

MA MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

The Hero's Journey: Tracing the History of the Myth to the Celebrity

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ABSTRACT:

The terms “hero,” “heroism,” and, more recently, “heroine,” are broad, wide-ranging, and contested terms prominent within academia yet there remains a general consensus that heroes are, historically, an essential component to society. This paper will identify that there are diverse Western cultural conceptions surrounding the hero. It is therefore important to trace the meaning behind the concept and draw conclusions as to whether or not the hero narrative has developed or shifted over time. Through an intensive review of the literature on the “hero,” this research paper critically identifies the historical constructions, empirical observations, and theoretical analyses in order to explore and understand how the hero narrative has changed or retained timeless qualities of meaning or myth. As the hero developed from the Classical times to the present, through the periods of oral tradition to electronic media, those who are identified as a “hero” became more and more far-reaching. This paper constructs several empirical tables that identify similarities and differences concerning how Western society’s classification of heroes has developed. By taking into account the different types of heroic figures that have existed across time, including Greek gods, soldiers, community workers, and celebrities, this paper establishes whether or not the conception of the “hero” changes depending on war, gender, race, popular culture, historical time period, and changes in communication technology.

INTRODUCTION: The Captivating Hero

The terms “hero,” “heroism,” and, more recently, “heroine,” are broad, wide-ranging, and contested terms prominent within academia yet there remains a general consensus that heroes are, historically, an essential component to society. Ralph Waldo Emerson provided this thoughtful definition of heroism when he stated that heroes mirror the ideal morals of the community and can be symbols for the highest aims of mankind (in Hume 9). The hero as a “great man” has a long tradition in scholarly thought (see Carlyle 1840) and the hero has been presented not only as a “great man” but also as a symbol of “his” culture. Describing the hero’s relationship to culture, prominent psychoanalyst, Ernest Becker defines culture as “a structure of rules, customs, and ideas, which serve as a vehicle for heroism” (78). Culture, then, is the hero’s medium and each culture has its own hero system.

According to communication scholar Lance Strate, “cultures are hero-systems, and heroes are a universal component of human culture” (“Heroes and/as Communication” 20), it therefore, can be assumed that heroes have always existed and will continue to exist, although the cultural conceptions may shift. Strate (1985) continues with

The hero can best be understood as an aspect of culture, a part of society’s collection of symbols or totems. The hero is a human figure that serves as an object of admiration, aspiration, and at times, worship. The story of the hero’s life is a codification of a culture’s values, beliefs and prescribed behaviors (“Heroes, Fame and the Media” 47)

In his later work Strate (2008) clarifies that “it would be a mistake to consider the hero to be nothing more than a human fabrication, socially constructed...nothing but a subjective phenomenon...[and] the form that the hero takes is very much influenced by the type of communication that produces the hero” (“Heroes and/as Communication” 22). What becomes significant then is how cultural conceptions are shaped as a consequence of

different media. Although other factors influence a particular culture's conception of the hero, Strate argues that, "the most significant characteristics of the hero are related to communication technologies" ("Heroes and/as Communication" 26). Following Strate, critical communications scholars Susan J. Drucker and Gary Gumpert argue that our conceptions are based on the dominant means of communication that we employ; it is therefore communication that is "at the heart of hero creation and maintenance" (15). These theorists have prioritized technological change as *the* explanatory factor in their research. However, one must also recognize that there are factors other than communications technology that affect the cultural conception of the hero.

By identifying the hero as a necessary component of human culture, every group and every era has had its heroes. They are the "inevitable concomitant of a system of values and thought that has been embraced by an aggregate of men [sic]...heroes serve as the anchors of human culture, the condensation of collective identity, the personification of our values, beliefs, and knowledge" (Strate, "Heroes and/as Communication" 20). Today, the dominant means of communication in Western society is electronic digital media. Becker argues, that there is currently a breakup of agreed patterns of heroism, thus resulting in all kinds of special heroics by sub-groups, and private heroics by individuals (126). There is thus confusion as to what constitutes a 'hero,' or 'heroine,' and why.

Public perception of heroism in the Western world today is derived from popular culture and media, not from religion, religious texts, or Greek mythology. Therefore, one must explore the literature, history and the importance of the cultural hero as well as how hero characterizations have evolved over time. In North America in the 20th and 21st centuries, a "hero" is not necessarily royalty or deity, as in the past, but instead can be an average person who strives to reach society's highest potential. With such diversity in the

Western cultural conceptions of the hero, it is important to trace the meaning behind the concept and draw conclusions as to whether or not the hero narrative has developed or shifted over time. It is also significant to identify whether these shifts have occurred in response to prevailing social relations and cultural demands, or whether there are some common elements that remain that are timeless. This research project will aim to investigate the genealogy of the word 'hero.' Through an intensive review of the literature surrounding the hero, including its use in religion, as (en) gendered, and as used in both entertainment (fiction) and media (news) narratives alike, this research paper will have the critical focus to define "hero" over time, to identify its historically specific significance, and to explore and understand how the narrative has changed or retained timeless qualities of meaning or myth.

Due to the incredible number of hero categories, the existing literature is extremely diverse. Previous scholarly work ranges from classical Greek mythology and Homeric epic tales (see Butler, 1979; Carlyle, 1840; Raglan, 1936) to comic superheroes (see Bainbridge, 2009; Bongco, 2000; Wright, 2000) to celebrity heroes (see Boorstin, 1972; Brown and Fraser, 2008) to sports heroes (see Drucker, 2008) to female heroes (see Fayer, 1994; Hartstock, 1989; Hume, 2000; Prividera and Howard, 2006) to war heroes (Anderson, 1986; Froula, 2007; O'Connell, 2005; Wilcox, 2005). This research paper will therefore explore the history of how the concept of the hero originated, and will identify the scholars who have done substantive work on the subject.

The study will begin with an evaluation of the historical antecedents to the modern hero, including the concept of the hero itself from the derivation of the word and the societal progression through different historical stages (see Dean, 2008). Such historical research will determine whether there is a quintessential hero narrative and, if there is, determine what has changed and what has not changed over time. The Western hero has gone through

various transitions and, according to Marshall W. Fishwick (1954) its evolution began in classical times, when heroes were god-men. The hero then progressed in the middle ages as God's men, in the Renaissance as universal men, in the 18th century as enlightened gentlemen, in 19th century as self-made men and, finally, in our own time, the common man has become heroic (Winfield, "American Hero" 82).

Perhaps the mythical hero was replaced by the historical hero and now, it is the historical hero who is being replaced by the celebrity. Both, it is argued, are a result of changes in the dominant means of communication, the first involving the literate revolution, the second the graphic revolution (Drucker and Gumpert, 2008; Strate, 2008). Technological innovations such as the written word, the printing press, and electronic communications have played a significant role in changing the way in which we talk about heroes and stabilize our conceptions of them.

As the hero develops historically from the Classical times of god-men to the 20th century common man (see Boorstin, 1972; Fishwick, 1954) through the periods of oral traditional hero to the electronic hero, Western cultural conceptions have shifted (Strate, 2008); this research paper will thus chart this shift and contextualize it within critical media studies. Establishing the historical or chronological timeframe, this research paper will specifically examine the relations between the hero and war, the hero and gender, and the hero and popular culture. Within each of these categories, the hero can be identified with seemingly different personalities, whether it is a Greek God, a soldier, a heroine, or a movie star. By taking into account these different types of heroic figures that have existed across time, this paper will establish whether or not the "hero" changes depending on war, gender or popular culture.

CHAPTER 1: THE MYTHICAL HERO

In non-literate or oral cultures, information is transmitted primarily through spoken language and preserved only by human memory. With speech as the dominant mode of communication it is only possible for a culture to maintain a relatively limited amount of information (Strate, "Heroes and/as Communication" 26). Oral societies are therefore traditional and transmit valued old social heritage and culture from generation to generation through short sayings, songs, poems, and epic narratives (Berger 289-290). Due to the fact that history is only preserved through human memory in this environment, information and narrative details get slightly altered and exaggerated over time. With such a media environment, the more unusual and bizarre the hero's adventure, the more memorable the story became. Therefore, oral cultures favor the extraordinary and supernatural hero; there emerged mythical and legendary oral heroes who, first and foremost, were characterized by their extraordinary abilities (Berger 291, see also Ong, 1982; Strate, 2008).

Through oral poetry and songs, the oral heroes often became composite figures, where one hero could represent the actions of many, thus making memorable, larger than life characters and dramatic narratives. Due to these realities of oral traditions, details relating to individual hero characteristics were not essential to carrying on the story. As a result, oral heroes tend to be impersonal, generic or type characters and they are thus predictable, and characterized by clichés and formulas in order to be remembered through song (Strate, "Heroes and/as Communication" 27). Therefore, "oral heroes are mythical or legendary heroes because the communication characteristic of oral cultures favors this conception of the hero" (Ibid 28).

During Classical times it was the God-like persona who maintained the identity of the "hero" through the dominant traditions of myth. When the concept of the hero was first

framed, myths became the vehicles of religious truth, history and custom (Butler 5).

According to Mircea Eliade, for members of archaic and traditional societies, myth “narrates a sacred history, telling of events that took place in primordial time, the fabulous time of the ‘beginnings’” (Eliot 23).

“Myth” can be defined as “a purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons, actions, or events” or “an untrue or popular tale,” therefore, the myth is associated with inconsequential fiction or falsehood (Mosco 22). However, myths are not falsehoods; “myths are stories that animate individuals and societies by providing paths to transcendence that lift people out of the banality of everyday life... myths are not true or false, but living or dead” (Mosco 3, see also MacIntyre, 1970). Myths are thus a form of reality that helps society understand what is seemingly incomprehensible, such as the collective mentality of a given age (Mosco 29, see also Lévi-Strauss, 1978, 1987). When comparing the myth to the structure and functioning of “ideology,” philosopher Louis Althusser argues that “ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” and is the imaginary “world views” that do not correspond to reality (294). Within our Western society, then, we are subjects of multiple, converging ideological systems, such as capitalism, democracy, and globalization.

The word *mythos* in Greek means “fable,” “tale,” “talk,” or simply “speech,” but it came to be used in contrast with *logos* and *historia*, thus coming to denote “that which cannot really exist” (Eliot 15). Classicist Jane Ellen Harrison argued that *mythos* was, for the ancient Greeks, primarily “just a thing spoken, uttered by the mouth” (Themis, 1912, 328; qtd. in Eliot 18). Although, even the earliest Greek philosophers criticized and rejected the Homeric myths as fictions, the myths of Homer and Hesiod continued to interest the

elite throughout their world. No longer taken literally, myths were examined for their “hidden meanings.”

The study of hero myths goes back to at least 1871, when the Victorian anthropologist Edward Tylor argued that “many of them follow a uniform plot, or pattern: the hero is exposed at birth, is saved by other humans or animals, and grows up to become a national hero” (Segal, “Hero Myths” 12). Tylor wanted to establish a pattern for hero myths, not to determine their origin, function, or subject matter and argues that, “the chief cause of the transfiguration of daily experience into myth was the general belief of primitives that nature is animated and thus is susceptible to personification” (Eliot 16). Myths thus reflect actions, ideas, and institutions that actually existed at some time in the past and in order to last, the meaning of myth emerges through social experiences through media discourse.

More recently, the investigation of mythical thought has attracted a number of philosophers who approach the problem of myth as the study of language or of symbol, or that of the analysis of imagination. Other anthropologists and folklorists have considered myths as a special form of the folktale, that is, as the traditional dramatic oral narrative. These investigations have been historical (Franz Boas, C.W. von Sydow), morphological (Vladimir Propp) or structural (Roland Barthes, Claude Lévi-Strauss) (Eliot 23). According to prominent cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997) “societies do not exist without communication and representation, and therefore socialization must be, in part, the learning of myths, rituals, and other archetypal articulations of a culture” (in Zehnder and Calvert 123).

There are several key scholars who have not only delineated patterns but who have also analyzed the origin, function, and subject matter of hero myths; they include the

Viennese psychoanalyst Otto Rank (1884-1939), the English folklorist Lord Raglan (1885-1964), and the American mythographer Joseph Campbell (1904-1964). These theorists all explain the construction of the hero as mythological in relation to socio-historical or cultural differences. The theories of Rank, Campbell, and Raglan, although criticized, opened the doors to comparative study of content and internal structure and have since been influential texts in chronicling the concepts and characteristics of the hero myth.

In his *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909), Otto Rank is significantly influenced by the work of Freud. He goes through a selection of hero myths and identifies the most important and constantly recurring motifs. Rank argued that prominent civilized nations such as the Babylonians, Egyptians, Hebrews, Hindus, Persians, Greeks, and the Romans glorified their national heroes through poetic tales and legends. Accordingly, Sargon the First was “probably the oldest transmitted hero myth in our possession” and derived from the period of the foundation of Babylonia (about 2800 B.C.) (Segal, Quest 13) Biblical characters are also noted, and through explorations of the biblical birth histories of Moses, Abraham, and Isaac, Rank discovers that the same mythological motifs appear (Ibid 15).

In his *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama* (1936), Lord Raglan is influenced by the anthropologists James Frazer and the Biblicist S.H. Hooke and, as a result, ties hero myth to the ritual, rather than the historical. For Raglan, as for Frazer and Hooke, “the myth describes the life of the figure and the ritual enacts it” (Segal, Hero Myths 23). Identifying and analyzing twenty-one hero myths to illustrate twenty-two common incidents, Lord Raglan turned a theory of myths in general into a theory of myths in particular, introducing his own detailed pattern of the hero who could be either divine or human (138). He equates the hero of the myth with the god of the ritual: “The conclusion that suggests itself is that the god is the hero as he appears in ritual, and the hero is the god

as he appears in myth; in other words, the hero and the god are two different aspects of the same superhuman being” (Raglan 162).

Raglan establishes a pattern of “well-marked features and incidents” (148) that are connected to the hero’s birth, to his accession to the throne, and to his death. According to Raglan’s study, the hero is the son of royal parents or of divine birth. The circumstances of his birth are unusual and, on reaching manhood, the hero sets out on a journey where he will go through many hardships and fight supernatural beings (Raglan 151). After victory over the king, giant, dragon, or wild beast, the hero will eventually reign as king, although will be driven from the throne, will have a mysterious death, and will have a holy sculpture mounted in his honor (Raglan 138).

By reading myths literally, Raglan equates and defines heroes as gods. He therefore denies the existence of modern hero myths for, “while granting that heroes may be based on historical figures, he denies that any aspects of their heroism are...” (Segal, *Quest* xxix) and offers various arguments against the historicity of heroes. Since the lives of Raglan’s mythical heroes involve supernatural events, his heroes’ lives parallel those of the gods. Accordingly, for Raglan, “the stories of Oedipus, Theseus, Moses, Christ, and King Arthur have marked similarities; all are rooted more in myth than in history” (Fishwick 11).

In his exceptionally thorough and groundbreaking work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Joseph Campbell attempts to identify common characteristics that belong to every hero. Campbell traces a multitude of heroic figures in order to understand the meaning of the images and to determine what he describes as the “monomyth,” which gave a series of commonalities in the adventure of the hero. Campbell argues that myths originate in one society and then spread elsewhere. For Campbell, “the composite hero of the monomyth is a personage of exceptional gifts” who is often honored, un-recognized, or

disdained by his society (37). For Campbell, culture proceeds from myth and myth proceeds from psyche. Sharing Carl Jung's understanding that that psyche is fundamental to the human organism and that the experiences of the psyche are commonly shared, he argues that all the stories of all the heroes are in fact foundationally the same universally but inflated by local societies. With respect to the hero, there are three stages: the separation or departure, the trials and victories of initiation, and the return and reintegration with society.

According to Campbell,

Whether the hero be ridiculous or sublime, Greek or barbarian, gentile or Jew, his journey varies little in essential plan. Popular tales represent the heroic action as physical; the higher religions show the deed to be moral; nevertheless, there will be found astonishingly little variation in the morphology of the adventure, the character roles involved, the victories gained (38).

Joseph Campbell placed heroes as public moral exemplars, and as examples of struggle and then success. He used religion, folktale, and mythology to come up with his "monomyth."

What are considered the defining characteristics of the mythical, or divine, hero?

Campbell established a framework where the hero archetype has to go through a number of physical or psychological trials and "the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation – initiation – return." (Campbell 30). This framework includes characteristics of origin, personality traits, life experiences and purpose, as well as other details concerning the life and death of the hero. The divine hero's primary purpose is his quest, a journey where "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (Campbell 30).

Although a distinction is often made in the study of mythology between heroes and gods, some argue that they are in fact intertwined (Butler 32). The origins of this fallacy lie with the Greeks where some major figures have been given divine and heroic honors, such as Heracles and Perseus. In differentiating between god and hero, generally, a god would be said to perform a certain duty, the main one being that of creation of the universe, the world, mankind or life. A hero, on the contrary, generally would be one who battles monsters, rescues maidens, and goes on a quest to do so. However, too many gods are also heroes and too many heroes are also gods (Butler 32). In the academic study of myth it is conventional to distinguish heroes from gods, however, heroism can blur the line between the human and the divine by elevating humans to gods. According to Robert Segal, “heroism, when recounted in myth, retains the distinction between the human and the divine but singles out the hero for making the leap from the one to the other” (Hero Myths 6).

Especially in Western religions, the gap between the human and the divine is insurmountable. This is epitomized by the efforts of Adam and Eve. However, the biggest exception to the divide between humanity and divinity is perhaps Jesus Christ (Segal, Hero Myths 7). For the ancient Greeks, those who dared to seek out divinity were doomed, however, there also exists an exception in the ancient world: Heracles (Hercules). Although he was the all-powerful Zeus’ son, Heracles was still mortal, yet accomplished superhuman feats of strength, beat death, and was rewarded with immortality (Segal, Hero Myths 6-7). Hero myths thus transform humans into virtual gods by conferring on them divine qualities which can include strength, size, looks, intelligence, drive, and integrity. Such are the historical antecedents to the conception of the hero.

So, “since the days of Homer’s epic poetry, heroes are featured as god-like creatures with superhuman abilities or strength to perform great deeds. Historically, cultures

designated such heroes in myths, epics, songs and story-telling rituals” (Winfield, “America Hero” 79). The divine hero survived through myth and oral tradition and although there seems to be no universal hero, it is significant to trace the meaning behind the concept and to conclude whether or not the hero narrative has developed or shifted over time.

Considering that the western hero is no longer defined solely by the supernatural, divine or deity, it is evident that the conceptions of the hero have gone through transitions since the Classical times of god-men. According to the theorists who prioritize technological changes as the explanatory factor, with revolutionary communication technology advancements, the historical hero replaced the mythical hero.

CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORICAL HERO

When the human world was younger and there were men like gods, reporters did not exist. Instead, there were only poets. Achilles, Ulysses, Siegfried, Roland, and Beowulf were the supermen of those days; “surpassing all others in bravery, loyalty, and strength, they were the idols of a culture moving from the Old Stone Age to the gentler codes of chivalry” (Wecter 4). According to Lance Strate, there is “no coincidence that increasingly more lifelike depictions of individuals coincides with the invention and diffusion of writing and literacy” (Strate, “Faces” 28). The invention of writing and literature, followed by the literature revolution, dramatically changed social and cultural conceptions of the world. Contrary to oral culture found predominately in Classical times, writing increases the amount of information that can be transmitted and preserved within a culture, and reduces the need for memorization. Consequently, this also “provides individuals with a certain amount of separation from their tradition, and gives them greater freedom to evaluate, criticize, and to innovate (Havelock, 1963, 1982; Ong, 1981, 1982)” (in Strate, “Faces” 28).

Following the invention of the Gutenberg Press in the mid-fifteenth century, the innovations of writing and art allowed for a much greater number of heroes to be celebrated and remembered than oral tradition since it established a means to store information outside of collective memory. In the West, “this trend was heightened during and after the Renaissance with the development of perspective in art and the invention of typography” (Strate, “Faces” 29). Writing and the visual arts, together with typography and engraving, made it possible to transmit and preserve an increasing amount of information about the heroes’ individual character, personality, and psyche, and this “resulted in the lowering of the hero from the mythic to a more human level” (Strate, “Faces” 36-7). Although the mythical god-like hero did not disappear with the literary revolution, gradually, the conceptions of the hero shifted and expanded away from the fantastic or supernatural that had been preserved through oral tradition (Strate, “Faces” 29).

Historically, it is apparent that faculty for myth and hero-worship is universal in the human race. Fishwick argues that, “it grows out of man’s refusal to accept a mechanistic universe and his own human limitations” (v-vi). For the Greeks, a ‘hero’ was the superior man and an embodiment of composite ideals and, although different ages and cultures may have varied notions of the heroic personality, “all heroes are true to their age” and the search for heroes is inherent in human nature (Fishwick 3). As already noted in chapter one, there are recognizable heroic themes and counter-themes in which scholars such as Otto Rank, Joseph Campbell and Lord Raglan have sought out patterns and typologies in the heroic story.

Although the new literate heroes were exceptional, they were no longer all divine creatures. Instead, “character, virtue, and inner quality [became] part of the new concept of the historical hero” (Strate, “Heroes and/as Communication” 29). Whereas the oral hero’s

exploits were expressed through episodic format, writing and print made it possible for linear narratives, presenting the hero as an individual who is characterized by greatness. As a result, there emerged “military heroes who are distinct from political heroes, who are distinct from religious heroes, and so on” (Ibid). It is evident that following the Classical Ages, there was a shift from the supernatural to the individualized, more specialized, types of heroes and this can perhaps be accounted for by the changes in communication technology.

Biblical heroes can be characterized within the realm of oral history as well as literary history. The Bible, the document that tells of Biblical times, is itself, the product of writing over a period of more than one thousand years, yet the stories and themes are themselves much older, oral accounts that have been written over time. In her article “Orality versus Monotheism or Media versus Narratives,” Eva Berger (2008) attempts to conclude whether Biblical heroes are typical oral heroes. Whereas oral heroes can be characterized by their extraordinary abilities, Biblical heroes also seem to have a greater power of action than a normal person. For example, although Abraham, Moses, and David did not have the gift of superhuman, god-like strength or might, they were exceptional individuals who displayed their knowledge of strategy, courage, and wisdom (Berger 299). These legendary humans have many similarities with the mythic Greek gods and (although both biblical and Greek heroes lived in a time when the spoken word was the main medium of communication) as writing began to spread, the Biblical heroes were transformed into more complex beings, no longer confined to the memorization of oral tradition (Berger 305).

Depending on the cultural, social, or political climate, or the exact historical period, the conception of the hero has shifted and has included different heroic models.

Fishwick attests that the hero developed from God's men, to Renaissance universal men, to 18th century enlightened gentlemen. Similarly, John Dean (2008) traces the historical antecedents of the modern hero through analyzing heroism within the context of social construction. By surveying what Dean identifies as eight historical stages, he argues that different cultural heroes have progressed from the Homeric Age to the Renaissance to the Industrial Age.

The heroes that were originally understood in Western civilization “were glorious by virtue of the risks that are known and taken by human flesh and blood” (Dean 69). Considering the Homeric hero, the word was initially used in the *Iliad* (c. 850 B.C.) as a title for the free and brave Greek warrior before Troy (Dean 68). According to Dean, the hero was conceived as a demigod during the Hellenistic civilization (c. 300 BC-275 AD) where heroes were made “into shadows of a god or goddess” such as Hercules, who was redefined in later literature (69-70). Throughout the early Renaissance the hero was then set in contrast to the villain. Adventurous, chivalrous, and of high class and aristocracy, the noble gentleman hero contrasted the peasant, the knave, and the scoundrel (Dean 71). Such Renaissance heroes can be typified by historical figures such as Cosimo de' Medici.

Dean's different historical stages of the hero encompass the military hero, noble hero, and the political hero, all of who can be considered as ‘great men’ in society. This work builds fundamentally off of the influential research of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) whose biographies and histories were devoted to demonstrating the power that heroes had, or could yet have (Segal, Hero Myths 1). Carlyle's work, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1840) blossomed out of a series of his lectures in 1840 and has since been highly influential, controversial, and a valuable historical document in its own right. Carlyle concentrated first on what he argued to be the oldest primary form of heroism, the

hero as divinity (Odin), and then moved on to the hero as prophet (Mahomet [Mohammed]), the hero as poet (Dante, Shakespeare), the hero as priest (Martin Luther, John Knox), the hero as man of letters (Samuel Johnson, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Robert Burns), and finally the hero as king (Oliver Cromwell, Napoleon). For Carlyle,

Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modelers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain (1).

According to Carlyle, heroes are not only celebrated but worshiped for the “Worship of a Hero is transcendent admiration of a Great Man” (11). However, heroes do not ultimately impose their will on history but instead subordinate themselves to history. For example, the hero as divinity could arise only in a pre-scientific age and, “were there no books, any great man would grow *mythic*” (Carlyle 25-26). Of utmost importance for Carlyle, however, is the fact that “hero-worship endures [forever] while man endures” (14). In other words, all those with power, that is, the “Great Men” in society, are heroes and will be worshiped as such.

There has since been much opposition to Carlyle’s position. One of his contemporaries, Leo Tolstoy, denies the very possibility of heroes in culture, and his work, *War and Peace* (1863-1869), establishes its own paradigmatic approach to heroism and heroic power. Both of these models, although contradictory, brought the role of the individual hero in history to prominence in intellectual and political debate throughout Europe during the nineteenth century (Stambler 737). Whereas Carlyle believes that heroes exist and that they shape history, Tolstoy argues that the masses do not require heroes for guidance since this guidance is ineffectual and nonexistent. For Tolstoy, the motivating forces of the masses lie in the masses themselves (Stambler 738). Other critics of Carlyle

include Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who argues that, “unless one deems the appearance of a great man a supernatural event, the appearance must itself be explained as the product of society at a certain stage of development” (Segal, Hero Myths 3). Therefore, rather than a cause of society, a great man is the product of society. Spencer’s metaphysical counterpart in the rejection of the influence of great men on history was philosopher G.W.F Hegel (1770-1831) who, although he praised the hero for his capability to do good for society, argued that the hero was motivated by his personal interests (Segal, Hero Myths 13) and that the individual was playing out a preordained role (Anderson 596).

Yet one must take into account the historiography of the works of Carlyle and Tolstoy. These two works were written in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, and thus the specific historic time affected the conceptions of the hero as well as the literature on it. Today, there has been stronger skepticism toward the impact of individuals nevertheless defenders of heroism still exist. Through the 1940s and 1950s, and decades of historically brutal tyrants, the kinds and degrees of “heroic power” was re-evaluated (Stambler 747). For example, in his work *The Hero in History* (1943), Sidney Hook argues for a middle ground between crediting heroes with everything (Carlyle) and nothing. He distinguishes between the “eventful men” whose actions happen to change history and the “event-making men” whose actions are intended to change history (Segal, Hero Myths 4), one born on circumstance, the other on agency. Hook therefore attempts to create a balanced method to study the ways “the social environment served as a selective agency in providing them [great men] with the opportunities to get their work done” (Hook 15, qtd. in Stambler 747). However, as historian Ilia Stambler argues, Hook's work was written during World War II, when great leaders, arguably the “new Napoleons” (Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Roosevelt,

Churchill) held the international community's attention and therefore Hook's "heroic views may have thus been consistent with the needs and trends of the time" (747).

When analyzing the literature that have defined the hero, it is significant to also consider the academic faculty of the author since, "to the historian the hero is one who shapes the course of events; to the philosopher, one who alters the thinking of his times; to the folklorist, one who evokes legends and songs" (Fishwick 3). Consequently, the literature addressing the concepts of the hero indicate that much controversy surrounding the conception and definitions of the hero has expanded into the academic world and has become an important topic of sociological, political and historiographical studies and literary theory (Stambler 748). According to Marshall Fishwick, whether considered a

Messiah, emancipator, founding father, preserver, creative genius: these are all related to terms for one whose influence or personally captivates the people. The personification of predominating ideals, the hero emerges at a moment when man's emotions are deeply stirred, and appeals to both the imagination and the reason (3).

John Dean describes that when analyzing the Revolutionary hero, European and American heroic traditions part ways since America's revolutionary heroes started with the nations' Founding Fathers and Mothers (1760s-1820s) whereas Europe's revolutionary heroism began with the French Revolution (1789-1795). As a result, Europe "established the moral revolutionary prototype and America established the litigious revolutionary prototype" (Dean 73). It can therefore be argued that the hero is created by public recognition of his worth, thus different cultures and societies will have different conceptions of the heroic ideal.

As previously noted, many scholars point out that heroes were god-like creatures, mostly male, with superhuman abilities or strength, and one can argue that, no matter the era

or continent, heroes exhibit similar attributes: distinctive physical skills, an exemplary response to a set of challenges or a particular challenge, and admirable moral characteristics (Winfield, "Press Response" 878). Classic qualities of the hero include valor, bravery, honor, perseverance, leadership, strength and courage and, moreover, it is the person's reputation that must transcend a lifetime. Whereas the heroes of the old world were of noble birth and "were 'subjects' of a ruler, serving with honor, the new nation's hero was an independent citizen who served the country with ingenuity, perseverance, enterprise, bravery, and valor" (Winfield, "Press Response 878). No longer confined to mythic gods, prophets or Kings, the conception of the hero extended to other prominent figures in society.

Historian Betty Houchin Winfield attributes the change in the conception of the Western hero to technological changes, specifically the nation's print media. By examining magazine and news text for hero labels and the important hero referents that previous scholars have defined (distinctive physical skills, response to a challenge, admirable moral characteristics, and a reputation that transcends a lifetime), Houchin (2003) analyzes how the nation's print media played a role in the making of heroes out of early American explorers.

This begs the question of whether cultural conceptions can be formed and changed as a result of communications technology. Research has already established that the development of writing, typography and the literary revolution resulted in drastic societal changes where these innovations allowed for the storage of, and access to, more information. Prominent communications theorists argue that communication technologies will have significant impacts not only on society, but also on the public's cultural perceptions of reality. Whether analyzing the public sphere, space and time, or the idea of the nation, prominent communication theorists (such as Carey, Habermas, Innis, McLuhan,

Thompson) establish the importance of the development of print and news as constituent to social consciousness. However, researchers must be cautious of technological determinist arguments, for it can not be assumed that all change in the conception of the hero is a direct result of communications media.

In James Carey's "A Cultural Approach to Communication," (1989), he prioritizes changes in communication technology as the explanatory factor, emphasizing that community is dependent on communication. Influenced by John Dewey and his claim that "of all things communication is the most wonderful," Carey defines communication as a "symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (23). Carey analyzes the role of the newspaper in social life and shows how one can examine the newspaper under a transmission view or under a ritual view. Most significantly, he argues that reality is brought into existence, is produced, by communication. Agreeing with Raymond Williams, Carey stresses that many of our communication models become social institutions. Thus, there is great importance in recognizing not only the transmission of knowledge but also the ritual model of communications for it also includes the sharing of aesthetic experience, religious ideas, personal values and sentiments, and intellectual notions.

John B. Thompson's *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (1995) deals with the notion of the public. Thompson argues that the development of printing drastically transformed the patterns of communication in early modern Europe (63). Early forms of newspaper and periodical publications developed through trade and emerged as key players in the affairs of the state for they became central in providing a continuous flow of information on current events on public concerns (Thompson 67). Similarly, communication theorist Harold A. Innis argues that the concepts of time and space reflect

the significance of media to civilization. In *Empire and Communications* (1950) Innis links the process of writing to an enhanced capacity for abstract thinking; the time world is extended beyond the range of remembered things and the space world beyond the range of known places (30). Most significantly, Innis argues that civilizations are dependent on various media of communications and describes the consequences of the development of paper, which not only supported the growth of trade as well as education beyond the control of the monasteries, but also facilitated an effective development of the vernaculars and gave expression to their vitality in the growth of nationalism.

As communications technology progressed from the oral tradition to print, the hero shifted from the mythical to the historical “Great Man” yet, as the communication technology and outlets become more far-reaching, the conception of the traditional hero has expanded and broadened. Still central to a society’s storytelling are today’s references to heroes, and now heroines, although now such feats are transmitted through the mass media. In their study of feature stories in prominent American newspapers, historians Betty Houchin Winfield and Janice Hume demonstrate how the American ‘hero’ evolved from nineteenth-century journalistic biographical accounts to feature stories. Winfield and Hume argue that the concept of the hero changed over time as a result of changes in American press reporting methods.

During the period of nation building after the American Revolution, early magazines highlighted patriots, gentlemen and scholars; heroes were men of rank and status, they were leaders who came from “respectable families” (Winfield, “American Hero” 83-84). Similarly, the biographies that were published from 1810-1820 in magazines focused on the founding fathers, depicting them as “brave, flawless heroes responsible for the birth of the republic” (Ibid 84). Heroic characteristics included “a special talent or a distinguishing

physical skill, an exemplary response to a particular challenge, or set of challenges, and an admirable moral character” (Ibid 79), thus maintaining some traditional heroic attributes. Legendary figures such as George Washington and Davy Crockett, became ideals of American character and moral values (Ibid 81).

The press thus highlighted the leaders of society, men of class and status, representing them as American “heroes.” However, Winfield suggests that a shift occurred as a result in changing reporting methods, such as advertising, that made an effort to expand readership to a more diverse, mass audience. The American mass media, in particular magazines as well as large American daily newspapers, began to rely on the hero label as an identifiable referent. The ‘hero’ became a way for distinguishing a newsworthy individual (Winfield, “American Hero” 80). Prominent penny press publisher Horace Greeley began to emphasize those who rose from humble beginnings because of hard work and, by the latter half of the nineteenth century, human-interest stories were growing in popularity. In her study Winfield thus highlights the changes in the media as being the explanatory factor in changing conceptions of the hero for, it seemed that “by emphasizing ordinary people, a type of egalitarian hero was created” (“American Hero” 87). By the end of the century heroes were not merely “discovered,” but in fact could be created (see Boorstin 1972). The “storytelling far outweighed the virtues of the hero...heroes became not only performers of great, courageous acts and shining examples of ideal societal values, but they became symbols of society’s tendencies” (Winfield, “American Hero” 88-89). This is clearly consistent with American liberal ideology, which stresses the individual who can achieve success solely by working hard. The ‘hero’ is thus used ideologically and is fundamentally part of propaganda and the American Dream.

Apparently, so many people were being identified as 'heroes' that by 1913, *Living Age* magazine asked, "Is Heroism Increasing?" and stated: "papers lately teemed with accidents... A dramatic demand has been made upon human daring, and it has been satisfied in measure which makes it difficult to deny that heroism is on the increase" (Winfield, "American Hero" 91). In a shift towards what seemed to be more sensational writing in the press with the intention to sell more newspapers, American public life and media outlets paid significant attention to those individuals who saved a human life despite risk to his or her own life. The trend toward the working-class hero in America thus increased and by the twentieth century, the hero included the ordinary individual, usually unknown. The schoolteacher, telegraph operator, the sailor, and the engine room operator were all labeled 'heroic' jobs (Ibid).

Historically, then, the title of "hero" has been assigned to different character types, ranging from the mythic and Biblical, to the "great man," and, eventually, to the common person. In his attempt to understand the nature of critical theory in terms of modes of literature, symbols, archetypes, and rhetorical genre, Northrup Frye (1957) offered a means of explaining multiple models of media development as well as the development of the heroic as part of the same process. According to Frye, the five literary models of the heroic included the: mythic, romantic, leader hero, commoner hero, and ironic.

The "mythic" heroes are the "gods and goddesses of the Greeks and Romans; the nature gods of indigenous peoples; the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam" (Swan 269) who only interact indirectly with people through visions or divine revelation. For American culture, the mythic ideals are primarily Judeo-Christian along with the nature gods of the Native Americans. Frye's "romantic" heroes are of legend and folktale and are "superior in degree" to other humans for they have extraordinary courage and powers. These heroes can

include the prophets of the mythic heroes and those who enact true miracles (Swan 270).

The “leader” hero still has a sense of elevation above the norm of humanity for “He [sic] has authority, passions, and powers of expression for greater than ours...” (Frye 33-34).

However, not all leaders are leader heroes. The “common” hero represents one who is neither superior to others nor to the environment. Frye argues that this quasi-heroic figure can be the community worker, the athlete, or the personal heroes of one’s family, and are “normal people called by circumstance to step outside a society that did not ‘fit’ to build something better, a something that eventually defined a new status quo” (Swan 272).

Finally, the “ironic” hero represents the anti-heroic figure that is inferior to others (Frye 45).

It is significant that Frye’s analysis of the different hero characteristics within popular literature is consistent with the changing perceptions of the hero in society.

Western cultural perception and definitions of the ‘hero’ thus shifted during the historical period and, whether or not this was initiated by new communication technology or the rise of sensational news reporting, the mainstream media began to apply the idea of the ‘hero’ in a broader sense. Considering this contemporary hero worship, one can argue that mainstream media now offers human-interest stories with the term “hero” applied more loosely. With one deed someone is instantly a hero and “this type of hero represents goodness and the possibility of greatness for ‘every person’” (Winfield, “American Hero” 94).

CHAPTER 3: THE ELECTRONIC HERO

How can the title of ‘hero’ be simultaneously embodied by mythical or literary figures as well as current common-man figures? As we move from oral to literate and typographical cultures, more elaborate descriptions and depictions are available of the

'hero.' Lance Strate argues that, "ultimately the hero is a cultural construction.

Communication technologies serve as the tools through which we construct our heroes... new forms of communication give us new tools for constructing heroes, and, therefore, new kinds of heroes" (Strate, "Faces of a Thousand" 27). The Graphic Revolution, the revolution in primarily visual communication technologies that began in the nineteenth century and continues on today, caused yet another gradual shift in the Western cultural conception of the hero towards a more diversified classification of heroes.

Traditional heroes have been transformed and new heroes have emerged who are not necessarily the 'great men' in history, but the individuals in sports, entertainment, business, and politics who are admired for their success, or individuals who have better served their community by risking their lives in a time of crisis, such as firemen, soldiers, or community workers. Due to the current work in understanding the mediation of public it is suggested that the inevitable product of the explosion of media technologies is a condition where the celebrity is more important than heroism, where anti-heroes thrive, and where heroes are short-lived creatures (Swan 275). Electronic telecommunications, favoring rapid turnover of information, gives way to the electronic hero, a contemporary who rapidly rises to fame. Consequently, there are many academics who argue that the hero no longer exists (See Boorstin, 1972; Segal, 2000). Comparing them to the traditional mythic heroic figures, contemporary 'heroes' are "far from divine," "hopelessly human – mortal, powerless, amoral," and, since "old-fashioned heroic virtues like courage and duty give way to new ones like irony and detachment... contemporary heroes scarcely reach the stature of gods, [and therefore] their stories fall short of myths" (Segal, Hero Myths 8-9).

With each new medium that has developed, the amount of information that is transmitted within our culture has expanded, allowing for greater numbers of heroes (Strate,

“Heroes and/as Communication” 32). Electronic media presents information in an audiovisual format that is more generally accessible than information that is encoded in writing. So, whereas the oral culture hero can be characterized as god-like, and the typographic hero or historical hero can be characterized by their significant achievements in a specialized sector, (examples being the “great man” or leader), the hero in the electronic culture seems to give more attention to the ordinary individual. Although there may be confusion as to what constitutes a hero, we still retain our traditional notions of the heroic and heroism (Ibid 34).

Several of the traditional heroic ideals apparent during the Classical period have remained consistent over time. Encompassing a broader range of hero types, the current graphic age identifies heroes from the working class to the celebrity. This chapter will thus analyze the construction of the hero from diverse academic perspectives and in doing so will: examine the heroic ideals in the military by identifying the representations of the soldier (both male and female), trace the rise of the celebrity hero, and finally evaluate the construction of the superhero.

Man and War - Masculinity and the Military Hero

Were there not heroes in battlefield in “classic” times? According to Fishwick “the favorite setting for heroes remains the battlefield, which provides the clearest test of strength and decision” (7; see also Braudy, 2005). Historically, war has been identified as a male enterprise and, consequently, the military hero has traditionally embodied male attributes. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge the definitions and history of masculinity within social, political, and armed conflict contexts. Within the context of war it is important to identify current studies, such as Bonnie Mann’s (2006) gendered analysis of America’s

justification of the current Iraq war. Mann argues, “when war becomes the way that a hyper-masculine national style is constituted and reconstituted, then it is beyond the mundane structures of international law” (159).

When defining masculinity, scholars document the preoccupation with the masculine ideals of physique and behavior that are the embodiment of a number of stereotypical “manly virtues.” Described by Mosse (1996) as “normative masculinity” these virtues included willpower, honor, courage, discipline, competitiveness, quiet strength, stoicism, persistence, adventurousness, independence, sexual virility and dignity and that reflected masculine ideals as liberty, equality, and fraternity (qtd. in Nagel 245). Despite the historical or comparative limits of these various definitions and depictions of masculinity, scholars argue that there is an identifiable ‘normative’ or ‘hegemonic’ masculinity that sets the standards for male demeanor and that hegemonic masculinity is more than an ideal, it is a widely held assumption, and has the quality of appearing to be natural (Nagel 247).

The history of masculinity has received great academic attention (Braudy, 2005; Kimmel, 1996). Outlining the intertwined ideas of war and masculinity since the Middle Ages, focusing on European and American history, Leo Braudy’s historical inquiry questions what defines heroism, masculinity, the ideal man, and the common man (xiii). War enforces an extreme version of male behavior as the ideal model for all such behavior. In his cultural history of manhood in America, Michael Kimmel (1996) explores how the experience of manhood has shaped the activities of American men beginning in 1776. Kimmel argues that gender must be made visible to men since, “we continue to treat our male military, political, scientific, or literary figures as if their gender, their masculinity, had nothing to do with their military exploits, policy decisions, scientific experiments, or writing styles and subject” (3). Considering how the military has been identified with the

masculine, how do the military definitions of heroism compare to traditionally recognized components of heroism?

Social psychologist and current U.S. Army major Jeffrey W. Anderson conducts an empirical investigation to determine the important dimensions of heroism and to define an operational definition of the concept, arguing that “Military heroism is readily recognizable for others and... the hero has certain measurable characteristics that distinguish him [sic] from common humanity” (Anderson 604).¹ Heroism is popularly defined as involving extreme bravery, daring, boldness, valor, virtue, and also includes elements of self-sacrifice, especially within the context of attaining a noble goal. The hero, then, “inspires enthusiastic obedience, loyalty, commitment, and devotion from his followers to both himself and his noble cause” (Anderson 592). According to Anderson, “We truly need heroes in the military, not only to quickly transmit approved modes of behavior and organizational goals to new soldiers but also to impart value to these goals” (599).

In order to define military heroism, Anderson evaluates a selection of Medal of Honor recipients (spanning from the year 1863 to 1979) and the military citations that accompanied them. The Medal of Honor, the highest military award for bravery, is only awarded to a service member who has incontestably “distinguished himself [sic] conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his [sic] life above and beyond the call of duty” (Anderson 599-600). As such, Anderson argues that the citations describing award winners’ actions are, essentially, narratives of critical incidents of heroism and are thus well suited to the development of an operational definition of military heroism (600).

¹ Note: Anderson assumes a male gaze in his academic writing and consequently does not identify the female. As a result, his work only refers to the male subject.

Similarly, those individuals cited for extreme heroism in the military should also represent a hegemonic heroic action.

The eight dimensions of military heroism are as follows according to Anderson's study: the service member is thoroughly devoted to accomplish "his" duty, sets a personal example of behavior for others, risks "his" own life or places "himself" in danger, rescues or saves another person, overcomes "his" own injuries or illnesses, succeeds when the odds are overwhelmingly against "him," takes command or gives leadership when it is lacking, and/or seizes upon an opportunity [sic] (601, see also Table 1 below).

The results from Anderson's empirical research, outlined below, are specific to the conceptions of the military hero over time. Common in social studies and natural sciences, factor analysis is a statistical way of identifying the quintessential, unobservable elements (or factors) of something through observable characteristics. The eigenvalue represents the particular factors' added value to the overall analysis. An eigenvalue above 1.0 suggests that the factor correlates to the desired element, in this case, the definition of the military hero.

Anderson is suggesting that the hero can be defined by one quintessential factor, which he measured with reference to the four items in "factor 1." Anderson does not attempt to reduce what "factor 1" represents; however, he argues that the first three dimensions describe heroism the best (603). The items in the second factor, which "seems to be a measure of the individual's ability to recover a deteriorating situation," (Anderson 603) are important components to heroism but are less reliable than the first factor, as indicated by the lower eigenvalue. So, although all eight dimensions noted describe military heroism, after they were calculated for seven major conflicts, from the Civil War through the Vietnam conflict, the results concluded that the factors of: setting a personal example of behavior for others, being devoted to duty, and having a willingness to accept personal

danger ranked the highest in importance when describing modern military heroism. This therefore implies that “military heroism as a construct is relatively stable over time, and that the definition of heroism has remained fairly constant...” (Anderson 602). Furthermore, Anderson concludes that it is these top dimensions that form the operational definition of military heroism (see Anderson Table 2, 604). However, Anderson does not specify race, gender, or class in this study.

Table 1: Factor Analysis of United States Medal of Honor Recipients from 1863 to 1979
From Anderson (1986)

Factor 1	
Item	Loading
Personal example	.60
Devotion to Duty	.79
Accepting Danger [risks own life]	.73
Overcoming Injury	.44
Eigenvalue	3.58

Factor 2	
Item	Loading
Saving life	.31
Defeating great odds	.50
Taking command	.48
Seizing an opportunity	.95
Eigenvalue	1.09

Source: Anderson, Jeffrey W. “Military Heroism: An Occupational Definition,” *Armed Forces & Society*. October 1986, 12 (4): 604.

In considering the general characteristics of heroic values and how they have been represented over time, one can compare these general attributes to Anderson’s specific factor analysis describing the military hero (see Table 1 & 3 below). Considering Table 3 below (see chapter 3), Anderson’s analysis reveals that the items listed, specifically: ‘accepting danger,’ being a ‘personal example,’ ‘saving a life,’ and ‘defeating great odds,’ are strikingly similar to the general heroic characteristics used to describe the oral, historical

and electronic heroes, suggesting that there have been consistent heroic qualities across time. Anderson's item describing soldiers' 'devotion to duty' is the only attribute that is not directly implied in the general heroic factors and this can perhaps be a result of the specific role a soldier plays in the military system.

Identified as the 'great men' of military leadership, Generals have been considered typical heroes. War news has thus historically focused on the political and military decision makers, neglecting the soldiers on the ground, however, there has been a shift towards identifying the fights of the individual soldier as well. Considering the changes in news values, war news has shifted toward bringing a human face, an individual's story, or an emotional interest to the presentation of an event, issue or problem. This new trend can be examined within the context of the current Iraq War, where perhaps the most substantive coverage of the war focused on the American soldiers as the heroes of television coverage, noting that they should be recognized for their skills and courage on the battlefield (Hoynes 192). At this time, the news media played a vital role in emphasizing the "support-our-troops" message and, as Hoynes argues, the "coverage was often zoomed so narrowly, telling stories of soldiers who the embedded reporters came to know and admire, that the reporting often lacked any broader context" (193). Although establishing a view of the struggles of the American soldiers, the news seemed to do "little to help citizens understand the complex meaning and consequences of the war in Iraq" (Hoynes 195).

The media is a powerful but complex historical source since it does not only reflect an event, but also can shape public perception and memory concerning historic events and the players involved. Capable of influencing its audience directly or indirectly, both the film and news industries have become powerful sources of communication within Western society. Our cultural understanding of what defines a war hero can be identified by the

images and text used in popular culture and news journalism. Susan Sontag wrote (2003), “television news producers and newspaper and magazine photo editors make decisions every day which firm up the wavering consensus about the boundaries of public knowledge” (61; qtd. in Schwalbe 448) thus arguing that images have the capability of affecting public perception of an issue or event.

Our cultural understanding of what defines a war hero can be identified by the images used in popular culture and news journalism. Media and communication analysts Carol B. Schwalbe, B. William Silcock, and Susan Keith (2008) conducted a content analysis that examined diverse images from U.S. mainstream media in order to establish shifts in media interest. Their study revealed that the “visual framing of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 shifted from conflict to human interest” (Schwalbe 448) and the war coverage became unique due to the emphasis on the lives and experiences of U.S. soldiers. The news scenarios of “shock and awe,” conquering troops, heroes, victory and control, all occurred in the first few weeks of the Iraq war coverage and “support what has been called the master war narrative, the idea that the United States has a moral imperative to go to war and play the role of global hero” (Schwalbe 458). By the third week, “the myth of the hero,” a concept so malleable it can be applied to an individual or an entire nation, was an important component of the master war narrative, and appeared embedded in the visuals of injured Private Jessica Lynch (Schwalbe 459). The study thus suggests that visual coverage of the war was affected by embedding photojournalists, personalization, and changing news values, and argues that the American media frame “shifted from conflict, epitomized by images of the war machine, to a frame of human interest, reflected in images of individual troops and civilians...” (Schwalbe 460). Such war coverage once again suggests distinct news values and the personalization of the hero.

The Heroine - Gendered Constructs of the Hero

Since the rise of feminism in the 1960's there has been substantial literature concerning the female's role in war and how the female image has, or has not been, depicted by visual culture. Feminist theorists have argued that the result of scholarly gender exclusion has been "to render invisible women's hands in the making of nations and states" (Nagel 243). Similarly, recent feminist literature about war and peace of "the last fifteen years have made little impact on the discussions and empirical research taking place in the predominantly male mainstream of political science of military history" (Goldstein 34). Such articles thus stimulate questions concerning gender.

Although the hero as a "great man" has a long tradition in scholarly thought (see Carlyle), one must also examine feminist research, which analyzes the history of the "great woman." However, there are variations in this feminist research concerning the role of the female hero. Whether defining "heroine" by using the mass media as a cultural and historical resource (See Hume, 2000), analyzing the visual depiction of women in mass media (See Halonen, 1999), examining race, gender and nationalism in the context of war (See Hartsock, 1989; O'Connell, 1999; Prividera and Howard, 2006) or identifying the current popular representation of female soldiers as heroines (See Froula, 2007; Prividera and Howard, 2004; Sjoberg, 2007) they all question how the heroine fits into the Western cultural conception of the otherwise male hero, what qualities they possess, and how the cultural perception of the hero changed when gender is a factor.

Although scholars may argue that heroic qualities change in different historical time periods, the dictionaries of the last two centuries include remarkably similar definitions of the word "heroine," defined simply as "a female hero" whereas the "hero" is describes as

“an illustrious person; brave warrior...” (Webster 142; qtd. in Hume 10). Opposing such definitions Joan Fayer (1994) explores gender bias in the etymology of the words hero and heroine and argues that ‘hero’ should be a gender-neutral word used for both men and women. Winfield argues that the Western woman’s early desired attributes were to be “quiet, unobtrusive and domestic – not public” and, as a result, national heroines were almost nonexistent in the mainstream American mass media and in hero-worship throughout the 19th century (Winfield, “American Hero” 81).

When examining literary history, the personality-types of legendary women have been symbols of sexuality, beauty, virginity, innocence, black magic, and seduction, and therefore do not fall into the traditional definitions of the heroic person as courageous, noble or brave. Similarly, throughout history, few Western women have been regarded as national heroines. However, one can argue that this lack of focus is a consequence of academic literature that has been dominated by the male gaze and that the prominent ideal concerning “the lady” in American society has shifted (Hume 10). In Janice Hume’s (2000) feminist approach to media research she argues that the characteristics of heroines portrayed in mass-circulating magazine such as the *Ladies’ Home Journal* correspondingly “changed as cultural values for women changed” and thus provides evidence that dominant American values shifted over time (25).

Analyzing visual framing of women in the Finnish media in the context of war, feminist scholar L.K. Halonen (1999) establishes that, although journalistic depictions and visual illustrations of war are more common, “women are virtually invisible” and, when depicted, it is “dictated by the masculine power of discourse” (6). Halonen gathered Finnish visual material and analyzed the myths in the reporting of catastrophes, arguing that women were categorized and placed into five myths: the crying woman, the earth mother, women

crying together (sisterhood), mother and child as victims of war, and women as the “damsel in distress” who are rescued by men (7). Men, on the other hand, are represented visually as the protector of women. So, according to Halonen, photos “offer unidimensional frames of reference by which complex and difficult issues may be interpreted” (15) and photojournalism makes vivid associations between the roles of the women in images and the archetypal, mythological themes, the most common images being the grief-stricken women who mourn for men.

Since there has historically been a prominence of heroes within the context of the military, it is significant to analyze whether the female soldier has been characterized as a heroine. In general, the military and armed conflict is characterized as a man’s domain, and the Western military sustains traditional notions of masculinity such as physical prowess, autonomy, and competitiveness (see Prividera 2004, 2006). It is thus evident that militarism is inextricably linked to masculinity. The dominant soldier archetype is the “warrior hero,” who is characterized to be physically and mentally resilient, a leader, and a determined individualist (Prividera, “Rescuing Patriarchy” 90). Feminist literature identifies the dominant female archetype as subordinate to male archetypes and therefore is not easily identified with the soldier role. Consequently, the rise of female soldiers challenges traditional female and male archetypes.

Despite the actual increase in women’s representation in the U.S. Military, recognition of their participation and influence remains at the margins in mainstream media and their involvement is still a contested ground of ideological debate (Prividera, “Rescuing Patriarchy” 89). Similar to Halonen’s study on the visual framing of Finnish women during a period of armed conflict, Prividera and Howard argue that the mainstream media frames women through a masculine rhetoric and interpretation of conflict. Their studies (2004,

2006) use a critical and feminist rhetorical approach and examine the representation of Private Jessica Lynch as an American soldier in the current War in Iraq in order to provide insights into the interconnected nature of gender, sexism, war and the military (See also Enloe, 1993; Enloe, 2000; Sjoberg, 2007). Exploring prominent media sources, such as transcripts from ABC, NBC, and CBS as well as stories from the popular weekly news magazines *Newsweek*, *US News & World Report*, and *Time*, Prividera (2004) analyzes the media narratives surrounding Private Jessica Lynch. According to the study, the media constructed Lynch as a “hero” for her war experience but Prividera argues that, “her hero label is consistent with fulfilling the archetypal expectations of the woman victim. Her heroism is for surviving, not for succeeding. She is a hero not for saving others but for living to be saved by the warrior hero. She is a hero for being an object, not a subject” (“Rescuing Patriarchy” 94). Lynch’s role in the military was exchanged for a role as the archetypal female victim to fit mythical categories, thus perpetuating the marginalization of female soldiers and supporting traditional, patriarchal, and dichotomous gendered meanings (Ibid 96). As this example suggests, the social construction of “real” military heroes is related to the active soldier archetype that preserves masculinity, power, and dominance (Ibid 96).

These dominant gendered archetypes are reinforced through the media and influence popular public perception. In her dissertation, “Soldier Girls” (2007), Anna Katherine Froula investigates the methods used in American popular culture that assimilate female soldiers into conventions of domesticated femininity and tropes of romantic heterosexual relationships. Similar to Prividera and Howard (2004, 2006), Froula argues that women in uniform subverts patriarchal values and challenges the traditional conceptions of the masculine warrior as well as feminine domesticity. Through Hollywood film analysis,

Froula argues that masculine narratives in war movies and stories identify “soldier” as synonymous with “male,” and Hollywood films nurture long-held biases that “continue to influence how Americans conceive... sex role and rights within the U.S. Armed Forces and its popular narrative of glory and honor” (5-6). For example, John Wayne is perhaps the most “lasting prosthetic memory” that was produced during the Second World War (Froula 60). Although he never served in the military, and his real name was Marion Morrison, Wayne was consistently cast as the Hollywood military hero and, due to his roles, was proclaimed by former U.S. President Reagan to symbolize the all-American hero, or, “the force of the American will to do what is right in the world” (Ibid). John Wayne, the “hero,” was codified as an American warrior-gentleman and as the idealized “American Frontier” male that Americans would emulate. In World War II Hollywood films such as *Sands of Iwo Jima*, John Wayne’s on-screen character symbolized the American national heroic ideal and John Wayne, the celebrity, became an electronic hero, worshiped for his celebrity persona.

The Celebrity

Developed historically from the Classical times of god-men to the 20th century common man (see Boorstin 1972; Fishwick 1954), through the periods of the oral traditional hero to the electronic hero, Western cultural conceptions of the hero have subtly shifted (Strate 2008). Today, there is an increasing ambiguity between the modern hero and the celebrity. Celebrities are identified as heroes and heroes are identified as celebrities (Drucker 3). The celebrity is a marketed cultural hero, is commodified through the different means of communication, and has become a focal point within Western visual culture, and many communication scholars argue that the media itself is now central to the construction

of celebrity (See Boorstin, 1972; Drake, 2008; Drucker, 2008; Ellis, 1982; Langer, 2006; Strate, 1985). By identifying the dominant representations of the celebrity that are analyzed, critical media scholars suggest that the concept of the hero has become blurred with that of the celebrity. Although the modern celebrity is idolized and adored, it does not constitute that celebrities are necessarily heroic. Visually constructed through modern communications media, the celebrity can be identified as merely a “pseudo- hero.”

The mythical hero was replaced by the historical hero and now, it is the historical hero who is being replaced by the electronic hero, or the celebrity. Both, according to Strate, are a result of changes in the dominant modes of communication, whether through the literate revolution, or the graphic revolution (Strate, “Heroes and/as Communication” 26). The visual representation of leaders or great men has been important historically. For example, historian Helke Rausch (2007) analyzes the memorials and statues of nineteenth-century national heroes as expressions of national ideals, popular war myths, and intentional national propaganda. Over the past two decades, a renewed philosophical concern for the visual termed “the pictorial turn” has recently emerged in communication research as focused on the ontology and epistemology of photography and the cinema. Popular culture pictorial accounts are typical of our Western visual culture today and, consequently, scholars have become interested in using interpretive strategies to study how meaning is communicated through visual images. The pervasive visual mass media, including television, film, magazines, and the Internet, are all used to emphasize the greatness and importance of the celebrity and it is thus within this realm of commodified popular culture that meaning and public conceptions are influenced. In order to understand the hero, the celebrity, and the shift towards the celebrity hero, one must understand the complex notions of public perception, visibility and the implications of seeing and being seen.

Media scholars have provided only a limited understanding of the central place of the celebrity in society, and the appeal celebrities have, across cultural, political, social and economic boundaries (Brown and Fraser 47). Celebrities have been shown to have enormous economic influence. They not only earn some of the highest incomes as reported annually by *Forbes* magazine, but can also generate an extraordinary amount of revenue for those companies that employ and promote them (Ibid 49). Celebrities are commodities; their images are used as marketing tools to encourage people to see films or to buy music, magazines, newspapers and other consumer products. Celebrities have thus become brands in their own right, with enormous commercial potential. The increased exposure to celebrities through both news and entertainment media have provided advertisers with a powerful means of persuasion for they have been shown to be effective influencers of purchasing behavior, whether alive or dead, such as John Wayne, James Dean, Elvis, and Marilyn Monroe (Brown and Fraser 49).

Celebrities are also capable of influencing political processes and outcomes. In the United States, a “movie star” celebrity has been elected as President (Ronald Reagan, 1981-89) and as governor of California (Arnold Schwarzenegger, 2003-present). Also, the potential political influence of entertainers is powerfully illustrated by the work of Paul Hewson of Ireland, otherwise known as Bono from the hugely successful band U2. Although he is not an elected official, he uses his worldwide celebrity status to raise money for African famine relief, to promote aids awareness and preventions, to inspire investments in Africa, and to influence church organizations and U.S. government policy to help meet the needs of the poor people in Africa (Brown and Fraser 51). Bono utilizes different facets of the media in order to promote these causes and is now not only identified as a music celebrity but as a key activist as well. Similarly, celebrities have attached themselves to

charitable causes and the public is aware of this through the diversity of media communication outlets that visually depict them, whether it is through magazine ads, television commercials, or through interviews on popular entertainment television shows, such as *Oprah*, or in popular magazines, such as *Vanity Fair*.

A current example of celebrities promoting a cause can be noted with the commercial for world poverty. Although there are several versions of the commercial, some utilizing Canadian celebrities and others using A-list celebrities, the commercial remains simple. Medium shots of the stars wearing white simple clothing are pictured on a white background. There is silence except for snapping and the dialogue or print stating, “every 3 seconds a child dies from extreme poverty...” The “Making Poverty History” commercial thus relies on the Canadian celebrities, such as Jan Arden and Raine Maida, and the American A-list stars such as Bono, Justin Timberlake, Brad Pitt and Penelope Cruz to make the cause legitimate and powerful for the viewer. Yet, one must question whether these celebrities are role models or heroes.

Celebrities are consistently promoted to appeal to people across cultures and can have a global appeal. This public interest has only grown with the increases in celebrity-based media, entertainment shows, and celebrity-journalists. Despite the vast exposure a celebrity can achieve, is it accurate to define these individuals as heroes? With the gradual changes in communications technology, the representation of the hero, and the conceptions of the traditional hero, have shifted over time. Whereas Vogler (1998) traced the root of the idea of the hero to “the concept of self-sacrifice on behalf of others,” this is no longer a requirement for one to be considered a hero today (in Brown and Fraser 53). According to communication scholars Brown and Fraser, although international audiences do distinguish between celebrities and traditional heroes “certain celebrities can become heroes for many

people, thus becoming what we call the celebrity hero” (52). Therefore, all celebrities are not necessarily heroes and heroes are not necessarily celebrities. Consequently, in the highly mediated culture that we now live, many of those who are most famous, idolized and emulated are not necessarily those who have demonstrated moral courage or heroism, but those who have garnered the greatest amount of media attention (Brown and Fraser 53). Who is currently considered a hero has been significantly blurred within our current electronic media time period.

Daniel Boorstin was one of the first scholars to identify the relationship between heroes and popular media in his works *The Image: Or What Happened to the American Dream* (1961) and *The Image: A guide to pseudo-events in America* (1972). Utilizing a critical media theoretical approach, Boorstin argues that celebrities are created by the media rather than by their achievement, and by access to power and notoriety rather than through their heroic deeds. “The hero was a big man; the celebrity is a big name” (Boorstin, What Happened 70). Since the graphic revolution, much of our thinking about human greatness has changed (Boorstin, Pseudo 45). In the past, the process of becoming known was a slow one; “two centuries ago when a great man appeared, people looked for God’s purpose in him; today, we look for his press agent” (Ibid 46). Great men, like famous men, only came into a nation’s consciousness slowly for “the processes by which their fame was made were as mysterious as those by which God ruled the generations” (Ibid). Through television, film, and other forms of communications, a common person can achieve “fame” overnight and then fade just as quickly. As the American pop culture artist Andy Warhol stated, “In the future everyone will be famous. For fifteen minutes” (1968; qtd. in Strate, “Heroes and/as Communication” 32). Arguing that these people are not truly heroes at all, Boorstin identifies this as the root of the problem concerning the modern celebrity hero.

Boorstin defines a hero as “a human figure – real or imaginary or both, who has shown greatness in some achievement. He is a man or a woman of great deeds” (Pseudo 49). For Boorstin, traditional heroic types included diverse religious, military, political and literary leaders such as Moses, Ulysses, Aeneas, Jesus, Caesar, Mohammed, Joan of Arc, Shakespeare, Washington, Napoleon and Lincoln (Pseudo 49) and argues that the word “celebrity” originally meant not a person but a condition “of being much talked about” (Ibid 57). Today, however, there is wide variety of celebrity-types, the most common are those associated with television, film, Internet, or sports, however, these are not exclusive. To be a celebrity means primarily to be a famous or well-publicized person (Ibid). From Boorstin’s perspective, then, individual greatness is the defining quality of the hero. The celebrity is thus a commodified hero. Today, heroes are mass-produced as part of the media market and therefore “the old heroic human mold has been broken” (Boorstin, Psuedo 48). Consequently, Boorstin concludes that, “our [graphic] age has produced a new kind of eminence...all older forms of greatness now survive only in the shadow of this new form. This new kind of eminence is ‘celebrity,’” a person known for their “well-knownness” (Psuedo 57).

The overlap that exists between hero and celebrity has been growing and this can be linked to the role of the mass media as a means of image production. Celebrities are not usually known for their achievements *per se* but “first and foremost by appearances in and across the mass media. Theirs is a phenomenological presence that accumulates visibility through its increasing media circulation” (Drake 436). While Boorstin argues that a celebrity can be made, we can never make a hero (Pseudo 48). He argues that since technology facilitates the ability to replace authentic experiences with manufactured ones,

people come to prefer the artificial in place of the real, and lose the ability to distinguish between the two.

Fame is repeatedly represented as a hallmark for greatness and hegemonically fame is artificial (Boorstin, Pseudo 47). As he explains, we have substituted images for ideals and have replaced genuine heroes with human pseudo-events, one of which is known as celebrities. Heroes are distinguished by their achievement; and celebrities by their image or brand. Whereas celebrities can simply become great because they are made famous by the communication and cultural industries, real heroes, according to Boorstin, are famous because they are intrinsically great (Ibid 48). The new mold of celebrity constitutes a false hero according to Boorstin, since for him, celebrity worship and hero worship should not be confused. Boorstin is thus representative of those scholars who read the modern celebrity as representative of a significant shift in contemporary popular culture.

Emerging from the critiques of the mass culture industries by the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1972), argued that the industries have the power to create stars and that these stars were simply a way through which capitalism maintains its ideological luster. Adorno used the celebrity/star system as central to the concepts of standardization and pseudo-individualization to elaborate his theory of the operations of the culture industry as a form of ideological deception. He regarded celebrities/stars as “one of the most important ways through which standardized culture was pseudo-individualized – in contrast with traditional heroes produced outside of mass culture” (Drake 439). He argued that the drive toward profit maximization leads to part interchangeability, where products will vary only superficially, requiring individualization through means such as advertising and publicity. Through the marketing of stars, then, Adorno’s critiques highlighted that

celebrities are interchangeable, individuated only by type, and predictable in the responses they effect.

According to Strate, within “an oral culture, the hero lives and dies by the sword. In a print culture, the pen is mightier than the sword. But in an electronic culture, the deciding factor is neither arms nor pen, but appearance and personality” (“Heroes and/as Communication” 35). Literate heroes were the subject of biographies and, as a result, were known primarily for their lives. However, in the case of electronic, online, heroes, who are subject of gossip columns, magazines like *People*, and programs like *Entertainment Tonight*, they are not known for their lives, but instead for their lifestyles (Strate 35). Leo Lowenthal first realized this shift in interest in his study of biographies in popular magazines between 1901 and 1941. In the earlier period the biographies’ subjects were ‘idols of production.’ These people included bankers, politicians, artists, or inventors; they were interesting because they achieved something in the world, they worked their way to the top, and were useful to society.² However, in the intervening years, there occurred a shift to ‘idols of consumption’ (Dyer 45). With present-day magazine heroes, almost every one is directly or indirectly related to the sphere of leisure time. Consequently, according to Lowenthal, “contemporary heroes stem predominantly from the sphere of consumption and organized leisure time” (Dyer 45) that is, they are entertainers or sportspeople. As a result, stars have become models of consumption for many in consumer society.

The production of the celebrity in the commercial media has become very sophisticated. The contemporary Western celebrity will usually have emerged from the sports or entertainment industries and will be highly visible through the media and they will

² This is ideologically based on individualism and the myth of the ‘protestant world ethic.’ Liberal societies highlight and propagate the great men, the ‘heroes,’ who have independently achieved the “American Dream.”

ignite public interest. Chris Rojek (2001) insists on the fundamental modernity of celebrity and describes it as a phenomenon of mass-circulation newspapers, TV, radio and film. The growth of celebrity is thus inherently linked to the spread of mass media, particularly the visual media (Turner 10). Discourses of celebrity invade the public today in forms of contests in shopping malls to the management of major political campaigns. Celebrity has become integrated into the cultural processes of our daily lives and now even political leaders have become celebrities.

Cultural theorist Graeme Turner argues that the celebrity is a result of “a cultural shift that privileges the momentary, the visual and the sensational over the enduring, the written and the rational” (5). Highly controlled images of the celebrity compromises the independence of the news media and its critical capacity since the relationships have been institutionalized between the news media and the publicity arm of the celebrity industry (Turner 46). Celebrity gossip has come to dominate the mass magazine market and is also increasingly prominent in television news. According to Turner, information has been sacrificed for entertainment, producing “infotainment.” Throughout the twenty-first century, the consumption of celebrity has become ordinary, part of our everyday lives, and has resulted in the shift from hero to celebrity mass consumption and worship.

Although there is a range of celebrities in the realms of sport, popular music, and television, the film star is perhaps the most elaborate and socially grounded instance of the broad phenomenon of modern celebrity. Richard Dyer’s *Stars* (1979) was groundbreaking in its proposition that stars worked as semiotic systems, like signs, embedded with cultural meanings to be actively read and interpreted by their audiences (Marshall 24). By analyzing the stars and, in turn, the celebrity, in terms of their signification Dyer argues that the public never knows them directly as real people, only as they are to be found in Hollywood media

texts (Dyer 2). Similar to Boorstin's argument where much of contemporary culture is pseudo-events these individuals appear meaningful but are in fact void of meaning. The work argues that the viewer reads film personalities as symbolic texts, and that these texts are ideologically saturated and discursively constructed. These celebrities thus have a personality that can be publicized and are figures that can become nationally advertised trademarks (Boorstin 162). Therefore, like the hero, the celebrity is a cultural construction and the characteristics that are associated with each can be compared to find distinct similarities and differences.

Dyer urges that it is also important to analyze the stars within the context of their roles and their filmic presentations since the examination of the images reveal complexity, contradiction and difference (Dyer 15). Although they are people, film celebrities serve to disguise the fact that they are just as much produced images, constructed personalities, as their 'characters' are. Dyer believes that "the roles and/or the performance of a star in a film were taken as revealing the personality of the star" (22). It has been also been argued that the star system fell victim to the "embourgeoisement of the cinematic imagination" which eventually saw the transformation of stars from the 'gods and goddesses, heroes, model,' that is, the embodiments of *ideal* ways of behaving, to 'identification figures, embodiment of *typical* ways of behaving' (in Dyer 24).

Over time, stars became more usual in appearance and more 'psychologically' credible in personality and, consequently, the motivational credibility of screen characters was accompanied by the desire of audiences to know the stars that played these characters 'as people', to have access to their 'real' lives, and to know what they were 'really' like. In short, to know their 'personalities.' Hence the proliferation of the fan magazines and the publicity machine which became crucial to the star system as an image-maker (Langer 184).

This vision and obsession with individuals as representing “success” eroded the “divine” status of the star system yet the star did not cease to be special but now “combine[s] the exceptional with the ordinary, the ideal with the everyday” (in Dyer 25).

John Ellis (1982) argues that film celebrities are paradoxically both ordinary and at the same time extraordinary (91). The star must seem obtainable yet maintain a distance necessary to continue the aura of stardom at the same time. They are presented in all forms of media as both stars and as ordinary people so, “the star is a legitimate object for the desire of the viewer in so far as the star is like the viewer, and an impossible object for the desire of the viewer in so far as the star is extraordinary, unlike the viewer” (Ellis 98). The celebrity is thus constructed as an individual who has successfully achieved the “American Dream” ideal of fame and fortune.

According to cultural theorist David Marshall, celebrity culture produces chains of signification, and the meaning of celebrity is a combination of some primary texts such as a film, secondary texts such as interviews and paparazzi photos, and tertiary audience work on the meaning of these various texts. Whereas magazines work to uncover the rumors, the paparazzi reveal the unguarded self, and entertainment media reports tend to present the celebrity in the most positive light in interviews that are highly structured by the star and his/her management (Marshall 3). According to Ellis, the star’s particular performance in a film “is always more than the culmination of the star images in subsidiary circulation: it is a balancing act between fiction and cultism” (91). Layers and layers of media texts are thus piled onto the meaning of the individual celebrity. The media produces a “reality-effect” that is alluring to the audience since it appears that we are discovering the “real” star, in Richard Dyer’s terminology (1979), every time we see them out of their constructed world in sport, film, television, or popular music (Marshall 3).

The difficulty in making distinctions between the real and the manufactured heroism of celebrity shifts the judgment increasingly to one about performance. It has become common that an audience 'reads' a film in accordance to the star's presence in it. So, when one speaks of 'a John Wayne film' or a 'film with John Wayne in it', the audience rarely remembers the name of the character that John Wayne actually played. Instead, "the star absorbs the identity of the film character, taking it over as his/her own, so that finally it vanishes completely" (Langer 189-90). However, according to Langer this can only be applied to film stars for, in the case of television celebrities, it is the fictional characters that maintain a high profile, not the actor behind them, due to the vision of intimacy that is created by the repetition of television shows. Therefore, there is always a temptation to think of a 'star image' as some kind of fixed repertory of fixed meanings, for example that Joan Crawford was always tough, independent, ruthless and threateningly sexy (Ellis 92).

Dyer notes that, today, "...the stars are a reflection in which the public studies and adjusts its own image of itself...The social history of a nation can be written in terms of its film stars" (Durgnat 137-8; qtd. in Dyer 6) and that, "Stars... are the direct or indirect reflection of the needs, drives and dreams of American society" (Alexander xi; qtd. in Dyer 6). Consequently, celebrity now occupies an increasingly significant role in the process through which we construct our cultural identities. As Todd Gitlin notes in *Media Unlimited* (2001), the public has varying sentiments surrounding the celebrity, "Yet an aura of some sort surrounds them. They take up ritual place as heroes, leaders, scapegoats, magical figures, to be admired, envied, loved or hated: to matter" (Gitlin 132; qtd. in Turner 89). Although criticized for his technological determinism, cultural communication scholar James Carey would argue that this aura and ritual place surrounding the celebrity is directly defined by communication technology that constructs and transforms reality (24).

Through the film industry, a new relationship between the adored and the adoring was born. The celebrity has developed into a powerful force within Western popular culture and through the diverse visual media representations the conception of the celebrity has become blurred with the traditional conceptions of the hero. Whereas it used to be primarily the gods, and then the historical masterminds who were worshiped and idolized, today it is the celebrity who has become constructed and commodified into the realm of 'hero.'

As previously noted, Bono is not only known for the music he plays but for his activism for the people in Africa. Similarly, Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie is not only idolized for her characters that fight evil on film but for her commitments as a humanitarian. Through magazine articles, interviews, ad campaigns, her personal online video journal, as well as the UN refugee agency website (www.unhcr.org), the public has become aware of Angelina Jolie's humanitarian lifestyle. According to an online article Angelina Jolie is a great example of a "humanitarian hero" and as someone who has made "a conscious move towards a heroic life" (Langdon 2007). Since 2001, she has been a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, and uses her celebrity status to generate media coverage about the plight of refugees and the conditions under which they live. Between being marketed as Laura Croft in *Tomb Raider* (2001), speaking publicly as an ambassador at the United Nations, pictured visiting African children in need, or as a mother who adopts children from all over the world, her image, despite some reported 'scandals' in some tabloids, has been constructed as a talented, kind, moral humanitarian. Perhaps, then, Jolie can be considered the modern-day heroine, yet her celebrity status was a necessary condition to her constructed role.

The sports figure has also remained a recognized and celebrated personage throughout Western culture. Whereas the ancient hero's deeds often reflected acts of physical strength and courage on a naturally occurring stage, the sports star today has

become representative of a person who can exceed physical norms. Sports heroes can cross economic, social, linguistic, racial, and geographic barriers since the modern world of the electronic media of communications fosters a sense of communal interest. Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods provide two of the best examples of sports figures who have been idolized and celebrated across the world. Considering that, historically, Western cultural heroes have predominately been white, Jordan and Woods, African American men, represent a shift away from this traditional white heroic mold into a socially accepted, more racially diverse conception of the hero. Similar to the film and music celebrity, however, the sports star has also been marketed and their fame is molded, created and prefabricated therefore creating a powerful cultural influence.

Media scholar Susan Drucker (2008) claims that it is the mass media's 'celebrification' of the athlete and sporting events that creates an illusion of heroes emerging from sports. Whereas the narrative, the myth, or the epic embodying the heroes' deeds, was, in oral cultures, the means of hero creation and perpetuation (see Campbell), print and electronic communication technologies now provide new mechanisms for hero-making (Drucker 422). Photography, news, publicity, radio, and television play a part in constructing the myth and Drucker argues that it is the celebrification process that makes athletes into pseudo-heroes and pseudo-events (Drucker 415).

By the end of the 20th century, the definition of "celebrity" was synonymous with "hero" in many dictionaries, yet can they be equated as the same? New communication technologies have reduced the distance between us, and what Meyrowitz (2008) identifies as, our 'media friends.' The term 'celebrity' captures the fact that modern media enhances the possibility that someone could be widely known for being widely known (Boorstin 1961). However, whether or not they are going to be immortalized as heroes is another

story. Whereas folklore, sacred texts and history books were used to create the traditional hero, the celebrity is the creation of gossip, public opinion, magazines, newspaper, the Internet, and the images and performances on film and television. Rising in and out of fame so quickly, one can argue that these celebrity figures are incapable of becoming a lasting, or legendary persona in cultural memory as traditional heroes such as Hercules did, thus limiting their significance. Perhaps Boorstin is correct, then, in stating that this century has only had pseudo-heroes.

For Boorstin, our society attempts to make celebrities stand in for the heroes we no longer have; “we forget that celebrities are known primarily for their ‘well-knownness.’ And we imitate them as if they were cast in the mold of greatness. Yet the celebrity is usually nothing greater than a more-publicized version of us” (Boorstin, Pseudo 74). Consequently, our heroes and their heroic deeds may indeed have been destroyed through overexposure and invasive reporting, replaced by media figures and media events. It is ironic that, whereas the celebrity hero is marketed and highly publicized and seemingly enjoys the media spotlight, the common individual, who demonstrates genuine acts of courage such as saving a life, is generally reluctant to be the center of media limelight (Brown 53) and is modest about said “heroic” actions. Although these modest, everyday individuals are constructed as exceptional by the mainstream media, they insist that anyone in the situation in question would act similarly. Perhaps, then, heroism is an inherently part of human nature, thus referring to Frye’s literary observation that the “common” hero is not superior to others or the environment but are “normal people called by circumstance” (45).

Within our current media-saturated environment, celebrities are admired and idolized as ordinary yet exceptional people and, as a result, they become heroes for parts of the North American public. There thus exists a hero-celebrity dichotomy that is not evident

in practice where perhaps it comes down to aesthetics or value judgments. Strate concludes that, instead of employing a two-valued, either/or orientation to heroes and celebrities, it is perhaps more effective to regard celebrities as the contemporary construction of heroes as commodified, understanding that “this constitutes a major change in our cultural conception of the hero” (Heroes 25).

The modern-day celebrity-hero is thus linked to the current electronic communication phenomenon and it is important to understand the larger cultural meanings that have been assigned to the visual. The celebrity is shaped and molded by the visual representations in the media and are consequently produced and displaced in rapid succession. However, it is clear that some celebrities have obtained such immense fame that they are undeservedly idolized and adored as heroic, resulting in what Boorstin defines as cultures’ “pseudo-heroes.”

Comic Book Superhero

Hero worship is an integral part of American and Western life. When recognizing that much of the public perception of heroism is derived from popular culture and media, one must also explore the history and significance of the superhero within the comic book industry, and how the characters have developed over time. Although it is not as prominent as the array of publications on comics as an art form, there does exist considerable academic writing on the cultural, social and psychological implications of the superhero found in Western comic books (See Bainbridge, 2009; Baker, 2007; Bongco, 2000).

Comic books first debuted in New York in the 1930s and, by the 1940s, had become a unique visual phenomenon that included “action-packed, vividly colored covers that were irresistible to children” (Bongco 86). It was the superhero that dominated the pages of the

early comic books and these characters were mostly muscular men who had all the traits that any child could dream of: speed, strength, power, and knowledge. Today, the superhero character has developed into a “lasting and vigorous presence in American and European popular culture such that the recognition of the Batman or Superman, for example, by millions who have never read a Batman comic book or seen a Superman film is ensured” (Bongco 86). Many of the heroes that exist today have survived at least forty years of publication and, while they may have undergone changes, the characters have retained the key components of their identity and the core ideas of their individual narratives.

Jason Bainbridge argues that the two comic giants, DC and Marvel, both “advance different notions of heroism. The former is premodern, invoking a transcendent and interventionist justice. The latter is melodramatic, involving working through trauma to restore virtue” (81). Bainbridge argues that the superhero is “central to any consideration of popular media’s thinking about concepts of heroism and justice because the superhero has spread beyond comics to be taken up by popular culture more generally as the exemplar of justice” (64). With respect to DC Comic superheroes, they can be understood as a part of the heroic tradition that is “directly informed by the ‘monomyth’ to which Joseph Campbell refers (Campbell 1971 [1949], 3-49)” since Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman could just as easily be the mythological Hercules, Orpheus, and Athena and, in many respects these superheroes “represent a condensation of the heroic archetypes” (Bainbridge 66).

John Cawelti (1976) gives a description of the basic structure the superhero’s adventure and it is remarkably similar to that which Campbell and Raglan describe in *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* (1949) and *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama* (1936) respectively. Accordingly, the central fantasy of the adventure story is that of the hero who has to overcome many obstacles, dangers, and moral dilemmas. For Cawelti, this

is the simplest and perhaps the oldest and widest appeal of all formula types and “can clearly be traced back to the myths and epics of earlier times that have been cultivated in some form or other by almost every human culture” (Cawelti 34, qtd. in Bongco 90).

Although specific characterizations of the hero are dependent on cultural motifs and themes, Cawelti describes that the hero can be characterized as either a superhero who has an exceptional strength or ability or, as a hero who is “one of us,” that is, a figure marked by flawed abilities and attitudes presumably shared by the audience. (Cawelti 34, qtd. in Bongco 90-91).

Adopting a feminist approach, scholars have also examined the representations of the fictional female superheroes, comparing the representations to male icons, such as the figures found in comic books. Similar to the female representations previously discussed in this chapter, some argue that American popular culture has maintained gendered representations of superheroes (see Stabile, 2009). Despite the popularity of superheroes in the film and television industries, Stabile argues that capitalist ideology is central to the social construction of the hero. In Stabile’s study on the representation of superheroes in television series’ she argues that, although more ethnically and racially diverse, there still exists narratives of protection and secular salvation that reinforces the stereotype that women are victims (86). In contrast, Baker (2007), assesses the demographic, personality traits, communicative acts, and physical behaviors of superheroes in today’s animated media and suggests that there has been a distinct shift away from the historical under and misrepresentations of women in action programs relative to the presence of men (28). Whereas women were historically passive, innocent, and submissive characters, Baker’s content analysis suggests that recent studies show no significant difference between male and female superheroes. Consequently, “Perhaps female superheroes are finally breaking

down gender-based stereotypes that have “permeated children’s cartoons for decades” (Baker 36). The fictional comic book heroes thus have foundational characteristics and it seems that, in some aspects of American popular culture, female superheroes are being visually represented as equal to the male.

Culture Hero

The Western world has emerged from the graphic revolution, shifting toward the electronic means of communication. For scholars such as Boorstin, there are no more heroes, instead, just pseudo-celebrities who have been *constructed* as the modern-day hero. With changing communication technology there has occurred a generalization of the “hero” concept, thus encompassing a broader range of hero-types. However, despite the plethora of new “heroes,” it is evident that Campbell’s “Great Men” in history are consistently still granted heroic status and this is highlighted by the recent Harris poll.

In February 2009, The Harris Poll, an online poll conducted in the United States, published the conclusions of the cross-section of adult Americans who were surveyed for “whom they admire enough to call their heroes” ([Harris Interactive 2009](#)). The methodology states that these heroes were named spontaneously, and that those who were surveyed were not given a list to choose from. Current President Barack Obama was mentioned most often, followed by Jesus Christ and Martin Luther King. The others in the top ten, in descending order, were: Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, Abraham Lincoln, John McCain, John F. Kennedy, Chesley Sullenberger and Mother Teresa. The Harris Poll first asked this “hero” question in 2001, a year of conflict when perhaps the United States desperately needed heroes. In the 2001 survey, Jesus Christ was the hero who was mentioned most often, followed by Martin Luther King, Colin Powell, John F. Kennedy and

Mother Teresa. Besides President Barack Obama, who was not mentioned in 2001, the changes since the first “hero” poll include: President George W. Bush moving from being rated number 19 to 5 on the list, John McCain, who was not in the top 20 in 2001, is now number 7, Chesley Sullenberger, the pilot who landed his jet safely in the Hudson River, is currently ranked number 9 and represents the common-man hero. Heroes who have fallen on the list include: General Colin Powell, actor John Wayne, sports star Michael Jordan, and missionary Mother Theresa.

The article notes that, although the public gave several reasons to explain their choice of heroes, the characteristics that were most common were when an individual does what was right regardless of personal consequences (89%), does not give up until the goal was accomplished (83%), does more than what other people expect of them (82%), overcomes adversity (81%), and when they are capable of staying level-headed in a crisis (81%) (Harris Interactive 2009). Interestingly, the heroic characteristics that Anderson describes for the contemporary military hero are very similar to those of this recent poll. These similarities and differences are apparent in Table 3 (pictured below). Of note is that, in the top ten, there are six heroes who are deceased, including Jesus Christ and Martin Luther King, and that the top ten includes five presidents, the top twenty includes eight. Therefore, in American culture at least, the public prides itself on its leaders and thus identifies them as heroes. Perhaps, then, Carlyle was correct in his argument that society will always have its heroes for “Hero-worship, *is nevertheless, as it was always and everywhere, and cannot cease till man himself ceases*” (12).

The ‘hero’ in the 20th Century consists of a more diversified classification that includes the brave person, the risk-taker, the dignitary, the champion, the defeater, the worshiped one, the role model, the commodity and the celebrity (Dean 77). Boorstin wrote

that we admire heroes because they embody popular cultural virtues. Similarly, other 20th century scholars have presented the hero as a symbol of his or her culture (Hume 10). Prioritizing media and technological change as the most important factor, Drucker and Cathcart (2008) argue that what constitutes a hero and heroic is a “function of cultural priorities and values, and, most significantly is related to the communication medium utilized for presenting and preserving information about heroes” (2). Although it has been argued that technological innovations such as writing, print, and electronic communications have changed the way in which we talk about heroes and the way Western society forms our conceptions of them, one must also recognize other social, political, religious, and cultural influences on a society’s, or individuals’, perception and definition of the hero concept.

Is the electronic hero that exists today a different kind of hero than the traditional oral or literary hero? In the past, heroes were idolized for their god-like abilities and today, although heroes can be characterized as a common person who the public can relate to, these heroic figures are consistently idolized, worshiped, emulated, or adored. Taking into consideration the diverse literature available concerning the “hero,” and the different types of heroic figures, Table 2 (pictured below) outlines the characteristics of the Western “hero” that have been represented over time. Similarly, Table 3 (pictured below) outlines the changing conceptions and representations of the heroine over time.

By taking into consideration the different types of heroic figures that have existed, and the academic literature that surrounds them, it is evident that the Western heroic ideals have remained relatively constant. As Table 2 indicates, many of the “heroic” characteristics have remained consistent despite changes in historical period or communication technology. However, as the hero developed from the Classical times to the present, through the periods where oral tradition and electronic media were the dominant

means of communication technology, those who are identified as a “hero” became more and more far-reaching. Therefore, how the Western world classifies their heroes has changed dramatically to include a more diverse body of individuals, ranging in class, gender, and race. For example, Hercules is considered a timeless hero archetype. As a half god, Hercules was tried and tested to prove his divine hero status, having to display all of the traditional heroic attributes to earn the title (Norman 60). For the traditional hero mere bravery, kindness, strength or knowledge would not be sufficient since one had to be magnified to the point of divinity. As we progressed historically as well as technologically, socially, and culturally, we have broadened our definitions of the hero. Today, one does not need to embody all the hero characteristics and become a timeless, legendary symbol of heroism to be entitled a “hero” or “heroine.” Instead, any individual who has demonstrated a heroic quality that can be highlighted and socially agreed as extraordinary, (whether it is leading a country, saving a life, or winning a sports title), is considered a hero, even if only for a short period of time.

The cultural conception of the celebrity has become blurred with that of the traditional hero. Boorstin argues that celebrities are only pseudo-heroes and that contemporary heroes no longer exist. When comparing the characteristics of the worshiped hero-celebrity with the general heroic characteristics listed in Table 2, it is evident that a celebrity can also be a leader, be determined, respond to a challenge, have enormous influence, have a special talent, have admirable moral character, or could have overcome adversity. It is unlikely, however, that the celebrity, a person typically known for their “well-knownness” according to Boorstin, would have accepted danger or risked their life as a condition of receiving the “hero” title, thus marking a significant difference from the traditional heroic conception.

Table 2 From the Classics to the Graphics: Characteristics of the Western Male Hero in Academic Literature Reviews

Time Period	Type of Communication	Hero Characteristics	Hero Gender	Variations
Classics	Oral: spoken word, song, poem, folklore	God-like, divine, supernatural Embarks on a Quest/ Journey Battles with an enemy/ Overcomes challenge Mysterious Birth Unusual Strength/ Cleverness High intelligence Larger than life Supernatural/ Sacrificial death Rarely interacts with humans Legendary	Male	Ex. Hercules Worshipped/ Idolized
Biblical		Greater power of action Strength Overcomes challenge Courageous, wise Leader High moral character Not necessarily high class	Male White?	Ex. Moses, Jesus (Leaders) Worshipped/ Idolized?
Renaissance	Literature: writing, printing, typography, engraving	Adventurous Chivalrous High moral character Noble gentleman/ Aristocracy King High class	Male White	Ex. Cosimo de' Medici (Noble) Worshipped/ Idolized
Post Printing Press 19 th C	Literature: newspaper → sensational news reporting	"Great Man" Special talent/ Distinguishing skill Patriotic Scholarly Leader Response to challenge Self-sacrifice/ Saves life Admirable moral character Men of rank	Male White	Ex. George Washington (Leader) Firemen (Common person) General (Mil. Leader) Idolized
Graphic Age	Electronic: television, radio, film, internet	Exceeds physical norms Brave Self-sacrifice/Saves life Accomplishes a goal Valor/ Virtue Determination Overcomes adversity Leader Good moral character Defeats odds High influence	Male or Female Diverse Race	Ex. Chesley Sullenberger (Common person) Tiger Woods (Sports Star) Pres. Barak Obama (Leader) Superman (Comic book superhero) Celebrity? Emulated

Although the conception of the “hero” has remained fairly consistent over time, the female has not always been characterized as “heroic,” or as a “heroine.” Following the Feminist Revolution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the cultural conception of the female in the Western world, in particular the United States, shifted towards female equality and away from the previous passive and innocent female archetype.

Table 3 Pre and Post Feminist Characterizations of the Western Heroine in Feminist Literature Reviews

	Past (Pre Feminist Revolution)	Present (Post Feminist Revolution)
Superheroes/ Comics	Passive, submissive Innocent Sex symbol (exception: Wonder Woman)	Complete a Mission High moral character Exceptional skills/talent/power Brave Intelligent Speed/Strength/Power
Females and War	Masculinized (ex. Joan of Arc)	Victim/ Brave (ex. Jessica Lynch)
Legendary/ Celebrity	Symbol of sex, beauty, innocence, virginity, black magic, seduction	Symbol of sex, beauty, power Humanitarian (ex. Mother Theresa) High moral character Influential Celebrity (ex. Angelina Jolie)

Due to the more far-reaching identification of the “hero,” coupled with the changing conceptions of the female, a greater number of heroines are being represented in mainstream media and women have gained ground in their military representations, such as Private Jessica Lynch. However, academic feminist literature (See Enloe, 2000; Fayer, 1994; Froula 2007; Hume, 2000; Privera, 2004, 2006) argues that dominant gendered archetypes are still reinforced in media coverage of female soldiers and in popular culture portrayals of fictional heroines. Yet, as Baker’s (2007) research suggests, perhaps female superheroes are

finally breaking down gender-based stereotypes that have been evident in children's television cartoons for decades (36).

Finally, Jeffery Anderson's factor analysis, clarifying his empirical study on the most important attributes of the military hero, can also be compared with the traditional and contemporary conceptions of the "hero" as well as with the results from the most recent Harris Poll (see Table 4 below). Whereas Table 2 (above) outlines the general characteristics of the hero as it has been represented over time, Anderson charts heroic characteristics as they specifically pertain to the American military hero. Despite the differences in scope, the heroic qualities are remarkably similar to both the classic hero and to the current common hero.

Table 4 Heroic Characteristics Represented in the Harris Poll Statistical Research Study

	Classic/ Traditional Hero	Graphic Age Contemporary Hero	Military Hero (Anderson 1986)	Harris Poll (U.S. 2009) Common Hero
Characteristics	God-like, divine, supernatural Mysterious Birth Unusual Strength/ Cleverness Embarks on a Quest/ Journey Battles with an enemy/ Overcomes challenge High intelligence Larger than life Supernatural/ Sacrificial death Rarely interacts with humans Legendary	Exceeds physical norms Accomplishes a goal Determination Self-sacrifice/ Saves life Brave Valor/ Virtue Defeats odds Leader High influence Overcomes adversity	Overcomes injury Devoted to accomplish duty Sets a personal example Risks own life/ places self in danger (accepts danger) Defeats odds Commands/ Leader Seizes an opportunity	Does not give up until goal is accomplished Does what is right despite personal consequences (accepts danger) defeats expectations (defeats odds) Level-headed in a crisis Overcomes adversity

However, as history and the Harris Poll suggest, "heroes" can go out of favor.

Considered heroes in the Harris Poll in 2001, actor John Wayne and athlete Michael Jordon, for example, have both fallen from the list in 2009. One could therefore conclude with a

question: why should society put faith in these timeless heroic qualities when they consistently fail us, and, why does the “hero” characterization have such a timeless resonance? (Mazepa 2009) Within the realm of popular culture and media circulation “heroic” individuals can disappear from a cultural memory, perhaps only a few will stand the test of time throughout history; nonetheless they were still considered “heroes,” and our conceptions of what are heroic characteristics remain timeless.

CONCLUSION:

As the above tables and the academia suggests, heroes have existed as a historically significant component to human culture. Heroes will emerge from a culture and are typically *of* that particular culture. Western heroes are, for the most part, Western, and thus personify Western values and beliefs. Table 1 outlines the general characterizations of the hero over time and it is evident that, despite the time period or dominant means of communication, the heroic ideal is defined in the same way: as an individual who overcomes a great challenge against all odds, who is capable of seizing an opportunity and taking leadership, who has admirable moral character, and who puts other individuals’ needs before his or her own. Although these heroic quality ideals have remained relatively unaltered over time, those who are currently characterized as “heroes” in Western culture have become more diverse than the Classical god-men, representing individuals ranging in class, gender, and race. Through identifying the various historical constructions, empirical observations, and theoretical analyses of the hero in Western popular culture one can trace not only the diverse academic approaches surrounding the issue, but also how the complex hero narrative has shifted over time depending on war, gender, popular culture or changes in communications technology.

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