

The Conceptualisation of Female Heroism in Ukrainian Society During Periods of Armed Conflict and Crisis

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Abstract: This study focuses on the specific conceptualisations of female heroism among Facebook users in Ukraine during the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. The material utilised in this study is drawn from an authentic corpus of written texts that exemplify the prevailing attitudes and perceptions of female heroism among Ukrainian Facebook users. We argue/suggest that the period of upheaval and crisis in Ukraine has had the effect of expanding the range of potential heroes and that the role of gender in the attribution of heroism has become less significant. The direct physical danger involved in engaging in combat is a key aspect in the conceptualisation of Ukrainian women's heroic actions. The heroic risk associated with helping others and caring for people is increasingly perceived not in terms of altruism, but in terms of dominance. Given the contemporary need for charismatic leaders to navigate the country through the profound systemic crisis caused by the war, the concept of female heroism is evolving to align with the archetypal and prototypical characteristics associated with leadership. The conceptualisation of female heroism is shifting towards leadership qualities that are considered essential for uniting the nation and guiding the country through this crisis.

Keywords: female heroism, discourse, conceptual models

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Introduction

In periods of crisis, public discourse is typified by an increase in the prevalence of heroic narratives, which are imbued with the concepts of 'hero' and 'heroism'. To a certain extent, this phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that heroes and heroines are often depicted as inspirational and life-affirming figures. The narratives surrounding these individuals provide a source of motivation for individuals facing challenges, offering them the opportunity to overcome adversity, find strength, and move forward (Allison, Goethals 2011; Kinsella, Ritchie, Igou 2015; Martens, Efthimiou, Franco 2018). The concept of heroism can be defined 'as a distinct state of embodied consciousness accessible to all human agents in everyday lived experience' (Efthimiou 2017: 41). This perspective suggests that heroism never entirely ceases to exist, but rather manifests in varying degrees. Every individual possesses the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual potential to embody heroic qualities (Keczer et al. 2016). This offers an explanation for the prevalence of heroic figures in periods of war and crisis. The heroic transformation of individuals in times of crises and stress, in which they exhibit adaptability, control, and coordination, determines the prevalence and, at the same time, the evasiveness of this phenomenon (Efthimiou 2017). This prompts the question of how the concept of heroism is perceived by the public (Franco, Blau, Zimbardo 2011). A comparable situation can be observed in Ukraine, where the population, affected by the challenges of war, is actively engaged in re-evaluating the conceptualisation of heroism and proposing a more nuanced approach to this phenomenon. In light of the 'need-based origin of heroism' theory put forth by Allison and Goethals (2014), it can be assumed that Ukrainian society during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict perceived a necessity for distinct forms of heroism, leading to a shift in the conceptualisation of heroism and an intensification of its emotional dimension. In light of these considerations, it seems reasonable to view this phenomenon as 'multifaceted cultural, emotional devices, and "unicorns", a partly mythical, partly manufactured, but arguably important cultural marker of a nation's purported union around key values, symbols and icons' (Peabody, Jenkins 2017: 210).

The concept of heroism is traditionally regarded as a social construct, comprising a set of actions deemed to exceed the 'reasonable limits' of ordinary behaviour to a certain degree (Aupitak 2023). The essence of the concept of 'heroism' is grounded in a set of prototypical traits, including bravery, moral rectitude, courage, self-sacrifice, perseverance, honesty, and a readiness to assist and safeguard others (Kinsella, Ritchie, Igou 2015). As postulated by Franco and colleagues (2018), the concept of 'heroism' is one that encompasses a profound dedication to acts performed for the greater good of society. These acts are often carried out at the expense of the individual, involving sacrifices such as relinquishing physical comfort, social status, or

quality of life. Additionally, the act of heroism undertaken on a voluntary basis is an action that is not motivated by the pursuit of personal gain (Mir, Bhattacharya, Gayas 2022; Leap, Kelly, Stalp 2022). Aupitak (2023) underscores that the conceptualisation of heroism is neither fixed nor static. Rather, it is an ever-shifting and evolving concept, subject to change and interpretation. The concept of 'heroism' is rendered more intricate and multifaceted by the inclusion of gender considerations. A notable transformation in the conceptualisation of heroism has occurred concurrently with the rise in the number of women occupying professions and social roles that pose substantial risks to their lives. For illustrative purposes, it is notable that by the beginning of 2024, the total number of women employed and serving in the Armed Forces was approximately 70,000, with approximately 47,200 of these individuals occupying military roles.¹ In light of these considerations, Ukraine serves as a particularly suitable setting for an examination of the integration of heroism and gender. In the context of the state policy on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men in Ukraine, an analysis of the conceptualisation of heroism offers a distinct opportunity to examine the extent of acceptance of 'traditionally marginalized groups such as women' (Kolpinskaya, Danilova 2024). Furthermore, as Becker and Eagly (2004) observe, raising awareness of female heroism among a broader audience has the potential to not only inform the development of psychological theories related to risk-taking, heroism, and gender, but also to facilitate cultural shifts that will result in heroism being perceived as more androgynous.

An analysis of the gender dynamics present in representations of heroic behaviour

The conceptualisation of women's heroism within the Western cultural context is subject to constant transformation, reflecting a dynamic and evolving discourse on the representation of women in literature and popular culture. It can be proposed that three distinct historical phases can be identified, during which women's heroism exhibited unique characteristics. The initial phase of the study spanned the period from classical Greek and biblical times until the conclusion of the Middle Ages in Europe. In literature and art of this period, heroines are depicted as righteous avengers and warriors, as exemplified by figures such as the Amazons and the Valkyries. The Renaissance marked the advent of a new phase that persisted until the conclusion

¹ Кількість жінок в армії на початок січня 2024 року становила майже 70 тисяч – Наталія Калмикова / At the beginning of January 2024, the number of women in the Ukrainian army was approximately 70,000, according to Natalia Kalmykova. Retrieved 14 October 2024 (<https://www.mil.gov.ua/news/2024/05/01/kilkist-zhinok-v-armii/>).

of the 19th century. The period is distinguished by a transition in focus towards a romantic portrayal of the saviour-martyr and/or virtuous virgin. This image was often symbolised by white attire and a display of fortitude and resolve. The resurgence of the action-oriented and/or politically active female protagonist characterises the third historical phase, which commenced in the late 19th century and persists to the present. Historical events including women's marches against discriminatory practices, the suffrage movement, and the First and Second World Wars have contributed to shifts in conceptualisations of women's heroism. These include protest against patriarchal constraints, sexual autonomy, the deconstruction of the 'traditional' family and marriage structures, the embrace of diverse physical forms, and a heightened independence from males (Aupitak 2023; Rankin, Eagly 2008; Bigazzi et al. 2023).

A cognitive approach to the study of female heroism

Contemporary scientific approaches to the study of heroism are characterised by an interdisciplinary methodology, whereby heroism is examined from a multitude of scientific perspectives and employing a diverse range of methods drawn from the natural, social, and human sciences (Rusch 2023). A comprehensive research topic based on a cognitive approach has been developed to investigate the influence of gender stereotypes on the conceptualisation of heroism. The representation of heroes in the media has been subjected to rigorous and comprehensive analysis, with particular emphasis on the extent to which these images serve to illustrate hegemonic masculinity (Santoniccolo et al. 2023; Leap, Kelly, Stalp 2022). This phenomenon is observed to perpetuate the justification of gender-based hierarchical relations between men and women and to reinforce the cultural consensus that a hero is undoubtedly a male person (Lash 1995). Representations of heroes in the media function as efficacious symbolic models through which individuals are evaluated and assigned status and respect (Cree 2019). While some researchers have questioned the gender dynamics of such representations (Dallacqua, Low 2021), others have increasingly argued that they serve to legitimise certain societal expectations regarding traditional gender roles (Khraban, Samoilenko 2023). In their engagement with these representations, individuals and groups are positioned within the context of pervasive and deeply entrenched systemic discrimination (Santoniccolo et al. 2023). Even in the context of fictional superhero narratives, where androgyny is a prominent trope, there remains an enduring tradition of portraying strong men as the rescuers of vulnerable women (Burch, Johnsen 2020). As posited by Leap and colleagues (2022), even exemplary female characters like Wonder Woman can perpetuate a patriarchal gender order that is inherently linked to heterosexuality. This can be explained by the tendency of

such heroic women to seek external validation of their heterosexuality through the male vanquishing of evil.

In their study, Khraban and Samoilenko (2023) examined the evolution of public opinion in the context of military conflicts. The researchers note that the media have a significant impact on the popularisation of the concept of gender equality, the presentation of an accurate gender image, and the use of neutral and non-gendered language. It is indubitable that this enhances general awareness of the part played by women in safeguarding the nation's borders and its national security. Furthermore, the media contribute to the dissolution of worldview barriers that compel servicewomen to navigate between two distinct identities to avoid being subjected to judgment for deviating from the conventional norms associated with their gender. This phenomenon manifests in instances where servicewomen imitate the behaviour of their male counterparts or display femininity, which is often perceived as antithetical to the ideals of military masculinity. Khraban and Samoilenko (2023) note that the Russo-Ukrainian conflict has resulted in the increased representation of diverse portrayals of female soldiers in the media. An exemplar of the ideal servicewoman, a paragon for others to emulate, is the 'Professional Soldier' image. This image serves to demonstrate that women are being accorded the same level of acknowledgment as men. This can be seen by the way in which the success and combat experience of women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine is being highlighted. The 'Rebel' image portrays a new cohort of women who are asserting their right to self-determination and enlisting in the military with the objective of challenging the conventional notion of the 'weaker sex'. Nevertheless, the accentuation of masculinity in the portrayal of a servicewoman indicates that, despite the growth in the representation of women in the military, the media continues to marginalise women. Additionally, the media presents its audience with a multiplicity of gendered, stereotypical images. These encompass 'beauty in uniform', 'model for a glossy magazine', 'first and foremost a woman', 'beloved', and 'mother'. The aforementioned images are shaped by benevolent sexism, which is defined as a form of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards women that encompasses three core components: paternalism, gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy.

Paternalism, conceptualised as the belief that women should be cherished and safeguarded by men, is predicated on the notion of protective superiority, which posits that men should wield authority over women. This practice endeavours to restrict women's access to resources and privileges, purportedly with the objective of safeguarding them. Gender differentiation, predicated on the notion that women exhibit heightened moral sensitivity in comparison to men, delineates an artificial boundary between the sexes by ascribing favourable characteristics to women in domains that

are irrelevant to status and power. Heterosexual intimacy is predicated on the idealisation of women as romantic partners. This perspective suggests that every man should have a woman he adores. Benevolent sexism fosters a societal environment that engenders patronising behaviours towards women. These behaviours, while ostensibly supportive, can perpetuate women's dependency on men and hinder women's career prospects. Concurrently, the majority of women remain unaware of their status as subjects of gender discrimination and, as a consequence, often reject the notion of their own marginalisation, despite its evident veracity. In light of the assertion that even brief exposure to sexist or sexually explicit media content is sufficient to trigger adverse social behaviours, and that gender stereotypes prevalent in media can exert a direct influence on women's intellectual pursuits and career aspirations, we can discuss the negative implications of such images, not only for women's status within defence institutions but also across Ukrainian society at large. Therefore, it can be asserted that the women who serve as prototypes for the 'beauty in uniform' and 'model for a glossy magazine' images, despite their physical attractiveness and strength, which inspire respect and admiration, are complicit in the perpetuation of sexism and the promotion of the brand. The 'person with special needs' image is centred on physiological processes associated with the female reproductive system. This image implies that women are frequently placed in situations where it is challenging to perform necessary hygiene measures, which may prevent them from engaging in activities in a war zone. The creation of images that objectify women and portray lesbians is frequently driven by commercial interests or constitutes a marketing strategy designed to appeal to a specific audience. Such gender-based images may impede the development of an egalitarian model of society. Despite the media's growing interest in the role of women in the defence of the state in times of war, Khraban and Samoilenko (2023) highlight a concerning tendency to replace the objective assessment of women's professional capabilities with stereotypes. The construction of female images within the military, which is shaped by the culture of hegemonic masculinity, is frequently employed to constrain the role of women or to assign them to subsidiary roles.

A behavioural approach to the study of female heroism

The findings of studies that adopt a behavioural approach and are based on psychological constructs related to risk-taking behaviour and empathic concern for the well-being of others are characterised by the absence of definitive assertions regarding the necessity for the hero to be male. Becker and Eagly (2004) argue that there is a significant divergence in the assumptions about the relevance of sex differences to the formation of heroic behaviour between theoretical frameworks that prioritise

social roles and those that emphasise evolutionary models of preference formation. The researchers conclude that, regardless of the origins of these tendencies, if heroism requires both risk-taking and the behavioural expression of concern for others, it is reasonable to expect that heroic behaviour is androgynous in nature (Becker, Eagly 2004). The results of more recent studies have yielded similar conclusions. For instance, Kinsella and colleagues (2017) conducted a critical examination of the personality traits, motivations, and behaviours associated with heroes and heroism. Furthermore, they delineated prospective avenues for contemplating the role of gender and gender stereotypes in the evolution of future heroism theory and research. Kinsella and colleagues (2017) argue that the concept of heroism is sufficiently malleable to accommodate both traditionally male and female models of heroic behaviour. The defining characteristics of a hero can be broadly summarised as comprising both agency and a selfless aspiration to act in the best interests of others (Kinsella, Ritchie, Igou 2017). The researchers' synthesis of the findings indicated that 'in sum, while bravery and courage are central to the construct of heroism, either one of these features does not equate to heroism. There are other features, such as moral integrity, honesty, altruism, compassion, and humility, which give insight into the motivations and behaviors of heroes' (Kinsella, Ritchie, Igou 2017: 9). Agentic traits are typically associated with masculinity and include characteristics such as strength, intelligence, decisiveness, ambition, integrity, energy, and courage (Dutz, Hubner, Peus 2022). In contrast, the characteristics that are essential for effective social interaction are typically associated with women and include qualities such as selflessness, compassion, and a willingness to act in the interests of others (Tremmel, Wahl 2023). It is evident that there is a correlation between gender and heroic behaviours, which can be observed in the scenarios of heroic deeds.

Rankin and Eagly (2008) highlight that in physical risk and rescue scenarios, the representation of heroes is predominantly male, given that they often possess greater physical strength and power than women. The concept of heroism is frequently associated with the idea of physical risk. This is often linked with qualities that are perceived as stereotypically masculine. These include strength, power, fearlessness, determination, adventurousness, quick thinking, and endurance. Risky behaviours can result in elevated levels of status and power among men, whereas the same actions among women tend to have a less pronounced or even the opposite effect (Salas-Rodríguez et al. 2022). Concurrently, in empathic scenarios, a pivotal element of heroism is conduct associated with assisting others and caring for individuals. These activities are predominantly social in nature and are conventionally ascribed to women (Leap, Kelly, Stalp 2022). Leap and colleagues (Leap, Kelly, Stalp 2022) observe that, although considerable research has been conducted on the gender aspect of heroism, there is a shortage of studies examining the tendency of individuals to confer

the status of 'hero' upon others. The researchers suggest that this topic is worthy of further examination, as the ascription of heroism is inextricably linked to the reproduction and potential subversion of hegemonic gender orders (Cree 2019). Furthermore, an examination of the implications of conferring heroic status upon women can facilitate a transition from an emphasis on heroic narratives to an investigation of the public's preferences regarding heroic figures.

This study examines the specific conceptualisations of female heroism among users of the Ukrainian-language Facebook social network during the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

Materials and methods

The present study employed a qualitative research methodology. The distinguishing characteristic of this study is its focus on the exploration of the nuances of human behaviour, social interactions, and societal dynamics. This approach stands in marked contrast to the approach taken in quantitative research, which is more concerned with the quantification of data. A qualitative research methodology is a set of techniques that enable researchers to examine the subjective realities, meanings, and experiences of individuals, groups, and communities (Grodal, Anteby, Holm 2021). Fuchs (2023) asserts that qualitative research provides an impartial comprehension of the social and cultural influences that inform individuals' thoughts, beliefs, and actions. In essence, qualitative research serves as a catalyst for the formulation of efficacious policies, the execution of strategic initiatives, and the realisation of indispensable social transformation, a process that is particularly crucial in the domain of gender studies.

The material utilised in this study is derived from an authentic corpus of written texts that exemplify the prevailing attitudes and perceptions of female heroism among the users of the Ukrainian-language Facebook social network. The data corpus was assembled from comments made by Facebook users on the pages of Ukrainian women soldiers stationed in combat zones,²³ as well as from comments collected from news media outlets⁴ covering events in Ukraine where women are the primary figures. To avoid the possibility of gathering material from fake accounts, priority was given to the account of a well-known Ukrainian news channel and accounts of prominent women, where they share authentic news not only regarding their personal lives but

² Катерина Поліщук. Retrieved 14 October 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086278774417>).

³ Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 14 October 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

⁴ Oboz.ua. Retrieved 14 October 2024 (Oboz.ua, <https://www.facebook.com/obozrevatel>).

also the activities of the units in which they serve. The timeframe for the collection of comments was restricted to the period between September 2023 and September 2024. This limitation stems from the assumption that women's active participation in combat exerts a considerable influence on the conceptualisation of women's heroism. However, this is a gradual process, and therefore the most pertinent comments are those from the most recent year of the war. The subsequent prerequisite for incorporating commentary into the data set was the presence of keywords with the semantic component 'heroism', including, for example, 'feat', 'courage', 'valour', 'bravery', and others. In accordance with the aforementioned requirements, 647 text units ($n = 647$) were selected. The corpus of written texts was subjected to a multi-stage analysis. The initial stage of the process entailed a lexical and semantic analysis. In order to identify the lexical items that reflect Ukrainian public opinion on the concept of female heroism, a search engine text analysis (SEO) program was employed. This was used to search for words that both possess the semantic component 'heroism' and also reflect the personal characteristics that underlie heroic behaviour. The results obtained were subjected to a comparative analysis with the findings of a study conducted by Kinsella and colleagues (2015) regarding the representative traits of a hero.

In the second stage of the study, a thematic analysis (TA) was employed. TA represents an effective and widely utilised method of analysing qualitative data. TA is a methodology employed to analyse qualitative data with the aim of identifying, analysing, 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 key characteristics that contribute to its suitability for this study. These include adaptability to different research contexts and compatibility with various theoretical frameworks (Fuchs 2023); the existence of a structured framework for organising and interpreting qualitative data (Neuendorf 2018); and the iterative nature of thematic analysis, which makes it possible 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 familiarisation 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, 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 organised and

managed using NVivo 8 qualitative analysis software.⁵ 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 is prepared. The identified topics are 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 impossible to determine the precise meaning of symbolic material, to attain complete contextual understanding, and, consequently, to identify essential categories (Yadav 2022). A significant weakness of thematic analysis as a qualitative research method is its inherently interpretive nature, where the identification and analysis of themes are contingent upon the particular viewpoint of the researcher. This subjectivity can give rise to discrepancies in analysis, and different researchers may identify disparate themes within the same dataset. A second limitation is the restricted scope of available research material. Given that the study was conducted on Facebook, it can be argued that the focus was predominantly on adults, who represent the majority of users of this social network.⁶ Furthermore, it can be inferred that Ukrainians residing in Ukraine on a permanent basis may have authored the comments made on social media regarding military events in Ukraine. The perspectives of Ukrainians who have been compelled to flee their homeland due to the armed conflict are, to a lesser extent, reflected in the findings of this study.

Results and discussion

In the first stage of the study, an SEO text analysis program⁷ was employed to extract words from the data set reflecting public opinion in Ukraine on the subject of female heroism. The extracted words were identified as belonging to two distinct

⁵ QSR NVivo 8.0. Retrieved 14 October 2024 (<https://qsr-nvivo.software.informer.com/8.0/>).

⁶ Загальний огляд соціальних мереж в Україні - квітень 2024/A general overview of social media in Ukraine – April 2024. Retrieved 17 March 2025 (<https://gemius.com/ua/%D0%B1%D0%B-B%D0%BE%D0%B3/zagalnij-oglyad-socialnih-merezh-v-ukrayini-kviten-2024>).

⁷ ADVEGO. Retrieved 14 October 2024 (<https://advego.com/text/seo/>).

Table 1: Frequency of words containing the semantic component 'heroism'

Words that have the semantic component 'heroism' and reflect the personal characteristics that underlie heroic behaviour	Frequency (%)
Courageous	3.33
Selfless	3.01
Patriotic	2.61
Brave	2.55
Optimistic	2.31
Responsible	2.14
Determined	2.07
Charismatic	2.01
Energetic	1.89
Intelligent	1.71
Strong-willed	1.54
Sincere	1.22
Truthful	1.13
Creative	0.99
Independent	0.97

Source: Authors.

categories, both of which were considered essential to the investigation. The first category comprised those words that conveyed the concept of heroism. The second category consisted of those words that reflected personal characteristics associated with heroic behaviour. Table 1 presents the frequency with which each of the specified words appears in the corpus.

Users of the Ukrainian-language Facebook social network are inclined to identify female heroism through the manifestation of agentic characteristics. However, the prominence of the personal trait 'selflessness', which accounts for 3.01% of the total frequency, suggests that people also recognise and appreciate heroic actions that prioritise the collective good. Such actions may include a dedication to the military team and a willingness to make personal sacrifices for the sake of the organization's common objectives. This conceptualisation of heroism is typical of collectivist cul-

tures (Sun, Kinsella, Igou 2024), in which selflessness is the primary defining characteristic of heroism. In such cultures, the status of hero is typically conferred upon an individual who sacrifices himself for the sake of others and serves others (Stanley, Shepherd, Kay 2023). A comparison of the identification of female heroism by the users of the Ukrainian-language Facebook social network with the results of a study conducted by Kinsella and colleagues (2015) on the representative traits of a hero reveals a similarity in the findings. The representative traits of a hero, ranging from central characteristics (e.g. altruistic, brave, displaying conviction, being courageous, determined, helpful, honest, inspirational, having moral integrity, protects and saves others, is selfless and willing to self-sacrifice) to peripheral characteristics (e.g. humble, proactive, compassionate, powerful), are consistent across both studies. As the study by Kinsella and colleagues (2015) does not distinguish between the genders of the individuals exhibiting heroic behaviour, it can be concluded that the characteristics associated with a hero can be ascribed to both men and women, irrespective of gender identity. This leads to the conclusion that in this corpus of written texts reflecting the public opinion of Ukrainian citizens on female heroism and heroic behaviour, there are no constraints based on gender.

In the second stage of the study, a thematic analysis was conducted on the corpus of written texts to identify the specifics of the conceptualisation of female heroism. The analysis of the type of risk women face when demonstrating heroic behaviour revealed the existence of distinct categories of heroines that resonate most strongly with Ukrainian society. These findings indicate the need for particular heroic figures in Ukrainian society in the current historical period. The findings from the coding of the features indicating the type of risk and the conceptual models of the women who are willing to accept this risk are displayed in Table 2. It should be noted that the frequency with which risk types are mentioned in the table may not be entirely accurate, as a single comment may encompass two or more themes simultaneously. In this case, the pattern was included in the thematic group (subgroup) that it seemed most alike.

The 'threats to life and health' risk type is associated with female military personnel and with other women in positions of responsibility who are expected to perform their duties in circumstances characterised by crisis, risk, and danger. This thematic group illustrates the expanded role of women who perform roles that are not traditionally associated with their gender. The primary criterion for belonging to these roles is not gender, but professional knowledge and skills. The principal criterion for taking up these roles is not biological sex, but rather professional knowledge and competencies. The 'social sacrifice' risk type is associated with the following: (1) Female leaders in politics and the military: Society places on them the expectation of acting to extricate the country from the pervasive, deeply entrenched systemic crisis precipitated by the war. They are also expected to embody the qualities that are

Table 2: A classification of heroines according to risk types

Type of risk	Classification of heroines	Examples	Frequency (%)
Threats to life and health	Female military personnel, as well as other women occupying positions of responsibility and expected to perform their duties in circumstances characterised by crisis, risk, and danger	<i>I'm amazed by you! I read this, and I can't imagine how you cope with everything you've got going on. Thank you and your colleagues for your defence, for believing in victory, for fighting! What would we do if you weren't doing what you're doing.^a</i>	53.2
Social sacrifice	Female leaders in politics and the military	<i>While watching the video about dumplings, I had a thought: The seers said that Ukraine will flourish when a woman comes to power. But where could we find one of those – a real Ukrainian woman from the people? And when I saw you with those dumplings, I had the realisation: 'We can't lose with such a woman.' She's got brains, she's sharp, she knows her way around politics, and she can hold her own in the military.^b</i> <i>I saw a woman warrior in a whole new light. From an unbreakable politician who didn't let her enemies off the hook, to a brave fighter at the front, to a caring housewife ... I'm proud of you, and we're proud of you. I'm sorry I didn't vote for you in the deputy election. If I can still change my vote, I'll be happy to do so.^c</i>	29.1
	Women who demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity, succeed in the face of significant challenges, and thereby serve as a source of social and moral guidance for others	<i>You are my heroine! Your courage and commitment to your principles are something we should all respect and try to emulate!^d</i> Child, you've got to be strong. You're a role model for many, and if the Ukrainian people had elected Catherine as president, the victory would now belong to the Ukrainian people.^e	11.0
	Female whistleblowers	<i>What great advice for the top management team! The problem is that people who don't know what they're doing and people who are willing to betray us are in charge.^f</i> <i>You always stand by the truth and give your opinion on what officials are doing and have done in the highest levels of government. You've been pretty fair in your reporting, both about Yanukovych and other officials. And now you're fighting for Ukraine and its land! Your ancestors and our people will always be proud of you!^g</i>	6.7

Source: Author.

^a Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 29 September 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

^b Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 5 July 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

^c Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 5 July 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

^d Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 5 July 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

^e Катерина Поліщук. Retrieved 1 September 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086278774417>).

^f Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 26 September 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

^g Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 5 July 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

considered necessary to unite the nation and to provide leadership for the country. (2) Women who demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity, succeed in the face of significant challenges, and thereby serve as a source of social and moral guidance for others. (3) Female whistleblowers: These women serve as the guardians of society, acting within the established system to fulfil their civic duties and to disseminate information regarding illicit or unethical activities. It is notable that the two risk types identified as 'threat to life and health' and 'social sacrifice' are of equivalent value in the conceptualisation of female heroism. This finding is consistent with the results of the initial stage of the study. A comparison of the aforementioned list of heroines perceived as attractive in Ukrainian society during wartime with the classification proposed by Stice (2023) indicates that the following types of heroines remain unidentified: (1) civilian heroines whose contributions are not deemed to be inherently dangerous or extreme but who are willing to assume considerable risks to their own safety if it means saving others from death or injury; (2) religious women who serve as models of public service – these women are distinguished by their lifelong pursuit of selfless religious service and their commitment to upholding or discovering higher religious/spiritual principles; (3) female religious and political leaders – these are religious leaders who have assumed political roles as agents of social transformation or politicians who espouse profound spiritual convictions that serve as the foundation for their political actions; (4) female martyrs, represented by religious or political figures who consciously (sometimes intentionally) put their lives in danger in the name of a cause or to draw attention to injustice; (5) female adventurers/explorers; (6) heroines of science – these are women engaged in scientific research that is vital to the future of humanity; (7) samaritan women – in circumstances where altruism is limited, these women are the first to provide assistance to those in need; (8) heroines of bureaucracy – these are women employed in large organizations who are involved in disputes within or between departments and who are distinguished by their adherence to ethical principles and their resilience to external influences aimed at safeguarding the well-being of people (Stice 2023). It can be argued that the appeal of certain types of heroines is contingent upon specific conditions that prevailed during a particular historical period. Consequently, there has been a notable increase in the public's interest in representations of female heroism that align with the archetypes of super-heroines, Amazon warriors, and contemporary figures who epitomise the attributes associated with Joan of Arc. The types of heroines associated with peacetime (civilian heroines, female adventurers/explorers, heroines of science) tend to be overshadowed or overlooked.

In the second phase of the analysis, the data set was once more divided into discrete thematic units. The rationale for the segmentation into discrete thematic units was the identification of unreflected ideas (stereotypes) within Ukrainian society regarding

Table 3: The characteristics required to attain the status of heroine

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Examples	Frequency (%)
Prototypical hero	internal, personal characteristics that are truly heroic; leadership	determination; courage; moral integrity; fortitude; perseverance; honesty	<i>You're a great role model for me. I see you as an example of femininity, strength, invincibility, love for the motherland, courage, and wisdom.^a</i> <i>You're beautiful, patriotic, strong, fragile, and full of optimism! I have to say, you're one of the best daughters of Ukraine. I really admire you and want to thank you for all you do.^b</i> <i>Your patriotism, optimism, courage, and charisma make you stand out in a crowd.^c</i>	48.2
Archetypal hero	actions that go beyond the capabilities of an ordinary person; giving your life to achieve a goal; affirmation of high moral values	superpowers; self-sacrifice; wisdom; rebelliousness; uniqueness	<i>Our fighting Mavka! You fit the name 'Cool Amazon'! Charming Princess! Extraordinary Woman!^d</i> <i>You are amazing! You are incredible! There are only a few like you.^e</i> <i>You faced some tough challenges right off the bat.^f</i>	44.2
Prosocial hero	altruistic behaviour; social and emotional connection with other people	empathy; sensitivity; kindness; humanity; benevolence; friendliness; unselfishness; generosity	<i>What a great, genuine, and vibrant person you are. You're like a beautiful flower that grows and smells great. Thanks for that. You're positive, open-minded, and your heart shows true love for your country and people. You don't just say you love them; you prove it with your actions.^g</i>	5.5
Everyday hero	affinity; membership	work; resilience; ordinariness	<i>What gorgeous, magnificent faces they are, radiant with the indomitable spirit of the Ukrainian people, an insatiable thirst for life, and an unwavering resolve for victory. It's as if the very genetic code of the Ukrainian nation shines in their eyes.^h</i> <i>Thanks to people like you, we do not lose faith in people. Thank you for your dedication, conscientiousness, care, work ... you can write a lot more ... Just stay in this world.ⁱ</i>	2.1

Source: Author.

^a Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 26 September 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

^b Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 22 September 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

^c Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 7 September 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

^d Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 22 September 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

^e Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 22 September 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

^f Катерина Поліщук. Retrieved 1 September 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086278774417>).

^g Катерина Поліщук. Retrieved 26 May 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086278774417>).

^h Катерина Поліщук. Retrieved 26 May 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086278774417>).

ⁱ Катерина Поліщук. Retrieved 29 March 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086278774417>).

various manifestations of heroism. These perceptions derive from a tendency to perceive phenomena in terms of established patterns and to preferentially seek simplicity in decisions, which ultimately results in the consolidation of diverse conceptual elements associated with a given phenomenon into a familiar cognitive framework. Table 3 illustrates the formation of societal expectations for women to exemplify specific characteristics that are deemed essential for them to be accorded the status of heroines. As in the preceding case, a pattern exhibiting the characteristics of two or more themes simultaneously was included in the thematic group that it seemed most alike.

The corpus of data reflecting Ukrainian public opinion about women's heroism was divided into four thematic groups as follows: 'Prototypical Hero', 'Archetypal Hero', 'Prosocial Hero', and 'Everyday Hero'. The most common thematic groups are 'Prototypical Hero' and 'Archetypal Hero', which are present in 92.4% of all the patterns analysed. These two groups are distinguished by their 'context-specific, multidimensional, and variable sets of attributes' (Hogg 2001) that most accurately reflect the notion of an archetype. Nevertheless, while prototypes bear a resemblance to archetypes, there exists a distinction between the two. In the prototypical approach, the heroine is recognised through a taxonomy of internal, personal characteristics that exemplify heroic qualities, such as determination, courage, moral integrity, perseverance, and justice. In contrast, the archetypal approach identifies the heroine based on the narrative context of a feat within a larger story of struggle and victory, which may include superpowers, uniqueness, self-sacrifice, wisdom, and rebellion. It seems reasonable to hypothesise that in a state of conflict, society demands a narrative in which the Great Hero makes the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of the Great Idea. This would explain the prevalence of collective mental models in the collective consciousness and the appeal of heroic figures who embody archetypal and prototypical traits. Female heroism can be readily accommodated within the cognitive framework of the prototypical hero, given that courage, the primary prototypical characteristic of heroism, is not contingent upon a person's physical strength. Rather, it is regarded as an unwavering decision to confront and oppose, albeit not necessarily in a direct physical manner, and to take a proactive stance regardless of the potential outcomes (Kinsella, Ritchie, Igou 2017).

An opposing viewpoint was presented when the attempt was to reconcile the concept of female heroism with its archetypal characteristics. Some commentators seek to discredit the conceptualisation of female heroism within an archetypal framework, or alternatively, ascribe to it a negative implication: *You can't look like that for seven days without ever washing. She's a witch!*⁸ It is our contention that there are two

⁸ Тетяна Чорновол. Retrieved 8 July 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana>).

primary factors that have led to this situation. First, the reason may have to do with the psychological state of people during wartime. The rejection of the heroic qualities of others may be a consequence of maladaptive coping mechanisms. In alignment with social comparison theory, individuals are driven to assess and compare themselves with others, a process that serves to maintain a sense of self-worth and personal integrity (Wang, Li 2022). It is evident that some individuals may experience psychological distress, including depression, as a consequence of perceived inequity in the distribution of good fortune (Tussing et al. 2022). In such cases, the individual who survives the ordeal and receives recognition as a hero or heroine is frequently juxtaposed with the individual who perishes, which often gives rise to sentiments of injustice. Second, the situation is further complicated by the presence of deeply entrenched, stereotypical perceptions of gender roles in society. In such a context, the rejection of female heroism may be an emotional response to a perceived threat to the traditionally defined gender status of men. It is imperative to acknowledge that comments with negative connotations are not prevalent in the overall data corpus. In fact, they account for a mere 2% of the total number of comments, as evidenced by the analysis of the data set. The aforementioned percentage is represented by 14 texts. The analysis did not identify a notable prevalence of male or female authorship of comments with negative connotations.

Aupitak (2023) suggests that the archetypal plot of the feat has consistently sought to underscore the hierarchical relationship between femininity and masculinity. The 'Damsel in Distress' female character is often utilised by hegemonic masculine heroes seeking to demonstrate their masculine attributes, as she embodies traits such as passivity, submissiveness, kindness, helplessness, and dependence. The function of 'Damsel in Distress' characters in the narrative is to illustrate the social expectations that are placed upon women. This representation has a tendency to depict female characters in a manner that aligns with traditional gender roles, often portraying them as princesses awaiting a male figure – typically a prince charming – to rescue them (Aupitak 2023). This ultimately restricts women's potential for associations with heroism, thereby facilitating the perpetuation of a patriarchal gender order that is closely associated with heterosexuality (Leap, Kelly, Stalp 2022). The conceptual framework of the archetypal hero, when applied to women's heroic actions, serves to challenge the prevailing hierarchical gender relations between men and women (Khraban 2021). However, this can be perceived as a threat to the socio-status and status-role positions of men in society. This is manifest in the discourse by an attempt to deny the conceptual possibility of filling the 'Archetypal Hero' with feminine meanings. It is important to highlight that the analysed discourse demonstrates a lesser propensity for the expression of meanings associated with women's heroism that pertain to the concepts of socio-emotional connection with others, altruistic conduct, kinship, and

a sense of belonging. These characteristics are commonly associated with the conceptualisation of prosocial heroism and heroism in everyday life. This does not necessarily imply that crises and upheavals have caused Ukrainian society to deviate from the principles of empathy, which may be defined as the capacity to comprehend the emotions and needs of others and refrain from assigning labels. Rather, it suggests that the nation requires leaders who can spearhead the advancement of civil rights and autonomy, and that the concept of female leadership is not inherently rejected by society. In light of the aforementioned findings, the present study corroborates earlier research suggesting that the construct of heroism is inherently malleable (Kinsella, Ritchie, Igou 2017). This notion is contingent upon the assertion that heroic concepts are not fixed but rather subject to shifts and adaptations within the expansive landscape of cultural and historical contexts (Khraban 2023, 2024; Wang et al. 2022).

Conclusion

In Ukraine, the period of upheaval and crisis has had the effect of expanding the range of potential heroes, as the role of gender in the attribution of heroism becomes less significant. The growing portrayal of women as heroes may be indicative of a broader societal shift towards greater tolerance and acceptance of women who challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. This phenomenon may be regarded as an indication of a growing inclination of Ukrainian societal attitudes to accept heroes who embody diverse gender identities, with an emphasis on celebrating individuality and rejecting rigid gender norms. In Ukrainian societal discourse, the conceptualisation of female heroism is distinguished by a notable degree of agency. The direct physical danger involved in engaging in combat is a pivotal aspect in the conceptualisation of Ukrainian women's heroic actions. The heroic risk associated with helping others and caring for people is increasingly perceived not in terms of altruism, but in terms of dominance. This shift in perspective is evident in the evolving conceptualisation of female heroic figures, who are now often viewed not as altruistic individuals but as figures who embody dominance, whether in the political or military sphere or as whistleblowers. Given the contemporary need for charismatic leaders to steer the country through the profound systemic crisis caused by the war, the concept of female heroism is evolving to align with the archetypal and prototypical characteristics associated with leadership. The conceptualisation of female heroism is shifting towards leadership qualities that are considered essential for uniting the nation and guiding the country through this crisis. This phenomenon represents a positive step towards ensuring equal recognition of the heroic status ascribed to both sexes. However, given the fact that the conceptualization of female heroism entails the neutralization of the meanings associated with the notions of socioemotional con-

nection with other people, altruistic behaviour, kinship, and belonging, which are fundamental to the prosocial and everyday heroism, it can be assumed that existing differences in heroic discourse in terms of gender representations are likely to intensify rather than diminish.

Further gender research may be conducted through an analysis of family members' narratives concerning instances of heroism exhibited by their mothers, grandmothers, or sisters. The aim of such research would be to study the perception of female heroism within the family unit. As Pink's (2022) observations indicate, themes that frequently manifest within the context of family histories tend to be centred on the experiences of traumatic events endured by female family members and accentuate their displays of heroic conduct. Narratives centred on familial female identities frequently highlight the principles and standards on which the societal structure of a specific historical period was founded. Consequently, an analysis of such narratives can provide insight into 'intergenerational solidarity' (Pink 2022) and shed light on culturally specific ways of conceptualising female heroism. Furthermore, such analysis may facilitate the development of a more comprehensive understanding of the role of women in the domestic sphere and the impact of female figures on children's perceptions of heroism.

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