Transforming Motives and Mentors: The Heroic Leadership of James MacGregor Burns

George R. Goethals, University of Richmond
Scott T. Allison, University of Richmond

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We are fortunate that James MacGregor Burns had become interested in psychology when he was developing his groundbreaking 1978 book called, simply, *Leadership*. During his first year as a member of the Psychology Department at Williams College in 1970-71, George Goethals, one of the authors of this paper, introduced himself to Burns, and asked him to speak to a psychology class that Goethals was teaching which considered US presidents. Burns introduced Goethals to the work of two psychologically-minded political scientists studying presidential leadership, James David Barber and Fred Greenstein. Both were interested, in one way or another, in the successful management of emotions as a key “presidential difference,” to borrow Greenstein’s term. One afternoon not long after, Burns showed up at Goethals’ office and asked if they could talk about psychology, particularly human motivation. Burns mentions this conversation in his 2003 book, *Transforming Leadership*, and so it was a memorable discussion to both of them. At that point Burns was not familiar with the name Abraham Maslow or his work on a hierarchy of needs. Subsequently, Maslow’s work figured prominently in Burns’ approach to understanding leadership. More particularly, it was central to the concept of “transforming leadership.” Maslow argued that once lower level motives such as hunger were satisfied, higher motives would be engaged, all the way up to the highest motive in the hierarchy, self-actualization. Burns was immediately fascinated by the idea that leaders could gratify followers’ lower motives, and thereby arouse other, higher level motives.
Burns wrote in a provocative way about wants and needs, and the way they manifested themselves as values. The argument, as developed in both his 1978 and 2003 books, was that myriad wants would be shaped by the environment, including leaders, into real needs, and that both wants and needs would be shaped into values or empowering motives. Burns started with Maslow but then creatively integrated a good deal of additional research on human motivation and human values into his overall analysis of “the psychological matrix of leadership.” Looking back at their first conversations of over 40 years ago about psychology and motivation, Goethals now imagines what it would be like to talk to Burns about new perspectives on motivations relevant to leadership. A conversation today might include a reformulated view of what motivations, conscious and unconscious, are most important to consider in understanding leadership.

Transforming Needs and Motives

Because Burns was so interested in Maslow, we would start by explaining some modifications of Maslow’s theory, and, again, our own sense of how best to modify the so called need pyramid. Maslow’s original need hierarchy was represented graphically as a pyramid with the lowest needs described as physiological needs, for nourishment, shelter, clothing and sexual gratification. If these needs are reasonably satisfied, people may move to the second level, called safety needs. These include needs for personal and financial security, and protection from accidents and poor health. If people’s basic biological needs and safety concerns are satisfied, they concern themselves with the third level of need, that is love or belongingness needs. People want to feel included and feel that they belong to important and significant groups of others, and they want to be loved both as an individual and as a member of a group. If love, inclusion and belongingness motives are satisfied, people then become concerned with the fourth level, esteem
needs. These include a need for respect and positive regard from others, and a need to see oneself positively based on one’s own achievements, especially one’s accomplishments or achievements relative to those of other relevant comparison persons. If an individual is fortunate enough find gratification of these four lower needs, he or she might develop a need for self-actualization, basically a drive to fully develop one’s potentials, to be, as the US Army sometimes advertises, all one can be.

There are two other important elements to Maslow’s original, and highly influential, description of a hierarchy or pyramid of needs. One, already suggested, is that an individual is only concerned about needs at a particular level if lower level needs are satisfied. For example, one can only be concerned about being loved or included if one is fed, sheltered and secure. More important, perhaps, is the idea that once needs at the four lower levels are satisfied, one is no longer concerned with them or driven by them. One, in effect, moves on to higher levels. The highest need, for self-actualization, is different. People never are satiated in their need for self-actualization. The more one experiences fulfillment and development of potentials, the more one wants. If lower needs are met, people can and will focus to improve and develop and to realize their potentials, during which times they might have “peak experiences” of having discovered meaning, beauty, truth and a sense of oneness with the world. Self-actualization has a sort of self-centered mysticism to it. One feels whole, enhanced, and connected.

As noted, Professor Burns was quite taken with the idea that leaders play an important role satisfying followers’ lower needs, and thereby elevating them for the important work that they, that is, leaders and followers, can do together to produce significant change for the better. As Burns described transforming leadership, individuals engage each other “in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.” Both
leaders and followers will be elevated such that the leaders create a “new cadre of leaders.” This conception follows Maslow closely, though it makes explicit an idea that is largely implicit in Maslow, and that is that the self-actualized person is a moral actor.

**Transforming Leaders and Motives**

The relevance of Maslow’s conception is seen in a recent exchange model of leading and following developed by social psychologist David Messick. Messick proposes that leaders provide various benefits for followers, and that followers reciprocate with corresponding benefits. Importantly leaders provide Vision and Direction, and in return followers respond with Focus and Self-Direction. Other benefits provided by leaders are Protection and Security, corresponding to Maslow’s safety needs; Achievement and Effectiveness, corresponding to Maslow’s esteem needs; Inclusion and Belongingness, corresponding to Maslow’s love and belongingness needs; and Pride and Self-Respect, also corresponding to Maslow’s esteem needs and also self-actualization needs. In return, followers provide gratitude, respect, cooperation, commitment, effort, etc. In a word, followers will “get with the program” as defined by the leader and accord status and positive regard in response to the benefits they receive from leaders.

Two additional points: interestingly, in Messick’s scheme, the Vision and Direction that leaders provide has no direct corresponding need in Maslow’s hierarchy. Since Vision and Direction seem central to leadership, we will consider below whether those benefits to in fact satisfy follower motives, and if so, which ones. Second, this model assumes coordination and cooperation, and actually altruism, as leaders and followers work together toward common goals. In this sense, it is highly compatible with Burns emphasis on mutual engagement and mutual elevation in the relationship between leaders and followers.
While Maslow’s five step pyramid is the most enduring version of his theory in the psychological literature, we should note that Maslow himself suggested a number of significant modifications, mostly at the top of the pyramid. For example, he suggested Aesthetic needs and Cognitive or knowledge needs might come into play before Self-Actualization. Most important, Maslow suggested a spiritual need for Self-Transcendence, a need to move beyond the self and to serve others. His thinking about self-transcendence is responsive to criticisms that the concept of self-actualization amounted to selfish self-aggrandizement, with little regard for the needs of other people. The Self-Transcendence need seems like a useful addition to Burns work on transforming leadership. It can be seen as integral to the dynamic of transforming leaders and followers striving to elevate each other toward higher levels of motivation and morality.

As influential as Maslow’s model has been, it has not gone unchallenged. Empirical support for it is mixed and its theoretical coherence is debatable. One of the more interesting revisions or updates comes from the evolutionary perspective within social psychology. Douglas Kenrick and his colleagues argue that while the lower four steps in the Maslow pyramid are about right, though importantly they broaden Esteem needs to Status/Esteem needs. That is, people want more than respect, they want status. They also propose that the top of the pyramid should include needs related to reproductive success, namely, mate attraction, mate retention and parenting. (Chances of attracting a mate are enhanced if one has achieved status, that is, esteem from others, and is included, safe and healthy.) Thus when the lower needs are satisfied, mate attraction, retention, and parenting needs have a better chance. In addition to adding these three needs related to reproductive success, Kenrick and his colleagues suggest two other major modifications of Maslow’s model. First, they suggested that any of the needs can operate at any time. So, a person looking to be included may still be worried about personal security. That is,
the needs can operate together rather than one at a time. Maslow would likely have no difficulty accepting this modification. The other modification seriously challenges Maslow’s overall emphasis. That is, Self-Actualization is not included in this revision of the pyramid. Kenrick argues that while people may enjoy fulfilling their potentials, doing so is not evolutionarily or reproductively relevant. In contrast, attaining status, attracting mates etc. are highly relevant.

If we were suggesting to Jim Burns a useful conception of motivation that is highly relevant to what leaders do, we too would omit self-actualization and focus on the other four steps in the Maslow pyramid, especially Esteem needs. That level would now be the top level. And we would suggest that it be expanded to be called something like Esteem and Value Needs or Esteem and Significance Needs. Leaders, in addition to finding ways to satisfy people’s physiological needs, and their needs for Safety and Belongingness, may have their greatest impact by making people feel valued and significant. At times leaders may do this by linking followers or potential followers to a specific Vision or Direction. At other times they can do it simply by treating people as if they have value within a valued group. That accomplished, they may then lead followers toward a particular goal of their own choosing, with the expectation that the followers will internalize that goal as one of their own. This distinction goes to the heart of a central question in the psychology of leadership. That is, to what extent do people follow because of their attachment to a leader’s Vision and Direction, and to what extent do they follow because of their attachment to the leader herself or himself. In most cases followers may be drawn forward and mobilized for both reasons. In fact, Freud emphasized that part of leaders “prestige” or “magnetic magic,” part of what made followers essentially love them, and direct their libido toward them, is the leaders deep – even fanatical – devotion to a cause.

Transforming Meaning and Motives
A good place to start thinking about how leaders can address people’s need for Esteem or Value is a fairly recent theory of which Jim may have been unaware, Terror Management Theory (TMT). Work on Terror Management Theory was slow in getting published during the 1990s since many reviewers simply did not believe either the theory or the data supporting it. However, since the theory made its breakthrough in the journals it has inspired hundreds of investigations that largely support it. Inspired by the anthropologist Ernest Becker, TMT proposes that human beings share with other animal species a strong survival instinct, but we are the only species who understand that this drive will ultimately be frustrated. We are all mortal, as President Kennedy mentioned in an important speech inviting the United States and the Soviet Union to reassess their relationship so as to avoid nuclear devastation. TMT holds that our knowledge of our mortality is terrifying and that human beings have devised two anxiety buffers to cope with the threat of death. They are reaffirmation of our self-worth, that is, a bolstering of self-esteem, and increased attachment and allegiance to our cultural world view, that is, our nation, our relevant ingroups, our leaders, our symbols, or our important philosophical convictions. By reaffirming that we are good, and that the things we belong to or value are also good, we are spared from feeling that in the end we are no more than decaying flesh. Our feeling that we are good and that what we stand for is good, may, depending on our specific circumstances and culture, include the belief that we will attain some kind of symbolic immortality, through our good works, or actual immortality by crossing over into some kind of afterlife. For example, publishing prominent papers or having things named after us may provide symbolic immortality. The most important implication of terror management theory is that human beings are terrified by their ultimate insignificance and worthlessness. We want to
feel that we have value, that we are in fact significant, that there is meaning to our existence. Feeling that we have worth, and that what we are linked to is good, we recover a sense of value.

Terror management theory holds that these anxiety buffers largely operate unconsciously. When our mortality is made salient we immediately suppress our fear of death, but those fears are still unconsciously active until our anxiety buffers have brought them down to baseline levels. One relevant group of studies supporting the theory shows that when mortality is made salient by having people write down their thoughts about such things as what will happen to them physically after they die, their endorsement of charismatic leaders as opposed to leaders whose style is more participative and inclusive rises dramatically. Charismatic leaders often make us feel that we are an important part of something great. That is, we have value and our vision or cause has value.

Starting from the idea that we have strong needs for value, significance and meaning, but that thoughts of our mortality threaten those needs, we can consider the various ways that leaders can gratify those needs, to some important degree. There are really two facets of leaders making us feel valuable. One is leaders behaving in ways that make us feel valued within the groups to which we belong. The other is leaders making us feel that our groups and their goals or missions have value.

An important psychological approach to the way leaders make people feel valued within groups is work on “procedural justice” by Thomas Tyler and his colleagues. Research on justice suggests, first, that within groups an authority’s procedural justice is more important to followers than distributive justice. That is, people care more about whether an authority or leader made a decision using fair procedures than about whether their outcomes are what they wanted. People consider whether they were listened to, whether they had a voice, and whether they were treated
with dignity and respect. These considerations trump getting what you want. And they are crucial in people voluntarily complying with authority, or going along with a leader. There is a sequence of psychological elements that produce this voluntary compliance. First, are leaders ethical and do they consider their views, establishing trust? Second, do they show respect for rights and treat individuals with dignity, giving them standing within the group? Third, are they neutral and unbiased, making decisions on the basis of evidence? When leaders give followers standing or voice, earn their trust, and decide honestly and without bias, they are perceived to be employing procedural justice. Very importantly, when a leader or authority treats you in a procedurally just manner, he or she is signaling that you have value within the group. This is especially important since the leader typically represents the values and opinions of the group as a whole, and if the leader conveys that you have value, that gives you important status within the group.

When you feel that the leader values you, and treats you fairly, you will feel that he or she has legitimacy, and legitimacy in turn creates the obligation to go along with leader’s decisions and direction. We should briefly note the crucial psychological sense among followers that a leader has legitimacy. In his book *The Mask of Command* John Keegan advises that military commanders, and by implication, other leaders, use coercion sparingly, so that they do not find their “power, essentially an artificial construct, dissipated beyond hope of recall.” A leader’s legitimacy and thus latitude to exercise power is very much in the minds of followers. Employing procedural justice is critical in building, through legitimacy, a leader’s ability to command followers. It is of great interest that President Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, chaired by Charles H. Ramsey and Laurie Robinson, emphasizes many insights from
elements of procedural justice research in their discussions of building better police-community relations.

If a leader’s procedural justice provides followers with a sense of value within a group, issues of the value of one’s group, especially in relation to other groups, are equally important. Within psychology, Social Identity Theory argues that self-esteem is based on both people’s sense of personal virtue and effectiveness (that as one psychologist put it, the person has avoided cognitive dissonance from feeling either stupid or guilty) and her or his “social identity,” or sense of the groups to which they belong and the value of each one. This view holds that groups compete with other groups for status and value, at least in the minds of group members, and that this competition creates an intergroup dynamic of ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination. People belong to many different groups, just as they have multiple facets to their individual personalities, and the overall value of their social identity is based on the value attached to each of those groups. People need leaders to tell them both that they are significant within their group and that their group is effective and ethical.

The importance of leaders and leadership in creating a sense of positive identity, on both the individual and group level, is highlighted in Howard Gardner’s book *Leading Minds*. Gardner proposes that leaders influence significant numbers of their fellow human beings through their words and/or example and that they do so through stories that they both relate and embody. Furthermore, the most powerful stories are stories about identity, about the leader’s identity and followers’ personal identities and the identity of their group. The story concept underlines the fact that leaders frequently offer a dynamic perspective, about where a group has come from, where it is going, and what obstacles it has faced and his facing. Leaders and followers are central and heroic figures in these dramatic narratives. Gardner’s examples include
Robert Oppenheimer who successfully led the Manhattan Project to completion by relating, through what he said and what he did, a story of dedicated scientists pushing back the frontiers of knowledge to build a weapon that would win the war against despotism but also, perhaps, make future wars unthinkable. That story was important in mobilizing thousands of young scientists toward the common goal of creating the atomic bomb. Another example is Pope John XXIII, who reached back to the early teachings of Jesus to relate a story about a caring, nonhierarchical, inclusive church that concerned itself with uplifting the human condition.

Gardner argues, in a way that resonates with Burns’ emphasis on leaders mobilizing followers “in competition or conflict with others,” that there are counterstories to most leaders’ narratives. Followers are often presented with competing stories about who they are and what goals and challenges lie ahead. Which stories prevail depends on complex interactions between the nature of the identity story that leaders relate, and the mind set with which followers process competing stories. Gardner first makes an important distinction between stories that are inclusive vs. exclusive. Most of the leaders Gardner considers in detail told an inclusionary story. The identity they related to their followers embraced the similarity and common humanity of different kinds of people, and their shared challenges. Pope John’s simple warmth and humanity recognized the value of non-Catholics and even non-Christians. Working with Soviet and American leaders, including Khrushchev and Kennedy, in the early 1960s, he once said to a Russian diplomat, “I know you are an atheist, but won’t you accept an old man’s blessing.” George Marshall, as Secretary of State in the 1940s, told an inclusionary story about how Americans needed to help Europeans, both former allies and former enemies, after World War II to take the lead in rebuilding the world economy. On the other hand, Hitler told an exclusionary
story about a “master race” that was destined to rule the world in part by ridding it of lesser advanced and virtuous groups.

Whether inclusionary or exclusionary stories prevail depends on in large measure on the level of sophistication with which potential followers understand the story. Gardner describes the “unschooled” or five year old mind that tends to see the world in rigid good and evil categories, through what he refers to as a Star Wars mentality. Exclusionary “us vs. them” stories appeal to this simple way of thinking. While adults may achieve higher levels of cognitive sophistication, they can be pulled back to a simpler more primitive way of thinking by powerful exclusionary stories. Cognitive development as described by Piaget, where once an individual reaches a more sophisticated level of thinking there is no back sliding does not quite capture the way people process leaders’ stories. A more Freudian perspective incorporates the fact that people can regress to more primitive modes of thinking and feeling, making them open to simple, exclusionary stories.

Gardner’s discussion of “minds” that differ in their level of sophistication, and that leaders can pull people back or attempt to pull them forward is entirely consistent with Burns considerations of cognitive, emotional and moral stages of development, and their relevance to transforming leadership. Transforming leaders can be seen to not only raise levels of motivation and morality, but also levels of cognitive processing. In this regard, as Burns notes, the theories of Erikson and Kohlberg about adult development are highly relevant to our understanding of transforming leadership.

In Erikson’s exploration of the “eight ages of man” and the psychological “crisis” associated with each one, the fifth stage, generally experienced in adolescence, was the time and place where people either achieved a coherent ego identity or fell victim to role or identity
confusion. Leaders, as powerful identity figures, could help adolescents and young adults figure out who they were, and shape both their personal identities and their social identities. However, the stories of identity to which people resonate continue to develop in adulthood. Each stage of adult development offers leaders and followers the possibility of attaining ever higher levels of motivation and morality, that can move people toward Maslow’s state of self-transcendence.

Of particular relevance here is Erikson’s seventh stage, the adult era during which people may achieve a sense of generativity. The psychological focus of generativity is “the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation.” Beside a need to have and mentor one’s own children, more broadly it includes the need to “to be needed” and to find and develop “other forms of altruistic concern and creativity.” It includes “productivity and creativity” along with parenting. Erikson’s idea resonates, of course, to Kenrick’s emphasis on parenting and to the theme of altruism that can be seen to be central to transforming leadership. Erikson argued that adults failing to develop a sense of generativity fall into a sense of stagnation or boredom, a feeling of insignificance reminiscent of Robert Frost’s hired hand who had “nothing to look backward to with pride, and nothing to look forward to with hope.”

The sense of lacking meaning in adulthood manifesting itself as a sense of stagnation takes a different turn in late adulthood, when one may fall victim to a sense of despair rather than resolve the life cycle’s final crisis with a positive sense of integrity, a sense that one “has taken care of things and people” and has been “the originator of others and the generator of things and ideas.” In both of these stages the need to feel that one has value and significance is paramount, along with the need to attain those feelings by giving creatively to others.

Although the connection may be tenuous, we can see the psychological crises of adult development as being linked to both cognitive development as described by Gardner and moral
development as described by Kohlberg. Gardner’s “ten-year old mind” is marked by “fairness to a fault,” a tendency to be concerned with more than one’s own side of a story or just one point of view. The individual with a “fifteen-year old mind” “revels in relativism,” that is, has a broader perspective, and the capacity to take other people’s point of view and see the world from their vantage point. This capacity to see the world from multiple perspectives enables what Kohlberg called post-conventional morality where ethical judgments are not based on conventional wisdom or values but rather one’s own carefully deliberated morality based on fundamental ethical principles and values such as justice and equality. The fact that post-conventional morality is based on perspective taking, an orientation that psychological research shows degrades with power, highlights the potential for altruistic, generative behavior among mature adults. People who have reached these higher levels of emotional, cognitive, and moral development described by Erikson, Gardner and Kohlberg are likely to have the “resource and motive,” in Burns’ terms, to be transforming leaders, raising others as well as themselves to higher levels of motivation and morality. They will have discovered that their powerful need for value and significance propels them to lead and transform others in the direction of values that produce significant, lasting and positive change.

The Hero’s Transforming Journey

Our hypothetical conversation with Jim Burns in the present day, with our emphasis on the need for value and significance, would also include a discussion of the connection that we’ve recently drawn between leadership and heroism. We’ve argued that all heroes are leaders, and that their leadership is either direct or indirect, to use Gardner’s distinction. Our analysis of heroism borrows heavily from the work of Joseph Campbell, a comparative mythologist who studied medieval literature and world religions. Campbell’s remarkable book, *The Hero With a
Thousand Faces, became one of the most widely read and influential books of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. While studying hero myths from around the world, Campbell noticed a distinct pattern. It didn't matter where or when a particular myth was created; the world's hero stories were all strikingly similar to one another. According to Campbell, the hero in these stories 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 prevails and then bestows a gift to society. In short, heroes have motives that evolve and produce a personal transformation that includes the development of a motive to improve the lives of others. Burns may not have known it, but his theory of transforming leadership describes the hero’s journey to a tee.

Campbell proposed that this prototypical heroic journey, which he called the hero monomyth, consists of three parts: departure, initiation, and return. The 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 truth about themselves and the world. The initiation phase 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. Good mentors are leaders in the classic sense; they help others discover their strengths and raise them to new levels of competence and morality. 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 society. This transition from self-transformation to a desire for a wider, social transformation is similar to Maslow’s distinction between the need for self-actualization and the need for self-transcendence. It also bears a resemblance to the progression from Erik Erikson’s 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 ascendency from followership to leadership. In this sense it is similar to the dramatic story form that Gardner suggests leaders use to influence followers’ identities. The hero evolves from one who is incomplete and in need of mentoring to one who becomes a mentoring figure for others. The process is remarkably similar to Jim Burns’ vision of followers being elevated by mentors and leaders to create a “new cadre of leaders.”

As noted earlier, Kenrick and his colleagues have emphasized the important human need to attract mates, retain mates, and enjoy reproductive success. The result of these needs is, of course, the parenting of children. We suggest that this parenting need reflects an expression of biological and psychological motives, not the least of which is the need to mentor. Not everyone possesses this “need to lead”. But evolutionary forces do conspire to pull us toward reproduction
and the mentoring of offspring who share our genetic heritage. Terror management theory describes our need to achieve a kind of symbolic immortality through “great works”. Many of us consider our children to be our greatest work, affording us an opportunity to achieve immortality that transcends any type of symbolic contribution. Parenting endows our lives with meaning and mentoring.

Burns suggested in 1978 that “leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.” How might this elevation operate? Our research on heroic leadership suggests that heroes lead by example, demonstrating high degrees of competence and morality to followers. We suggest that a heroic leader’s demonstration of exemplary morality can exert an elevating effect on followers. Recent work suggests that moral exemplars evoke a unique emotional response which Jonathan Haidt and his colleagues have, in fact, called elevation. Haidt borrowed the term “elevation” from Thomas Jefferson, who used the phrase moral elevation to describe the euphoric feeling one gets when reading great literature. When people experience elevation, they feel a mix of awe, reverence, and admiration for a morally beautiful act. The emotion is described as similar to calmness, warmth, and love. Haidt argues that elevation is “elicited by acts of virtue or moral beauty; it causes warm, open feelings in the chest”. Most importantly, the feeling of elevation has a concomitant behavioral component: A desire to become a better person. Elevation “motivates people to behave more virtuously themselves.” A form of moral self-efficacy, elevation transforms people into believing they are capable of engaging in significant prosocial action.

Transforming Needs and Heroic Leaders
In our most recent work on heroic leadership, we have proposed a taxonomy of heroism that is based on the social influence that heroic leaders wield with their followers and society as a whole. Specifically, our taxonomic model offers categories of heroism based on the depth, breadth, duration, direction, stability, development, authenticity, transparency, and trajectory of social influence. Our taxonomy proposes ten different types of heroes, but for the purposes in this chapter we focus on one hero type in particular: Transitional Heroes. The idea that heroes can be transitional is based on our observation that people’s choices of heroes change as a result of changes in people’s needs and motives. As human beings mature, their goals, values, emotional states, cognitive abilities, and priorities tend to shift and evolve in significant ways. The participants in our studies have told us that their past heroes have corresponded to their life circumstances. When our participants were competitive soccer players, Pele and Mia Hamm were their heroes. When they battled cancer, family members who successfully fought cancer were their heroes. As our needs evolve naturally, so do our choice of heroes.

The evolving nature of need-based heroism was illustrated in 1983 by legendary Tonight Show host Johnny Carson. At that time, Carson was embroiled in a contentious divorce from his third wife Joanna. The divorce proved to be a costly one for Carson, both emotionally and financially. One night, during his Tonight Show opening monologue, Carson couldn’t resist making light of his difficult divorce. “I remember being a kid, age 7 or 8,” he said. “Babe Ruth was my hero. Then when I first got into show business, Jack Benny was my hero. Now my hero is Henry VIII” (Carson, 2003). With this joke, Carson illustrated the need-based origin of heroism as well as the dynamic nature of heroic leadership. Our psychological needs dictate our choice of heroes, and as these needs inevitably shift over time, so do our preferences for heroes.
and heroic leaders. Johnny Carson’s quip has inspired us to call our tendency to choose heroes that match our current needs the *Johnny Carson Effect*.

**Conclusion**

A full consideration of human motives particularly relevant to leadership is prompted by James MacGregor Burns’ interest in Abraham Maslow’s hierarchical theory of motivation, and its principle that motives can grow, develop and change throughout the life cycle, along with other stages or patterns of development, whether they be cognitive, emotional and moral. The range of human motives, particularly the need to have value and be significant, opens to potential leaders ways of attracting followers to themselves and their causes. In the case of transforming leaders, as defined by Burns, these leaders and causes will engage followers in ways that raise both leaders and followers to higher levels of motivation and morality. This is a reassuring view. At the same time, we should be alert to the fact that this idealized vision of what transpires between leaders and followers may not always, or even often, play out in specific cases. Motives and morals can be aroused, gratified and transformed by leaders for good or ill. The human capacity to justify almost any activity undertaken by their groups should be of grave concern to us as we consider the ways leaders address people’s needs for esteem, value and significance.

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