University of Richmond

2017

Attributes and Applications of Heroes: A Brief History of Lay and Academic Perspectives

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Research on heroism typically seems fascinating to people in everyday life: they ask insightful and interesting questions about the research, offer their personal reflections on heroes, and sometimes share details of significant life events triggered by the conversation. Heroism is an approachable topic that appears to influence individuals and groups in extraordinary ways. Indeed, heroes have been described as "support for all human life and the inspiration of philosophy, poetry, and the arts" and function as "a vehicle for the profoundest moral and metaphysical instruction" (Campbell, 1949, p. 257). Campbell further suggests that the metaphors by which heroes live have been "brooded upon, searched, and discussed for centuries: they have served whole societies, furthermore, as the mainstays of thought and life" (p. 256).

Scholars convey similar ideas about the ways that heroes shape and represent culture (Hegel, 1801/1975), and act as source of social control (Klapp, 1954). Other philosophers highlight hero-worship as a way to re-establish meaning and idealism (Früchtl, 2009). Not only do heroes help people to survive physical dangers, but also they can evoke eudemonistic questions of "How should I live? What do I really want?" (Früchtl, 2009). Further still, individuals may seek to achieve symbolic immortality and a meaningful existence by worshiping the lives of their heroes (Becker, 1973). In an essay entitled "What makes a life significant?" William James wrote:

> What excites and interests the looker-on at life, what the romances and the statues celebrate and the grim civic monuments remind us of, is the everlasting battle of the powers of light with those darkness; with heroism, reduced to its bare chance, yet ever and anon snatching victory from the jaws of death.
>
> *(James, 1899, pp. 5–6)*

These influential writings about heroes hint about the psychological importance of heroes to individuals and groups, and are suggestive of the role heroes can play in movements, institutions, political regimes, historical periods, and everyday life (Klapp, 1954). However, until very recently the associated systematic empirical investigations have been scarce in the social science literatures.

Addressing this gap, contemporary social scientists have turned their attention to finding answers to important and unanswered empirical questions about heroes, such as: What are the

most essential characteristics of a hero? Why are heroes important? What psychological and social functions do heroes provide to individuals and groups? How does heroism differ from altruistic behaviors? What are the conceptual differences between heroes, leaders, and role models? In this chapter, we highlight the contribution of psychology so far to our understanding of this ancient and complex subject.

First, we briefly summarize the existing research on heroism with particular focus on the audience for heroes, and their perception of hero characteristics and influence. Second, a new model, the hero functions framework (Kinsella, Ritchie, & Igou, 2015a), is presented and the three categories of psychological functions that heroes seem to fulfill for others are discussed. Third, we outline three areas that we believe should be prioritized when planning future research. Fourth, we provide examples of how to use citizen heroes as a tool for positive change in health, well-being, rehabilitation, and education contexts.

What is a Hero?

Heroes come in many forms: some real and some fictional. The term hero derives from the Greek word *heros*, meaning protector or defender. Historical views of heroism emphasize the importance of nobility of purpose or principles underlying a heroic act (see Zimbardo, 2007), but definitions of heroes have changed over generations. The term hero is used on a daily basis in the media (Sullivan & Venter, 2010) and many people readily name their personal heroes (Kinsella et al., 2015a). However, the term hero has been described as "radically ambiguous" in contemporary life (Gill, 1996, p. 98). For example, heroes have been described as those who reflect societal values (Campbell, 1949; Smith, 1976), provide standards of conduct (Pretzinger, 1976; Wecter, 1941), represent an ideal self-image (Caughey, 1984), in terms of their exceptional behavior, unusual merits or attainments (Boorstin, 1987; Klapp, 1954), and acting in an altruistic or courageous way despite physical risk (Becker & Eagly, 2004).

Becker and Eagly (2004), however, were criticized for narrowing the definition of hero to exclude heroism in the service of ideas (Martens, 2005). Heroes are also described as individuals concerned with protecting and promoting the well-being of future generations (McAdams, 2008). Schwartz (2009) describes heroes as individuals who demonstrate practical wisdom, showing the desire to do good for others and the capacity to do the right thing in a particular situation.

Franco, Blau, and Zimbardo (2011) distinguish between heroism and other prosocial behaviors, such as altruism: Heroism typically involves greater levels of risk and self-sacrifice, and unlike altruism, health benefits are rarely associated with heroism due to the high levels of personal sacrifice involved. Those authors note that heroes reliably choose a challenging particular course of action even when it may be psychologically easier to exit the situation (e.g., in the case of whistleblowers and political activists), whereas bystander intervention typically involves an actor who feels they have no psychological choice but to save, rescue or help another person in an emergency situation (see Franco et al., 2011).

A number of scholars have suggested that a common heroic ideal exists (Jung, 1969; Allison & Goethals, 2011). To examine stereotypes of heroes, researchers refocused the meaning of heroism, by examining lay conceptions of heroes; a means to understand the defining features of heroism and how the term is applied in daily life (Allison & Goethals, 2011; Kinsella et al., 2015a; Sullivan & Venter, 2010). This approach converges with some of the central goals of empirical research; namely, construct conceptualization and quantification, method and results replication, and practical applications.

The first of such studies included pilot work with children to identify the characteristics of their preferred hero characters (Gash & Conway, 1997). The 24 characteristics derived from this work were: active, beautiful, brainy, brave, brilliant, caring, confident, dresses well, famous,

friendly, funny, gentle, good, good-looking, helpful, honest, important, kind, loving, loyal, rich, skillful, strong and warrior. The children named heroes who originated from diverse domains such as family, film, TV, politics, community, religion, music, sport and other broad categories. It is interesting that children selected beautiful, famous, good-looking, and rich as important features of heroism. However, perhaps it is not surprising given that fairy tales, cartoons, or movies often portray good people and heroic figures as beautiful, pretty, or attractive (Eco, 2004; Klein & Shiffman, 2006). The findings from Gash and Conway (1997) indicate that children do show some bias, such that "beautiful people are good," or in this example, heroic. At a later developmental stage, children may develop an ability to acknowledge good and heroic behavior with less regard for a person's physical appearance, however adults do still have a tendency to assume that beautiful people possess more socially desirable traits (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972).

In another study, students based at a Catholic university in the USA were asked to define a hero and were provided with one half of a page to write an open response. Participants' responses were compared with six categories of hero definitions existing in the literature (see Sullivan & Venter, 2010, p. 437). Most commonly, participants defined heroes as "providing standards of conduct/being a role model" ($n = 81$) and "representing an ideal self-image" ($n = 85$). Fewer individuals defined heroes in terms of their accomplishments ($n = 57$), specific altruistic acts ($n = 48$), embodying social values ($n = 16$), or allowing individuals to vicariously reach new experiences ($n = 1$). Many persons' responses reflected how they relate to their hero, in other words, viewing the hero as a role model or viewing the hero as an idealized version of the self.

In a second study, Sullivan and Venter (2010) requested students recruited from a Southern Baptist university in the USA. Participants were asked to identify one of their heroes and to provide reasons to explain why this person is a hero. Participants were provided with 9 blanks for them to record their reasons as well as an example: "Hero: George Washington, US President; Reasons: Honest, intelligent, great leader, brave." Participants' responses were coded to account for synonyms or unique phrasing, and features were compiled according to frequency of each term's use. The results indicated that the participants described heroes as intelligent, loving, caring, talented, hardworking, a role model, creative, motivated, and religious (Sullivan & Venter, 2010). One wonders whether adults sampled from a secular setting would prioritize different hero features. The authors acknowledge that the example of George Washington may have primed participants to think and respond in a particular way, thus calling to question the validity of the list of hero features generated. The issue of using specific hero examples in research is a key methodological challenge facing hero researchers.

Allison and Goethals (2011) asked a sample of college students in the USA to list the traits that they believed described heroes. Next, a sample of students sorted the traits, identified in the first study, into groups based on how similar or different they thought the traits were to each other. Data analysis suggested eight trait clusters of heroes: smart, strong, caring, selfless, charismatic, resilient, reliable, and inspiring (the "Great Eight"; Allison & Goethals, 2011). One could argue that "loving" is an aspect of "selfless" and that "creative" is included in the "smart" category. The characteristics smart/intelligent and caring were also mentioned by Sullivan and Venter (2010), but the characteristics loving, talented, hardworking, a role model, creative, motivated, and religious did not appear in this more recent study. Given the discrepancies between the findings in the studies described above, one could wonder whether the differences were arising as a result of the different methods employed as well as the populations sampled. Further, one could ask whether non-USA and non-student samples respond similarly to the question, "what makes a hero?"

To address these questions we (Kinsella et al., 2015a) conducted seven independent samples using prototype methods, in an attempt to understand how people think about the character-istics of heroes, and to decipher how those features compare with leader and role model

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characteristics. The samples were drawn predominantly in Europe and the USA from community samples, online communities, and among student populations. Research on everyday social phenomena is dependent on the availability of a conceptual definition (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). To meet this requirement, a theoretical definition must ensure rigor and coverage of the topic (Gregg, Hart, Sedikides, & Kumashiro, 2008). A method that balances both scientific rigor and captures the complexity of everyday phenomena is prototype analysis (e.g., Hassebrauck, 1997; Gregg et al., 2008). We employed this method to identify how a hero is viewed and to characterize the features that are more or less prototypical of that person.

In our studies, the first step was to generate open-ended descriptions of the *characteristics* of heroes and heroic behavior (Study 1, $n = 189$). These descriptions were later grouped together into 26 categories of hero features by independent coders to determine if such features were identical, semantically-related, or meaning-related. The second step was to identify which of these characteristics were most central to the concept of hero using a ratings scale method (Study 2, $n = 365$), a reaction time task (Study 3, $n = 33$) and a surprise recall task (Study 4, $n = 25$). The findings from these four studies indicate that the central features of heroes are: brave, moral integrity, conviction, courageous, self-sacrifice, protecting, honest, selfless, determined, saves others, inspiring, and helpful. Less common than the central features but frequently included peripheral features are: proactive, humble, strong, risk-taker, fearless, caring, powerful, compassionate, leadership skills, exceptional, intelligent, talented, and personable. Interestingly, the list of central and peripheral features represents characteristics that area stereotypically masculine (brave, protecting, strong, fearless) and female (helpful, selfless, caring, compassionate) which perhaps challenges a view that heroes are conceptualized in exclusively masculine terms. Next, in our Study 5 ($n = 89$) of that project, participants most strongly identified a hero when the target was described with central features (vs. peripheral or neutral features). The findings support the idea that people's conceptions of heroes are matched on the basis of a cognitive construction process (Goethals & Allison, 2012).

The third stage involved teasing apart the characteristics that were most closely associated with heroes when pitted against leaders or role models using rating scales. Both Study 6 ($n = 212$) and Study 7 ($n = 307$) indicated that the prototypical or central features of heroes did not fit conceptually as well for role models and leaders. In other words, heroes were more likely to be described as brave, showing moral integrity, saving others, willing to sacrifice, altruistic, compassionate, selfless, courageous, and protecting, than leaders or role models.

Lay conceptions of heroes encompass both planned, learned, controlled heroic everyday acts, as well as heroic acts that include spontaneous, involuntary, reactive, and unplanned acts. These findings suggest that participants (aged between 18 and 73 years), sampled predominantly in Europe and the USA, were able to communicate clear conceptual differences between heroes, leaders, and role models. What is particularly noteworthy is that lay conceptions of a hero, sampled across 25 different countries, reflect its original Homeric meaning—pertaining particularly to moral integrity, bravery, and self-sacrifice. Thus, a person described as brave, showing moral integrity, conviction, courage, self-sacrifice and who is willing to protect others is likely to evoke the schema of hero, if at least in Europe and the USA. It is interesting to note that lay theories about risk and personal sacrifice associated with heroes are consistent with previous concerns about the physical risk, financial consequences, loss of social status, social ostracism, or possible long-term health problems associated with heroic behavior (Franco et al., 2011; Glazer & Glazer, 1999; Shepela et al., 1999).

Participants described martial heroes, civil heroes, and social heroes (discussed later in this chapter; for full discussion see Franco et al., 2011) in their survey responses, and notably, both male and female heroes were named as personal heroes. While gender differences in conceptions of heroes were not apparent (both male and female participants agreed on the central characteristics of heroes), there were differences in participants' naming of their personal heroes. For

instance, there was a slight tendency for participants to name female family members and lesser known or "unsung" heroes (e.g., mother, grandmother, teacher), as well a limited number of female social heroes (e.g., Rosa Parks, Aung San Suu Kyi). The male heroes named by partic-ipants tended to fit the more traditional stereotype of a hero that includes physical risk heroism (including both martial and civil heroism), superheroes (e.g., Batman, Spiderman, Iron Man), as well as famous heroes and political activists (e.g., Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King). Cultural views about heroes are shifting and educational initiatives such as Giraffe Heroes Project (www.giraffe.org) and Moral Heroes (http://moralheroes.org) serve to remind audiences of the many inspirational examples of female and male heroes around the world.

Opportunities for explicit, implicit, or subliminal priming of heroic behavior are now possible using the central and peripheral characteristics of heroes. Using various priming techniques, researchers can learn how to use heroes to influence individuals' physiological, cognitive, motiva-tional, emotional, or behavioral responses. Future research could assess how priming people with heroic images or characteristics might influence their internal states, goals, and behavior. In fact, such techniques might also prime people to display their own heroic characteristics (e.g., strength, bravery, integrity, and self-sacrifice), if at least temporarily. We encounter positive caricatures and ideal forms of heroes in books, comics, television programs, movies or videogames, however, little is known about the priming influence of these superheroes: How do these everyday heroic encounters shape our daily lives?

What about Warmth and Competence?

Warmth and competence are universal dimensions in person perception (Fiske, Cuddy & Glick, 2006). Judgments about politicians and leaders, for example, typically involve perceptions of warmth and competence (Chemers, 2001). Deductions about heroes may also rely on these dimensions. The central and peripheral characteristics of heroes (Kinsella et al., 2015a) reveal that heroes are described as warm (and the closely related dimension of moral; Wojciszke, 2005) and competent (Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999). People who are judged to be warm and competent tend to evoke positive emotions and behavior in others (Fiske et al., 2006). Interestingly, admiration is the emotional response that people experience following an encounter with someone who is warm and competent (Cuddy, Glick, & Beninger, 2011), giving clues about the psychological influence of heroes. Some prototypical features of heroes map onto the dimensions of warmth (e.g., helpfulness, trustworthiness, and moral integrity) and competence (e.g., intelligence, talent, exceptional). Other central heroic characteristics (e.g., protecting, self-sacrificing, saving, inspiring) fit less well within those two dimensions, reinforcing the idea that heroism is multi-dimensional and complex. Therefore, evidence of high morality/warmth and high competence are not sufficient for promotion to traditional hero status according to lay conceptions.

What are the Physical Characteristics of Heroes?

There may be particular physical characteristics associated with heroism. Research suggests that leaders who are taller, more attractive, and display a greater physique are more successful (Van Vugt & Ahuja, 2011); however, the physical features of heroic individuals are not well understood and need clarification. Research on face perception suggests that individuals make instantaneous facial judgments about other individuals and their intentions, often drawing conclusions about the trustworthiness of a person (Willis & Todorov, 2006). For instance, recent evidence suggests that men with wide faces tend to be more sacrificial (Stirrat & Perrett, 2012). Other studies have shown that facial width-to-height ratio can be used to judge aggressiveness (Carré, McCormick, & Mondloch, 2009). Do we make decisions about heroic or non-heroic people based on facial

and other physical attributes? If so, to what extent do such attributes correspond with actual heroic behavior?

Anecdotal evidence suggests that heroes are often described as strong, larger-than-life, someone to look up to, and standing out from the crowd: each of these phrases suggest that, at least in abstract terms, individuals believe that heroes are larger than the average person. Heroes may appear larger due to their physical size or social size (fame, authority, prestige, social influence). This idea is consistent with research on embodiment by Landau and colleagues (2011), who found that exposure to an expanding physical image led participants to report higher levels of self-actualization. The relationship to heroism becomes clearer by considering the items of the Jones and Crandall's (1986) self-actualization scale that was used. Some of these items relate to feeling a sense of responsibility to help others, fearlessness, having a purpose in life and as such could be viewed as a proxy for heroism.

Similarly, physical size typically correlates with strength (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980); therefore, if people consider heroes as "larger than life" it is not surprising that associated adjectives of strength are common. These ideas are reiterated in heroic journeys of hardship and challenge (see Campbell, 1949), which call for physical and mental strength. Some heroes are known for their physical size but other heroes are celebrated for their mental strength and determination (e.g., Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks). When an individual encounters a hero directly, they may feel overwhelmed by their extraordinary behaviors, stature, physique, or size resulting in an experience of awe and perceived vastness (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Considering the physical attributes of popular heroic figures and embodied perceptions may prove a fruitful and interesting direction for future research.

There is likely to be a relationship between the features of heroes and the types of heroes that exist. Perhaps heroic features may be grouped together in a way that different types of heroes emerge. Next, we will turn our attention to examining different types of heroes.

Types of Hero

Three broad categories of heroes have been outlined in the literature (Franco et al., 2011): martial heroes, civil heroes, and social heroes. Some individuals, including police officers, fire-fighters and paramedics, are bound to a code of conduct where they are trained to protect and rescue others from danger, referred to as martial heroes. Civil heroes, or physical-risk, non-duty-bound heroes, also risk themselves for others but there is no military code or training to help them deal with the unfolding scenarios. An example of a civil hero could include a bystander performing an emergency rescue, in other words a Good Samaritan. Not all heroism involves immediate physical risk. For instance, social heroism is associated with serious personal sacrifices. Examples of social heroism include whistleblowers, scientific heroes, martyrs, Good Samaritans, underdogs, political figures, religious figures, adventurers, politico-religious figures, and bureau-cratic heroes (Zimbardo, 2007). The prototypical features of heroes identified in our own research (Kinsella et al., 2015a) are relevant and applicable to almost all types of heroes. In fact, these central and peripheral features can be applied and used to describe each of the three broad heroic types, namely, martial heroism, civil heroism, and social heroism (Franco et al., 2011).

Taking a different position, Allison and Goethals (2013) have developed a detailed taxonomy of heroes differentiating heroes on the basis of the type of influence they have on others. The authors note that heroic influence can differ along various dimensions including weak-strong, short-term-long-term, widespread-limited, waxing-waning, hidden-exposed, or constructed-authentic (Allison & Goethals, 2013), and suggest ten subtypes of heroes. Trending heroes, for example, are those heroes whose impact is rising or falling. Examples of trending heroes include Lady Gaga and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Transitory heroes are those individuals who are deemed heroic and celebrated but quickly forgotten—Joe Darby, the whistleblower of Abu Ghraib, for

example. Transitional heroes are those are particularly influential in our lives during particular phases of development. Examples of transitional heroes include Iron Man and Captain James T. Kirk. Tragic heroes are those whose character failings bring about his or her downfall. Famous examples of tragic heroes include Tiger Woods and Oedipus the King. Transposed heroes are described as individuals who are heroes or at least appear to be heroes, but then convert to villain status (e.g., Harvey Dent). Transparent heroes are those individuals who humbly perform heroic deeds outside of the public spotlight. Examples of transparent heroes include supporting cast in hero narratives and many parents. In one of their studies, Allison and Goethals found that 65 percent of the heroes were perceived to be transparent heroes by participants. Transparent heroes are everyday heroes such as nurses, teachers, fire fighters, first respondents in emergency situations, whose achievements often remain unnoticed.

Traditional heroes, according to Allison and Goethals (2013), are those individuals who come from humble origins, experience early setbacks, and receive assistance from unlikely sources, overcome obstacles, and returns with gifts to society, akin to the classic hero journal described by Campbell (1949). Examples of traditional heroes include the Dalai Lama and Irena Sendler. According to Allison and Goethals' research, traditional heroes made up only 13 percent of their participants hero choice. Transfigured heroes are those who are declared heroic despite only partial evidence to determine whether their status has been exaggerated (e.g., Amelia Earhart, Sherlock Holmes). Transforming heroes are those individuals whose actions have transformed the hero and the society in which they live (Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela). Finally, there are transcendent heroes who are made up of a mixture of the subtypes of the taxonomy. Examples of transcendent heroes include Jesus of Nazareth and Harry Potter. This taxonomy highlights the diversity of heroes, and the next step then is to identify exactly how heroes act as agents of social influence, and to use this taxonomy to help structure the process.

Functions of Heroes

On an individual level, heroes can be viewed as norms for social comparison where individuals can emulate (e.g., observing the charitable work of Mother Teresa and looking for opportunities to volunteer in one's local charity shop) or avoid (e.g., observing a bystander emergency rescue and then seeking to avoid putting one's own life at risk in the future by putting in place better safety processes and equipment in the workplace) their behavior (Klapp, 1954). Individuals rarely live up to the standards of the hero, according to Klapp, but they do benefit from affirming themselves vicariously through their personal heroes. On a group level, Klapp suggests that heroes organize and simplify collective responses by enlisting interest in causes and creating mass followings, heightening a sense of "we," and strengthening morale by focusing collecting efforts and complexities on one individual.

Groups of people may draw together to praise and support a hero, which reaffirms group values. Heroes may also perpetuate collective values and socially necessary virtues (such as courage, self-sacrifice, hatred of evil) across generations. In fact, Klapp (1954) describes a hero as an heirloom, a symbol or metaphor for values and codes of behavior that can be passed on to others. More recently, Allison and Goethals (2015) proposed the heroic leadership dynamic, a framework that describes both the epistemic (i.e., imparting knowledge and wisdom to others) and energizing (i.e., inspiring and promoting personal growth) functions of heroes. Each of these potential functions, for groups and individuals, seem plausible and fascinating, and complement our own ideas and research about heroic functions (see Kinsella, Ritchie, & Igou, 2015b). In our own analyses of writings about heroes in philosophy, sociology, and psychology, the functions of heroes tend to map onto three key areas of influence: uplifting and enhancing the lives of others (Klapp, 1954; Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Cialdini, 2007), modeling morals and values (Carlyle, 1840; Pretzinger, 1976; Cohen, 1993; Flescher, 2003; Schwartz & Schwartz, 2010), and protecting

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others from physical or psychological harm (Becker, 1973; Hobbs, 2010; Goethals & Allison, 2012).

To our knowledge, the first psychological study on this topic was conducted by Gash and Conway in 1997 with children (mostly aged between 9 and 10 years) in an attempt to understand what *functions* heroes provide to others, and the results were as follows: to entertain, to be the best at what they do, to give a good example, to do good, to protect against bad things, to risk their lives for others, to show how well things can be done, and there was an open-ended category (full details not provided). While interpreting these responses it is worth noting that the children sampled by Gash and Conway (1997) were most likely operating at the pre-conventional and conventional levels of moral development (see, for example, Kohlberg, Levine, & Hewer, 1983). The children's responses reflect heroes as figures of authority on good behavior and viewing heroes as a means of promoting interpersonal harmony, rather than representing more abstract principles of social contracts and universal ethical principles (a stage of moral development that typically occurs later in life). Some children may have selected celebrities or sports players as their personal heroes, which in turn influenced their descriptions of heroic functions (for instance, to entertain others). In our view, many celebrities and sports players entertain others, as well as serving as (positive or negative) role models for others, yet few of those well-known individuals display qualities such as bravery, moral integrity, conviction, courage, and self-sacrifice, which are central characteristics of heroism (Kinsella et al., 2015a). A number of the functions identified by these elementary school children relate to themes of enhancing, modeling morals, and protecting others (consistent with our literature review), and spurred us to begin our own investigations of heroic functions.

Building on this work, we designed and conducted four studies in an attempt to identify lay perspectives about the psychological functions provided by heroes (Kinsella et al., 2015b). As part of our initial research project, we asked participants ($n = 189$) to share open-ended descriptions of hero *functions*, which were then sorted by independent coders into 14 categories, including to instill hope, to guide others, to improve morale, and to act against evil or danger. In Study 2, participants ($n = 249$) rated how each function resembled their personal views about heroes. Both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis techniques revealed that a three-factor model of hero functions fit the data well: Participants described how heroes enhanced the lives of others, promoted morals, and protected individuals from threats (themes that we had previously identified in the literature). In Study 3 ($n = 242$), participants rated heroes as more likely to provide a protecting function than either leaders or role models. In Studies 4a ($n = 38$) and 4b ($n = 102$), participants indicated that thinking about a hero (compared to a leader or an acquaintance) during psychological threat fulfilled enhancement, moral modeling, and protection needs, as predicted by the three-factor model (we call the hero functions framework).

The Hero Functions Framework

Our analysis of the literature and empirical studies (see Kinsella et al., 2015b) provided support to the idea that hero functions can be mapped into three categories: Uplifting and enriching the lives of others (*enhancing*), promoting morals and virtues (*moral modeling*), and protecting individuals from physical or psychological threats (*protecting*): Together these ideas posit the hero functions framework.

• **Enhancing.** Lay persons describe the enhancing function of heroes: to motivate, to be a role model, to inspire, to instill hope, to improve morale and camaraderie, and to guide others. Heroes boost energize and inspire us (e.g., the energizing function of heroes; Allison & Goethals, 2015), and likely boost positive emotions such as awe, gratitude, or admiration (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). People experience positivity when they feel a part of their hero's

exceptional accomplishments (Allison & Goethals, 2011) and while basking in their reflected glory (Cialdini, 2007). Heroes raise awareness of ought selves and ideal selves (Klapp, 1969), perhaps occasionally motivating individuals toward being a better person.

- **Moral modeling.** We noted previously that previous hero definitions describe them as modeling the values and virtues of society (Carlyle, 1840) and acting as comparison targets for the masses (Pretzinger, 1976), consistent with the moral modeling function of heroes. Heroes impart wisdom by supplying mental models or scripts for how one could, or should, lead one's life (epistemic function of heroes; Allison & Goethals, 2015), as well as helping people to understand the norms and values within society (Erikson, 1977; Cohen, 1993). Heroes prompt people to do what they can for those who need help (Flescher, 2003). Heroes are moral exemplars and although it may not be realistic to imitate heroes that show moral fortitude, but the encounter may trigger a moment of reflection where the individual questions their moral decision-making and behaviors, avoiding moral complacency (Flescher, 2003).

- **Protecting.** Consistent with the etymology of the word, heroes are protectors (Becker & Eagly, 2004) and our research suggests that heroic functions reflect this theme: protecting, doing what no one else will, helping, saving, guiding, and acting against evil or danger (Kinsella et al., 2015b). Some philosophers and psychologists have alluded to the idea that heroes protect against threats to perceptions about one's own meaning or purpose in life. For example, Hobbs (2010) suggested that heroes offer resources to adults who feel dejected. Heroes who represent cultural values and norms may also serve as a resource for dealing with threats to uncertainty, meaning, or other existential dilemmas (Becker, 1973).

The hero functions framework organizes existing information about hero functions, and enables researchers and practitioners to generate hypotheses about the influence of heroes on individuals and groups. The next step is to consider the extent that heroes enhance, protect, and provide moral guidance in a variety of controlled laboratory settings. For instance, researchers could design an intervention where individuals are requested to think, read, or write about a hero every day over time and monitor changes in their levels of enhancement (e.g., using measures of positive affect, motivation, inspiration), moral guidance (e.g., using measures of ethics and integrity, moral decision making), and protection (e.g., using measures of depression, anxiety, meaningfulness, perceived control, and mortality salience) over time. Besides analyzing the effectiveness of heroes in providing these functions, the extent that heroes affect people in everyday life is an interesting point of inquiry for future researchers.

In Allison and Goethals' (2013) taxonomy of heroes, transparent heroes are the "nurturers" of society: heroic individuals who appear in the roles of nurses, teachers, coaches, and mentors who each guide us somehow and aim to clarify how we heal, learn, succeed, and be good persons and citizens. Their contributions tend to go unrecognized and remain unsung because nurturing & enhancing activities are less newsworthy than the more glamorous & attention-grabbing protecting activities. Future research might conduct careful analyses using these complementary frameworks about which type of heroes (e.g., transitory heroes, traditional heroes, transparent heroes) provide greater enhancing, moral modeling and protecting functions, and whether these hypothesized effects differ by individuals (e.g., strength of identification with hero, perceived similarity to hero) and differ by groups (e.g., shared group membership, identification with group represented by hero). If this distinction of hero-intervention is supported empirically, the model could applied to school curricula, psychotherapy, rehabilitation and elsewhere. More broadly, future researchers may opt to study the role of heroic individuals and how their stories communicate moral messages within a given culture.

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Heroism Research: Some Questions

Building on these findings, there are many opportunities for interesting and useful research and applications about heroes. For instance, there is a need for more global cross-cultural research on heroism, and a closer examination of the vicissitudes of the Western bias in heroism research. In the past and occasionally in the present, the term hero was synonymous with the masculine and masculinity, generally. An important direction for future research is to clarify the extent that gender bias impacts upon how researchers perceive hero concepts, measures, and applications. Heroism research remains a nascent discipline and as such it can be difficult to determine how to priorities research resources when so many avenues are unexplored. Next, we outline three areas of research that we believe should be prioritized.

Individual Differences and Hero Identification

One study found that people who rated themselves higher on integrity also chose heroes who were characterized by principled commitment, authenticity, beneficence towards others, non-self-absorption, and spirituality (Schlenker, Weigold, & Schlenker, 2008). The authors adopted the following definition: integrity is the steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code (taken from the *American Heritage Dictionary*). People who self-reported with lower integrity (e.g., putting profits over telling the truth, willing to compromise principles for possible gain) evaluated their hero as intelligent, likeable, and similar to them. The authors concluded that the people with higher (vs. lower) levels of integrity use different criteria to judge the actions of others and decide whom to admire. Furthermore, when asked to judge the behavior of a central character, participants who were higher on integrity were guided by principles (ethical/not-ethical) rather than the outcome (successful/not-successful).

These findings suggest that people who claim greater commitment to ethical principles are more likely to admire heroes with similarly high standards for integrity and values, even if the hero's efforts are not objectively successful. Also, the authors proposed that people with heroes who model high moral standards are more likely to adopt their hero's ethical ideologies and emulate the hero's behavior. Further research needs to be carefully designed to assess the extent that individual differences influences judgments about heroic figures, and also, the extent that hero identification may actually influence judgments about the self.

Indeed, humility varies from person to person: some individuals may feel humble more often than others. Humility includes an understanding of oneself through awareness of personal identities, strengths and limitations, as well as perspective of the self's relationship with others (Nielsen, Marrone, & Slay, 2010). Humility enables a realistic assessment of one's strengths and weaknesses (Ryan, 1983). Heroes often deny their own heroic status, saying they just did what needed to be done or did what anyone would do in that situation, modeling humility (e.g., Worthington, 2007; heroes of humility). In our own research, humility is one of the defining characteristics of heroism (Kinsella et al., 2015a).

Furthermore, we believe that encounters with heroes who display extraordinary behaviors sometimes induce humility in onlookers. Humble individuals may seek out heroes in order to experience humility. For others, encounters with heroes are likely to provoke a humble state, at least temporarily. When experiencing humility as a result of a heroic encounter the individual may be more likely to get an accurate sense of self (instigating a period of self-focus; Bryant & Veroff, 2007) than they would experience in their usual daily lives without a heroic encounter. This shift of perspective may help to motivate the individual towards personal goals and make people aware of what they need to do to achieve their own success. Future research could consider the match and associations between types of heroes and individual preference for heroes, and hero effectiveness as a function of the match.

Self-Discrepancies and Regulatory Focus

Mark Twain (1835–1910) famously claimed, "If everybody was satisfied with himself, there would be no heroes," expressing unfulfilled needs that are projected onto others. The idea of regulatory foci has origins in self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) which suggests that during a person's life, self-guides (ideal or ought) are formed and provide the basis for self-assessment. One's own ought self may tend to represent the duties and obligations that a person feels that they should be going in the present. A discrepancy between one's actual self and ought self sometimes results in negative, self-focused affect is likely to ensue (rumination, anxiety). Conceptualizations of the ideal self tend to be associated with the achievements and aspirations of the individual. When a discrepancy between actual and ideal self occurs, a person will experience a sense of loss, such as rumination, depression and disappointment. Heroes may remind some individuals about an ideal self or an "ought self," motivating us to keep striving to pursue personal goals.

For instance, according to regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1987) individuals are typically driven to strive towards making good things happen, maximizing gains (promotion focus) or to avoid opportunities for negative events to occur, minimizing threats (prevention focus). These two orientations influence the behaviors, emotions, cognitions, and preferences of individuals and may also provide a useful lens for examining people's identification with heroes. For example, individuals with a promotion-focus may be more attracted to heroes who show attributes that are similar to their ideal self. Promotion-focused individuals are concerned with values, ideals, goals, which in turn could provoke associations with accomplishment, advancement, and nurturance; however, individuals with prevention-focus may be more likely to choose a hero that reduces the discrepancy between ought and actual self—such heroes are likely to represent safety, security, duties, and obligations.

Heroic Influence: A Case of Upward Social Comparison?

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) suggests that individuals often look to other individuals as a reference for comparing one's own behavior. Downward social comparisons involve comparing the self to a person who is considered worse than one's self on some attribute. Upward social comparison, on the other hand, involves comparing oneself to someone else whose abilities and attributes are better than one's self. It is often through upward social comparisons that individuals improve themselves and learn how to perform like those who are more knowledgeable, skilled or experienced (Butler, 1992; Helgeson & Mickelson, 1995; Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995; Wood, 1989).

Self-improvement is one of the four central processes, along with self-enhancement, self-assessment, and self-verification, each part of the self-system, operating together to promote well-being and social functioning (Sedikides & Strube, 1997; Gaertner, Sedikides, & Cai, 2012). People actively pursue upward social comparisons when pursuing self-improvement goals. For instance, dieters have placed images of thinner individuals on the refrigerator to remember dietary goals and desired changes (Helgeson & Taylor, 1993). The decision to actively seek upward social comparisons occurs when the available comparison provides important learning benefits in relation to motives. In such circumstances, exposure to successful others (including heroes), can be motivational, inspiring, and mood elevating (Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Social comparisons must be "cognitively digested, actively worked on, and made sense of" (Collins, 1996, p. 66) and in doing so, the individual can consciously prevent upward social comparisons from hurting evaluations about the self. For example, one might expect that social comparisons with heroes might result in feeling bad about the self (e.g., "I could never go through the hardship encountered by Aung San Suu Kyi in her pursuit of democracy in Burma") or perhaps

instead one decides to feel inspired by her efforts and decide to show more courage and determination modestly in one's own daily life.

Additional research will need to uncover the extent to which the positive influence of heroes can be explained by contemporary ideas about social comparisons. Key factors, such as personal relevance, closeness to the self (Tesser, 1988), shared social identity, and individual differences need to be carefully assessed. Our observations suggest that heroes may sometimes trigger a period of self-focus and self-improvement goals, but at other times heroes trigger an outward focus, where the individual is more concerned with others than the self (world-focused; Bryant & Veroff, 2007); however, this has not been investigated empirically.

Heroes Applied: Some Examples

As much of the previous sections have focused on theory and the conceptualization of heroic attributes, the aim of the next section is to focus on the pragmatic and usefulness of heroism research, particularly the many functions that heroic individuals provide to others. There are numerous examples of practical applications for heroes in health, education, rehabilitation and organizational settings.

Heroes for Health, Wellbeing, and Rehabilitation

Given the multiple positive psychological benefits that people can gain from interacting with and thinking about heroes, there is great potential to create interventions that promote positive emotions, well-being, growth, creativity, and social connections. Indeed, studies have shown that failing to adequately cope with stressful life events contributes to a variety of clinical disorders (Kross, Davidson, Weber, & Ochsner, 2009) and impedes subjective well-being (Ritchie, Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Gidron, 2011). Knowledge about the ways in which people use heroes to self-regulate (e.g., using a personal hero as a metaphor to help a client to make links between values, goals, and behaviors) may be important for people who work in mental healthcare, such as psychotherapists. Broadly, the findings from the present research could be used to inform clinical therapists and those who work in mental healthcare, such as to refine psychological interventions that aim to decrease personal negativity and also promote psychological well-being and positive affect.

For instance, broad-minded affective coping (BMAC; Tarrier, 2010) is a technique that builds on Fredrickson's (1998) broaden-and-build theory. The BMAC approach aims to promote positive emotions by prompting individuals to recall positive autobiographical memories for their own lives. Even brief, transient experiences of positive emotions have been found to increase resilience (measured one month later), suggesting a role for clinical interventions that foster positive affect. An adapted BMAC technique would focus specifically on those autobiographical memories that involve encounters with heroic persons. Such positive memorial activity may prompt individuals to feel a greater sense of protection (from negative feelings), and enhancement of positivity towards self and humanity, in addition to positive affect, generally.

Another approach, appreciative inquiry (e.g., Johnson & Leavitt, 2001; Martinetz, 2002), encourages individuals, organizations, or communities to contemplate and extend their most effective behaviors or practices rather than dwelling on the problems. The aim of this technique is to focus on the stories, metaphors, or symbols that inspire hope, change, purpose, joy, camaraderie, compassion, and innovation (e.g., Fitzgerald, Murrell, & Miller, 2003). Such aims are associated closely to the characteristics and functions of heroic influences. Appreciative inquiry opposes other approaches that focus on problems and difficulties; indeed, negative foci can reduce motivation and persistence (e.g., Whitney, 1998). Extending appreciative inquiry further, individuals could be asked to contemplate heroic qualities or actions that they have witnessed in

others or in themselves, and then share these observations with others. Individuals or groups work together to formulate plans to utilize, share, and remember these uplifting initiatives and practices. For instance, initiatives that promote gratitude promote positive emotions and psychological well-being (e.g., Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). As a personal development exercise, a person might write a letter of gratitude to each of the heroic people who have entered their lives. Such expressive writing may increase gratitude, which promotes emotion regulation (e.g., Pennebaker & Chung, 2011) and ultimately could boost psychological well-being.

Metaphoric identity mapping (MIM; Ylvisaker, McPherson, Kayes, & Pellett, 2008) is an approach to identity construction and goal setting that draws up theories of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), metaphors, and interacting cognitive subsystems (Barnard, 1985). This approach was designed to help survivors of acquired brain injury (ABI), such that individuals with brain injuries could construct a new sense of identity, in part, by identifying a hero that unifies the self and offers a sense of emotional power to their strong characteristics, and opens up action strategies associated with the identity schema (Ylvisaker et al., 2008). The action strategies purportedly identify meaningful and realistic goals, overcome resistance and other obstacles that the individual is struggling with. One advantage of MIM is that the heroic metaphor unites the elements of a person's cognitive representation of the self into an organized unit of thought (e.g., hero, symbol, metaphor), helping them to effectively encode and retrieve this information in memory.

Heroes for Education and Socio-Cultural Change

In educational settings, heroes can inspire, motivate, and offer moral guidance to students of all ages. For instance, the Hero Construction Company (www.heroconstruction.org) and the Heroic Imagination Project (http://heroicimagination.org) offer classroom presentations, educational modules, and large group assemblies that convey stories, images, and interactive discussion about heroes. These initiatives aims to convince young students that they too are "heroes in waiting" and that they have the potential to behave heroically—showing bravery, self-sacrifice, moral integrity—when the situation arises. Teaching students and teachers about the characteristics of heroes and sharing examples of heroic behavior may help them to increase awareness of heroism. Images, videos, classroom discussions, keywords or quotes (i.e., environmental cues) could be strategically placed around the immediate and virtual learning environments. New creative initiatives in schools, colleges, and universities could be designed in an effort to promote and celebrate heroic behaviors. Given our research findings that indicate that heroes can sometimes provide many social and psychological benefits, it seems reasonable to encourage faculty, teachers, educators, instructors, and students to identify and learn about heroes.

On a related note, the explicit instruction about the bystander effect, groupthink, and other social psychological phenomena that result in poor decision-making could increase the likelihood that individuals take action to intervene, to prevent potential malfeasance and even thwart disaster. If heroes characterize virtuous traits such as strength, bravery, integrity, doing what no-one else will, protecting others, and showing leadership qualities, then such qualities are worthy of modelling to our young people. Furthermore, action research (Lewin, 1946) or participatory action research on specific hero-related topics (e.g., speaking out against bullying, speaking out against wrong-going) could be useful, such as educating children about relevant skills for solving real-life problems.

Historically, heroes have played an important role in inter-group conflict scenarios, particularly those involving racial, political, and religious tensions. Heroic figures, such as Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Mahatma Gandhi, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Nelson Mandela, have each been instrumental in influencing conflict scenarios. Indeed, a variety of heroes may be powerful

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and influential in different types of public crises and across historical eras (see Klapp, 1969). Perhaps learning from the past, we could assess what heroes are needed to reduce tension between groups and increase co-operation. There are heroic figures of the past that seemed useful; however, more research is needed to elucidate how historical heroes can influence the present and the future.

Conclusions

Heroes exemplify rare agentic and moral virtues. Heroes can be spatio-temporally remote, even dead, and yet these figures continue to influence the lives of others. Despite the power of heroic figures to act as a positive and everyday source of influence, heroes are currently an underused resource in health, education, and rehabilitation settings. In this chapter, we examined the literature and recent research, considered the practical and theoretical implications for understanding heroes and their influences on individuals, and we suggested ways to use this information to create new hero initiatives. We are honored to be part of the growing collective of researchers who are passionate about the empirical study of heroism, and hope that our chapter will inspire other researchers to continue this exciting advancement of ideas and practices. We hope that this chapter will provoke self-reflection among readers, regarding their own potential for heroic behavior and ability to recognize and celebrate in the heroic behavior that exists around them: "Wishing for heroism and the spectacle of human nature on the rack, I had never noticed the great fields of heroism lying round about me, I had failed to see it present and alive" (James, 1899).

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