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## Perceptions of Heroes and Heroism among Ukrainian Military Youth

*Abstract:* The present study adopts a behaviorist approach to conceptualizing the phenomenon of heroism. It endeavors to identify the behavioral tendencies that military students may display in extreme situations. These behavioral tendencies are influenced by their perception of what constitutes heroic behavior. The orientation towards the Archetypal Hero may be indicative of the psychological unpreparedness of military students to commit acts that go beyond the actions required by military service. The attraction to the Prototypical Hero may be explained by the need to be identified with another person who is an example of efficiency. The behavior of respondents whose associations make up the Prosocial Hero group would, in an emergency, be closer to the requirements outlined in the Military Ethics and Codes of Honor. It may be expected that respondents who prefer everyday heroism will be more successful in adapting to stress and maintaining their mental and emotional well-being in difficult and negative situations.

*Keywords:* associative experiment, hero, heroism, behavior in critical situations, armed forces.

### Introduction

People representing different social communities and groups often turn to the concepts of hero and heroism. Under the influence of incentives and factors of varying intensity, these concepts change over time. There are important social and psychological functions of the concepts of hero and heroism in society. They can become the basis for the development of “self-efficacy,” which refers to the ability of the individual to produce the effects that are needed. Observing the successes of others can activate the need for achievement, create intrinsic motivation and a sense of self-worth, and contribute to the formation of a self-concept and self-esteem that enable people to achieve at high levels and to act morally, even when doing so is difficult (Goethals, Allison 2012). The concepts of hero and heroism are involved in identity formation. This is especially important during adolescence, when heroic concepts help young people to experiment with their own sense of self and develop a greater sense of clarity about their authentic sense of self (Kinsella, English, McMahon 2020). At the same time, ideas about the Ideal Self are formed. This increases internal motivation, strengthens the desire to achieve important goals, and reduces the likelihood of antisocial and self-destructive behavior (Bray, James 2019; Ross 2019). The Ideal Self acts as self-regulation, motivating self-improvement and prosocial behavior, which manifests in increased attention to others’ needs, willingness to help them (Stice 2023). Furthermore, appeals to heroic concepts can function as coping strategies that promote post-traumatic growth (Keck et al. 2017; Khraban, Silko 2022). Indeed, individuals inspired by heroes

tend to adopt healthy new beliefs and values, view themselves and the world in a more positive manner, acquire wisdom, and experience a greater appreciation for life (Allison, Green 2020). The concepts of hero and heroism play a cultural role. They serve as models for following (Schindler et al. 2019), which has an important function in strengthening society and blurring social boundaries (Allison, Green 2020).

Heroic concepts are not static; they are subject to change as influenced by the broader cultural and historical context. Note that different social and professional groups may have different conceptions of the hero and heroism, even within the same culture (Keczer et al. 2016; Wang et al. 2022). In Rusch's view, the armed forces are a particularly favorable environment for the study of heroic concepts (Rusch 2022). There are two factors behind this statement: 1) war 'offers' plenty of opportunities to risk your life for the benefit of others, and 2) the military has formal procedures for honoring outstanding bravery through decorations (Rusch 2022). Modern wars have a significant impact on the understanding of heroism, potentially changing the current concept of heroism and leading to a metamorphosis of traditional definitions of heroism. Stice points out that "the contradictory nature of heroism is precisely what makes it compelling. Heroism is a social attribution, never a personal one; yet the act itself is often a solitary, existential choice. It is historically, culturally and situationally determined, thus heroes of one era may prove to be villains in another time when controverting evidence emerges; yet some heroes endure across the centuries. Moreover, the very same act accorded hero status in one group, such as suicide bombing, is absolutely abhorrent to many others" (Stice 2023).

### *Review of the literature on the concepts of hero and heroism*

The ever-increasing human awareness of catastrophic and existential threats, such as a global pandemic, out-of-control artificial intelligence, and nuclear war, has contributed to a growing number of studies on the phenomenon of heroism. Over the past decade, these studies have become more empirical in nature. The study of the phenomenon of heroism has become a scientific field involving neuroimaging, behavioral decision measures, Large-N analyses of archive data, and promising first attempts at simulating high-stakes decision contexts in virtual reality (Rusch 2022). For this study, conducted in the field of social psychology and psycholinguistics, the works that emphasize the constructivist processes of social perception and understanding of heroism are of interest. Goethals and Allison (2012) argue that people identify a hero when a person's cognitive schema contains structured sets of concepts of heroism, and when knowledge about the hero's traits, actions, and behavioral patterns is sufficiently consistent with that schema. Then, in accordance with the principles of schematic perception of the whole image, the cognitive construction of the heroes involves the process of filling in the missing fragments in accordance with the principles of Gestalt psychology. In this case, the mental construction and formation of heroes takes place in response to important physical, emotional, and existential needs of a person (Goethals, Allison 2012). The main postulates of this theory were used as an analytical basis for the study of heroic leadership during the Russo-Ukrainian war. Thus, Zachara-Szymańska (2023) focused on the mechanisms of personification of heroism and villainy in this conflict. The researcher argues that Volodymyr Zelenskyy is perceived as

a hero not only because his behavior fits the description of heroism, but “also because he addresses the vital need of a public longing for a noble cause” (Zachara-Szymańska 2023). The personality of Volodymyr Zelenskyy is internationally identified with the mental construction of heroism, where heroism is not limited to personal qualities, but becomes an ideological and emotional platform for interaction and mobilization. Spector (Spector 2023) calls for a critical assessment of the heroicizing of Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The researcher points to the contradiction between the presentation of Zelenskyy as a heroic leader and the deep distrust of any notion of heroic leadership within the theory of critical leadership. The proponents of critical leadership point to the potential danger of transformation of the acknowledgement of the hero’s merits into worship in a situation where critical evaluation recedes into the background. In this case, “such worshipfulness all too easily becomes a kind of ‘great man’ theory of leadership” (Spector 2023).

Considering the ongoing war on the territory of Ukraine and the situation when a large part of the population is involved in active hostilities or lives in the combat zone, it is necessary to mention scientific research on military heroism. The works of Rusch (2013; 2022), Nawata (2019), Störmer (Rusch, Störmer 2015) are focused on the study of the social functions of the awards for valor in the United States Armed Forces in relation to heroic behavior in war. A study of a sample of World War II veterans found that Medal of Honor recipients go on to achieve greater success throughout life. Higher levels of self-rated leadership, loyalty, and risk-taking were found among combat-decorated soldiers when the responses of American World War II veterans with no combat decorations were compared with those who had been awarded the Bronze Star, Silver Star, Distinguished Service Cross, or Medal of Honor. Stein and his colleagues (2020) conducted a series of surveys of Israeli Yom Kippur War veterans. Long-term health monitoring of military personnel with combat awards suggests that decorated veterans are more resistant to post-traumatic effects. Content analysis of written materials left by Japanese kamikaze pilots demonstrates that these pilots considered suicide noble and justified in protecting their country from external threat (Orbell, Morikawa 2011).

Based on the model of an ideal junior officer in the British Army during World War I, Stice 2023 develops four main ideas in his study: 1) the concept of heroism enables to unite several types of deeds of courage or bravery, which have been considered in the literature for the most part independently of each other; 2) there are multiple components to the definition of heroism—the risk inherent in prosocial behavior cannot be the sole and undisputed component in the concept of heroism; 3) heroism is not the same as pro-social behavior motivated by compassion and altruism; 4) approaching heroism solely as prosocial behavior provides a simplistic view and omits important (and sometimes negative) aspects of the phenomenon. In the next study on the concept of heroism, Stanley and colleagues (Stanley, Shepherd, Kay 2023) conceptualize the hero label as a widely held positive stereotype. They examine the possible consequences of attributing this label to military veterans. Drawing on the theory of positive stereotypes, the study demonstrates that the “hero” label, while intended to honor military veterans, may exacerbate the employment problems veterans face during the transition to civilian employment. The discrepancy between the heroic status of military veterans and their high levels of unemployment and underemployment is the result of attributing to them such stereotypical heroic qualities as selflessness and

orientation to the needs of others. This leads to a situation in the labor market in which veterans are offered a limited number of relatively low-paid jobs related to selflessness, i.e., “the overwhelmingly positive public sentiment toward military veterans has not always materialized into tangible benefits” (Stanley, Shepherd, Kay 2023).

It is also worth mentioning the experience gained in the application of psycholinguistic research methods to the study of the concept of heroism. For example, Keczer and colleagues (2016) modeled social perceptions of everyday heroism and heroism in crisis and extreme situations by mapping them as freely associative networks. Findings showed that social representation of everyday heroism is more centralized and cannot be divided into smaller units. The social representation of heroism in crisis and extreme situations was divided into five subgroups. The attributes of these subgroups shifted from abstract characteristics to specific examples, such as references to social roles and professions. In tracing the changing perceptions of heroism, the researchers concluded that the structures of these networks show a moderate degree of similarity, but when they mapped the social perceptions of everyday heroism, the connections between the associations were more explicit.

The primary hypothesis of this study is that an individual’s interpretations of heroic behavior may act as an indicator of their likelihood to demonstrate particular manifestations of such behavior. The focus of this study is on the social perceptions of heroes and heroism during the period of the Russian-Ukrainian war as perceived by military youth in Ukraine who are in the process of obtaining higher military education. This study aims to identify the behavioral tendencies military students may display in extreme situations, as influenced by their perception of heroic behavior. The present study adopts a behaviorist approach to the conceptualization of heroism as an extreme form of prosocial behavior. The following attributes are associated with this category: orientation towards helping other people as well as supporting socially approved ideals or new social norms; performance without coercion and without seeking personal gain (even in a military context, heroism remains an act that goes beyond the actions required by military duty); association with a significant amount of risk and requires self-sacrifice; and relation to the awareness of the potential risks/costs (Stice 2023).

## Materials and Methods

This research focuses on studying social perceptions, i.e., ideas, opinions, and attitudes shared by social groups about social objects (Buhagiar, Sammut 2020). To ensure the authenticity of the responses obtained, the study employed the psycholinguistic research method, with a particular focus on a free association experiment. In the domain of psycholinguistics, experimental methods hold the potential to foster a safe environment wherein individuals can articulate their thoughts and opinions without the concern of facing criticism or derision from their peers. This is facilitated by the anonymity and confidentiality that such methods provide, ensuring that the respondents’ personal identities and feelings remain hidden from the audience (Khraban 2022). This consideration assumes particular relevance in a military setting. Moreover, the outcomes of the association

experiment correspond to the real thoughts and sentiments expressed by the respondents. The associative experiment was conducted in October 2023. During the research and preparation stages of the current article, the relevant ethical requirements were adhered to. Specifically, the Code of Ethics of the International Sociological Association<sup>1</sup> and the Code of Professional Ethics of the Sociological Association of Ukraine<sup>2</sup> were consulted. The participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. The military administrative authorities duly granted the necessary authorization for the study to proceed. All participants were involved in the study on a voluntary basis. Also, participants could withdraw from the study at any time. The study involved students of Kruty Heroes Military Institute of Telecommunications and Information Technology—48 fourth-year military students in the rank of private (n 46,2%) and 56 fifth-year students in the rank of junior lieutenant (n 53,8%). The respondents were divided by specialty: 24 respondents (n 23,1%) were studying Computer Science, 22 (n 21,1%) were studying Cybersecurity and Information Security, 19 (n 18,3%) were studying Information Systems and Technologies, and 39 (n 37,5%) were studying Electronic Communications and Radio Engineering. The respondents are between 19 and 25 years old (mean age 21,8); 93 (n 89,4%) are men and 11 (n 10,6%) are women. The participants were selected based on the following criteria: the students had to be free of any commitments during the designated time span of the experiment and willing to participate. During the free association experiment, the following instruction was offered to the respondents: “Look at the stimulus word and quickly, without hesitation, write any word that comes to mind on the answer sheet. You have two minutes to complete this task.” We chose the stimulus word “hero” for the psycholinguistic experiment.

To process the results, we used reflective thematic analysis (TA), a qualitative research method of data analysis that involves one’s own interpretation to select codes and build themes (Braun, Clarke 2023), and even in cases where there is a lack of prior research to draw on, it allows valuable conclusions to be drawn and new hypotheses to be generated (Michelen et al. 2024). TA represents an effective and widely utilized method of analyzing qualitative data. TA is a methodology employed to analyze qualitative data with the aim of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting its meaning through a systematic process of code generation that culminates in the development of themes (Ayton, Tsindos, Berkovic 2023). TA possesses several salient characteristics that render it particularly well suited for the purposes of this study. These include adaptability to different research contexts and compatibility with various theoretical frameworks (Fuchs 2023); the existence of a structured framework for organizing and interpreting qualitative data (Neuendorf 2018); and the iterative nature of thematic analysis, which helps to understand data dynamically and evolutionarily, facilitating the search for multiple layers of meaning (Christou 2023). The present study employed the six-phase TA process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2023). The preliminary phase of the process entails a comprehensive familiarization with the data set, which can only be achieved through an extensive immersion in the content. This process requires meticulous reading and re-reading of data, comprehensive note-taking,

<sup>1</sup> International Sociological Association. Retrieved October 27, 2023, from [http://www.isa-sociology.org/about/isa\\_code\\_of\\_ethics.htm](http://www.isa-sociology.org/about/isa_code_of_ethics.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Website of the Sociological Association of Ukraine. Retrieved October 27, 2023, from <https://sau.in.ua/>.

and preliminary observation, all of which contribute to the development of a comprehensive understanding of the nuances and subtleties inherent in the subject. The second phase of the thematic analysis involves the systematic coding of noteworthy features, patterns, or ideas that emerge from the qualitative data. The present study employs a dual coding approach, whereby manual and inductive coding are carried out in parallel. The latter is organized and managed using NVivo 8 qualitative analysis software.<sup>3</sup> In the third phase of the analysis, the codes that are found to be similar are grouped together into themes. In the fourth phase, the final determination is made regarding the selection of topics to be presented and the relationship between these topics and the central objective of the research. In the fifth phase of the analysis, the results of the coding are subjected to critical reflection to identify the key characteristics and boundaries of each theme. In the sixth stage, the final report will be prepared. The identified topics will be combined into a logical, consistent, and concise presentation.

This study is subject to the same limitations as other qualitative research that deals with the symbolism embedded in textual materials. Symbolism offers a vast array of potential for interpretation, underscoring the necessity for an exhaustive and meticulous examination of familiar concepts to achieve a comprehensive understanding of their underlying meanings. As a result, it is frequently unattainable to determine the precise meaning of symbolic material, to attain complete contextual understanding, and consequently, to identify essential categories (Yadav 2022). This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that the respondents provided their answers in their native languages, which are Ukrainian and Russian. The translation process might have failed to capture the nuances and contextual meanings that respondents originally attached to the associations. A significant weakness of thematic analysis as a qualitative research method is its inherently interpretive nature, whereby the identification and analysis of themes are contingent upon the particular viewpoint of the researcher. This subjectivity can give rise to discrepancies in analysis, whereby different researchers may identify disparate themes within the same dataset.

## Results and Discussions

Table 1 summarizes the results of the coding and development of themes based on associations to the stimulus word “hero.”

The associations that were obtained with the stimulus word “hero” were grouped into four themes: “Archetypal Hero,” “Prototypical Hero,” “Prosocial Hero,” and “Everyday Hero.” It is important to acknowledge the intersections among these four thematic groups. As the coding process unfolded, it became evident that single associations could be interpreted as indicative of either one group or the other. This fact lends further corroboration to the findings of Kinsella and her colleagues (Kinsella, English, McMahon 2020). Researchers argue that the concept of heroism is characterized by ambiguity and complexity, and as with many other commonplace concepts, it proves challenging to articulate with a straightforward, definitional approach. Attempts to develop an exacting coding of heroism, whereby each association can be definitively assigned to a single

<sup>3</sup> QSR NVivo 8.0. Retrieved October 14, 2023, from <https://qsr-nvivo.software.informer.com/8.0/>.

Table 1

**Coding and development of themes on the material associations to the stimulus word “hero”**

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Examples of associations
Archetypal Hero	deeds beyond the capabilities of an ordinary person; sacrifice of life to achieve a goal; promotion of high moral values	superpowers; self-sacrifice; wisdom; love; rebel; unique talent	Lover (1), legend (1), thief (1), hero (1), wisdom (1), winner (1), model (2), luck (3), superhero (2), cape (2), smart (1), creator (1), fairy tale (1), luck (1), Joker (1), Ryan Gosling (1), Anton Chygyr (1), Titan (1), love (1), fighter (1), horror (1), gladiator (1), honor (1), desire (1), God (1), savior (2), pain (1), self-sacrifice (6), glory (5), hand (1), not me (1), history (1), single (1), rescue (3), salvation (5), goal (1), victory (5), superpowers (1), deeds (2), money (1), road (1), fear (3), death (12), handsome (1), special (2), beauty (1), Thor (1), Stalin (1), cool (1), David (1), Hercules (2), strength (2), well done (1)
Prototypical Hero	inner, personal qualities that are truly heroic; leadership	determination; courage; moral integrity; perseverance; justice	Courage (7), honor (6), strong (5), determination (2), justice (18), honest (6), indomitable (1), virtues (1), frantic (7), historical (1), manliness (5), guts (3), lone warrior (1), strength of spirit (1), hero (4), perfection (3), independent (1), belief in success (1), cunning (1), achievement (2), outstanding (2), powerful (2), movie (1), book (1), revolution (1), city (1), Mickey Mouse (1), Dorian Gray (1), Marvel heroes (1), Captain America (1), confidence (2), character (1), bravery (8), heroism (1), leader (3), example (1), team (1)
Prosocial Hero	altruistic behavior; having a social and emotional connection with other people; empathy	responsivity; kindness; humanism; benevolence; selflessness; generosity	Sacrifice (2), friend (3), loyalty (1), needed (1), soul (1), kind soul (1), good (3), love (9), trust (1), faithful (1), sincerity (1), kindness (1), the one who doesn't pass by, pretending not to notice a person in need (1), crossing the street for an old lady (1), thinking of people who need help (1), kindness (1), putting someone's interests above your own (1)
Everyday Hero	durability; ordinariness; inconspicuousness	work; military service; resilience; volunteerism	Volunteer (1), war (12), defender (3), patriot (1), Ukrainian (1), veteran (1), pensioner (1), warrior (2), serviceman (6), Ukraine (8), soldier (1), work (1), heroine (1), man (1), people (3), Azov (1), fighter (1), blockader (1), Bakhmut (4), call sign “Thunder,” Armed Forces of Ukraine (1), Zaluzhnyi (1), ATO (1), Azovstal (1), military (6), Kyiv Drive (1), doctor (3), man (4), flag (1), inspiration (1), savior (1), respect (4), recognition (1), duty (1), special forces (1), me (1)

group, encounter significant impediments due to the inherent nature of heroism as a mental and social construct (Wundrack 2019; Allison, Goethals 2010). The rationale behind this phenomenon pertains to the manner in which individuals ascribe the label of “hero” to a particular individual, and their subjective interpretation of what it means to be a hero. Rather than adhering to a rigid, objective standard in which the actions of an individual are meticulously evaluated for their heroism, the prevailing tendency is to place greater emphasis on the personal, subjective perceptions of heroism (Allison, Green 2020). Therefore, it is inaccurate to consider the thematic groups identified in this study to be exclusive of one another. In accordance with this supposition and with the objective of eradicating bias, associations that satisfied the criteria of more than one group were assigned uniformly across groups.

The content of the “Archetypal Hero” theme shows that the archetype of the hero is well known and widespread in the military subculture, and provides a ready-made basis for identifying heroes. The phenomenon of archetypalization implies that some respondents rely on collective experience in the recognition of heroes. Jung (1969) views the idea of collective experience in the following way: “There are as many archetypes as there are typical situations in life. Endless repetition has engraved these experiences into our psychic constitution, not in the form of images filled with content, but ... only as forms without content, representing merely the possibility of a certain type of perception and action” (Jung 1969). Jung believed that the part of the psyche called “the collective unconscious” was a repository of latent or potential images based on human evolutionary history. These latent images are archetypes. When Jung spoke of latent or potential images, he meant that they are not realized at first. They can be activated when the experience sufficiently corresponds to one of them (Jung 1969). The dominance of collective mental forms in the minds of some respondents leads them to identify as a hero a person who, overcoming natural fear or without much effort, performs deeds that go beyond the capabilities of an ordinary person and are unattainable for others (*fear, superhero, superpowers*). The implication of this distinction is that one cannot demand that all people act like heroes, so heroism is not an obligation (*not me*). This approach is indicative of the psychological unpreparedness of some members of the military to commit acts that go beyond the actions required by military service. However, the attraction of some respondents to the Archetypal Hero cannot be explained by the mere dominance of collective mental forms in the consciousness of the respondents. It is our belief that in a war situation, military personnel need more than ever the idea of a great hero sacrificing his life for a great cause (*horror, death, pain, self-sacrifice*). Drawing on certain archetypes is a reaction to a realization of one’s own mortality. To overcome paralyzing fear or horror, a person seeks social significance. In this respect, the Hero archetype provides a reasonable, ordered, and sustainable concept of the sense of living. Furthermore, the Hero archetype is based on the belief that those who fight to establish high moral values can overcome death.

Since our consciousness is filled with an infinite number of archetypal patterns (Jung 1969), respondents may be attracted to a particular Hero archetype. Among many latent archetypes, respondents prefer and select those objects, people, and experiences that match their worldview principles. This indicates the affective or emotional valence of the archetypes. We found that the closest and most attractive archetypes for the respondents were: Classic Hero, who stands out from other people because of his unique talents or abilities (*cloak, hero, Titan, Gladiator, fame*), Rebel, who has a strong sense of justice and refuses to accept the existing state of affairs and can act as an anti-hero (*Joker, Anton Chigurh, Ryan Gosling*), Lover (*lover, love, happiness, fairy tale*), Mentor/Sage (*wisdom, intelligence, God, Creator*).

The associations united in the Prototypical Hero group represent “contextspecific, multidimensional fuzzy sets of attributes” (Hogg 2001) that best reflect the idea of an archetype. However, although prototypes are similar to archetypes, there is a difference. In the case of the archetypal approach, the hero is identified through the scenario of the feat in the story of struggle and victory, and in the case of the prototypical approach, the hero is identified through the taxonomy of personal traits (*honest, indomitable, virtues,*

*frantic, guts, lone warrior, strength of spirit, independent, belief in success, cunning, outstanding*). The associations of the Prototypical Hero group (*movie, book, Mickey Mouse, Dorian Gray, Marvel heroes, Captain America*) indicate that a significant number of heroes came to us from comic books, television, or movies. Fictional characters have well-defined characteristics, with fewer flaws and weaknesses than real people. This makes them particularly prototypical and recognizable. The respondents highlighted determination, courage, moral integrity, bravery, conviction, and justice as the most prototypical heroic traits. Thus, some respondents who use the prototypical approach define a hero as a person who possesses the best human virtues and acts to uphold important moral and ethical values. Such heroes can be a source of motivation and focus for both achievement and right action (Goethals, Allison 2012). The importance of the Prototypical Hero for the military is likely to be the commonality it has with the concept of military leadership. The attraction to the Prototypical Hero in the military environment can be explained in terms of the need to identify with another person who is an example of efficiency. This is done in an attempt to become more like him (Khraban 2024).

The associations included into the Prosocial Hero group reflect respondents' perceptions of a hero who exhibits developed traits of mercy and compassion and for whom a sense of social and emotional connection with other people is important (*sacrifice, friend, loyalty, needed, soul, kind soul, kind, loving, trusting, faithful, sincere*). At the same time, heroism is correlated with altruism and empathy, which are defined as "an emotional state induced by the situation of another person, internalization (assimilation) of norms dictating acting on behalf of others, such as the norm of reciprocity, the norm of love for people, the norm of social responsibility, as well as building personal bonds, for example, friendship and sympathy, and treating another person as an autonomous value" (Kohen, Langdon, Riches 2017). In wartime emergencies, the trigger for action is an impulsive reaction caused by the influence of socialization and upbringing that compels response (Kohen, Langdon, Riches 2017). The associations united in the Prosocial Hero group can be considered an objective indicator of a respondent group's prosocial and altruistic behavior. It can be argued that the behavior of respondents whose associations belong to the Prosocial Hero group in an emergency will be closer to "fulfillment of the following conditions: recognition of a (someone else's) need, recognition that this need can be met, recognition of one's own responsibility, and assessment of the costs of assistance" (Bodziany, Kałużny 2021). The phenomenon of prosocial and altruistic behavior should be considered in its coherence with the specifics of the armed forces. Bodziany and Kałużny (2021) note that this behavior "reveals all desirable characteristics for such a specific institution as the Armed Forces. The requirements placed on soldiers described not only in the codes of honor of various armed forces but also in the regulations and instructions, give altruism an institutional character. That is underpinned by the need to shape disinterestedness, cooperation, and mutual assistance, which are essential in military action and beyond. That means that altruism (although not literally) is or at least should be a feature of every soldier. It also results from the mere availability to the public and the constitutional duties of the state." The Everyday Hero grouping shows that during the war, the "everyday hero" is a person who does not have any exceptional qualities or abilities, and whose actions often go unnoticed because they are not considered to be performed in critical circumstances, since the circumstances are

long-term and become commonplace (*Ukraine, veteran, pensioner, Ukraine, man, people, Azov, blockade, Bakhmut, Azovstal, doctor, man*). We can identify local contexts in which everyday heroism manifests and define specific characteristics of a hero by coding associations into categories such as “work,” “military service,” “resilience,” and “volunteering.” The immediate physical danger to which all residents of Ukraine are exposed, the efforts of the civilian population to survive the war, and the mass mobilization undertaken by the armed forces create conditions under which the concepts of “hero” and “heroism” take on a national character. Respondents’ awareness that they are dealing with a critical situation involving ordinary people, and that the way out does not necessarily require exceptional moral qualities or skills, can be a source of inspiration and motivation to realize their own potential for heroic behavior. It can be assumed that respondents who have a preference for everyday heroism may be more successful in terms of stress adaptation and maintaining their mental and emotional well-being in difficult and negative situations.

### Conclusions

This qualitative research suggests that there is a strong relationship between our attraction to certain concepts of heroes and heroism and our behavior in critical situations. Identifying the idea of heroism that dominates consciousness provides a ready basis for both identifying a person’s personal qualities and predicting their behavior in situations of increased risk and danger. In the military environment, within the framework of the formation of specific values and the acquisition of traits that are part of the culture of the armed forces, the promotion of certain concepts of the hero and heroism should be considered as the most important direction for the solution of problems of adaptation to military service, preservation of mental and emotional well-being in difficult and negative situations.

The findings presented in this article can be used as a starting point for studying patterns of behavior in critical situations. Quantitative research can develop tools for measurement and testing of the conception proposed in this qualitative study. Moreover, the application of other different approaches and methods of data collection for qualitative research can contribute to understanding the effectiveness of the use of psychological resources related to work and survival in critical situations.

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