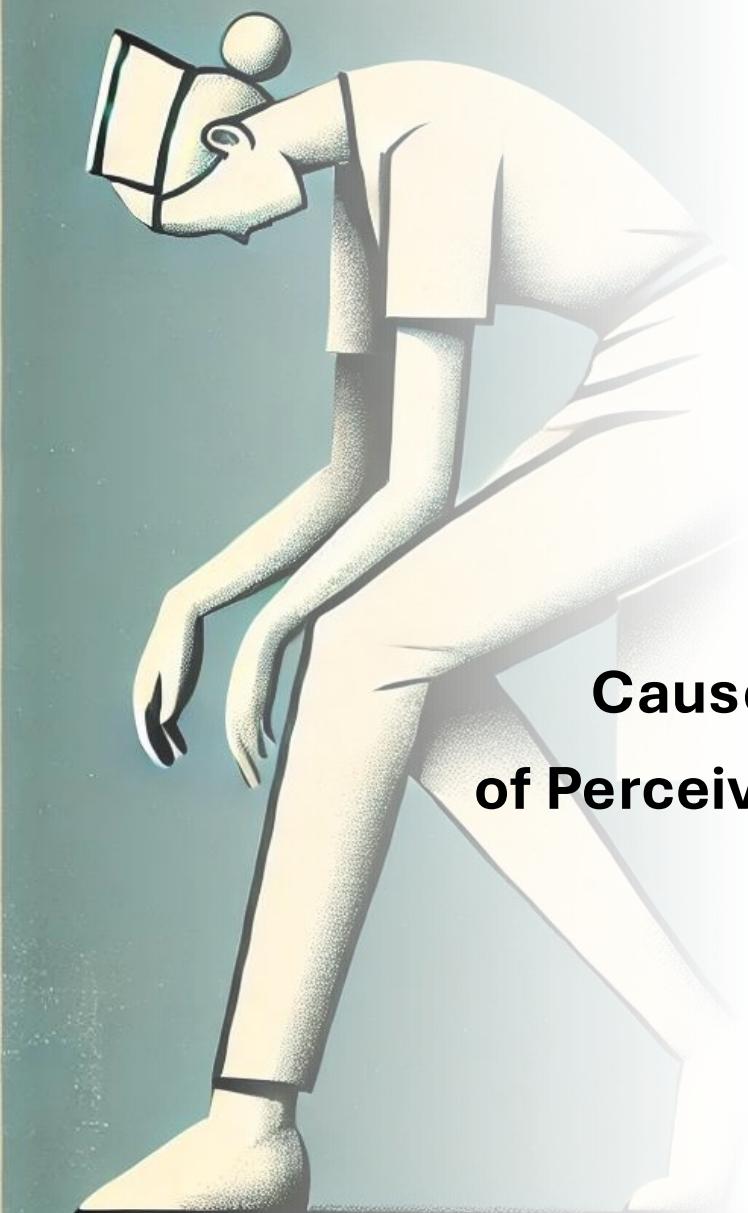




Hard to Be a Hero

**Causes and Consequences
of Perceived Occupational Heroism**



14/01/2026

BPS DOP 2026 - Cardiff

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‘Heroes or not?’



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Why it matters?

- Perception of heroism predicts exploitation (Stanley & Kay, 2023; 2024)
- Perception of heroism shape lay people understanding of History (Bayer & Pabst, 2017; Giner-Sorolla et al., 2017)

« This whole notion of being a hero, of being oh-so-amazing, is just a manipulation. It is to make us work without complaining. It's a trick and we all got trapped (participant 164, nurse). »
(Hennekam et al., 2020, p. 15)



Heroism

- “To act in a **prosocial** manner despite **personal risk**”

Franco et al., 2011

- “To knowingly put **one’s future Individual** \leftrightarrow **Context relations at risk** to improve the future adaptive **Individual** \leftrightarrow **Context relations of others** who are not related to them”

Schmid Callina et al., 2017

- “*Heroism consists of actions undertaken to **help others**, despite the possibility that they may result in **the helper's death or injury***”

Becker & Eagly, 2004

→ Two main components of heroism: 1) **Risk** and 2) **Altruism**



Who are our heroes?

Heroism ratings as predicted by:

‘Exposed to danger’ ratings:

$t(22782) = 12.90, p < .001$; Std. beta = 0.23, 95% CI [0.19, 0.26]

‘Helpful’ ratings:

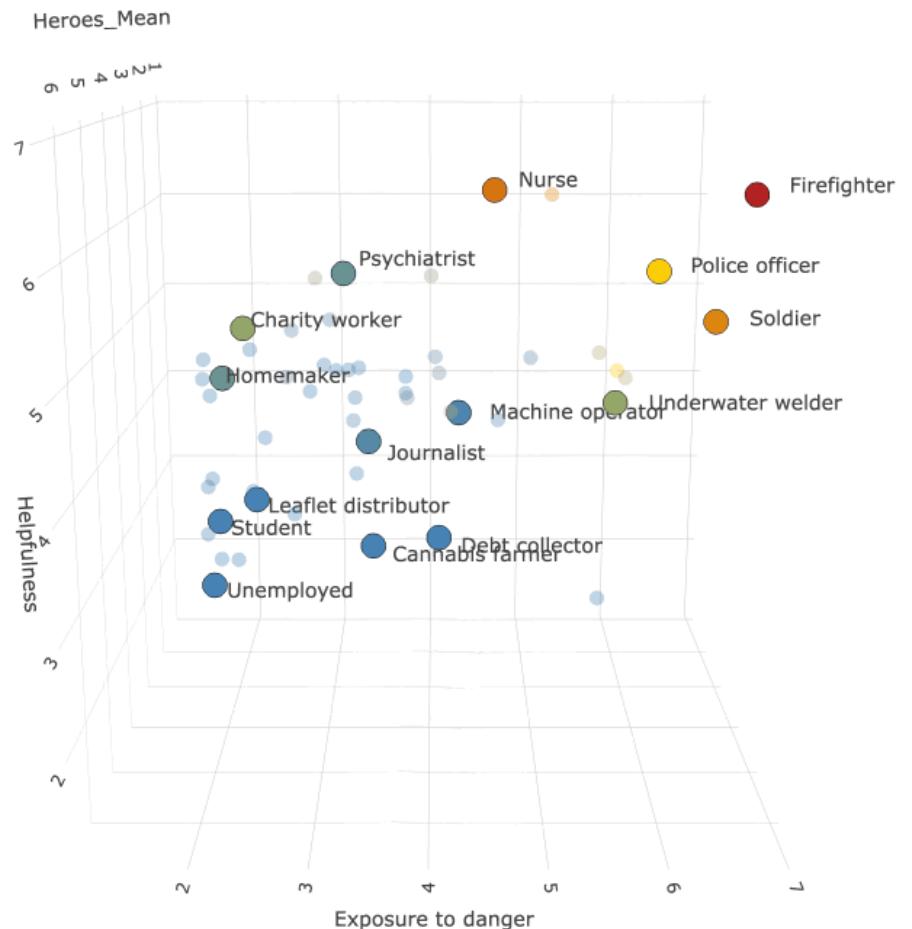
$t(22782) = 12.32, p < .001$; Std. beta = 0.27, 95% CI [0.22, 0.31]

‘Brave’ ratings:

$t(22782) = 13.56, p < .001$; Std. beta = 0.26, 95% CI [0.22, 0.30]

‘Selfless’ ratings:

$t(22782) = 10.81, p < .001$; Std. beta = 0.19, 95% CI [0.16, 0.23]



Methods

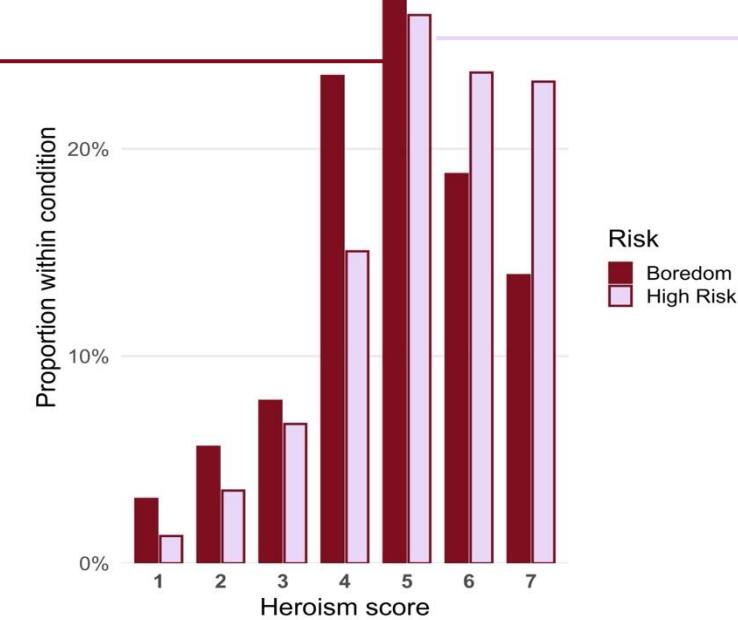
- **Program 1:** Experimental manipulations of occupational heroism
“Can we make welders heroic? Can we remove the heroic status of firefighters”
- **Program 2:** Societal consequences of occupational heroism
- Online surveys (Prolific)
- UK representative samples



Heroes face danger (Study 1)

- Firefighters, Nurses, Police officers, Psychiatrists, Underwater welders:
 - exposed to danger (vs bored)
 - motivated to help (vs motivated to self-improve)

Firefighters actually spend most of their time in long meetings, reviewing safety protocols, and training.



Firefighters regularly face wildfires, burning buildings, and dangerous rescue missions.

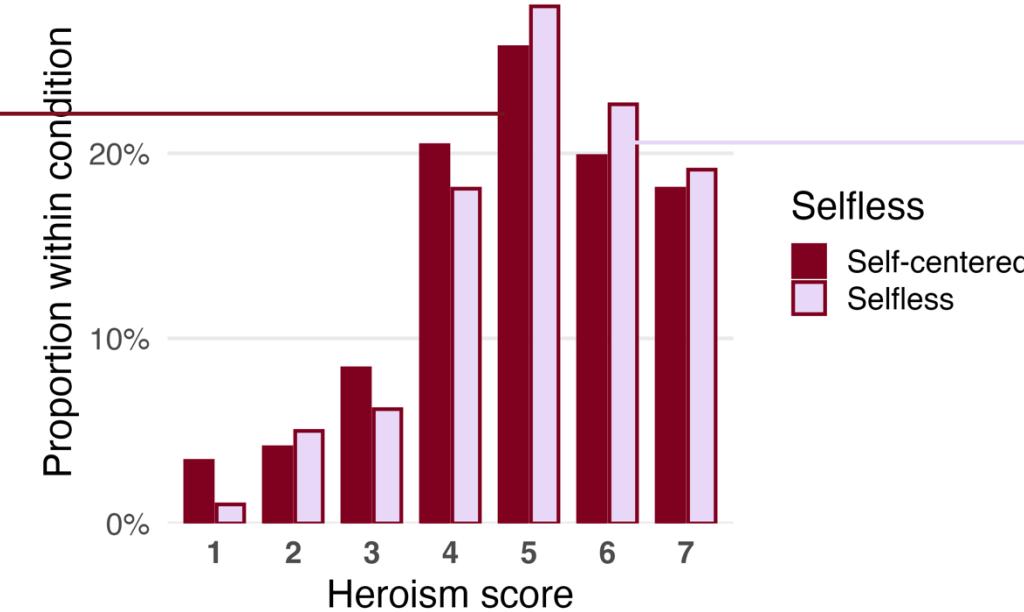
$$t(1356) = 6.02, p < .001, \text{std. } b = 0.16, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.11, 0.21]$$



Heroes are altruistic (Study 1)

- Firefighters, Nurses, Police officers, Psychiatrists, Underwater welders:
 - exposed to danger (vs bored)
 - motivated to help (vs motivated to self-improve)

. Nurses are driven by a desire for self-improvement, using their work to grow and develop on a personal and professional level. The challenges and complexities of healthcare provide them with opportunities to refine their skills, strengthen their emotional resilience, and deepen their understanding of themselves



They work in this field because they want to help people. Most patients they see are individuals who suffer and need support in their daily lives, someone to listen to them, and to give them hope in spite of their illness.

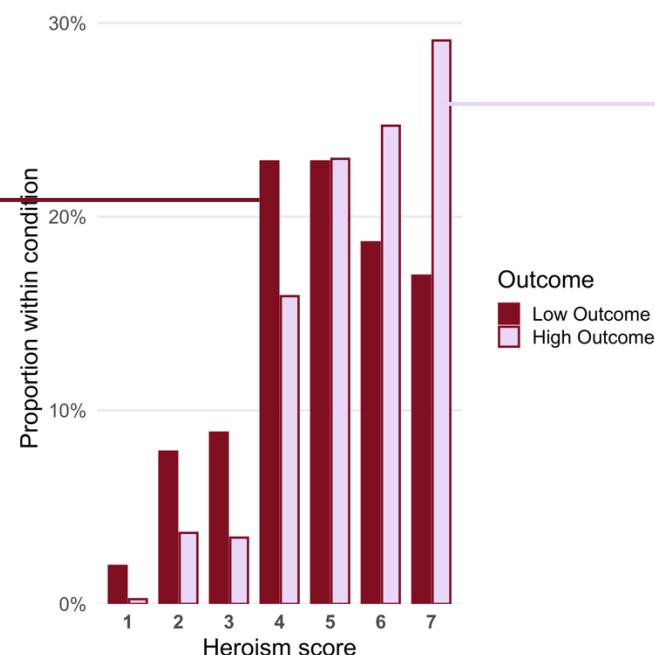
$$t(1356) = 2.32, p = .021, b = 0.06, 95\% CI [0.0095, 0.11]$$



Heroes help people (Study 2)

- Firefighters, Psychiatrists, Underwater welders:
 - Helpful (vs not helpful)
 - motivated to help (vs not motivated to help)

In practice, firefighters more often help mitigate damage to buildings and property, rather than saving lives. **Only about 11% of their direct interventions offer the possibility of helping someone.**



In many areas, firefighters regularly assist people through education, medical assistance, and support for vulnerable individuals. **About 89% of their direct interventions are reported to help people**

$$t(812) = 6.61, p < .001; \text{std. } b = 0.23, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.16, 0.29]$$



Heroes are **not** motivated to help (Study 2)

- Firefighters, Psychiatrists, Underwater welders:
 - Helpful (vs not helpful)
 - motivated to help (vs not motivated to help)

Psychiatrists are often seen as motivated by a desire to help people who are struggling emotionally. **However, when asked why they chose this occupation, only 8% of the psychiatrists mentioned helping patients.**



Psychiatrists are often seen as motivated by a desire to help people who are struggling emotionally. **Indeed, when asked why they chose this occupation, about 82% of the psychiatrists mentioned helping patients.**

$$t(812) = 1.87, p = 0.061; \text{std. } b = 0.06, 95\% \text{ CI } [-2.94e-03, 0.13]$$

What about it?

- What are the consequences of heroism (beyond effects on workers)?
- Correlational study (N = 840) contrasting **Heroism** with:
 - **Gratitude** (H: We are grateful for heroes)
 - **Criticism acceptability** (H: We blame people who criticise heroes)
 - **Impunity** (H: We support de-regulation of heroes)

Questionnaire (25 items) evaluated through 3 stages:

- expert consultation (5 experts – **construct validity**)
- lay people consultation (20 UK residents – **Face validity**)
- Psychometric **reliability** and **factor structure** (N = 440 + 300 representative UK residents)



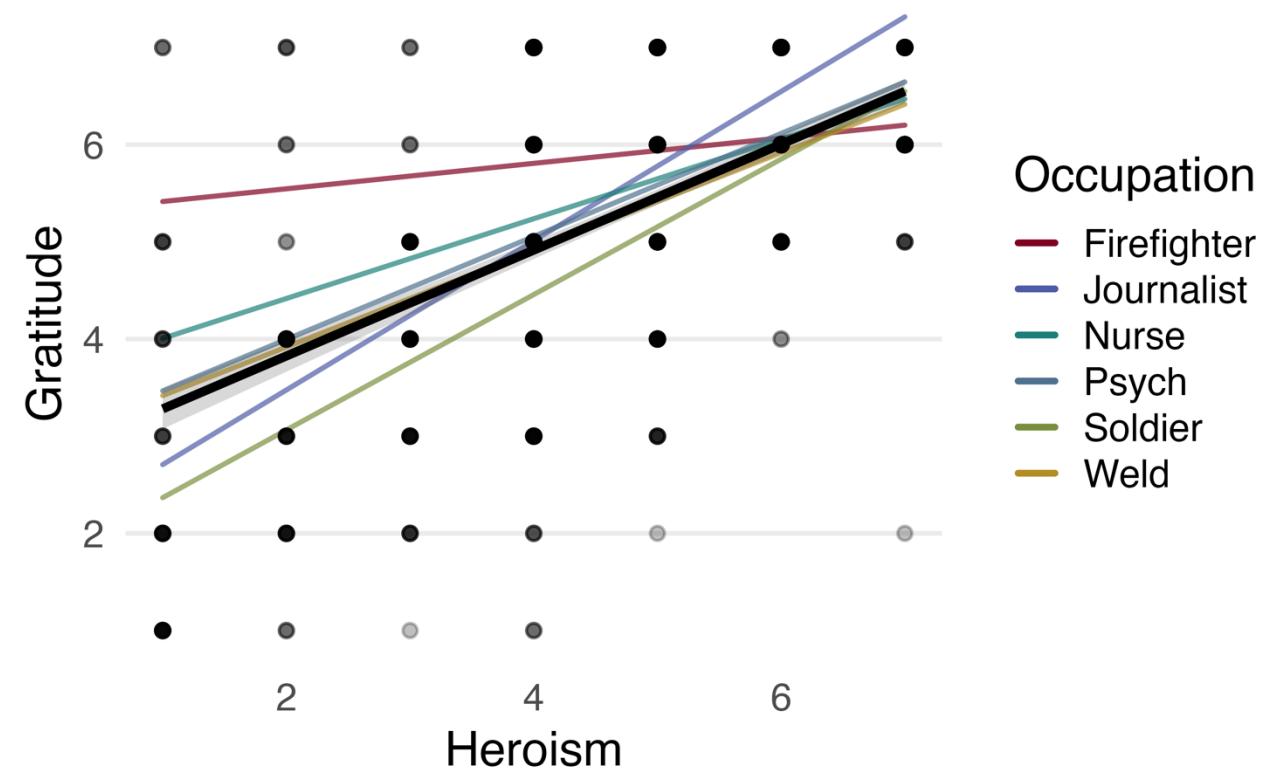


We are grateful to heroes

e.g. 'Sharing a supportive post about [xxxx] on my social media'

$F(1, 832) = 36.41$ $p < .001$ $\eta^2 = 0.042$

[when controlling for attitude and occupation type (sum-to-zero contrast)]



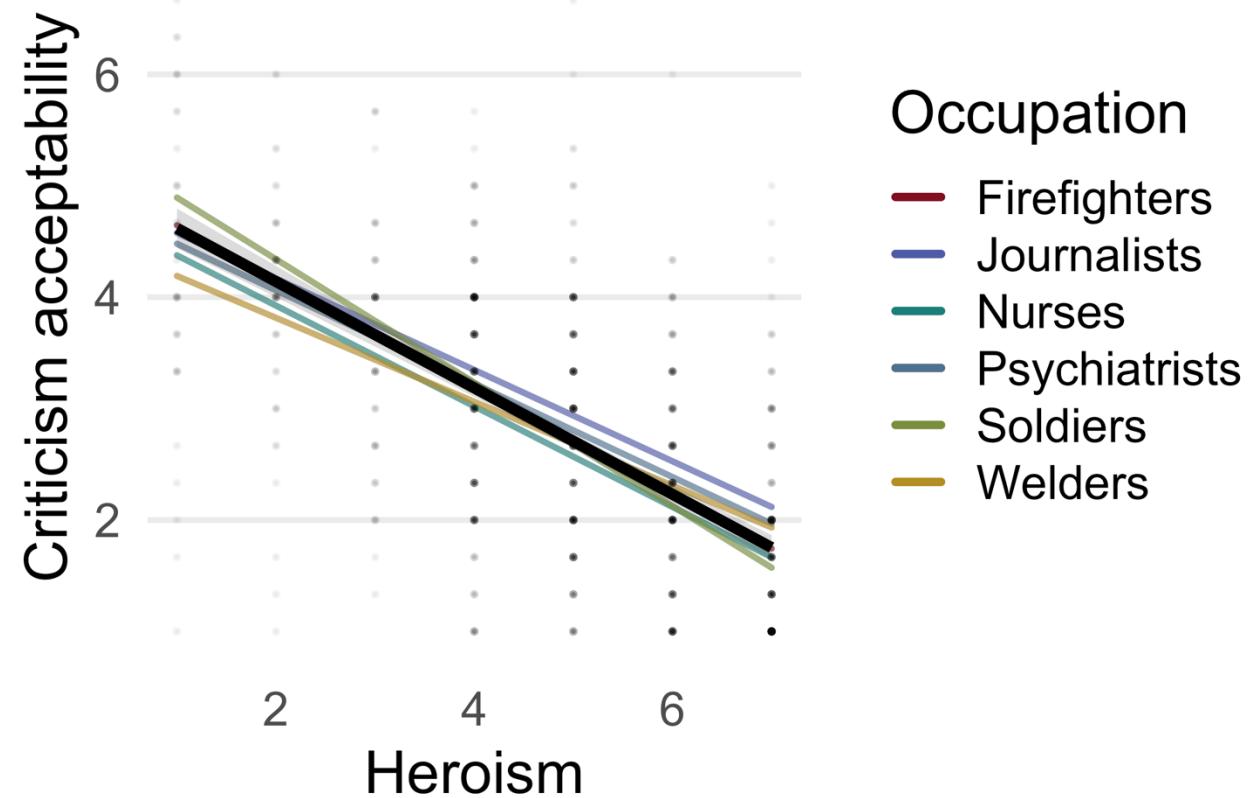


We blame people who criticise heroes

e.g. 'People should stop badmouthing [xxxx]'

$F(1, 832) = 58.13, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.065$

[when controlling for attitude and occupation type (sum-to-zero contrast)]



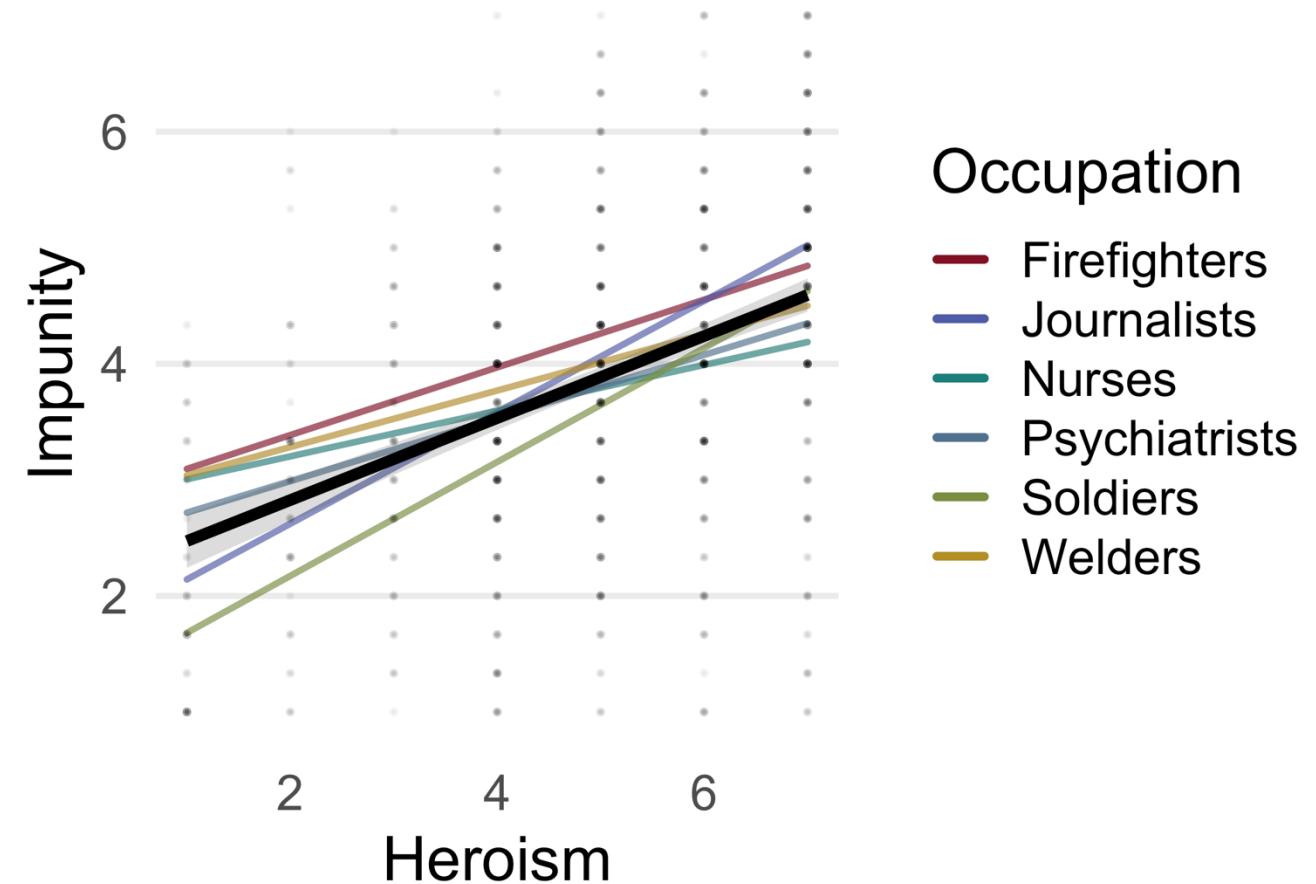


We support de-regulation of heroes

e.g. '[xxxx] can do their job better when they're not forced to follow standard procedures '

$F(1, 832) = 31.59, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.037$

[when controlling for attitude and occupation type (sum-to-zero contrast)]



Conclusion

- We demonstrated that, given the appropriate frame, we can make workers more or less heroic
- We observed that perceived occupational heroism correlates with criticism acceptability and impunity – acting as a moral shield
- Given these ethical extensions of the heroic status – **it is worth considering carefully how occupations are framed in public discourse.**



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