

Imagine a hero. A hero of any race or gender, ability, era, any nationality, status or of any belief system. What defines them? Heroes throughout time have been fundamentally different, from Joan of Arc to Malcolm X: every hero has different objectives, different methods, different demeanors and purposes, but they all have one common trait: courage. Whether that be the courage to take responsibility of a situation, stand up to an oppressive force, risk one's life, or express oneself, heroes have the courage to live by their beliefs and truths.

Courage is thought to mean the ability to face a fear and is often thought to be interchangeable with the word *bravery*, but courage is very different from bravery. It is the ability to be true to oneself, especially when that means facing one's fear. The word "brave" originates from the Spanish word *bravo*, which is an expression of approval over another person's action or performance. This creates a dependence of the action on the audience because the audience's approval of the action is what allows the action to be brave. This means that the source of the bravery, the source of facing one's fear, is motivated by the desire of the approval of others. However, the ability to sincerely face one's fear because one believes it is right to do so, this is to be courageous. The root of "courage" is *coer*, the Latin word for heart. Courage relies on the heart, one's inner strength; it has no ulterior motives and exists without the approval of others; to be courageous is to have an inner strength that is stronger than one's fears. Although courage exists without the approval of others, it does not need to lack the approval of others, the distinction being that the approval of others is not the source of the courage. This is what distinguishes a hero: heroes live by their beliefs, whether their beliefs and actions are approved of or not. This means that a hero does not need to be considered a hero to be one, because their actions may not be approved of; in fact, it takes courage to act or speak to one's beliefs that are not approved of or supported.

Since courage is to act on one's sincere truths and beliefs, especially when difficult, courage is the action of truth. Gandhi once said, "To believe in something and not to live it, is dishonest." To believe one's belief, but not accept that one's belief is not as strong as the fear that rivals the belief, is to be dishonest to oneself. The difference in believing one's truth and living one's truth is the courage to do so. The writer Ambrose Redmoon once wrote that, "[Courage] is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear." A courageous act is a risk, not to be confused with fearlessness.

Fear is a state of mind. It is instinctual; to be courageous is to choose one's belief over one's fear. If one is fearless, one's actions pose no instinctual dilemma, thus no act is a moral or psychological challenge. The fear forces one to test one's beliefs, to prioritize. To commit an act of courage is an act of personal truth; there is nothing more telling about one's character than the beliefs that one would take a risk for. Courage is the action that propels one out a state of fear. Fear is the instinct that has protected the human species. Fear is an instinctual response to what we perceive to be dangerous. Fear, or what we feel when we sense danger, is triggered by two parts of the brain: the amygdala and the hypothalamus. The amygdala operates emotions and signals the hypothalamus; the hypothalamus activates the sympathetic nervous systems, which releases adrenalin into the bloodstream and triggers the fight-or-flight response. The fight-or-flight response is the physical reaction to fear; it is the adrenalin pumping in one's bloodstream that gives one energy and causes one to feel as though one must fight or flight. This system of sensing fear and immediately responding has helped the human species survive. Since the human species is sensitive to danger, it is more wary of danger and, subsequently, more likely to survive.

Fear is caused by anticipation of a harmful outcome. In her Ted Talk about how fear is a form of storytelling, *What Fear Can Teach Us*, the fiction writer, Karen Thompson, states, “If we think of our fears as more than just fears but as stories, we should think of ourselves as the authors of those stories. But just as importantly, we need to think of ourselves as the readers of our fears, and how we choose to read our fears can have a profound effect on our lives.” Fear helps us see into the future and imagine an outcome, creating a fiction of the future. The outcome of our fiction is based on stories we have been told or past experiences, both of which can be reliable and unreliable sources. For example, if one’s first encounter with a dog is that of a monstrous creature—with shiny, sharp teeth, and a piercing bark—that lunges at anyone who dare walk past, one would be afraid of dogs and become wary of future encounters with dogs because one remembers their past experiences. Or, if one has never encountered a dog, but has only been told stories about dogs who are monstrous creatures—with shiny, sharp teeth, and piercing barks—that lunge at anyone who dare walk past, one would be afraid of dogs and be wary of future encounters with dogs because one remembers the stories one has been told and took those stories as truth. In both scenarios, one is afraid of dogs because one imagines that the outcome of an encounter with a dog is that one is mauled or bitten. The anticipation created by imagination causes one to be afraid and cautious. But, as Thompson points out, these are just stories we have told ourselves, and if we can see them as stories, we can see that their endings are not truths. These foreseen outcomes give us perspective and help us make decisions.

The anticipation of an imagined outcome that causes fear, though distressing, is an extraordinary ability that can be used to help one make decisions and be courageous. If one can move past the adrenalin rush caused by fear and face the imagined outcomes as possibilities, then one can see a decision more clearly than if one was deciding, with no concept of an outcome. For example, I am terrified of speaking in public about my art. It is a very vulnerable experience for me that opens up the possibility that I can be judged or rejected, a possibility that would not exist if I, or my artwork, were unnoticed. But, I love making art and I know that making art in private or keeping it a secret is impractical and limits my options as a student and an artist. I can use my fear of speaking about my art to see the outcomes I am afraid of: I am afraid of my art being judged and rejected by others. Now that I can see this fear, I can decide if I would rather secretly make art or not make art at all, or to make art with the possibility of someone disliking it. When I can see that the worst outcome is simply someone or some people disliking my work, then the decision to make and present my work is simple. Fear, though overwhelming, can be used to see possible outcomes and help one decide what is important.

Courage cannot exist without fear. Without fear, there would be no decision. People would act without precaution, unknowing of the future and unable to imagine a negative outcome. Fear gives one perspective about a situation and about oneself. Courage is the decision to act, born from the perspective that fear gives. There are two different types of courage: physical courage and psychological courage. Physical courage is courage that “responds to a fear of death or physical harm.” This courage is the more easily recognized because it is the type of courage associated with soldiers off to battle, or firefighters charging into a burning building or even protesters at a rally. Physical courage can manifest in the act to risk one’s life, or to stand up to a bully; both, though of differing degree of physical danger, are examples of physical courage.

There are many people throughout history who have exemplified tremendous physical courage. For example, Harriet Tubman. She was born a slave in 1820; her birth name was Araminta Ross. She changed her first name to Harriet, after her mother, and her last to Tubman, after marrying John Tubman in 1844. In 1849, she risked her life when she ran away on foot

from Maryland to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania by following the North Star. A year after her escape, she returned to help her sister and nieces escape. She later helped her brother and two other men escape from the South and began her career as an Underground Railroad conductor. She escorted over three hundred slaves to freedom and made nineteen trips to the South. Not only did she actively put herself in danger each time she went to the South, but there was a forty-thousand dollar reward for her capture. She was in danger, at risk of being killed or captured, since running away. To risk her life again and again for her convictions, to save people she had never met before, is an extreme act of courage.

Physical courage is much more profound when one's acts are unsupported or one is safe, but takes the risk to not be. Physical courage is often associated with being faced with death, for example, the courage a soldier exemplifies when he or she marches into battle, he or she is in a situation where they must face death. Yet Tubman chose to return to the South when she could have stayed in the North, where she was much safer. This kind of courage, is stronger than that of one who is faced with death because there is no immediate ultimatum and there is no clear answer. For a soldier, the choice is to charge into battle and face death immediately, which is thought to be the courageous choice, or to retreat, which is thought to be cowardly. Tubman not only chose to face death and live by her convictions when she could have stayed North, but there was no clear action to take. She is seen as a hero now, but she was also wanted by the state; her choice was not popular or seen as *right* at the time as the decision a soldier makes by charging into battle would be popularly seen as *right*. The courage she demonstrated, to do what she felt was right, even when it risked her life, was unsupported by many. That depicts extreme inner strength.

There are common misconceptions of physical courage and the difference between physical courage and physical bravery. Putting oneself in danger or risking one's life are not inherently acts of physical courage. In fact, putting oneself in danger or risking one's life can often be done out of fear or peer pressure. For example, in 2001 a study compared the fatalities of American firefighters to those of the UK, which showed that per a hundred thousand workers, the fatality rate for American firefighters was three times higher than in the UK. This has been attributed to what is called the "duty-to-die syndrome." This syndrome was discovered by psychologists who analyzed the unnecessary deaths of firefighters in America. It is the syndrome that makes firefighters feel obligated to take unnecessary risks to fulfill the cultural concept of what a firefighter should be. Rather than simply putting out fires and saving lives when needed, the image of a firefighter is to be aggressively strong and masculine. According to Fire Chief Brian Crawford, who discovered the "duty-to-die-syndrome," the culture of firefighting promotes "the mentality that, 'We've got to live up to this image of this macho firefighter, and we've got to go in every fire; we can't fight it from the outside or it's going to make us look weak.'" Being perceived as "weak" drives the actions and methods of firefighting before all else. The idea of heroically marching into the fire is more influential than the fact that one is potentially marching to one's death. Firefighters who are affected by this syndrome are not acting out of courage, but something closer to bravery because they are facing their fears in hopes of the approval of others, motivated by the pressure of fulfilling this concept for others and their own concept of what they should be... a pressure so strong that one would inadvertently die for it.

Psychological courage, though more complex and less culturally recognized as courage, is equally courageous to physical courage. Psychological courage "responds to a fear of loss of ethical integrity or authenticity. [Psychological courage] addresses fear of psychic instability or

loss of self. It involves us in facing our irrational fears and anxieties, ranging from bad habits and compulsions to phobias." Psychological courage is not the fear one feels when faced with a physical challenge, it is the courage to face a non-physically threatening fear. It requires one to be true with oneself, to recognize and address one's fear. Examples of this are: the courage it takes to follow one's dream or one's heart, to sincerely apologize or tell the truth in a difficult situation, or to self-advocate or advocate for others. Since courage is more commonly associated with physical courage, like firefighters and soldiers, it is difficult to expand one's definition of courage past those iconic images. When one is acting without the support of others, when one's actions are not recognized, it is even more difficult to continue. The fact that one usually acts alone when one commits an act of psychological courage, without others understanding why, makes the act more difficult and more courageous. This kind of courage combats fears that are not physically dangerous, like the fear of rejection, failure or loneliness. Simplified: psychological courage is to face an emotionally vulnerable situation.

Psychological courage is shown in many ways, one of which is speaking one's truth. One example is Augusten Burroughs. He was born in 1965, to the name Chris Robinson, but wrote under the name Augusten Burroughs. He wrote excruciatingly personal and revealing memoirs about himself and his family, including *Wolf at the Table*, *Dry*, and *Running with Scissors*. In *Wolf at the Table*, Burroughs exposes that his father was an abusive alcoholic, that his brother was terrible to him throughout their childhood, and that his mother was unstable to the extent that she relied on her psychiatrist to take care of him and too self absorbed to take action when he was molested at the age of thirteen. Though it was a great literary success, his work had various personal repercussions, including the falling out between Burroughs and his mother; before the book was published, they talked more than once a day, but now have not spoken for years. She later published a memoir of her own that greatly differed from the story that Burroughs tells. He risked relationships with his family by publishing his truth, as well as exposing himself to the public. In a society where vulnerability, especially male vulnerability, is seen as a weakness, the publication of this book, of a man being vulnerable, is extremely courageous...beyond the tremendous courage it took to risk one's relationships. There were no guarantees that the book would be successful, that his family would forgive him, or that anyone would accept him with his flaws completely exposed. He risked all of that; he faced loneliness, failure, and judgment to speak his truth; a true example of courage.

Not only did he risk the love of his family, the success of his book, and exposing his personal past, but by publishing the book, he came out as a victim of sexual and psychological abuse. This takes a tremendous amount of courage. All forms of abuse leave lasting psychological effects, which make it difficult to be truthful with oneself about the situation one is in. According to *Hidden Hurt*, a domestic abuse information center, "Many abuse survivors say it takes them longer to come to terms and get over the emotional abuse than the physical abuse, the violent episodes. Being in an abusive relationship can knock your sense of self and your self-confidence right down, until you barely know who you are any more, it can rob you of your ability to trust or to make even simple decisions, it can leave you doubting your own judgment and gut reaction." When one is dealing with the serious effects of abuse, it is very hard to break free from the mental state one is in, to be honest with oneself about who one is, the situation one was in or is in currently. After coming out of a situation where one is abused, being able to deal with this abuse, to recognize it, write about it, and publish it publicly is a huge step for a victim of abuse. Burroughs exemplifies tremendous psychological courage by being truthful with himself and others about an extremely painful topic.

Like physical courage, there are many misconceptions about psychological courage and the difference between psychological courage and psychological bravery. For example, public apologies from politicians, like Bill Clinton, or from celebrities, like Lance Armstrong, are difficult to give and extremely vulnerable. But, they come expected to the public. There is no way of knowing whether these people apologized because they felt it necessary to take responsibility for their actions, or if they were required to apologize by a publicist, perhaps an apology they did not even write. Since publicists and brand consultants curate the personalities of public figures, it is impossible to tell if a public figure is genuinely being themselves or if their actions have been decided for them. The very fact that public figures are acting based on the instructions of others, on what they *should* do, teaches us that we should only do the right thing if someone is watching. It doesn't teach us that we should be responsible, vulnerable, or honest as a way of living; if public figures were responsible, vulnerable, and honest, they would not need a publicist to decide their actions. There probably would not be as many scandals to apologize for.

Though it is difficult and often painful to be courageous, it is far more harming not to be. If Harriet Tubman had not had the courage to run away, she would have been a slave for her entire life and her siblings and nieces or the other three hundred people would have lived their lives as slaves as well. If Augusten Burroughs had never written or published his memoirs, he would have lived his whole life with his family never knowing how he felt, without ever allowing himself to realize his past, thus never realizing who he is. Courageous acts have ended in failure, in death, in humiliation, and hurt. But, to act without courage is to never take a risk, to never be true to oneself, to never believe stronger than one fears, to allow one's fear to conquer oneself. Everyone has faced situations where the options were: to be or not to be courageous. Everyone has the power and opportunity to choose. The modern-day philosopher and linguist, Noam Chomsky, once said that, "Passivity may be the easy course, but it is hardly the honorable one." Though it may seem that to be passive is to not be involved, to be passive, to not choose, is to not choose bravery. Passivity is the opposite of bravery; passivity is cowardice. Passivity and cowardice have greater consequences than imaginable.

Cowardice and passivity can result in fatal consequences. In March of 1964, Catherine Genovese was stalked and murdered while returning home to Kew Gardens, an apartment complex in Queens. There were thirty-eight witnesses, some of whom knew her, in the apartment buildings surrounding the murder; thirty-eight law-abiding citizens watched as a woman was murdered and thirty-eight people did not call the police. She was attacked three times in a thirty-five minute period and, according to the Assistant Chief Inspector, Frederick M. Lussen, "If we had been called when he first attacked, the woman might not be dead now." Even after hearing her cries for help, no one helped. One of the witnesses confessed they "didn't want to get involved," another stated that they "thought it was a lovers' quarrel... Frankly, we were afraid." Too afraid to simply make a phone call without even leaving the safety of their home? This bewildering case is that of an incomparable passivity. Though the witnesses were safe inside and would not have put themselves in danger by calling the police, they would rather watch a woman, a neighbor, be murdered. The extreme passivity and lack of bravery of all of these people is attributed to "the bystander effect," or "bystander apathy," a psychological phenomenon developed by psychologists John Darley and Bibb Latané. The bystander effect causes bystanders of a situation to internally divide responsibility between themselves and the other bystanders. Since there are others around, they feel less responsible and are less inclined to help. As Patrick Markey puts it, an Associate Professor of Psychology at Villanova University, "This is the idea that when more people are around, we kind of feel like 'well, it's not my job to

help. There's all these other people. There's 12 other people I see, why should I help?' And the problem is this is going on in everyone else's head." This psychological phenomenon demonstrates how quickly we are able to refuse responsibility and blame others, instead of communicating or taking responsibility as a witness. The case of Catherine Genovese is an extreme case of passivity, but we are all guilty of being passive at one time or another—whether it is not speaking up in class, allowing someone to be treated unfairly or bullied, or removing oneself from a situation where one could help another. This lack of bravery contributes to a culture of passivity, a culture strong enough that lives, like Catherine Genovese, have been taken for it.

Unfortunately, there are far many more cases of passivity that resulted in the deaths of far more people, just one of which is the “war on drugs.” In 2009, a series of studies came out showing the systemic racism in the justice system, including the fact that although it is estimated that white people are 76% of illicit drug users, compared to 14% African American and 15.9% Hispanic, African Americans make up 37% of the people arrested for illicit drug use and 56% of the people serving time in state prison for drug offenses. Keep in mind: African Americans, including multi-racial African Americans, make up 14.2% of the U.S. population. African Americans born in 2001 have a one in three chance of being arrested and receive a 10% longer sentence than white offender for the same crimes. They are twenty-two times more likely to be shot by a police officer than their white counterparts. This situation is a case of institutional racism, an injustice so grand it seems impossible to change. But, like the murder of Catherine Genovese, there are witnesses and the bystander effect is in motion. Instead of the thirty-eight witnesses of the Genovese murder, the citizens of America are all witnessing this injustice and being directly or indirectly affected by it. The bystander effect is causing us all to divide the responsibility...not to share it, but to push it away and pretend it is not our responsibility to change it.

Every individual who chooses not to act is not choosing bravery; rather, they are allowing unjust arrests, sentences, and deaths of people of color. There are many forms action against institutional racism can take: we can use our votes to support candidates who care about the lives of people of color; we can impeach or protest against the politicians who do not care or look out for people of color; we can refuse to accept stereotypes as truth; we can help give people and children of color the support needed; and teach white people and children about their privilege and how to be an ally. Injustices, especially at the institutional level like the “war on drugs,” seem almost impossible to dismantle, which makes it more difficult for people to take responsibility and help change it. But, if we saw injustices and the responsibility that comes with witnessing an injustice as means to work together, we would be more effective at dismantling injustices. To be courageous in a group setting is clearly difficult, but to be a courageous person one must always live by their morals, especially when difficult.

There is no formula for courage, but knowing oneself can help one see clearly and be courageous. One cannot predict all the problems and situations one will face, but one can identify what one believes to guiding action. This way, one can identify what is the right action to take, without being too overwhelmed by fear or stress of a situation. I want to live courageously; I want my actions to reflect my beliefs and I want to be true to myself. The most effective way I can do so is to identify my beliefs and values so I can keep them in mind when facing decisions.

A main belief of mine, the one that drives most of my decisions, is the belief that one should contribute more help and positivity than hurt and negativity to the world. This accepts the

fact that everyone contributes some negativity to the world; most people, certainly everyone who is a part of Western culture, contribute to global warming. Everyone has hurt another person or thing in one's life, whether it was a mistake or not. To contribute more positivity than negativity, I have to be aware of all of my actions, because all of my actions fall on a scale of helpful to harmful. This belief relies on my other values and beliefs to help define what is a positive action and what a negative action is. For example, I believe that one should respect and be compassionate to others, as well as oneself. This helps define what I believe is positive, because following this belief, being kind and compassionate, is a positive action; while being unkind or apathetic is a negative or harmful action.

I believe that people should be treated equitably, which does not mean that all people should be treated the same. The world is inherently unequal, which means one should not treat everyone the same because people already have different advantages and disadvantages. Systems should be set up to help make systems more fair; for example, equal opportunity schools or employers help make the employment and admission process more equitable.

I believe in living by my beliefs. This means to live courageously and by my beliefs, to take responsibility for one's actions, to be honest to others and oneself, to work and fight for my beliefs; and through these means, to contribute to the world in the best way that I can. To live courageously, to live truthfully, is the lifestyle I believe Henry David Thoreau wrote about in *Walden* when he wrote, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." To live deliberately *is* to live courageously...to question and make decisions based on an inner sense of right and wrong. But, knowing that one can be taught, I am sure that my list of beliefs and values will change and grow with the new lessons and experiences I collect. Like Thoreau, I want to live deliberately, not just exist or survive, but to *live*.

To live deliberately is to live courageously, and there is not other way to live. Living deliberately does not mean that life is perfect or easy, but that one lives and acts from a deep sense of oneself. One must have the courage to let this sense of self, this inner strength, direct one's life. But, it requires self-exploration and exploration of the world around oneself, with the knowledge that oneself and the world around oneself is worth exploring. It is to dare gratefully for one's beliefs, for oneself. There is no formula to live courageously, because everyone's beliefs are different and everyone is different. It is a lifestyle one can only learn from practice, practicing exploring who one is and how that manifests itself in actions. I have challenged myself to explore who I am and the world around me...to lean into vulnerability, to be deliberate, to accept failure, to act honestly, to be and to believe shamelessly. To live courageously.

Bibliography

- "Abuse Victims." *Abuse Victims*. N.p., n.d. Web. 28 Nov. 2014.
- "Augusten Burroughs' Mother Speaks Out." NPR. NPR, n.d. Web. 16 Nov. 2014.
- "Bravery." *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 11
- "“Bravery Is Not the Absence of Fear, but Rather the Judgment That Something Else Is More Important than Fear.” ~Ambrose Redmoon." *Wellness Words of Wisdom RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Nov. 2014.
- "Bystander Effect and Diffusion of Responsibility | Heroic Imagination Project." *Heroic Imagination Project RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 28 Nov. 2014.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 10 Feb. 2014. Web. 16 Nov. 2014.
- "Courage." *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 14 Nov. 2014.
- Gansberg, Martin. "Thirty-Eight Saw Murder." South-Eastern Louisiana University. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Nov. 2014.
- Griffith, Nichole. "Racism in the Criminal Justice System." Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Nov. 2014.
- "Harriet Tubman." PBS. PBS, n.d. Web. 14 Nov. 2014.
- Moore, Andrew. "Commentary on "Psychological Bravery"" *Project Muse*. N.p., n.d. Web. There are multiple kinds of bravery in relation to the challenge or fear one is facing.
- Mosqueda, Priscila. "Hero Complex - The Texas Observer." *The Texas Observer*. N.p., 1 Apr. 2014. Web. 15 Nov. 2014.
- Quigley, Bill. "Fourteen Examples of Systemic Racism in the US Criminal Justice System." *Common Dreams*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Nov. 2014.
- Richards, Suzanne. "That Thing Called Fear." - *Science in Our World: Certainty & Controversy*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.
- Stehman, Peter. "Risk Taking Behaviors and Attitudes in the US Fire Service 1." *Risk Taking Behavior and Attitudes in the U.S. Fire Service* (n.d.): n. pag. U.S. Fire Administration. Web. 15 Nov. 2014.
- Thompson, Karen. "Transcript of "What Fear Can Teach Us"" *Ted Talks*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01

Dec. 2014.

"Understanding the Stress Response." *Understanding the Stress Response*. Harvard Health Publication: Harvard Medical School, n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.

Wing, Dan. "Psychology Professor Explains The Bystander Effect." *CBS Philly*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2014.