SUN TZU AND COMMAND ASSESSMENT: A STUDY ON COMMANDER'S COURAGE

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Sun Tzu opened his sixth Century BCE work on the art of war by providing assessments for evaluating 5 important components of war. Among these components was the military commander. Sun Tzu identified the characteristics of knowledge, trustworthiness, courage, and strictness as the way to assess the military commander. Recent studies of courage have focused on perceptions of courage in an attempt to develop a general courage model. This study used military veterans to provide qualitative assessments of the behaviors associated with a commander's courage, the difference between courage and bravery, and the opposite of a commander's courage. Results indicate that the commander's courage presents a different behavioral mix from those behaviors identified in previous courage studies.

The sixth century BCE, military philosopher Sun Tzu began his exposition "The Art of War" by identifying 5 characteristics of war: military philosophy, weather, terrain, leadership and tactics (Gagliardi, 2004). Within each of these characteristics he then built a brief assessment rubric. The rubric for leadership contained the following 4 characteristics: knowledge, trustworthiness, courage, and strictness (Denema, 2001). Through the remainder of the text, Sun Tzu spent little time expounding on these leadership characteristics as if the reader already understood their meaning. Construct definitions that are held by individuals and used by those individuals to evaluate the actions of those around them are considered implicit theories (Sternberg, 1985; Sternberg, Conway Ketron, & Bernstein, 1981). Sun Tzu, in not defining these constructs or providing a way to assess attributes such as courage, appears to have relied on the reader to use their own implicit definition of these constructs when evaluating a commander.

Courage, while defined in literature, through movies, and cultural lore, remains for the most part an implicit theory (Rate, Clarke, Lindsay, & Sternberg, 2007). Unlike the 3-point line in basketball, there is no clearly defined test for courage. To confuse matters even more, courage appears to be liberally applied to a wide variety of ventures and actions (Evans & White, 1981; Putman, 2001; Woodward, 2004; Brymer & Oades, 2009; Norton & Weiss, 2009). While the search continues for a central core system of values or behaviors that shape the defining characteristics for courage, Sun Tzu appeared to address the characteristics of the type of courage that is necessary for the commander of military forces.

The purpose of this research is to discover the implicit theories of a commander's courage. The commander's courage will be defined as those elements used by the study's

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participants to evaluate the type of courage unique to the role in which a military commander serves. As these theories are held by individuals and do not reside in an Army Field Manual or similar doctrinal guideline, a qualitative, grounded theory approach will be used to discover the elements of these implicit theories. This paper will conduct a review of recent research into the construct of courage, then discuss the approach used to gain insight into the commonly held threads of implicitly held theories or definitions.

Literature Review

Lopez, Koetting, O'Byrne, and Peterson (2003) assessed the physical aspects of courage by defining courage with respect to one's ability to, after assessing a situation as potentially harmful or fatal, overcome the fear and proceed with the task. Participants who were rated as overconfident expressed higher levels of fear and apprehension when repeating a similar task. Fearless individuals were ones who did not indicate elevated levels of fear or apprehension when repeating a similar risky endeavor. Lopez et al. determined that components of courage included risks and facing fears.

Brymer and Oades (2009) validated the view that courage included fear and risk through conducting a series of interviews with extreme sports participants (BASE jumpers, waterfall kayakers, solo-rope free climbers, and extreme mountaineers). The participants in these sports recognized that the risks they were taking could result in serious injury or death. These participants also acknowledged that they faced fears associated with these risks, yet they also recognized that in one way or another they needed to cope with and control these fears in order to perform at the level necessary to successfully execute their sport. These participants voluntarily subjected themselves to these risky situations; yet Brymer and Oades determined that by overcoming their fears, the extreme sport athletes were demonstrating courage.

Sekerka and Bagozzi (2007) chose to compare moral courage and physical courage. A morally courageous person was defined as one who takes personal risks as an outcome of decisions that benefit others. This type of risk taking needed to be a consistent characteristic of the individual's behavioral repertoire as opposed to something more episodic. Sekera and Bagozzi used this definition to analyze how moral courage developed in the face of ethical challenges in a business environment.

Pury, Kowalski and Spearman (2007) approached the study of courage by looking at courage from a general and a personal level. General courage was determined to be acts that would be considered courageous when compared to the general populace. Personal courage was seen as a courageous act when compared to the felt fear of the individual actor. The key to determining the courageousness of an act was the comparison group used. Pury et al. asked students to provide a narrative on a courageous act that they performed, and then asked the students to rate the act on its basis of personal and general courage. The various actions of the students fell into 16 different types, divided into the three main groupings of physical, psychological, and moral courage (Putman, 1997). The students provided information on risk factors of non-physical difficulty, physical difficulty or risk, and risk to one's image. The researchers determined that personal courage was more closely related to one's sense of personal risk, while general courage was more closely related to one's sense of confidence and fearlessness in a given situation.

Woodward (2004) defined courage with respect to fear, "the ability to act for a meaningful (noble, good, or practical) cause, despite experiencing the fear associated with

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perceived threat exceeding the available resources" (p. 174). Taking into consideration that individual actions may be seen as courageous when the individual's levels of felt fear were not significant, Woodward and Pury (2007) revisited courage and altered the definition by removing the concept of fear as a necessary lens through which to interpret courage: "Courage is the voluntary willingness to act, with or without varying levels of fear, in response to a threat to achieve an important, perhaps moral, outcome or goal" (p. 136). In both studies, participants were asked to complete questionnaires citing various scenarios where there were threats to desired outcomes. The participants rated their willingness to act and their perceived levels of fear in such a situation. Woodward and Pury found support for four different types of courage: work/employment courage, patriotic-religion, or belief based physical courage, social-moral courage, and independent courage. In Woodward (2004) and Woodward and Pury's (2007) studies, the 30 scenarios presented situations to be coded and may not have included the full range of possible categories for courage.

As courage is seen to be an implicit theory, letting the individuals provide the data on the definition may present a way to more thoroughly capture the nuances of this construct. Rate et al. (2007) conducted a four-phase study with students from Yale University and the United States Air Force Academy. In phase one, the students were asked to describe behaviors associated with courage. The 639 behaviors from phase one were provided to a different sample of students who were asked to rate them with respect to the degree these behaviors were associated with courage (phase two). In phase three, two samples of students were asked to conduct a card sort of the 60 descriptive behaviors of courage that emerged from the ratings in phase two; then the researchers evaluated the grouping of descriptors using classical multidimensional scaling and hierarchical cluster analysis to bring to light three salient clusters of behaviors termed: self-focused perseverance despite fear; non-physical/social-oriented acts for noble ends; and self-sacrifice/risk for others. In phase four, to assess how reliably individuals applied their implicit theory of courage, two groups of subjects were given scenarios and asked to rate either the types of courage displayed in the scenario or the level of courage displayed by the protagonist in the scenario. Rate et al. (2007) concluded that the subjects of their study were able to effectively apply their implicit definitions of courage in rating the actions of others and the type of courage displayed.

These studies evaluated courage from a general sense while recognizing that courage may take on different characteristics based on the situation and the call for action. In light of these considerations, is the courage needed by a military commander different from more general forms of courage? Using the Chinese text as a starting point, courage shares a similar root character with brave. This root character can be used interchangeably in translations of courage or brave, leaving one with the question: is there a difference between courage and bravery, and if so, can understanding the difference between courage and bravery provide a clearer understanding of courage? Finally, although these studies considered descriptions of the construct of courage, none of them considered using descriptions of the opposite of courage as a way to help amplify the salient courage behaviors. The use of polar opposites in research questionnaires is supported as a valid method of inquiry (Schriesheim, Eisenbach, & Hill, 1991; Bentler, Jaskson, & Messick, 1972; Jordan, 1977).

Methodology

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This study was conducted to identify the characteristics military veterans associated with a commander's courage. Military veterans were selected as the population of interest because they have had the opportunity to use their implicit definition of courage in assessing the courage of the commanders with whom they have served or whom they have observed. These veterans were asked to complete an online survey with demographic data and three open-ended questions about courage. Survey respondents were able to complete the open-ended items with as much or as little information as they preferred. The survey was hosted on the Survey Monkey website, and a response window of 18 days was provided. Responses were limited by the computer's Internet Protocol address, making multiple responses by single individuals more difficult. Braithwaite, Emery, de Lusighan, and Sutton (2003) indicated that internet based surveys provide an alternative to paper based or telephone surveys when issues with external validity are addressed.

A convenience sample of military veterans was recruited for this study through email and the social networking site, Facebook. The email and Facebook postings on the Regent University Military Veteran's page on facebook encouraged study participants to forward the original email to veterans in their social networks as a variation of the snowball sample technique (Patton, 2004).

Survey respondents (n=104) were overwhelmingly from the United States Military (n=101). The various branches of service were represented: Army (n=88), Air Force (n=8), Coast Guard (n=4), Marines (n=2) and Navy (n=2). With the exception of the warrant officer grades of WO-1 and CWO-5, all ranks were represented from E1-4 to O-6 (U.S. Army Colonel or U.S. Navy Captain) (E1-E4, n=5; E5-E6, n=12, E-7, n=5; E-8, n=8; E-9, n=2; CWO2, n=1, CWO3, n= 1; CWO4 n=2, O1 n=1; O2 n=3; O3 n=26; O4 n=14; O5 n=21; O6 n=3). Ages ranged from below 21 to over 65 with the median age of 35-44 (n=48). Both males (n=88) and females (n=15) were represented in the sample. Respondents with a master's degree or higher represented 55% of the sample. Only 37 of the 104 respondents did not have at least one combat tour of at least 4 continuous months.

After completing a series of demographic questions, survey participants were asked to complete the following open-ended questions:

> What are the behaviors or qualities that best describe the courage you would expect from a military commander/leader? You may craft your response in a word processing program then cut and paste it into this box:
>
> How does a leader/commander's courage differ from similar behaviors such as bravery? You may craft your response in a word processing program then cut and paste it into this box:
>
> How would you describe the opposite of a commander/leader's courage? You may craft your response in a word processing program then cut and paste it into this box:

Open-ended responses were then reviewed, evaluated, and coded with the assistance of the Atlas ti 6.0 software. In all, 422 statements or phrases were identified for evaluation in the coding phase, yielding 502 coded phrases. (See Table 1 for example phrases of the different codes identified in the survey responses). A total of nine codes were associated with

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commander's courage, five codes were associated with identifying the difference between bravery and courage, and eight codes were identified with the opposite of a commander's courage. Between those codes for courage and the opposite of courage, seven codes overlapped (e.g., "Makes the hard choices; thinks" and "Indecisiveness; no thought; not making hard choices"). The code "Short Tempered, Irrational, Yelling, and Abusive" was revealed in the responses to the question on the behaviors associated with the opposite of command courage. The codes for courage as a "Character trait-long term" and "Courage the foundation for bravery" were revealed in the inquiry of the differences between the commander's courage and bravery.

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Table 1 (Part 1)
Codes, Code frequencies and Example Phrases

Code Family	Code	Frequency	Example
Courage	Makes the hard choices Thinks	91	It takes courage to lead troops into battle and make decisions that could result in great injury or death of subordinates.
	Accepts responsibility willing to learn	12	it is often more difficult for leaders to take personal responsibility for actions than it is to display physical courage.
	Selfless regardless of consequences or career	23	selfless dedication, action and or commitment to further the success of another human being, entity, organization or institution without regard or concern for the repercussions or ramifications that could occur to one's own well-being or standing in the world.
	Integrity Honesty Personal code Principles	26	Honesty and integrity, everything else they do stem from these qualities
	Confront risks and fear without showing fear	70	I define courage as the willingness to face adversity with a positive attitude and inspire those around you to do the same. This must occur based upon an assessment of the situation and a desire to do the right thing regardless of the potential consequences to the commander or his subordinates.
	Continue to try, Mission Completion	9	They do not give up when the odds of the battle are against them
	Lead from the front Lead by example	15	A willingness to lead from the front, sharing the dangers the troops face
	Character trait - long term	17	A leader's courage is demonstrated on a more consistent basis and over a wider set of circumstances and situations – not just in battle, but day to day, under the stresses of every day work and personal life..
	Courage foundation for bravery	9	Bravery is perhaps a subset of commander's courage
Bravery	Bravery facing imminent physical threat	27	I see bravery as just the ability to perform tasks under hostile fire or the imminent threat of hostile fire.
	Bravery immediate action	39	I view bravery as instinctual and generally without forethought.
	Bravery may be without courage	6	Bravery is more of a reaction to a circumstance that may or not be a result of personal courage.
	Individual	10	Bravery seems to infer individual effort in the face of individual risk.
	Bravery and Courage are the same	4	I see bravery and courage to be interchangeable depending on who is telling the story

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Table 1 (Part 2)
Codes, Code frequencies and Example Phrases

Code Family	Code	Frequency	Example
Opposite	Indecisiveness, No thought, Not making hard decisions	42	The biggest thing I've ever viewed as being "the opposite of" courage is faltering decision making. Lack of self confidence, waffling in front of "troops," being unsure of the next move.
	Failure to take responsibility, failure to learn	15	if a subordinate fails, throw him/her under the bus and fail to accept your responsibility as the leader.
	Selfish, Refuses to take career risks or challenge command	42	Craven devotion to self; The opposite of a commander's courage is someone who thinks more about how their career will be affected, and decided things that way, than to do the right, if not popular thing to do.
	Failure of Morals Lacks Integrity	11	The opposite would be when he or she compromises his or her values of the values of the army/unit or that person puts his or her interests ahead of the unit or doing the right thing.
	Fear dominates Avoids risk or conflict	14	I once knew a commander who spent the last month of his tour in a container (a steel box, usually fortified with sand bags and used as bomb shelters etc.). This seemed pretty opposite to me.
	Quitting or giving up	3	Accepting the consequences of defeat
	Lead from the Rear, Fail to lead by example	8	the leader that doesn't share the hardships and fire of his men. leading by example is not trite, it carries more weight than can often be defined
	Short Tempered, Irrational, Yelling Abusive	9	One who folds under pressure. He or she exhibits this by anger and yelling. He or she is feared when the fighting gets the hardest in the area of responsibility. His or her mood changes erratically normally.

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In considering the attributes of commander's courage and the opposite of courage, several codes overlapped. Evaluating these opposites revealed a dissimilar distribution of responses (see Table 2). Making the right decision and indecisiveness both held the highest frequency of occurrence in the responses between descriptions of the commander's courage and the opposite. Facing and overcoming fear was identified as the second most frequent behavior of commander's courage, while "selfish, refuses to take career risks or confront the chain of command" was equal in the frequency to indecisiveness for the opposite of commander's courage.

Table 2
Frequency Distribution of Courage and Opposite of Courage Codes

Ranking (Frequency)	Courage	Ranking (Frequency)	Opposite of Courage
1 (91)	Makes the hard choices Thinks	1 (42)	Indecisiveness, No thought, Not making hard decisions
2 (70)	Confront risks and fear without showing fear	3 (14)	Fear dominates Avoids risk or conflict
3 (26)	Integrity Honesty Personal code Principles	1 (42)	Selfish, Refuses to take career risks or challenge cmd
4 (23)	Selfless regardless of consequences or career	4 (11)	Failure of Morals Lacks Integrity
5 (17)	Character trait - long term		(n/a)
6 (15)	Lead from the front Lead by example	6 (8)	Lead from the Rear, Fail to lead by example
7 (12)	Accepts responsibility willing to learn	2 (15)	Failure to take responsibility, failure to learn
8 (9)	Courage foundation for bravery		(n/a)
8 (9)	Continue to try, Mission Completion	7 (3)	Quitting or giving up
	(n/a)	5 (9)	Short Tempered, Irrational, Yelling Abusive

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The survey participants identified the differences between bravery and courage in terms of the time frame in which the behaviors were displayed, the risks involved, and the nature of the risk (individual vs. corporate). Bravery was seen as an immediate response to an imminent threat to the individual, and may be a reflexive response by someone who in other circumstances would not be considered to possess courage. Courage, on the other hand, was seen as a long-term character quality that served as a foundation for brave acts. Commanders with command courage were capable of facing physical threats, but also responded to moral and ethical risks, and in facing those risks considered the mission and the welfare of the troops ahead of their own. The commander's courage was defined by the participants as an individual trait that is revealed over time.

Based on the survey responses, a commander's courage appears to be clearly centered on the commander's ability to be a decisive decision maker, one who takes into consideration the mission and the troops yet will make the "hard decisions," even if it places themselves, their troops, or their careers at risk. The commander's courage is built on integrity, honesty, and the adherence to principles and is demonstrated through selfless acts of putting others ahead of their own concerns. Commanders also display this courage by not shying away from facing the same conditions as their troops and will lead from the front as well as lead by example. Commanders must have the courage to accept responsibility for their actions and the actions of their unit and will permit their subordinates to take risks while accepting the responsibility should the subordinates fail. This courage is also demonstrated in their drive to not give up despite the odds. A commander clearly demonstrates a lack of courage by indecisiveness; placing self and career ahead of mission and troops; shirking responsibility; allowing fear to paralyze them; failing morally; acting short-tempered, irrational, or abusive to their subordinates; not setting the example and leading from the front; and quitting or giving up.

Discussion, Limitations, Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine if the assessment of the courage of a commander, as a desired characteristic identified by Sun Tzu, was composed of different behaviors or a different collection of behaviors than those associated with courage in previous studies. Understanding that the survey respondents were not randomly selected and the survey methodology restricted the sample to those with Internet access, this study's identified behaviors associated with a commander's courage provide some verification of a type of courage not yet examined in the literature.

While various types of risk were a consideration, a commander's courage was evidenced in their decision-making processes and the biases that were revealed. This focus on decision-making is unique in the study of courage, where the preponderance of courageous behaviors have focused on an individual's actions as they have faced individual risk. The commander of units in combat must make decisions on which units to send into battle, which units to pull, which units will receive what resources in order to accomplish the mission, etc. The commander faces these risks as an individual, yet their decision-making involves placing others at risk. The pressures of putting others at risk are unique to the role served by commanders. The dual nature of these risks thus extends the role of risk in defining courage beyond merely individual physical risk, as was associated with bravery.

By including courage in Sun Tzu's assessment of commanders, this study's participants indicated that a commander's courage is defined differently from that of general or personal

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courage (Pury et al., 2007). In drawing from the implicit theories held by military veterans about the courage necessary for command, the importance of decision-making as opposed to facing episodic threats to one's life or health came to the forefront. Bravery appeared to be valued less as it was seen as a temporary event delineated by time and circumstance. The commander's courage was seen as indicative of a deeper character trait that revealed itself through the decisions the commander made over time.

The commander's courage appears to be unique and deserving of a more thorough and robust research approach. By identifying which behaviors are associated with a commander's courage, as well as the trait vs. state-like nature of the construct, opportunities may exist to not only use this data as a command assessment tool but also in fostering the development of future commanders.

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