

Heroism Science

Volume 5
Issue 2 *Special Issue - The Downside of Heroism*

Article 3

2020

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Recommended Citation

Beggan, James K. (2020) "Monomyth or Monogamyth? Polyamory's Conceptual Challenges to the Hero's Journey," *Heroism Science*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.

DOI: 10.26736/hs.2020.02.03

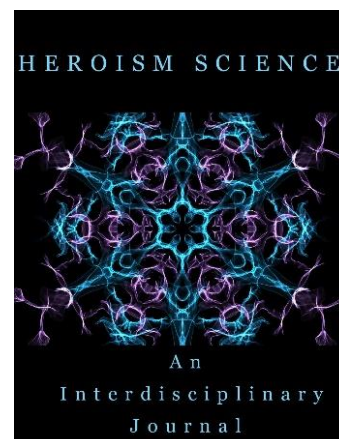
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Heroism Science: An Interdisciplinary Journal (ISSN 2573-7120) <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/heroism-science/>

Vol. 5 No. 2 (2020) pp. 1-46

Monomyth or Monogamyth? Polyamory's Conceptual Challenges to the Hero's Journey



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ABSTRACT: In the context of polyamorous relationships, a unicorn can be defined as a single, bisexual woman interested in forming a relationship with a heterosexual couple. Heroism scholars have suggested that the hero's journey (or monomyth) can be used as a framework for understanding everyone's life. By extension, it would be possible to frame the search for a receptive unicorn as a hero's quest. Unicorn hunters are stigmatized by the general public for challenging the monogamyth, i.e., the monogamy norm. They are also criticized by the polyamorous community for privileging their own interests ahead of those of the women they are seeking. By finding a unicorn, a couple may disrupt the stability of their own relationship in addition to harming the unicorn's well-being. The quest for a unicorn raises a warning about encouraging people to "follow their bliss" because of the possibility of producing collateral damage to the parties involved. In some instances, refraining from undertaking a heroic quest may be the better option.

KEYWORDS: *heroism, hero's quest, monogamy, monogamyth, monomyth, polyamory, unicorn*

Article history

Received: May 5, 2020

Received in revised form: June 10, 2020

Accepted: June 20, 2020

Available online: July 2, 2020

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1 INTRODUCTION

The hero's journey (Campbell, 1949/2008), also termed the *monomyth* (Lang & Trimble, 1988), is the underlying narrative of all myths and legends—as well as their current incarnations in popular culture—which can be understood as a story with three shared elements. In the first stage, the hero journeys from a common world to a region of supernatural wonders. In the second stage, the hero encounters supernatural forces and achieves a victory and is transformed. In the final stage, the hero returns to the everyday world and offers the achievement to others. Allison and Goethals (2011) termed these steps *departure, initiation, and return*.

Heroism scholars have argued that the monomyth can be applied universally, asserting (e.g., Hubbell, 1990, p. 146), “Everyone undertakes a journey in life.” Areas where the monomyth has been employed successfully as a framework for understanding life experiences include the job of teachers (Goldstein, 2005), being in therapy (Lawson, 2005), the desire for physical fitness (Beggan, 2016), seeking public service (Hubbell, 1990), and grief management (Busick, 1989). Legal scholars have suggested that the hero's journey can serve as a template for developing a client's defense (Robbins, 2005). Even the research process can be framed as a hero's journey (Holmes, 2007).

Given the right circumstances, it is possible that anyone could be a hero (Featherstone, 1992). Although heroism scholars would generally encourage heroic imagination and action (Kohen, Langdon, & Riches, 2019), recent work (e.g., Beggan, 2019; Riches, Langdon, & Kohen, 2020) has recognized there is a potential *downside of heroism*, i.e., the negative consequences of heroic action. In this paper, I consider the downside of heroism with regard to individuals undertaking their own heroic journeys, suggesting that a hero's journey can have negative consequences for both the individual on the journey as well as others affected by the journey. Although Campbell believed that the hero's journey was

open to everyone, he warned that "...the big question is whether you are going to be able to say a hearty yes to your adventure" (Campbell, 1988, p. 43). In some cases, the prudent course of action would be to refrain from undertaking a heroic quest.

Diamond (1997) used the term the "Anna Karenina principle" with reference to the eponymous novel's opening line, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Campbell (1949/2008, p. 19) cited the same opening as a prelude to his discussion of romance, adding, "Modern romance, like Greek tragedy, celebrates the mystery of dismemberment, which is life in time. The happy ending is justly scorned as a misrepresentation; for the world, as we know it, as we have seen it, yields but one ending: death, disintegration, dismemberment, and the crucifixion of our heart with the passing of the forms that we have loved."

As described by Velikovsky (2014, no page number), "By that sentence, Tolstoy meant that, in order to be happy, a marriage must succeed in many different respects: sexual attraction, agreement about money, child discipline, religion, in-laws, and other vital issues. Failure in any one of those essential respects can doom a marriage *even if it has all the other ingredients needed for happiness*" (emphasis in original). By extension, a heroic quest that takes the form of the search for romance can fail for many different reasons.

2 THE QUEST FOR A UNICORN

The specific hero's journey I consider is the pursuit of a three-way sexual or romantic arrangement (Joyal, Cossette, & Lapierre, 2015), a popular and particular manifestation (Scoats, 2020) of the broader phenomenon known as consensual nonmonogamy which includes open relationships, swinging, and polyamory (Matsick, Conley, Ziegler, Moors, & Rubin, 2014). *Polyamory* is generally defined in terms of maintaining simultaneously more than one romantic and/or sexual relationship. *Swinging* refers to couples who seek out other

couples with whom to temporarily exchange partners. An *open relationship*, the broadest term, refers to an arrangement where each person retains the possibility of having relationships with third parties. Although there can be many qualifications of simple categorical distinctions (e.g., Anapol, 2010), it is often assumed that swingers and people in open relationships focus more on the sexual gratification rather than emotional support that can be achieved from the availability of additional partners.

In the polyamory community, the term *unicorn* refers to a woman with a rather unique set of characteristics (Unicorns Rule, undated). She is bisexual and desires to have a sexual and romantic relationship with both members of a mixed-sex couple. She will refrain from having relationships outside the primary dyad and subordinate her own needs to those of the couple. Further, she will refrain from having sex with one member of the couple unless the other also participates. As described by Hardy and Easton (2017, p. 111), the term unicorn is used "...because they are rare and possibly mythical," a sentiment echoed by Veaux and Rickert (2014, p. 303) who wrote that this type of woman is "...about as thin on the ground as mythical horned horses."

Locating a third person is not an easy task which is why I suggest the search for a third can be conceptualized as a heroic quest. In an analysis of personal ads, George (2001) noted that bisexual women are highly sought. Sheff (2014) proposed three reasons why unicorns (operationalized as bisexual women) become fetishized. The first is the greater acceptance of female bisexuality in comparison to men's. The second is the stigma associated with bisexual men. The third is a shortage of available female partners.

The pejorative term *unicorn hunters* refers to couples who pursue a third. Unicorn hunters are criticized for objectifying people in terms of their gender, sexuality, and sexual availability without adequately considering the needs of the unicorn (Dodgson, 2018, no page number). For example, Vetter (2019, no page number) wrote "...unicorn hunters are stalking

their prey on apps....” Vasicek (2018) framed unicorn hunting as dehumanizing to the unicorn, demonstrating couples’ privilege, and often biased toward the needs of men, i.e., finding a second woman for the man’s benefit. Finally, because couples often seek out a third in order to “spice up” a distressed relationship, it puts the burden of being an amateur therapist on the unicorn whose job becomes in part to repair a damaged couple. As noted by Sheff (2014, p. 83), “...I came to think of it later as Unicorn Hunter’s Syndrome. The plethora of personal ads from unicorn hunters on poly websites and the ubiquitous presence of couples cruising at poly social events hoping to meet available women make it abundantly clear that the stereotype is well grounded in reality.”

One limitation of this paper is that it focuses on a male-female couple in the role of unicorn hunters. This limitation is driven by the definition of a unicorn as a bisexual woman. This definition excludes the idea of a bisexual man and triads other than a FFM configuration.

It is possible to think of the dilemma encountered by people seeking to complete a three-way in terms of three mythological animals: The unicorn, Great White Whale, and scapegoat. The mythical third is, of course, the unicorn. The quest for a unicorn is analogous to Ahab’s quest for Moby-Dick, the great white whale that consumes and ultimately destroys him. The final animal is the scapegoat, the animal sacrificed to free a community from its troubles (Kearney, 1995). Although the quest for a third can bring a couple closer together, as they pursue a cooperative joint task (Ramenzoni, Davis, Riley, Shockley, & Baker, 2011), obtaining the third may create new stresses in the form of jealousy and relationship instability. A couple who scapegoats the unicorn for their subsequent relationship troubles can restore stability to their couplehood by ending the triadic relationship with little regard for the feelings of the unicorn, which can help explain why unicorn hunters are criticized even in the polyamory community.

Considering a couple's effort at unicorn hunting from the framework of the hero's journey represents a potentially important contribution to heroism scholarship because it addresses several elements of the monomyth. These elements are: (1) the concept of sexual heroism; (2) consideration of the monogamous ideal as a heroic quest; (3) the distinction between an individual and collective quest; (4) gender differences in the nature of the heroic quest; (5) the idea of a recursive quest; and (6) an instantiation of the downside of heroism.

2.1 SEXUAL HEROISM

Sexual behavior in the form of *sexual heroism* is a neglected area of heroism science. A Google Scholar search for "sexual hero" obtained only 154 hits, most of which were irrelevant. McClintock (2004) introduced the term "herosexual" to include someone who is sexually highly competent, concerned with a partner's sexual satisfaction, or admired or courageous in a sexual context. A number of references to "sexual hero" framed the concept in a negative fashion, such as "...American culture is saturated with fantasies of men as the conquering sexual hero and sexual aggressor" (Critelli, & Bivona, 2008, p. 65). The intersection of "sexual hero" and "heroism science" received exactly zero hits on Google Scholar.

One way to think of a sexual hero is by considering individuals who have distinguished themselves in a sexual domain. Examples include Margaret Sanger, the educator and birth control activist (Huss & Dwight, 2017), Hugh Hefner, the founder and publisher of *Playboy* magazine (Pitzulo, 2017; but see Green, 2017, for a discussion of the controversy surrounding Hefner's heroic contributions), and Alfred Kinsey, the pioneer sex researcher who examined people's sex lives from data collected through extensive interviews (Bullough, 1998).

Franco, Blau, and Zimbardo (2011) distinguished between physical-risk, action-oriented heroism and social heroism. Both forms can be included in McClintock's (2004)

concept of a herosexual. Whereas action-oriented sexual heroism would focus on actual sexual behavior—and be akin to a herosexual’s actions—social heroism can be viewed as a sustained effort in the pursuit of an ideal. Although not typically associated with physical threat, as noted by Franco et al. (2011, p. 100), social heroism can be “...associated with considerable risk and personal sacrifice in other dimensions of life, including serious financial consequences, loss of social status, possible long-term health problems, and social ostracism...”

They further noted that social heroism can be conceptualized as having the goal of “...the preservation of a community-sanctioned value or standard that is perceived to be under threat.” Alternatively, it is also possible that a person is “...actually trying to establish a set of *extra*-community standards—pushing toward a new ideal that has not yet found wide acceptance” (emphasis in original).

On the basis of the definition advanced by Franco et al. (2011), sexual heroism could be operationalized as the willingness to promote values associated with sexual behavior that exist outside the mainstream of accepted values. Seeking out, endorsing, or advocating for nonmonogamous relationships—such as a threesome—could be viewed as an expression of sexual heroism. It is also possible that someone in a threesome could be judged to be a physical-risk hero on the basis that coordinating interactions among three people with regard to sexual and emotional needs could be viewed as a daunting task.

2.2 THE MONOGAMOUS IDEAL AS HEROIC QUEST

Despite evidence contradicting its assumed benefits (e.g., Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, & Valentine, 2013), monogamy is the culturally dominant form for romantic relationships (Willey, 2015). *Monogamy* can be defined as exclusivity with another person in four distinct domains: Romantic, sexual, social, and genetic (Kleiman, 1977; Ziegler, Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Rubin, 2015). Romance refers to forming a strong emotional connection

to another person. Sexuality, of course, refers to engaging in sexual activity. The social expression of monogamy involves spending time together and living in the same household. The genetic element involves having biologically-related children in common. In a traditional monogamous marriage, those four distinct elements are expected to (and often do) converge. It is not hard, however, to find situations where they do not. For example, in a blended family, one spouse would adopt a caretaking role for genetically unrelated children. Even happily married people may not live together for an extended period if their jobs keep them apart.

It is possible to distinguish hard and soft monogamy (Emens, 2004). *Soft monogamy* recognizes that there is more than one suitable possible partner but a person—once having found and committed to a single individual—will make a conscious choice to remain faithful to that individual.

Hard monogamy—also termed *supermonogamy*—can be considered as an instantiation of the soul mate. As noted by Wilcox and Dew (2010, p. 689), “The soulmate model of marriage focuses on the emotional and individual possibilities of married life. Adults in America who subscribe to the soulmate schemata of marriage largely see marriage as an expressive ‘super-relationship’ designed to secure them personal growth, emotional intimacy, and individual fulfillment...adherents of the soulmate model of marriage aim to find happiness in marriage by focusing on it directly.” The soul mate marriage paradigm assumes that an individual can search for and find an ideal partner with whom he or she can have a fulfilling, long-term relationship with little work or effort (Willoughby, Hall, & Luczak, 2015).

At the heart of the soul mate model is the *assumption of the one*, that there is a single, special other destined to be found. This belief can be understood in terms of a sexual script (Gagnon & Simon, 1973/2005) operating within and between people and embedded in

societal values and institutions. I term the beliefs held by individuals and society about the value of the search for a soul mate the *monogamyth*, a portmanteau of “monogamy” and “monomyth.” The tropes of romantic comedies (Doherty, 2010) can be considered elements of the monogamyth. A Google Scholar search on June 1, 2020 found literally zero hits for the term “monogamyth.” As such, one contribution of the present paper is to promote and encourage research on this term.

Just as the monomyth can be considered the superordinate script that defines the hero’s journey, the monogamyth defines the superordinate script that outlines the search for a soul mate. Moreover, desire for a soul mate turns the search for a spouse (or long term romantic partner) into a hero’s journey. In this usage, the word “myth” also encompasses the idea that the story being told is a falsehood. Campbell (1949/2008) did not speak well of romance. He wrote, “Modern romance, like Greek tragedy, celebrates the mystery of dismemberment....The happy ending is justly scorned as a misrepresentation....” The myth of monogamy refers to the idea that a long term monogamous relationship is unrealistic and yet highly sought (Barash & Lipton, 2001). As noted by Ziegler et al. (2015, p. 219), “...individuals often adopt *monogamism* without question or challenge” (emphasis in original). Despite evidence to the contrary in the form of relatively high rates of marital infidelity (Shackelford & Buss, 1997) and divorce (Pelley, 2019), most people endorse monogamy as a value and personal goal (Treas & Giesen, 2000).

Given monogamy’s dominance as a value and goal, it is possible to think of almost everyone on a hero’s journey in pursuit of a soul mate marriage (or committed relationship). Despite its prevalence, other models hold—albeit limited—sway (Rubin, Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, & Conley, 2014). Perhaps the most visible alternative to monogamy is polyamory. Other popular ideas are the open marriage and swinging (also known by the more antiquated and sexist term “wife swapping”). As noted by Schaschek (2014, p. 90), the polyamory

movement can be viewed as an effort to value—rather than “despise”—promiscuity, especially given the negative connotation of the term.

Exploration of alternatives to monogamy can also be conceptualized as a hero’s journey. A problem is that because they contradict the dominant model, these journeys and the people who undertake them may be denigrated rather than valorized. As noted by Allison and Goethals (2011, p. 18), “There is a fine line also in that who is a hero and who is a villain is in the eye of the beholder.” By pursuing nonmonogamy—and implicitly or even explicitly rejecting the monogamyth—someone can be viewed as a rugged individualist or perhaps a hedonistic deviant. As a consequence, the person on a nonmonogamous quest can actually be viewed as being on two distinct—but related—hero’s quests. The first involves a personal search for a partner—or set of partners. The second involves reifying an alternative model for relationships. Because it contradicts the status quo, this second quest can be considered social heroism (Franco et al., 2011). Always-shifting social norms around sexuality mean that both heroism and human sexuality can be viewed as socially constructed (Simon & Gagnon, 2003). A further and more intriguing problem is that even among people sympathetic to consensual nonmonogamy, certain manifestations of the hero’s journey in this domain, e.g., unicorn hunting, may be looked down upon.

When the hero returns to the everyday world, he or she brings back a boon or gift. In the case of unicorn hunting—or more generally polyamory—the boon can be considered the concept and ability to experience *compersion*, defined as “...joy and delight when one’s beloved loves or is being loved by another” (Anapol, 2010, p. 121). As noted by Mogilski, Reeve, Nicolas, Donaldson, Mitchell, and Welling (2019, p. 1823), “...compersion may not be the opposite of jealousy, but rather the satisfaction of provisioning a desirable resource to a valuable mate.” Haidt (2000, p. 1-2) described *elevation* as “...a warm, uplifting feeling that people experience when they see unexpected acts of human goodness, kindness, and

compassion....” that “...makes a person want to help others and to become a better person himself or herself.” By extension, *sexual elevation*, as it relates to compersion, could refer to a positive response that stems from an awareness that someone else is experiencing a sexually beautiful act, even if that other person is a romantic partner. The two-fold goal of the heroic polyamorist is to learn to convert jealousy to compersion (de Sousa, 2017) and to pass on this skill to others. Of course, this goal is hampered by the all-too-real temptation of giving into jealousy in response to seeing one’s beloved loved by and loving another.

2.3 COLLECTIVE HEROISM

In Campbell’s (1949/2008) analysis, the hero’s quest as monomyth is the story of a single individual. Using *Star Trek* as the narrative context, Palumbo (2008, p. 115) proposed the *collective hero* that existed by “...combining attributes and experiences of several protagonists....” Rowland (2010) conceptualized the hero in detective fiction as a collective. In an analysis of musical scores in sports movies, Scheurer (2005) suggested that the coordinated effort of coach and players to develop as a team could be viewed as a collective hero. Ashmore (2010, p. 6) described the characters in fantasy as a “hero-by-committee.” Allison and Smith (2015) considered collective heroism in dyads, families, teams, and ensembles. A couple in search of a unicorn can be viewed as on a collective hero’s journey. Two people are united in an adventure in search of a third.

The collective quest has been termed a “duomyth” or “triomyth” (Opdahl, 2015). Mains (2005a, p. 29) suggested that a duomyth “...is more than the telling of two separate quests in which the heroes interact. It is the single quest of one hero, one actant at the structural level, split into two characters at the surface level....” Mains (2005b, p. 42-43) suggested that the duomyth can “...shift the narrative focus away from the traditional solitary hero, to make of the quest a group effort rather than that of a single person acting alone, to emphasize the importance of community and collaboration.” By extension “...a triomyth

allows for an interpretation where the central characters contribute to achieving a common quest” (Opdahl, 2015, p. 45-46). It would be possible to extend this idea to a polymyth or more abstractly to the idea of an *n*-myth, using the mathematical convention where *n* refers to any number of participants.

In extending the monomyth to the *n*-myth, it is important to recognize how Mains and Opdahl modified the meaning of Campbell’s term. For Campbell, the monomyth referred to the idea that all stories or myths were variants of a single hero’s journey. Despite apparent differences, the stories were the same. The “mono” referred to one story. Hence the hero with a thousand faces. In contrast, the *n*-myth as described by Mains and Opdahl refers to the number of people involved in a single story not the number of stories.

2.4 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE HEROIC QUEST

One criticism of Campbell’s monomyth is that it distills the stories of male heroes into a universal archetype but does not speak to the stories of female heroes (Mains, 2005a). In their analysis of British and American literature, Pearson and Pope (1981) suggested that Campbell’s monomyth operates differently for women than men. They proposed that a woman’s heroic quest begins with her Exit from the Garden, which functions in a parallel manner to the male hero’s crossing of the threshold. As part of the exit, the hero “...comes to realize that people she had previously seen as guides for her life—parents, husbands, religious or political authorities—are her captors” (p. 68). The female hero then encounters the male figures of suitor and seducer. To achieve her heroic goal, she must “...slay the dragon of romantic love and demythologize the seducer” (p. 68).

Mains (2005b, p. 42) suggested that with the duomyth there can be a “...separation of the quest hero into male and female counterparts....” Mains (2005a, p. 29) further proposed that the two characters “...undertake what appear to be separate quests but are, at the underlying structural level, a single quest split between the masculine and feminine aspects of

the hero.” Gender stereotypes, or the extent to which gendered characteristics are incorporated into an individual’s self-concept, may inhibit or facilitate the expression of different types of heroic behavior from men and women (Beggan & Allison, 2018; Hoyt, Allison, Barnowski, & Sultan, 2020; Kinsella, Ritchie, & Igou, 2017).

The quest for a unicorn can be viewed in terms of the collective quest described by Palumbo (2008), Mains (2005a, 2005b), and Opdahl (2015). Two people are looking for the same thing, though their different skills or interests might coordinate to represent two distinct elements of the same collective goal. Although men may do more searching for possible partners (Bentzen & Træen, 2014), women express agency by deciding with whom to form a relationship (Vaillancourt & Few-Demo, 2014). It is also possible that women seeking a third might be seen as more trustworthy than men, given the stereotype—and reality—that men are more opportunistic than women in their search for sex (Clark & Hatfield, 1989).

The effort to understand how men and women may differ in their roles in a collective quest for a unicorn is complicated by the relationship between romance and sexual gratification as it applies to women in contrast to men. It is possible to conceptualize the Exit from the Garden as leaving the relative comfort of the monogamyth—the search for a soul mate—where love and sex are inextricably tied and instead beginning on a more complex path that may include accepting or even encouraging one’s partner to become involved with another person. To the extent that “men drive the swinging process” (Bentzen & Træen, 2014, p. 139), a husband could be viewed as either a guide or as a captor. Coming to understand or experience compersion could be viewed as part of slaying the dragon of romantic love. A woman on a heroic quest for a unicorn—or for polyamory in general—demythologizes her soul mate partner by realizing she can love additional men—or more generally people.

In a collective quest, the goals or outcomes of the parties involved may differ in the degree to which they are congruent (Dixit, 2006). In a purely cooperative collective quest, the actions that one party takes to achieve his or her best outcome also facilitates the other party's outcomes. In a purely competitive collective quest, one person's efforts actually hinders the other person (which does not make sense in terms of a joint quest). A mixed motive collective quest possesses cooperative and competitive elements (Luce & Raiffa, 1957). People have an incentive to work together but, at the same time, some patterns of choices lead to better outcomes for one versus another person.

Although the search for a unicorn can be viewed as a collective quest, it is perhaps naïve to think that each party would benefit from finding the unicorn to exactly the same degree. As such, it is possible to think of the search for a unicorn as a mixed motive collective quest. From the perspective of the husband, the search for a unicorn brings the promise of sexual variety. From the perspective of the wife, a unicorn brings the promise—or threat—of a same-sex romantic or sexual encounter. Both parties take the risk of being replaced by the unicorn. Both parties may want a third member but may differ in terms of what attributes are most desirable. As such, given that they can only have one unicorn at any one time, one person might have to compromise more than the other. Although multiple simultaneous unicorns is an unlikely possibility, their inclusion with the couple would create a tetrad (Willis, 1962), thus changing the structure of the network.

2.5 THE RECURSIVE HERO'S JOURNEY IN THE SEARCH FOR A UNICORN

The search for a unicorn actually contains four distinct searches which are recursively embedded within each other in what can be considered akin to a fractal pattern (Palumbo, 1996). Three of them occur prior to the actual quest for a unicorn. The first two are undertaken singly by the person first suggesting the threesome. This person's first quest is within the self and involves coming to terms with the idea and consequences of contradicting

convention. The internal struggle is the initial step in becoming a social hero (Franco et al., 2011).

This person's second quest is finding a partner comfortable with the idea of being in a threesome. The journey for a co-searcher is fraught with danger because bringing up the idea of searching for a unicorn can sabotage a couple's relationship. The nature of the quest makes it more difficult to obtain the assistance of a mentor due to the unique nature of the monogamous bond. A mentor encouraging the quest for a unicorn, i.e., someone encouraging infidelity, would itself be viewed as a form of betrayal. This quest may be the most difficult because it represents a solitary person's effort to navigate uncharted territory.

The third journey involves the partner accepting the challenge of opening up his or her relationship, i.e., becoming receptive to the idea of a threesome. The second and third quest are tightly interrelated. In this third journey, the initiator acts as a mentor to encourage his or her partner to undergo the journey to willingness. If the partner is sympathetic to the idea, then the quest for the unicorn can begin. Alternatively, in the case of the couple's journey, one person may refuse the call. Given the argument raised by Pearson and Pope (1981), the (male) partner who acts as initiator and mentor could also be viewed as a captor or seducer. In the end, the journey for a unicorn can be impeded by the search for a partner willing to engage in the collective journey. Moreover, the very act of suggesting opening up a relationship could alter the dynamics of the relationship. Once suggested, it cannot be unmentioned. As such, even if the partner refuses the call to action, the bond between the members of the couple may be irrevocably broken. It would be interesting to examine whether making this type of call to action could actually foment marital discord or divorce.

The sex of the parties may influence their receptivity to the unicorn quest. In comparison to women, men are more open to the idea of a threesome (Hughes, Harrison, and Gallup, 2004). Further, an FFM configuration is more appealing to men than an MMF

arrangement (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014). Sheff (2006, p. 626) described the FFM triad as an “iconic triadic relationship” that could be viewed as a “seemingly ubiquitous fantasy.” As such, although a woman suggesting a threesome should be more influential than a man, it would also be important to consider the make-up of the mixed-sex configuration being proposed. A situation where a woman suggests a MMF threesome is most unpredictable. Men’s overall higher interest in opportunistic sex (Clark & Hatfield, 1989) would lead to the prediction that they would accept the invitation; however norms against men having sex with other men even among swingers (Frank, 2008) would lead to the assumption they would reject such an offer.

Only the fourth and final journey is the actual quest for a unicorn. This collective journey can be characterized by Mains’ (2005a, 2005b) idea of the duomyth. One unique aspect of the search for a unicorn is that one party in the couple may be more knowledgeable about the process than the other. In this case, then, one partner is simultaneously on the quest and also serving as a mentor for the other person.

To the extent that men are more likely than women to “drive the swinging process” (Bentzen & Træen, 2014, p. 139), it is possible to think of the woman in a mixed-sex dyad as embarking on a heroic quest to abandon her conventional view that valorizes monogamy. Her male partner who raises the possibility of a threesome is both suiter and seducer, as described by Pearson and Pope (1981). Being able to enter into the threesome requires that she exit the safety of the illusion of monogamy. Further, bisexuality represents a challenge to normative relationship ideals revolving around monogamy (Lahti, 2018).

Once a couple has become comfortable with the idea of searching for a unicorn, i.e., they have successfully completed the first three quests, their unicorn quest may not have a time limit. It could take a long time to find a unicorn. Further, it is possible that they might eventually lose their unicorn, and begin the quest again. Alternatively, a malady that could be

termed *unicorn hunters' fatigue* might set it, making the couple abandon their hunt for a unicorn and take up another kind of search, perhaps choosing to resume a more conventional monogamythic quest.

2.6 THE DOWNSIDE OF THE HEROIC QUEST

Perhaps the most dramatic and unfortunate way heroic behavior possesses a downside is with regard to physical-risk heroism where someone tries to help another and inadvertently makes the situation worse. It is not difficult to find instances where an intervention produces additional misfortune rather than solves a problem. In one instance, a woman's efforts to pull someone from a car accident may have exacerbated the victim's injuries (Williams, 2008). Although the man who rescued 18-month-old Baby Jessica from a well succeeded in the rescue, he committed suicide eight years later after an unfortunate downward spiral caused by the vicissitudes of fame (Belkin, 1995). The would-be Good Samaritan who called the police on a woman who briefly left her son in the car while she went into a store caused years of turmoil to the woman and her child (Brooks, 2018). These misfires can be conceptualized as variations of the "almost hero" (Hutchins & Allison, 2018).

One way to conceive of the downside of social heroism is in terms of difficulties that stem from endorsing contradictory values. This threat could occur within a single person motivated to reify competing values. Colin Powell, the American politician and general, said, "There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure." Walt Whitman said, "Do anything, but let it produce joy." It is not hard to imagine that someone might value both hard work and the desire to enjoy life, but to some extent those motives are incompatible. Holding contradictory thoughts simultaneously can create an unpleasant emotional state known as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

The downside of social heroism can also occur when different people with competing values come into conflict. The American Civil War and the Civil Rights movement that

started a century later can both be framed as a battle over what was meant by the phrase “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,” which appears in the second paragraph of the *Declaration of Independence*. Which men (and women) should be given this protection? Which rights should be protected?

Unicorn hunters—as champions of polyamory—challenge two values. The first, most obviously, is monogamy. Polyamory and other forms of consensual nonmonogamy are stigmatized by the general population (Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin, & Conley, 2013). With regard to monogamy, unicorn hunters are positioned on the same side as polyamorists and practitioners of other forms of consensual nonmonogamy. The second value concerns the perceived vulnerability of unicorns which then fuels the negative view of unicorn hunters held by many in the polyamory community. Unicorn hunters are stigmatized even by those receptive to consensual nonmonogamy (Dodgson, 2018; Sheff, 2014; Vasicek, 2018; Vetter, 2019) because the couple doing the hunting is viewed as exploiting or objectifying the unicorn. This assertion seems rooted in the idea that the unicorn is relatively powerless in comparison to the couple. In an analysis of the television show *You Me Her*, which is about a polyamorous triad, Armstrong (2018, p. 17) wrote “...there is an imbalance of power between Jack and Emma as the original couple and Izzy who enters the pre-established relationship. This results in a level of marginalisation (sic) of Izzy as the third in the triad...” Third parties—regardless of their personal interest in consensual nonmonogamy—tend to judge unicorn hunters negatively. One strategy that unicorn hunters can try in response to social sanctions is to undermine criticisms by emphasizing being in love, being discreet, and being healthy (Griffiths & Frobish, 2013).

The accusation that the unicorn is being exploited contradicts the basic economic principle that scarcity, or perceived scarcity, drives up the price of a desired commodity

(Lynn, 1991). Given the paucity of available unicorns and the magnitude of the demand, from a purely economic perspective, the unicorn has more, not less, power than the couple seeking a unicorn. Whyte, Brooks, and Torgler (2019) reported quantitative evidence consistent with this assertion in that bisexual and pansexual women (but not men) enjoyed enhanced market value. In a qualitative analysis of 22 men and women in polyamorous relationships, Roach (2015, p. 62) quoted a respondent named Maia who stated, “Everybody who is in an established couple is trying to add that magical third person because they think that is how polyamory is supposed to work. There are a lot of people looking for their unicorn. There are dates all over and there are dates to be had.” In a polyamory advice website, Zinnia (2018, no page number) wrote, “...if you're just interested in finding a couple to date - you are in some serious luck. That is something that a LOT of couples want, and you will not have a hard time finding a couple to date!”

3 THE STIGMA OF THE CALL TO ACTION

The hero's journey begins with a call to action. In the case of unicorn hunting, which can be conceptualized as a collective journey, the call to action most likely involves one partner in a dyad bringing up the idea of a three-way to the other. Raising the idea of a three-way can create discord in the primary relationship to the extent that one person feels rejected by the other bringing up the idea. Campbell (1949/2008, p. 49) recognized, “Often in actual life, and not infrequently in the myths and popular tales, we encounter the dull case of the call unanswered; for it is always possible to turn the ear to other interests. Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative....the refusal is essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one's own interest.” When applied to a collective journey, one downside of heroism is that one person's call to action may be in conflict with another person's steady state in the everyday world. This conflict would be manifested by a couple

where one partner wants to pursue a unicorn and the other is intent on maintaining the monogamous status quo.

Alternatively, it is also possible that two people who are both receptive to accepting a call to action will run into trouble if one person's call to action conflicts with another's. If two people meet, regardless of how compatible they might be otherwise, if one's journey is in the direction of polyamory and the other's quest is for the monogamyth, they will be ultimately incompatible.

An unreceptive spouse or partner would be likely to talk to friends and family members about the proposition. Given society's negative view of consensual nonmonogamy, most likely friends would be more sympathetic to the uninterested partner than the would-be quester. As such, another aspect of the stigma of the call to action is the social risk associated with the potential to be ostracized by mutual associates.

4 THE DIFFICULTY OF THE CHALLENGE

It is important to recognize that someone could fail in the pursuit of a heroic goal, despite the fact that Campbell's (1949/2008) classic book has few references to failure. One exception is the Greek myth where Orpheus' doubt causes him to lose his true love Eurydice as they are leaving the underworld. The failure to accomplish a heroic journey (Pile, 2012) can have a detrimental effect on those pursuing their quests.

Hutchins and Allison (2018) identified three types of "almost heroes." The first is a person who fails to act in a situation where heroism is required. This type of almost hero corresponds to Franco's (2017, p. 186) concept of *heroic failure* which can be viewed as "...not that someone tried to be heroic and failed in the process, but rather than a leader's 'heroic imagination' failed, thus not allowing her to see the unfolding crisis events as requiring a heroic response...." The second type is someone who tries but fails. The third is

the person who tries, fails, and suffers as a consequence. In its darkest form, this third type dies in the process of trying to act heroically but furthermore fails to help the victim. It would also be possible to extend the third type by considering someone who tries to help, fails to do so, and actually causes more damage to the victim than what would have otherwise resulted (Beggan, 2019).

In the quest for a unicorn, the four places where an individual can fail and become an almost hero correspond to the four recursive hero's quests. A person may fail to acknowledge his or her own desire for consensual nonmonogamy. He or she might, for example, entertain it only as a form of sexual fantasy rather than admit the desire to actualize it. Even if desirous of finding a unicorn, a person may fail to reach out to a partner, perhaps out of fear of losing the partner or being censured for the desire. In the third quest, he or she may be unable to motivate a partner to become interested in the collective quest. In one subsequent scenario, he or she gives up on the desire. In the alternative, the relationship ends. Finally, and perhaps most damning, he or she may engage a partner but they may be unable to find a unicorn. Sheff (2014, p. 85) wrote, "Many polyamorists related similar stories of their unsuccessful quests...and the varied impacts that had had on their relationships. Some retained their original goal of seeking her out and looked for fifteen or more years, to no avail. Others found her, only to discover the relationship did not meet their expectations." Heiss (2017) described herself as a "real-life unicorn" and wrote encouragingly, "Couples, find unicorns. Unicorns, find couples. Curious readers, try it out."

5 THE DANGER OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

In the third stage of the hero's journey, as noted by Campbell (1949/2008, p. 23), "...the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." This benefit can help individuals as well as the collective community. For

Campbell (1949/2008, p. 167), "...the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet or the ten thousand worlds."

The story of Prometheus the fire bringer is a cautionary tale for the hero's quest. Although he succeeds in stealing fire from the gods and gifting it to humans, he is also punished by Zeus with eternal torture. He is chained to a rock by Zeus and each day an eagle comes to eat his liver; each night it grows back and the cycle is repeated. The boon of fire also comes with the danger of possible abuse. Fire itself—or the civilization that fire symbolizes—can also be a force for destruction if used poorly or put into the wrong hands.

Three problems are associated with achieving the unicorn. The first involves the two people who have found their unicorn; the second involves the two people in relation to the larger community; the third and final issue involves the larger community itself.

It is possible that by pursuing their unicorn goals, which can be viewed as analogous to Campbell's idea of following your bliss, couples may achieve an optimal psychological functioning (Martin, Conners, & Newbold, 2019). Alternatively, a unicorn can also threaten the stability of the couple. Regardless of whether interactions with a unicorn are limited to one, or a few, encounters and only involve sexual expression, or the triad evolves into a long- or longer-term relationship which includes an emotional or romantic element, emotional fallout from the three-way can interfere with the stability of the original couple.

As noted by Brooks (2020, no page number), there is a fourth stage of the hero's journey—"the personal crucible"—which can be considered "...the end of the true hero's journey...coming home and finding a battle to be waged not with an external enemy, but with one's own demons. Win that final battle—the hardest one of all—and true victory is yours."

This fourth stage relates to the consequences of successfully finding a unicorn and creating a threesome. What is the impact of a threesome on one's dyadic relationship?

Two emotions that might operate in a three-way are jealousy and envy (Parrott & Smith, 1993). Smith and Kim (2007, p. 47) defined *envy* as an "...unpleasant, often painful emotion characterized by feelings of inferiority, hostility, and resentment produced by an awareness of another person or group of persons who enjoy a desired possession (object, social position, attribute, or quality of being..." Romantic envy occurs where "...invidious comparison refers to perceived aspects of courting relationships and pairbonding..." (Hupka & Zaleski, 1990, p. 18). By extension, sexual envy would relate to aspects of sex-based interaction.

Jealousy occurs when one person fears losing an important relationship to a rival. Romantic jealousy can be viewed as the "...emotions, cognitions, and behavior associated with the appraisal of threat...arising from the potential, actual, or imagined involvement of one's loved one or mate in a relationship with an interloper" (Hupka, Buunk, Falus, Fulgosi, Ortega, Swain, & Tarabrina, 1985, p. 425). Sexual jealousy can be defined as the "...aversive emotional response that is triggered by the real or imagined sexual attraction between the partner in a romantic relationship and a third person" (Buunk & Hupka, 1987, p. 13).

In an early analysis of triads, Caplow (1968) used the names Ahab, Brutus, and Charlie to refer to the three members. In keeping with conventions derived from a paper on encryption that defined a research problem with regard to a troubled relationship between Alice and Bob (Blum, 1981; Gordon, 1984; Rivest, Shamir, & Adleman, 1978), I have chosen to identify Alice and Bob as a couple and Carol as the unicorn. Envy is what Carol feels with regard to the relationship that Alice and Bob possess. Carol wishes that she could replace Alice or Bob. Jealousy is what Alice or Bob would feel with regard to Carol if one of them thought that Carol might steal the other away.

The counterpoint emotion of jealousy and envy is compersion (Deri, 2015), but even confirmed polyamorists acknowledge that it may be sometimes difficult to actually experience pleasure rather than distress knowing that a loved one is being made happy by someone else (Sheff, 2016). As noted by Pitagora (2016, p. 400), "...though perhaps easier said than done, learning the art of compersion can be an antidote to jealousy...." She further suggested that "...the most effective way to address these types of relational changes in a kink-poly relationship is in making continual efforts towards self-improvement, and a desire to support partner(s) in the same effort...." Compersion can be viewed as the gift provided to society by the efforts of heroic polyamorists.

Another way to think about the challenge created by the achievement of the unicorn is in terms of *identity gaps* (Rubinsky, 2019, p. 20), which refer to a discrepancy between one aspect of identity in contrast to another and are illustrated by a situation such as: "if a polyamorous individual's romantic partner tells him or her that he or she is behaving like he or she is jealous, that ascription of jealousy may be in tension with how the individual sees himself or herself as a person who does not experience a high degree of jealousy because he or she is polyamorous and okay with multiple-partner relationships." Finding a unicorn can represent a challenge to one's self-concept as a polyamorist if attainment of the goal creates uncomfortable emotions such as jealousy rather than permits the expression of compersion.

In addition to emotional fallout, another danger of entering into a three-way relationship is that the unicorn will replace one of the members of the original dyad. A *coalition* can be defined as agreement of two or more people to unite together against another (Komorita & Chertkoff, 1973). As observed by Caplow (1968, p. 2), "The most significant property of the triad is its tendency to divide into a coalition of two members against a third." Accomplishing their goal of finding a unicorn can permanently change a couple's life. The unicorn "...is bound to alter some of the mechanisms operating in the dyad, whether by

throwing a spanner into its works or by acting as buffer, lubricant, or even adhesive-to indulge in engineering metaphors...” because “...third parties may divide, exploit, or else consolidate the original dyads, depending on the process they set in motion-such as fueling dissent, arbitration, or bridge building...” (Bunge, 1997, p. 412). Although a couple may have an initial advantage in terms of stability, Baum, Shapiro, Murray, and Wideman (1979, p. 505) wrote, “Triads may be inherently unstable because of the tendency for coalitions to form against one member.” From this perspective, the unicorn, even if initially disadvantaged, may obtain greater power and ultimately replace one of the original members of the dyad. Her power could be based on novelty, utility, or guile. Over time, if members of a triad gain or lose power, they could shift their allegiances such that a steady state is never obtained (Caplow, 1956).

It is possible to think of the influence of the unicorn on the members of the couple in terms of four distinct models (Mitchell, Bartholomew, & Cobb, 2014). In the *separate systems* model, the influence of the unicorn is independent from the influence of each partner on the other. In the *compensation* model, an attribute of the unicorn makes up for a weakness of one of the partners. In the *contrast* model, a positive attribute of the unicorn highlights a deficit of one of the partners. The idea that a second relationship can interfere with a primary may be part of the reason why people are skeptical of and stigmatize polyamorous relationships (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013). In the *additive* model, any benefit provided by the unicorn is combined with a positive attribute of the partner.

On the basis of data collected from 357 respondents, Moors, Ryan, and Chopik (2019, p. 108) concluded “...people engaged in polyamory treat their relationships as distinct and independent from one another, findings consistent with recent research that has not found support for additive, contrast, or compensatory models of relationship functioning among people with multiple concurrent partners....” Although Mitchell et al. (2014, p. 336)

concluded that their results "...suggest that polyamorous individuals' relationships with one partner tend to operate relatively independently of their relationships with another partner," they did report limited evidence in support of the contrast model in that "...getting needs met with one partner may somehow threaten the relationship with another partner, perhaps because high need fulfillment with one partner fosters comparison between the two, leading to relatively less satisfaction with the less fulfilling partner." To the extent that contrast model operates, embracing the unicorn may lead to future discord in the dyad and create an unfortunate downside to the pursuit of the unicorn.

If a couple decides their relationship is being stressed by the presence of the unicorn, they might choose to abandon the unicorn. One reason why unicorn hunting couples are criticized is that they put the needs of the unicorn after their own (couple-based) concerns. Scapegoating the unicorn may or may not be effective in restoring relationship satisfaction to the couple but it can clearly prove detrimental to the happiness of the now-scapegoated third.

One of the difficulties the successful polyamorist must face is how to translate his or her experiences with polyamory into a form that is palatable to those who are monogamous. As noted by Campbell (1949/2008, p.188), "There must always remain, however, from the standpoint of normal waking consciousness, a certain baffling inconsistency between the wisdom brought forth from the deep, and the prudence usually found to be effective in the light world.....How teach again, however, what has been taught correctly and incorrectly learned a thousand times....That is the hero's ultimate difficult task." The dilemma faced by the heroes in their joint quest for a unicorn is that the gift—advocacy for nonmonogamous relationships—may not be recognized as a gift by those intended as the recipients. In fact, the returning heroes may be sanctioned for offering their views. The stigma associated with consensual nonmonogamy can be applied to both the unicorn and the unicorn hunters.

An important consideration with regard to coming out as nonmonogamous is the possible consequences of such an admission on a person's friends and relatives (Sheff, 2014). Rambukkana (2004) suggested that those who can afford to come out need to do so to create a more favorable climate for those who are not as free to do so.

The case of Katie Hill, a Democrat who was elected to the House of Representatives for California's 25th district in 2018, illustrates the possible consequences of the stigma of consensual nonmonogamy with regard to the coming out process. She was involved in a sex scandal associated with being in a *throuple*—a triadic relationship—with her husband Kenny Heslep and campaign staffer Morgan Desjardins (Boswell, Gould, & Van Laar, 2019). Given that Desjardins was an employee, the polyamorous element was confounded with the stigma of sexual harassment or an inappropriate work relationship (Mai-Duc, 2019). But the scandal was exacerbated by the release of intimate photographs reinforcing what could be viewed as the salacious nature of a threesome (Emba, 2019). Katie Hill resigned on October 27, 2019 (Alter, 2019), and in a special election for her replacement, the seat was won by Republican Mike Garcia in what can be viewed as a boost for the GOP (Itkowitz, 2020; Olsen, 2020). In the aftermath of the scandal, Hill is trying to rebuild her career by writing a book (called *She Will Rise*), giving speeches about women's empowerment, and appearing on television (Moscatello, 2020).

Ross (2019) considered the extent to which an individual on a hero's quest needs to return to an everyday land to provide the discovered boon to others. In the present case, the boon may take the form of challenges to monogamy which may be resisted by their potential audience, given the ideological dominance of monogamy. The quest for a unicorn can then create a new kind of quest: The challenge of bringing forward the value of nonmonogamous patterns of relationships. In this way, successful unicorn hunters become social heroes advocating for social change. Two prominent issues involved in the legitimization of

polyamory are whether or not marriage can occur among more than two people (Stein, 2016, 2020) and whether polyamory can be classified as a core and unchanging element of identity and hence subject to protection under the law (Tweedy, 2011).

Part of being consensually nonmonogamous requires individuals to decide to what extent they personally want to challenge the monogamyth by becoming involved with social movements geared toward legitimizing different forms of consensual nonmonogamy. Perhaps the most likely form of consensual nonmonogamy to create social change is polyamory, which refers to having more than one concurrent romantic relationship. The reason is that, like monogamy, polyamory valorizes love and romance above and beyond hedonistic, sexual pleasure.

As noted by Campbell (1949/2008, p. 196), the talent of the master is, “Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back—not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other....” In the case of unicorns and polyamory, there can be a significant cost trying to exert such a freedom.

6 CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on sexual heroism that takes the form of social heroism (Franco et al., 2011). Seeking a unicorn demonstrates a tacit endorsement of consensual nonmonogamy, a value in direct conflict with powerful pressure toward finding monogamous relationships, what can be termed the monogamyth. Other forms of sexual heroism are possible, such as the actions of sex workers who frame their sexual behavior as a form of empowerment (The Artifice, no date given).

Furthermore, action-oriented sexual heroism may also exist. Athletes can be considered heroes on the record of their accomplishments (Duret & Wolff, 1994).

Alternatively, they can be considered heroic because their actions mimic the virtue associated with heroic struggles (Reid, 2017). Conceiving of athletes as heroes can be extended to McClintock's (2004) concept of a herosexual. In a manner analogous to the way sports figures can be viewed as heroes based on their competency or agency (Dector-Frain, Vanstone, & Frimer, 2017) or charisma (Humphrey & Adams, 2017), dimensions of heroic achievement for sexual heroes/athletes could include the number of people with whom heroes or heroines have had sex, their level of physical attractiveness, and the length of time or enthusiasm with which they have sex. People who make significant earnings on the basis of their sexual activity can also be considered sexual heroes. Profitable actions could range from modeling to actual and explicit sexual activity, i.e., the production of pornography.

For consumers of pornography, it is possible that the "macho superstud" (Lust, 2010, p. 31) porn actor could represent an instantiation of action-oriented heroism. Although men watch pornography more than women (Hald, 2006), a significant number of women have been documented as consumers of pornography (Wright, Bae, & Funk, 2013). Both men and women might view porn stars as heroes but perhaps to different degrees or for different reasons. Future research could consider the dimensions that influence the way in which people conceptualize sexual heroes.

The focus of this paper was on the quest for a unicorn. It is also possible to imagine that unicorns might be on a quest for a couple, i.e., a unicorn could be a unicorn hunter hunter. Although attitudes toward unicorns tend to be favorable, especially to the extent that they are seen as exploited, it is unclear how unicorn hunter hunters would be viewed. They might be seen as victims of a *false consciousness* (Jost & Banaji, 1994), i.e., as willing participants of their own exploitation. Alternatively, they might be viewed as complicit in perpetuating a stereotypic pattern of relationships. It is also important to recognize that

another downside in the quest for a unicorn is the harm that comes to the unicorn rather than the couple engaging with the unicorn.

Criticisms of unicorn hunters seem rooted in antipathy toward approaching human interaction, especially those involving sex or romance (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004), in terms of social exchange, despite the preponderance of evidence that relationships are governed at least in part by a consideration of the potential costs and benefits of maintaining those relationships (Foa & Foa, 1980; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Both unicorns and unicorn hunters could be viewed as exploiting their counterparts or merely as making an effort to satisfy their needs. One way to think of the quest for unicorn (or the quest for a couple seeking a unicorn) is as the MacGuffin (Goode, 2003), a term coined by filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock to refer to a plot element that is more important to the characters in the film than to the audience watching the film. By extension, is a couple seeking a unicorn concerned with optimizing their relationship with the unicorn, or merely interested in what the unicorn can provide for them on their own collective search for sexual or romantic fulfillment? If the unicorn's own phenomenological experiences do not matter, then she is demoted to a living MacGuffin (Gagiano, 2019). Of course, it is also possible to adopt the perspective of the unicorn and consider to what extent she values a relationship with a couple beyond considering what they can do for her.

By definition, a unicorn is a bisexual woman. It is possible to imagine a male unicorn, a man seeking out a heterosexual couple with whom to form a relationship or have sex. Future scholarship could consider the search for a male unicorn as a heroic quest and its possible negative consequences. It is interesting to speculate on the frequency of male unicorns in the population. Given that men are more sexually opportunistic than women (Clark & Hatfield, 1989), male unicorns may be relatively easy to find; however given the greater stigma associated with male—as opposed to female—bisexuality (Yost & Thomas,

2012), the bias against men having sex with each other even in consensual nonmonogamist contexts (Frank, 2008), and the preference for FFM as opposed to MMF threesomes (Thompson & Byers, 2017), it is also plausible that male unicorns and those hunting them would be even rarer than a traditional, i.e., female, unicorn.

Once the idea of two complementary people on a single quest is introduced as an expression of the hero's journey, it is possible to hierarchically structure the two participants' contributions. Does each participant contribute equally? Is each person equally invested in the journey? Does each person benefit to the same degree from the heroic transformation? The present analysis suggests that future heroic scholarship could consider the role of hierarchically stacked heroes on their heroic quests.

Given the potential sensitivity people display to topics related to human sexuality, although Campbell encourages people to say yes to their heroic quest, in some cases, its undertaking can lead to uncomfortable feelings or experiences that—in the end—might be viewed as a net loss for an individual and an individual's relationship with another person. The quest for a threesome is one instance where people may experience the downside of heroism. It is likely that there may be other downsides associated with sexual heroism that might not operate in other domains. Further research would be required to assess where there might be prohibitive costs associated with the heroic sexual quest.

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8 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.