

“Exclusive” and “Inclusive” Visions of Heroism and Democracy

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Abstract Two contrasting visions of heroism and democracy have evolved side by side. An “exclusive” vision presents democracy as involving heroic leadership by exceptional individuals along with relatively limited volunteer participation by ordinary citizens. This “exclusive” vision has been supported by the personalization of politics, as well as the increased importance of elite leaders in an era of candidate-centered democracy. In contrast, an “inclusive” vision depicts heroism as integral to everyday life for ordinary people, and widespread volunteer participation in social life as normative in all democracies. In a study we conducted that involved a nationally representative sample of 4,000 adults in the United States, about a third reported considerable volunteering, and one out of five reported having carried out a heroic act. A detailed analysis of types of volunteering and heroism supports an inclusive vision of heroism and democracy. However, a number of trends associated with globalization and technology suggest increasing challenges to this inclusive vision.

Keywords Heroic imagination · Democracy and psychology · Minority-majority differences

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Democracy is no single melody, but a mix of possible conventions and rules.
Anderson (2000, p. 20)

Huntington (1991, 2009) identified three major waves of democratization in the modern world, the most recent being the doubling of the number of democracies between 1974 and 1990. The ongoing large-scale changes associated with the “Arab Spring” uprisings suggest that the momentum of democratization is continuing, reflecting the possibility that globalization is having an “additive” impact on democratic movements (Moghaddam 2013). However, the new waves of democratization are also highlighting the idea that there are many different kinds of democracies, and the newly emerging democracies of Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe could become very different from one another, and from traditional Western democracies.

Differences between visions of democracy are also evident in Western societies. We do not mean this only in the obvious ways in which Western democracies differ, for example how democracy in the United States differs from parliamentary democracy as practiced in the United Kingdom. Rather, we refer to a deeper and subtler difference in two contrasting visions of democracy emerging in the Twenty First Century, magnified by technological and globalization trends. These two visions are associated with different conceptions of heroism and public participation: the first “exclusive,” glorifying the role of “great” heroic leaders and giving relatively less importance to the role of ordinary citizens; the second “inclusive,” according to which heroism is integral to everyday social life, and the participatory role of ordinary citizens in democracy is normative. We now examine both of these visions.

The “Exclusive” Vision of Heroism and Democracy

A powerful theme in the “exclusive” vision of democracy is the role played by the heroic leader, whose activities and image dominate the rest of society. In this section, we argue that there are three different facets to the image of the heroic leader. First, the role of the heroic leader has become even more important, as a result of changes in technology and the personalization of politics. Second, as the role of the heroic leader has expanded and become more prominent, the role of ordinary citizens has been overshadowed and actually diminished. Third, some interpretations of psychological research have endorsed a limited role for ordinary citizens in democracy.

Political leadership in major democracies has increasingly become personalized (Caprara and Zimbardo 2004), in the sense that single individuals have come to be the focus of concentrated public and media attention. Ohr (2011) has summarized the changed situation of leadership in major democracies in this way, “In a presidential system like that of the United States, personalization is more or less the natural state of affairs, with ‘candidate centered’ election campaigns, a highly personalized media coverage of politics, and an electorate for whom the candidates’ personal qualities play a significant role when casting the ballot” (p.11). This change has come about in part because of technological innovations, and particularly the spread of television (Garzia 2011). Integral to these changes is the shift in focus away from political groups, parties, and citizens in general to individual leaders with their “manufactured

images” (Newman 1999) streamed to almost every household through television and Internet technology.

On the one hand, the personalization of politics involves the general public coming to see political leaders as “essentially similar to us” (Caprara and Zimbardo 2004, p. 590), but on the other hand, the concentrated focus on individual leaders achieved through television and the new electronic communications systems magnifies the role of these leaders, and their “manufactured images” endorse a new kind of heroic leadership. In an era of continuous campaigning costing billions of dollars, an armies of networked supporters are helping to magnify the role of the leader. In comparison, groups and ordinary citizens become overshadowed. This “exclusive” vision of leadership in democracy is reinforced in some respects by the “uninformed and unengaged” image of ordinary citizens presented by some important lines of empirical research, leading to a somber conclusion, “...based on several decades of empirical research...American citizens, despite participating in a long-standing and reasonably robust democracy, fall far short on almost every normative criterion,” (Borgida et al. 2009, pp. 2–3).

Thus, the “exclusive” vision celebrates the role of exceptional and sometimes heroic leaders and, in contrast, depicts ordinary people as “falling short” on the requirements of active and informed participation in democracy. According to this vision, heroism is a rare personal trait, and typically found only among exceptional leaders, and it is to these leaders, rather than to ordinary citizens, that we must look to safeguard democracy. We are reminded of poet John Milton’s view, “Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil.” The historical view of the hero also suggests that there is something innately special about heroes. Historian Lucy Hughes-Hallett (2004, p.17) writes, “There are men, wrote Aristotle, so godlike, so exceptional, that they naturally, by right of their extraordinary gifts, transcend all moral judgment or constitutional control: ‘There is no law which embraces men of that caliber: they are themselves law.’”

The “Inclusive” Vision of Heroism and Democracy

In contrast to a focus on “heroic leadership” (Wansink et al. 2008), the “inclusive” vision assumes heroism to be a feature of everyday life, and the participatory role of ordinary people to be both normative and essential to democracy.

An important inroad into the nature of the role of ordinary citizens in democracy is research on volunteerism, and participation in volunteer activities broadly (Musick and Wilson 2008). At the level of the individual, research has identified a number of personality features, such as extroversion and agreeableness (Omoto et al. 2010) and also spirituality (Einolf 2011), as being associated with higher volunteerism. At the societal level, it has been proposed that increasing volunteerism is integral to a larger process of democratization, and some positive signs for the future have been identified. For example, in the United States, volunteerism among high school seniors has been increasing steadily (Wilson 2012). Of course, critics could argue that such increases are for self-serving reasons, such as high-school students “padding” their credentials through volunteerism in order to become more competitive college applicants. Also, critics could argue that more Americans are “bowling alone” and are becoming less engaged in civic life (Putnam 2000). However, such criticisms do not negate the

proposition that the civic act of volunteering is integral to democracy, and that evidence (Einolf 2009) suggests the future of volunteerism is robust in the United States, with both younger and older Americans likely to routinely engage in higher levels of volunteerism as the baby-boom generation, born 1946 to 1955, join the elderly.

The “inclusive” vision also proposes that heroism is normative in the everyday lives of ordinary people, rather than unique to exceptional heroic leaders. This proposition derives directly from a long tradition of psychological research on the power of situations to influence individual behavior. The classic studies of Sherif (1936) and Asch (1956) demonstrated that individuals can be influenced by the situation to conform to arbitrary and incorrect social norms, and those of Milgram (1974) and Zimbardo (2007) dramatically demonstrated how the power of the situation could lead ordinary people to carry out extraordinary actions that can seriously harm others. Thus, the major concern of researchers in the social arena has been to explore the role and power of situational factors that result in harm and injury to others. But the impact of the situation is not always negative. Is it possible that the “banality of evil” as Hannah Arendt (1963/1994) described mass murderer Adolf Eichmann, has a counterpart in the “banality of heroism” (Blau et al. 2009)?

Research on “grounded cognition” (Barsalou 2008), “situated cognition” (Robbins and Aydede 2008), and the integration of culture and neuroscience (Harré and Moghaddam 2012), has highlighted the power of the situation in shaping cognitive and neurological processes, including when “contextual healing” and other practical benefits arise (Miller and Kaptchuk 2008). We propose that the power of the situation is also centrally important in heroic behavior: Just as extraordinary situations can lead people with normal psychological profiles to do extraordinary harm to others (Zimbardo 2007), extraordinary situations can lead such people to carry out extraordinary acts of good, including heroic ones. From this perspective, heroism does not only arise from historic “heroic leaders,” but it can also arise when ordinary people find themselves in extraordinary situations and when so challenged feel called upon to do “amazing” things for the good of humanity. They stand up, speak out, and take action against injustice of all kinds.

We are, then, comparing two different visions of heroism and participation in democracy. The “exclusive” vision views heroism as unique to truly extraordinary leaders, and the increased focus on such individuals in the television era has overshadowed the participation and widespread role of ordinary people in democracy. In contrast, the “inclusive” vision sees heroism as extraordinary acts that arise out of extraordinary circumstances in which ordinary people find themselves. According to this view, heroism is part of everyday social life. It is the transformation of the highest personal virtue of compassion for others into the highest civic virtue of heroic action to help others in need or in defense of a moral cause—aware of potential risks and costs. Also, rather than being disengaged and passive, many ordinary people carry out volunteer acts regularly as engaged citizens in society.

Methods

This research employed a nationally representative probability sample of 4,000 adults, age 18 and older, selected randomly from an Internet-enabled panel maintained by

Knowledge Networks (KN). KN panel members are recruited through a random digit telephone dialing system based on a sample frame covering the entire United States. In contrast to voluntary, “opt-in” Web surveys, which recruit participants of unknown characteristics via “blind” Internet solicitations, KN panel members are selected on the basis of known, non-zero probabilities. Individuals are not permitted to volunteer or self-select for participation in the KN panel. In addition, individuals who lack either computers or Internet access are provided equipment or access without charge. KN panel-based surveys have demonstrated acceptable concordance with a variety of “benchmark” large-scale surveys (e.g., Baker et al. 2003; Dennis and Li 2007; Heeren et al. 2008).

In the present study, the response rate to invitations to participate was 71 %. To reduce the effects of potential non-response and non-coverage bias, post-stratification sample weights¹ incorporating the probability of participant selection based on age, sex, race and ethnicity benchmarks from the most recent available Current Population Survey and supplements were employed in all statistical analyses using algorithms modified for complex survey designs in the statistical software packages STATA (StataCorp 2007).

Measures

Volunteer Activity

Participants were classified as *volunteers* if they answered affirmatively to the question, “In the last 12 months, have you performed any UNPAID (except perhaps for except for personal expenses) VOLUNTEER activity through or for an organization?” Participants were asked to estimate the number of hours engaged in volunteering over the year, as well as the type of organization for which volunteer services were provided.

Heroic Actions

Participants were classified as *heroes* if they responded affirmatively to the question “Have you ever done something that other people—not necessarily you yourself—considered a heroic act or deed?” Participants were also asked to identify “... any of

¹ Complete population demographics for the KN Panel are known prior to survey recruitment. Consequently, a unique advantage of sampling from a pre-recruited web-enabled panel is that the socio-demographic characteristics of panel members who declined the invitation to participate can be unambiguously described. In this study, people who declined to participate were more likely to be woman, under age 30, Black or Hispanic, and have a high school or less education. Statistical analyses that fail to account for response rate differences among such subgroups of participants can bias estimates of effects and yield imprecise and misleading standard errors and confidence intervals. Sampling weights are typically employed to reduce bias of this kind. Details regarding the Knowledge Networks panel design and post-stratification sample weighting is available on-line at <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp/docs>. Briefly, an iterative process is used to create weights that are inversely proportional to the probability of selecting each subject, i.e., the proportion of people in the population belonging to each “cell” or cross-classification by age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, income, and geographic region groups. Participants in over-represented cells are weighted less; participants in under-represented cells are weighted more. Iteration is continued until the distribution of weighted data converges on the most recently available U.S. Census distributions for each cell. Sampling weights are employed in subsequent statistical analyses to adjust for response rate and coverage biases and to strengthen the representativeness of results.

the following actions that are most similar to or best resemble your heroic act: Helping another person in a dangerous emergency; “blowing the whistle” on an injustice with awareness of the personal risk or threat to yourself involved; sacrifice on behalf of a non-relative or stranger, such as an organ donation; defying unjust authority, or other.” Participants who responded “other” were further prompted to provide a brief, open-ended response for further clarification, which were subsequently categorized by two research assistants as altruistic or non-altruistic.

Results

A majority (58 %) of U.S. adults reported no volunteer activity during the prior year nor any heroic act over their lifetime. In contrast, nearly a third (32 %) reported volunteering, acting for or through a non-profit organization and donating an average of 59 h of volunteer activity during the prior year. One out of five Americans (20 %) reported that they had once performed a heroic act. Among participants who reported heroic acts, 55 % had helped someone during an emergency, 8 % confronted an injustice, 14 % had defied unjust authority, and 5 % had sacrificed for a stranger. Including respondents who endorsed the “other” category of heroic acts, 58 % of those who reported heroic acts could be classified as having performed *altruistic* acts of heroism. Heroic acts were reported by 29 % of volunteers compared to only 16 % of respondents who had not volunteered in the previous year.

Table 1 shows the distribution of socio-demographic indicators within four subgroups: NEITHER HERO NOR VOLUNTEER, i.e., participants who reported neither activity (59.4 %); VOLUNTEERS ONLY, who claimed no heroic act (20.9 %); VOLUNTEERS AND HEROES, who reported both actions (8.5 %); and HEROES ONLY, who reported no volunteering (11.2 %). Significantly greater proportions of men, adults between 45 and 59 years of age, individuals with some college education, as well as participants who reported a history of military service were observed within both categories of VOLUNTEERS AND HEROES as well as HEROES ONLY. Significantly fewer Non-Hispanic Whites belonged to either hero group, while significantly more Blacks belonged to HEROES ONLY. Although high school educated participants were less prevalent within HEROES ONLY, participants with less than a high school education were significantly more prevalent within HEROES ONLY. In contrast to either hero group, VOLUNTEERS ONLY had significantly fewer participants with annual household incomes under \$20,000, more participants age 60 or older, and more participants with a Bachelors degree or additional postgraduate education. Significantly fewer urban residents, multiple non-Hispanic race/ethnicities, or participants with military experience characterized the group of participants who claimed neither heroic nor volunteer activity.

However, although co-variations in education, income, race/ethnicity, and other variables are expected, the univariate analyses of proportions shown in Table 1 “ignore” correlations among socio-demographic variables. Consequently, a multivariate multinomial logistic regression was employed to evaluate relationships among socio-demographic variables and volunteer/hero subgroups. In this form of multivariate analysis, predictor effects are expressed as Relative Risk Ratios (RRR), which, similar to odds ratios, index the estimated rate (or odds) of belonging to a volunteer/hero subgroup relative to the rate in the NEITHER HERO NOR VOLUNTEER “base”

Table 1 Univariate comparisons of socio-demographic distributions by categories of altruistic actions

Sociodemographic variable	Altruistic action			
	Neither volunteer nor hero	Volunteer only	Volunteer and hero	Hero only
Male	46.3	46.6	<i>59.1***</i>	<i>54.4**</i>
Age group				
18–29	22.6	20.2	19.4	21.4
30–44	27.2	26.4	26.9	26.8
45–59	26.9	26.3	<i>32.9**</i>	<i>34.1**</i>
60+	23.3	<i>27.1**</i>	20.8	<i>17.8**</i>
Race/Ethnicity				
White, non-Hispanic	74.0	75.4	<i>66.6**</i>	<i>69.3**</i>
Black, non-Hispanic	9.3	7.9	11.4	<i>12.2**</i>
Other, non-Hispanic	4.5	5.0	5.7	4.0
Hispanic	11.5	10.4	14.2	13.1
Multiple, non-Hispanic	<i>.7**</i>	1.4	2.1	1.4
Education				
<High school	12.8	9.5	10.2	<i>15.0**</i>
High school	34.2	28.9	27.9	<i>25.8**</i>
Some college	25.6	29.9	<i>36.8***</i>	<i>32.6**</i>
B.A. degree or higher	<i>27.5**</i>	<i>31.7**</i>	25.2	26.6
Household income				
<\$20,000	15.0	<i>10.6***</i>	18.0	<i>20.0***</i>
\$20,000–\$59,000	45.2	46.2	44.6	<i>38.5**</i>
>\$59,000	39.8	43.2	37.4	41.6
Urban residence	<i>81.2***</i>	84.2	85.9	84.2
Military service	<i>12.2***</i>	14.1	<i>21.6***</i>	<i>18.2***</i>

Italicized percentages differ significantly from the pooled remainder of the sample at * $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, or *** $p < .001$

group. All socio-demographic variables were included in the analysis; thus, the RRR for each socio-demographic variable is adjusted statistically to take into account differences among all remaining variables. Table 2 provides only the statistically significant results.

After controlling statistically for all demographic variables, the odds of belonging to VOLUNTEER AND HEROES were 80 % greater among men than women. The odds of belonging to either hero subgroup—VOLUNTEERS AND HEROES or HEROES ONLY—increased 60 % with military service. Partial, B.A. degree or advanced college education also significantly increased the likelihood of membership in VOLUNTEERS ONLY, doubled the odds of belonging to VOLUNTEERS AND HEROES, but had no significant relationship with HEROES ONLY. As indicated by effects sizes less than 1.0, participants between the ages of 18 and 29 were *less likely* to be VOLUNTEERS AND HEROES, while participants age 60 and older were less likely to be HEROES ONLY. An annual household income under \$20,000 significantly decreased the odds of belonging to VOLUNTEERS ONLY, but significantly increased the odds of belong to HEROES ONLY.

Table 2 Results of a multivariate, multinomial logistic regression of altruistic action groups on socio-demographic variables (Only statistically significant effects are shown)

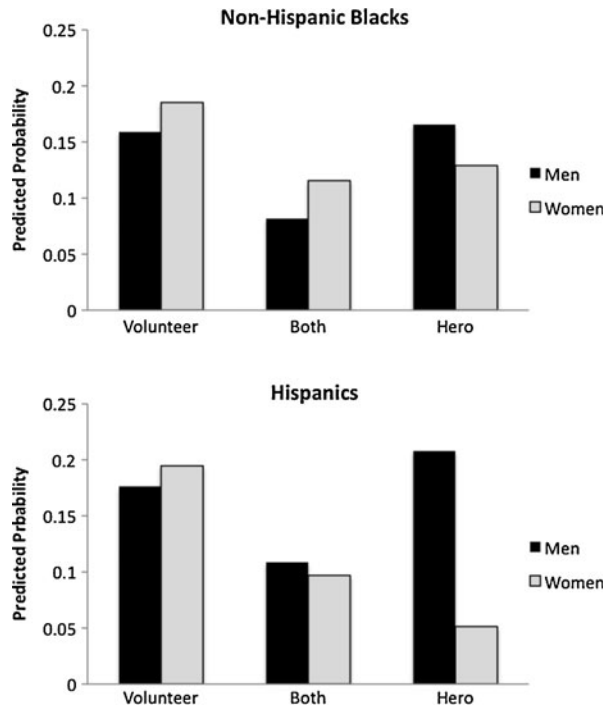
Predictor	Altruistic groups								
	Volunteer only			Volunteer and hero			Hero only		
	RRR	SE	<i>p</i> <	RRR	SE	<i>p</i> <	RRR	SE	<i>p</i> <
Male				1.80	.34	.002			
Age									
18–29				.63	.14	.05			
60+							.59	.11	.004
Race/Ethnicity									
Black, NH				2.17	.78	.03			
Male×Black				.33	.18	.04			
Hispanic							.43	.16	.03
Male×Hispanic							4.75	2.18	.001
Education									
High school							.63	.14	.04
Some college	1.73	.35	.006	2.07	.62	.02			
B.A. degree or higher	1.59	.32	.02						
Household income									
<\$20,000	.72	.12	.05				1.59	.31	.02
Military service				1.62	.34	.02	1.60	.31	.01

The multivariate regression was statistically significant ($F(57,3969)=2.92, p<.0001, pseudo R^2=.025$). All socio-demographic variables listed in Table 1 were included as covariates. The “base” or comparison group represents participants who reported no volunteer or heroic actions. A Relative Risk Ratio (RRR) less than 1.0 signifies an increased probability of the predictor belonging to the *base* group. Main effects for race/ethnicity must be interpreted in conjunction with sex interactions. See text and Fig. 1 for discussion of the interpretation of the sex \times race/ethnicity interaction

Parenthetically, please note that a RRR less than 1.0 indicates that membership was more likely in the base group. For example, the RRR for participants age 60 and over was .59 for HEROES ONLY; thus, participants age 60 and older were less likely within the HEROES ONLY subgroup. The reciprocal of this effect (i.e., $1/.59=1.70$) is equivalent to the odds of belonging to the base group—NEITHER HERO NOR VOLUNTEER, therefore, the odds of adults 60 and older belonging to NEITHER HERO NOR VOLUNTEER was 70 % greater than belonging to HEROES ONLY.

After accounting for all socio-demographic variables, age, college education, military service, and low income significantly differentiated volunteers and heroes. Race and ethnicity also differentiated VOLUNTEERS AND HEROES from HEROES ONLY significantly, but in conjunction with sex differences. The interactions with sex for non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanics shown in Table 2 are displayed graphically in Fig. 1. Figure 1 provides the mean predicted probability of membership in volunteer/hero subgroups by sex for Blacks and Hispanics. Thus, on average, Black men were more likely members of the HEROES ONLY subgroup, while Black women more likely among VOLUNTEERS ONLY or both VOLUNTEERS AND HEROES. Hispanic men

Fig. 1 Mean predicted probability of reported volunteering, heroism, or both by Black or Hispanic race/ethnicity



were even more likely members of HEROES ONLY, while the probability of Hispanic men and women belonging to VOLUNTEERS ONLY or VOLUNTEERS AND HEROES did not differ significantly—were equally highly represented. Thus, we can conclude that race and ethnicity—being African American or Hispanic American—matter significantly in fostering heroic actions.

Although causal or temporal sequences cannot be established conclusively in cross-sectional data, volunteer acts were restricted to the prior year, while heroic acts could have occurred at any time. Even after controlling for sex, age, race/ethnicity, education, annual household income, urban residence, and military service, a logistic regression analysis revealed that reporting a heroic act more than doubled the odds of volunteering ($OR=2.14, p<.0001$). Moreover, the odds of volunteering increased significantly if the heroic act was described by participants as providing help in a dangerous situation ($OR=2.47, p<.0001$), “blowing the whistle” on something corrupt ($OR=3.55, p<.0001$), or sacrificing on behalf of another ($OR=2.18, p<.04$).

Discussion

We assessed two contrasting visions of heroism and volunteer participation in democracy among a representative sample of Americans. The first vision, “exclusive,” glorifies “heroic leadership,” depicted as rare, and arising out of the special innate qualities of exceptional individuals. From this viewpoint, even volunteer participation among ordinary people is less common. The second vision, “inclusive,” depicts both heroism and volunteer participation as normative among ordinary people in democracies. We

argued that just as extraordinary situations (such as those created experimentally by Milgram 1974 and Zimbardo 2007, and all too evident in many war contexts, such as the Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq) could result in ordinary people seriously harming others, extraordinary situations can also result in the opposite outcome of ordinary people carrying out heroic acts that benefit others. Thus, we postulated that heroism can arise out of the demands of the situation, and that many ordinary people can and do act heroically under certain conditions.

A possible criticism of our methodology is that we left it up to the participants to determine what qualifies as acts of heroism. There is some danger that respondents might interpret heroism “incorrectly” and exaggerate their positive acts (Carpenter and Myers 2010). On the other hand, who better than a representative sample of the population to decide the question of what counts as heroism? As Eagly and Becker (2005) noted, “Heroism is socially constructed on the basis of people’s observations of others’ behaviors and the sharing of these observations within a culture” (p. 344). Following this logic, we tapped into people’s observations of heroism. Moreover, the participants specified categories of heroic acts, and these categories help to further explain the source of the heroic actions.

Among the participants who reported heroic acts, by far the largest group did so during an emergency (55 %, as compared to the next largest group, 14 % who had acted heroically by defying unjust authority). This finding supports the “inclusive” vision of heroism: these ordinary Americans took heroic action when the circumstances called for such action. Our results suggest that in emergency situations, many ordinary people step forward to act heroically. One thinks, for example, of the passengers on United Airlines flight 93 on 9/11, ordinary citizens who immortalized the phrase “Let’s roll” as they attacked the terrorists who hijacked their plane. They all died trying to prevent the terrorists from using the hijacked plane as a weapon against targets on American soil. It was the unexpected emergency situation that gave them the opportunity to act heroically, a uniquely challenging opportunity that some of them seized.

This situational perspective also accounts, we believe, for the differences found in heroism across sex and age groups. Women and men are given different and unequal opportunities for demonstrating heroism, and one way to study heroism across sexes is to gather data only from settings populated by both sexes, a strategy used by Becker and Eagly (2004). By leaving it open for participants to report on acts of heroism in all domains of life, we created opportunities for men to report heroism in domains, such as the military or emergency first responders, where women are not equally represented. Not surprisingly, therefore, the odds of being both volunteer and hero were higher for men. Similarly, younger people have had fewer opportunities to carry out heroic acts and to volunteer over the course of their shorter lives, and so they were lower on these measures than older participants. Again, situational opportunities are the best explanation for this difference. The finding that Black and Hispanic men were more likely to be members of the “heroes only” sub-group is also best explained by considering the greater opportunities available to men, relative to women, to act heroically.

The heroism and volunteerism reported by Black and Hispanic men and women might be surprising, given the well-established idea that pro-social behaviors arise out of positive experiences earlier in life (Penner et al. 2005). The difficult life conditions of many Blacks and Hispanics, whose health and quality of life is negatively impacted by

their experiences of relative deprivation (Marmot 2004), might lead us to expect much lower levels of pro-social behavior among these groups. However, Vollhardt (2009) has persuasively argued for the concept of “altruism born of suffering,” the idea that suffering can actually strengthen rather than weaken the motivation to help others. We believe the heroic acts reported by minorities can in part be explained through “altruism born of suffering.” However, we plan to conduct additional research to determine if race and ethnicity influence heroic actions across socio-economic classes or rather, is influenced by greater opportunities of those people who live in inner cities, or high crime areas.

The finding that heroic acts are for many people normative in everyday life, and that volunteer participation is at a robust level in the lives of Americans, bodes well for an “inclusive” vision of democracy, and also has implications for the role of research on “everyday heroism” in support of more open societies. Undoubtedly there are enormous obstacles to democratization around the world, with the energetic expansion of various fanatical movements that are using electronic communications and new technologies to try to thwart change toward more open societies. Examples of such fanatical movements are seriously damaging democratic change promised by the “Arab Spring” (Moghaddam 2012). At the same time, the global spread of television and the manufacturing of heroic leadership images (Newman 1999) tend to reinforce in non-Western societies a trend that is already evident in Western democracies: The use of modern technologies to celebrate and highlight “heroic” leadership, but to neglect the active participatory role of ordinary citizens. Given these challenges, it is important for supporters of democracy to conduct more research that celebrates the everyday heroism of ordinary people, and highlights the participatory role of people as normative in democracy. Our focus in researching heroism must shift from extraordinary individuals, to the extraordinary situations that result in heroic acts; “Not, then, men and their moments. Rather moments and their men” (Goffman 1967/2005, p.3).

To this very end, your senior author has created an organization whose mission is to inspire and train ordinary people of all ages and backgrounds to stand up, speak out, and take action in challenging situations in their everyday lives. We are answering the question raised by Jonah Lehrer in his *Wall Street Journal* essay: “Are Heroes Born, or Can They Be Made?” (Lehrer 2010). This *Heroic Imagination Project* advances the proposition that taking wise and effective heroic actions can be learned and practiced through daily socio-centric exercises by anyone who is willing to be a “hero-in-training.” In addition to conducting original empirical research on heroism (where there is a dearth of substantial research), our educational program uses basic principles and research in social and cognitive psychology first to demonstrate our vulnerability to the powers of the dark side, then to make evident the need for situational awareness, while also inspiring and teaching students how to become social change agents by developing the moral courage to transform compassion into heroic action. In addition, our corporate initiative encourages heroic leadership across many areas of corporate functioning. In visiting our web site: www.HeroicImagination.Org, it will be evident that we are creating a new vehicle for an inclusive, democratic conception of everyday heroes—in every society—who are willing to give their best selves in service to humanity.

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