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Setting the Scene: The Rise and Coalescence of Heroism Science

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Introduction: Setting the Scene

The Rise and Coalescence of Heroism Science

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Words move people, examples compel them.

(Latin proverb)

The goal of humanity lies in its highest specimens.

Friedrich Nietzsche (Hollingdale, 2001, p. 102)

Heroism represents the pinnacle of human behavior. The most noble act that a human being can perform is a heroic act, and the most distinguished life that a human being can lead is a heroic life. More than the pinnacle, heroism occupies a *central* place in human experience. Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1841) opined that “society is founded on hero worship” (p. 19). William James (1899) observed quiet heroism among the entire working class, noticing “the great fields of heroism lying round about” him (p. 2). Modern treatments of heroism emphasize that heroes serve fundamental human needs (Allison & Goethals, 2014; Kinsella, Ritchie, & Igou, 2015a), and that all of humanity—not just a select group of moral elite—is capable of heroism (Franco, Blau, & Zimbardo, 2011). Heroes are “fascinating to people in everyday life,” (Kinsella, Ritchie, & Igou, Chapter 1, this volume), “literally commanding our attention” (Franco et al., 2011, p. 99). So central to our humanity is heroism that it may even be imprinted into our DNA (Efthimiou, 2015; Chapter 8, this volume).

Yet this centrality of heroism to our lives remains a well-kept secret. All of us may harbor the potential for heroism, but we tend to reserve the label of “hero” for the best of humanity. Perhaps we relish occupying the role of spectator; it leaves us clean, unharmed, and able to savor the feelings of elevation that sweep over us upon witnessing others’ heroic acts (Csikszentmihalyi, Condren, & Lebuda, Chapter 13, this volume). For Carlyle (1841), “no nobler or blessed feeling dwells in man’s heart” than the feeling of hero worship. The veneration of heroes serves as the catalyst for self-enrichment, as “every true man” feels that “he is himself made higher by doing reverence to what is really above him” (p. 23). Each human being, according to Carlyle, “in some sense or other, worships heroes; that all of us reverence and must ever reverence Great Men” (p. 24). The allure of heroism taps into a deeply rooted archetype of god-like individuals who are “the creators” and “the soul of the whole world’s history” (p. 6). Hero worship, from Carlyle’s perspective, is

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the deepest root of all; the tap-root, from which in a great degree all the rest were nourished and grown ... Worship of a hero is transcendent admiration of a Great Man ... No nobler feeling than this of admiration for one higher than himself dwells in the breast of men.

(Carlyle, 1841, pp. 18–19)

Carlyle's assertions about our depth of feeling for heroes are not mere hyperbole. The deep veneration of heroes permeates every segment of our post-modern society, from the adoration of pseudo-hero celebrities to the sobering reverence of consummate heroes who sacrifice their lives to save others. Our thirst for heroes runs so deep that people are quick to attribute heroism to those who are famous, muscular, or talented, or to anyone who performs *any* action considered "good," such as saving a slice of pizza from hitting the ground. One cannot help but stumble upon daily news stories about dogs, cats, and even parakeets who are deemed heroes by the media (People, 2009). Some bemoan this dilution of the term hero, and there is reason for concern if the reckless use of the "hero" nudges it from the pinnacle of human experience. But we interpret the liberal and generous use of the hero label as exposing people's profound hunger for heroes in a world that so desperately needs them.

Descriptions of Heroism

Early conceptions of heroes emphasized the qualities of power, apotheosis, and masculinity (see Hughes-Hallett, 2004). Heroes in antiquity were revered for their strength, courage, resourcefulness, and ability to slay enemies (Schein, 1984). The human tendency to assign god-like characteristics to heroic leaders can be traced to Beowulf and Achilles, and it later became manifest as the divine right of kings during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Carlyle (1841) believed that hero worship was a small leap from divine worship, observing that "there needs not a great soul to make a hero; there needs a god-created soul which will be true to its origin; that will be a great soul!" (p. 194). From this perspective, "worship of a hero is transcendent admiration of a Great Man" (p. 19). Max Weber (1919) argued that great men are endowed with charisma, which he called "a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities." The word *charisma*, of course, stems from the Greek phrase "divine gift of grace" (Riggio & Riggio, 2008), and in that sense it includes a religious element. In fact, Weber noted that the qualities of charismatic heroic leaders "are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary."

In the same vein, Freud (1922) noted that the leader of early human groups, "at the very beginning of the history of mankind, was the *Superman* whom Nietzsche only expected from the future ... The leader himself need love no one else, he may be of a masterly nature, absolutely narcissistic, but self-confident and independent" (p. 3). Intrigued by Darwin's view of the primal horde leader, Freud was fascinated by the tendency of these leaders to become deified in death. He observed how we respond to charismatic leaders with reverence and awe. Leaders who invoke religious feelings and ideation, he noted, are viewed as especially charismatic. People in groups crave heroic leadership but those who would be leaders must not only be powerful and charismatic, they must themselves "be held in fascination by a strong faith (in an idea) in order to awaken the group's faith." Freud expanded on Gustave Le Bon's (1895) crowd theory and suggested that "leaders make themselves felt by means of the ideas in which they themselves are fanatical believers" and that through "the truly magical power of words" leaders acquire a "mysterious and irresistible power" which acts as "sort of domination exercised over us" (p. 5).

Sadly, throughout most of human history heroism has been a decidedly male activity denied to the vast majority of women. Men's advantage in the heroic realm stems from their greater physical prowess, highly entrenched patriarchal social forces, and the restrictions that women's

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reproductive activities place on their activities in many settings (Becker & Eagly, 2004; Wood & Eagly, 2002). Most classical descriptions of heroism have thus emphasized male behavior and masculine attributes. Carlyle (1841) wrote that heroes possess “a sort of savage sincerity—not cruel, far from that; but wild, wrestling naked with the truth of things” (p. 193). As a result, “the history of the world is but the biography of great men” (p. 12). Freud (1922), as we have noted, invoked an evolutionary basis for male heroic leadership, arguing “that the primitive form of human society was that of a horde ruled over despotically by a powerful *male*” (p. 122; emphasis added). Evolutionary psychologists have argued not only that men evolved a tendency to take risks but also that women evolved a tendency to avoid them (Campbell, 1999). Baumeister (2010) has made the similar argument that because men have faced a more daunting challenge in reproducing, they may have evolved to be more risk-taking than women. To attract mates, nature designed men to take chances, try new things, be creative, and explore bold heroic possibilities. Today it has become clear that biology is not destiny. Women are men’s equals in all realms of heroism, and in fact women occupy the majority of occupational positions (e.g., teachers) in the category of “unsung” heroes (see Goethals & Allison, 2012).

Perhaps the most famous description of heroes comes from the seminal work of Joseph Campbell (1949), a comparative mythologist who noticed a distinct pattern within hero myths from around the world. In virtually all mythological stories from every time period in human history, a hero embarks on a journey that begins when he or she is cast into a dangerous, unfamiliar world. The hero is charged with accomplishing a daunting task and receives assistance from unlikely sources. There are formidable obstacles along the way and villainous characters to overcome. After many trials and much suffering, the hero learns an important truth about herself and about the world. Succeeding on her journey, the hero is forever changed and returns to her original world. There she bestows some type of gift to that society, a gift that is only made possible by her own personal journey of growth and change. In short, heroes undergo a personal transformation that includes the development of a motive to improve the lives of others (Allison & Goethals, Chapter 20, this volume).

Campbell proposed that this prototypical heroic path, which he called the hero *monomyth*, consists of three parts: *departure*, *initiation*, and *return*. The initial *departure* phase refers to the forces that set the hero’s journey in motion. Heroes embark on their journeys to achieve a goal that requires the acquisition of an important quality that the hero lacks. All heroes start out “incomplete” in some sense. They are missing some essential inner strength or quality that they must develop to succeed. This quality can be self-confidence, humility, courage, compassion, faith, resilience, a moral compass, or some fundamental insight about themselves and the world. The second phase, *initiation*, refers to the challenges, obstacles, and foes that must be overcome for the hero to prevail. Heroes cannot triumph over these obstacles without help from others. Campbell calls these helpers *mentors*, who bear a resemblance to the Jungian archetype of the *wise old man*. These mentors can be friends, teachers, love interests, sidekicks, or father figures. The role of the mentor is to help the hero discover, or recover, the missing quality that is needed to overcome challenges and obstacles on the journey (Allison & Smith, 2015). Good mentors are leaders in the classic sense; they help others discover their strengths and raise them to new levels of competence and morality (Burns, 1978). Campbell believed that the most satisfying heroes we encounter in mythic storytelling are heroes who are transformed by the mentoring they have received. Transforming mentorship is a pivotal component of the hero’s journey.

Of central importance in the hero monomyth is the phase involving the hero’s *return* to his or her original world. Upon returning, the hero brings a great boon, or benefit, to the world. Having been personally transformed, the hero is drawn to a higher calling of giving back to his or her group, organization, or society. This transition from self-transformation to a desire for a wider, social transformation is similar to Maslow’s (1943) distinction between the need for self-actualization and the need for self-transcendence. It also bears a resemblance to the

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progression from Erik Erikson's (1975) stage of identity formation to the later stages of generativity and integrity. The hero's journey is the human journey, replete with struggle, growth, learning, transformation, and an ascendancy from followership to heroic leadership (Goethals & Allison, 2017).

Metaphors of Heroism

Scientists have long used metaphors to guide their worldviews, theories, hypotheses, and experimental designs (Leary, 1994). William James (1878/1983) claimed that the use of metaphor undergirds all human understanding, and this assertion is supported by contemporary research suggesting that metaphors may form the basis for all thought, perception, language, and social experience (Allison, Beggan, & Midgley, 1996; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; McPherson, 1992; Olson & Haynes, 2008). Metaphors assist us in grasping the complexities of the world by providing, in James' words, vivid examples and "similar instances" which operate as "pegs and pigeonholes—as our categories of understanding" (p. 12). Leary (1994) has argued, moreover, that the use of metaphor throughout the history of science has led to revolutionary breakthroughs by offering scientists fresh frameworks for identifying new phenomena worthy of scrutiny. As new fields of inquiry are born and begin cutting their teeth, metaphors are proposed and take root in the emerging literature, energizing researchers. These metaphors are then replaced, or augmented, with new ones, and the process keeps repeating itself. Heroism science is no exception to this pattern.

One could argue that Carlyle's (1841) *great man* theory of heroic leadership offered the first metaphor of human agency as paramount in understanding heroic action. From this perspective, heroism derives entirely from the motives and abilities of the hero, and situational forces that may have given rise to the heroism are largely neglected. Kinsella, Ritchie, and Igou's (2015b) prototype analysis of a hero's characteristics serves as an example of research that follows in this metaphorical tradition. Campbell's (1949) monomyth of the hero's journey represents another metaphor of heroism. The idea that heroism is a journey of growth would seem to underlie research on heroism as a lifelong developmental process (Allison & Goethals, 2016; Goethals & Allison, 2012, 2017). Franco and Zimbardo have composed two metaphors of heroism. The banality of heroism metaphor (Franco & Zimbardo, 2006) underscores the human universality of heroism and opens doors to researching the heroic potential in everyone. The metaphor of *heroic imagination* (Franco et al., 2011) "can be seen as mind-set, a collection of attitudes about helping others in need, beginning with caring for others in compassionate ways, but also moving toward a willingness to sacrifice or take risks on behalf of others or in defense of a moral cause" (p. 111). From this metaphorical perspective, unleashing the heroic imagination involves fostering the development of new mental scripts and enhancing people's heroic self-efficacy.

Two additional metaphors have recently appeared on the horizon. Allison and Goethals (2014, 2016) have recently proposed a model called *the heroic leadership dynamic* (HLD). Central to the HLD is the idea that people need heroes and that one's life circumstances determine which specific heroes one needs. Young soccer players need professional soccer heroes, and cancer victims need cancer survivor heroes. Also crucial to the model is the idea that need-based heroism shifts over time, explaining people's occasional repudiation of heroes. There is more to the HLD than simply need-based heroism, but for our purposes we will focus on the two metaphors inherent in the model. First, the HLD describes humans as creatures of needs and motives. These needs developmentally follow Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, with each level of the hierarchy corresponding to a different type of hero that someone at that level may adopt. The second metaphor of the HLD is the image of humans as dynamic beings. People change. Our heroes evolve to reflect our own maturation process across the lifespan.

One final metaphor that we will discuss is that of the hero organism as proposed recently by

Efthimiou (Chapter 8, this volume). The organism metaphor places heroic actors in their biological, psychological, social, and cultural contexts as living entities that grow, respond, and regenerate within complex systems. According to Efthimiou:

The concept of the heroic actor as a dynamical hero organism self-system is born out of the notion of the “heroic body as biological organism” which can only be fully comprehended in unison with the broader ecological, cultural, social and phenomenological aspects of the heroic body.

(Chapter 8, this volume)

In short, the heroic actor is a “functioning biological organism that can perceive, move within, respond to, and transform its environment” (Johnson, 2008, p. 164). Efthimiou’s hero organism metaphor adopts and extends a systems theory approach toward understanding human organisms in multiple contexts. Imbedded within her organism framework is the additional metaphor of *regeneration* or *restoration*, an acknowledgment of an organism’s ability to grow, heal, and re-create itself (Chapter 8, this volume). Efthimiou’s metaphors are bold, provocative, and subsume several other hero metaphors that have been proposed, such as the metaphors of agency, needs, development, and dynamism.

Definitions of Heroism

In discussing the definition of *hero*, we first make the obvious observation that there are many different subtypes of heroes, each with its own unique definition. Scholars have made distinctions between heroes who are *impulsive reactive* versus *reflective proactive* (Zimbardo, 2015); *episodic* versus *everyday* (Kerrigan, 2015); *personal* versus *cultural* (Allison & Goethals, 2012); *proper* versus *dark* (Kruger, Fisher, & Jobling, 2003); *transformed* versus *untransformed* (Allison & Smith, 2015); *emergent* versus *sustained* (Kraft-Todd & Rand, Chapter 3, this volume); *civil* versus *martial* (Franco et al., 2011); and *brave* versus *caring* (Walker & Frimer, 2007). The list of hero dichotomies could fill several pages, and scores of other hero tropes have been identified in film, television, and literature (TV Tropes, 2016). We will discuss different taxonomic structures of heroes in the next section of this chapter, each outlining and defining many subcategories of heroes. In this section, for the sake of simplicity, we will address attempts to construct one single definition of the broad category of *hero*. From our review of the literature, we observe that efforts to define a hero fall into one of two camps: those who believe that the term can be defined objectively, and those who believe that heroism defies an objective approach and is ultimately in the eye of the beholder. We describe the objective and subjective approaches below.

Objective Approach

Scholars who adopt the objective approach to defining heroism tend to converge on several core ideas. First, heroism involves taking one or more actions that are deemed to be morally good, or that are directed toward serving a noble principle or the greater good. Second, these good actions must be exceptional, not minor or ordinary. Third, heroism involves making a significant sacrifice. Fourth, heroism involves taking a great risk. Franco et al. (2011) thus offer this definition: “Heroism is the willingness to sacrifice or take risks on behalf of others or in defense of a moral cause” (p. 13). Kohen (2014) tweaks this definition slightly in stating that heroes are “people who faced the fact of their mortality, who took serious risks and/or overcame major hardship, and who did so in service of a principle” (see also Kohen, 2015). Merriam-Webster’s definition of hero also adds that a hero attracts admiration from others, a *recognition* aspect of heroism that Franco et al. acknowledge in their observation that heroism is “a social attribution.”

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Most objective attempts to define heroism, however, do not include this idea that a hero must be admired by others for her work to be considered heroic. A more thorough discussion of previous objective efforts to define heroism can be found in Chapter 1 of this volume, by Kinsella et al.

Subjective Approach

Scholars who challenge the objective approach point out that most of the criteria for heroism listed above are open to vast subjective interpretation. If heroism is good, who defines what is good? And how much good is a *heroic* amount? Moreover, even if a standard of goodness were found and applied, who determines the criteria for judging a *heroic* level of exceptionality, sacrifice, and risk? Advocates of the subjective approach claim that there exist no absolute standards or criteria for determining a threshold by which sufficient levels of goodness, exceptionality, sacrifice, or risk can merit a heroic designation.

Campbell (1988), in discussing his hero monomyth, acknowledged the weakness of an objective approach: “You could be a local god, but for the people whom that local god conquered, you could be the enemy. Whether you call someone a hero or a monster is all relative ...” (p. 156). The World War II German soldier who died, said Campbell, “is as much a hero as the American soldier who was sent over there to kill him.” Allison and Goethals (2011) mince no words in claiming that “heroism is in the eye of the beholder” (p. 196). These scholars have discovered in their research that people’s needs and motives determine whom they choose as heroes, a finding consistent with their HLD model. Maturity and development play a role in hero selection, with younger people tending to choose heroes known for their talents, physical skills, and celebrity status. Older people tend to favor moral heroes. As we get older and wiser, our tastes in heroes evolve, an idea captured in the subtype of *transitional heroes* (Goethals & Allison, 2012). Franco et al. (2011) also hint at the subjective nature of heroism in their observation that heroism is a “social construction” and that “heroes of one era may prove to be villains in another time when controverting evidence emerges ... Moreover, the very same act accorded hero status in one group, such as suicide bombing, is absolutely abhorrent to many others” (p. 99).

Not coincidentally, there is also a subjectivist approach to evil and villainy. This perspective is evident in Baumeister’s (2012) views of evil, which tends to be a label for behavior assigned by victims and witnesses of evil but not by perpetrators. “It is therefore necessary,” wrote Baumeister, “to define evil as in the eye of the beholder, who may be victim or observer but is probably not the perpetrator. And this means that evil is defined in a way that is not strongly tethered to objective reality” (p. 374). Schoenewolf (2014) has identified “a particularly toxic variety” of “person or group that abuses others and not only thinks it’s quite normal to do so, but very often thinks their abuse is an act of heroism” (p. 1). During the Nazi era, when millions of Germans persecuted Jews, they felt justified in doing so and believed they were acting for the greater good. The subjective approach uncomfortably reminds us there exists a fine line between heroism and villainy.

Scholars who adopt the subjective approach to heroism focus less on attempting to define heroism themselves and more on studying how the general population perceives and defines heroism. Allison and Goethals (2011) asked participants to list as many traits as they could that best describe heroes. These traits were then sorted by other participants into piles based on similarity, and the resultant piles were subjected to exploratory multivariate factor analyses and cluster analyses. The resultant factors and clusters revealed the following eight categories of traits describing heroes: *intelligent, strong, reliable, resilient, caring, charismatic, selfless, and inspiring*. Allison and Goethals called these trait categories *the great eight*. Kinsella, Ritchie, and Igou (2015b) improved on this methodology by using a prototype analytic approach toward discerning people’s conceptions of heroic traits. Their analysis yielded 12 central characteristics of heroes

and 13 peripheral characteristics. Kinsella et al.'s central characteristics are *brave, moral integrity, conviction, courageous, self-sacrifice, protecting, honest, selfless, determined, saves others, inspiring, and helpful*. The peripheral characteristics of heroes are *proactive, humble, strong, risk-taker, fearless, caring, powerful, compassionate, leadership skills, exceptional, intelligent, talented, and personable*. What is important to keep in mind with regard to Allison and Goethals' great eight traits, and with Kinsella et al.'s central and peripheral traits, is that these characteristics are not necessarily the actual characteristics of heroes. They reflect perceptions of heroes.

The weakness of the subjective approach is that it can potentially legitimize any claim to heroism, even behaviors that are acknowledged by nearly everyone to be abhorrent. Kohen, an ardent supporter of the objectivist approach to defining heroism, makes the following point:

If someone claims that Stalin is a hero or a cactus is a hero and a researcher says, "well, heroism is in the eye of the beholder," then the researcher's implicit argument is that absolutely anyone or anything is a hero because there's no way to judge one person's claim from another person's without taking sides, being partial.

(Kohen, 2013)

Kohen argues that the subjectivist approach "might suggest that people have a lot of different ideas about heroism, but it might also suggest that people simply aren't thinking very critically or carefully about heroism." We take the position that both the objective and subjective approaches to understanding heroism are useful in different ways. The objective approach is useful in scientifically identifying and defining the phenomenon, fine-tuning our understanding of it, and distinguishing it from other related phenomena. The subjective approach is useful in illuminating lay-perceptions of heroism that, regardless of their accuracy, are no doubt important to know because these perceptions drive people's decisions, social judgments, and everyday behavior.

Taxonomies of Heroes

Carlyle (1841) observed that "Nature does not make all great men, more than all other men, in the self-same mould" (p. 108). As heroes are packaged into different types, there is a need to develop a classification scheme. Carlyle identified six different "classes" of heroes: *divinity, prophet, poet, priest, man of letters, and king*. Klapp (1954) suggested the following eight types of heroes: *conquering, clever, Cinderella, quest, deliverer, popular benefactor, cultural, and martyr*. Several contemporary investigators have since proposed taxonomies of heroism based on situational demands of the heroism (Franco et al., 2011), the social influence exerted by the hero (Goethals & Allison, 2012), and the social structure of heroism (Allison & Smith, 2015). We examine these models below.

A Situational Demand-Based Taxonomy: Franco et al. (2011)

Franco et al. (2011) were the first contemporary investigators to propose a taxonomic framework. Their model is based on the relationship between heroic individuals and the situations that drive these individuals' heroic actions (Franco & Zimbardo, 2006). The taxonomy contains twelve heroic subtypes along with the situations that give rise to heroism. Two forms of heroism are included that involve physical risk: *military heroes* and *civilian heroes*. To be considered heroes, military heroes must go beyond the call of duty, and civilian heroes must knowingly put their lives at risk. The remaining ten types of heroism require social sacrifice: *religious figures, politico religious figures, martyrs, political leaders, adventurers, scientific heroes, good Samaritans, underdogs, bureaucracy heroes, and whistleblowers*.

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In describing these eight social heroes, Franco et al. (2011) argue that religious heroes must perform life-long service embodying the highest principles of living. Politico religious figures turn to politics to affect sweeping change or they apply deep spiritual practices to enact wide political reform. Martyrs put their lives at risk in the service of a cause or to spotlight an injustice. Political leaders successfully lead a nation during times of war or disaster. Adventurers explore unfamiliar geographic areas. Scientific heroes use novel methods to make discoveries valuable to humanity. Good Samaritans help others in need when there are significant deterrents to altruism. Underdogs prevail by overcoming obstacles or difficult conditions and serve as social role models for others. Bureaucracy heroes stick with principles despite severe pressures to conform or blindly obey higher authorities. Whistleblowers report insider knowledge of illegal activities occurring in an organization, and they report the activity publicly to effect change, without expectation of reward. Overall, Franco et al.'s taxonomy provides a thorough and compelling typology of heroes that remains the gold standard in the field of heroism science today.

A Social Influence-Based Taxonomy: Goethals and Allison (2012)

Goethals and Allison (2012) developed a taxonomy of heroism based on their observation that a hero's influence can differ on many significant dimensions. Influence can vary along the continua of *weak* versus *strong*, *short-term* versus *long-term*, *widespread* versus *limited*, *waxing* versus *waning*, *hidden* versus *exposed*, and *constructed* versus *genuine*. These dimensions of influence are reflected in the various categories of heroism contained in the taxonomy. Goethals and Allison's taxonomic structure features the following subtypes of heroes: *trending*, *transitory*, *transitional*, *tragic*, *transposed*, *transparent*, *traditional*, *transfigured*, *transforming*, and *transcendent*. Trending heroes are either on a trajectory toward becoming heroes or losing their heroic status. Transitory heroes are "hero today, gone tomorrow," exerting only brief heroic influence. Transitional heroes are heroes that we outgrow over time. Tragic heroes self-destruct due to a personal shortcoming. Transposed heroes undergo rapid change from either villain to hero or from hero to villain. Transparent heroes are the invisible, unsung heroes. Traditional heroes follow the conventional Campbellian hero's journey. Transfigured heroes are individuals whose heroism is constructed or exaggerated into legend. Transforming heroes tend to transform entire societies. Transcendent heroes wield such great influence that they defy placement into only one of these hero categories.

A Social Structure-Based Taxonomy: Allison and Smith (2015)

Allison and Smith (2015) have recognized a larger social structure of heroic actors that includes heroes as individuals, dyads, small group ensembles, large organizations, and societies. Individual heroes in hero narratives include the hero as one's self, the leader of a group, or "the face" of an organization. Dyadic heroes in film and literature include buddy heroes, romantic heroes, divergent heroes, and a hero and sidekick. Group ensembles can include teams, police or military units, family units, or fraternity units. Larger social systems include governments, corporations, organizations, or institutions. Another important feature of Allison and Smith's taxonomy is its emphasis on the transformations that heroes undergo while on their hero's journeys. Heroes can undergo one of five types of transformation: *moral*, *emotional*, *mental*, *physical*, and *spiritual*. One sees parallels here to Carlyle's (1841) classes of heroes, with the priest being Carlyle's *moral* hero, the poet occupying the *emotional* role, the man of letters corresponding to *mental*, the king *physical*, and the divine *spiritual*. Allison and Smith also propose seven different transformational arcs describing the hero's trajectory during her journey. Depending on the arc, heroes can be designated as *enlightened*, *irredeemable*, *untransformed*, *regressed*, *fallen*, *classic*, or *redeemed*. Central to their taxonomy is the idea that heroes of any scale unit (individual, dyad, small group ensembles, large organizations, and societies) can traverse the path of the hero.

Themes in Heroism Science and Heroic Leadership

Although heroism science is only a decade old, several recurring themes are emerging that have attracted attention, debate, theorizing, and empirical work. In this section, we describe four such themes. The first frequently encountered issue, situationism versus dispositionism, has a longstanding history in the study of myriad other social science phenomena. Carlyle (1841), as we have noted, set the dispositional ball in motion with his great man theory. Shortly after Carlyle's book appeared, Herbert Spencer threw down the gauntlet by counter-arguing that great men are a mere artifact of social conditions (Carneiro, 1981). Tolstoy (1869), moreover, wrote that "kings are the slaves of history," suggesting that events shape leaders more than leaders shape events. Thus was born the nature-nurture debate that has wracked the field of leadership studies for many decades. It was only inevitable that heroism scientists would confront the issue, too. In this handbook, we see either implicit or explicit treatments of the situationism-dispositionism schism in chapters by Walker (Chapter 6), Parks (Chapter 23), Decter-Frain, Vanstone, and Frimer (Chapter 7), Janoff-Bulman and Bharadwaj (Chapter 29), Halmburger, Baumert, and Schmitt (Chapter 9), and Franco (Chapter 10).

A second recurring theme in heroism science research is the issue of whether heroic action precedes, or is the result of, prosocial thoughts and feelings. The preliminary answer to this question is that the causal path is bi-directional, with heroism triggering specific meaningful mindsets and also occurring as a result of those mindsets, depending on contextual factors. The pervasiveness of *reciprocal causal influence* has deep roots in psychology (see Bandura, 1986). Heroism scientists who address this issue in this volume, either directly or indirectly, include Bronk and Riches (Chapter 26), Green, Van Tongeren, Cairo, and Hagiwara (Chapter 27), Janoff-Bulman and Bharadwaj (Chapter 29), and Nakamura & Graham (Chapter 22).

A third recurring theme in heroism research addresses whether mental images and conceptions of heroism are learned (e.g., cognitive scripts and prototypes) or are hardwired into us (e.g., Jungian archetypes). Campbell (1949) championed the latter approach, and other contemporary theorists have built on Campbell's ideas (e.g., Allison & Goethals, 2011; Moxnes, 1999). In addition, Preston (Chapter 4, this volume) and Kafashan, Sparks, Rotella, and Barclay (Chapter 2, this volume) use principles of evolution to illuminate the biological correlates of heroism. Efthimiou (Chapter 8, this volume), moreover, argues for a transdisciplinary understanding of heroism which includes the biological basis as a central feature. With regard to heroism as a learned activity, Callina et al. (Chapter 5, this volume) elucidate a life-span approach to the study of the development of a heroic character. Kraft-Todd and Rand (Chapter 3, this volume) also put forward a clever and surprising argument for the learned nature of heroism. In addition, Kramer (Chapter 14, this volume) shows how he may have devised an exercise for helping people acquire existential courage and for fostering the development of heroic personal identities.

A fourth, related theme we see emerging is the portrayal of heroism as resulting from deep, deliberative thought processes versus shallow, perhaps even automatic mental processes. This distinction has a voluminous presence in the scientific literature in psychology (e.g., Bargh & Ferguson, 2000), and it veers close to the *free will* versus *determinism* debate endemic to both psychology and philosophy. Joseph Campbell hints at this issue in several of his books, citing an essay written in 1840 on the foundations of morality by Arthur Schopenhauer. Paraphrasing Schopenhauer, Campbell writes that a hero may act

out of an instinctive recognition of the truth that he and that other in fact are one. He has been moved not from the lesser, secondary knowledge of himself as separate from others, but from an immediate experience of the greater, truer truth, that we are all one in the ground of our being ... For a moment one is selfless, boundless, without ego.

(Campbell, 1972, p. 150)

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This issue about the degree of deliberation necessary for heroism to unfold is addressed in this volume either directly or indirectly by Goranson and Gray (Chapter 21), Allison and Goethals (Chapter 20), Humphrey and Adams (Chapter 24), Franco (Chapter 10), and Efthimiou (Chapter 8), among others. No doubt there are many more themes in heroism science beyond these four that merit inclusion in this chapter. Unfortunately, we do not have the time and space here to give all these issues the attention they deserve. We list these four themes as a starting point of discussion and we invite other heroism scientists to examine these and other recurring themes, and their resolution, in greater depth.

Overview of the Chapters in This Volume

This inaugural *Handbook of Heroism and Heroic Leadership* has assembled scholarly contributions about heroism from a variety of distinguished social scientists from around the world. Our volume begins with a thoughtful foreword by Phil Zimbardo. We do not exaggerate when we say that none of the editors of this volume, nor any of its contributors, would be producing a handbook about heroic behavior without Zimbardo's groundbreaking vision and accomplishments. The nature and scope of his farsighted thinking in the field is described in several of the chapters in this volume. There is much more to Zimbardo's indelible impact on the newly emerging science of heroism than can be told in a single page, chapter, or handbook. His leadership in fostering people's heroic imagination, establishing heroism as a science, and galvanizing a strong activism branch of the heroism movement, all borders on the heroic. We hope you take a few moments to read his thoughtful reflections in his foreword to this volume.

The main body of the *Handbook of Heroism and Heroic Leadership* is partitioned into three conceptually distinct parts that reflect the current state of theory and research on heroism and heroic leadership:

- Part I: Origins of Heroism;
- Part II: Types of Heroism; and
- Part III: Processes of Heroism.

Below we briefly highlight the contributors and content of each of these sections.

Origins of Heroism

Part I of this volume focuses on the formation, causes, and antecedents of heroic action. Elaine Kinsella, Timothy Ritchie, and Eric Igou lead us off with an overview of existing research on heroism with particular focus on the audience for heroes, and their perception of hero characteristics and heroic influence. Kinsella and her colleague discuss three categories of psychological functions that heroes fulfill for others: enhancing, moral modeling, and protecting others—together forming the hero functions framework. Next, Sara Kafashan, Adam Sparks, Amanda Rotella, and Pat Barclay show us how evolutionary biology, and its subfield evolutionary psychology, can offer an understanding of the genesis of heroism. Kafashan and her colleagues use relevant evolutionary literatures to develop compelling explanations for the phenomenon of heroism, and they suggest some practical implications of evolutionary perspectives on heroism.

In the next chapter, Gordon Kraft-Todd and David Rand show us how heroism may be adaptive ethical behavior taken to the extreme by over-generalization. Because this behavior is *typically* adaptive for individuals, it becomes automatized as social heuristics, and these heuristics may then be (mis)applied to produce heroism. Next, Stephanie Preston examines the evolutionary and neural bases of heroism. She argues that research on altruistic behavior cannot be applied to heroism because of heroism's unique qualities. Preston describes how accumulating

evidence on the neural bases of offspring care can be applied to heroism, and she argues for a homology between offspring care and heroism. Next, Kristina Schmid Callina, Richard Lerner, Ettya Fremont, Brian Burkhard, Danielle Stacey, and Shaobing Su examine the formation of heroism from the perspective of human development. They introduce a relational developmental systems-based model that conceptualizes character in regard to mutually influential and mutually beneficial individual-context relations. The authors offer a model that may account for the emergence of leadership and heroism across diverse settings.

We next offer a chapter by Lawrence Walker, who explores aspects of the moral character of heroes that may help explain their extraordinary actions. Walker examines recipients of awards for moral action or historical figures who were notable for their moral character. His research findings indicate that the distinctive character of moral heroes clearly emerges from the data and that character is causally operative, supporting a dispositional explanation for their behavior and challenging a situational one. Next, Ari Decter-Frain, Ruth Vanstone, and Jeremy Frimer describe the motives and mechanisms underlying the tendency of groups to turn ordinary individuals into moral heroes. Followers give leaders titles and awards, encouraging leaders to give charismatic speeches that specify a threat, speak of sacrifice for sacred values, and contain themes of agency and communion. Our section on the origins of heroes concludes with a chapter by Olivia Efthimiou, who defines heroism as a distinct state of embodied consciousness accessible to all human agents in everyday lived experience. She maps out the *lived heroic body* across five spheres: the biological; the ecological; the social; the cultural; and the phenomenological. Efthimiou's chapter concludes with a transdisciplinary epistemological and methodological framework, the *hero organism*, which focuses on the development and functioning of the heroic embodied mind.

Types of Heroism

In Part II of this volume our contributors address phenomena associated with different categories of heroism and how these hero types affect individuals and society. Anna Halmburger, Anna Baumert, and Manfred Schmitt focus on everyday heroes to illustrate the phenomenon of moral courage. They distinguish moral courage from heroism and helping behavior, and they propose an integrative model of moral courage as well as practical implications for its promotion in organizations and society. Next, Zeno Franco shows us how disasters offer a rare chance to examine heroic leaders in action. His chapter takes a situationist perspective, offering theories of crisis as critical elements in understanding the dynamics that set the stage for leadership failure or daring success. Franco describes five specific tactics used repeatedly by crisis leaders, and he shows how these tactics distinguish good leaders from those who are truly heroic in the midst of disaster.

Next, Stephanie Fagin-Jones provides an overview of the social psychological research on the rescue of Jews by non-Jews during the Holocaust. She finds that rescuers were a demographically heterogeneous population who showed strong care-based moral courage. Their moral exemplarity was likely an ordinary extension under extraordinary circumstances of the natural progression of moral identities formed in childhood. Our next chapter, by Margaret Plews-Ogan, Justine Owens, Natalie May, and Monika Ardel, addresses the topic of medical heroes. These scholars describe the journey of physicians who have made a medical error and who, rather than retreating, acknowledged their mistakes, reached out to care for the patient and family with honesty and humility, learned deeply from the experience, and allowed it to change them for the better. Next, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Michael Condren, and Izabela Lebeda examine the heroism of social activists and dissident artists, with the goal of illuminating the role of social influence in the decision to engage in heroic behavior. Interviews with these heroes yielded support for the importance of role models in fostering epiphany moments, elevation, and empowerment for the activists, and in providing examples, initiators, and comrades for the artists.

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Our next chapter, by Roderick Kramer, explores the antecedents and consequences of existential courage in the specific context of individuals' pursuits of desired but challenging identity attributes. Drawing from the results of a pilot study, Kramer identifies identity-relevant concerns students view as salient and significant, as well as experiments in existential risk-taking that students design to "nudge" themselves toward successful pursuit of those coveted identities. Next, Dana Klisanin shows us how digital connectivity and social media have forever altered the expression and potential for collaborative heroism. She describes various tools of collaboration in an age of transition from a mythos of exclusion, separation, and boundaries, into a mythos of inclusion, relationship, and openness. Klisanin portrays heroism as evolving, becoming more digital, complex, interdependent, collaborative, communal, and planetary.

We then present a chapter by Elsa Lau, Sarah Sherman, and Lisa Miller, who contribute an overview of work on spiritually-oriented leadership. These scholars review the intrapsychic, interpersonal, organizational, and societal implications that have been investigated up to date. They propose a model of core pedagogical mechanisms in spiritual leadership, and they introduce a spiritually-oriented academic training program that portrays the processes and outcomes of spiritually-oriented leadership and training. Next, Bryan Dik, Adelyn Shimizu, and William O'Connor explore the theoretical links between heroism, career development, and a sense of calling in one's work and career. These authors show how a sense of calling overlaps conceptually with heroism, and their analysis underscores the value of adapting an integrative approach to understanding the interaction of work environments and personal characteristics. Our section on types of heroes continues with a chapter by Joseph Vandello, Nadav Goldschmied, and Kenneth Michniewicz. These scholars address why people love to root for and venerate underdogs. Vandello and his colleagues evaluate various explanations for the underdog phenomenon, focusing on aversion to inequality and the belief in a just world, and they show how an understanding of underdogs informs our understanding of heroes.

In the final chapter in this section, A. J. Brown unpacks the conventional image of the whistleblower as an organizational or social hero. By reviewing when and why whistleblowers tend to be portrayed as heroes, he posits that we can begin to identify a more nuanced and useful approach to identifying what is (or can be) heroic about whistleblowing, and what may not be, or isn't. Given the very real prospect of unintended consequences, and even institutional and societal harm that whistleblowers might cause in an increasingly tightly-coupled world, this is a much-needed perspective.

Processes of Heroism

Part III of the *Handbook* examines the functions, processes, and consequences of heroism. This section begins with a chapter on the hero's transformation by Scott Allison and George Goethals. These authors argue that the hero's transformation is the most central yet most overlooked component of the hero's journey. They describe the many triggers, dimensions, processes, and consequences of the hero's transformation. Next, Amelia Goranson and Kurt Gray focus specifically on moral transformation. These scholars explore six different varieties of moral transformation. They argue that the route to heroism is not through extraordinary deeds, but through everyday acts of kindness that can change not only our mental character but also our physical power. We then present a chapter by Jeanne Nakamura and Laura Graham, who examine the impact of narratives of heroism on heroes themselves and on witnesses of heroism. These authors show how remembering stories of witnessed heroism elicits the moral emotion of elevation, and how feeling elevated, or uplifted, becomes the mechanism through which heroism changes those who observe heroic actions.

Next, Craig Parks reviews phenomena that can, and often do, suppress a person's impulse to act heroically. He distinguishes between *accidental* impediments, which arise as a result of social

factors, and *purposeful* impediments, which arise when people desire to prevent victims from receiving relief from their plight. Parks concludes with a consideration of the distinction between thwarted heroism and cowardice. Ronald Humphrey and Laural Adams then explore the role of empathy in heroic leadership. These scholars review research on empathy that supports the empathy-altruism hypothesis, and they show how empathy explains why heroes take risks on behalf of others and make personal sacrifices for people. Humphrey and Adams also examine heroic empathy from a distributed cognition perspective that positions heroic leaders in the larger context of organization and systems. Next, Anika Stuppy and Nicole Mead elucidate how two central aspects of social hierarchies—status and power—influence heroic leadership. These scholars show how status and power are both *antecedents* of leadership and *individual motivations* reflecting different desires to obtain power or status. Stuppy and Mead's chapter encourages scholars to differentiate between power and status and investigate them as separate yet interacting constructs.

Our next chapter, by Kendall Cotton Bronk and Brian Riches, introduces a framework that outlines two ways that purpose and heroism overlap in the lives of real heroes. Drawing from two case studies, Bronk and Riches make an interesting and useful distinction between *purpose-guided heroism* and *heroism-guided purpose*. Next, Jeffrey Green, Daryl Van Tongeren, Athena Cairo, and Nao Hagiwara propose that meaning is a likely motivator of heroism as well as a natural consequence of heroic actions. These scholars discuss how virtues of humility, prosociality, self-control, and gratitude are relevant to heroism and meaning. Seeking meaning and affirmation of meaning via virtuous behavior may be a key to unlocking the latent hero that exists in all of us. Our next chapter, authored by Brett Murphy, Scott Lilienfeld, and Ashley Watts, focuses on the link between heroism and psychopathic traits. These scholars argue that some psychopathic traits can help us achieve success in life, and perhaps even allow us to act heroically when the situation calls for it. Their conclusion is that psychopathic traits may sometimes be conducive to heroism, or at the very least adaptive in some cases. We wrap up our Handbook with a chapter by Ronnie Janoff-Bulman and Prerana Bharadwaj, who address extended acts of morality that involve considerable personal risk. These authors argue that strong moral conviction may motivate heroism at the outset but may also develop gradually, even unwittingly, from more ordinary moral actions that transform motivation and justify increasingly costly, principled behavior. They conclude with some caveats regarding human tribalism and moral exclusion.

Looking Ahead: The Future of an Emerging Science

Hero worship ... cannot cease until man himself ceases.

(Thomas Carlyle)

It is our deepest hope, as scholars of pro-social behavior, that this inaugural *Handbook of Heroism and Heroic Leadership* offers you, the reader, some enjoyment, insights, and inspiration about the zenith of human behavior. In our view, the chapters in this volume have laid some sturdy foundations for the development of a multidisciplinary and even transdisciplinary perspective on the antecedents and consequences of heroic behavior. In aggregate, these chapters chart the landscape of what we currently know about heroism-related phenomena, covering a panoply of human experiences. The chapters encompass such diverse topics as courage, empathy, resilience, hope, meaning, purpose, spirituality, morality, altruism, character strengths, wisdom, development, regeneration, and transformation. Looking ahead, we anticipate future editions of this handbook will push the borders of our understanding even further, by going both deeper and broader in their inquiry. We imagine future volumes might separate the study of heroism per se from heroic leadership, perhaps into two different volumes. We can also envision future handbooks that

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splinter into specialized volumes corresponding to particular components of heroism, such as its evolutionary, biological, motivational, or cultural components. Attempting to peer into the crystal ball of heroism science might seem a futile endeavor, as the growth of this nascent field will no doubt spawn new research areas that we cannot even imagine today. We are encouraged, however, by the breadth of theoretical perspectives which have already been brought to bear on this enterprise, as well as the diversity of methodological approaches employed, and the distinctive kinds of empirical evidence they have spawned.

In a world that produces more than its share of bystander apathy and villainous behavior, we pause to rejoice that there are ample gifted and enlightened individuals whose behavior has embodied the most exquisite qualities of humanity. The world, as we know all too well, desperately needs heroes. We dedicate this handbook to all those who answer the call, to these awakened heroic individuals—past, present, and future. With equal appreciation, we wish to acknowledge those dedicated researchers who have taken on the challenge of furthering our understanding of the well-springs of such heroism and its impact. It is clear the embryonic science of heroism is off to a sound start and has a bright future ahead of it.

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