TINY HEROES, BIG SYMBOLS: SMALL GROUPS, VALUES, AND THE

PROLIFERATION OF HEROES IN AMERICA

by

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ABSTRACT

Recent sociological research has suggested that the social type of the "hero" has changed in contemporary American culture. These studies have suggested two possible conclusions to this change: that there are too many heroes and therefore the word has no meaning, or that heroes have been replaced with victims, leaving no heroes left in American culture. While both sides offer theoretical explanations for these conclusions, neither has attempted to empirically analyze how the word is being used. This study begins with the premise that neither conclusion is accurate. Instead, it is suggested that the dilemma sociologists have in determining whether there is a proliferation or deficit of heroes stems from the lack of a cogent definition of the word "hero." Pulling from various sociological studies on heroism, this study proposes that heroes are symbolic characters that are made the subjects of reputational claims. It is these claims that proliferate, not necessarily the heroes themselves. By analyzing how heroes are constructed by claimsmakers in social and traditional media, it is possible to understand the myriad ways heroes are constructed. In a culture predicated on individualization and democratic ideals, anyone can make a claim about a hero, and anyone can become a hero. The plethora of possibilities offered by this conclusion explains why there appears to be too many heroes and not enough of them at the same time.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

"Those sociologists who worry that our society has no heroes ought to look around: there are heroes everywhere. If anything, one might argue that there are too many heroes." –
Joel Best, *Everyone's A Winner: Life in Our Congratulatory Culture*, p. 111

One has only to open their eyes to find a hero; there is a plethora to choose from. The word "hero" seems to appear everywhere, from websites dedicated to "everyday heroes," memorials for those who fought and/or died in some conflict (be it foreign or domestic), media depictions of men and women (real or fictional) who wear costumes as they fight crime, even in unlikely places such as home improvement stores where buying a gift card is advertised as making the consumer a "Home Depot Hero." But are there too many heroes? If a purchaser of gift cards can be a hero, is it possible that the term "hero" has lost some of its meaning? Is that gift card purchaser the same as the hero who saved lives in a war, or pulled children from a burning building? If a child writes a school report claiming that their father or mother is their hero, does that make it true? Yes, one *might* argue that there are too many heroes, though this is only one argument in a spectrum of arguments regarding how people choose heroes in contemporary American society.

In sociological literature, the topic of heroes springs up in several bodies of work, including risk, collective memory, and social identity. However, these discussions are mostly focused on who is a hero. Very little effort is spent attempting to determine how and why a person is named a hero. How do we choose our heroes? How does a hero compare to the average citizen? Do we need heroes? If so, what purpose do they serve? Most social scientific research on heroes states that heroes are role models, the paradigm of model citizenry. Yet this conclusion assumes that everyone is agreeing on who the hero is and why they are a hero, ignoring the fact that there are many frameworks with which to view a cultural element such as the hero. Social science clings to the classical concept of the hero as a character committing great and selfless acts for the good of society as a whole. Average social actors are said to be always looking up to these characters, attempting to shape their own identities based on the model provided by heroic figures. This mistakenly treats the hero as purely externalized, a cultural element that exists outside of society and must be sought out by others in order to help them formulate individual and social identities. By adhering to these conceptions, sociological research is unable to reconcile the proliferation of heroes without either concluding that we have too many heroes or not enough true heroes.

While most research on heroes concludes that heroes are directly connected to the values of a social group, recent approaches, which recognize the dynamic nature of culture, have concluded that the values connected to heroes are not the same across segments of a population and can be interpreted in many ways. This means that the word "hero," like the values associated with it, has many meanings to many people. Therefore,

there may be many heroes, due to the many possible interpretations of the word. This implies that the construction of a hero is more important than the hero itself. If this is the case, then sociological research on heroes needs to shift its focus from the hero itself to how people construct heroes. The best way to do this is to analyze how people talk about heroes.

Just because people talk about someone being a hero does not mean that this person is a hero. Rather, like any element of a culture, a hero must be agreed upon by the consensus of the group (whether that group is a small, localized subculture or an entire society). Someone must make a claim that states another person is a hero (a hero-claim). If everyone in the group agrees with the claim being made, then the subject of that claim is granted the reputation of hero. From this perspective, heroes should not be viewed as being external to society, but rather as a part of it, constructed from within. A similar process can be said to occur when someone is awarded a prize for excellence in a certain field or task, but not all claims regarding the status of an individual are hero-claims. There is something specific in using the word "hero" in a claim's rhetoric which denotes a specific type of status elevation. It is the rhetorical differentiation implied in the specific use of the word "hero" that is important. Other studies (Raglan 1936; Klapp 1962) on heroes have listed character traits and titles, claiming that they are automatically subsumed under the heroic reputation. However, this takes us away from the word "hero" itself and therefore can lead to including similar, but not equivalent, reputations such as role models. It is possible that not every role model is a hero. Therefore, sociological research on heroes must focus directly on the word "hero" and its specific constructions.

The following research will attempt to discover the nature of the hero in contemporary American culture by doing these things: focusing on the constructions of those people specifically named as heroes. Because contemporary American society is one based on the principles of individualism and democracy, which have led to increased population segmentation, I predict that hero-claims vary across segments of the population due to the influence of each group's unique local culture. I will demonstrate that heroes are social characters derived from small groups of individuals, imbued by social actors with values they believe are common to members of that group, and made into a symbol representing the values of the group as well as the group itself. By taking this approach to analyzing heroes, the hero is seen, not as some monolithic being with universal standards to which everyone must adhere. Rather, it becomes a social symbol for group identity, internalized by the small group and projected beyond the boundaries of that group in an effort to promote claims that this hero can act as a symbol for others as well. The hero is therefore a diverse character with many meanings to many groups. This allows for the possibility that society can have a proliferation of heroes as each group has its own heroes. This proliferation of heroes does not dilute the salience of the character or its meanings since heroes within each group appear to be distinctive from those of other groups.

This is important because it redirects sociological research towards the meso-level of analysis, seeing the small group as a site of action which generates norms and rituals that extend beyond social boundaries and creating and legitimating social structure at the macro-level. In this instance, the act of choosing a hero and making claims about its

salience as a symbol for others is a ritual which allows for the (re)production of culture at the local and societal levels. Consensus formed around hero-claims, therefore, would provide a source of social solidarity for both the small group and society as a whole. Ultimately, it does not matter who is selected to be a hero because it is the act of claimsmaking which is most important. Hero-claims can be viewed as a unique method of establishing social boundaries, informing social identities, and creating social solidarity.

I will do this by analyzing discourse about heroes in the media, identifying hero-claims and their content, their sources, and their intended audiences. This data will be derived from a content analysis of media sources that discuss heroes or report on others discussing heroes. By analyzing discourse about heroes and hero-claims, it is possible to elicit myriad meanings utilized to construct the hero as a social character as well as which meanings are common to the various constructions of the heroic character across society. To pursue this end, the following research will ask how hero-claims from one group compare to those of another. This question necessitates a focus on two primary issues, who is making hero-claims and the contents of those claims. I hypothesize that local constructions of heroes (represented in hero-claims) carry across social boundaries but may not remain the same as they shift. Hero-claims, regardless of content, support social structures at both the levels of small groups and society.

Chapter 2

SOCIOLOGY AND HEROES

"A man is just flesh and blood, and can be ignored or destroyed. But a symbol…" –
Bruce Wayne, *Batman Begins* (Nolan and Goyer 2005)

Sociologists have proposed definitions and descriptions of the hero since

Durkheim analyzed the function of religion in society in 1912. These definitions suggest

that the hero might be many things: mythical, god-like characters of ancient religions,

men of great deeds who act as leaders for the general population, purely symbolic

characters who have tenuous or no connections to history, or even characters of legend.

Examining each approach, looking for commonalities, allows us to understand how each

has added to the discussion of the hero in society and how their contributions help

establish a working definition of "hero," one that allows for examining heroes in

contemporary media. The establishment of a working definition of the word "hero" will

provide a focal point for understanding how this social character will be studied for the

purposes of this dissertation and for future sociological analysis.

2.1 The Hero Denied

Before discussing the hero at any great length, it is important to consider one

body of literature that claims that the hero does not exist at all in contemporary society:

the sociology of risk. One of the primary concerns found in this literature is that individuals lose trust in social institutions and tradition, creating a sense of anomie that threatens social solidarity (Beck 1992). This creates a culture rooted in "individualization," one that divorces social actors from the constraints offered by social structures and institutions (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). This has a direct effect on a society's ability to socially construct heroes, as this leads to localized of culture. This reduces cultural constructions like the hero to an "idiosyncratic and compartmentalized whim" (Edelstein 1996, 4).

The changes in cultural attitudes brought on by the onset of risk society create a society that has become so obsessed with risk and safety that we have fundamentally altered our value systems. Furedi (2002) claims that safety itself has become the top value of our times. He places this value in opposition to the value of progress and the struggle to change the world. Furedi (2002; Chanin 2006) notes that risk-taking is an important part of scientific experimentation and therefore progress. "If experimentation is discredited, society effectively acknowledges its inability to tackle – never mind to solve – the problems which confront it… The virtues held up to be followed are passivity rather than activism, safety rather than boldness" (Furedi 2002, 13). Our culture becomes fundamentally altered into what Furedi calls a "culture of fear" (2002).

Furedi argues that individuals often believe that risk is continually ignored or underestimated by both society as a whole and individual actors (2002). The decline of trust means that individuals often view others' actions as potentially hazardous. Humanity itself is therefore viewed as diminished, with any effort that produces risk considered

destructive, abusive, and irresponsible. The new morality is one that respects limits and exacerbates the concept of victimhood. Victimhood becomes a key element of a person's social identity. Furedi claims that the fear of the future, combined with increasing disillusion in humanity's abilities and increasing levels of distrust, ultimately leaves us in a society comprised entirely of either villains or victims, but never heroes. The lack of confidence in human action means that even if you could trust a person to help a victim, the assumption is that they would fail. Knowing your limits and never challenging them are the hallmarks of a responsible citizen.

In a society devoid of heroes, there are still people who perform heroic acts, great deeds that require courage and self-sacrifice (Edelstein 1996). This, however, is merely a temporary solution, indicative of a greater moral dilemma in contemporary American society, the need for national heroes. America's desire for a hero, coupled with increasing individualization, means that in lieu of having national heroes people compromise by celebrating local heroes. He believes these people are worth celebrating for their heroic acts, but does not see them as true heroes due to their limited reputation in the general population as well as the limited amount of attention they receive from the media. The expansion of the definition of hero to include people working at the community level is another indication that America needs national heroes more than ever (Edelstein 1996).

The conclusions made about heroes and society in this body of literature would make sense if these theories did not include several flaws. Mythen (2004) notes that Beck characterizes individualization as a new cultural experience that fundamentally changes social structure and interpersonal relationships. This ignores the fact that both

individualization and risk have existed organically in society for all time. If individualization has always existed organically in society, and society has always had heroes, then arguments made by risk society and culture of fear scholars that blame individualization for the elimination of heroes are incorrect.

Similarly, Tudor (2003) notes that Furedi grounds the culture of fear in a model of individuals suffering from free-floating anxiety that attaches and detaches itself from social situations. What is missing are links between this culture of fear and everyday activity. Further research has demonstrated that actors do not fear something because culture has told them to, nor is fear the primary impetus of human action (Glassner 1999; Tudor 2003; Newby and DeCamp 2014). Referring to the "culture of fear" or "risk society" as a singular social phenomenon ignores the fact that individuals do not utilize cultural resources from just one culture. It is more appropriate to acknowledge that no culture is a monolithic force on a society, rather it is made up of many segments of smaller cultures that are combined into one larger general culture. An individual belongs to many cultural segments, never just one, and these associations change over time (Tudor 2003, 252). In essence, it would be better to accept increased individualization and cultural segmentation as it is in contemporary society rather than to reject it as pathological as the culture of fear literature has done. This implies that the rise of localized heroes, which Edelstein claimed was a vain attempt to compensate for a lack of national heroes, is a naturally occurring change in society.

Assumptions made by Furedi and Edelstein about the attitudes of society regarding heroes are purely theoretical with no empirical evidence to support them

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(Tudor 2003). Both authors go so far as to conclude that heroes no longer exist at all. It seems naïve to believe that contemporary America is the first society in the history of humanity to be completely devoid of heroes. Instead, it is more likely that these scholars are not seeing how today's heroes reflect a more contemporary approach to defining heroes that eschews the classical approach. What is needed, then, is an exploration of the varying definitions of heroes in the sociological literature in order to understand where the risk and fear scholars are coming from and how the definitions they used led them to their spurious conclusion. First, however, the classical concept of heroes must be discussed in order to understand how it fails to apply to a society characterized by increased individualization.

2.2 Classical Concepts of Heroes

Early social scientific definitions of the hero were rooted in the ancient Greco-Roman concept of *heroum*, humans who achieved near god-like status by performing tasks of mythic proportion. Heroic legends and myths were often morality tales, expounding virtues popular to their respective cultures. While the concept of *heroum* formed the foundation of these discussions, it left unanswered the question of whether or not these god-like humans were historical figures or fictional characters. The most notable discussion of heroes in these terms comes from Thomas Carlyle (Carlyle 1840[1993]) who viewed society as a chaos of ideologies that required control and direction. Heroes were those with the creative and spiritual abilities to remedy the contradictions inherent in society. Carlyle's heroes were "men of great deeds" with great power and historical value such as Oliver Cromwell and Martin Luther. These men

served as inspirations to the masses, compelling them to something he called "hero worship," admiration without limit (Carlyle 1840[1993]). Carlyle believed that the common people should want to admire these men of great deeds and find spiritual nourishment in their worship. Like the ancient Greeks, Carlyle saw heroes as the closest humans could get to being gods, though these people must be real, historical figures rather than fictional characters.

Other social scientific attempts to analyze heroes utilized a religious framework in lieu of Carlyle's political one. In analyzing how belief in spiritual beings can influence religious systems, Durkheim (1912[1995]) addressed three types of mythological beings that existed beyond the soul: the spirit, the civilizing hero, and the god. He invokes the Greek concept of *genius*, one who protects and guides an individual while also becoming one with that individual's personality. The genius/spirit is the soul of an ancestor who had great power when alive but now has a spiritual connection to a person and some aspect of the environment. The individual is influenced by this ancestral spirit, adopting behavioral patterns that make him unique amongst his tribesmen. According to Durkheim, the tribe's imagining of these spiritual ancestors reifies the ancestor's history, making them seem as though they have existed for all time in an archetypal form. The attachment of the ancestral spirit to an individual makes them less than a god but more than a mere spirit. Durkheim posited a more contemporary version of the civilizing hero in his theory of altruistic suicide in which a person commits suicide due to an over-attachment to society. One example he uses is the combat soldier who sacrifices his life in order to save his fellow soldiers (Durkheim 1897[1979]; Blake 1978). The suicide is

an act which shows how the person is committed to the progression of society and death

separates him from his body, making him spiritual in nature. In this way, he becomes the

modern incarnation of the civilizing hero.

Risk society theories claim that contemporary society is devoid of heroes. While

they offer no overt definition of heroes in their work, they imply that heroes are leaders

like Carlyle's men of great deeds, or saviors like Durkheim's military hero committing

altruistic suicide. They imply that heroes are real, historical figures. On the other hand,

like Furedi's concept of fear as a free-floating phenomenon that attaches itself to all

social situations, the hero is treated in this same literature as an externalized force that

only acts when necessary, when society cannot help itself. Ultimately, risk society and

culture of fear theories create an impossible scenario for heroes: they must be real people

committing real actions, yet they must exist outside of society in order to be able to

protect against the free-floating fear that can attach to any social situation. While this

may not have been their intention, their framing of heroes and society attempts to

characterize heroes in a way that is incongruous with the proliferation of heroes found in

contemporary society.

As our society's social structure changes to accommodate increased specialization

in the workforce, segmented audiences in the media, and the increased validation of

subcultures and minority groups (Thompson 1988), it stands to reason that our heroes

might change as well. Strate (1985) notes that as forms of communication change over

time, so do the heroes depicted in each iteration. Linking fame and heroism, he notes that

how we construct fame through communication creates opportunities to create different

heroes. In the electronic age, where communication is rapid and located primarily at the level of individuals, heroes are also highly individualized, appearing and disappearing rapidly (Strate 1985). This is akin to Beck's concept of individualization, except it is not framed as a threat to social solidarity as Furedi suggests.

From this discussion, we can conclude that the denial of heroes in contemporary society does not stem from an actual deficit in heroes, but rather from a need to understand how heroes, social solidarity, and individualization are all connected without contradiction. Rather than view heroes as homogenous demi-gods existing apart from society, scholars should view heroes in a different way. The objectivist approach used by contemporary scholars of risk and fear does not work for a society characterized by increased individualization. Instead, a more subjectivist approach is needed. The goal of this dissertation is to investigate contemporary heroes, and therefore a definition which best fits contemporary society is required. Utilizing a subjectivist perspective supports the idea that increased individualization has led to the localization of the hero without dismissing the possibility that the local hero is still a hero.

2.3 Contemporary Definitions of Heroes

Contemporary sociological approaches to defining heroes began in the early twentieth century with Lord Raglan. Raglan's (1936) discussion of heroes in society formed an early base for modern social constructionist thoughts on the subject, utilizing qualitative methodology to support his argument. His approach started by analyzing fictional heroic tales (e.g. King Arthur, Gilgamesh, etc.) for key features in each hero's story and then compiling them into a list of key features that could be used to measure the

heroic nature of a mythical or historical person. He identified 22 traits that could be applied in total or in majority to any heroic figure's life. The fact that so many stories, both fictional and historical, were able to fit this pattern led Raglan to conclude that historical heroes were most likely works of fiction rather than actual people performing real feats of heroics (1936, 200). The blurring of reality and fiction was something Raglan believed to be a key feature in the presence of heroes in society. He believed that the general public would accept as history any tradition that they could justify to themselves. Stories were recorded as truth without research and accepted as fact by the masses in preference to the truth, creating a false history (1936, 209-12). Through these false histories, heroes could become national icons.

Raglan's work is important to the discussion of heroes because he is among the first scholars to posit that the hero was a product of social construction and collective memory. His demonstration of the similarities between fictional and historical heroes establishes the idea that the hero does not exist outside of society, but rather that he is a product of society. However, there are several points in Raglan's analysis that he fails to make clear. The first is social acceptance of the character as a hero. His theory suggests that society immediately concedes the point of the hero, accepting the character as historical fact if the right conditions are met. He touches on this when he discusses the need for a collective memory in placing the hero in an historical context, yet never explains how this is achieved. His discussion also hints at, but never makes explicit, another element of the hero's character, that of his symbolic purpose in society. Raglan alludes to the possibility that a hero's story may have been changed to fit some ritual

pattern but never develops this idea in full. The only reason a society would have to rewrite a character would be to emphasize certain characteristics of their choosing. They would only choose these characteristics if they found them valuable. In this way, Raglan's work begins to draw connections between the heroes and the collective values of a society.

Joseph Campbell saw the importance of heroes as lying in their symbolic nature. Like Durkheim and Raglan, Campbell views the hero as an archetype that has applications to any culture in the world. These *monomyths*, generalized tales that are tailored with specific details to become relevant to a unique culture, can vary in the size of their impacts. The hero of these tales either triumphs over his personal or local-cultural demons, or he discovers the key to rejuvenating the entire society (1949[2008], 30, 212). The concept of monomyths is akin to Raglan's notion of a society blending history and fiction to create a new history that was meaningful to that particular society, creating national heroes.

Like Carlyle, Campbell depicts post-industrial society as in danger of succumbing to rampant individualism brought on by democratic ideals and the influence of the Industrial Revolution on social solidarity. Campbell insists that society uses heroes as "constellating images to pull together all these tendencies to separation, to pull them together into some intention" (1988, 163). He notes that this process of renewing social solidarity is constant, that as a culture changes, so must its heroes who must attend to the social needs of contemporary society (1988, 166). While Campbell's depiction of the hero is akin to the image of the hero-as-near-god, his emphasis on the importance of

having heroes is a new contribution to the defining of heroes. This is the first time when it is implied that it might not matter who the hero is, but that the hero acts as a symbol that encourages social solidarity within a group.

Campbell's description of the hero as a "constellating image" that unites society through action is akin to Durkheim's conclusion about the hero's purpose in society. He states that the sacred nature of ancestral spirits inspires ritual and rites. Because many members of a single clan may perform similar rituals, or several clans may perform the same ritual as others in their tribe, the ancestral spirit is thought to share its influence amongst the whole tribe. In this way, the ancestral spirit becomes the "civilizing hero," one who inspires the entire social group towards progress. Durkheim concludes that the hero is the personification of certain tribal rites, an anthropomorphized symbol of what is important to the group (i.e. their value system) (1912[1995], 297).

2.4 The Hero and Social Solidarity

Scholars have noted the importance of ritual in maintaining social solidarity (Durkheim 1912[1995]; Speth 1999; Ismer 2011). Rituals allow emotions to build up and be shared by participants, fostering social solidarity and a sense of group identification. This sense of group cohesion is based on the shared symbols and meanings created or reinforced by the ritual practice (Durkheim 1912[1995]; Klapp 1969). The hero is one of these shared symbols, or collective representations as Durkheim calls them. In celebrating the hero through ritual, tribes maintain social organization through interaction. The difficulty in Durkheim's conclusion lies in the obdurate nature he ascribes to the hero. He portrays the hero as a fixed image in the collective consciousness

that inspires all members of a group in the same way. Social structure is therefore created by every member of the group acting and reacting towards the image of the hero in the same way. This conclusion ignores the internalization of the image by individuals as noted by Mead (1934[2009]) or Goffman (1959) in their explorations of the self and society as well as the fluid nature of culture and social structure.

From the above discussion of heroes, several themes emerge that are relevant to the sociologically defining the hero. First, as Raglan's research suggests, the hero is a social construct, created by members of a group who agree who the hero is, why he or she is heroic, and what they represent to that group. Second, the nature of the hero is such that he or she must stand out amongst the common members of the group. Whether this means Carlyle's men of great deeds, Campbell's symbol of social solidarity, or Durkheim's civilizing ancestral spirit, the hero must be someone up to whom others can look. Finally, instead of viewing the hero as some monolithic super-human, the contemporary theories depict the hero as an archetypal social character that is adjusted and revised across time, place, and social boundaries. This is exemplified in Campbell's concept of the monomyth, a story or character used to promote social solidarity within any society that chooses to adapt it to their particular cultural needs. Therefore, we can now begin to construct a working definition of "heroes" as social actors who perform some action that benefits a group of people. This actor is elevated to a symbolic level, representing the group in some way and acting as a model for acceptable behavior, fostering group solidarity in the process.

What still remains unclear is the symbolic nature of heroes and their relation to society. How does the hero symbolically represent a society? The above authors couch their discussions of heroes in the topics of mythology and religion, relying on generic discussions of faith, belief, and post-human qualities that do not allow for a grounded approach to examining the role of heroes in society. These discussions construct the hero as having an obdurate and exterior nature to society, being completely removed from social interaction except whenever the hero is called upon to intervene in social affairs. Even Raglan never does more than subtly imply that the hero is socially constructed. These approaches demonstrate that the hero is a functional part of a society but does not explain how members of a society relate to the hero. Contemporary sociology increasingly eschews this approach for a more interaction-based analysis (Ferris and Harris 2011). By forgoing a functionalist approach for a symbolic interactionist approach, scholars are better able to understand the symbolic nature of heroes, better understanding how who the hero is in relation to the general population of a society. Doing so requires that the approach taken in defining heroes shifts from a macro-level focus to a micro-level focus. This will further emphasize the individual's role in the social construction of heroes instead of assuming that society acts uniformly to create these symbols. Therefore, the next step in defining the hero is to understand how the hero is socially constructed by individuals as they interact with others in society.

2.5 The Hero as a Social Type

The most notable sociological understanding of the hero as a social symbol comes from Orrin Klapp, who links the significance of heroism in modern society to the process

of identity searching. He posits that as society has become more specialized, there is an increase in the number of social roles available to individuals as well as a growing awareness of the divide between the various social roles performed by individuals and their true selves.

Klapp defines identity as being the sum of everything a person can say about him/herself. These are conceptual qualities, not to be confused with physical qualities like hair or eye color. Keeping in line with the identity theories of Mead and Goffman, Klapp believes that the self only exists in social contexts. One is only aware of oneself because of the juxtaposition to another, realized through social interaction. Identity, according to Klapp, ultimately rests in one's connections to mass society. We are all participants in social institutions and the more connected we feel to those institutions, the stronger our sense of self. Those who are not strongly committed to institutions will feel a pull towards external objects in society that offer possible identities. These objects range from status symbols, to rituals, to vicarious experiences in identity seeking. This latter category is where Klapp locates the heroic character.

Klapp claims that we categorize each other into social types. We are able to type people by drawing upon the stock of symbols and images associated with a culture. Typing is a collective action, undertaken by members of the society. A social type defines the way people should or should not act. The person does not become a social type through consensus alone, as that would mean that stereotypes and misjudgments could characterize a person. Likewise, you cannot take a person's word that they are what they say they are. According to Klapp, the best way of determining the social type of a person

is to consult the judgment of "shrewd appraisers of human nature," "those who 'know'" (1962, 13, 15). These "shrewd appraisers" are experts in social types, possessing special knowledge that allows them to differentiate a social type from any other type of collective judgment that might arise from mass society. Unfortunately, Klapp never explains who exactly these experts are, how they came by their knowledge, or how we can differentiate them from anyone else in society.

The important contribution of Klapp's work on social types is the understanding that a social character, like the hero, is not a product of a whole society. Rather, we can see how social characters are developed at both the micro- and macro-levels. Social types are created by drawing on cultural images that are embedded in social structure. They also influence social structure by individuals deciding which social types are best for incorporating people into social structure. This is important as it fundamentally shifts the macro-level focus of all of the previous theories discussed towards one that attempts to develop an understanding of the role individuals play in constructing social phenomena. Heroes can now be better understood as social constructs without assuming that society as a whole must agree on whom are heroes and the values that are attributed to them. By accepting individualization in society rather than rejecting it as a social problem, heroes are no longer impossibility; they are a functional social type within social structure.

According to Klapp, we use social types to pass judgment on each other and ourselves. The expression of approval or disapproval can be categorized in three ways: praise, condemnation, or ridicule. These three categories translate into three primary social types, the hero, the villain, or the fool. Klapp refers to these three social types as

the three most basic dimensions of social control (1962, 16-7). Heroes, those who

perform above and beyond the established norm, are the models for behavior in a society.

Villains exemplify condemned behaviors so extreme that they must be feared and viewed

as dangerous to society. Fools fall short of the norm in ways that should be ridiculed for

their absurdity. All three social types are forms of deviance, different than normal.

Normal equates with ordinary for Klapp, the mundane. Those who are normal set the

standard by which the other three social types are judged. This implies a collective effort

in judging individuals to be social types. Their function, then, is to not only type the

individual, but also maintain social structure by demonstrating acceptable behaviors in

social situations. The most important models of each social type become institutionalized

mainly through media (Klapp 1962).

Having social types is a product of, as well as a tool for, promoting specialization

in contemporary society. This is reflected in the fact that Klapp's three primary social

types can be broken down into further categories. The category of "hero," for example,

encompasses several social types that all share the character of being admirable. Heroic

social types include winners (those who defeat everyone else), splendid performers

(being highly liked by an audience), heroes of social acceptability (those who best

represent the pleasures of conformity), independent spirits (those who stand alone,

achieving socially acceptable goals by themselves), and group servants (those who

promote social solidarity through commitment to others) (1962, 27-8). These five social

types can be broken down even further, though this process creates so many categories of

heroes that each social type's heroic status seems predicated on the character trait

exclusive to each type, rather than the other way around. In other words, Klapp's

typology lists character traits, implying that a person is heroic for having these traits. The

problem with this approach is that anyone can be named a hero just for falling into one of

Klapp's types. They need not be "men of great deeds" or any deeds, for that matter. This

dilutes the concept of heroism, making it seem like something you have just for being

who you are, rather than the other way around as virtually every theory about heroism

claims.

Klapp pointedly states the dilemma in having this many categories: no one could

ever approve of all heroes. "Ethically, they are a motley crowd; even a broad-minded

person would find it hard to approve all of them…" (1962, 96). Every hero represents a

different value, and since there are myriad values to which people adhere, there are just

as many heroes to choose from in a society. In a democracy, one value is not necessarily

better than another. This implies that one hero is no better than another. Klapp points out

that this proliferation can confuse, if not demoralize, members of the society. This can

also lead to a devaluation of hero-types, as having too many heroes means we have too

many models to sample without devoting any significant convictions towards the values

embodied by any one hero. Having too many heroes can also point out inequalities in

heroic representations. Klapp points out the "dilemma of modern woman," the idea that

because more heroes are men than women there is more glory in men's roles that in

women's (1962, 97). Though Klapp himself does not make note of this, the same

dilemma exists in terms of race and class, as more whites and middle or upper-class

citizens are portrayed as heroes than those not of those social categories. In summary,

Klapp warns that having too many heroes can mean that people will be more likely to adopt roles to which they are unsuited. Goffman also warns about this danger, claiming that our job as social actors is to be discriminate in the roles we choose for ourselves in order to avoid having to be "cooled out" because we fell short of expectations (1952).

The myriad heroic social types posited by Klapp suggests the possibility that anybody can be a hero if they can find just one social type in which they fit. Klapp's list of types expands upon previous attempts to conceptualize heroes, including not just "men of great deeds" but also celebrities, stars, and everyday heroes. This seems contradictory in light of his warning about too many heroes leading to unmitigated role adoption. The dilemma posed by Klapp's theory of social types is that society can, and perhaps does, deem too many social roles as heroic. Many of these heroic types are judged so because they have performed some action that has been deemed by a group of people (whether general society or a small group within society) as being noteworthy. This leads the definition of the hero into mundane territory, where anyone who does something better than others can be defined as heroic. Yet we do not call everyone a hero for being better; we have many titles such as role model, star, winner, etc.

Klapp's theory allows us to finally understand the symbolic nature of the hero. Heroes act as archetypes, constellating images, collective representations, which allow a group of people to reaffirm their social solidarity. They perform this function by symbolizing the values of that group. Therefore, we can postulate a more complete definition of the hero: the hero is a social actor who performs some action that benefits a group of people. The actor is socially constructed by the group as a symbol of the values

that the group holds high. These are values reflected in the actions of the hero and therefore the hero is seen as embodying those values. In short, the hero is a value-laden character, elevated by a group of people to a symbolic status due to actions performed by the hero that are lauded by that group.

There is an infinite number of ways to segment a population, with each segment being considered its own small group with their own unique set of values. As Klapp points out, one value cannot be set higher than another in a democratic society like America. This opens up the possibility that anyone who is connected with a value, such as an award winner or a role model, can be called a hero. However, not everyone is called a hero. Therefore, it can be concluded that the final part of the definition of a hero is that they are specifically *named* as a hero, rather than as someone who was the best in their field.

Klapp's theory of the hero states that anyone who is exceptional in their field can be a hero to someone else. In his typology of heroes, he includes celebrities, stars of sports fields and screens, and even those who perform above and beyond the call of duty in an occupation. Each of these characters is heroic because of some specific style they have or value with which they are associated. However, even Klapp notes that we do not necessarily call these people heroes; rather we have myriad descriptive titles such as lone wolf, top dog, playboy, or benefactor. Klapp treats these monikers as synonymous with "hero" but this ignores the possibility that any one of these characters could be constructed as villainous or foolish. For example, not everyone agrees that playboys such as Hugh Hefner or John Kennedy, Jr. are symbols of morality, nor would they call them

heroes. This implies that there is something unique about the specific title of "hero" that is not found in these other titles.

In searching for heroes in society, we must look for specific uses of the word "hero" and attempt to ascertain the particular traits of that hero rather than looking for specific character traits and assuming them to be heroic as Klapp ultimately did with his typology. The goal of research on heroes should not be to devise a typology of heroic people, but rather to discover what people believe is unique about heroes. This requires that researchers shift their focus from the hero itself to how the hero is constructed. If a hero is a symbol, not just a person, than the exact individual is incidental. A hero could be anyone. It is the title that is most important and sociological research needs to focus on how this title is constructed, not on who inhabits the construction.

2.6 The Definition of the Hero

Thus far, we have examined how scholars have attempted to define the social character called "hero" in an effort to elicit a sociological understanding of this social character. The purpose of this examination was to elicit a definition of heroes that allowed for the possibility of individualized and localized heroes. To understand the hero of contemporary society, a society characterized by increasing individualization and a segmented population, a definition of heroes that allows for these changes in social structure is required. By rejecting the notion that individualization in contemporary society is a social problem, the path has been laid out for understanding what a hero is in our culture.

The result of this exercise is two-fold. The hero has been defined in such a way that anyone's construction of a hero could be encompassed by the definition, and the definition has been restricted enough to be empirically testable. In examining the works of classical scholars such as Carlyle we can first define the hero as someone who has performed a great action, one that benefits many people without necessarily benefitting the hero. Contemporary concepts of the hero by scholars like Klapp and Campbell expand our definition of the hero to be anyone who, in performing a great deed, has been elevated to a symbolic level by a group of people. The hero is constructed by that group as someone who embodies certain values that they hold dear. Finally, by comparing heroes to other forms of high status, it can be concluded that being named specifically as a hero has some social significance. Therefore, the hero is defined as a value-laden symbol for a group of people. The symbolic nature of the hero stems from the group's recognition and admiration of deeds performed by that person and the subsequent naming of the person as a hero by the group.

While a definition of heroes has been proposed, it has not been established how and why heroes are chosen. How does the hero fit into society? The above discussion has demonstrated that heroes are neither purely an individual construction nor a macro-level phenomenon. This leaves the hero in the hands of small groups. The following discussion will address how the hero is chosen by small groups of people and how heroes spread from one group to another. This will, in turn, complete the explanation of how contemporary society can have so many heroes without diminishing the meaning of the hero through proliferation. To accomplish this, the hero must be viewed as a product of a

process of reputational claimsmaking. These reputational claims, or "hero-claims," allow for the understanding of how the hero becomes a social symbol for a group of people. Understanding how we construct hero-claims and why addresses a gap in social scientific research on heroes, offering a more complete understanding of how heroes are constructed and how they are utilized by social groups to maintain social solidarity.

2.7 Reputations and Claimsmaking

The sociology of reputation is a field that examines how individuals are remembered as opposed to how they lived. Lifetime achievements, as well as social factors, play a role in obtaining and maintaining individual reputations (Olick and Robbins 1998). Reputation is defined as "a socially recognized persona: an organizing principle by which the actions of a person (or an organization that is thought of as a person) can be linked together" (Fine 2001, 2). Reputation is used by a collective in the perception of individuals. Fine makes a point of emphasizing the collective aspect of reputation. Reputation is not formed based on one person's opinion; it is a shared image, requiring consensus to legitimate it. Reputations affect social relations and communication within a community, allowing for new social opportunities and perceptions of each other. In order to avoid seeing the value-laden symbolic hero as an external force as many other scholars have done, the title of "hero" must be treated as a reputation like any other, something that defines the character of an individual in the eyes of the collective.

Reputations, positive or negative, assert a moral identity for the person in question. This moral identity must be situated within a reputational market in which

many moral identities compete (Sauder and Fine 2008). To expound upon the reputation of another is to set yourself up as a claimsmaker, someone with a vested interest and (assumed) knowledge pertinent to that reputation (Best 2013; Fine 2012a). The purpose of claimsmaking is to gain support for an argument by appealing to the values of a target audience that you believe will be, or can be made to be, sympathetic to your argument. A claim cannot establish or modify a reputation without the support of others, whether they already agree with the moral standpoint or need to be persuaded to agree with the claims being made. Essentially, claims do not exist without someone to react to them. Therefore, to call someone a hero is not to make them a hero per se, rather it is to assert a belief that this person's reputation should be viewed by others as heroic. In order for a person to become a hero, the claim must be transmitted by the claimsmaker and adopted by people within the claimsmaker's target audience who must agree with that claim.

A claimsmaker's audience is not a homogenous mass of people. Rather, it is a segment of the larger population, a small group to whom the claimsmaker feels they can appeal (Best 2013). Fine (2012b) defines the "small group" as an aggregation of persons who recognize that they constitute a meaningful social unit, interact on that basis, and are committed to that social unit. Each member of the small group knows each other either as discreet persons or as their social roles. Small groups can exist for long periods of time, fleetingly, face-to-face, or through other modalities such as cyberspace (2012b, 21). No matter the size or scope of the small group, all participants recognize that they have a shared common history. What separates small groups from other social relations is this shared common history (Fine 2010). Shared history, made up of interactions, meanings,

and memories unique to a group of people, is what differentiates one small group from another.

Making reputational claims suggests to the audience that the claimsmaker belongs in a specific social group that shares specific knowledge, values, and frameworks for viewing the subject of the claim. By making a reputational claim, the claimsmaker is signaling to the audience that his or her framework for viewing the claim's subject is best and the audience should adopt this way of thinking. Claims, therefore, are tools used strategically to spread a specific framework (Fine 2001; Fine 2012a). If adopted by enough people, strategic claims can become part of the taken-for-granted view of the world, creating a master frame for everyone within the group to easily reference (Snow and Benford 1992). A public identity functions in the same way as it is based on a set of reputational claims. If that public identity is embraced by enough members of a group, the identity becomes a self (i.e., the person becomes a hero). By embracing that public identity, the members of that group are implying that they all share the same framework and draw upon the same knowledge about that identity. Therefore, how we make sense of the world not only defines who we are but with whom we wish to associate (Fine 2012a).

This point is crucial to understanding how a claimsmaker relates to the audience through the claim, as well as the function of heroes for social groups. By claiming that a person is a hero, several things are happening. The first is that the claimsmaker is making a specific status claim about the target individual to a specific social group, a group whose values become the moral foundation of the claim. Second, the claimsmaker is claiming that the target individual is a person whose actions make them likely to be a

symbol for the values of the social group. Furthermore, the target individual is not merely a celebrity, role model, or other type of high status individual; they personally embody the values in question in a heroic way and should be called a hero accordingly. Next, by drawing upon that specific group's values, the claimsmaker is linking his or her self to the group, suggesting social solidarity exists between them because of their shared values. Finally, the claimsmaker is promoting a specific framework that not only applies to the hero, but also to the world. This framework, based on the shared local history of that group, asks the members of that group to view that history in a way that supports the hero. This framework emphasizes the localized history shared by the members of the group and allows them to strengthen the social solidarity of the group in the recognition of that shared history and the framework it implies.

In this way, making a claim about heroes is a way of honoring a group's past, promoting social solidarity in the present, and asking the group to continue the promotion of certain values into the future. The act of claiming someone is a hero, and all of the implications that stem from making such a claim, is a "hero-claim." Hero-claims are defined as any claim made that seeks to elevate the social status of an individual to that of hero (someone who embodies the values of a group and acts as a symbol for that group and its values), imbuing that individual with the reputation of being a hero, and reinforcing the social cohesion of that specific group.

In order to convince the group that they should accept the hero-claim, the claimsmaker must construct the claim in such a way that it is both appealing and convincing to that group. Claimsmaking requires factual evidence as well as appeals to

values to support the claim (Rottenberg and Winchell 2012; Best 2013). Hero-claims require these as well but, by virtue of the fact that heroes are rooted in value systems, need to emphasize the appeal to values far more than the factual evidence. Some factual evidence may be statistically based, such as a record of efficacy for a police office or firefighter. However, this sort of information will not be available for the majority of people. Therefore, the most obvious evidence to present about a hero in a hero-claim is proof that they performed the action. Anecdotal evidence or media coverage of the action would serve to provide the factual base necessary to support the claim. Scholars have primarily done this in the past through the use of direct observation (Durkheim 1912[1995]) or through historical records (Schwartz and Schuman 2005). However, to understand the contemporary hero, up-to-date information is necessary, such as news articles or social media. Once the hero's actions have been established in the claim, the appeal to the group's values must be accomplished. This is the most crucial element of a hero-claim as the hero, being a symbol of values, will represent the group's values if the claim is accepted. The claimsmaker must therefore demonstrate to the group that the hero relates to them in some way that justifies their adoption of the hero as a symbol. To accomplish this, the claimsmaker must invoke the group's shared local history through their collective memory.

2.8 Values and Collective Memory: Connecting the Hero to the Group

If history is made up of the narratives we are taught, collective memory is how these stories are recalled. Much of history is a narrative about the reputations of "great men," men whose deeds made them memorable in the same way Carlyle proposed about

heroes. Who is considered to be great depends on who is in power both when history is recorded and when it is recalled. The status quo of a social group is justified by these narratives, elevating figures to the status of hero or role model or demoting them to the status of villain or cautionary tale. Fine (2001) notes that historical knowledge is not a gauge of how many facts we know but rather a test of our moral involvement in a group.

The sociology of collective memory pays particular attention to the recollection of history and how it is used by a group. Functionalist approaches to collective memory see individual minds mediated by ritualistic practice, connecting people directly or indirectly to their group's past (Durkheim 1912[1995]; Halbwachs 1992). The symbolic interactionist approach has amended this relationship by noting that memory employs history to serve its purpose. For example, history is used to provide legitimation for national identities. This calls into question the salience of objectivity as it applies to history (Novick 1988) and implies that national heroes such as Abraham Lincoln or George Washington were specifically constructed in such a way as to maximize their usefulness for forming a national identity.[1] All heroes, therefore, have a fictional aspect to them. This isn't to conclude that all hero-narratives are lies, but rather that memory and history are negotiated in such a way as to construct the hero that a group wants or needs.

Collective memory acts as a model of society, reflecting contemporary social structure (Schwartz 1997). This, however, appears to be an incomplete understanding of the function of collective memory. When considering a contemporary social problem, we

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[1] This echoes Raglan's idea that the hero may be someone who performed real acts but their history has been altered to better serve the collective needs of a group.

search our memories for ways to deal with it, selecting memories that resonate with the current issue and allowing claimsmakers to align frameworks with the audience more quickly and the media to better package secondary claims (Best 2013). This implies that collective memory does not act simply as a model *of* society, but also a model *for* society. As a model of society, memory acts as a form of language where symbolism is used for articulating present conditions. As a model for society, it allows us navigate problems by showing us where we are and where we have been (Shils 1975; Schwartz 1997).

The hero can be characterized in the same manner as collective memory. The hero is a symbol of collective memory, one that instills meaning into social action. Members of a group view the hero as the embodiment of values they hold in high regard and therefore treat the hero as a typifying example of what is acceptable to that group in terms of social character and action. In this way, the hero, like collective memory, can be viewed as a model for the group. The fact that the values associated with the hero are ascribed to the hero by the other members of that group means that the hero is also a model of that group, symbolizing the present conditions of the group.

The claimsmaker's job is to make these connections between the group and the hero apparent in the hero-claim. In doing so, the claimsmaker must demonstrate in some way how the hero is a model of that group's values. By convincing the group's members to accept this idea, the claimsmaker is persuading these people to ascribe their values to the hero, making the hero the model of that group as well. How exactly this is achieved (i.e., what specific rhetorical strategies are used by the claimsmaker) has never been

explored by social scientists. To understand how heroes are constructed in contemporary society, these rhetorical strategies must be researched.

As stated above, the collective memory of that group frames the hero and his or her actions in a way that is useful to them. Values, like any element of culture, can change over time and therefore the collective memory of the group is employed to construct the adopted hero in a way that is salient to them now. This allows the members of the group to use the hero to guide their construction of self, both as individuals and as members of the group. This fosters social solidarity within the group and opens up the possibility of individuals making their own hero-claims.

2.9 Connecting the Hero and the Individual: The Proliferation of Hero-Claims

Individuals define themselves by the cultures in which they participate. Values and symbols learned from those cultures create a sense of self. Identities are shaped by creating boundaries based on the group's unique culture, who is a member and who is not. Culture, however, does not dictate socialization; it is a tool for forming identity. In order to embrace the culture of a group (i.e. ideals, beliefs, meanings, etc.), individuals must identify with like-minded others who belong to that group, therefore identifying themselves as a part of that group. A social world can only exist if individuals define themselves as members of a group (Fine 2012b). Group culture is essential for creating boundaries, which in turn, are essential for creating identity. How a group responds to its environment and to structural constraints allows it to produce distinct values. Local traditions and values are created by the group to address external reality. In this way small group culture and identification are dialectic, each helping to construct the other.

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This allows individuals and groups alike to create and shape their frameworks, and claims about those frameworks, as they change.

This change derives from the influences of like-minded groups of people with whom we identify. Individuals often identify with many segments of society. There are many reasons for identification with a segment of society. Identification may be based on location, with a local identification having more salience to an individual than a larger population segment. Identification may also vary based on social occasion (what Fine refers to as "wispy communities") or emotional ties (2012a).

Small group cultures are dynamic, utilizing the same communicative relationship of transmission and adoption as individuals do. Cultural elements being shared across social boundaries are more likely to be adopted by the other group if that group already has some commonalities with the transmitting group (Strang and Meyer 1993). As members from one group interact with other groups, cultural items that are salient to the first group may be incorporated into the other groups. These groups will then manipulate that cultural item to meet their own ends. Agents of social control, such as heroes and villains, can also affect identification as they act as symbols for appropriate or inappropriate behaviors (Klapp 1969).

Understanding how cultural elements are shared beyond the boundaries of small groups allows for a greater understanding of how hero-claims spread. The symbolic nature of heroes allows them to be placed into the category of cultural elements. As a small group agrees upon a hero-claim, therefore creating a hero for that group, individual members of that group take this new cultural element with them as they interact with

other groups. These individuals transmit a new hero-claim, one that attempts to extend the symbolic nature of the hero beyond its relevance to the original small group. The hope is that other groups will share a similar framework about the world as they do, having similar values that can be appealed upon in the hero-claim's transmission, therefore facilitating the adoption of the hero-claim itself.

Fine notes that adoption of a cultural element will not occur if the adopting group does not find the element compatible with their group's unique culture (2012b). This means that while adoption of the element may be considered by a group, it is not guaranteed. Therefore, before it finally adopts the element, the group must go through a process of consideration that allows them to try and fit the foreign element into their local culture. The hero-claim is transmitted from one group to another via a hero-claim that states that both groups share the values symbolized by the hero. The adopting group reframes the claim in a way that best suits dissemination through their particular group. Members of the adopting group discuss the merits of the claim and attempt to determine the salience of the hero to the group. Once this has been accomplished, the adopting group must conclude if they will adopt the claim or not. This will be conveyed to the transmitting group in some way, either directly or through some passive form of communication. This requires that the original claim be addressed, not the reframed version discussed by the adopting group. Finally, the adopting group experiences the hero itself, having adopted the claim. They have adopted the hero as their own symbol which they may view as attached to the same values as did the transmitting group, or they may adapt the symbolic nature of the hero to better suit their own specific values.

The examination of hero-claims spreading across social boundaries illustrates how it is possible for some sociologists to believe that there are too many heroes in contemporary society. It is possible that as individualization increases in contemporary society, the number of small groups that celebrate their own heroes will increase as well. It must also be noted that culture is not static, and as the small group's culture changes, so will their values and symbols. If every small group in a society has their own heroes, and these heroes can change over time, then the number of hero-claims transmitted at any given time in a society stands to be great. In our current age of instant, democratically accessible communication through electronic media, the number of hero-claims transmitted could be overwhelming. This is not to say that every claim is adopted, but every single claim represents someone's or some group's hero-elect. This can make it seem as though there is a proliferation of heroes in contemporary society, when in fact what we have is a proliferation of hero-claims.

2.10 The Present Study

The act of making hero-claims reinforces social solidarity in small groups by emphasizing features of the group which unifies members, features such as values and shared history. The culture fostered within each small group is created through a process of claimsmaking regarding which framework is best for providing meaning to social structures and social interactions. Heroic reputations, embedded in hero-claims, are part of this process. Each small group will have its own values, and for these values they will have a symbol which is unique to their local culture and derived from their shared local history. This symbol, the hero, represents not just the actions of a person within an

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historical context but also the ideal socially embedded in those actions which have been sustained in the collective memory.

By making attempts to align frames across group boundaries, myriad hero-claims are presented to the general population of a society where they compete in a fashion similar to what Best describes as the "social problems marketplace" (Best 2013). Hero-claims are made, invoking contemporary values and cultural elements that are used to reinforce social solidarity for a social group. The fact that so many hero-claims exist in this marketplace, and that new claims can be made by the same group as time passes and narrative forms change, suggests that the act of hero-claims is a normal part of society. In a sense, this entire process can be viewed as a ritual. It is through claims and the acceptance of these claims that participants find themselves as belonging to a group. Small group cultures provide the basis for stable collective expectations, so groups can create routine practices and maximize the clarity of their meanings to members. Members expect that the themes of their interaction tomorrow will be similar to themes of interaction today, therefore making tradition and ritual crucial to social organization. Traditions build on each other; the more rituals a group has, the more new or elaborated rituals they will create the future (Collins 2004; Fine 2012b). Any unique action can become practice if it is deemed to serve the group's needs. Even the smallest social groups (i.e. couples or families) develop rituals that are specific to their tiny local group. These encourage the building of future practices and protect participants from external demands. These practices/rituals reify group history, setting standards for what is normal and appropriate and how members are supposed to act accordingly. This does not mean

that action and meanings are never negotiated, but changes are normal and expected. Actions can be adjusted through these negotiations, but even these adjustments are ritually enacted.

The proliferation of heroes, in this case, is a normal and necessary part of everyday social life. By making claims about heroic reputations, spreading these claims across social boundaries, and ensuring each small group can have its own hero, a ritual is enacted that sustains the local culture for each group. In doing so, the small group continues to act as a site of social action and a microcosm for society. Enforcing this are the occasional heroes which transcend their local origins to become symbols for society as a whole. In doing so, they imply that having heroes serves a greater purpose for a social unit by providing legitimation of the collective memory and shared history, justification for identities and beliefs in the present through rituals, and hope for the ideal future.

This also means that having one hero, or only acknowledging the heroes representing an entire society, is not enough. It is important for each segment of the population to have its heroes and to be able to make claims about the generalizability of the values embedded in that symbol. Not only have heroes not disappeared as some scholars have suggested, but having myriad heroes has become an important aspect of sustaining society. In a sense, it is important that we understand, as a culture, that anyone can be a hero. This is not to say that anyone *will* be a hero, or that everyone *is* a hero. Rather, it is akin to parents telling their children that anyone can be President of the United States or an astronaut. Any person, by performing actions which can be seen as

embodying the virtues of a group, can be made the subject of a hero-claim and possibly elevated in reputation to the symbolic level of hero. What matters, in the end, is not who is made a hero, but that groups continue to have heroes and make hero-claims.

If the hero itself does not matter, but the hero-claim does, then sociological research on heroes should focus on who makes hero-claims and how they make them. The following research project makes claimsmakers and their claims the units of analysis. Previous research on heroes has always focused on the hero itself, how it is a social construct. By focusing on the claimsmaker and the claim instead of the cultural artifact itself (i.e. the hero), we are able to better understand the interactive process by which heroes are constructed. My argument is that hero-claims will vary from small group to small group (rather, from hero to hero) due to the influence of each group's unique local culture but will still retain the same basic rhetorical constructions. This requires that three primary lines of inquiry be addressed utilizing inductive reasoning. The first question is who makes hero-claims? The second question is what are the contents of these hero-claims? This line of inquiry will necessitate an examination of the explicit and implicit values embedded in hero-claims. Finally, how do hero-claims compare with each other? By comparing the origins and contents of hero-claims, it is possible to determine how different groups construct different claims and whether or not those constructions retain a similar rhetorical structure.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

"It's not who I am *underneath*…but what I *do* that defines me." – Batman, *Batman Begins* (Nolan and Goyer 2005)

Every small group has its own ideas about which values should be held highest and how to interpret those values. The hero is a symbol of those values, and choosing a hero is a way of interpreting them. What is important about this is not who becomes a hero, as anyone can be a hero, but rather how a hero is chosen and why. Rather than asking the question "who is a hero?" researchers should examine the characteristics and actions that cause others to view an ordinary person as a hero and how this conclusion is drawn. This differs from previous studies of heroes that focused on the hero itself as a social construct rather than the process of constructing heroic reputations. This shifts the focus of research on heroes from the cultural artifact itself to the social processes that construct the artifact. As previously established, the process used to construct a heroic reputation involves reputational claimsmaking. Specifically, these claims argue that a certain individual embodies the values of a group and can act as a symbol for that group and its values. Hero-claims are constructed using rhetorical devices that establish in some

way who are the heroes, why they are heroic, and how they relate to specific groups of people. The purpose of this study is to determine the specific rhetorical devices common to hero-claims by analyzing the claims themselves.

3.1 Methodology

To pursue this end, the following questions must be addressed: who makes hero-claims, to whom are they making them, and what are the contents of these hero-claims. The question of who is making hero-claims necessitates an examination of micro-level communications made by individuals and small groups. The contents of those claims are developed socially within a group and debated within and outside that group. Therefore, an analysis following this line of inquiry must take place at the micro- and meso-levels where it is possible to examine how people and small groups develop the idea of heroes through their interactions. The ideal site to conduct this examination is in social media, a place where people generate their own news rather than rely solely on a traditional news outlet. One of the most popular social media sources in contemporary American culture is the website Twitter. Twitter offers users the opportunity to observe or participate in real-time, text-based discussions about almost any topic imaginable. As will be explained, Twitter's unique ability to consolidate topics into easily found hubs of information (hashtags) while still maintaining an open-door policy that allows any user to add his or her own thoughts at any time makes it the ideal source for a micro- and meso-level exploration of hero-claims.

The drawback of using Twitter for the analysis of hero-claims is that, due to its highly individualized nature, it does not sufficiently demonstrate whether or not a

particular topic has become widely received by a general population. Therefore, to

complete this analysis by considering the macro-level life of a hero-claim, we must

utilize traditional media sources, specifically regional and nation-wide media. In keeping

with the text-based format of Twitter, this final avenue of research will be conducted in

top-circulated newspapers as identified by noted media analysis group Burrelles*Luce*.

3.1.1 Twitter

Twitter is a social media website on which users communicate to others in real-

time using a maximum of 140 characters in each post (called "tweets")(see Figure 3.1). A

user creates a profile, a brief description of themselves and their interests, and "follows"

other users' posts by subscribing to their feeds. In turn, the user creates tweets of his or

her own in order to attract followers. Tweets consist mainly of text but can also include
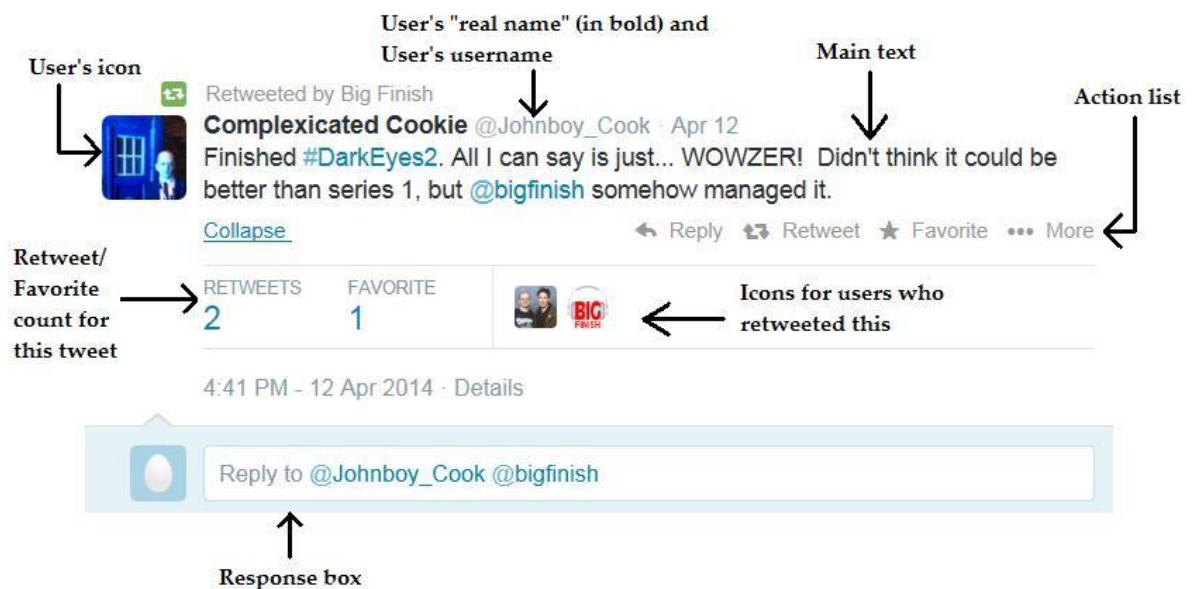
Figure 3.1: Example of a tweet[2]

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[2] On Twitter, a user has two names: their "real name," which can be the user's actual
name or one they make up (as in the example in Figure 3.1), and their "username,"

links to webpages, links to information hubs (called hashtags and represented by the

symbol "#" next to the key word), videos, or pictures. Tweets are sent directly to your

followers, but are also available by search engine to anyone who wishes to read them

(tweets are instantly public domain). Twitter is available as a free downloadable

application on virtually every electronic device on the contemporary market and is the

third largest social network on the internet (Burelles*Luce* 2012). While social networks,

such as Facebook or Myspace, only allow you to directly communicate with people in
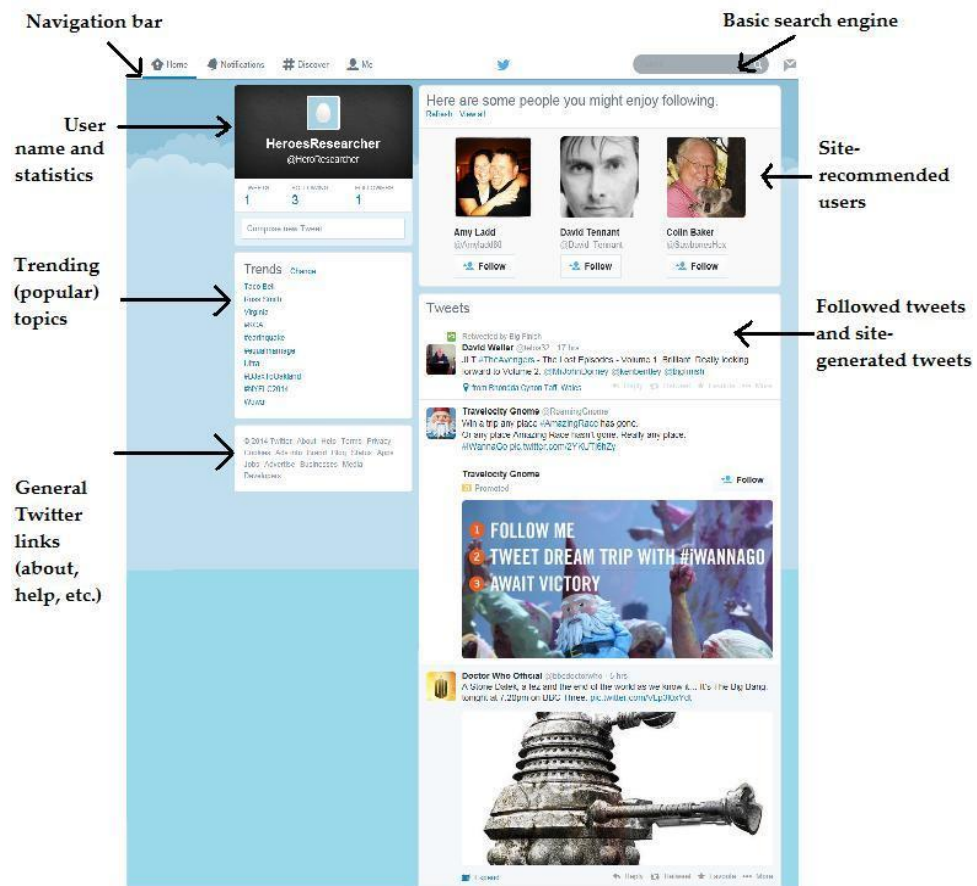
Figure 3.2: Twitter homepage

designated by the "@" symbol before it, which acts as an address to anyone who wishes
to send them a tweet.

your chosen list of contacts, Twitter feeds you the tweets of users following the same people as you, as well as recommends other people to follow, therefore allowing people with similar interests to connect and socialize despite having never met each other offline (see Figure 3.2).

Twitter is differentiated from social networking platforms, such as Facebook, Google+, or Myspace, by its designation as a site for user-generated news (*social* media rather than *traditional* media) (boyd and Ellison 2007; Murthy 2012). "Social media are designed to facilitate interactive multicasting (i.e. the broadcasting of many to many)" (Murthy 2012). Normally, if one were to forward a piece of information via electronic means (e.g. email or posting on a social network), that information would only reach those people found in that user's personal contact list. Twitter, on the other hand, allows information to be disseminated beyond a user's contact list, particularly through the use of "retweets." Retweets are tweets that echo or relay another person's information verbatim. Retweets allow users to share information outside of a specific group of followers. This is a perfect practical example of Fine's (2012) concept of shared local history in which members of a group share information and innovations across social boundaries by presenting the information to other groups to which they belong. Its unique technique of sharing information across social boundaries makes Twitter the ideal site for researching the transmission of hero-claims.

3.1.1.1 Hashtags

Hashtags are a popular method of drawing the attention of followers to topics of interest. These icons make specific terms stand out within a tweet and convert them into

hyperlinks[3] that lead to a specific part of Twitter entirely devoted to that topic (see Figure

3.3). The use of hashtags not only presents a topic to followers but also gives them the

Figure 3.3: Example of a hashtag in a tweet

means to research the topic. Clicking on the hashtagged word will take the user to a

specific page on Twitter that is devoted to tweets that share that word. These information

hubs collect every tweet that uses that same hashtagged word, creating a webpage that

allows for easy access to anything anyone has tweeted about this topic (see Figure 3.4).

Hashtags are used to draw attention to a specific topic (e.g., a news story, or a subplot of

a television series, etc.) by making it obvious to readers of that specific tweet while

providing them an easy way of finding more tweets about that topic.

Hashtags are indicative of the participatory culture of Twitter in several ways.

According to Twitter's Help Section on Hashtags, they were created organically by users

(not by Twitter designers) in order to categorize tweets (Twitter 2014). They continue to

be used in this manner rather than Twitter providing users with a bank of pre-established

hashtags from which to choose. They are embedded in tweets in two ways, either as a

way of categorizing a message,[4] or to punctuate a message (i.e. express a feeling, much

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[3] A hyperlink is a word that, when clicked with a computer mouse, acts as a shortcut to
another part of the internet. It is usually designated by blue-colored text (see Figure 3 for
example).

[4] For example, BBC's Official *Doctor Who* Twitter account tweets when episodes are
being televised. One tweet stated "'He replaced you with a brand new model… Yeah. He
does that…' #SchoolReunion #SarahJane #K9" (Doctor Who Official (@bbcdoctorwho)
2014). The hashtagged comments signal to readers that this tweet and its contents are

like emoticons).[5] Hashtags allow information to be aggregated, resulting in a
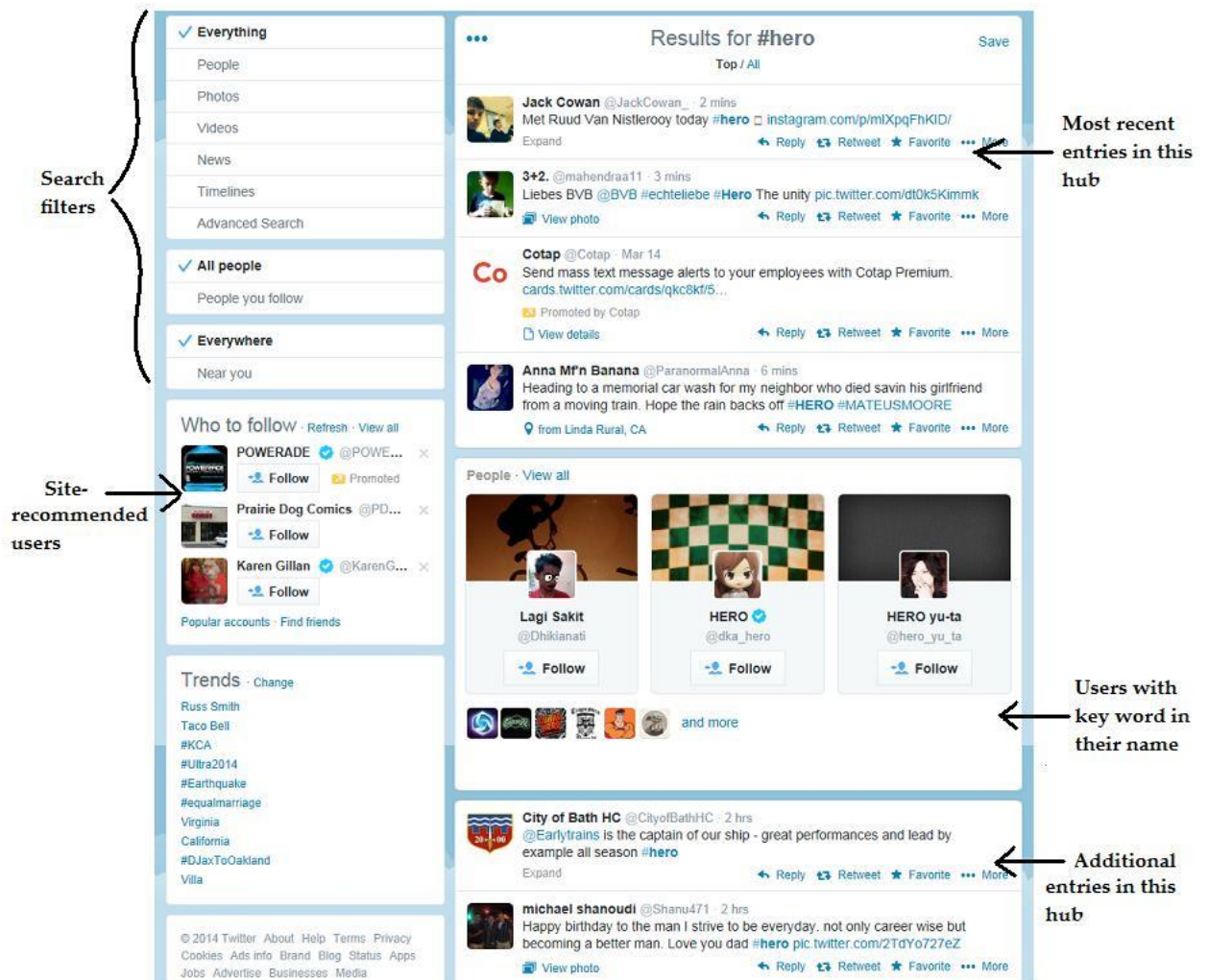
Figure 3.4: ***#Hero* Twitter page**

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about the episode "School Reunion" (indicated by "#SchoolReunion") and characters Sarah Jane and K-9 (indicated by their respective hashtags).

[5] For example, one female user tweeted "My Papa is free of cancer! **#hero** #sothankful ☐☺☐" where "#sothankful" (Taylor Murphy (@tayyyylord17) 2013) acts as a way of expressing her positive emotions about her father's medical state. The emoticon that follows is a redundancy that supports this conclusion.

conversation-like presentation akin to the para-social simulations of face-to-face dialogue found in broadcast talk (Tolson 2010; Page 2012). Including a specific hashtag in a tweet also implies to other users that you belong to a specific group of people who relate to this information in some way, creating tacit social groups. This can range from simply sharing a similar emotion to being part of the same cultural fan base, as implied by the two primary uses of hashtags (Page 2012).

3.1.2 BurrellesLuce

Burrelles*Luce* is a media-monitoring company that began as two separate news-clipping organizations that merged into what is today the largest, most successful media monitoring organization in the United States. Their primary service is to examine and compile media coverage about their clients so that the client can better manage their public relations. One of their most popular features is their published list top media sources in the United States. This list covers major print and online media, social media and networks, websites, and blogs. This comprehensive, and oft-updated, list allows researchers and public relations managers to easily determine which publications are most likely to include the information for which they are looking. The ranking of newspapers provided by Burrelles*Luce* makes it easier to determine which sources reach the largest segments of the population and therefore is indicative of the best sources of macro-level hero-claims.

3.2 Pros and Cons of Content Analyses

Content analysis is the methodology of choice when analyzing messages and communication in the media (Neuendorf 2002; Macnamara 2005). It is a technique that

aims at precisely describing what is said about a specific subject in a specific time and place (Lasswell, Lerner and Pool 1952). While often used as a quantitative method to confirm theorized relationships between units of analysis, a more reflexive version of this method is used to explore theoretical relationships while allowing for the possibility of emergent variables during the course of the investigation (Altheide 1987). Altheide refers to this style of content analysis as "ethnographic content analysis," an approach that is "embedded in *constant discovery* and *constant comparison* of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings and nuances" (Altheide 1987 emphasis in original; Glaser and Strauss 1967). Rather than establishing fixed categories of data before beginning analysis, this approach allows for a few categories to guide early analysis while providing room for new categories to rise from the data (Mayring 2000). Due to the malleable nature of the term "hero," this is the most logical approach for conducting an analysis of both social and traditional media as it allows the reported uses of the term to establish categories and coding organically during the analysis.

A content analysis is only a snapshot of a social phenomenon. Research using this method is only able to derive data from what is depicted in that snapshot. This means that content analyses are purely descriptive approaches, lacking the ability to incorporate mitigating factors like the motives of actors or the opportunity structures that influence those actors. Any data obtained during a content analysis is subject to the researcher's bias during analysis. The researcher is only able to assume what is meant in each representation rather than have it interpreted directly by the primary source of that data. The researcher also chooses which data are relevant based on personal assumptions of

what is relevant, further biasing the analysis (Schreier 2012). In other words, the researcher does not have any definite information about the cultural object besides what he or she can get from context clues and these clues are interpreted by the researcher in a subjective way. On the other hand, this approach provides readily available data for analysis while still leaving open the possibility of future comparative and/or elaborative research projects utilizing a more in-depth method.

Content analyses of media sources, such as those utilized in this research, are limited to what data are made available by those media sources. Therefore, the data utilized in this research are limited to those hero-claims that these particular media sources found newsworthy. Any media source is limited in carrying capacity, meaning that only so much information can be covered within a single broadcast or publication (Best 2013). Twitter is unique in this aspect, as the internet potentially has an unlimited carrying capacity, but Twitter's servers do not. Twitter, therefore, deletes more and more tweets from its archives as time goes by. Preliminary searches of tweets made in the years 2010 and 2011 found that most tweets available in the search results were from users that Twitter deems "highly influential" (i.e. celebrities). This means that the average person's hero-claims are no longer available for analysis.

All of the traditional print media sources utilized in this dissertation are either major metropolitan or national news sources and are more inclined towards reporting news that will be pertinent to the largest possible audience. Therefore, they must determine which news stories to include in each issue based on what is considered newsworthy to a general audience. In particular, the hero-claims found in the news are

claims that are deemed newsworthy by the media and conform to the media's own subjective understanding of what is or is not heroic. This means that they may be more likely to report hero-claims that pertain to the nation or a city as a whole, rather than those that pertain to small, highly localized groups. Finally, the opinions and claims of the groups featured in these news stories may not be the same as what researchers would find if they went directly to the group. Media choose what they want to report and how they report it based on the pressures of newswork, various constraints attached to the job, and the need to appeal to a vast audience (Best 2013). Therefore, hero-claims mentioned in these news stories may be misrepresented.

3.3 The Data

3.3.1 Twitter

In order to understand how information is shared on Twitter, I needed to make an account. The account name "HeroesResearcher" (username @heroresearcher) was established for this purpose. In order to keep my place in the "twittersphere" professional, no personal contacts were established through this account and no followers were sought. Opening an account does require that new users follow some other users and, to this end, three users were followed. This allowed for first-hand experience of how Twitter actively feeds the user with information from various sources. While this was useful for understanding the nature of tweeting and determining what access to information the average Twitter users have available to them, it was not sufficient for conducting a time-specific search as was required by this project. Twitter's search engine only allows for

access to the most recent tweets. Therefore, a search engine outside of Twitter's main site was required.

The general search of Twitter was performed using the advanced search engine provided by the social analytics website Topsy. Topsy's search engine was chosen over other social analytical search engines because it almost exactly recreates Twitter's internal search engine but allows for the additional parameter of time to be included. Topsy's results automatically include a retweet and favorites count as well. The search engine was configured to find any English-language tweets made between January 1, 2012 (12:00 am) and December 31, 2012 (11:00 pm) that feature any of the following words: hero, heroic, heroism, heroine. The search engine automatically included any compound or hyphenated words that included these terms (e.g. guitar hero, fallen hero, hero-or-heroism, etc.). Finally, the number of results from this (and other) searches was increased through the use of a free trial of Topsy Pro, an advanced form of the Topsy search engine.

From these results, the first 500 individual tweets were gathered as a convenience sample. Omitted from this sample of 500 tweets were any posts that were indecipherable,[6] comments to another user who had the word "hero" in their screen name,

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[6] These include any tweets that do not include a contextual base (like a conversation) in which to couch the hero-claim. For example, a tweet stating "Gave up on going out. Single player red wine games on heroic. No gameshark." was a stand-alone tweet that did not make any sense on its own, nor did it have any responses from other users that might give clues as to what it means. Also omitted were tweets that utilize so many abbreviations as to render them unintelligible. For example, a tweet stating "@JoyneelM hero activa or hero maestro bater scooter in purchases" might mean something to the user at whom it was directed but nothing to the casual reader.

or not referring to a person or a person's social status (i.e. music lyrics, book or movie titles or plot details, apparel, etc.). Of the 500 tweets gathered, 154 (30.8%) were removed for these reasons. The remaining tweets were analyzed for their origins (who is making the claim, an individual, a social movement organization, etc.), their content (what is said about heroes? What can be inferred from the text?), to whom the claims were being directed, and how often each tweet was retweeted or marked as a favorite by other users (signifying acceptance of the claim). Individual tweets that were included in the sample were often part of a conversation (i.e., multiple users discussing the same topic over many tweets) or had responses from others users connected to them. In these cases, all of the tweets were included in the sample. These were useful for elaborating upon the initial hero-claim or for finding additional hero-claims.

The next step of this research was to repeat the search of Twitter but limit it to tweets made within the *#hero* topic. The purpose of examining the hashtagged word was to determine how these claims differed from those in the general search. In this step, the following questions were addressed: How do these hero-claims differ from those found in general tweets? Are the same types of users making these claims? Do *#hero* tweets contain more in-depth discussions of heroes or heroism? Do these tweets have a higher retweet or favorite count than general tweets? Are there are particular topics that stand out from the rest (i.e. are repeated frequently or are especially unique)? A total of 500 tweets were gathered in this data set, removing 144 (28.8%).

During the analysis of the "hero/heroism/heroic/heroine" and *#hero* data sets, several more avenues for research were discovered. From these, three more Twitter data

sets were added to the analysis: *#heroine, #realheroes,* and *#trueheroism*. The *#heroine*

data set yielded a total of 250 results, omitting 117 (46.8%).[7] The *#realheroes* data set

yielded 100 results of which only 6 were removed (6%). The *#trueheroism* data set

yielded 47 results, omitting 9 (19.1%). Four of the data sets were analyzed until

saturation had been reached[8] and *#trueheroism* reached a natural cap, only yielding a total

of 47 results in all tweets made in 2012. A grand total of 967 tweets from all five

searches were considered viable sources of information and analyzed.

3.3.2 Traditional Print Media

A sample of newspaper articles was collected from the research source Lexis

Nexis Academic (Lexis Nexis 2013) which compiles back issues of many periodicals

world-wide. This database was compared to the Burrelles*Luce* list of top 100 daily

newspapers in the United States of America (Burrelles*Luce* 2012). This list is created by

ranking each periodical every 6 months based on circulation. From this list, the eight

highest-ranking newspapers that were found in both databases were chosen and added to

the search engine. The final list of periodicals is as follows (with Burrelles*Luce* rank):

USA Today (2), *The New York Times* (3), *The Daily News (*New York) (4), *The San Jose*

Mercury News (6), *The New York Post* (7), *The Washington Post* (8), *The Denver Post*

(14), *The Star Tribune* (Minnesota) (17). This list consists of two national news

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[7] The reason for the high omission rate in this data set was that the hash-tag hub
coincided with that of a highly anticipated Bollywood film called *Heroine*. For this
reason, nearly half of the Topsy results referenced the movie rather than the reputation.

[8] Saturation was determined as being the point when claims made within tweets were
redundant, echoing hero-claims made many times before and not presenting any new
information or opinions.

publications and six local publications that cater to a large, metropolitan area while maintaining strong circulation outside of their primary areas.

Each periodical was searched for reference to the term "hero*" in order to include any use of the word "hero" beyond its root (i.e. heroism, heroine, heroes, etc.). Due to the fact that Lexis Nexis will not display search results that number over 3,000 hits, the same periodicals had to be searched on a month-to-month basis. The entire time span added up to one year, January 1, 2012 until December 31, 2012.

Each news story was examined for use of the word "hero." Any use of the term that does not pertain to a person's reputation was removed from the dataset. These included uses of the word in terms of sandwiches, word puzzles, drugs (i.e. heroin), apparel, etc. All news stories that discussed heroes in terms of reputations were examined to determine what values were being associated with that reputational claim. This yielded the following results (presented as # of articles used/total # of articles in search results):

USA Today – 292/579 (49.6% omitted)
New York Times – 902/2635 (63.7% omitted)
New York Daily News – 723/1230 (41.3% omitted)
San Jose Mercury – 479/1105 (66.7% omitted)
New York Post – 637/1347 (62.7% omitted)
Washington Post – 577/1371 (67.9% omitted)
Denver Post – 255/556 (54.1% omitted)
Star Tribune – 219/673 (77.5% omitted)

A grand total of 4,084 articles were deemed viable for analysis.

Omission rates were significantly higher in the traditional media data sets as opposed to the Twitter data sets due to the fact that newspapers are writing about a broad list of topics and are therefore more likely to include more references that were not

pertinent to the research.[9] Tweets, on the other hand, tended to be far more focused on specific topics and could be more easily filtered using search engines.

3.4 Creating Categories

During the initial analysis of the first Twitter data set ("hero/heroism/heroic/heroine"), extensive notes were taken regarding the possible categories of hero-claims that could be found within the data. Possible categories were determined by listing every type of hero encountered in the data set (i.e. sports hero, soldier, father as hero, friend as hero, saved life, saved property, etc.). Next, this extensive list of possible categories was culled by adding, subtracting, or merging categories with other similar categories until a precise list was created that would best encapsulate the hero-claims found in the data while avoiding redundancy and triviality.

The final list of categories fit into three types: Heroic Attributes/Actions, Heroes of Institutions/Occupations, and Emergent Heroes. The three types of heroes are designated by how the subject of the claim (i.e., the hero) is framed in the hero-claim. Heroic Atttibutes/Actions are types of heroes discussed more for their actions or characteristics than for who they are as a person or with whom they associate. Heroes of Institutions/Occupations are types of heroes framed as heroes for who they are or for the social group with whom they are associated. Emergent Heroes are heroes that were framed as spur-of-the-moment heroes, heroes that emerged suddenly in times of crisis.

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[9] For example, *The New York Times* included an extremely high number of reviews of films and books. The authors of these articles almost always used the word "hero" in lieu of the word "protagonist" to refer to the main characters of the plots. As "protagonist" is not a reputational claim, and these appearances of the word "hero" were often in reference to fictional characters, all of these articles were eliminated from the data set.

The final list of categories is provided below, with brief explanations of what types of

hero-claims are encompassed by each category:[10]

Table 3.1 – Typology of Heroes

Heroic Attributes	Heroes of Institutions/Occupations	Emergent Heroes
• Above/Beyond the Call of Duty	• Celebrity Worship	• Heroes of 9/11
• Cult Hero (Not Sports or Sports)	• Family Member	• Heroes of Aurora, CO
• Folk Hero (Not Sports or Sports)	• First Responders (Firefighters)	• Heroes of Hurricane Sandy
	• First Responders (Law Enforcement)	• Heroes of Sandy Hook Elementary School
• Helpful/Notable Actions		
• Heroes Who Performed Great Acts	• First Responders (Medical)	• Saviors
• Inspiration/Role Model	• Hero of a Group/Community	
• Overcoming Adversity (Physical)	• Olympic Hero	
• Overcoming Adversity (Social)	• Politicians in Elections	
• Professional Accolades/Admiration	• Sports Hero	
• Unsung Hero (Not Sports or Sports)	• War Hero/Soldier	

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[10] Several categories of heroes that had not been present in the Twitter data were found in
the newspaper data. The following categories were added to the final list: unsung heroes,
cult heroes, folk heroes, and politicians in elections.

3.4.1 Heroic Attributes

Hero-claims in the category of "Above/Beyond the Call of Duty" were any hero-claim that specifically used this phrase or any derivation of it; it refers to people deemed heroic by performing a task or job beyond the scope of what is deemed normal. The "Cult Hero (Not Sports or Sports)" were hero-claims in which the claimant suggested that the subject of the claim is a hero to a few devoted supporters or fans. The specific phrase must be used. Similarly, "Folk Hero (Not Sports or Sports)" referred to any hero-claim in which the claimant suggested that the subject of the claim is a hero to all people, "the common people," or some derivation of these. The specific phrase must be used. The category of "Helpful/Notable Actions" referred to any hero-claim made about a person whose actions were deemed helpful to the claimsmaker or someone directly associated with the claimsmaker, as well as any hero-claim that did not fit into any other category specified here (i.e. general claims about teachers, neighbors, etc.). "Heroes Who Performed Great Acts" were hero-claims about a person whose action were considered significant points in history without being tied to a major political or social upheaval (e.g. first astronauts on the moon, first woman in space, first trans-Atlantic flight, etc.). Heroes named in the category of "Inspiration/Role Model" were being heralded by the claimsmaker for inspiring them in some way, utilizing these specific words or any derivation of it. This differs from "Professional Accolades/Admiration" (see below) in that the claimsmaker is either praising the subject of the claim for a general, life-affirming reason (i.e. inspire me to be a better person) or the claimsmaker is suggesting that they have not achieved their goal yet, but aspire to because of another person. The

category of "Overcoming Adversity (Physical)" referred to hero-claims about a person who had to conquer a physical impairment in order to be considered heroic (e.g. physical handicap, cancer, etc.). Paralympic heroes qualified for this category and "Olympic Hero" (see below) due to the linked nature of their actions and physical attributes. Likewise, "Overcoming Adversity (Social)" were hero-claims about a person who had to conquer or challenge some form of social discrimination in order to be considered heroic (e.g. humanitarian actions, civil rights advocates, etc.). "Professional Accolades/Admiration" were hero-claims in which the claimsmaker is praising another person in their occupational field for either acting as a role model to people within that field or changing the field in a positive way. Differs from "Inspiration/Role Model" (see above) in that the claimsmaker is specifically noting that the subject of the claim only inspired them to be better within their shared occupation field. Finally, the category of "Unsung Hero (Not Sports or Sports)" referred to any hero-claim in which the claimant suggested that the subject of the claim is a hero who does not receive enough recognition for their heroism or is now a hero in spite of often being overlooked for their achievements. The specific phrase must be used.

3.4.2 Heroes of Institutions/Occupations

"Celebrity Worship" referred to any hero-claim that praised a person for their celebrity status or ability to entertain people well; includes any hero-claim made about a person who is noteworthy within a certain form of entertainment (e.g. guitar-hero, hip-hop hero, etc.). The category of "Family Member" referred to any hero-claim in which the claimant is referring to a member of his or her family. The categories "First

Responders (Firefighters)," "First Responders (Law Enforcement)," and "First Responders (Medical)" referred to any hero-claim in which the claimant referred to a member of a firefighting team (paid or volunteer), an officer of the law (police, marshall, security guard, etc.), or emergency medical team (within or outside of a hospital or office setting). The category of "Hero of a Group/Community" referred to any hero-claim in which the claimant specified that actions performed by the subject of the claim were praiseworthy or directly benefitted a specific segment of a population (i.e. national heroes, religious heroes, hometown heroes, etc.). "Olympic Hero" was any hero-claim in which the subject of the claim was heralded for their prowess during Olympic or Paralympic games. Paralympic heroes qualified for this category and "Overcoming Adversity (Physical)" (see above) due to the linked nature of their actions and physical attributes. "Politicians in Elections" referred to any hero-claim in which the claimant referred to a person running in a political election or is highly influential in a political election (e.g. presidential candidates, members of congress, etc.). The category of "Sports Hero" was any hero-claim in which the subject of the claim was praised for performance during a sporting event or because of their association with a sport. Finally, "War Hero/Soldier" referred to any hero-claim in which the subject of the claim is a member of a military group or has a positive association with efforts made during wartime (i.e. a war hero is not necessarily a soldier and a soldier is not necessarily a war hero).

3.4.3 Emergent Heroes

"Heroes of 9/11" were any hero-claims that referred generally to people involved in the terrorist attacks on the United States that took place on September 11, 2001 (very

often the specific phrase, "heroes of 9/11," was utilized). Likewise, "Heroes of Aurora, CO" were any hero-claim about a person directly or indirectly connected with the shooting spree that occurred during the viewing of the film *The Dark Knight Rises*, July 20, 2012 in Aurora, Colorado. The category of "Heroes of Hurricane Sandy" referred to any hero-claim about a person directly or indirectly connected with the events and/or after-effects of Hurricane Sandy, October 22-31, 2012. "Heroes of Sandy Hook Elementary" referred to any hero-claim about a person directly or indirectly connected with the shooting spree that occurred in a Newtown, Connecticut elementary school on December 14, 2012. Finally, the category of "Savior" referred to any hero-claim in which the subject of the claim rescued another person/people from imminent danger or death.

3.5 Comparing Data from Twitter and Newspapers

The findings presented in the following chapters summarize all of the data analyzed. Hero-claims from both data sets will be conflated whenever possible in an effort to elicit common themes and address the following questions: who is making hero-claims, who are the audience for these hero-claims, and what is the content of these hero-claims. For the most part, hero-claims from both data sets were uniform, containing similar information and rhetorical structure. In certain instances, however, the form of communication affected how hero-claims were presented and what they contained.

There is a plethora of research elaborating upon the influence of the medium of communication on the form of claims (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Sobieraj 2011; Best 2013). All agree that each form of media has its own unique structure and rules, necessitating different approaches to communicating the same idea from one medium to

another. In other words, how you make a claim in one medium may not be exactly the same way you make the same claim in another medium. For example, a newspaper article may have a story about teen suicides. This story would need to fit within the standard structure of the paper by being a certain length, presenting facts as quickly as possible, etc. Meanwhile, the same topic discussed on a talk show would use fewer facts and more dramatic tension in order to keep the audience attentive and coming back after commercials. The essential character of a claim may be the same across forms of media, but its presentation differs depending on the method of communication.

The carrying capacity of a media source is the space and/or time available to present a story. Because traditional news media have limited carrying capacities (i.e. space on a page, minutes in a broadcast, etc.), claims presented in these media must be simplified, reducing ideology and enhancing the drama of the claim in order to make it more presentable for the audience (Best 2013). Print media are specifically limited by page count as well as the space available on each page (keeping in mind the need to leave space for advertisements, pictures, etc.). The consequence of such limits is that news articles appearing in this medium must be concise, getting to the point without overwhelming readers with too many details or opinions. The newspaper sources used in this research conform to this standard, though there were variations in style from source to source.[11]

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[11] For example, the *New York Times* tended to cover more international stories than the other periodical sampled for this research. This is most likely due to its high international circulation and its attempts to be the most thorough source of world news. The *Washington Post* featured more political-themed stories and fewer cultural articles than the other periodicals. This is due to the fact that it is located in Washington, D.C.

While a newspaper's carrying capacity is a product of its form, Twitter's carrying capacity is self-imposed. Originally conceived as a mobile communication service (i.e. for use on mobile devices such as cell phones), Twitter was designed to conform to the standards of text messaging as a form of communication. While a text can theoretically be as long as you want it to be, users tend to type in shorthand, using slang, abbreviations, and symbols to communicate ideas more efficiently. Twitter makes the de facto shorthand of texting a structured rule by limiting all tweets to maximum of 140 characters. The designers of Twitter justify this limit by stating that it keeps people focused instead of rambling. "Brevity keeps Twitter fast-paced and relevant by encouraging people to Tweet in the moment and to focus on the essential idea they are trying to communicate" (Twitter 2014). Therefore, Twitter's carrying capacity functions in the same manner as that of a newspaper: to keep the author of the story/tweet focused on the essential elements of the claim being presented.

The only significant difference between newspapers and Twitter in this case is how language is affected by each medium's sense of concision. Twitter's insistence on the 140 character limit and emphasis on texting-style communications means that users have very little room in their tweets to elaborate on their claims. Newspapers, on the other hand, have more space with which to use elaborate diction or justify claims. This resulted in the newspaper data set yielding more categories of heroes than the Twitter data set. With the exception of the "politicians in elections" category, these additional categories were all heroic attributes.

Another constraint on the presentation of claims in the media is the time frame in which the news can be presented. Newspapers are often a day behind, only able to print a story after it has occurred. However, contemporary media groups have created online versions of their papers, allowing them to not only supersede the problem of a carrying capacity but also to present news faster than their print versions allow. Many media groups now have Twitter accounts as well, allowing them to also feed news into the "Twittersphere."

Being on the internet, a media source which theoretically has no carrying capacity or time limitation, Twitter has the ability to generate news instantaneously, with users posting news stories as they happen. However, Twitter does not live up to this potential. Rather, all of the tweets analyzed for this research appeared following the publication of a new story in another medium. Many users even included in their tweets links to previously published news articles (several of which came from online versions of newspapers). This demonstrates the often reactionary nature of Twitter, rather than its proactive potential.

In terms of how long a story can be told by a media source, carrying capacity and time dictate that a story, once presented, will have little further presentation unless that story continues to present new and dramatic details that warrant further printings. Therefore, newspapers tend to only present a story once, moving it aside to make room for more current news. There were a few exceptions to this, such as the following of a sports star or team (as new games presented new information to be shared) or developments in the 2012 presidential election (whether a candidate had dropped in or

out of the race, how these candidates were doing in the polls, etc.). The lifespan of an average news story in the newspapers was 1-2 days after the event occurred (i.e., the initial breaking of the story).

Twitter, because it has a theoretically infinite capacity for shared news (the internet knows no bounds in terms of storage), could have a story become the focus of a tweet, conversation, or information hub (i.e. hash-tag) at any moment after the news has broken. However, like newspapers, the lifespan of a particular news story was almost always limited to the immediate day or two after the actual event occurred. For example, in a search for tweets regarding Victoria Soto (the teacher who died trying to save her students during the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre), references to Soto were limited to two days after the massacre occurred. There were occasions where a conversation between users about a news story would continue past this time frame, but these instances were rare. Therefore, the lifespan of a news story on Twitter did not vary from that of a story presented in the newspapers.

3.6 Analysis

The analysis of the data will address the following questions: who makes hero-claims, who are the audience for hero-claims, and what is the content of hero-claims. Addressing these questions will clarify several points about the social construction of heroes in contemporary America. First, we will determine the nature of the contemporary hero, what characteristics they possess and how they expected to implement them. This will allow for a better understanding of how heroism is defined in our individualist

culture and how that compares to the definitions posed by past scholars as well as the definition of heroism I proposed in the previous chapter.

Second, this analysis will yield a better understanding of the construction of hero-claims themselves. In doing so, we will determine the general rhetorical structure of hero-claims. This will foster a better understanding of how the hero fits into society as a social character; what is the purpose of a hero? Establishing a rhetorical structure for hero-claims will not only allow for comparison across different styles of claimsmaking (e.g. social problems claims versus hero-claims) but will also demonstrate what makes the heroes listed in the typology above heroic.

Chapter 4

WHAT IS A HERO?

Gordon: "I never cared who you were…But shouldn't people know the hero who saved them?"
Batman: "A hero can be anyone. That was always the point. Anyone."
- *The Dark Knight Rises* (Nolan and Nolan 2012)

In chapter 2, a broad definition of "hero" was proposed, one that attempted to encapsulate all of the different types of heroes that might be encountered in a study of heroes. While that definition offers a framework for research purposes, the purpose of this study is to examine how the hero is discussed in everyday life. When people speak of heroes, they often are making specific references to particular people. People making hero-claims are often drawing upon their own specific ideas about what is heroic and who qualifies as a hero. The data will demonstrate how people define heroism for themselves, drawing upon specific rhetoric to construct their hero-claims.

The data will be broken down in three ways: who makes hero-claims, to whom are these claims being made (the audiences), and what are the contents of these claims (what are the characteristics of a hero and what actions do they perform). The latter two sections will elaborate on the specific characteristics of heroes as defined through specific rhetorical devices that are common to hero-claims. These rhetorical devices are the

appeal to an audience (is it a personal hero or a hero to many), the relationship between the hero and the general population (is the hero of the people or above the people), and the scope of the hero's reputation (is it a brief moment of heroism or heroism that stands the test of time). Eliciting these rhetorical devices from the data will allow a more precise examination of the hero as it is constructed in contemporary claims, offering insight into how the hero is defined and how heroism is constructed.

4.1 The Claimsmakers

Hero-claims are found in the data come from two different sources: primary claims and secondary claims. Primary claims are claims directly stated by the claimsmaker, while secondary claims restate another person's claim. Primary claims were more common in the Twitter data than the newspaper data. This is because Twitter users are encouraged to post what they find interesting in order to share it with others. The idea is that by posting self-serving claims, you are expressing yourself and your beliefs to your followers and, by extension, the world. One of Twitter's catch phrases states that "Twitter connects the planet to a global conversation" (Twitter 2014). Twitter actively encourages users to converse with people outside of their followers list. This is easily done as tweets are published openly, without the typical privacy restrictions common to other forms of social media.[12] When you send a tweet, it is available for all to see.

Hero-claims on Twitter can be made in three ways, by writing a new tweet or commenting on another's tweet, retweeting (sending a tweet someone else has already

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[12] It is possible to block users from sending you messages, but you cannot block users from reading your messages. This differs greatly from social media sites such as Facebook where it is possible to block from seeing your content all users that are not on your list of approved friends.

sent), or marking favorite posts. Composing a new tweet or commenting on others'

tweets are forms of primary claimsmaking on Twitter. In these cases, the claimsmaker is

making a direct hero-claim or supporting one already made. One example of a direct

hero-claim read as follows: "My girl @CarlysVoice is on the Doctors! She is my amazes

me #autism #hero" (Holly Robinson Peete (@hollyrpeete) 2012). Hero-claims made in

tweets are often presented as direct statements, with any questioning or debate about the

hero's status coming from subsequent conversations with other users. Since every

original tweet is supposed to be a reflection of that user's beliefs and world-view, these

claims can be directly attributed to the twitter user who generated them, making them

primary claims. The above example came from Holly Robinson Peete, an activist for

autism research, making her the primary claimsmaker for that hero-claim. The very act of

including something in a tweet is to say that you support it. For example, a tweet sent by

user Stanley T. Evans (@MashUpStanleyT) read "To all servicemen & women past and

present...throughout the world; Thank You. Happy Veterans' Day. #realheroes" which

another user commented upon, making a unique but similar claim: "@MashUpStanleyT I

had a great uncle who served in World War II. He is my Hero, because he fought for our

Freedom in this World. ;-)" (Stanley T. Evans (@MashUpStanleyT) 2012). This example

demonstrates how commenting on another's hero-claim can result in a totally new, yet

related, claim. In this case, the general claim about veterans as heroes led to the other

user making a personal claim about a family member who was a veteran.

　　　　Secondary claims on Twitter come in the forms of retweets, attachments, and

favorite votes. Retweets are understood to be echoes of others' comments, shorthand for

agreeing with someone else. Retweets are marked by the letters "RT" followed by the

original comment. For example, the tweet "RT @BarackObama :Neil Armstrong was a

hero not just of his time,but of all time.Thank you,Neil,for showing us the power of 1

small step.-bo" (luis jaime cisneros (@ljcisneros) 2012) demonstrates how one user took

a hero-claim made by Barack Obama and retweeted it, showing support for the claim.

Marking another user's tweet as a favorite is a similar gesture. Favorite votes, as well as

total retweets, are kept as a score along with the original tweet. The result helps to show

how much support a hero-claim has from other Twitter users. For example, a typical

Twitter hero-claim and its subsequent support looks like this (idil (@idillionaire) 2012):

> **idil**@idillionaire 12 Jul 12
>
> The human life is made up of choices. Yes or no. Love or hate. To be a
> hero or to be a coward. Choose wisely!

- **164** RETWEETS
- **42** FAVORITES

Figure 4.1: Example of a Twitter hero-claim

By retweeting or marking a tweet as a favorite, the claim is being restated but the user

retweeting or voting for favorites is not the original claimsmaker. This makes these types

of claims secondary claims.

The author of a newspaper article is usually just reporting news. News work, the

act of finding and reporting news to the public (Best 2013), is more concerned with

finding newsworthy stories and claims that will hold the audience's attention rather than

reporting claims in which they have a vested interest. Often, the author is writing about a

particular type of news (e.g. sports, politics, etc.) to which they have been assigned. This,

however, does not preclude the possibility of primary claims being made in newspaper

articles. Like Twitter, both primary and secondary claims can be found. Upon analysis, approximately 53% of the hero-claims found in the traditional print media data set were made by the author of the article, making that writer the primary claimsmaker. The majority of these hero-claims came from the sports sections of these newspapers. It is common practice for sports writers to use highly dramatic, action-oriented language in order to convey a story. This is reflected in the frequent use of the word "hero" to describe the most valuable player (MVP) of a play, a game, or even an entire season. For example, an article describing one Oakland Athletics' player wrote that "Oakland then capped its major league-high 11th walk-off victory of the season…Crisp was the first A's player to became [sic] a hero twice, after a different hitter had delivered the winning RBI in the 10 previous walk-offs" (Sports 2012).[13] This quote demonstrates how the player's actions in this specific game were heroic for allowing the team to continue a specific winning streak, though the dramatic use of the term comes across as hyperbolic.

Other common sources of writers directly making hero-claims came from references to people that are culturally considered heroes, such as first responders and soldiers. For example, an article reporting the death of a New York firefighter began the article by describing the man as an "FDNY 9/11 hero" (Burke, Paddock, and Hutchinson 2012). Even though his death was not related to his rescue efforts on 9/11, the FDNY was granted considerable heroic status after 9/11 (Monahan 2010). In these cases, the use of the word "hero" is to be expected as it is considered proper in America's post-9/11

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[13] "Walk-off" is a baseball term referring to a score-earning hit that not only provides a team with the point that puts them in the lead, but also the win. It must be the last hit in the final inning of the game and the opposing team must have no recourse.

culture. Similar rhetoric was found in obituaries ("Beryl Larson, 85, passed Sept. 10, 2012…She was our light and our hero" ("Obituaries and Memorials" 2012) and letters from readers ("Who is the Denver Post to call Lance Armstrong a quitter? Mr. Armstrong is a hero of mine exactly because he is not a quitter" (Levinson 2012)), both of which are sections of newspapers where the hero-claims are attributed to the writer of that article. In all of these cases, the text of the newspaper story presents hero-claims as facts, as if the subject of the claim's heroism is already decided and beyond question.

The other 47% of hero-claims found in the traditional print media data set were claims from direct or indirect quotes from someone other than the article's author. Direct quotes from interviewees were the most common source of these hero-claims, followed by indirect quotes from interviewees. A direct quote refers to a secondary hero-claim found in an article that is written as a specific quote from someone being interviewed. For example, in an article describing how a man pulled someone from a car before it exploded featured a quote from the local police chief regarding the savior: "'He was a real hero,' Ticer said" (Lofholm 2012). An indirect quote is any hero-claim attributed directly to the opinion of another person without the use of a direct quotation from that person. For example, the author of an article about modern art reported that the curator of a new exhibition had a specific art-hero: "One of his heroes is the polymath par excellence Mauricio Kagel…" (Colman 2012). This quote, like the previous one, reports someone's hero-claim but does so without specifically quoting that individual. Other common sources of these hero-claims came from the names of assistance programs or the titles of awards or monikers granted to the subjects of the hero-claims. For example,

several articles in the data discussed the "Hiring Our Heroes" initiative, a program that assisted veterans with finding jobs once they end their tour of duty (Brunswick 2012). Direct quotes, along with the personal claims made by Twitter users, made up the primary sources of information regarding the definition of "hero."

4.2 The Audience

It is the duty of a claimsmaker to convince an audience to accept the claim. Best (2013) notes that one strategy for spreading a claim is to target a specific population, one that most likely will agree with the claim. Finding a specific audience allows the claimsmaker the advantage of only having to appeal to certain attributes found in that segment of the population (i.e., specific ideologies, demographic characteristics, etc.). This is meant to increase the chances that the audience will adopt the claim.

For newspapers, their primary audience is those in their immediate location, specifically subscribers. If every article is meant to support the paper, and the paper is a product of a specific geographic or social region, then it is to be expected that hero-claims found in these articles should demonstrate a bias towards that region. This was evidenced in much of the data. For example, newspapers based out of New York were most likely to have a plethora of hero-claims about the New York Giants, the football team that won the 2012 Superbowl. Out of 373 total references found in the newspaper data set, 241 were from New York-based newspapers (64.6%).[14] Newspapers originating

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[14] 112 references were found in the *New York Post*, 96 references were found in the *Daily News* (New York), and 33 were found in the *New York Times*.

from west coast regions referenced the Giants far less (64 total references),[15] often only referring to them as winners or champions rather than as heroes. Similarly, newspapers with closer proximity to a major disaster tended to report on that disaster more often and in more detail. For example, the *Denver Post* was the newspaper to contain the most hero-claims about people involved in the Aurora movie theater massacre (25 out of a total 69 claims, 36.2%) which occurred in Colorado. The newspapers next most likely to make hero-claims about the Aurora shooting were *USA Today* (a national newspaper (17 references, 24.6%)) and the *San Jose Mercury* (which, geographically, is the next closest periodical to Colorado (13 references, 18.8%)) respectively. Similarly, New York-based papers were most likely to contain hero-claims about the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre (39 claims out of 61 total, 63.9%),[16] which took place in Connecticut (a neighboring state) and was also linked to New York by the dramatic connection between Giants star Victor Cruz and Sandy Hook victim Jack Pinto.[17]

Another method of appealing to a specific audience common to the newspapers in the data set was the "local hero" section found in some of the papers. These sections, often marked by the phrases "hometown heroes" or "heroes of [insert specific community here]" made significant numbers of hero-claims about members of specific communities. For example, *The Daily News* (NY) featured a series of articles describing the

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[15] 58 references were from the *San Jose Mercury* and 6 were from the *Denver Post*.

[16] 28 references were from the *Daily News* (New York), 10 references were from the *New York Post*, and 1 was found in the *New York Times*.

[17] Pinto, a fan of Cruz's, was buried in a Cruz jersey. Cruz made several personal gestures to honor his fan, all of which were nationally recognized.

"Hometown Heroes of Transit," an annual award given by the newspaper to a member of the mass transit system (commuter or employee) whose actions made using the mass transit system more enjoyable for others. These types of articles were often framed in such a way as to inform the public, and specifically that community or segment of the population, that a hero was among them, making their lives better. This type of hero will be explored in more detail in chapter 5.

Twitter, not bound by geographic region, still has a subscriber list known as a user's "followers." Followers automatically receive the tweets of those they follow on their homepage. A user's most immediate audience is their followers. Any message they tweet is automatically sent to their followers and they, in turn, receive any message sent by someone they follow. A user will also receive tweets from someone they do not follow when those tweets are retweeted by someone they do follow. Hero-claims made on Twitter, however, did not demonstrate a penchant for catering to their subscribers as newspapers must do. Rather, tweeted hero-claims were often general statements about heroism or a specific hero, presented in a factual manner. For example, a tweet from Stephen Fry claimed that "The Cri lunchtime talk v enjoyable. Chris Holmes, struck blind aged 14 won 9 gold 6 silver: he's now director of 2012 Paralympic Games #hero" (Stephen Fry (@stephenfry) 2012). The rhetorical structure of this tweet is typical of those found in the Twitter data set. The hero-claim is presented in a matter-of-fact way, stating that paralympian Chris Holmes was a hero (represented by the hashtag) and providing evidence to support that claim. While evidence was not always provided by the

claimsmaker, most claimsmakers made some sort of statement as to why they supported the subject of their claim.

The only direct way for a claimsmaker on Twitter to specify a segment of the population was to include hashtags in the claim. By placing a hashtag (#) next to a word, it changes that word into a link that takes you to a specific section of Twitter that only lists tweets with that same hashtagged word. Hashtag sites are information hubs, places where people with the same interest (designated by the hashtagged word) can pool all of their thoughts on the subject. By putting a hashtagged word into a tweet, a user is ensuring that their tweet (including their claim) will be listed with tweets about the same subject. This also means that anyone who follows that hashtag link will be brought to the information hub for that word, granting them access to people who are interested in the same topic.

4.2.1 Rhetorical Device #1: The Appeal to an Audience

Once an audience has been selected, it is the claimsmaker's responsibility to convince them to adopt a specific framework about a topic. The purpose of a hero-claim is to convey to an audience a specific framework about a hero, or heroism in general. This is achieved by using certain rhetorical devices that, when combined, form the basic structure of the hero-claim, providing for the audience a basic construction of the hero. The first of these rhetorical devices is the appeal to an audience. Once an audience is found, the claimsmaker makes an appeal to that audience, claiming that the hero is appropriate for that group or person. The appeal to an audience takes two forms, the

claimsmaker is either making a singular appeal ("this is my/your hero") or to appeal to a group of people to accept the hero themselves ("this is our/your hero").

4.2.1.1 Singular Appeals

Singular appeals take two forms, the personal opinion and the appeal to an individual. The personal opinion was the more common form of singular appeal found in the data. It is directed at no particular audience. It is simply a statement of personal interest made by the claimsmaker. Hero-claims with singular appeals found in the data are addressed to a general audience by virtue of the fact that they are in public media. However, the content of the hero-claim suggests that the hero is heroic to one person only, usually the claimsmaker. These are personal statements meant to express personal opinions. For example, a claimsmaker wrote a newspaper article that conveyed a personal opinion about Bob Costas to his readers:

> "This is why my heroes are the people who utilize their platform for good and direct their audiences toward matters more urgent than wins, losses and hot stove action - and why my New York Daily News Sportsperson of the Year is Bob Costas, for his use of a Dec. 2 NBC "Sunday Night Football" broadcast to call for increased gun control." (Martino 2012)

While the article itself is meant to reach a general audience of readers, this hero-claim does not contain any rhetoric that specifically asks the audience to adopt Bob Costas as their hero. It is a personal statement from the author, claiming that he finds Costas heroic for the way he utilized his public presence as a sports commentator.

Many tweets also made singular appeals of personal opinion, stating in a public forum that a person was the user's personal hero. The popularity of these personal opinions (i.e., how much others agreed with that personal opinion) could be judged by

observing the retweet and favorite counts posted on each tweet, as well as examining any attached conversation from other users. Retweets and favorite votes, being secondary claims themselves, also present a tacit agreement with the primary claims. This is because Twitter users are generally tweeting about what matters to them, adhering to Twitter's suggested format of communication (making personal statements for everyone to read). Therefore, if one user makes a personal hero-claim and a second user retweets it or echoes the sentiment in a comment, it is possible that the second user is not only agreeing with the first's hero-claim but making one himself. This differentiates comments that agree with a hero-claim and those that retweet it or make their own hero-claim in

Mo Bruno Roy@meaux_marie 11 Aug 12

I have huge respect and love for sports/athletes, but I reserve the word hero for beings that risk their lives for other beings #realheroes

- **5** RETWEETS
- **3** FAVORITES

4:45 PM - 11 Aug 12

1. **Todd Rowell**@onlyanumber11 Aug 12

   @meaux_marie yes, this has always bugged me!

2. **Laura Weislo**@Laura_Weislo11 Aug 12

   @meaux_marie exactly why I was so proud of Jimmy Watkins. Firefighter, bad ass sprinter.

3. **Tom**@giantcu9211 Aug 12

   @meaux_marie agree. Always nice to have sports "heroes" but I know a lot of real heroes out there.

Figure 4.2: Example of retweeting

response to the first. Figure 4.2 (Mo Bruno Roy (@meaux_marie) 2012; Todd Rowell (@onlyanumber) 2012; Laura Weislo (@Laura_Weislo) 2012; Tom (@giantcu92) 2012) clarifies this point. In this example, the primary claim is made by Mo Bruno Roy (@meaux_marie), stating that he believes the word "hero" only applies to those who risk their lives for others. This is a personal opinion, evidenced by his wording ("I reserve" instead of "we" or "you"). The first two responses (Todd Rowell (@onlyanumber) and Laura Weislo (@Laura_Weislo)) voice agreement with the primary hero-claim ("Yes, this has always bugged me!" and "exactly why I was so proud of…"). The third response (Tom (@giantcu92)), however, voices his agreement but takes this opportunity to make his own separate, yet related, hero-claim ("I know a lot of real heroes out there"). We may not know to whom he refers, but it is clear that he is still differentiating between sports stars and real heroes, just as the primary claimsmaker did.

This ability to judge tacit or explicit agreement with a hero-claim is exclusive to Twitter as very few readers' opinions are publicized in newspapers. Overall, there were far more personal opinion hero-claims in the Twitter data set than in the newspaper data set, owing to the purely individualized nature of Twitter. This means that, for the most part, Twitter data were more likely to provide specific hero-claims, naming specific people as heroes, rather than descriptive ones that expound on the concept of heroism itself.

The second form of singular appeals found in hero-claims is those that refer to specific individuals. In these cases, the rhetoric used suggests that the hero is heroic to a single person who is not the claimsmaker. For example, an article describing a group of

high school students who raised money to support a heart transplant patient made a claim about one student's affection for the subject of their charity: "'The whole group is very sad' about Duevel's leaving, said Johnson, who hopes to keep in touch with her hero via Skype" (Rosenblum 2012). In this claim, the claimsmaker is the author of the article, but the claim refers to one individual (Johnson). The claim suggests that the hero, Duevel, is heroic specifically to Johnson ("keep in touch with her hero"). The individual nature of the hero-claim makes it a personal claim about a third party.

4.2.1.2 Appeals to a Group

On the other end of the dichotomy is the appeal to the group. The hero, in these cases, is someone the claimsmaker believes should be a hero to a group of people. This group can be of any size, from a small segment of an audience to an entire nation or the world, nor does the audience of the claim necessarily have to belong to the group cited in the hero-claim. For example, figure 4.3 demonstrates a Twitter conversation (Karen Rodriguez (@krod65) 2012; Gary Maylin (@GaryMaylin) 2012) about Sandy Hook Elementary School teacher Victoria Soto, who died attempting to save her students from

1. **Karen Rodriguez**@krod6516 Dec

   Victoria Soto is an inspiration to all teachers and americans #wewillremember

   Gary Maylin@GaryMaylin16 Dec

   @krod65 She is an inspiration to all people in all places. #TrueHeroism #RIP
   7:11 PM - 16 Dec 12

Figure 4.3: Example of an appeal to a group

a killer, putting the act of heroism in a grand context. The first user in this example claims that Soto's actions should appeal to teachers (a specific segment of the population) and Americans (a whole nation) without making a hero-claim. The second user makes the actual hero-claim (represented by the hashtag near the end of his tweet), suggesting that her heroic appeal is universal. In this instance, the appeal is to the largest group possible, everyone. Most claims do not make such grandiose appeals, often claiming that a small group of people should accept the hero. For example, the recipients of local awards often receive the title of "community hero," naming the specific community in the title. Thus, the recipient of the Montgomery County Civic Federation Community Hero award, the coach of a special needs hockey team in Bethesda, Maryland, could be considered a hero specifically to those associated with the Montgomery County Civic Federation, to Montgomery County (Maryland) itself, or to the children he coaches (McEwan 2012). In any case, the hero-claim specifies that he is a hero to a specific group of people.

The above examples also demonstrate a common rhetorical device used in hero-claims that appeal to a group: the appeal to social solidarity. Hero-claims appealing to a group usually include rhetoric that states that the hero is a source of solidarity for the group. The first example makes the statement of social solidarity in two ways, through the use of common remembrance phrases like "RIP" (represented here as a hashtag) as well as the statements that Soto is an inspiration for all. The second example demonstrates the social solidarity inspired by the hero in the title of the award itself, naming the hero specifically as a community hero.

Hero-claims appealing to a group come in two forms, active and passive. An active appeal is when the claimsmaker makes an overt link between the hero named in the claim and a group of people. Active appeals to a group leave no doubt as to the hero-claim's audience. For example, the author of an article discussing the man who popularized high-speed skiing stated that "[though] he was a hero in France…I had never heard of Allais until his death…" (Lindgren 2012). In this example, the claimsmaker is directly stating that the subject of the claim was already a hero in France. Therefore, there is no question as to whom the hero-claim is meant to appeal. The hero-claim actively names the French people as the group associated with the hero.

A passive appeal is when the hero-claim does not contain a direct link between the hero and a group of people. Often the group is implied in some way outside of the hero-claim or through foreknowledge of whom the hero is typically associated, though one may need to search for context clues outside of the claim to find them. These types of appeals were more common than active appeals in the data, being most common in hero-claims made about sports stars. For example, a common turn of phrase in sports-related hero-claims was that a specific player was a hero in a specific game or play. In these instances, the player is named a hero but the hero-claim did not contain the name of the player's team. Rather, it was assumed by the author that the reader already knows the team. "Keyon Dooling was a hero in Game 4 with 10 points" (Lawrence 2012) demonstrates how the player, Dooling, was claimed to be a hero by the author of the article. However, this hero-claim does not overtly specify the group to whom Dooling is a hero. Reading the rest of the article would uncover the fact that Dooling played for the

Boston Celtics when this article was published. It is therefore implied that he is a hero to his team and the fans of that team. This link is further implied by the fact that he was heroic for scoring points that would only have counted for his team.

4.3 The Claims: Characteristics of a Hero

Once the claimsmaker has found an audience and made an appeal, the claim itself must be stated. While hero-claims can contain a plethora of information, framed in many different ways to convince others of its validity, there are two rhetorical devices necessary to complete the primary construction of the hero-claim, establishing the relationship between the hero and society, and identifying the scope of the hero's actions. Establishing the relationship between the hero and society requires constructing the hero using certain characteristics. The data yielded several traits that many people believed were integral to the hero's character. Among these traits was valor, bravery, modesty, selflessness, righteousness, and extraordinariness or difference.

Traits such as valor and bravery were most often used in association with discussions of soldiers or saviors. Heroes must have these traits if they are to overcome tragedy and adversity. Commenting on the Aurora movie theater massacre, one vigil attendee noted, "We all have the ability to rise above what has happened to us and become heroes" (Ingold, Lee, and Robles 2012). This quote exemplifies the many hero-claims regarding the need for bravery and valor found in the data.

Righteousness refers to the requirement that a hero believe that what they are doing is the right thing. For example, when asked about his policy of racial integration on the television show "American Bandstand," Dick Clark was quoted as saying "I don't

think of myself as a hero or civil rights activist for integrating the show; it was simply the right thing to do" (Delmont 2012). Here, Clark's comment makes right and wrong out to be clearly defined sides of a story. This sort of black-and-white approach to morality was not shared by all claimsmakers, with some noting the subjective nature of righteousness. For example, one Twitter user commented on the nature of social movements and government sanctions, saying "Why are military movements called "liberation or heroism," but freedom movements called "terrorism"? At least we're not murdering anyone" (Sebastian Vègo (@Sebastian_Veg) 2012).

Clark's modesty in the former quote ("I don't think of myself as a hero…") also acts as an example of one of the most agreed upon characteristics for heroes found in these hero-claims. Modesty was addressed in the data from many angles, the most prominent of these being the concept of selflessness. Many claims were made about the need for heroes to be selfless, often to the point of self-sacrifice. The hero's motivations must take into account the needs of the many; they must put their own problems aside in order to help others solve their problems first. For example, one Twitter user made the following claim about personal hero: "Amazing woman on #diysos .Just been told she has terminal cancer & the next day she's helping out someone with the same problem #realheroes" (Poppy G (@p0psicle) 2012). Related to the characteristic of modesty in heroes is the idea that a hero cannot be thinking about being a hero. "A hero is some1 who, in a crisis sitaution isn't thinking about bein a "Hero or Hero Statues" but is thinkin about saving a life [sic]" (Ms. Curtis Brooks (@cb74745) 2012). As this tweet suggests, the hero's only concern must be the needs of the people; ego cannot be a motivation.

4.3.1 Rhetorical Device #2: Relating the Hero to Society

The most prominent characteristic found in the data was the relatable nature of the hero. The construction of the hero in terms of how he or she related to society was a common element of many hero-claims. While claims in the data that discussed the nature of a hero covered a host of topics, over 40% of these claims specifically addressed the relationship between the hero and the general public. Several of these hero-claims were general statements about the necessity of heroes in a society. For example, in his political speeches during the 2012 presidential election, Republican candidate Mitt Romney stated that "We are a nation that has been formed and preserved by heroes" (Barbaro 2012). Similar rhetoric was found in other hero-claims that promoted the idea of the hero as a backbone for a community. However, most claims of this type specified exactly how the hero related to society, rhetorically constructing the hero in one of two ways: as normal like anyone else, or as abnormal and standing apart from the rest of society.

While it was agreed upon by claimsmakers that heroism is a human characteristic with no connections to divine power as in mythological stories, there was contention over how much like a "normal human" heroes truly are and therefore how the general population should relate to a hero. As one Twitter user put it, "You can tell me an amazing story of survival or heroism and keep me captivated but as [soon] as you mention 'divine intervention' im leveing [sic]" (Sean Goodman (@Sean_Gman) 2012). The degree to which the above character traits applied was contested by many claimsmakers. Some claimsmakers believed that heroes stand apart from society, above it, uncommon and infallible. Others, on the other hand, believed that heroes are of the

people, that their heroic actions do not make them any less fallible and human than normal people. These two constructions of heroes form the second rhetorical device necessary for constructing a hero-claim: the relation between the hero and other people. With the appeal to the audience made, the claimsmaker must demonstrate how the hero relates to that audience.

4.3.1.1 Heroes Above the People

According to those on one side of this debate, the hero must be a flawless individual, symbolically standing above the general public as a role model or beacon of hope. In this case, the hero should greatly display the characteristic of difference. They should be timeless and inspirational, preserved in the collective memory of the people. This is not to say that anyone believes that heroes should literally be immortal, living forever. Rather, it is a hero's *reputation* that needs preserving, and those who do not receive this treatment are not considered true heroes. For example, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was quoted in one article making a claim for overlooked African-American scientists whose achievements should make them as heroic as their white contemporaries. "…Lewis Howard Latimer…worked on many of the innovations for incandescent lighting that Edison would later incorporate into one of the great inventions of modernity. But while Edison went on to immortality, Latimer was thanklessly relegated to oblivion" (Nazaryan 2012). This quote exemplifies the emphasis on immortality for a heroic reputation, noting that a heroic reputation must stand the test of time.

A hero's status as a role model also means that his or her reputation must never tarnish. Speaking on the issues surrounding the use of steroids in professional sports, one

claimsmaker pointed out that "If athletes were using steroids, kids who admire them would also, to be like their heroes" (O'Keeffe and Vinton 2012). This quote demonstrates a common argument about the necessity for perfection in a hero's reputation, that they are emulated by others and therefore must always set a good example. This example also demonstrates the argument that it is up to the hero to maintain his or her own reputation. One article, discussing the different forms of heroism embodied by Neil Armstrong and Lance Armstrong, said:

> "If the cyclist had conducted himself more like the astronaut, things might have been different…Lance Armstrong was driven to achieve out of a love for competition and individual glory. Neil Armstrong was a military veteran who put himself in harm's way for NASA out of a love for his country. Even if you believe the cyclist is being railroaded, it goes without saying which Armstrong is the true hero." (Hogan 2012)

This quote puts the burden of reputational maintenance on Lance Armstrong. Even the possibility that his reputation was tarnished because of external pressures does not relieve Lance of his responsibility as a hero to be as perfect as possible according to this claimsmaker.

The hero's reputation was also inextricably linked in the data to the reputation of his or her supporters, the group of people who share the same claim about this person's reputation. One article made this explicit in the case of Lance Armstrong and his heroic status among fans of professional cycling: "Because of his fall from grace…[and] in the absence of a cycling hero, professional cyclists are now regarded warily and with suspicion" (Carroll 2012). This quote notes that because Armstrong was caught using steroids to cheat his way to his many victories, it is plausible to assume that other cyclists have done the same. It is made worse by the fact that Armstrong was considered a hero

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and that no other hero has been found in the cyclist community to fill the gap, making every cyclist a suspect for cheating. The relationship between heroes and the groups that support them places pressure on the hero to protect the reputation of the group. Heroes must represent the group in the best way possible, striving to maintain their own reputation as well as that of the group. One Twitter user stated this as a mandate to her peers: "Study well, be a better you, then you can be an example to this country as a hero or heroine! Fight for Indonesia" (Fitriana Anwar (@fitriana_anwar) 2012). Claims like this put the responsibility of maintaining the group's reputation in the hands of the hero.

On the other hand, several hero-claims suggested that people must choose their heroes wisely, ensuring that they do not choose a flawed hero. Many hero-claims in the data connected the claimsmaker's reputation with that of the hero by placing the claimsmaker into a specific category of people whose morals and ethics are assumed to be in alignment with those represented by the hero. For example, Muslim youth in France were noted in one article as publically referring to a French Muslim terrorist as a hero in an effort to cause discord in their community. "There is ambivalence, even pride, in his crimes. Some young men seem to enjoy the horror they can provoke by calling him a hero, residents and social workers said. Some surely believe he is" (Sayare 2012). The example of the French Muslim youth also brings to light a further aspect of the connection between the reputations of heroes and their claimants. If a claimsmaker's hero-claim is not supported by other members of the group to which they belong, it can put the claimsmaker at odds with the group, ruining their own reputation. The French Muslims making the claim were noted in the article as being ostracized by other French

Muslims for their support of a known terrorist. These claims put the responsibility of maintaining the group's reputation in the hands of the members of that group rather than in the hands of the hero.

4.3.1.2 Heroes of the People

There is a strong counter-argument found in the data regarding the flawless nature of heroes. Many hero-claims noted that people often have unrealistic expectations for heroes, who are just as human as anyone else. One football player commented on the hero-status of his teammate, stating "We all forget that people we idolize are just people. Do we have unreal expectations of our heroes?" (Saraceno 2012). Many claimsmakers constructed heroes as coming "from the people," individuals who rise to the occasion from among the general population. This rhetoric was common in claims made about heroes-as-saviors. One article, discussing the impromptu heroism of people during the Aurora, Colorado massacre, called upon the themes of the film *The Dark Knight Rises,* the movie these people had been watching when they were attacked: "In an instant, called upon to be heroes, ordinary people in an ordinary suburb became exactly that… You see, heroes don't come from above" (Pitts, Jr. 2012). The idea conveyed in this quote is that average citizens can react in above average ways when challenged. These people may not be someone whom you would expect, in fact they may be entirely unexpected, but they come from the general population. One baseball general manager, commenting on why one team was better than another, claimed that "…I knew we had a very good team. We have guys that can hit. You don't have a guy that has to be the hero every night.

We have guys that come out of nowhere to become the hero" (Lewis 2012). In this sense, heroism has an egalitarian framework, claiming that anyone has the potential to be a hero.

Some claimsmakers in the data suggested that people should expect flaws in heroes and as long as the hero is open about these flaws, they can maintain their heroic status. For example, one cancer survivor was quoted as defending Lance Armstrong's reputation as a hero by pointing out how much good he has done for the cancer community through his charity Livestrong. "Many great heroes are flawed…[and while] we may all come to believe that Lance's competitive edge and desire to do the improbable went awry it was exactly those qualities that helped him think so big and bold with Livestrong" (Szabo 2012). This quote suggests that a hero's flaws can be forgiven if they are sublimated into a more positive action. One article goes so far as to suggest that the only reason a flawed hero could lose their reputation is by denying their flaws. It is the lying that is the unforgivable act, not the flaw itself. "Whether it's a sports hero or a president, it's not the act that gets them in trouble, it's the lying about it afterward," claimed one publicity expert (Schrotenboer 2012). Several hero-claims back this opinion up, particularly in discussions about fallen sports heroes Lance Armstrong and Joe Paterno, both of whom were often noted as only losing their status due to their denial and avoidance of the crimes of which they had been accused. Regarding Lance Armstrong's fall from grace, the latter article's author stated that "If he had only handled the allegations differently, experts say he could have received lighter penalties and perhaps an easier path to public forgiveness" (Schrotenboer 2012) while another article claimed that Joe Paterno "now passes to eternity less as a legendary coach than as that guy from

Penn State who let a pedophile keep abusing kids…He could have been a hero" (Contra Costa Times editorial 2012). Both quotes support the proposition that a hero coming clean can mitigate the loss of reputation by suggesting that a choice to do the right thing at the right time would have saved their reputations.

The logic behind the argument that heroes can be flawed characters is that it makes them more relatable. Many hero-claims found in the data suggested that people wanted to be able to identify with some aspect of the hero, either physically (e.g., skin color, physical attributes, etc.) or characteristically. One example of this comes from the copious discussions about basketball star Jeremy Lin, a young Asian-American who performed admirably during the 2012 NBA season. Many of the claims about Lin note how important he had become to the Asian-American community, particularly in New York (Lin played for the Knicks) because, as Lin himself put it, "[growing up] none of my so-called heroes looked anything like me" (Vongsarath 2012).

Not all arguments for relatable heroes centered on the hero itself. Some claims in the data suggested that the public gravitates towards the drama of watching a hero rise to defend his or her reputation. In this way, the hero shows how relatable they are by having struggles to overcome just like anyone else. One example of this is Olympic swimming star Michael Phelps, whose reputation as an Olympic hero was challenged when newcomer Ryan Lochte defeated Phelps in the Olympics qualifying races. One article's author claimed that heroes are "great when they're unbeatable, like Michael Phelps in Beijing, but also great when proved mortal, like Phelps on Monday night" (Brady 2012). The article's author notes that the appeal of this scenario is watching Phelps defend his

title rather than the shame of seeing it challenged. Phelps himself claimed that the "excitement from the crowd…and I was saying to Ryan (afterward) that you could see the flames going off and you could hear the excitement in the crowd…I think that (gave) me a little bit of extra energy that last 150. I was very pleased with that" (Brady 2012). This suggests that the flaw of being beaten is acceptable, especially since Phelps himself does not express discouragement about his situation as demonstrated by the latter quote. It also lends to a different interpretation of the "hero rises to the challenge" rhetoric, suggesting that the hero might rise to a personal challenge, setting an example for others by not giving up on his or her own problems (as opposed to the hero who rises to fight the problems of a society).

4.3.1.2.1 Democracy and Heroism

A dominant theme in the data that supported the hero-of-the-people argument was the idea that the hero was democratic in nature. This can mean two different things, that the hero is a symbol for everyone or that the hero can be anyone. The former meaning is best summed up in the hero-claims that noted that "the idea of heroism exists in virtually every human culture ever recorded — from cave paintings and folklore to the dawn of literature and right up to, say, *The Dark Knight Rises*" (Cloud 2012). The hero is framed by these claimsmakers as a universally applicable symbol. Several hero-claims self-consciously noted the persistence of hero-claims in our society, claiming that "we like to create heroes" (Cloud 2012). These claims were reinforced by others that espoused the necessity of heroes: "America needs heroes – people of integrity who do extraordinary things in the face of insurmountable obstacles" (Hogan 2012). Some claims made about

the hero as a universal symbol discussed the hero as standing apart from society rather than being a part of it. They saw the hero as inspiring others to action rather than leading them into it directly. For these claimsmakers, the hero is simply an inspiring symbol; it is regular people who create change. "Social change has always resulted from the courageous 'leadership of the many,' not just the inspiration or heroism of the few" (Paul Schmitz (@PaulSchmitz) 2012). These claims exemplify the concept that the hero is democratic in that it acts as a symbol for everyone, transcending social boundaries. The various claims made about the hero as a symbol for everyone demonstrate how the hero could be constructed as either of the people or above them.

The democratic nature of heroes can also mean that anyone can be a hero. This construction of heroism, unlike the other, only supports the idea of the hero being of the people. This rhetoric does not suggest that everyone *is* a hero, but rather that there is the *potential* for anyone to be a hero. Rather than putting distance between the hero and the general public, these claims make the hero one of the people. One Twitter user stated that "every one of your heroes was just like you" (Andy Biersack (@AndyBVB) 2012). These claims humanize heroes without removing their symbolic importance. Instead, they suggest the possibility that anyone can be a hero in the proper circumstances, that we all have "the potential for heroism in each of us" (French 2012). These circumstances are trying or tragic times, times when a hero or heroes emerge from among the people, sometimes even the group directly afflicted by the tragedy. For example, in an article listing those who saved another's life during the Aurora movie theater massacre, the list of names was prefaced with the following: "They had all gone out for a night of fun, but

more than one died trying to save someone else. The greatest heroes weren't on the screen" (Pitts, Jr. 2012). The change from ordinary citizen to hero takes place, according to these claimsmakers, when a choice is made to be heroic (self-sacrificing) or egotistical (self-preserving), to run towards danger rather than away from it. "The human life is made up of choices. Yes or no. Love or hate. To be a hero or to be a coward" (idil (@idillionaire) 2012).

Similar to the notion that anyone can be a hero is the idea that many heroes remain undiscovered, that any given community is full of heroes who have yet to be recognized. "Our area is full of heroes and we certainly enjoy seeing them recognized" claimed one article, following up with "I'm sure you know a local hero. We'd love to hear who they are" (Anaya 2012). One claimsmaker suggested that "there are thousands of hidden American heroes out there that make this country work" (Burnett 2012). Another suggested that "Every year, I'm reminded that we walk amongst real heroes and we don't know it" (Dortch 2012). This rhetoric was frequently invoked in the nomination criteria or advertisements for local hero awards exclusive to traditional print media sources. For example, the Pacifica Tribune PCT Awards were specific, seeking to honor "local heroes in the Public, Education and Government sectors" (Anaya 2012) while the Wonder Bread Wonder Heroes Award took a more general approach, looking for nominations "for mothers, fathers, service members, and teachers with inspiring stories" (Small 2012).

4.4 The Claims: Actions of a Hero

Common depictions of heroes usually portray them as action-oriented individuals, performing acts that are noteworthy for whatever reason. In the data, actions were a

significant part of the construction of heroes, with hero-claims making some reference to actions over 60% of the time. While most hero-claims focused on heroes who had committed one heroic act (usually something that had just happened recently), others focused on heroes who committed repeated acts (more than one occurrence of the same heroic act or several acts over a period of time). For example, many hero-claims were made about school teacher Victoria Soto who died saving her children from a gunman in their elementary school. Her one action inspired many hero-claims about her. Sports stars were often the subject of hero-claims that noted their repeat performances, particularly big-name sports stars whose performances were consistently notable, such as LeBron James in basketball or Mario Manningham in football. A select few hero-claims focused on heroes whose actions were so impressive or notable that their reputations as heroes have persisted through a great deal of time. These latter heroes were always historical figures, some were recent figures like presidents (e.g. Ronald Reagan, Barack Obama), but most were figures from the distant past (e.g. George Washington, Abraham Lincoln). These three permutations of action, the one-time hero, the repeated-hero, and the hero of history, describe the scope of heroism, the final rhetorical device necessary to the construction of a hero-claim. Now that the claimsmaker has appealed to an audience and demonstrated how the hero relates to that audience, he or she must explain the applicability of the hero's actions.

4.4.1 Rhetorical Device #3: The Scope of Heroism

It was common for people to see heroes as forged during battle with some "villain," something from which society felt it should be protected, be it a person (like a

criminal) or some general force that is viewed as a threat to society (such as corruption or racism). This is reflected in statements that claim that we need heroes to "erase the bitter taste of crooks and the disgusting taste of war" (Gath 2012). Whether the hero is someone who simply gets involved or someone who defeats a specific threat, it is this dramatic conflict between good and evil, right or wrong, that forges the hero as a person. Several hero-claims suggested that heroism and its associated morality was part of human nature, though so was immorality. In a Twitter conversation about the effects of Hurricane Sandy, one user claimed "I am left breathless by the spectrum of human nature revealed today, from the craven and shallowness to the heroism and selflessness" (Phil Plait (@BadAstronomer) 2012). Similar claims stated that individuals make the choice of whether to be heroes or villains and act accordingly.

The dramatic dichotomy of heroism and villainy can be seen as the symbolic focal point for the scope of heroism. The data reflected this in claims about the need for the hero to protect society, particularly those who cannot protect themselves. This latter point is revealed in claims that the hero is the champion of equality, helping the helpless. One Twitter user quoted Harriet Beecher Stowe that the hero should "meet death rather than betray the helpless" (Ron Adair (@ronadair) 2012). The hero is framed by these claimsmakers as a defense against social problems, with any given social problem acting as the villain. The hero is therefore like social problems workers (Best 2013), attempting to solve the problem by helping individual victims as well as using their experiences to influence society towards addressing the problem on a larger scale.

As social problems workers are expected to make the lives of their subjects better by alleviating a social problem in some way, heroes too are expected to make the lives of the common person better. It is the hero's duty to bring "joy and beauty" into the lives of the people around them (Ament 2012). Lacking heroes in this capacity was viewed by some claimsmakers as leaving emptiness in society. Commenting on the death of a man in the subway and the lack of a hero to save him, one article commented that just as "heroes inspire, the lack of one in this week's subway death seems to have left a void" (News 2012b). A small portion of the hero-claims found in the data specified that heroes were role models for children more than any other member of society, stressing the need for heroes to be model citizens. One article noted the danger of sports stars who cheat by using performance-enhancing drugs, stating "Young athletes, boys and girls, want to emulate their heroes in many ways. That can include taking PEDs" (Brennan 2012). Overall, heroes reflect back to a society its beliefs in "human nature…and social and cultural forces" (Haidt 2012). The question was how often the hero did this, how far their heroism extended.

4.4.1.1 One-Time Heroes

The one-time hero is the most common hero found in the data. This hero is someone who has performed one action that was considered heroic. Their heroic reputation rests on the memory of that single action. What separates these heroes from others in terms of scope is not what is included in the hero-claim, but rather what is not included. These hero-claims do not make any reference to previous heroic actions made by the subject of the claim, presumably because there are none. The hero is constructed

as a hero right now, at this moment. For example, when discussing the executives

responsible for saving Ford from the recent automotive industry financial disaster, CEO

Alan Mulally was described as "a hero for bringing the company back from financial

disaster. He insisted on Thursday that he'll continue to lead Ford" (Durbin and Krisher

2012). This description designates Mulally's heroic reputation in the present, but does not

refer to any past heroics nor does it insinuate that he is expected to perform more heroic

actions in the future. He is simply described as continuing to lead the company.

Similarly, a man who saved a group of skydivers from a runaway hot air balloon during a

storm was described as a hero of that event. "The sky divers, whom Ristaino told to jump

from the balloon before it crashed, were not injured. Erin Daly, whose brother was one of

the sky divers, called Ristaino a hero who saved six lives" (Associated Press 2012b). No

reference is made to past heroics by Ristaino and no future heroics would be possible

since he died in that storm.

Ristaino's single action, saving the lives of six people, represents one of the major

Ariel Helwani@arielhelwani 14 Dec

Bless her. RT @GoldmanRussell: #Hero teacher Kaitlin Roig tells @ABC
she locked 1st graders in classroom bathroom after hearing gunshots...

- **49** RETWEETS
- **4** FAVORITES

12:02 PM - 14 Dec 12

1. **Jim Glaspy III**@jglaspy314 Dec

@arielhelwani @goldmanrussell @abc a lot of every day heroes today.
Sad that they couldn't protect them all but at least they saved some!

Figure 4.4: Example of a hero-as-savior in a hero-claim

forms of one-time heroism. Of all the actions a hero can perform, saving a victim from some menace is perhaps the most notable. In the data, the hero-as-savior was one of the most common descriptions of a hero and was viewed by many as the primary function of a hero. For example, figure 4.4 shows users in a Twitter conversation about the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre (Ariel Helwani (@arielhelwani) 2012; Jim Glaspy III (@jglaspy) 2012). For these users, Roig's heroism stems from her saving children, as did any hero-claim made about the teachers and staff members of Sandy Hook Elementary School. Some hero-claims went so far as to suggest that if the victim is not saved, the hero has failed in his task and has not fulfilled his role. In other words, heroes must save others or they are no hero at all. A striking example of this characterization of heroism can be found in a Denver Post article about a woman who failed to save a rape victim from being murdered by her rapist. "I feel like I let her down," claimed the woman. "In that part, I don't feel like a hero" (Steffan 2012). Saviors were almost always one-time heroes.

On the other hand, some hero-claims insinuated that saving an actual life was not necessary, with suggestions that simple "getting involved" or making charitable donations was enough. For example, a blog posted on Twitter discussed how it was important for fundraiser coordinators to frame donors as heroes to encourage them to continue donating. "Your number one job is to engage, cultivate, solicit and steward donors to continue [donating]… How are you providing service to your donor that's remarkable? That feels personal? That makes the donor the hero?" (Locke 2012). In

either case, saving a life or getting involved, the scope of heroism was limited to a single action performed by the hero.

4.4.1.2 Repeated Heroism

Unless they die after committing their one heroic act, any one-time hero has the potential to become a hero of multiple acts. Heroes of more than one act, repeat-heroes for short, are heroes who have performed more than one action that is constructed as heroic. These actions do not need to be performed close together, nor do they have to be of the same type. For example, Jon Blunk died during the Aurora movie theater massacre protecting his girlfriend from harm. Blunk was recognized as a hero for this act by many claimsmakers in the data, with several articles recognizing him as a hero in more than one way because he was a Navy veteran. His girlfriend's mother claimed that Blunk was a hero to her daughter because of his service. "…Blunk, a security guard, had served in the Navy and had recently filled out papers to reenlist with a goal of becoming a Navy SEAL. "To her, he was a hero anyway because he wanted to serve his country," she said of her daughter" (Crosson, Wills, and Hutchingson 2012). Blunk, therefore was a repeat-hero for his service in the military and for saving his girlfriend's life from a shooter.

Blunk's case is an uncommon one, however. Repeated heroism was applied most often to sports stars, particularly MVPs. In these cases, the hero is a professional sports player who did something special to secure a win for his team on more than one occasion. For example, Carmelo "Melo" Anthony of the New York Knicks was heralded in one article for saving two separate games, both wins achieved by his making consecutive three-point baskets in the final minutes of the game.

"[Knicks owner James] Dolan will expect more of them in the playoffs, perhaps against the same club Melo gunned down heroically in yesterday's Garden matinee thriller… With two right-wing 3-point daggers, Anthony saved Easter just as he saved Christmas against Boston with late-game heroics." (Berman 2012a)

In this case, Anthony is lauded as a hero by the article's author for having performed the same heroic game-winning action twice and in separate games. Anthony's heroism, unlike Blunk's, stems from the same act performed in the same scenario, a truly repeated heroism.

4.4.1.3 Heroes of History

The scope of the heroism discussed in a hero-claim extended, in a few cases, across great amounts of time. These are heroes of history, heroes whose reputations extend into the distant past, whether decades or centuries ago. For example, the *#heroine* data set contained several hero-claims about a woman named Irena Sendler. Sendler was considered a hero for having smuggled approximately 2,500 children out of the Nazi ghetto in Warsaw, Poland. Claims about her included the messages "a #woman to remember" (Kimberly Morin (@Conservativeind) 2012) and "a #woman worth knowing…#inspirational" (3PlusInternational (@3PlusInt) 2012).

Heroes of history were often the subjects of criticism. Over time, as more facts about a hero are uncovered, changes or challenges to that person's heroic reputation become more prominent. Thomas Jefferson, Revolutionary War hero, founding father, and former president was a common subject of these types of reputational challenges. Several articles point out the fact that Jefferson had sired children with one of his young slaves. Outspoken politician Charles Barron called for Jefferson's portrait to be removed

from New York City's City Hall and replaced with a bust of Malcolm X. The articles said

"he called [Jefferson] 'a slaveholder, a hypocrite and a rapist'" (NLVL 2012a). Several

other articles pointed out the dubious nature of the Jefferson administration's stance on

the institutional strength of the Supreme Court. "[Marbury v. Madison] established the

court's power of judicial review, which persists to this day. But the decision itself was a

legal pretzel, concluding that Thomas Jefferson's administration had acted illegally but

also that the court lacked jurisdiction" (Eggen 2012). One other article pointed out a

foolish declaration made by Jefferson, stating that "Thomas Jefferson wasn't much of a

seer; he'd predicted the conquest of Canada 'will be a mere matter of marching'"

(Hampson 2012). Even attempts to protect Jefferson's heroic reputation were met with

criticism, as one article devalued the work of right-wing Jefferson-enthusiast David

Barton:

> "In his new book, *The Jefferson Lies*, Barton argues that academics have
> spread a series of falsehoods about Jefferson -- that he was a racist, a
> secularist and an advocate of strict church/state separation. Barton thinks
> he knows better… Barton is a culture warrior driven by desire rather than
> by evidence. As a result, his writing is more 'truthy' than 'truthful.'"
> (Prothero 2012)

These sorts of challenges to the hero's reputation can cause people to question

their support of that hero.

As some articles point out, it is necessary for a society to maintain its

historical heroes. "But what of the heroes of the past? The legends whose power

is symbolic and points beyond itself? Historically, one thing America has been

good at is offering inspiration. We haven't been doing a brilliant job of it lately…"

(Mendelsohn 2012). This quote speaks not only to the nature of historical heroes

("legends whose power is symbolic and points beyond itself") but also to the

pressing need to maintain them in contemporary society ("we haven't been doing

a brilliant job"). An anonymous quote was used in several articles which echoes

this sentiment: "Poor is the nation that has no heroes, but beggared is that nation

that has them and forgets them" (Hill 2012).

The most resilient heroes of history were those whose reputations survived these

reputational challenges. For example, several claims were made about the contemporary

appeal of Abraham Lincoln as a hero. The claimsmakers often began by citing that, in

2012, two very distinct movies were made about Lincoln, one purely fictional and

constructing Lincoln as a superhero, the other a semi-biographical piece about Lincoln's

politics during the Civil War. One claimsmaker expressed surprise over the length of time

it took to construct Lincoln as a superhero:

> "'It's interesting why it's taken so long' to create this new version of an
> actual American hero, says Mark Pohlad, associate professor of art history
> and architecture at DePaul University and an expert on Lincoln. Pohlad
> said the 16th president was strong, both politically and physically. 'He
> really did have this reputation for being kind of a (butt-kicker).'" (Chicago
> Tribune 2012)

He went on to state that Lincoln's popularity is high in contemporary times as he is

viewed as the president who guided us through one of the most politically turbulent and

divided times in our country's history. Other claimsmakers echo this sentiment, stating

that in this time of extreme partisan politics, we are looking for a leader who can foster

compromise like Lincoln, and lift us out of hard times. "The centerpiece [of the film

Lincoln] is the American icon, Abraham Lincoln; it brilliantly captures him doing what

politicians are supposed to do, and today too often avoid: compromising, calculating, horse trading, dealing…There is no greater hero than Lincoln" (Hunt 2012).

4.4.1.3.1 Heroes and Time

The scope of a hero's actions is judged in terms of time. Primarily, this was done by looking at how many heroic acts had been performed by the hero (one act, more than one act) and how long ago they were performed (recently, in recent history, in the distant past). However, time was a significant framework used in the construction of heroes in the data. This was achieved in several ways, either through the construction of the hero itself over time or how time is a significant factor in heroic actions.

Many hero-claims in the data discussed how the concept of heroism, as well as related concepts, changed over time. One way this was expressed in the data was in discussions of how the meanings of certain words have changed over time. In these few cases, terms related to heroes were discussed, demonstrating changes in how we utilize

> **biblioklept**@biblioklept 12 Jul 12
>
> "Epic," as an adj, refers to a narrative that is grand and/or heroic in its scope; "epic" is not a synonym for "this is pretty nifty"

- **5** RETWEETS

  11:58 AM - 12 Jul 12

1. **Nick Harris**@nharris103212 Jul 12

   .@biblioklept Language is a dynamic system. Just because your definitions were the only ones yesterday does not guarantee that tomorrow.

Figure 4.5: Example of defining "hero"-related terms

hero-related terminology. For example, figure 4.5 exemplifies how one Twitter user conveyed his annoyance with people who use the word "epic" inappropriately during a conversation (biblioklept (@biblioklept) 2012; Nick Harris (@nharris1032) 2012). In this instance, the first user is using a critique of contemporary language to express the general opinion that the term "hero" is over-used or used improperly, making it mean something less than it should.

In terms of defining heroism, some hero-claims included references to heroes from other time periods, examining them within the framework of contemporary definitions of heroism. One such example came from an article discussing a bounty hunter from the 1860s who killed a prominent Minnesotan Indian leader just after the Sioux massacre. At the time, the hunter was viewed as a hero for killing an outlaw, but the article notes that today he is considered a ruthless killer who murdered an innocent Native American. He said of his ancestor that "at the time Little Crow was still the bad guy and my great-grandfather was a hero who shot the renegade outlaw…Now, of course, all the thinking in today's world has changed and my ancestor is the bad guy who got the $500 and Little Crow is the hero" (Brown 2012). In this example, the bounty hunter was viewed as heroic in a time period where Native Americans were viewed as savages who stood in the way of white-American progress. Today, when Native Americans are viewed as victims of discrimination and genocide by white settlers, the same bounty hunter's heroic reputation does not hold up. By changing the framework of heroism from that of the past to that of the present, it is possible to distinguish differences in the construction of heroism over time.

Changes in the construction of heroes were also achieved by comparing two heroes across time. One article described a memorial ceremony that took place in Aurora, Colorado after the movie theater massacre that occurred in July of 2012. The ceremony had originally been intended to honor the anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City and recognize its heroes. The ceremony was altered because of the comparable nature of the two incidents. The pastor who presided over the ceremony claimed that "'we had to expand it. We had our own tragedy and heroes to include'" (Parker 2012). In homage to the past, Bibles were given to the first responders that participated during the massacre and family members of the victims, just as a first responder was given a Bible by a chaplain at Ground Zero on 9/11. This example demonstrates how the heroes of two time periods (9/11 and Aurora in 2012) were viewed as similar and treated accordingly. In this instance, contemporary ideas of heroism were renewed rather than replaced.

Aside from discussing how time altered the construction of heroism, many hero-claims in the data state that time is an integral element to acts of heroism. One theme that is common in the data is that the key to being a hero, particularly in sports, is timing. These claims suggest that a heroic action performed at the wrong time may not be deemed as heroic at all. This aspect of heroism is over-emphasized in claims about Olympic heroes, where being the heroic gold-medalist can come down to mere fragments of a second on a stop-watch. An example of this is an article that discusses France's win over America in the 400-meter individual medley swim competition during the 2012 Summer Olympics: "Agnel smoked Lochte in the last 100meters by a full second. It was Phelps, swimming second, who swam the fastest leg for the Americans, expanding the

lead from 0.14 seconds to 0.76, and dishing off the lead that looked so safe with Lochte as the closer" (Cannizzaro 2012). As this quote demonstrates, timing can mean the difference between whether or not a person becomes a hero, though this is an extreme example.

Time as an element of heroism can also refer to the lifespan of a heroic reputation. Several hero-claims limited the hero's reputation to a specific time period. For example, when a young girl was recognized for saving a fellow student from choking, she was called the "Hero of the Day" in that school (Venezia 2012). Another claimsmaker compared two life-saving acts, saving one life and saving many during the Holocaust of WWII, stating that some acts hold more weight in terms of heroism than others:

> "That word, 'hero' gets misused a lot in our society…Even pulling someone out of a burning building, that's a heroic moment. This is stuff that these people did for nearly two years. They saved lives in that day and age, when most people would not get involved. Even those who felt sympathy for the plight of the Jews would not get involved. Frans and Mien did. They saved at least two dozen Jews from certain death."
> (Freeman 2012)

These examples demonstrate how some claimsmakers saw certain acts of heroism as ephemeral while others transcended the moment of time in which the act occurred. In this way, they are ranking acts of heroism.

Time as an element of heroism was expressed in the data in one other way, in the form of heroic legacies. These claims framed heroism as something that required recognition over a long period of time and beyond the lifetime of the hero. Several claims were made for war heroes who had yet to be recognized with service medals or awards for their heroic efforts. In these cases, family members were viewed as activists in the

cause to have the hero recognized in a more significant way. For example, the family of a Vietnam War soldier who had yet to receive a Congressional Medal of Honor went to great lengths to appeal for their family member's recognition as a hero by recruiting the help of an influential politician to aid their cause.

> "Rep. Peter King, the Long Island congressman who chairs the Homeland Security Committee, has joined the fight. 'A very compelling case has been made that Army Private Minogue should have received the Medal of Honor,' King said as he promised to take it up personally with officials in the Department of Defense." (Messing 2012)

In this case, the family is attempting to protect the legacy of their father's heroism by having it formally recognized.

In other cases, the heroic reputation was passed on to the family members of the hero. For example, several print-media articles discussed Chinese "princelings," descendants of heroes of the Maoist Revolution. Many articles commented on how these people were using their influence to push a military agenda in China, describing them as "a new Chinese dynasty of 'princelings' -- the sons of revolutionary heroes who have widespread contacts in the military" (Chellaney 2012). These people are not necessarily heroes themselves, but are considered politically strong and famous for their parents' heroism. In these cases, heroism is treated as an inherited title.

4.5 The Rhetorical Structure of Hero-Claims

This chapter has expounded upon the idea that the hero is not something that can be summarized neatly by one definition. In chapters 2, the hero was defined as the value-laden symbol for a group of people. This definition was practical in its application as a framework for research, but it is too broad to truly offer any definite understanding of

how heroes are constructed by people through hero-claims. The analysis of the hero-claims found in the data allowed for a more complex understanding of constructions of heroes.

This analysis of hero-claims has elicited three rhetorical devices necessary to the construction of a strong hero-claim. Put together, these three form the primary dimensions upon which contemporary heroes are constructed. The first of these is the appeal to the audience. These take the forms of either singular appeals or appeals to a group of people. If the former is the case, the claim is only intended to apply to the claimsmaker (a personal opinion) or to one person (appeal to an individual). These claims are expressed to a general audience, without any intention or rhetoric to persuade others to agree. While they maintain the basic structure of a claim (they have a subject/hero, a reason for making the claim, an audience) they are more personal statements than anything else. Appeals to a group of people, on the other hand, are made by the claimsmaker in an effort to persuade that group of people to adopt the hero as their own. These types of claims can be active or passive, either directly naming the group for whom the hero-claim is meant or tacitly implying the connection between hero and group.

The second rhetorical device of a hero-claim is the association between the hero and a population. Here, the claimsmaker is stating that the hero is either above the people or of the people. The former construction frames the hero as infallible, an uncommon element among average citizens. The hero is a perfect symbol, and that perfection must be maintained by the hero himself, the people, or both. The latter construction frames the hero as a common person who has done something uncommon. They are, on the whole,

regular people whose exploits are worthy of above-average recognition. The hero's actions are more likely to be viewed as exceptional, rather than the hero himself. In this sense, they are more relatable to the general population, seen as being "one of us."

The final rhetorical device of a hero-claim is the scope of the heroism. What has the hero done to be seen as heroic and how much of it has he done? Three categories make up this dimension. The first is the hero of one act. In this case, the heroic action is something that probably happened recently and is an isolated incident. The hero is a hero for the moment. The second category is the hero of many acts. This hero has either performed the same heroic action multiple times over a small period of time or has committed multiple and various acts of heroism over a small amount of time. These heroes may have performed enough acts of heroism to be seen as reliably heroic, someone that the people can expect to be heroic. Finally, there are heroes of history. These heroes' reputations stand the test of time, often being re-evaluated but always passing the test.

Putting these three rhetorical devices together shows how contemporary heroes are constructed. The myriad combinations of these rhetorical devices of help explain why so many heroes exist in contemporary society and that they do not require universal appeal. Some claims were personal appeals that claimed the hero was of the people, performing one action that was laudable. For example, one woman described her husband as "my hero" for giving his life to save hers from an oncoming car: "He sacrificed his life for me. He really gave me a good shove. It was in a second. He saved my life" (Palmeri and Fredericks 2012). In this quote, we have a personal appeal ("my hero" and

"sacrificed his life for me"), a scope of one act ("it was in a second"), and a relatable hero (he was her husband). Other claims constructed the hero in an entirely different manner. For example, Malala Yousafzai was a 14-year-old Pakistani girl whose blog openly criticized the Taliban and called for gender-equality in education. For her politics, Taliban soldiers shot her in the head, though she did not die and has since become a symbol of anti-Taliban sentiments and women's rights in Pakistan. Many claims were made about her in the data, often constructing her in different ways. One claim posted on Twitter contained a link to an article about her shooting. The article quoted a member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan as saying "This is an attack to silence courage through a bullet" ("Outcry over Pakistan attack on activist Malala Yousafza, 14" 2012). The tweet, as well as the article, constructs Malala as a hero of the group (fighting for women's rights) and a hero of many acts (she began her blog at the age of 11 and tours the world). The quote from the article gives her a more symbolic quality however, equating the bullet that hit her with a bullet striking courage itself. This elevates the person more than the heroic action itself, suggesting that Malala is the embodiment of courage. This would make her a hero above the people rather than of them.

The example of Malala points out another aspect of the construction of heroes: that the construction very much depends on the claimsmaker. The individual perspective of the claimsmaker can change the construction of the hero depending on that claimsmaker's preferences and points of view. The above claim about Malala comes from the representative of an organization looking to push its agenda. Symbols and propaganda are common tools for organizations as claimsmakers. Meanwhile, Pakistani

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students, who are directly affected by the shooting, claim Malala as a leader of the cause but qualifying her part in the movement with statements like "This is not just Malala's war…it is a war between two ideologies, between the light of education and darkness" (Kristof 2012). In this construction, Malala is specifically removed from the ideology, making her one of the people instead of a symbol for them to follow.

The three rhetorical devices of hero-claims elicit the complex nature of heroes in contemporary society as well as how to examine this complexity. Understanding who makes hero-claims and how they do so allows for a better understanding of the proliferation of heroes in contemporary society. It demonstrates how the hero is constructed in many ways, and how these many constructions yield so many different types of heroes. This diversity is not necessarily because of the word is over-used, or because of rampant individualism. Rather, the hero is a democratic concept, able to be applied to anyone or any group. There is a hero for everyone, not because there are too many heroes, but because there is more than one way to recognize heroism. This also means that anyone can be a hero, or rather that everyone has the potential to be constructed as a hero based on their actions. The next step is to explore specific types of heroes, demonstrating how these rhetorical devices allow for all the ways that these people have been constructed as heroes.

Chapter 5

WHO IS A HERO?

"Who is to say who is the villain and who is the hero?
Probably the dictionary." – Joss Whedon

The idea that all hero-claims contain the same basic rhetorical devices does not

mean that every hero-claim is exactly the same. Just as there are choices of how to

employ each basic rhetorical device, a hero-claim may also be constructed in other ways

that allow that claim to stand out from other hero-claims. The following analysis of

specific hero-claims will illuminate various ways in which hero-claims are constructed.

By examining the most common categories of heroes found in the data, we can determine

which characteristics their hero-claims contained in common and which characteristics

were unique from claim to claim. Table 5.1 lists the most common categories of heroes

found in the data, listed in order and by type, with totals broken down by data set.

Each category will be examined in the order presented in Table 5.1. Categories will also

be compared to one another throughout, clarifying the different constructions of hero-

claims.

This chapter will also examine how people treat their heroes and how they wish

them to be treated. This entails an examination of villains, who they are and why they are

seen as opposed to heroes. Examining villains allows for a deeper understanding of how people relate to heroes as well as how they deal with challenges to their heroes. Villains challenge heroes, oppose them and the groups they represent. If heroes are symbols of a group's values, then villains are challenging these values. By understanding how groups combat these challenges, we can better understand the importance of heroes to the group.

Table 5.1: Total hero-claims across categories of heroes

	Newspapers	Twitter	Grand Total
Heroes of Institutions/Occupations			
Sports Hero	1022	89	1111
War Hero/Soldier	583	129	712
Hero of a Group/Community	463	24	487
Heroic Attributes			
Unsung Hero (not sports)	63	0^{18}	63
Unsung Hero (sports)	247	0^{1}	247
Helpful/Notable Actions	252	44	296
Overcoming Adversity (Social)	194	76	270
Emergent Heroes			
Savior	245	46	291
Heroes of Aurora, CO	69	33	102
Heroes of Sandy Hook Elem.	61	78	139

5.1 Heroes of Institutions/Occupations

5.1.1 Sports Heroes

In the overall data, hero-claims about sports stars were the most common type of hero-claims with a total of 1,111 individual claims made (not including unsung or folk heroes of sports), nearly 400 claims more than the next highest category (war

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[18] The category of "Unsung Hero" was not identified during the analysis of the Twitter data set. It was added during the analysis of the newspaper data set.

heroes/soldiers). This phenomenon is more of a rhetorical one than a trend in actual hero-claims, a point made clear by the fact that the vast majority of hero-claims regarding sports stars came from traditional print media.[19] Newspapers have a sports section in every issue, making stories of professional athleticism the very common in the data set. Additionally, the term "hero" was a common rhetorical device used by writers to enhance the drama of their reports. Some claimsmakers took umbrage with this fact. "Sports stars are not heroes for the things they do on field. It's more than just checking hyperbole. It's a matter of not diluting the word…" (Kiszla 2012). While the suggestion that calling a sports star heroic is simply hyperbole implies that many of these hero-claims are not made in earnest, this cannot be determined from the present data and therefore these claims must be taken at face value. It is for this reason that the category of sports heroes was the most prolific in terms of numbers of claims yet probably the most controversial category in the data, the heroism of professional athletes regularly questioned and challenged.

The most common construction of the sports star as a hero was the most valuable player-as-hero. These claims named specific players, and occasionally entire sections of a team, as heroes for their athletic prowess during a specific period of time. The period of time was usually a single game, though it was not uncommon to have a hero of a single play, a set of games (e.g. a series of games against a certain opponent, or a road-trip,

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[19] Only 89 hero-claims were made in the Twitter data set about sports stars, ranking it third among categories as opposed to its first place position in the traditional print media data set (the category of celebrity heroes ranked higher in the Twitter data set, but not high enough to be an overall top category).

etc.), or an entire season. These claims most often stated that a specific player was heroic for making a specific play that secured victory for their team. For example, the following quote noted the hero of a specific basketball game between the New York Knicks and the Miami Heat: "With chants of 'MVP' from the Miami faithful, LeBron James was a scoring force, pouring in 23 firsthalf [sic] points to carry the Heat. He finished with 32, along with four steals, crushing Carmelo Anthony in their head-to-head matchup" (Berman 2012b). This quote came from a specific section of the sports article entitled "Hero."[20] The claim encapsulates all key elements of a hero-claim and more: appealing to a group ("Miami faithful"), establishing the scope of heroism ("finished with 32, along with four steals" implying multiple acts within one game), noting the relation of the hero to others ("MVP" implying that he is the most important player of all), and creating a drama from the action by creating an opponent to be beaten ("crushing Carmelo Anthony"). The majority of hero-claims about sport stars followed this rhetorical structure.

The MVP-as-hero rhetoric often centered on the characteristics of competitiveness and ambition. Heroism in sports comes only with victory, and therefore the sports hero must be a winner at almost any cost. On more than one occasion, sports heroes were compared to religious heroes. One article noted that in religion, the primary goal is to lose oneself in surrender to God. In sports, the primary goal is to lose oneself to performance. "The sports hero tries to perform great deeds in order to win glory and

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[20] Having a specific section for the MVP entitled "Hero" was common in the newspapers. It was often juxtaposed with a section for the worst player in a game entitled "Zero."

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fame...His job is to beat his opponents and avoid the oblivion that goes with defeat"

(Brooks 2012a). Another article calls sports heroes "sacred," claiming that they should

not be defaced by placing them in profane imagery (O'Keeffe, Abramson, Powers, and

Barrow 2012). These types of claims exemplified one extreme on the spectrum of sports

heroism, falling just short of comparing sports heroes to mythological heroes of antiquity.

Most claims of this sort were more realistic, noting that should a sports hero fail to

perform up to their status, the people who supported that hero would be disappointed. For

example, an Olympic swimmer commenting on Lance Armstrong's drug use and

downfall stated as a sports fan that "I just get bummed when people don't make good

decisions…I would want Lance Armstrong to make a good decision when it comes to

representing himself, his country and his sport (Johnson 2012). Other claimsmakers

fundamentally challenged the notion that athletic performance is linked to heroism,

claiming that there are "no such things as heroes in sports. Only people who play games

better than other people" (Bondy 2012).

The other construction of sports stars as heroes was the role-model-as-hero.

Articles about sports stars often portrayed them as bastions of virtue, claiming that they

were models of both good behavior and good sportsmanship. For example, one article

quoted the epitaph from a statue of Olympic sprinter Matthew "Mac" Robinson, an

epitaph that was a direct quote from the Olympian himself: "Athletes should recognize

that once they establish themselves, people will attempt to pattern their lives after their

sports heroes" (Weintraub 2012). The root of the role-model-as-hero construction lies in

the competitive nature of sports. Competition naturally fosters an us-versus-them

mentality in both players and fans, one that creates a twist on the hero and villain dynamic unique to sports. This dichotomous nature in sports was most often depicted in the phrases "hero-to-goat" and "goat-to-hero." The hero is the winner, the MVP, the one whose actions should be emulated. The goat, short for scapegoat, is the loser, the one who is to blame for not securing victory for the team and its supporters. It is through competition that sports heroes are created and in competition that we see why they are heroic. "Through fierce competition, sport separates the elite from the mediocre. It identifies the heroes and standards of excellence that everybody else can emulate" (Brooks 2012b).

Other hero-claims opposed the notion of the role-model-as-hero, challenging the notion that sports stars are only either heroes or goats. For these claimsmakers, sports stars were not perfect examples to be emulated, but rather flawed individuals who may have performed some action worthy of praise. These claims constructed the hero as being closely related to the general public, someone normal who did abnormal things on occasion. The question, however, was how flawed could a sports star be and still be a role model, or even a hero? One article, commenting on the recent rash of damaged reputations in sports, noted that "In light of the dramatic falls of Michael Vick, Marion Jones, Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens, Tiger Woods and now Lance Armstrong, we need to either recalibrate our definition of the sports hero or scrap it altogether" (Rhoden 2012). This claimsmaker went on to suggest that "our sports heroes do good things but do not have to be good people" (Rhoden 2012). The implied conclusion to this argument is that if the sports hero does not have to be a good person, then they are not role models.

5.1.2 War Heroes/Soldiers

The status of warriors and soldiers as heroes, like sport stars, was highly debated in the data. However, while sports heroes were named as such through a common rhetorical device in sports reporting, hero-claims about war heroes and soldiers were much more direct. Soldiers named as heroes were almost always specifically called heroic; it was rarely implied by section titles or hyperbolic rhetoric. These heroes were constructed in every conceivable way, from heroes of the people to heroes above the people, across any amount of time, and valorized for any number of actions.

One of the reasons for the popularity of the war hero in the data is the amount of heroic characteristics that can be ascribed to a soldier. As one quote about a fallen Special Forces operative notes, American soldiers are constructed as embodying many popular traits associated with heroes.

> "The special operators who conducted this raid knew they were putting their lives on the line to free a fellow American from the enemy's grip. They put the safety of another American ahead of their own, as so many of our brave warriors do every day and every night. In this fallen hero, and all of our special operators, Americans see the highest ideals of citizenship, sacrifice and service upheld. The torch of freedom burns brighter because of them." (Preston 2012)

In this quote, we can see how the typical hero-claim about soldiers was constructed. The hero in this claim embodies many values upheld by Americans including national security, citizenship, bravery, saving victims, self-sacrifice (an extreme extension of modesty), and freedom. By naming the fallen soldier as a "fellow American" the claimsmaker established that the hero was one of the people. This single heroic action

may have been brief in scope, but it is appealing to any American who considers themselves patriotic, supporters of the armed forces, or simply supporters of saving lives. This means that the audience appealed to by this claimsmaker is very wide. Because soldiers were always framed as representatives of the nation, this latter rhetorical device was a constant; the appeal was always to American society as a whole. This was reflected in common phrases such as "our soldiers" or "American values" that were found in many hero-claims about soldiers and war heroes.

While sports heroes needed to be on the winning team to be considered heroic, soldiers were not restricted in this way. This was evident in several hero-claims that noted how different claimsmakers constructed war in various ways. For example, one article noted how the perception of the Vietnam War and its soldiers was once negative ("this ill-advised, mismanaged war divided the nation, with substantial numbers of citizens turning against the armed forces" (Bacevich 2012)) while many others noted how Vietnam veterans are now regarded as heroes for their service ("wreath remembrance ceremony to honor fallen heroes from World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Storm and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan" (The Denver Post 2012)). Even though Vietnam is widely regarded as a conflict lost by the United States, its veterans are now considered as heroic by contemporary claimsmakers as those who fought in conflicts we did win such as World War II or Operation Desert Storm.

Soldiers were often denied heroic platitudes or had their heroism questioned by claimsmakers because of their involvement in war, stating that the machinations of war

do not necessarily make heroes. These arguments took several forms. One form questioned the heroism of killing, even during battle. For example, one Medal of Honor recipient claimed that there is an ambiguity to his actions, that they could be heroic to some but not to others: "To see me as somebody who may have done something heroic but also did something that was terrible, I think helps people adjust in their own lives to their own attitudes about war and bad behavior. Because we're not perfect people" (Bai 2012a). This hero-claim suggests that the war hero is a flawed character, of the people rather than above them. The claimsmaker's stance is one of ambiguity, recognizing that the values needed to believe in war may not be shared by all. In this way, his claim appeals to a large audience, asking both supporters and non-supporters of war to consider their own values as they relate to war heroes. Other claimsmakers were more definitive about their stance on killing during war. "I never wanted to kill anybody," claimed one WWII veteran, "and I never had any particular yen to be a hero. Heroes are a dime a dozen in my book" (Walsh 2012). In this instance, the claimsmaker does not believe that he should be lauded as a hero for his actions.

Another form of denying battlefield heroism was to single out those who had not died in combat or saved the lives of others. For example, some claimsmakers suggested that those who were merely wounded in battle were not heroes. "Being shot down, or wounded in the air is NOT 'acts of valor or heroism beyond the call of duty in the air'" (Shoq Value (@Shoq) 2012). Still others claimed that those soldiers killed in action by accident or with our own weapons were not heroic. "I think we could choose heroes that more exemplify our values than soldiers accidentally killed by our own weapons" (Green

2012). In these instances, war heroes are not being entirely denied the reputation of hero, only certain soldiers who actions are not believed to embody any values necessary for them to deserve hero-status. Some claims in this vein, however, did deny soldiers as a whole the right to be called hero:

> "In record numbers, our soldiers have deep emotional problems, commit suicide and generally indicate that their military experience has unhinged them. Finally, one of them simply murders 17 unarmed persons, many of them innocent children. Are we supposed to cheer now and extol the heroes of the 'Arsenal of Democracy'?" (Nieman 2012)

In this instance, heroism is denied to all soldiers for what is perceived as an inherent flaw in war veterans. War heroes, in these types of claims, were constructed as being above society, perfect models of American values. To not live up this standard of perfection is to lose the status of hero.

War heroes were seen by many claimsmakers in the data as treading a fine line between hero and villain. Several claimsmakers noted, particularly in terms of the recent Middle East conflicts, that American soldiers overextended themselves as heroes, turning themselves into villains in the process. "We go in as liberators, then stay to become oppressors. As liberators we defeat the enemy and as oppressors we stay to see the enemy become the heroes" (Hall 2012). Similarly, other claimsmakers stated that some battles are incapable of producing heroes. "As the last American troops left Iraq, it's fair to say that the war and the debate that surrounded it produced few real heroes; rather, it served as a kind of vortex of destruction that sucked in and defiled nearly everyone associated with it" (Bai 2012b). In these instances, war heroes were not supposed to be flawless characters, but they remained too flawed to deserve to be called heroes.

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Several claimsmakers suggested reasons for the debate over the heroism of soldiers. One reason given was that some people saw the naming of war heroes as a justification for war. The most popular example of this argument came from articles about MSNBC host Chris Hayes. During a broadcast, Hayes has stated that he felt "uncomfortable about the word hero because it seems to me that it is so rhetorically proximate to justifications for more war… It seems to me that we marshal this word in a way that is problematic" (Williams 2012). Hayes' claims, however, were met with backlash from the veteran community, with Richard DeNoyer, the national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, stating that "His words reflect his obvious disregard for the service and sacrifice of the men and women who have paid the ultimate price while defending our nation." Hayes apologized for his comments, stating that "it's very easy for me, a TV host, to opine about people who fight our wars, having never dodged a bullet or guarded a post or walked a mile in their boots" (Murray 2012). In this example, Hayes' apology claims that it is difficult for those who are not soldiers to understand what a soldier goes through and therefore how heroic their actions truly are. Commander DeNoyer's statement about Hayes' "obvious disregard" for soldiers implies that war heroism is inherent in the act of fighting in a war, that these men and women are putting other lives before their own, a characteristic deemed important for heroes.

Another reason given for the debate over the heroism of soldiers was that the very nature of military recruitment has changed. These claimsmakers saw heroism as being more prevalent, yet ironically unrewarded, in the drafted soldiers of the past rather than in the purely volunteer ranks of today's military:

"Not required to serve or to sacrifice (or even to cover the costs incurred), Americans have effectively off-loaded responsibility for national security onto a small warrior elite, whose members, according to [historian James] Wright, 'are embraced as heroes, even as we do not really know them'... Nothing is too good for these heroes when they come home…" (Bacevich 2012)

These claimsmakers measured the amount of heroism bestowed upon soldiers by the amount of rewards and recognition granted to soldiers. Most suggested that too many rewards are granted to contemporary soldiers. On the other hand, some claimsmakers felt serving in the military was not only heroic but required more rewards than currently offered. Some articles noted that "some returning soldiers complain that gratitude isn't backed up with real benefits" (Stuever 2012). This argument, however, seemed to lack grounds in the face of the plethora of other articles or tweets (too many to cite here comprehensively) that discussed the many programs that offer benefits to war heroes. Among the most common charities and benefits offered to war heroes were personal benefits such as the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund (for building rehabilitation centers for soldiers with PTSD and traumatic brain injury), VOW to Hire Heroes Act (legislation creating a job search program for veterans), or the Hire Our Heroes program (a program for creating a job market for veterans), as well as benefits that directly protected the heroic status of soldiers such as the Stolen Valor Act (deems criminal anyone who impersonates a decorated soldier, or lays claim to soldier's honors without having earned them, for personal benefit). This last benefit will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

5.1.3 Heroes of the Group/Community

While part of a hero-claim's rhetorical structure is the appeal to a group, the naming of a specific audience that are expected to best relate to the hero, some hero-claims were constructed with the audience as the most prominent feature. These claims framed the hero in a way that emphasized the hero's connections to a specific group of people more than the scope of heroism or the relationship to the group. In fact, these hero-claims always constructed the hero as being of the people, without exception. The prominence of this category of hero in the data stems from its open nature; virtually any person made the subject of a hero-claim could be framed as the hero of the group or community.

For example, one article discussing Brazilian basketball star Nene's move from the Denver Nuggets to the Washington Wizards argued why, despite his less-than-perfect record on the court, he was a valuable asset to the city:

> "There is no question that Wizards big man Nene (a weird phrase to type) made his mark on this franchise and this community…He became a hero to Denver's Brazilian community and a fixture in the Denver community, where he lived year-round with his Colorado-native wife and recently born child. (How many big-time athletes play pickup soccer in the park?)" (Hochman 2012)

This example demonstrates several key rhetorical elements about this category of heroes. First, the hero-claim makes a concerted effort to connect Nene with the Denver community, using the word three times, as well as noting his connections through the Nuggets franchise and his family (Colorado natives). The claimsmaker also notes that his foreign background made him especially important for representing a specific segment of the Denver population (Denver's Brazilian community). Finally, the claimsmaker makes

a note of how accessible Nene was to the community (a sports star playing pick-up games in a public park). While the article does note that he is a strong basketball player ("He's ninth all time in franchise scoring and seventh in rebounding" (Hochman 2012)), it does not make the assertion that he is a sports hero. Rather, it makes a concerted effort to claim that Nene's heroism lies in his connection to the community. While this example may have been more explicit than others of its kind, this distinction is the key to understanding these types of hero-claims and the heroes they name.

The most common heroes of the group/community in the data came from specific newspaper articles about local heroes. Many communities offered awards to members of their community that had outstanding records of community service. These outstanding members of the community were usually referred to, either as a specific title or in general, as "hometown heroes." For example, Oakland, California holds an annual Hometown Heroes ceremony, "a gala showcasing people trying to make their communities a better place" (Bender 2012). The ceremony, created by a partnership between Bay Area News Group and the Comcast Corporation, celebrated 28 people in 2012. Among the honorees were founders of various charitable organizations or projects (the vast majority of honorees were of this type), several teachers and coaches, a clergyman, and a volunteer. What united them as heroes, according to the article, was that they "among other things, rally against violence in Oakland, fight disease, boost educational opportunities, and support members of the armed services overseas" within the borders of their community (Bender 2012).

Several newspapers devoted regular sections towards praise for hometown heroes, the Hometown Heroes from the *San Jose Mercury* mentioned above being one of them. The *Mercury* coupled with Comcast to publish a regular series of articles, as well as videos on Comcast On-Demand, set the following goal for this series:

> "[Hometown Heroes] celebrates people in the Bay Area who make a difference in their communities. In addition to highlighting remarkable individuals, the Hometown Heroes feature aims to encourage volunteerism, raise visibility of nonprofits and key causes in the area and create a spirit of giving" (Murphy 2012)

These hero-claims, as stated in the above quote, not only serve to promote local heroes, but also to inspire others to equally heroic actions. In this way, the hero's symbolism within the community becomes the central feature of these hero-claims, demonstrating how anyone can be a hero to their community.

Another regular newspaper section devoted to celebrating hometown heroes was the *Daily News'*s "Hometown Heroes of Transit" section. Like the *Mercury*'s hometown hero section, this column regularly printed hero-claims about members of the local community, in this case mass transit workers of the local community, which culminated in an awards ceremony at the end of the year. Criteria for the Heroes of Transit included:

> "What makes a Hometown Hero? Many are the qualities: Compassion that moves a worker to go the extra mile to help a passenger or a colleague in need; dedication that refuses to be satisfied with anything less than the best service he or she can give; selflessness that puts the good of others above personal interests; ingenuity that finds a way when conventional thinking says there's none. And there is courage…" (NLVL 2012b)

These criteria share several characteristics with those of war heroes: courage, selflessness, and going "the extra mile" to help others. Like other hero-claims about heroes of the group/community, this quote emphasizes the localized nature of the hero's

actions (passengers and colleagues imply that they must have direct, possibly regular, contact with those they help in the course of their daily job). The year-end celebration of these honorees includes a panel of local celebrity judges who choose the most outstanding members of this group of heroes, those "transit workers who improve our daily commutes through heroism and civility" (Paddock 2012).

5.2 Heroic Attributes

5.2.1 Unsung Heroes

Unsung heroes were the most common heroic attribute discussed in the data. These heroes were constructed as not receiving enough attention or credit for their heroism. "Unsung hero" was a specific phrase that appeared often, mostly in reference to sports stars (247 sports-related claims versus 63 non-sports-related claims). Two newspapers, the *Daily News (New York)* and the *New York Post*, both contained running segments of their sports section entitled "Unsung Hero." Unsung sports heroes were constructed in the same way as normal sports heroes (as an MVP or as a role model) but with the added characteristic of being a player whose deeds were perhaps overshadowed by more prominent teammates. For example, one article stated the following under the subheading "Unsung Hero": "With Rashard Mendenhall and Jonathan Dwyer both inactive, Steelers running back Isaac Redman marched through the Giants defense for 147 yards on 26 carries and the go-ahead fourth-quarter touchdown" (Schwartz 2012). This example demonstrates the general structure of a hero-claim about unsung sports heroes. It specifies that the subject of the claim (Isaac Redman) is a hero to the Pittsburgh Steelers team and its fans for his multiple actions during a game against the New York

Giants. The unsung aspect of Redman's heroism lies in the fact that two other players (Rashard Mendenhall and Jonathan Dwyer) were absent from the game, allowing the third-string Redman the opportunity to be the MVP. It is this latter aspect of this hero-claim that is the dominant trait of an unsung sports hero.

While unsung sports heroes were the most common type of unsung hero found in the data, non-sports-related unsung heroes were far more diverse. Anyone could be constructed as an unsung hero, so long as the nature of their heroism included a lack of recognition. Among the various people constructed as unsung heroes were a wine maker ("Bob Lindquist is one of the unsung heroes of California wine, and his Qupé label is consistently overlooked, possibly because he makes wines of little-known Rhône grapes like marsanne." (Asimov 2012)), a groundskeeper ("… behind-the-scene folks toil anonymously at monuments, museums and memorials to keep Washington the visual treasure that it is. Three cheers for [John Turnour, head groundskeeper for the Washington Nationals] and all his fellow 'unsung heroes'" (Engel 2012)), and the people who handle props for theater productions ("Properties people are the unsung heroes of the design team" (Wren 2012)). Each of these examples demonstrates the unsung quality of these heroes: the wine maker runs an "overlooked" label and uses "little-known" grapes, and the groundskeeper and prop wranglers are "behind-the-scene" people. In these constructions, the unsung hero operates on the outskirts of the general public's purview. These are people who might be overlooked on a day-to-day basis, but someone has noticed them and constructed a hero-claim about them.

Like their sports-related counterparts, unsung heroes are constructed like any

other hero, with the exception of their unsung nature. For example, an journalist made the

following hero-claim:

> "Leon Swain Jr. is an unsung hero of our nation's capital. Faced with an
> offer to pocket thousands of dollars in exchange for committing criminal
> acts against the city government, Swain, a longtime District resident who
> at the time chaired the D.C. Taxicab Commission, chose instead to report
> the bribery attempt. He then worked with city and federal authorities to
> bring the perpetrators to justice. For that service to his city, Swain
> received . . . not even a pat on the back." (King 2012)

Swain is named a hero by the article's author for the single act of actively resisting

corruption and pursuing justice against corruption. The claim appeals to a specific group

of people ("hero of our nation's capital"). His relationship to the public is stated later in

the article, the author specifically calling his actions "civic actions," implying with the

word "civic" that he is a hero of the people (King 2012). The final line in the above quote

("not even a pat on the back") demonstrates the unsung nature of this hero and thus

setting this hero apart from other heroes.

5.2.2 Helpful/Notable Actions

This category of heroes refers to anyone whose actions were considered heroic to

the claimsmaker or someone directly associated with the claimsmaker. Heroes of

helpful/notable actions were constructed as being heroic for actions that were deemed

useful but were closer to mundane activities than actions performed by other heroes. For

example, a tweet praised a political asylum and support services company for their efforts

helping Syrian and Libyan refugees: "#RealHeroes: Yorkshire firm helps victims of Arab

turmoil rebuild lives" (Hend (@LibyaLiberty) 2012). An article was attached to this

tweet that explained how this firm was helping Middle Eastern refugees find housing in Great Britain after being displaced from their homelands ("Yorkshire firm helps victims of Arab turmoil rebuild lives" 2012). No lives were directly saved, and the company was not overcoming any great obstacles to achieve its goal, so this hero-claim did not fit into another category. However, as the claimsmaker explicitly states, the company's efforts are helpful and for that reason it is deemed heroic. Many of the hero-claims that comprised this category were similarly constructed, with no part of the hero-claim justifying its placement in a more specific category. For this reason, hero-claims that did not fit into other categories were placed in this one.

This category of heroes included heroes praised for efforts that resulted in failure. In other words, the claimsmaker called someone heroic for their efforts, even though those efforts were not fruitful. These claims often had a rhetorical structure that implied that it was the attempt that was praiseworthy rather than the action itself. For example, an article entitled "Life and Death: Passer-by heroes lift cab off victim" stated that an "Upper East Side hospital worker was struck by a yellow cab and dragged halfway down the block yesterday - trapped under a tire until good Samaritans managed to lift the taxi minivan off her in a futile bid to save her life" (Livingston and Garger 2012). This hero-claim contains the standard rhetorical devices necessary for a hero-claim: a singular appeal (the Samaritans were heroes to the victim only), a scope of one-time heroism, and heroes of the people (implied by the use of the word "Samaritans").[21] However, the

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[21] Samaritan is defined as a person who generously helps those in distress, especially strangers (Merriam-Webster.com 2014). They are commonly depicted as regular people who lend a helping hand if they are present during someone's moment of distress.

presence of the word "futile" changes these heroes from saviors to attempted-saviors. The article notes that the victim died while receiving medical treatment for her injuries. Because she was not ultimately saved, the heroes cannot be classified as saviors, though the article's author still claimed that they were heroic for lifting the car off of her and attempting to save her life.

5.2.3 Overcoming Adversity (Social)

Many hero-claims were made about people who stood up against social discrimination or some form of social resistance. These heroes were constructed as rebels, trailblazers, and freedom fighters. One of the most prominent examples (27 hero-claims out of 270 (10%)) was Malala Yousafzai. Malala, a teenaged blogger who supported the women's education movement in Pakistan, was shot twice in the head by Taliban militants on October 9, 2012. She survived the attack and became a symbol of resistance against the Taliban as well as Pakistani traditions regarding the education of women. Many hero-claims about her were found in the both the newspaper and Twitter data sets. Hero-claims on Twitter mainly focused on the immediate aftermath of Malala's shooting, with hero-claims such as "Malala is recovering! Shows No Sign of Brain Damage #miracle #heroine" (Shannon Wianecki (@swianecki) 2012) and "Get well soon Malala Yousafza. BBC News - Outcry over Pakistan attack on activist Malala Yousafza, 14 #TrueHeroism" (GnomeAliceAforethght (@gnome_alice) 2012) demonstrating the immediate interest this story inspired. Hero-claims found in newspapers were more likely to examine how Malala's actions made her a hero.

> "When Malala was shot for it [her blog], Pakistanis across the political, ethnic and religious spectrum came forward to denounce the Taliban. In

the south of the country, where it is safer for girls to go to school, Malala
is considered a hero. 'I want to do what Malala did,' said Swaliha
Abdullah, a 12-year-old eighth-grader at Eck Eck Government School, a
Karachi public school. 'She saved her school by writing about it.'"
(Yousuf, Raza, and Khaliq 2012)

The quote from the eighth-grader demonstrates one reason why Malala was the subject of

so many hero-claims: she could be placed in many categories of heroes. This specific

quote makes her out to be a savior as well as a freedom fighter. Other claims noted how

she overcame physical adversity (her bullet wounds) to continue the struggle against the

Taliban. Still others noted that she was a hero to specific communities such as Middle

Eastern women, anti-terrorist social movements, or Pakistan itself.

This category of heroes included many historical heroes. Hero-claims that were

constructed with a historical scope often appeared in the data on and around significant

anniversaries in the lives of those heroes. For example, many hero-claims about Martin

Luther King, Jr. appeared in the weeks surrounding his birthday and the national holiday

that commemorates it (in 2012, it was January 16). One article speculated on what it

would be like if he had not been assassinated:

"He would be an elder statesman now, a lion in winter, an American hero
perhaps impatient with the fuss being made over his birthday. At 83, he'd
likely still have his wits and his voice. Surely, if he were able, he would
continue to preach, to pray - and to dream. For the Rev. Martin Luther
King Jr., dreaming was not optional. It was a requirement of citizenship to
envision a fairer, more prosperous nation no longer shackled by racism
and poverty. It was a duty to imagine a world no longer ravaged by
senseless wars." (Robinson 2012)

Like other hero-claims about historical figures, this quote contains the standard rhetorical

structure for constructing the historical hero, emphasizing King's place with the people

rather than above them (e.g. the emphasis on citizenship and common personality traits

like impatience) and his appeal to Americans as a whole ("an American hero"). It is the fact that King's heroic actions were specifically made to fight racism and foster universal peace that place this hero into the category of those who overcame social adversity.

The actions of the heroes in this category were not always as grandiose as those of Malala or King. Often, the hero presented in the claim was someone who simply stood up against a majority within their own group. For example, several articles hailed as heroes conservative politicians in Colorado who stood up against fellow conservatives in order to vote for a bill legalizing civil unions for homosexual couples in the state.

> "For us, the loss is easy to identify: a missed opportunity to provide equal rights to all Colorado citizens…More easily overlooked is what was gained. Conservatives supporting civil unions gained heroes like Reps. B.J. Nikkel, Don Beezley and Cheri Gerou. Also, Sens. Ellen Roberts, Nancy Spence and Jean White." (Nicolais 2012)

In this instance, it was the act of standing up for the civil liberties of a minority group despite political pressure that made these people heroes overcoming adversity.

5.3 Emergent Heroes

5.3.1 Saviors

Saviors were people who were made the subject of hero-claims because they saved a life or rescued someone from imminent danger. Hero-claims found in this category could be made by the person rescued or a third-party observer or commentator. Heroes in this category were constructed in a wide variety of ways, mixing and matching rhetorical devices in any combination. The majority of heroes found in this category were people who saved someone from death rather than rescued them from danger (182 hero-claims out of 291 total (62.5%)). The most extreme example of this is a man who is

officially credited with saving over 160 individuals by convincing them not to commit

suicide. The tweet (Stewart Woodhouse (@Stewsonn) 2012) stated

"#SuicideAwarenessDay What a hero pic.twitter.com/YFLi3TZj" and the link is to a

picture file outlining the deeds of Don Ritchie, otherwise known as "the Angel of the

Gap," who lived next to Sydney, Australia's most popular suicide site. The picture's

caption read:

> "Officially, Mr. Ritchie saved 160 people over the past 50 years, though
> his family believe [sic] the number is closer to 500. He hasn't been able to
> save everyone and has watched people jump to their deaths right in front
> of him, but that doesn't stop him from going out there again and again,
> every time [sic]." (Stewart Woodhouse (@Stewsonn) 2012)

Ritchie, who died four months before this tweet was sent, was constructed in the picture

as being a man of the people, a hero of many acts, and a hero of the community.[22]

The case of Don Ritchie was unique in scope. Most saviors were one-time heroes,

only saving a life or lives on one occasion. For example, many hero-claims were made

about firefighters or law enforcement officers who saved a life in the line of duty.[23] The

rhetorical structure of these hero-claims was fairly uniform.

> "SIMONE ROBERTS [sic] and her two little girls came to the Ladder
> 32/Engine 62 firehouse in the Bronx for a reunion with Firefighter Patrick
> Griffin, who rescued Roberts and one of her daughters from their burning
> apartment a week earlier… For his valor, Griffin, 30, is the Daily News
> Hero of the Month. And while he is Roberts' personal hero, he thinks she
> showed courage, too." (O'Shaughnessy 2012)

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[22] A Google search about Ritchie turned up articles that even claimed that his death was a
loss to the entire nation of Australia.

[23] Any hero-claims that constructed someone as a hero both for their actions and in terms
of their occupation (e.g. firefighters, law enforcement officers, medical experts) counted
as a hero-claim in both categories.

This quote demonstrates the general structure of these types of hero-claims. The hero and his/her actions are stated immediately ("rescued Roberts and one of her daughters from their burning apartment") and then elaborated upon throughout the article (not shown). The hero is then named as such, either referred to as the victim's hero or a hero in general. This particular example demonstrates both, as the *Daily News* names Griffin its own "Hero of the Month" as well as the victim's personal hero ("he is Roberts' personal hero").

Although it was uncommon (less than 1% of hero-claims), multiple people could be named as heroes for the same action. In these cases, a group of people were involved in the rescue, working together to save the victims. For example, one Twitter user simply tweeted a link to an article along with "#trueheroism" (Henny (@Henny_honey1otb) 2012). The attached article reported that "As many as 10 heroic people jumped into an icy Utah river to help save three trapped children after a car plunged down a 10-foot embankment and flipped over" (Daily Mail Reporter 2012). Most of the men helped to flip the car onto its tires, while one man used a handgun to shoot out the windows so he could cut the children out of their seatbelts before they drowned. Another man used resuscitation techniques to revive a boy who was not breathing. All of these actions combined led to the rescue of the children and the claim that all ten were heroes.

5.3.2 Heroes of Aurora, CO

On July 20, 2012, audience members attending a screening of the film *The Dark Knight Rises* were attacked by an individual assailant[24] armed with tear gas grenades and multiple firearms. 70 people were injured and 12 people were killed. In portraying the drama of the event, the mass media reported the stories of individuals who protected others, sometimes saving lives (many by sacrificing their own life in the process). These people were always constructed as being of the people, a technique used by the media because it makes it easy for the audience to identify with the protagonists of these dramatic stories (Monahan 2010). The word "hero" was used in conjunction with values such as self-sacrifice, bravery, and courage. For example, figure 5.1 shows a twitter conversation (Jason Kaplan (@Siriusjay) 2012; Sean (@DukeofBayRidge) 2012) that contained statements about several men who died during the assault.

Jason Kaplan@Siriusjay 27 Jul 12

Much love to Alex Teves, Matt McQuinn & John Blunk who died a week ago protecting their loved ones in the Aurora massacre #RealHeroes

- **24** RETWEETS
- **2** FAVORITES

7:34 AM - 27 Jul 12

1. **Sean**@DukeofBayRidge27 Jul 12

@Siriusjay #RealHeroes When we despair in the face of such reckless hate let us remember these brave men and take comfort

Figure 5.1: Juxtaposition of heroism with bravery and self-sacrifice

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[24] James Eagan Holmes was arrested on site and remains the sole suspect in the case. His trial is set to begin on October 14, 2014.

While the first user (Jason Kaplan, @Siriusjay) discusses the self-sacrifice of the three men ("died a week ago protecting their loved ones"), the second user (Sean, @DukeofBayRidge) chooses to invoke bravery as their characteristic.

While the majority of hero-claims about people involved with the Aurora massacre were spread amongst the many victims and survivors of the event (most people received only one hero-claim), several names were prominent in these hero-claims. The most common hero-claims were about three young men found in the above tweets. They died while protecting their girlfriends, each man taking fatal hits from bullets that supposedly would have killed the women instead. Of the 162 total hero-claims found in the data regarding the Aurora massacre, 16 (9.9%) were specifically devoted to these men.

> "Three young men are being hailed as heroes for their old-fashioned chivalry and courage under fire in saving the lives of their girlfriends. While using their bodies as shields, Matt McQuinn, 27, Jonathan Blunk, 26, and Alex Teves, 24, were killed in the worst mass shooting in US history." (Gibbons, Edelman, and Gartland 2012)

While several victims of the shooting spree reportedly rescued others, these three men became the most prominent, most likely because they died. Their deaths made their stories more dramatic, therefore more appealing to the media.

The victims who received the most amount of hero-claims after McQuinn, Blunk, and Teves were all 12 of the victims who died. These hero-claims (12 out of 162 (4.3%)) made an all-encompassing claim that these people died heroically. "They had all gone out for a night of fun, but more than one died trying to save someone else. The greatest heroes weren't on the screen" (Crummy 2012). This rhetorical structure appeared in many

hero-claims, particularly some form of the final sentence from this quote, followed by a

small obituary for each person. This emphasizes the fact that the heroes were in the

audience, that these heroes were of the people.

Comparatively, victims who did not lose their lives received only a few specific

references in the data. The next highest amount of hero-claims focused on Allie Young

and Stephanie Davies, a pair of friends who were willing to sacrifice their own lives for

the sake of the other, though both ultimately survived.

> "Allie Young was shot in the neck, her carotid artery spurting blood, yet
> she was willing to sacrifice her own life by telling her friend, Stephanie
> Davies, to leave her behind, run out of the theater and save herself. At the
> same time, Stephanie was willing to sacrifice her own life, telling Allie
> that she would never leave her behind, and she didn't. Stephanie managed
> to stop the bleeding and carry her friend out of the theater and across two
> parking lots to safety. There is no question that these two young women
> are not just BFFs, but each a true hero." (Malec 2012)

The story of these two women shares much of the same drama with that of the three

boyfriends, but they only received six total hero-claims (3.7%) in the data. This speaks to

the possibility that the death of the hero creates a stronger dramatic story for media

coverage.

In this set of hero-claims, two names stood out as being considered heroic though

they only had tenuous connections to the massacre. The first, receiving three hero-claims

in the data, was actor Christian Bale who played Batman/Bruce Wayne in the film *The

Dark Knight Rises*. While many members of the film's cast and crew made gestures of

good will towards the victims of the shooting, Bale made a personal visit to the victims in

the hospital, spurred by an internet campaign asking him to do so. "'I propose we should

make enough noise asking Christian Bale to visit these kids in the hospital dressed in the

real Batman outfit. They need to know Heroes [sic] can be real too, not just the bad guys,' Emily Sanchez posted on Facebook" (Lysiak and McShane 2012). Though he did not wear the Batsuit, Bale did spend several hours visiting with the hospitalized victims of the shooting. A similarly vague connection was made between Olympic athlete Missy Franklin and the victims of the massacre since Franklin's hometown is Aurora.

> "For a community that really needed a hero in the wake of a terrible tragedy…there couldn't be any better story than Missy Franklin from Aurora. I doubt that when she went to the Olympics she thought she would become a beacon of hope and pride for a community terrorized by a gunman on July 20." (Garrett 2012)

Like Bale, Franklin had no direct connection to the massacre yet received one hero-claim in the data for giving hope and support to those who needed it in the community.

5.3.3 Heroes of Sandy Hook Elementary

On December 14, 2012, Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut was assaulted by Adam Lanza, who shot and killed 26 people on-site after murdering his own mother in their home hours before his attack commenced. 20 of the victims were children, 6 were staff or faculty of the school. Lanza shot himself in the head as first responders arrived on the scene. It is, to date, the deadliest mass shooting at a grade or high school in the United States. As with the Aurora incident, mass media began issuing reports of bravery and self-sacrifice almost immediately. Generally speaking, hero-claims about Sandy Hook were the same as those for Aurora, with one significant difference. While hero-claims about Aurora were split almost evenly among people involved with the incident, with no one person or group of people receiving more than 10% of the hero-claims, claims made about people involved with Sandy Hook were

highly focused on only a couple individuals. Only five hero-claims out of 139 (3.6%) were about a group of people, with all of them focused on the 6 staff and faculty that were killed. While several articles listed the names of the murdered children, none of those articles named these children as heroes. Several other hero-claims focused on one teacher or staff member at a time.

The largest number of hero-claims about anyone involved in the event (60 out of 139 (43.2%)) were made about Victoria Soto, a 27-year-old first grade teacher who hid her students in a closet while attempting to distract the shooter, receiving a fatal gunshot wound during the encounter. Soto's popularity in the media stems from the values she is imbued with by the public. "Soto became a defiant symbol of resistance to the epidemic of mass shootings in recent years" (Colton 2012). Another article quoted Soto's mother: "She was truly selfless… She would not hesitate to think to save anyone else before herself and especially children" (Bennett 2012). Many articles noted that while Soto was unable to save all of her students, many did survive, making her a savior as well as selfless and resistant to the villain.

One article quoted a member of the Newtown community who noted the immediate presence Soto had in the media: "When the news broke about Vicki, it spread like wildfire. Everything online was in remembrance of her and her heroism for what she did" (Poulisse 2012). The online community's immediate reaction to the tragedy, particularly Soto's role in it as noted in this quote, is reflected by the data. Of the 60 hero-claims specifically made about Soto, 42 (70%) were from the Twitter data set. Many hero-claims tweeted about Soto included some sort of picture that summarized what was

known about her at the time. As most of these pictures were created within the first 24-hours of the event, before all of the facts about the case were released to the public, they often contained whatever was known at the moment. For example, figure 5.2 is a

Figure 5.2: Victoria Soto "chain letter" photo (Erin Sanders **(@ErinZariah) 2012)**

common picture found in hero-claims about Soto on Twitter that were posted on either the 14th or 15th of December (within 36 hours of the event). Figure 5.3, by comparison, was originally posted late on December 15th after more information had been circulated about the event. The difference between the two is found in the description of Soto's actions: she saved all of her students according to the first picture but "died trying to save" her students according to the second picture (implying that she did not save all of them). This modification to her story did not affect her status as a hero, as hero-claims about her could be found through December 31st, when the data set ended.

Figure 5.3: Still shot of CNN coverage of Soto's vigil (Geoff Ninecow (@geoff9cow) 2012)

One other person killed during the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting received a large amount of coverage in the media. Six-year-old Jack Pinto was one of the 20 children murdered by Lanza during the assault on the school. Sixteen hero-claims were made about Pinto in the data (11.5%). What made Pinto's story unique was that he was an adamant fan of the New York Giants football team, particularly receiver Victor Cruz.[25] Cruz was notified of Pinto's fandom via Twitter and was moved to respond to the death of his fan. He immediately tracked down the family and called them, offering moral support for their loss. During his next game, Cruz honored his fan by adding messages about Pinto to his uniform: "Cruz wrote Jack's name on his gloves and cleats - on his right cleat, he inscribed 'R.I.P. Jack Pinto' and on his left 'Jack Pinto My Hero.' He plans

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[25] Many articles noted that Pinto was buried in his Victor Cruz jersey.

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to pass along the gloves to the family and attempt to visit them during the week" (Hale 2012). Cruz drove up to Connecticut later that week and spent several hours visiting with the family.

All of the hero-claims about Pinto found in the data were from Cruz. Both Soto and Pinto were constructed as heroes of the people, but Pinto was only a hero to one person while hero-claims about Soto were constructed to appeal to a large audience. Pinto was not reported as having acted heroically at all, while Soto was a hero of one act. Because hero-claims about Pinto do not include all of the necessary rhetorical devices for constructing a hero-claim, and only one person can be found making the claim, it can be concluded that Pinto is not really a hero. Rather, it demonstrates that the drama attached to the word "hero" is useful for attracting attention to a news story. The case of Pinto and Cruz is unique in that Cruz's hero-claim about Pinto appears hyperbolic, yet received more attention for its drama than any other hero-claims about people involved in the Sandy Hook shooting except Soto. It is also noteworthy that none of the hero-claims about Pinto were found in the Twitter data set, though his name was mentioned. Monahan (2010) states that collective reputation of the New York City Fire Department as heroes was not necessarily supported by evidence, but was useful for helping the media to fill holes in their coverage of the 9/11 terrorist attacks after the event. The same can be said about Pinto: his heroism is unsubstantiated by evidence but the drama of having a child's sports hero return the gesture makes great news.

5.4 Villains, Fakers, and Fallen Heroes

As stated in Chapter 4, a hero's actions are judged by their success against some opposing force. Dramatically speaking, this force, the villain, is something that the hero must defeat. The villain could be an actual person, a social force (such as a social movement or political platform), or a moral dilemma. In cases like those of Lance Armstrong or Joe Paterno, the villain was a moral dilemma, their own inability to stand up for justice even at the risk of their own reputations. For saviors, it was a physical villain of some sort, one that threatened the lives of other people. Malala Yousafzai, on the other hand, was portrayed as being in conflict with both a physical villain (her Taliban attackers) and a social force (the politics of Pakistan that forbade education for women). Villains, these opposing forces against which the hero fights, were depicted in the data in three primary ways: the standard villain-type (i.e. anti-heroes, "bad guys," criminals, etc.), the faker (i.e. someone who attempted to be heroic but whose actions were both failed and detrimental to others in some way), and the fallen hero (i.e. a hero who became a villain).

5.4.1 Standard Villains

One story featured in the data was of an Italian cruise ship that crashed into rocks and sank. Its captain, Francesco Schettino, was said to have lied about the severity of the situation to the coast guard, and then abandoned ship instead of staying with the boat and attempting to mitigate the crisis. Furthermore, he was having dinner with a mistress at the time of the crash. The head of the Port Authority, Captain Gregorio Maria De Falco, openly criticized Schettino's actions at the time of the crisis, telling him to "Get back

aboard, damn it" (Povoledo 2012). The Italian press immediately branded the two

captains as villain and hero:

> "The drama has captivated Italy, offering the land a national metaphor at a
> time of political uncertainty and economic challenge, a juxtaposition of
> hero and anti-hero: Schettino, 51, accused of leaving the ship prematurely,
> and Capt. Gregorio Maria De Falco, a coast guard officer, who tried to
> cajole him into returning to the helm." (The New York Times 2012)

Several critics stated that this was too dramatic an understanding of the situation

and that the words "hero" and "villain" were being misused. One critic objected "to what

he called the abuse of the term hero, which he said in Italy today seemed to be awarded to

anyone who does his or her duty" (Povoledo 2012). Schettino's mistress also attempted to

defend his honor, claiming that "he was a hero for bringing the Costa Concordia close to

shore after the accident so passengers could get to land" (Kennedy 2012).

Schettino's actions were seen as villainous because his actions depicted values

that opposed those the Italian people found heroic. Many critics stated that the two

captains represented two sides of Italy's culture, one that historically caused trouble and

ran from responsibility and one who attempted to stand firm and do what was right.

> "The behavior of the two captains, Aldo Grasso wrote in the newspaper,
> contrasted the 'two souls of Italy' -- one represented by a 'cowardly fellow
> who flees his own responsibilities, both as a man and as an official' and
> the other as the one who tries to bring him back." (Pianigiani and Cowell
> 2012)

As demonstrated in this quote, a person need not be a criminal with intent to do harm to

be called a villain. Just as the hero is the symbol of what a group finds laudable and

decent about itself, the villain is the symbol of what a group detests about itself.

The villain as the symbol of a group's despicable traits was an idea that pervaded several articles in the data that dealt with the reputations of notorious criminals. These criminals had committed great crimes, yet were often depicted in the media as folk heroes. For example, "Slick Willie" Sutton was the most famous bank robber in the nation when he was caught in 1952, having escaped from prison six times and stolen millions of dollars. After he served his final sentence, he made television commercials and wrote a book. One article noted that "He had become kind of a folk hero, but to Shea [the officer who caught him], he was just a perp" (Connor 2012).

Another example is "Crazy Joey" Gallo, a New York city mobster whose reputation earned him several popular culture references, including the phrase "sleeps with the fishes" (one of Gallo's henchmen was killed and stuffed with fish) and the famous restaurant massacre scene from *The Godfather* (1972) (Gallo himself was gunned down in a restaurant while celebrating his birthday). Gallo was also the subject of the popular Bob Dylan song, "Joey," which depicted the man in his popular persona, "the Robin Hood of Red Hook" (McShane 2012). A man who runs a museum dedicated to mobsters noted that "They were heroes in the neighborhood - unless you owed them money or something" (McShane 2012), emphasizing the point that Gallo was ultimately less a hero than a villain.

In both examples, the criminals had reputations for being both heroes and villains, though in each case, the articles were quick to remind readers that these men were villains in the end. One article offered a reason for this reputational confusion, stating that the suave criminal "was someone who captured our imagination" (McShane 2012). A

further example demonstrates the need to separate the drama of these narratives and the truth behind these criminals' actions. Movie star Mark Wahlberg stated his intention to get exclusive rights to the story of multiple murderer and FBI informant James "Whitey" Bulger. This caused the families of Bulger's victims to protest: "Patricia Donahue, whose husband, Michael Donahue, was allegedly killed by Bulger, said she prays that filmmakers don't make Bulger out to be a hero. She wants him portrayed 'as he really is, the murderer that he is'" (Associated Press 2012a). This quote further emphasizes how villains are constructed, through the values associated with their negative actions. Donahue does not want people to forget that Bulger allegedly killed 19 people in cold blood, actions that are not heroic and should be treated as such by the media.

5.4.2 Fakers

Fakers are those who purport to be heroes but cannot maintain the façade. For example, Tania Head was supposedly a survivor of the New York terrorist attacks on 9/11. Her fiancé was killed and she lost an arm, only surviving because she was saved by the "man in the red bandana." [26] In 2004, Head became the first president of the World Trade Center Survivors' Network, a group dedicated to helping survivors of Ground Zero. In 2012, it was discovered that Tania Head did not exist, and the woman who claimed to be her was really Alicia Esteve, a native of Barcelona, Spain, which is where she was when the attack happened. "The woman who helped other survivors as they struggled to pick up their lives and deal not just with the horror of what they saw, but

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[26] Welles Crowther, also known as "the man in the red bandana," was an equities trader who was at Ground Zero when the Twin Towers were struck. He died during the attack, but not before saving at least a dozen people.

with survivor's guilt, became a national hero. Only problem is none of it was true" (Stasi 2012). The article continued, claiming that for the survivors who had looked up to her for so many years "the shock, outrage, hurt and anger of the survivors is palpable" (Stasi 2012).

Another example found in the data was the story of the "Jewish Indiana Jones." Rabbi Menachem Youlus provided Torahs through a charity, claiming that they had been rescued from Nazi prison camps. The judge who sentenced him attempted to illuminate the reason for such actions, stating that "the reason is that Mr. Youlus had a screw loose, that Mr. Youlus has this desire to be something he's not, which is an adventurer, a hero" (Weiser 2012). Youlus, in addition to serving jail time, was sentenced to pay back his victims in the amount of $990,000. The reason for this was because the victims felt betrayed by such a lie. "The judge had received many letters from victims, describing their humiliation at learning of the fraudulent provenance of the Torahs they had bought in honor of loved ones" (Weiser 2012).

Fakers may not necessarily intend to defraud people; they might actually believe themselves to be heroic. For example, 2012 saw the trial of a 10-year-old boy who killed his neo-Nazi father, shooting him in the head as he rested on the couch. The prosecution claimed that the boy was angry at his father for belittling him at a birthday party the day before the incident. The defense, on the other hand, claimed that the boy was a product of Nazi violence and conditioning. They claimed that the boy "thought he was being a hero by shooting his father" (McKinley 2012).

What is evident from these examples is that fakers not only damage their own reputations by pretending to be something they are not, they hurt others as well, making victims of them. Whether they are victims of financial fraud, such as the case of Rabbi Youlus, emotional fraud, such as the case of Tania Head, or physical violence, as in the case of the 10-year-old boy, people are hurt by the actions of fakers. Heroes do not create victims, though, they save them. If these fakers are harming people, creating victims, what separates them from standard villains?

The answer can be found in the example of the Stolen Valor Act. The Stolen Valor Act was signed into law by President G.W. Bush in 2006. The primary purpose of this act was to criminalize anyone who falsely represented themselves as having received military honors or medals. Just as it is illegal to impersonate an officer of the law, this act attempted to stop people from falsely benefitting from military prestige without having earned it, making it a misdemeanor to do so. The moral justification behind this act was that faking military heroism infringes upon honestly earned heroic reputations. "False claims of military heroism diminish the sacrifices of America's true military heroes and allow imposters to reap undeserved benefits that should be reserved for those who earned them" (Wong 2012). In 2012, the Supreme Court challenged the constitutionality of the act, ultimately repealing it.

The repeal of the Stolen Valor Act prompted strong responses from war veterans who continue to want those who fake military excellence to be punished.

> "The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States 'is greatly
> disappointed,' the organization's commander in chief, Richard L. Denoyer,
> said in a statement. 'Despite the ruling, the VFW will continue to
> challenge far-fetched stories, and to publicize these false heroes to the

broadest extent possible as a deterrent to others'." (Ruane and Barnes 2012)

Harold A. Fritz, president of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society claimed that "It's more than just a piece of metal suspended on a piece of cloth on a pin. . . . And people who abuse that . . . need to be penalized" (Ruane and Barnes 2012). One lawyer connected to the case claimed that "This case is about theft, not lying in general…[People] have misappropriated for their own benefit an unearned share of the two centuries' worth of goodwill and prestige associated with American military awards" (Barnes 2012). The focus of these quotes is on the damage done to those heroes who earned their honors by "false heroes" who have "misappropriated" a reputation they have not earned.

This last distinction is the difference between standard villains and fakers. While villains attack people, attack society, embodying everything bad about a group, fakers attack the hero. Fakers place themselves in the position of hero without the consensus of the group. As we have noted many times before, it is the group who decides who becomes a hero, who becomes the symbol of their values. What is worst about the actions of fakers is that their attempts to be heroes are not just damaging to themselves but to others. The actions of fakers make inadvertent victims of those to whom they meant to be a hero. The indignation found in the above quotes from those victims who want justice for the transgressions of fakers borders on offense. The group is offended by the faker's attempts to play at being heroic. Their demand for justice, punitive or compensatory, demonstrates their desire to protect against the violation of their values and the symbol of those values.

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5.4.3 Fallen Heroes

Fallen heroes are heroes who, either because of a character flaw or devious actions, are no longer considered heroic by the people who once celebrated them. These villainous figures were often the subject of much debate in the data, with arguments ranging from constructing them as pure villains to some who believed heroes should be forgiven. Three men were named in the majority of claims made about specific fallen heroes: former CIA director General David Petraeus (8 out of 42 (19%)), former Penn State University head football coach Joe Paterno (9 out of 42 (21.4%)), and former cycling champion Lance Armstrong (18 out of 42 (42.8%)). All three were accused of lying about and/or covering up crimes, Petraeus was cheating on his wife with his biographer as well as being possibly involved in a cover-up regarding the murder of four Americans in Benghazi, Paterno was part of a conspiracy at Penn State to cover up known molestations of young boys carried out by Paterno's assistant coach Jerry Sandusky, and Armstrong was accused of using illegal steroids to win all of his races and threatening his teammates if they told anyone. All three men were forced to resign their positions and both Paterno and Armstrong were stripped of their official titles and awards in their respective sports communities.

Most of the discussions regarding these three men examined why they were no longer considered heroes, which transgressions were most heinous, which could be forgiven, and which were unforgivable. For example, several articles suggested that Armstrong's worst act was not cheating but lying about it. "I have newfound respect for his teammates but not for him," stated one claimsmaker. "They've come clean in a sincere

effort to attempt to clean up the sport of cycling. Armstrong, however, continues to refuse arbitration in order to avoid testifying" (Scott 2012). Another claimsmaker stated that Armstrong's lies were his worst offense because they made people believe he was still a hero when he was not. "When the medals and trophies are returned, the overriding feeling isn't 'I can't believe Lance was guilty.' No, it's 'How gullible was I to ever think he was the last clean cyclist?'" (Wise 2012). A similar argument was made about Paterno: "Like so many others, I wanted to believe in him…I make no apology for clinging to that belief until the evidence began mounting, until it became clear that Paterno not only empowered evil, he ultimately embodied it. He was a facilitator for a pedophile" (Frei 2012). These arguments demonstrate that, for some, the worst thing a hero can do is misrepresent himself, to accept the mantle of virtuous symbol under false pretenses.

For fallen heroes like Armstrong and Petraeus, whose heroic reputations were tied to multiple groups of people for multiple reasons, arguments were made about whether or not failure in one aspect of heroism meant failure in all aspects. Petraeus, for example, was known as a war hero for being the head of military operations during the recent Middle East conflicts, an American hero for his work as head of the CIA, and a hero to military families for his stable relationship with his wife. Several articles suggested that his crime of marital infidelity should not affect his status as a war hero. "Petraeus was a brilliant general [sic], and the good he did for our country speaks for itself… Yes, he made a terrible error in judgment regarding his extramarital affair, but many men throughout history have, too" (Larson 2012). Others suggested that the worst offense he made was to betray his wife, who had a strong reputation as a role model to military

wives. "His wife… who has become a hero to military families herself, is humiliated because a man described in The New York Times as the "preeminent military officer of his generation" turned out to have the morals of a drunken cadet on a weekend furlough" (Lupica 2012). Similarly, Armstrong, a sports hero and hero to cancer survivors for his own survival and philanthropies, was said to still maintain his heroism in one area even if he loses it in another. "He continues to do good for cancer causes. Let them take medals away, so what. He still remains our hero and honest champion. We love him always" (Rilling 2012).

This latter quote speaks to another aspect of fallen heroes, that no matter what they do some followers will maintain their faith in the hero. For example, one article stated why Armstrong will maintain his supporters despite his scandal:

> "Armstrong's decision to halt his defense could have a wide-reaching impact…Armstrong has done a better job than many of the sports world's fallen heroes of maintaining a large cadre of believers, said [communications expert] Jason Maloni…'Lance's fans will see this latest development as somewhat heroic, that he's above this petty back and forth with USADA'." (Maese 2012)

This quote demonstrates how Armstrong's fan base will maintain its faith in its hero, rationalizing his actions to justify their heroic construction of him. Similar quotes can be found about Petraeus and Paterno. Regarding Petraeus' status as a hero, one claimsmaker stated "Keep the public and private person separate. The fact is that the general made a mistake but remains an American hero" (News 2012a). At Paterno's funeral, longtime friend and Nike co-founder Phil Knight said of his friend, ""It turns out he gave full disclosure to his superiors…Whatever the details of the investigation are, this much is clear to me: if there is a villain in this tragedy, it lies in that investigation, not in Joe

Paterno" (Coffey 2012). These latter quotes demonstrate that the hero's supporters

maintain their faith in the hero by compartmentalizing the hero's detrimental side from

his heroic side. Petraeus' private shortcomings should be kept separate from his public

heroics, while Paterno's involvement in the investigation should show that it wasn't he

who covered up the scandal but his superiors.

Finally, for those claimsmakers who deemed the fallen hero beyond redemption, a

sense of loss was expressed in their claims. Losing a hero created a tension for these

claimsmakers, especially in the absence of another hero to take the first's place. For

example, one claimsmaker noted the dilemma of driving Lance Armstrong out of sports:

> "Every sport needs its heroes, and Armstrong stood head and shoulders
> above every other cyclist -- a symbol of courage and
> determination…Perhaps there are people who believe the purity and
> integrity of the sport is everything. But are there enough of those purists to
> sustain worldwide interest in the sport?" (Veitch 2012)

For this claimsmaker, the loss of Armstrong as a hero, particularly the way he was lost,

damaged the sport by weakening its fan base. By driving Armstrong out in order to

preserve the integrity of the sport, this claimsmaker believes that the sport itself becomes

compromised as it loses fans. Who wants to watch a sport known for its cheaters?

Similarly, Joe Paterno's biographer, who was researching his book at the time the

news of the Sandusky scandal broke, wrote about the personal moral dilemma with which

he was faced. "There was the bloated superhero of Nov. 4, the savage villain of Nov. 5

and I searched for the human being in the middle. I believe most of us live somewhere in

the middle" (Posnanski 2012). He had been tasked with writing a book about the name

affectionately known as "Saint Joe" but now he had to tell a tale of a man who had helped

to cover up heinous crimes. Like the example of Lance Armstrong, the loss of Paterno as a hero caused many to look at the very nature of sports as a cultural institution. In a statement addressing the Sandusky scandal, NCAA president Mark Emmert asked if "'integrity, honesty, and responsibility' were what drives a university. 'Or are we in a position where hero worship and winning at all costs has subordinated those core values?'" (Raissman 2012b). What is implied by these examples is that if the hero is the symbol of the values of a group, and that hero fails to live up to those ideals, the integrity of those values is left in question. As suggested in the above quote about Armstrong, the social solidarity of the group could be jeopardized by such a turn of events.

5.5 Defending Heroes

With the integrity of their group and their values at stake, it is logical that people will defend their heroes. As mentioned in the section about fakers, people find direct attacks on their heroes offensive and want those attackers dealt with in some fashion. Several articles featured claims about attacks on heroes and how people felt about those attackers. The twitter conversation found in figure 5.4 (SashaKane (@SashaKane) 2012;

SashaKane@SashaKane16 Sep

Sometimes there are no answers as to why [greed] and titillation trump human decency and kindness. □ @autumnanderson

autumnanderson@autumnanderson 16 Sep

@SashaKane Well said, Sasha. I have noticed that sometimes some seem to delight in tearing down that which is innocent, beautiful, or heroic

Figure 5.4: Example of the offensive nature of attacking heroes

autumnanderson (@autumnanderson) 2012) demonstrated the offensiveness of attacking the heroic. As this conversation indicates, some claimsmakers view attacking the heroic as indecent and unkind, fueled by selfish desires rather than altruistic ones. Other claimsmakers were more incensed by these assaults on heroism. For example, one article's author railed against Gore Vidal, a man who was quoted on many occasions attacking the reputations of American heroes: "Vidal would have spent his final years as a laughingstock, if anyone was still listening to his toxic gibberish… Vidal's political self is a story of leftism metastasized. In memory, let's surgically excise the tumors we can never forgive" (Smith 2012). The metaphor of the attacker being cancerous, needing excising, is a particularly graphic depiction of how these villains are reviled. These quotes also share in common the rationalization of such attacks ("some seem to delight in tearing down" and "toxic gibberish"), attempts by claimsmakers to undermine the arguments of the villains.

Just as claimsmakers used rationalization to justify the actions of the villain, they also would go to lengths to justify the reputation of the hero in spite of the villain's attack. For example, in Figure 5.5, one Twitter user posted his distaste for news commentator Piers Morgan's criticism of British Olympian and Knight Chris Hoy not audibly singing along with the national anthem during the 2012 Summer Olympics (Tom Doran (@portraitinflesh) 2012; Robert Jobson (@theroyaleditor) 2012; Katherine Birkett (@Kitty_B_Good) 2012; Mike (@hollim86) (a,b) 2012; Blair Supporter (@blairsupporter) 2012). His grievance with Morgan was met with many responses by people who offered justification's for Hoy's silence.

Tom Doran@portraitinflesh 7 Aug 12

Piers Morgan is dissing Chris Hoy for not singing the anthem. That's @chrishoy, national hero, being dissed by @piersmorgan, national twat.

- **3,501** RETWEETS
- **214** FAVORITES

11:42 AM - 7 Aug 12

5.   **Robert Jobson**@theroyaleditor7 Aug 12

@portraitinflesh @chrishoy @piersmorgan Sir Chris was overcome at emotion of becoming our most decorated Olympian. Piers is being daft.

7. **Katherine Birkett**@Kitty_B_Good7 Aug 12

@portraitinflesh @chrishoy @piersmorgan There's a concept called 'being too emotional to be able to sing'.

15. **Mike**@hollim867 Aug 12

@portraitinflesh @chrishoy @piersmorgan totally agree, absolute legend....and until we know why he didnt sing the anthem who are we to judge

17. **Mike**@hollim867 Aug 12

@portraitinflesh @chrishoy @piersmorgan could have just been overcome with emotion......could hate the monarchy lol

21. **Blair Supporter**@blairsupporter7 Aug 12

@portraitinflesh FGS @chrishoy was crying too much to sing. Proud of my fellow Scot. So proud. @piersmorgan

Figure 5.5: Example of protecting a hero

These justifications, including the emphasis on Hoy's knighthood and national standing

(original tweet and response 5), his emotional state (responses 5, 7, 17, 21), his political

opinions (response 17), and his Olympic standing (response 5), help buttress the hero's reputation, ensuring that it is protected from Morgan's attempt to tarnish it.

It is not just rhetorically that people will defend their heroes, but with actions as well. In late November of 2012, a group of New York City firefighters organized a free food tent for a community that was severely lacking in resources due to the effects of Hurricane Sandy. When the city's health inspectors arrived and cited the firemen for the mishandling of food, protestors expressed outrage at the harassment of its local heroes. One firefighter who was directly confronted by the inspectors expressed his anger: "I'm dealing with hungry women whose homes are being bulldozed and he wants a license to give her a bowl of chili. I asked him where you got a license to feed hungry people and give out bottles of water during a tragedy" (Hamill 2012). In an article entitled "City inspectors hassle heroes who feed victims," a *Daily News* reporter claimed "This is what the city of New York did for the relief effort of Sandy victims. This notice of violation is a violation of human decency. Mayor Bloomberg should bury his head in shame in the sands of Breezy Point" (Hamill 2012). The protests against the inspectors led to an official apology being issued by the Health Department, stating that the inspectors overstepped their bounds and were only supposed to advise the firefighters on how to better handle the food.

Another example of action taken against those who would attack a hero demonstrated full legal action being taken against the villains. When an undercover cop contracted hepatitis during a 2-year operation, he appealed for a disability pension and was denied by the Pension Board. He appealed the decision in court and was awarded

benefits. The judge's ruling demonstrated his outrage at the actions of the Pension Board, stating that it "has done all that it could to deprive one of (the) Finest the benefits that he has properly earned…The decision to deny petitioner this status…must be set aside as arbitrary, capricious, unreasonable and unlawful" (Parascandola and McShane 2012).

In both the cases of the firefighters and the police officer, the heroes were defended from the attacks of others in word and in deed. The attackers were not only rebuffed by protests and legal action, but chastised for their "violation of human decency" and "unreasonable and unlawful" actions. In any case, the reputations of the attackers are in turn attacked, as the people condemn them for their stance against the hero. This suggests that those who dare to fight against a recognized hero are placing their own reputations in jeopardy. Only villains fight against heroes.

5.6 Unique Qualities in Hero-Claims

While hero-claims adhere to the three rhetorical devices of audience appeal, relationship to the people, and scope of heroism, they can also have their own unique rhetoric depending on the type of hero they are promoting. Variations in a hero-claim's rhetoric can denote how the claimsmaker is framing the hero, particularly if that hero can be framed in many ways (i.e. the hero is heroic to more than one group for more than one reason). This allows hero-claims some flexibility, which allows for better transmission of hero-claims from one group to another. Different categories of heroes also seem to favor certain combinations of rhetorical devices. For example, saviors were almost always constructed as heroes of the people rather than above them, while hero-claims about war heroes and soldiers were almost always structured to appeal to a group of people rather

than individuals. These distinctions add to the unique nature of a hero-claim, making it stand out from other hero-claims that one might encounter.

Many types of hero-claims also add drama, enhancing the rhetoric of the claim with specific imagery or word choices that make the claim more noticeable. Emergent heroes and sports heroes in particular tended to use drama, adding tension to the narrative of the hero in order to make that person's actions seem more heroic. Adding drama also makes the hero-claim more appealing to the media, as demonstrated by the popularity of stories about Vicki Soto and Jack Pinto.

All hero-claims involve some level of drama as the hero must overcome some villain in order to earn the reputation. Villains serve several dramatic purposes in hero-claims. Standard villains symbolize the negative aspects of a group, those aspects that must be overcome. Overcoming fakers demonstrates the desire of the group to protect its heroes. Fallen heroes threaten the integrity of the group itself, as well as its values. Overcoming villains of any type allows the group to not only protect itself and its values but to maintain its hero, the symbol of that group and a source of social solidarity. As demonstrated in the data, group members will not let their heroes face the villains alone, coming to the defense of the hero when necessary.

This analysis supports the idea that having a hero fosters social solidarity in a group. The hero, the symbol of the group's values, is as sacred to them as the values themselves. Heroes should be protected from villains just as the group's values should be protected from those who mean to undermine them. Losing their values means jeopardizing the solidarity of the group. Therefore, it is crucial that the hero exist and

remain untainted, unchallenged. In this way, the hero stands as much for the group as it

does for the group's values.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

"For most of its duration, *The Dark Knight Rises* is a story about a terrorist who thinks he has won. It isn't until the end -- when citizens step forward to protect one another and police officers show the bravery behind the badge -- that heroes emerge. But the Aurora gunman didn't need to wait until the end to learn that. He saw it play out in front of him in real life. Heroes arose before his eyes." (Ingold 2012)

This study began by addressing the idea that there were no more heroes left in society, only victims and the fools who try to be more than victims. The data presented in these pages is full of refutations of that claim: people to whom others look for inspiration, people lending helping hands, people saving others' lives. Heroes exist, and as some sociologists have noted, there are many. But this is not because the word "hero" is overused. Rather, our society, typified by increasing individualism and population segmentation, allows for the possibility that anyone can be called a hero.

6.1 Tiny Heroes, Big Symbols

Through the analysis of past definitions of heroes, we determined what a hero is. A hero is a person who has performed some action (or actions) that is deemed beneficial to a group of people. These actions are seen by the group as reflective of values they

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consider important. The person who committed these actions is elevated by the members of the group to a symbolic status, becoming the representative of these values. The hero, therefore, is a value-laden symbol of a group of people. The group's social solidarity is reinforced by the choosing of a hero, which causes them to reaffirm their values or consider new ones. This process brings the group together, ultimately binding them under the symbol of the hero.

The elevation of the hero takes place through a process of reputational claimsmaking. It is through the process of constructing and discussing the hero's reputation, making hero-claims, that the group enforces their solidarity. They must decide what values the hero and the hero's actions represent. Logically, this means that they must know beforehand what values their group holds. By making claims about the hero's reputation, the members of the group are reiterating these values, choosing which ones the hero represents. The acceptance of the hero-claim by the group means reinforcing among its individual members that the group holds those particular values in regard. Acceptance of the hero-claim also means that the individual members of the group are reinforcing their membership in that group, which reinforces the group's social solidarity.

Claims, however, are not isolated within a single group. People belong to many social groups, and cultural elements from one group are carried to other groups by individuals. In the case of the hero, transmission from one group to another occurs when members of one group ask other groups to adopt their hero. Hero-claims in this scenario attempt to demonstrate that the groups do or should share the same values and that the hero is the symbol of those values. Adopting the values means adopting the hero as well.

By sharing heroes across social boundaries, social solidarity is enforced between small groups, bringing them together under the same symbol. Just as the hero can bring individuals together into a group, it can also bring groups together into a society. In this way, the hero is important for maintaining social solidarity at all levels of analysis.

Society, being comprised of small groups, is segmented in innumerable ways. If each group has its own hero, and these groups are attempting to share their heroes with other groups, then there is a proliferation of heroes, but an even larger proliferation of hero-claims. Not every hero will be accepted. As several hero-claims in the data suggest, one group's hero might be another group's villain depending on their values. One article's author commented on the fact that sports broadcaster Suzyn Waldman came to the defense of baseball star Roger Clemens when he was accused of using steroids when Clemens was perhaps not worthy of defense:

> "For there was no doubt that not only did her words show her loyalty to Clemens, but an unwavering respect for a guy who ignored his critics, thumbed his nose at baseball's establishment and walked out of court a free man. In my book, that does not make Clemens any less a manipulative sleazebag. But one man's creep is another woman's hero. And there ain't anything wrong with that." (Raissman 2012a)

This claimsmaker not only recognizes that heroes are not universally accepted across social boundaries, but normalizes this fact. The article notes that Waldman believed Clemens was just part of a new era of baseball, while the article's author disagreed. For Waldman, Clemens remains a hero though the article's author sees him as a fallen sports hero.

This sort of disagreement over values and how to frame elements of society is normal in a democratic society. Therefore, the proliferation of heroes and hero-claims can

be seen as a democratization of heroes and hero-claims. This framing of heroes allows for the acceptance of individualism in society rather than treating it like a social problem. It also means that the classical hero of a society (e.g. Carlyle's men of great deeds or Durkheim's civilizing hero) cannot exist, as the consensus required to make a hero for all of society is rare. Instead of having one big "Hero" for everyone, everyone has their own small "heroes." Nor do heroes require a great number of heroic attributes as suggested by Raglan and Campbell. Instead, heroes can be named based on one or two values, and those values do not have to be the same as those embodied by a different hero. For example, sports heroes were constructed in ways that made them role models (worthy of being looked up to) or most valuable players (pinnacles of excellence in sports). War heroes/soldiers, on the other hand, were constructed using values such as bravery, self-sacrifice, and courage, similar values attached to saviors. As groups adopt new values or cultural elements from other groups, the group can change culturally, making it necessary to find a new hero to represent this new iteration of the group. Since any value can be attached to a hero, and these values might change or be combined in any number of ways, there can be many little heroes constructed by many hero-claims. This, and not a blatant misuse of the word "hero," is why there is a proliferation of heroes in contemporary American society. There is a hero for every group, or at least a claim about one.

With all these hero-claims floating around, it creates competition for claimsmakers. How does one claim get adopted over another? How do they compete in a hero-claims "marketplace" (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988), making themselves more attractive to the audience than competing hero-claims? Like any type of claim (i.e. social

problems claims, political claims, etc.), the hero-claim must adhere to a basic rhetorical structure in order to be recognizable to audience members. By appealing to a specific audience (singular or appeal to a group), establishing the relationship of the hero to the general population (hero of the people or above them), and establishing the scope of the heroic actions (one act, many acts, historical hero), a hero-claim is able to stand out on the marketplace. By combining these choices in any number of ways, a plethora of hero-claims exist. Anyone can be nominated as a hero, and anyone can have their own hero.

Each group of people is going to have a particular hero, constructed a particular way. This was demonstrated in the data by the way that certain categories of heroes were constructed in specific ways and using variations on the basic rhetorical structure of the hero-claim. For example, sports heroes as MVPs were often constructed as being superior to their teammates, who were already successful professionals, for their actions, making them heroes above the people. On the other hand, emergent heroes were almost universally heroes of the people, as reflected by the common theme that the hero rises up during times of tragedy and adversity (Ingold, Lee, and Robles 2012), emerging from among the people (Dortch 2012). These variations in the rhetorical structures of hero-claims establish that each category of hero is constructed slightly differently. As each category of hero is created by its own group (i.e. saviors constructed by those who value life or were themselves saved, or sports heroes constructed by their fan base), then it is possible to see how heroes vary across social boundaries by comparing the rhetorical variations in each type of hero-claim. Each group will emphasize values pertinent to their unique localized culture and construct the hero in a way that best emphasizes what they

find heroic and valuable. This offers a unique way of studying localized group cultures that has not been done before.

The transmission and adoption of hero-claims within groups and across social boundaries allow people to feel connected to each other, fostering social solidarity. This was most evident in the analysis of villains and how people fought to defend their heroes. Group members become active in these battles, making new hero-claims meant to protect the reputation of their hero. Several hero-claims in the data noted that many heroes have their reputations challenged while many more hero-claims reported on fallen heroes. Several articles stated that this was a regular thing, that sometimes "heroes turn out to be…villains" (Shapiro 2012). Another article stated that "old heroes are feted anew or new heroes are crowned," again noting that this happens with regularity, particularly in sports (Pennington 2012). These claims make the process of making hero-claims, as well as attacking and defending heroic reputations, appear normal and routinized. In these battles, group members are fighting to protect their hero, the symbol of their values. If the hero is under attack, then by extension so is the group's value system. If a hero falls, the group must decide if that hero was simply not worthy of his or her status, or if the values attached to the hero require reevaluation.

While Durkheim's conception of the hero may not necessarily apply to the heroes discussed here, his emphasis on the hero as a source of ritual still applies (1912[1995]). Challenges to the hero, and the act of replacing a fallen hero, serve as rituals performed infrequently that allow the group to examine its own value system and determine what values they hold highest. As a group's culture changes due to influences from other

groups (i.e., the adoption of new cultural elements), this practice becomes necessary. Not only does naming a hero foster a group's social solidarity but reexamining the hero, through the presence of villains or challenges to the hero's reputation, causes the group to ritually reexamine their own social structure, particularly their value system. In this way, social solidarity is reinforced, either by reaffirming the current hero, or choosing a new hero that better fits the latest incarnation of that group. While the hero may not be one to society as a whole, it is still a "constellating image" that draws small groups together (Campbell 1988). In the end, it does not matter who the hero is, only that we have them and continue to make claims about them.

6.2 The Future of Heroes Research

The scope of this project has only extended as far as individual people named as heroes. As the data set demonstrated, heroic reputations are extended to more than just individuals. Animals, for example, were the subject of several hero-claims, particularly in the Twitter data set. Many of these claims were about animals that protected or saved the life of a human. Common rhetoric for these claims echoed the following tweet: "Dog performs heroic act," which was followed by a link to an article about a dog warning his family of a fire (AOL Real Estate (@aolrealestate) 2012). Other animal-related hero-claims were about animals saving other animals, such as this news bulletin tweeted by the Huffington Post: "Heroic cat saves kittens by taking a bullet in the head, lives," which included a link to an article about a cat that took a bullet to protect its litter (Huffington Post (@HuffingtonPost) 2012). A significantly smaller portion of hero-claims not included within the scope of this project was corporate entities hailed as heroic. For

example, one tweet from the New York Stock Exchange's official Twitter account stated "8 cos including @UPSers honored with #NYSEbell for swift Corporate Action with #Sandy Relief #hero" ((NYX) NYSE Euronext (@NYSEEuronext) 2012), which states that UPS did not stop making deliveries during Hurricane Sandy and for that they were honored with a dedication during the ringing of the Stock Exchange bell.[27] Finally, a portion of hero-claims, particularly in the *#heroine* data, were about fictional characters. For example, one tweet stated "Star Trek Voyager ... oh yeah, Captain Janeway #heroine #geeknight" (ChocolateChilliMango (@ChocChilliMango) 2012). What these three types of hero-claims represent is the possibility that the hero, being a symbol of values, does not need to even be a person, or even real. This project maintained a narrow scope in terms of hero-claims, and a wider scope would be better for understanding the place of these so-called "heroes," determining how much of these hero-claims is hyperbole or true hero-claims.

The idea of fictional characters as heroes begs another question worthy of further pursuit: What is the role of narrative in the hero-claimsmaking process? Fictional characters perform actions, although fictional actions, which can be seen as representative of values (e.g. Superman's fight for truth, justice, and the American way). By examining only real-life heroes, this project has perhaps implied that heroes must be rooted in real life. However, many of the heroic tales we are told as children are not historically accurate. For example, one of the reasons we are taught as children that George Washington was an American hero was because of his honesty and sense of

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[27] The ringing of the Stock Exchange bell is the daily tradition that marks the beginning of the trading day.

responsibility, a concept learned through the tale of his chopping down a cherry tree and then taking responsibility for the misdeed. This event never occurred, yet it is still used as an example of Washington's heroic character.[28] If this is the case, then perhaps the story of heroism is more important than whether or not that event occurred. This question also arises in analyses of hero-claims about Vicki Soto. As previously noted, initial hero-claims about Soto were not accurate, yet they spread the message of her heroism anyhow. Taken to its logical conclusion, this implies the possibility that a fictional character could become the subject of a hero-claim, as it is the story of the actions performed that comprises a hero-claim.

In addition to examining new populations of heroes, future research on heroes should include an exploration of how social and political structures influence the construction of hero-claims. This can be done as a study across time or as a study across social hierarchies. In terms of time, many of the hero-claims about firefighters and law enforcement officers can be traced to the American post-9/11 mentality that all first responders are heroes. Sociologists have already made note of the role of politics and culture in the rise of firefighters as heroes (Monahan 2010), though a comparison of hero-claims from before and after 9/11 would demonstrate how significant changes in social structures and culture can influence how hero-claims are constructed and about whom they are made. In terms of social hierarchies, an examination of hero-claims from minority groups would be useful for seeing how the hero, a symbol of social justice, is constructed by groups who are denied access to social justice.

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[28] As a child, I had a biography about Washington that featured this tale despite its being a fiction.

Finally, though a content analysis was useful for eliciting a basic understanding of hero-claims and the heroes represented in them, interviews with people about who they find heroic and why would allow for a deeper understanding of how and why people choose their heroes. One-on-one interviews would be useful for delving further into individual hero-claims while interviewing specific social groups (e.g. a sports team's fans or supporters of war veterans) would help increase understanding of how groups come to consensus about their heroes.

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[29] Due to the fact that I accessed these tweets from the Eastern Standard Time zone (EST), all time stamps on tweets were automatically adjusted by Topsy or Twitter to reflect EST.

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