and Evil
▶ Mental Health and Heroism
▶ Positive Deviance
▶ Power and Abuse of Power
▶ Villainy and its Relationship to Heroism

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PTG

▶ Psychological and Physical Wounds of the Hero

PTSD

▶ Psychological and Physical Wounds of the Hero

Public Accountability

▶ Whistleblowers As Portrayed by Media

Public Charities

▶ Nonprofits and Nongovernmental Organizations Heroism

Public Figure

▶ Fame and Celebrity

Public Good

▶ Common Good

Public Health Workers

▶ Heroism and Healthcare Workers in Epidemic Films

Public Service Heroism

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Synonyms

Bureaucratic heroism; Moral heroism; Whistleblowers

Definitions

The term "hero" can be defined as people who overcome serious risks, suffering, and deprivation, or even face danger, including death, to serve a principle or others, including powerless people (Kohen 2013).

In the public service, whistle-blowers, people who advocate for the powerless and the poor or who fight for social justice, can be called heroes. It should be noted that heroic behavior is not necessarily involving physical risks (Martens 2005). In healthcare, one example is the heroic action of Dr. Li Wenliang, one of the eight imprisoned whistle-blowers who first warned against the early cases of COVID-19 in Wuhan in 2019. He displayed moral courage in his fight for transparency. Li's death from COVID-19 was considered an act of heroism, moral courage, and high sense of civic duty (Green 2020).

The concept of "hero" is important in public administration: public service heroism offers

public servants a heuristic to make sense of and understand the nature of their work. It can also be considered as an alternative to "careerism", the pursuit of individual benefits, and opportunistic behaviors among public servants (Campbell 1968).

In essence, public service heroism points to ▶ prosocial behavior (Becker and Eagly 2004) and can as such inspire other public servants. Heroism can be framed against three intertwined social, psychological, and physical roles. Acting as role models, heroes enhance and uplift others, they transmit a sense of ethics and moral values, and protect the physical and psychological well-being of others (Kinsella et al. 2015). Thus, heroism is central to human experience and it can be argued it has its place in public organizations (Allison et al. 2016a).

However, heroes in the public sector may face risks, such as social stigma, lowered social status, loss of credibility, financial instability, social ostracization, and arrests (Franco et al. 2011), if because of their actions, they disrupt the balance of power. This is well encompassed in the concept of social heroism (Franco et al. 2011), which is similar to the concept of "courageous resistance" introduced by Shepela et al. (1999).

History of Public Service Heroism

Since 1991, the academic interest in public service heroism has been challenged by the extensive rise of new public management. In many countries, increasing negative perceptions regarding the public sector resulted from failing private market-driven reforms and policies, which stimulated individual careerism and contributed to a devaluation of the public service (Bellavita 1991; Rainey and Steinbauer 1999; Terry 1997).

In public management, public service heroism is rooted in the early writings of Campbell (1968), who introduced the notion of "bureaucratic heroism", a form of moral heroism: in the service of democratic and civic values, bureaucrats can undermine the formal organizational goals for the sake of achieving the greater public interest. Similarly, O'Leary 2006 refers to the notion of "guerrilla government", defined as the actions of public servants who act based on principles and for the common good, even if it goes against the interests of their superiors and if it means facing potential negative consequences (O'Leary 2006). They refuse to obey despite intense pressures (bureaucracy heroes), report on illegal or unethical activities without any expectation of rewards (▶ whistle-blowers), or engage in selfless helping behaviors in situations that discourage any form of altruism (Franco et al. 2011).

Typology of Heroes

Many taxonomies of heroism exist. Some scholars focus on the individual transformation of heroes and consider the nature of personal change processes (emotional, moral, mental, physical, and spiritual) (Allison and Goethals 2016). Heroism is sometimes referred to by personality traits (conviction, courage, self-sacrifice, protecting, honesty, selflessness, determination, strong moral responsibility, bravery, moral integrity, saving others, inspiring, and helping others) (Kinsella et al. 2015). Others adopt a situational view of heroism where the contextual conditions surrounding individuals are key in the emergence of heroic actions. For instance, Zimbardo (2011) and Franco et al. (2011) distinguished between martial (military) heroism, civil and social heroism. Martial heroism is related to on-duty call heroes who feel bounded by a strict code of conduct, such as soldiers and also police officers, nurses, doctors, and fire fighters (Franco et al. 2011). Heroism is also classified according to the extent of social influence heroes have on their followers (e.g., weak or strong, short- or long-term, exposed or hidden) (Allison and Goethals 2013).

The heterogeneity of the existing taxonomies of heroism stems from the historical evolution of heroism studies, from individual-centered heroism focusing on personality traits (Bellavita 1991) to recent developments such as the situational perspective on heroism (Franco et al. 2011), where heroic actions can emerge from the interaction between individuals, their peers, and the surrounding organizational and institutional context.

Individual Versus Pluralistic Heroism

Early writings of Campbell refer to public service heroism as an individual "hero journey". It is an extreme form of self-altruistic behavior that underlies successful performance in public organizations (Campbell 1968). The action of individual heroes contributes to trigger social change in public organizations by helping people and by ensuring that public resources are used effectively (Bellavita 1991). Public service heroism involves self-sacrifice (a central motive in PSM), and disinterested, morally heroic behavior, forgoing personal interest to serve the underprivileged. Scholars showed a close relationship between self-sacrifice and public service heroism (Vandenabeele and Van Walle 2008; Vandenabeele et al. 2004) particularly about whistle-blowing in public organizations (e.g., reporting fraud, mismanagement).

According to Campbell, during the "hero journey", the public servant undergoes a psychological and spiritual transformation. First, there is a call to adventure (duty, opportunity, drive). It implies some form of risk taking, suffering, including the risk of death. Second, "the ordeal" presents a specific threshold, at which point the hero develops a vision and engages in the ordeal process including planning, implementing, and organizing, making allies, and dealing with enemies. Finally, there is the return in the form of rewards, hero transformation, and changing the world (Campbell 1968). The individual conceptualization of public service heroism is challenged by the democratic nature of public organizations. In addition, many conditions may dissuade public servants to engage in heroic actions (no credentials, prohibitive rules, bureaucracy, political barriers, power dynamics, and high risk of failure) (Terry 1991; Bellavita 1991). The individualistic perspective places unrealistic expectations on public servants when confronted with wicked issues beyond their scope of control. It precludes the role of perceived image by others (Bellavita 1991). It may also be tainted by gender bias as it reflects an image of a powerful masculine public service hero (Stivers 2018).

In the public sector, a social perspective of heroism offers wider opportunities for the study of heroism and it opens avenues for both research and managerial practices in the public sector. Hubbell (1991) introduced the notion of pluralized heroism, where any public servant might engage in a hero journey when faced with heroic opportunities. This is what Franco et al. (2018) refer to as small "h" heroism. Franco et al. (2011) introduced a situational perspective on heroism, where heroism can be displayed on a day-to-day basis by all actors with the right mindset and within the right context. Heroes can be nurtured to help others in need, to care for others compassionately, and to develop the self-confidence to undertake heroic action. In summary, in line with MacDonald et al. (2018), and McNamee and Wesolik (2014), we consider heroism as a learned capacity resulting from the dynamic interaction between specific situations (i.e. call for heroic action) and specific individual attributes (i.e. moral courage, personality).

Motivational Drivers of Public Service Heroism

In the heroism concept, heroes are motivated to serve higher goals that go beyond their own interest and even the organizational roles. Public service heroism and in particular whistle-blowing behavior have been associated with the notion of public service motivation (PSM) (Pandey and Stazyk 2008). PSM is an intrinsic form of motivation that drives prosocial and self-sacrificial behaviors in the public sector (Vita 1991). PSM is grounded specifically in the public service (Perry and Wise 1990) and serves the interest of a larger political entities beyond the individual and motivate them to display ► prosocial behavior (Vandenabeele 2007).

PSM is considered as an antecedent of heroic behaviors (whistle-blowing and helping behaviors (Brewer and Selden 1998, Caillier 2014). Scholars such as Brewer and Selden (2000) and Brewer and Selden (1998) found consistent associations between PSM and heroic whistleblowing. A recent systematic review showed that public service heroism has a unique motivational structure

grounded in the public service motivation theory (Cho and Song 2015; Brewer and Selden 1998; Caillier 2013; Kang 2023) and to public service ethics (Vandenabeele et al. 2004), similar concepts such as guerilla government (Newswander 2015; Newswander 2012; O'Leary 2006) and the moral agency theory (O'Kelly and Dubnick 2006).

Employees with a higher level of PSM also exhibit higher levels of organizational citizenship behaviors (M.Podsakoff et al. 1990, Ritz et al. 2014) and a reduced turnover intention (Park and Rainey 2008).

Other scholars adopt a situational approach when relating public service motivation to heroic behavior. This depends on an intertwined relationship between individual beliefs, values, PSM, and the organizational structure (e.g. accountability mechanisms) (Johnson and Kraft 1990), social norms and culture (Jos 1991), and the institutional context (Hill and Lynn Jr 2015);

Methodological Limitations and Research Avenues

Despite the growing interest of the study of heroism in psychology (Franco et al. 2018; Allison et al. 2016a), there is still little theoretical development and little evidence about the development process of heroes, the process of internalization of heroic qualities, and its effectiveness in bringing about social change (MacDonald et al. 2018) (Franco et al. 2018). Public service heroism is often criticized for its conceptual heterogeneity, the multiple perspectives on heroism (objective versus subjective lay perception), forms, and the extent of associated physical and social risk.

Research might expand on the conceptual distinction between heroism and the Ubuntu philosophy of public leadership (Asamoah and Yeboah-Assiamah 2019), authentic leadership (Walumbwa et al. 2007), servant leadership (Greenleaf 2002), spiritual leadership (Allison et al. 2016b), and other forms of situational leadership, such as complexity leadership (Belrhiti et al. 2018) and systemic leadership (Gilson et al. 2023).

There is also a need to explore public service heroism using lenses of leadership, role modeling, deviant-based perspectives (risk taking, impulsivity, and psychopathy), prosocial perspective (altruism and self-sacrifice, organizational citizenship behaviors), and time (Franco et al. 2011).

More research is needed to explore the relationship between public service heroism and public service motivation. Evidence has shown that public employees often score better in social altruism behaviors (Belrhiti et al. 2019; Wright 2008; Caillier 2014). The context of public organization and hospital setting may provide more suitable environment for the fulfilment of altruistic behaviors and prosocial motives.

More experimental studies and theory-driven evaluations are needed to understand the actual motivational cognitive and social predictors of heroic behaviors.

Most studies on heroism are conducted in occidental settings, requiring more studies in low- and middle-income countries to contextualize the public service heroism in the social, cultural, and religious context (i.e. Ubuntu spiritual leadership in Africa).

Finally, researchers might also explore how the bureaucratic context of public organization (i.e., obedience, routinisation, and anonymous actions) shapes the features of public service heroism due to the limited opportunities for public servants to display moral heroism and to their limited personal responsibility for the service.

Cross-References

▶ Prosocial Behavior
▶ Social Values and Heroism
▶ Whistleblowers As Portrayed by Media

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Publicity

► Hype About Heroes and Villains

Puer Aeternus Phenomenon: An Obstacle to Hero Development

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Synonyms

Adultescence; Arrested development; Eternal child; Impediments to heroism; Narcissism; Perpetual adolescence; Peter Pan syndrome; The Neverland effect

Definition

The *Puer Aeternus* is a term derived from Latin meaning "eternal child." In psychology, the Puer Aeternus complex describes an adult, often a man, who remains in an extended state of adolescence, exhibiting traits commonly associated with youth (Allison et al. 2020; Banschick 2021). The phenomenon represents a significant barrier to personal growth and heroism due to its characteristic evasion of the hero's journey that transforms people into their best, most heroic selves.

Those afflicted with Puer Aeternus tendencies remain stuck in childish ways and avoid navigating life's challenges and growing from them. Also known as the *Peter Pan Syndrome*, the Puer

Aeternus condition involves remaining ensconced in the comfort zones of their perpetual youth, shying away from the necessary trials and tribulations that forge strength of character and the wisdom required for heroic acts. The reluctance of the Puer Aeternus to commit to life's serious roles can stifle the development of virtues such as courage, perseverance, and self-sacrifice, which are essential in making heroically transformative contributions to society. Consequently, the eternal child's self-absorption and avoidance of maturity can limit their potential to achieve and embody the profound change often characteristic of a true hero's journey.

Overview of the Puer Aeternus

Characteristically, individuals embodying the Puer Aeternus may exhibit a reluctance to take on responsibilities, a tendency for escapism, and a narrow or naive worldview. They often remain childish, with propensities toward narcissism, egocentricity, and self-absorption. The Puer Aeternus archetype, first explored by Carl Jung (1969), suggests a struggle with the transition from the innocence of childhood to the expectations of maturity, leading to challenges in achieving psychological growth and self-realization. A person afflicted with Puer Aeternus issues can resist personal growth and heroism in myriad ways.

1. **Avoidance of Responsibility**: The eternal child often shuns the responsibilities and commitments necessary to foster growth and contribute meaningfully to society.
2. **Fear of Commitment**: Their reluctance to make lasting choices can prevent them from forming deep relationships and bonds that are often the foundation of heroic acts.
3. **Lack of Direction**: Without the willingness to embrace maturity, individuals may lack the focus and direction needed to pursue a cause greater than themselves.
4. **Resistance to Learning from Experience**: Heroism often involves learning from failure and adversity, but the Puer Aeternus may avoid situations where such growth could occur.
5. **Difficulty Facing Challenges**: Heroic actions typically require facing challenges head-on, something that the eternal youth might circumvent in favor of comfort and familiarity.
6. **Self-Centeredness**: The Puer Aeternus may display self-centeredness or narcissistic traits, focusing on their own needs and displaying a lack of consideration for others. They may avoid adult responsibilities and seek constant validation from others, characteristics that can be associated with narcissistic behavior.

The condition of arrested development in the field of sociology has been described as *adultescence* or *infantilization* (Kočerová 2017). It refers to the phenomenon of adults engaging in behaviors and lifestyle choices typically associated with adolescence. This can include delaying traditional adult responsibilities such as independent living, long-term career commitments, romantic relationships, and parenthood in favor of maintaining a youthful, carefree lifestyle often characterized by living with one's parents, impulsivity, lack of responsibility, poor emotional regulation, and difficulty with long-term goals. Adultescents experience an extended period of adolescence into their adult years, eschewing traditional markers of adulthood.

Hero Development Challenges of the Puer Aeternus

Beginning with Joseph Campbell (1949), scholars have identified the necessary stages for becoming a hero and for leading a heroic life (Allison et al. 2019; Franco et al. 2011; Kohen et al. 2018). Below are the essential ingredients for heroism and how the Puer Aeternus avoids them.

Abandoning the Comfortable and Familiar

The Puer Aeternus archetype embodies the eternal youth who, rooted in their comfort zones, resists the call to adventure and the growth it promises. This avoidance stems from a deep-seated fear of the unknown and the risks associated with change. Consequently, they remain ensconced in safe, familiar routines, often romanticizing their inertia

as a choice for freedom and spontaneity. However, this preference for the known confines them to a repetitive loop of experiences, precluding the development that comes from facing life's inherent challenges. Their adherence to comfort denies them the lessons learned through struggle, leaving them perpetually unprepared for the demands of adult life and the fulfillment it can bring.

Preparation and Training

Kohen et al. (2018) identified several ways that heroes undergo preparation and training that allow them to perform heroic acts. The Puer Aeternus archetype often avoids making commitments to education and training essential for serving and saving others due to a deep-seated resistance to the binding obligations these paths entail. The intensive dedication, discipline, and sacrifice required for such vocations run counter to the Puer's desire for perpetual freedom and avoidance of the structured, often rigorous demands of professional development. Their aversion to long-term commitment also stems from a fear of being confined to a defined identity or role, which they perceive as a loss of potential for other, unexplored paths. As a result, the Puer Aeternus typically steers clear of the transformative processes that education and training provide, processes that not only benefit the individual but also contribute to the greater good. This avoidance restricts their ability to engage in deeply altruistic acts, like serving or saving lives, which require a level of competence and reliability that only comes with committed effort and learning.

Growth Mindset

Scholars have identified in heroes a drive to maximize their potential and become their best selves (Allison and Goethals 2017). The Puer Aeternus typically lacks the drive to maximize their potential and become their best selves, often due to a fear of failure and a deep-seated resistance to the finality of choice. This eternal youth is captivated by the allure of endless possibilities and dreads the idea of being tethered to a singular path, which they equate with the cessation of potential. Their idealization of boundless freedom and avoidance of definitive commitment prevent them from delving deeply into any one endeavor that would require the sustained effort and focus necessary for mastery. The Puer Aeternus remains in a state of perpetual exploration, which, while seemingly liberating, paradoxically hinders true self-actualization and the fulfillment that comes from realizing one's full capabilities.

Commitment and Patience

Campbell emphasized the significance of patience in the hero's journey, noting that the sequence of stages is deliberate and should not be hastened or overlooked. The process of waiting is integral to the development of the hero. Each phase of the journey corresponds to a specific psychological shift necessary for the hero's internal metamorphosis. Hastily moving through these phases can result in an incomplete absorption of the wisdom and lessons they hold. The journey's tempo is crucial as it ensures the hero can thoroughly assimilate and gain from each phase's experiences. Campbell warned against bypassing steps, as this could lead to a hero who is unfinished or unsatisfied.

Resilience

The Puer Aeternus tends to avoid experiences that build resilience, typically shying away from challenging or uncomfortable situations that require enduring stress or overcoming adversity. This avoidance is rooted in a preference for maintaining the carefree and unburdened lifestyle of youth, steering clear of commitments or confrontations that might test their emotional or psychological mettle. By eschewing the very experiences that foster grit and perseverance, such as facing failure, navigating complex relationships, or shouldering responsibilities, the Puer Aeternus remains insulated from the growth that these trials can engender. Consequently, they often lack the robustness that comes from pushing through difficulties, which leaves them ill-equipped to handle the inevitable challenges of life, thereby hindering their development into resilient, well-rounded individuals.

Sociocentricity

Several scholars (Allison and Goethals 2017; Zimbardo 2007) have noted that the process of becoming a hero is characterized by the movement from the pre-transformed state of egocentricity to the post-transformed state of *sociocentricity*. The Puer Aeternus archetype is often characterized by self-serving behavior, prioritizing personal pleasure and avoidance of discomfort over engaging in activities that promote the common good. This inclination stems from their desire for immediate gratification and an aversion to the sacrifices required for collective welfare. The Puer's reluctance to relinquish personal freedom and commit to the responsibilities that underpin societal contribution results in a limited investment in communal efforts. By focusing on their own interests and shying away from the disciplined, often thankless work that benefits others, they miss out on the deeper satisfaction and growth that come from service and contribution, thus maintaining a cycle of individualism that overlooks the broader needs of the community. The *puer aeternus* is highly selfish, narcissistic, and egocentric. Sadly, without considerable psychotherapy, the *puer* appears incapable of adopting the more socially conscious mindset of a mature adult. To use Lincoln's phrasing, the Puer Aeternus cannot activate "the better angels of our nature," but, rather, they lower, less evolved elements of our nature. They operate in Kohlberg's (1969) pre-conventional or conventional levels of morality.

Elderhood and Mentorhood

The Puer Aeternus stands in direct contrast to another Jungian archetype that pervades all of hero mythology – the archetype of the wise elder. According to Baltes and Staudinger (2000), elders serve an important mentoring function by disseminating knowledge from one generation to the next. Wise elders as mentors share the following characteristics: they are kind and wise; they are usually older than their mentees; they are often parent figures; they are often seen as outsiders; they often hail from another time period or generation; and they are often presented as a wizard or a hermit. Elders possess rich factual and procedural knowledge, offer insights into lifespan development across varied contexts, share wisdom about values and life priorities, and teach us how to recognize and manage uncertainty. They find a way to balance wisdom with humility. Moreover, elders share their knowledge of life's obligations and life goals, offering an understanding of the complex nature of human life, including its finitude, cultural conditioning, and incompleteness.

The Puer Aeternus often shuns the guidance of positive mentors, resisting the insight and growth that such relationships can foster, as they may necessitate acknowledging limitations and embracing change. Their continuous pursuit of independence and avoidance of the perceived constraints of maturity also deter them from becoming mentors themselves; they often fear that taking on a mentorship role would entail an acceptance of adulthood and its associated responsibilities. Consequently, they deprive themselves of the rich, reciprocal process of learning and teaching that mentorship embodies, a process that not only contributes to personal wisdom but also to the nurturing of the next generation.

Conclusion

In summary, the Puer Aeternus's persistent evasion of the trials and responsibilities necessary for maturation fundamentally hinders their capacity to lead a heroic life. Their avoidance of long-term commitments, resistance to the wisdom of mentors, and reluctance to endure the transformative ordeals of life preclude the development of virtues such as courage, self-sacrifice, and perseverance. Such attributes are essential in the making of a hero. Therefore, the Puer Aeternus, stuck in perpetual adolescence, remains on the periphery of heroism, unready for the call to action that defines true heroism, which often demands a selfless and risky leap into a potentially painful unknown.

Cross-References

- ▶ Adolescents and Heroism
- ▶ Childhood Maltreatment and Heroism
- ▶ Children Heroes
- ▶ Growth Mindset
- ▶ Moral Development and Heroism
- ▶ Moral Maturity and Heroism

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Pulp Heroes

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Synonyms

Amazing Stories; Comics; Science fiction; The Shadow; Turok; Westerns

Definition

The pulps derive their name from the literally cheap, pulpy paper on which many early pulp novels and magazines were printed. Pulp heroes can be considered those bombastic and larger-than-life heroic figures that not only appeared in early-twentieth-century pulp magazines, but those heroes that draw inspiration from the pulps. The pulp hero is, by and large, defined by what they stand for, and what they stand against. Comics provide a particularly strong example of embracing pulp mentalities outside of pulp magazines and novels proper, as well as pulps existing after the main pulp era.

To understand the figure of the pulp hero is to understand the material and historical means of their production. "The pulps" derive their name from the literally cheap, pulpy paper that many early pulp novels and magazines were printed on. Typically printed in small, portable books and magazines, pulp stories were designed to be produced as inexpensively as possible for maximum profit and for ease of portability. Covers to pulp stories promised sensational tales marketed by lurid artwork designed to bring customers in with the best bang for their dime, often promising thrills with adventure, excitement, and more than a little eroticism mixed in. Science fiction magazines featured gargantuan aliens and fantastic spaceships, dime romance novels often showed a bare-chested couple in the throes of amorous passion, war mags showed soldiers in the midst of dangerous battles with explosions, planes, tanks,

and gunfire around. The stories were formulaic in content and narrative, such that authors could be working on several stories at once or churn out several short stories in quick succession. Avid readers of all stripes consumed these tales to see how the author either executed a well-worn formula or put a unique spin on the tale. According to the curators of *The Pulp Magazines Project* (2022), the cheap, formulaic, and bombastic formula of the pulp proved so successful that “by 1915, 8 best-selling titles had the combined monthly circulation of 2.7+ million copies – an estimated readership of 15% of the U.S. population.”

The pulps can be traced back to, in some ways, early Western dime novels in 1820s and 1830s, like with James Fenimore Cooper’s Hawkeye, aka, Nathaniel “Natty” Bumppo – a white frontiersman raised by Indigenous folk from the Delaware tribe, then further educated by members of the Protestant Moravian church (Agnew 2018). These early Westerns provided escapist fantasies of the wild and untamed west, of adventuring men going forth and settling the high plains. In another way, the pulps are to be found in the first pulp magazine proper, Frank Munsey’s *Argosy* magazine published in 1896: no cover art, just 196 pages of mass-printed pulp paper and American fiction by cheaply paid authors. *Argosy* represented a turn toward mass production of popular fiction, effectively paving the way for future pulp magazines to be printed as inexpensively as possible to maximize profits. Pulp stories also have roots in nineteenth-century British “penny dreadfuls,” serial stories published in weekly installments that could be purchased for a penny each and featuring the likes of Varney the Vampyre, Spring-Heeled Jack, and Sweeney Todd alongside terrible tales of crime, war, and gothic romances.

The pulp hero is, by and large, defined by what they stand for, and what they stand against (Chambliss and Svitavsky 2008). These heroes have strong moral codes of conduct that are given at the beginning of a tale or emerge in direct conflict with villainy, antagonists, or impending danger. Most often, pulp heroes right wrongs, punish evildoers, save women and children, etc. How that evil manifests, or what wrongs the pulp hero addresses, is largely dependent on the genre the pulp hero appears in. Pulp heroes, of course, appear in all manner of genres: Western, war, crime, romance, science-fiction, mystery, horror, fantasy, sports, nautical stories, and more. Western pulp heroes like the Lone Ranger or even Zorro do battle against corrupt men and protect innocent civilians out in the western plains of the United States. War-focused pulp tales follow US military men in the trenches or in aerial dogfights as they push back the forces of various national enemies depending on the war at the center of the tale.

However, as the literal embodiment of cheap and sensational entertainment, the pulps (and by proxy, pulp heroes) were commonly seen as a low form of storytelling, particularly in comparison to higher forms of art and culture, due in no small part to their cheap means of mass production and to their content. This can be seen in the receptions of pulp detective heroes versus more canonical, refined detective characters: the lower class dealings of cynical hardboiled detectives like Sam Spade or Dick Tracy versus the highbrow and thoughtful meditations from Sherlock Holmes. Or, another instance might be Tarzan and Conan the Barbarian pitted against the high-fantasy tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. This high-low culture difference further manifests in the distinction between canonical novels like *Moby-Dick* and *War and Peace* against the formulaic, cheap fare of popular fiction.

At the same time, several significant authors and artists finetuned their craft in the pulps, elevating their prose, conventions, and aesthetics into something more noteworthy than their peers who were, fairly, just in the trade to make ends meet. Writers like Ray Bradbury, H.P. Lovecraft, and Dashiell Hammett emerged to have an undeniable impact on their respective genres, codifying tropes in some instances or pioneering new traits in others. Lovecraft, for instance, contributed complex and horrific tales of otherworldly beings just beyond the mortal ken, Great Old Ones whose very presence pushes at the fabric of

reality, giving birth to a popular subgenre known as Lovecraftian horror. Cover artists like Margaret Brundage and H.W. Wesso serve as strong exemplars of those sensational illustrations designed to draw readers in. Noted for being "The Queen of the Pulps," Brundage painted lurid and racy covers of scantily-clad women and men for *Weird Tales*. Wesso brought to life the fantastic, wild, and strange literary writings found in *Astounding Stories* and *Strange Tales*.

What's more, the medium in which a pulp hero appears is significant to understanding the heroic nature of the character. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan (2012) notes that "the medium is the message," meaning that the method of communication or storytelling is just as important as the stories being told. Because pulp heroes from their outset appear in multiple medium forms including novels, short stories, magazines, illustrations, etc., their medium bears scrutiny. Taking for example science fiction magazines like Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*, or *Black Mask* and other crime mags, literary representations of pulp heroes in magazines such as these offer different nuances and depth of character that other media might not convey. Pulp heroes in short stories offer punchy, quick adventures in just a few thousand words while their literary position in novels offers longer heroic tales still broken down by formulaic beats (chapters, self-contained arcs, etc.). At the same time, radio plays of pulp stories bring a significant auditory quality to the characters, breathing a new life into the adventures of Doc Savage, the vine-leaping romps of Tarzan, and so on. Still other forms like comics visualize the pulp heroes, showcasing the otherworldly action of characters like Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, and Olga Mesmer, whether black and white or in full color. The advent of film and television continued bringing these pulp heroics to life, men and women battling Gothic monsters and galloping across the high plains of the wild west.

To study the pulp hero, however, involves more than simply recognizing and identifying its pulpiness. The status of the pulp is rife with racism, sexism, and ableism. As one example, one need only skim many Western pulps to find garish caricatures of Indigenous peoples written by "Hudson River Cowboys" as pulp writer Ryerson Johnson (1989) terms the class of authors who wrote tales of the American west without having ever traveled past the Hudson River in New York. Though the pulps were created cheaply and intended to reach the masses, their popularity also contributed, in some ways, to a spread of problematic ideologies at the same time that they prioritized a white, male experience. Wartime pulp tales pushed nationalist agendas that dehumanized international citizens; romance pulps often depicted women as simpering and shallow, or as overtly sexualized temptresses in villainous roles; science fiction and horror magazines routinely depicted non-white people as aliens or monsters; and so on. Many canonical pulp writers, including Lovecraft and Edgar Rice Burroughs, subscribed to racist and sexist ideologies that pervaded their work. Studying the pulps in any fashion involves reckoning to some degree with historical, cultural, literary, and visual problematic components.

Yet, because of their capacity for lurid, sensational, and seemingly disposable stories, the pulps just as frequently featured heroes in progressive or counter-cultural narratives. In these stories, heroes do battle against white capitalists, corrupt politicians and policemen, and maniacal despots. Heroes that are women, Black, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, and/or disabled occupy a small but significant space within the pulps, representing non-white and non-male people as arbiters of action, romance, and adventure. Women heroes like Domino Lady and Jirel of Joiry were often created in the shadow of male pulp genre heroes, and just as often depicted in stereotypical or masculine ways, but their appearance brought significant female representation to the largely male-dominated pulps. In many cases, LGBTQ+ characters were rarely explicitly present within the pulps, but careful readings of pulp novels or stories reveal queer subtexts that offer complicated views of many narratives. We might also turn to characters like Ernest Bramah's blind detective Max Carrados, who appeared in stories throughout the turn of the twentieth century, or in

Zorro's deaf and mute servant, Bernado. While contemporary sensibilities and understandings of disability view these and other characters as problematic (particularly the many, many villains with physical or mental ailments positioned as monstrous due to their disabilities), their appearances still offer important insight into how disability was viewed in the pulp era, as well as helped to ensure disability was not altogether erased from popular fiction (Zola 1987). Moreover, their heroic status is significant: as heroes, pulp readers aspire to their nature on some level, and in many cases, identify with their qualities. Though far from perfect, these non-hegemonic characters actually appeal to a greater body of readers than the standard white, male, normative pulp hero.

Comics provide a particularly strong example of embracing pulp mentalities outside of pulp magazines and novels proper, as well as pulps existing after the main pulp era (Hirsch 2021). Many early superheroes are drawn from the likes of Doc Savage, John Carter, and Zorro as well as from the fantastic elements found in science fiction magazines. Comics scholar Qiana Whitted (2019) notes the cultural cache of horror comics for their representational qualities, particularly within the "preachies" of EC Comics in the 1950s. In these comics, editors and comics creators placed Black characters into the role of hero railing against white conservativism and supremacy. *Turok, Son of Stone* provides another strong case study of pulp heroism after the heyday of the pulps. First appearing in *Four Color Comics* #596 (1954) and later in his own series published by Western Publishing's Dell Comics (then Gold Key Comics), Turok is a pre-Columbian era Mandan warrior who, along with his brother-sidekick, Andar, is displaced in time and space, adventuring through the Lost Valley and trying to return home. Within the Lost Valley, Turok faces what he terms "honkers": prehistoric animals and dinosaurs, including tyrannosaurs, velociraptors, pterosaurs, plesiosaurs, triceratops, stegosaurs, and more. At times, Turok and Andar can be rendered as caricaturist or stereotypical depictions of rich Indigenous cultures, to be sure. These facets are notable, and not to be downplayed. Yet, their indigeneity adds a layer of nuance that would otherwise render these pulpy comics as being solely absurd escapism. Placing Turok and Andar as the primary arbiters of history and culture in an otherwise uncivilized and dangerous world gestures toward a decolonial setting.

Engaging with heroes that draw on pulp sensibilities, whether heroes created in the heyday of the pulp era or those created nearly several decades later, involves reckoning with the lineage of the pulps: reading across historical, cultural, geographic spaces to determine whether pulp heroes are still fighting problematic villains and upholding outdated ideologies, or whether creators reinscribe the pulps to some new effect. Romance finds a home with publishers like Harlequin and Gold Medal in the 1950s and 1960s, and as both Christine V. Wood (2014) and Barbara Grier (1981) note, these post-pulp publishers were often bastions of queerness and queer smut in mass publishing. Taking another route, understanding Lovecraftian horror created in the present day involves critically interrogating the heroes for their pulp sensibilities; some popular examples might fall under what John Jennings and Kinitra Brooks (2020) term to be Racecraftian horror – horror narratives directly engaging with critical race studies to dismantle or circumvent racist tropes, ideologies, and constructions, Black heroes actively battling white villains who are often very literal monsters. Looking further at pulp heroic legacies in the twenty-first century might entail exploring superhero narratives, particularly those within the Marvel Cinematic Universe or the DC animated slate of cartoons, which were created in the shadow of pulp heroism. Reading and viewing these twenty-first-century superheroes involves seeing what pulp signifiers are transported across the decades, which are left behind, and what new popular ideologies these superheroes stand for.

While this particular entry focuses closely on North American pulp heroes and their lineage, there is a critical imperative to continue exploring pulp heroics beyond North America, particularly given the rich historical and cultural landscapes of the Global South, East Asia, Australia, Central

and South America, Africa, and more. With new advancements in technology and media emerging seemingly every year, it also bears mentioning that pulp heroics continue to exist in mediums like video games, augmented reality, and hypertext – avenues in which players actually don the roles of pulp heroes, adding new complexities and layers to how pulp heroism is to be understood. The golden age of the pulps may have passed by the early twentieth century, but the pulps still live in several decades later.

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Purpose

► Meaning and Heroism

Purpose and Heroism

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Synonyms

Aim; Heroic meaning; Goal; Mission; Motive; Objective; Vision; Worldview

Definition

There is a strong relationship between having a purpose in life and living a heroic life. A clear sense of purpose provides individuals with direction, motivation, and a framework within which to understand their experiences and the impact of their actions. This sense of purpose often translates into a life characterized by greater intentionality and commitment to ideals that are larger than oneself, which are essential attributes of heroism. The literature in positive psychology suggests that individuals with a strong life purpose are more likely to exhibit qualities traditionally associated with heroism, such as resilience, courage, and altruism, because they feel driven by a meaningful mission. Such individuals are often propelled to take decisive action in the face of adversity, stand up for their beliefs, and engage in self-sacrificial behaviors for the benefit of others, thereby embodying the essence of a heroic life.

Perhaps counterintuitively, having a purpose in life can also be a consequence of heroic action (Bronk and Riches 2017). This idea is consistent with research in psychology showing that behavior can shape dispositional qualities as much as dispositional qualities can shape behavior (Bem 1972). When people engage in a heroic action, they may see themselves as possessing attributes that are consistent with that action. Thus, heroism can be a precursor to having a purpose in life. In most cases, however, having a purpose in life is the cause of heroic behavior (Allison et al. 2017).

In positive psychology, the importance of having a purpose in life is underscored by its strong

association with overall well-being, resilience, and optimal psychological functioning (Yuen et al. 2017). Purpose in life refers to having a sense of direction and meaningful goals that guide one's actions and give significance to life events. The following points provide an overview of the theory and research on this topic:

Seligman's PERMA Model: Martin Seligman's PERMA model, which stands for Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment, includes "meaning" as a critical component of well-being. Meaning, in this context, is closely related to having a purpose, as it involves serving something larger than oneself and contributes to a fulfilling life (Seligman 2013).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT): Developed by Ryan and Deci (2000), SDT suggests that people are motivated to grow and change by three innate and universal psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Purpose can be seen as an extension of these needs, providing a framework for personal growth and a sense of belonging to a larger social context.

Psychological Well-Being: Research has consistently shown that individuals with a clear sense of purpose report higher levels of psychological well-being. They tend to have better mental health, less distress, and lower incidence of depression and anxiety (Ratner et al. 2023).

Physical Health: Purpose in life has been linked to better physical health outcomes, including lower risk of heart disease, stroke, and Alzheimer's disease. People with a strong sense of purpose often engage in healthier behaviors and may have enhanced immune functioning (Kim et al. 2022).

Resilience and Coping: Having a purpose can enhance resilience by providing a reason to persist in the face of adversity. It helps individuals to interpret stressful events through a lens that gives meaning to their struggles, which aids in more effective coping (Ward et al. 2020).

Longevity: Purpose in life is associated with longevity. Studies have shown that individuals with a sense of purpose live longer than those without it, possibly due to the protective health behaviors and psychological resilience it fosters (Alimujiang et al. 2019).

Goal Setting and Achievement: Purpose drives goal-oriented behavior. It guides individuals in setting and striving for goals that are congruent with their values and aspirations, leading to a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment (Yuen et al. 2017).

Identity Formation: Purpose contributes to identity formation and coherence, helping individuals to make sense of who they are and aspire to become. It provides a narrative thread that can unify life experiences into a coherent story (Bronk 2011).

Altruism and Social Contribution: A sense of purpose often involves a prosocial orientation. Individuals with a purpose are more likely to engage in altruistic behaviors and contribute positively to their communities, enhancing social well-being (Yuen et al. 2017).

Eudaemonic Happiness: Unlike hedonic happiness, which is about pleasure attainment and pain avoidance, eudaemonic happiness is about realizing one's true potential and is closely linked to having a purpose. It represents a deeper form of satisfaction that comes from pursuing and living in alignment with one's goals and values (Ryff 2024).

In summary, a purposeful life is integral to the fabric of positive psychology as it encapsulates the essence of what it means to lead a rich and fulfilling life. The ongoing research continues to reveal the multifaceted ways in which a sense of purpose can enhance human flourishing.

Bronk and Riches' Bidirectional Model of Purpose and Heroism

Bronk and Riches (2017) suggested that the heroic act is not always the culmination of the hero's transformative journey. At times, the heroic act inspires such a journey. These scholars introduced two concepts: *purpose-guided heroism* and *heroism-guided purpose*, to describe two possible

sequences of a hero's evolution. Purpose-guided heroism occurs when the hero's path leads them to adopt a life of heroic deeds, as traditionally described by Joseph Campbell (1949). They use Archbishop Oscar Romero as an illustration. Romero's commitment to a meaningful life led him to bravely confront social injustices in El Salvador. In contrast, heroism-guided purpose refers to instances where a brave deed sparks a personal transformation. This path is exemplified by Miep Gies, whose act of concealing Anne Frank's family was the impetus for her subsequent lifelong dedication to advocating for oppressed groups. The lives of both Romero and Gies illustrate the profound relationship between heroism and leading a meaningful and purposeful life (Igou 2023).

Conclusion

When individuals engage in heroic acts, their purpose can be driven by a variety of motivations, often deeply personal and contextual. However, some common purposes behind heroic actions include altruism, defense of the defenseless, justice, compassion, duty, integrity, love, or simply because a heroic action is immediately needed. These purposes are not mutually exclusive and often overlap. Heroes may act because of a combination of factors that include innate disposition, personal values, social influences, and situational pressures (Allison 2024). Moreover, the purpose of a heroic act may not always be clear at the moment it is performed; sometimes, the significance and motivation become evident only in retrospect. Or, as Bronk and Riches (2017) proposed, performing a heroic act can have a profoundly transformative effect on one's self-concept, purpose in life, and future heroic intentions.

Cross-References

- ▶ Absurd Hero
- ▶ Definitions and Descriptions of Heroism
- ▶ Meaning and Heroism
- ▶ Storytelling and Meaning
- ▶ Terror Management Theory and the Existential Psychological Function of Heroes
- ▶ Universal Urge to Heroism

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Purpose of Heroism

► Functions of Heroism

Pursuit of Truth

► Science and the Hero's Journey