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A Lion's Blues: Heroism, Heroic Self-Representations, and Emotional Distress in the Life and Character of Yonatan (Yoni) Netanyahu

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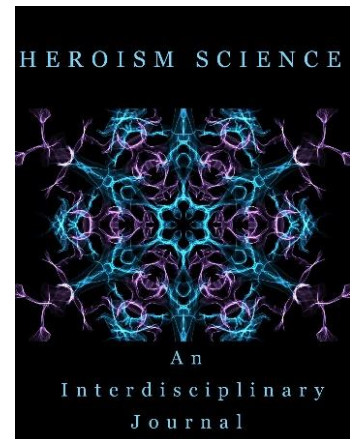
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A Lion's Blues: Heroism, Heroic Self- Representations, and Emotional Distress in the Life and Character of Yonatan (Yoni) Netanyahu



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ABSTRACT: The realization that heroism – representing either a trait or a value system – is potentially pernicious is important for both scientific and societal reasons. In this article, we adopt a psychobiographical perspective to analyze the character and life of one of Israel’s greatest heroes, Yonathan (“Yoni”) Netanyahu. Yoni was an illustrious military leader, as well as an outstanding intellectual and adored persona. He served as the commander of the special operation forces spearheading the famous Entebbe Operation during which Israeli commando forces rescued hostages taken captive in Uganda. Yoni was the only military casualty in this operation, which was ultimately named after him. Subsequent to his death, his numerous personal letters were made public, allowing further glimpses into his heroic self-representations but also to the emotional distress he suffered. Applying our theory of heroic self-representations (HERS; Shahar, 2013), we analyze Yoni’s letters. Our analyses confirm Yoni’s tendency to construe himself as a savior and conqueror, and to identify with cultural heroes. The emotional distress Yoni suffered is characterized by depressed and anxious affect, masked by superb functioning. Qualitative analyses of the letters suggest two mechanisms of the effect of heroic self-representations on distress in Yoni’s case: compulsive purposefulness and emotional seclusion.

1 A LION'S BLUES: HEROISM, HEROIC SELF-REPRESENTATIONS, AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS IN THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF YONATAN (YONI) NETANYAHU

"We spotted a landing of Syrian commandos near Nafah (HQ of Zahal in the Golan Heights) and were informed that we were in fact the last force to defend the place. We moved fast to that location. We were standing on the road looking for the enemy when suddenly heavy fire was opened on us, killing one of our officers. The Syrians caught us very conveniently, with themselves behind cover, while we were exposed in the field. At this point somebody had to start giving clear orders; otherwise the situation there could have been grim. There wasn't much firing after that first barrage, and there was a kind of feeling that you were waiting for somebody to do something. I personally remember that I began to be frightened. I was very frightened. What I saw then was a picture I'll remember all my life: suddenly I saw Yoni stand up quite calmly, as if nothing had happened. With hand movements he signaled to the men to get up. They were all lying down behind cover, and he began to go forward as if it were a fire exercise. He walked upright, giving out orders right and left. I remember my thoughts then as his soldier: Hell, if he can do it, so can I! I got up and started to fight." (From the reminiscences of an officer). (Netanyahu & Netanyahu, 2001, p. 261).

The above quote pertains to one of Israel's most illustrious military heroes, Yonatan ("Yoni") Netanyahu. Currently more well-known as the deceased brother of the Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin ("Bibi") Netanyahu, Yoni is adored in Israel as the epitome of military valor. Moreover, despite the controversy surrounding his brother Binyamin and perhaps the entire Netanyahu's family, Yoni's image is consensually revered. Yoni's command of the SWAT team that burst into the Entebbe terminal, in which Israeli/Jewish passengers were held hostage by Palestinian and German terrorists, culminated in a dramatic success – the hostages

were freed. Yet, the operation led to Yoni's death, in turn linking Yoni's name with the fight against international terrorism, posthumously making him one of Israel's most influential public figures.

This article constitutes the first iteration of a comprehensive psychobiography of Yoni Netanyahu. Yoni's psychobiography, in turn, is embodied in a novel program of research developed at our lab, which examines the complex relationships between heroism and emotional distress (e.g., Israeli et al., 2018; Shahar, 2013). We begin with a brief bio sketch of Yoni and the letters he wrote to people close to him throughout his short life. Next, we ground Yoni's psychobiography within heroism science. We then describe the present investigation.

2 YONI: LIFE AND LETTERS

Lieutenant-Colonel Yoni (Yonatan) Netanyahu (March 13, 1946-July 4, 1976) was an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) officer who commanded the elite commando unit “Sayeret Matkal” during Operation Entebbe, an operation to rescue Israeli hostages held at Entebbe Airport in Uganda in 1976. Although the mission was successful, Yoni was the only IDF soldier killed in this action.

Yoni was born in 1946 in New York City to his parents, Cela and Professor Benzion Netanyahu. His father was a renowned historian who faced difficulties finding a university position in Israel and was therefore forced to find such positions in the USA. Yoni was the oldest child and had two younger brothers, Binyamin and Iddo. In 1948, when Yoni was two years old, his family moved back to the newly founded state of Israel and Yoni grew up in Jerusalem. Throughout his childhood, Yoni was considered a bright student and charismatic youth. The family moved back to the USA when Yoni was in his junior year of high school. Leaving his friends and classmates at age 17 was very difficult for Yoni, as is evident from his letters and reports of other people in his life.

After graduating high school in 1964, Yoni returned to Israel to enlist in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). He joined the Paratroopers Brigade and excelled in the Officer Training Course. His letters revealed that, after his difficult time in the USA, the army life suited Yoni perfectly. It provided him with a calling – to fight for Israel's security. This calling was also strongly founded by the Netanyahu family's political persuasion that lay squarely within the revisionist-Zionist camp, currently identified with the Likud party (arguably, the equivalent to the Republican party in the USA). Throughout his service, Yoni was regarded as an incredibly daring, outstandingly diligent and bright commander and was even deemed by many in the IDF as a future Chief of Staff (i.e., commander of the IDF).

During the six-day war, Yoni was seriously wounded in the course of a search and rescue mission that took place behind enemy lines. He was decorated for valor for this action. After the war, Yoni decided to leave the IDF and pursue his academic interests. Soon after marrying his girlfriend Tirza, the couple moved to the USA, where Yoni attended Harvard University. He took classes in philosophy and mathematics, excelling in both. However, his letters revealed him to be restless and worried, primarily about Israel's security. Feeling that his place was in Israel, Yoni and his wife returned in 1968. At first, Yoni continued his studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, but in 1969 he left his studies and re-enlisted in the IDF.

By 1970 he was a squad leader in “Sayeret Matkal” (arguably, Israel’s most illustrious commando unit). At this point, his marriage was facing difficulties and at the beginning of 1972 he and Tirza were divorced. Yoni kept advancing in his units’ chain of command, eventually becoming the unit's deputy commander in the summer of 1972. At the time, the unit's commander was Ehud Barak, Yoni's close friend and the highest decorated IDF soldier to date. In 1999, Barak became Israel's Prime Minister after beating Binyamin (“Bibi”) Netanyahu, who had his first term as Prime Minister between 1996 and 1999.

The Yom Kippur War in 1973 caught Yoni back at Harvard, where he was trying to complete his studies while on leave from service. Yoni quickly returned to Israel and took command of a “Sayeret Matkal” squad that was engaged in difficult fighting in the Golan Heights. In the ensuing battles, his unit killed more than 40 Syrian commando soldiers in a curtail battle. Later in the war, he rescued a Lieutenant Colonel who was lying wounded behind Syrian lines. For this, Yoni was awarded the medal of distinguished service and received the command of the Barak Armored Regiment, which had been shattered during the war. Under Yoni's command, this regiment turned into a leading military unit.

In 1974, Yoni left the armed corps and moved back to “Sayeret Matkal.” He was made a Lieutenant Colonel and received command over the unit. The following years found Yoni attempting to find peace in his life by trying to keep a sense of meaning in his command while, at the same time, attempting to develop and maintain a romantic relationship. In 1976, Yoni was killed while commanding the SWAT team spearheading the Entebbe Operation. The operation was propelled by the high jacking of an Air France flight from Tel Aviv to Paris by German and Palestinian terrorists. The plane was redirected to Entebbe's airport in Uganda and the hostages were guarded in the terminal. The Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, who was adamant not to give in to the terrorists' demands, instructed the IDF and other Israeli security agencies to develop a rescue plan. With very little time to gather information and prepare, and in the face of formidable logistic obstacles, a plan was devised, entitled "Operation Entebbe." Selected fighters from "Sayeret Matkal" were assigned to the extremely dangerous role of bursting into the terminal, and Yoni was deemed their commander.

Soon after landing at the airport as planned, the entering force met some resistance from local soldiers. While the exact circumstances of this delay are contested, it is agreed that Yoni was shot dead by a Ugandan soldier a few meters into the charge and that he died before the

mission was completed. The operation itself was a huge success and was renamed “Operation Yonatan” in Yoni's honor and memory.

The death of Yoni made him, for the first time, a public figure. His memory was forged around the ideals of courage, sacrifice and patriotism. The story of "Operation Yonatan" was transformed into movies (the latest released in 2018), documentaries, books and art exhibitions. In 1977, Yoni's brothers – Binyamin and Iddo – assembled the various letters Yoni had written to people close to him, organized them chronologically, and published them under the Hebrew title, *Yoni's Letters* (Netanyahu & Netanyahu, 1977) and in English as *The Letters of Jonathan Netanyahu* (referred to herein as *The Letters*; Netanyahu & Netanyahu, 2001). The book consists of 261 letters and is divided into six distinct periods: late teenage years in the USA, being drafted into the IDF, Six-Day War experiences, academic pursuits at Harvard University, the return to the IDF during the "Yom Kippur" War and Yoni's late army career up until his death. The book provides Yoni's perspective on Israel's current events while reveling in his incredibly sensitive and poetic soul. Through the letters, Yoni expresses his reflections on belongingness and loneliness, self-fulfillment and estrangement, and love of family, friends, women, and country.

Immediately after publication, *The Letters* became a bestseller. It is routinely made accessible to teens and young soldiers in officer training to instill them with patriotism, determination and courage. Notable Israeli military officers and politicians have alluded to the fact that the book had a profound influence on their career development. It is also well known that Binyamin Netanyahu entered politics as a consequence of his older brother's life and death. Beyond the book, Yoni's commemoration continues through the awarding of his name to schools, streets, neighborhoods, and parks around the country.

Alongside Yoni's heroism, decorum, and outstanding personality, there are also very clear indications that he dealt with inner turmoil throughout his life. Specifically, his letters are

marred with first-person expressions of tremendous emotional distress. In addition, an important book published by the journalist and author Moshe Zoder, which describes the lives of commanders of Sayeret Matkal, elaborated on Yoni's psychological pain:

Except that at a certain point Yoni was probably afflicted by depression. Such a thing could happen to any person at any period in their life and at any level of severity. Unfortunately for Yoni, however, he was afflicted by depression when he was the commander of Sayeret Matkal, a demanding role that requires the entire energy and senses of the person carrying the role. ... (Zonder, 2006, p. 129; The above quotation was translated from Hebrew by GS).

3 SCIENTIFIC CONTEXT

3.1 THE DETRIMENTS OF HEROISM

The realization that heroism is related to distress is embedded in a relatively novel focus on the downside of heroism (Allison et al., 2017; Beggan, 2019; Classen, 2003; Smith et al., 2013; Zimbardo, 2007). In particular, Beggan's review compellingly demonstrates how an endorsement of heroic values and ideals, as well as executing heroic deeds, may be related to adverse personal and societal outcomes such as vanity, psychopathic dispositions, and indifference to and infringement on the rights of others.

In our previous theoretical and empirical work, we examined an aspect that is related, but not identical, to the status of being (or not being) heroic. Specifically, we focused on Heroic Self-Representations (HERS; Shahar, 2013), i.e., individuals' perceptions of themselves, and expectations of themselves, to being heroic. Such expectations, we postulated, are likely to lead to emotional distress, illustrating yet another aspect of what Beggan (2019) title "the downside of heroism".

HERS theory delineates three aspects of perceiving the self as a hero: Self-as-Conqueror (SaC), Self-as-Savior (SaS), and Heroic Identification (HI). The first two aspects constitute a straightforward application of heroism science from the late Sidney J. Blatt's influential personality theory (e.g., Blatt, 1974, 2004, 2008). According to Blatt, personality develops in the context of parent-child relationships, through the dialectic and synergistic interaction between the need for secure, supportive, and nurturing interpersonal relationships (“Interpersonal relatedness”), and the need to attain a coherent, clearly demarcated, and essentially positive sense of self (“self-definition”; see Blatt, 1974, 2004, 2008; Blatt & Zuroff, 1992; Luyten & Blatt, 2013). In intact development, interpersonal relatedness and self-definition are posited to be harmoniously integrated into a person’s personality. In contrast, disruptions in early parent-child relationships lead to a situation whereby one of two personality constellations – relatedness or self-definition – is markedly emphasized at the expense of the other, evolving into psychopathology (Blatt, 2008).

According to Shahar and colleagues (Israeli et al., 2018; Shahar, 2013), SaS is a manifestation of an extreme emphasis on interpersonal relatedness at the expense of self-definition, albeit with a twist – instead of needing others, I experience others needing me. Similarly, SaC is a manifestation of an extreme emphasis on self-definition, also with a twist – instead of being preoccupied with failure, I view the world as a set of challenges that I may overcome. The third heroic self-representation, heroic identification, was formulated based on social constructivism theory (e.g., Gergen, 1985; Harré, 1986), according to which cultural and societal norms and myths shape our cognition and emotion. In general, societies and cultures highlight the myth of heroism, and encourage individuals to embrace heroic idols (Allison & Goethals, 2011; Campbell, 1949; Franco, Blau, & Zimbardo, 2011; Zimbardo, 2007); hence, the HI dimension (Shahar, 2013). Empirical research conducted by Shahar and colleagues (Israeli et al., 2018; Itamar & Shahar, 2014; Shahar, 2013) implicated SaS and HI, in particular

the latter, as a risk factor for depression, anxiety, and narcissistic features. Whereas SaC was depicted as primarily resilience-related, intimately linked to generalized self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). However, in some of these studies, complex interactions between the three HERS dimensions emerged.

Shahar and colleagues linked HERS to the Israeli myth of the Tzabar (Sabra in English). This is the Hebrew word for the cactus fruit, which is thorny on the outside but sweet and juicy when its skin is removed. Likewise, the Tzabar, pertaining to “The New Jew,” is tough on the outside but also warm and sweet once his/her guard is lifted (Almog, 2000). As the New Jew, the Tzabar constitutes a fierce reaction to the Old Jew of the diaspora, who is helpless and uprooted. As a mythical symbol, the Tzabar is epitomized by great military leaders and has inspired countless works of art, literature, and film (Almog, 2000). The Tzabar is inherently heroic. It is a conqueror, liberating lands and territories at great personal risks. Importantly, however, the myth of the Tzabar is rooted in a socialistic ideology that elevates solidarity and comradeship. Thus, a real Tzabar is willing to sacrifice him/herself to save others. Finally, the Tzabar is a form of identification in that it symbolizes the mission of an entire society and culture: to be fearless and independent.

It is the myth of the Tzabar that propelled our interest in Yoni Netanyahu. As is clear from the above bio sketch, Yoni's life and character correspond strongly to this myth. At the same time, the contents of *The Letters* and informant reports point out the great emotional distress Yoni suffered, probably throughout his life. This tension between "Tzabaric" (Israeli) heroism and distress, juxtaposed with the formidable impact Yoni's life had on Israeli society and culture, renders him an ideal candidate for the present investigation. As Yoni is, of course, deceased, psychobiography was selected as the natural (perhaps only) methodology to study him and extract the insights of his character in the link between heroism and distress. Our selection of the psychobiography methodology in the study of Yoni echoes previous

psychobiographical studies that have illuminated the link between leadership – military and political – and psychological pain and mental illness (see, in particular, Ghaemi, 2012).

3.2 BEING VS. WANTING TO BE HEROIC

The focus on distress in military leadership is particularly important to heroism science. In addition, it also allows for the disentanglement of two, hitherto unseparated aspects of heroism: actually being heroic vs. wanting or expecting oneself to be heroic. As the vast majority of military leaders previously studied have exhibited documented, uncontested heroic deeds (as in Yoni's case), their heroism status is "fixed," so to speak. They may vary in terms of their own expectations of themselves, which were developed during their childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, to actually becoming heroes. In fact, we deem HERS theory to be a theory of wanting/expecting one's self to be heroic. We title those who wish/expect themselves to become heroes as "heroists" (a.k.a. "idealists"). When the two dimensions – being a hero and being a heroist – are disentangled, interesting avenues for the study of the determinants of heroism are revealed.

These dimensions are depicted in Table 1. It is a 2 x 2 table that forms four possibilities: Ordained, Exposed, Revealed, and Exempt. The *Ordained* possibility pertains to individuals who harbored wishes/expectations of being heroes, whose self-representations are replete with heroic contents, and who ultimately perform heroic deeds. Such a long-standing desire to become a hero may be inspired by individuals' families. Alternatively, the individual inspires (convinces) the family to treat him/her as a hero (-to be). Generally, we assume both processes are in effect. Be that as it may, cultivating themselves to become heroic, these individuals construe their identities as conqueror and saviors, and they identify cultural heroes. In turn, they ultimately act heroically. As will become clear, Yoni Netanyahu epitomizes this possibility.

Table 1*Heroes vs. Heroists*

	Heroic	Not Heroic
Wanting to be heroic	Ordained	Exposed
("Heroists")	(e.g., Yoni Netanyahu)	(Sabbatai Zvi)
Not wanting to be heroic	Revealed	Exempt
("Non-Heroists")	(e.g., Rabbi Akiva)	

The *Exposed* possibility pertains to individuals who harbor a desire to be heroic but who ultimately do not perform heroic deeds. There may be numerous reasons why these individuals do not ultimately become heroic. For some, opportunity is lacking. Others may not “have what it takes” to perform heroic deeds due to a lack of courage, talent, or vision. I entitled this possibility *Exposed* because these individuals' desire to become heroic usually goes public. However, at a certain point in their biography, when they refrain from becoming genuinely heroic, people become aware of this and note the discrepancy between intention and action. Consequently, these individuals are usually exposed as "fakes." Many (but not all) cult leaders belong to this category. In the Jewish tradition, Sabbatai Zvi, a Sephardic Rabbi who announced himself and convinced others that he is the Messiah (Mashiach), was exposed as a fake after he was arrested by the Ottomans and then forced to convert to Islam. Being exposed as a fake Messiah, Zvi caused tremendous anguish to his many followers.

The *Revealed* possibility pertains to the individual who never aspired to become heroic but who, due to a combination of external stressful situations and some inner fortitude, found themselves committing heroic deeds. Drawing again from the Jewish tradition, Rabbi Akiva is noted as an example of a revealed hero. Growing up as a non-articulate (stuttering) humble, unassuming young person, Rabi Akiva gradually became known as a formidable scholar of the

Torah, making an intellectual impact on a generation of Hebrew scholars. Being intellectually outstanding, however, does not necessitate heroic actions. Yet, after being acknowledged as an outstanding scholar, Rabbi Akiva was also revealed as a hero. He publicly supported the revolt against the Romans and explicitly encouraged Shimon Bar Kokhva, the leader of this revolt, to carry on the (ultimately failed) fight. For this, he was executed by the Romans along with nine other known scholars of the Torah who also advocated for the revolt (i.e., the "Ten Martyrs").

The fourth possibility, *Exempt*, pertains to individuals who neither harbored the quest to become heroic nor committed heroic deeds. These individuals are exempt from the trials and tribulations of confronting heroism as an organizing life theme, although they may experience other types of extreme situations, possess outstanding virtues and skills, etc. As these individuals constitute the reference group for the other three possibilities, and may pertain to a variety of different people, I intentionally did not include this possibility as an example in Table 1.

Of the four possibilities, we deem *Ordained* to be characterized by the greatest level of inner turmoil, i.e., emotional distress. The reason is straightforward. The Ordained are compelled by themselves, their family, and their society to become heroes. As heroic acts are invariably risky, the Ordained are doomed (some would say condemned) to live in perpetual risk, often under the shade of a constant threat to their lives and loss of close people around them. Again, Yoni epitomizes this existential condition.

3.3 PSYCHOBIOGRAPHY AS A METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING THE INNER WORLD

To deem a person as "a heroist," the investigator must have some access to this person's inner world. To the best of our knowledge, only HERS assesses dimensions of heroism. However, because it is a newly developed instrument, it has not yet been extensively applied.

This makes psychobiography a preferred method of studying the wish to be a hero, particularly among those who have already demonstrated heroism (i.e., military leader, Yoni).

Psychobiography has been defined as “the intensive life-span study of an individual of historic significance in socio-cultural context using psychological and historiographic research methods and interpreted from established theories of psychology” (Ponterotto, 2015b, p. 379). At its foundation, a psychobiography attempts to comprehend the life, or more frequently, specific life events, of a particular person, thereby illuminating that person’s creative work, political decisions, interpersonal relationships, and so forth. It is considered a branch of applied personality science in which theories and findings are utilized to make effective sense of real, lived lives. As such, this approach focuses less on the ascertainable details of a life and more on what those details reveal about a person’s inner experience — motives, coping techniques, goals, and styles of relating (Schultz, 2005). Psychobiographers tend to rely on constructivist idiographic qualitative approaches, though an increasing number of studies are incorporating quantitative and mixed methods approaches (Kasser, 2013; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2013; Simonton, 1998). Therefore, advanced methods integrate theories and statistical findings derived from large-scale studies to examine whether such methods contribute to understanding the life of a particular individual (Kasser, 2017).

To conduct a successful psychobiography, the investigators need to rely on archival material. Fortunately, as described earlier, in Yoni's case this exists in abundance. Namely, due to two reasons: *The Letters* and their link to the Entebbe Operation, and the prominence of the Netanyahu family, which includes relationships with numerous scholars, artists, writers, physicians, and judges. This family is often compared to the Kennedy family in the USA, with Yoni being depicted as the equivalent of John F. Kennedy.

Furthermore, psychobiography involves complex ethical dilemmas. One such dilemma concerns the privacy and confidentiality of the subject of the investigation as well as of persons

still alive. Accordingly, when reporting sensitive information, this must be balanced against the possible harm of revealing newly uncovered private information. To date, we have not identified any potential infringement upon individuals' (dead or alive) privacy and confidentiality in the course of studying Yoni, hence we deem this issue moot. Moreover, the authors of a psychobiography must consider the professional and scientific value of revelations of personal details (Berg, 2001; Carton, 1993; Ponterotto, 2013, 2015a). In doing so, they should be able to disclose their own subjective position (persuasions, interests) with respect to the investigation. Each author's disclosure will be expanded on in the following section.

4 THE PRESENT INVESTIGATION: SPECIFIC AIMS AND DESIGN.

The aims of this first-step psychobiographical investigation of Yoni Netanyahu were:

- (1) To examine the extent to which Yoni was characterized by the three HERS dimensions, i.e., SaC, SaS, and HI.
- (2) To examine the extent to which Yoni's apparent distress could be quantified using standard measures of distress, particularly those tapping depression and anxiety, thereby identifying specific nuances of such distress.
- (3) To extract from the archival material – primarily *The Letters* – clues to understand the effect of heroism on emotional distress.

To realize these aims, we (GS, RB, and SI) immersed ourselves in Yoni's biography and letters. Based on this archival material, the three of us completed – on Yoni's behalf – a measure of the three HERS dimensions, as well as measures of depressive and anxiety symptoms. We related "Yoni's" scores to extant norms available for the completed instruments (see below). Next, we scrutinized *The Letters*, coding themes relating to the three HERS dimensions. Finally, we focused on letters where the dimensions appeared together and generated hypotheses as to how the HERS dimensions may lead to emotional distress.

Two important disclaimers are in order here. First, we disclose our subjective point of view, as individuals, in conducting the psychobiography. GS, the initiator and leader of this investigation, acknowledges that at least some of his impetus for studying Yoni is derived from the fact that his parents and other key family members were members of the Likud party, to which the Netanyahu family belonged and has been led by Binyamin for more than a decade. Mostly, however, GS's interest in Yoni stemmed from growing up in Israel, being exposed to Yoni's mythical impact, and becoming increasingly interested in the role of heroism in depression and suicidality.

RB was intrigued by this project due to its interface between psychology and literature and specifically between the psychological and literary aspects of the individual. Yoni's letters include a clear poetic tone, propelling her to utilize the letters not only to shed light on Yoni's character and heroic self-representations but also to understand the role of poetic tendencies in the mind.

SI acknowledges that the motives for joining the study were related to a personal fascination with the psychoanalytic aspects of heroism and mythology as a conscious manifestation of object-relations. SI is affiliated with post-Zionist politics, which make up a part of Netanyahu's opposition.

Second, it is important for us to emphasize that this psychobiography does not intend to diagnose Yoni. That he suffered tremendous emotional distress is undisputed, although whether or not he was clinically depressed is largely unclear. For instance, after the publication of Zonder's (2006) book, in which the author claimed that Yoni suffered from clinical depression, several of Yoni's friends and brothers-in-arms published an open letter disputing this claim. Suggestions of Yoni's depression continue to surface and be disputed until today. We are neither in a position to determine such a diagnosis nor do we believe that this issue is of importance. Depression and related anxiety appear to conform to a continuous, rather than

binary, condition (e.g., Slade, 2007). Furthermore, subsyndromal emotional distress has been documented to be quite debilitating (e.g., Judd et al., 1997; Shahar et al., 2014). Many people with outstanding abilities and accomplishments have harbored emotional distress (e.g., Blatt, 1995; Shahar, 2001, 2015) and their lives should be examined irrespective of the presence or absence of a diagnosable psychiatric condition. It is the quality of these extraordinary people's distress and its experiential determinants that we seek to identify herein.

5 METHOD

5.1 NATURE OF THE DATA AND ANALYSIS

Yoni's Letters was published in 1977 in Hebrew (Netanyahu & Netanyahu, 1977). According to Binyamin Netanyahu and Iddo Netanyahu, the process of assembling the 261 letters commenced immediately after Yoni's death. The book spreads over 306 printed pages (including relevant photos) and covers Yoni's life from the age of 17 until 30. The book opens with a brief forward by the Netanyahu brothers, in which they note that they have not included all of the available letters and that not all letters published have appeared in their complete, original form. They do not elaborate on their decision to omit some letters and trim others, although they state that the letters chosen to be published reflect Yoni's style and character. In general, we deem this statement correct based on what we know of other reports by people who knew Yoni and have either done media interviews or spoken to GS about him.

Following this forward, a poetic piece describing Yoni appears, written by one of his childhood friends – Elisha Breimyer. This piece was previously published in the Israeli newspapers in 1976, following the Yonatan Operation. As this piece is highly evocative but not present in the English version of *The Letters*, GS have translated it and am presenting it here:

Yoni

Yoni is everything that is different.

Yoni is everything that is beyond words.

First and foremost, Jerusalem, and scenery, and thorns and deadlocks. Sun sets and sunrises in hell. Challenges no one has ever presented. Missions no one has ever accomplished. Competitions of stamina, exhaustion of the last bit of ability. Deserts without water, huge mountains, small kids in distant houses, rooms-for-hour, after sleepless nights, chess games, a smoking pipe, Edgar Allan Poe, Chikovsky 1812, Alterman.

Yoni is few friends.

Friendships without words, words at heart, with a shy smile.

Yoni is a constant war against sleep, fatigue, luxury, forgetfulness, incompetence, helplessness, lying. Yoni is making the impossible possible.

In studying physics.

In studying navigation routes.

Yoni – all the beauty that we do not have.

Yoni – the eternity of Israel.

Next, there were five segments included in Yoni's letters: the period in which Yoni lived with his parents in the USA (1963-1964), mandatory service in the IDF (1964-1967), discharge and re-enlistment around the 1967 ("Six-Day") War, the period at Harvard and Hebrew University (1967-1969), in the IDF again (at Sayert Matkal, 1969-1973), and the period from the 1973 (Yom Kippur) War to Operation Yonatan (1973-1976). An epilogue by the Netanyahu brothers follows, in which they reflect on Yoni's inner life and turmoil. The book concludes with three documents: an interview by Yoni's lieutenant in command from August 1976 (shortly after the operation); a letter from the IDF Chief Commander of Intelligence, General

Shlomo Gazit, to Yoni's parents; and an obituary done by Shimon Peres, then Minister of Defense, at Yoni's funeral.

Our focus in this study was on the letters, as they represent the most faithful avenues to Yoni's inner world. We did not analyze the other segments of the book. The three of us read and re-read the letters. Next, each of us completed, on Yoni's behalf, three measures: the Shahar's Heroic Self Scale (SHERS; Shahar, 2013), the Center for Epidemiological Studies – Depression Scale (CESD; Radloff, 1977), and the Hebrew version of the State Anxiety Inventory (SAI; Spielberger, 1972). For a description of the measures, see the Measures section. The purpose of this procedure was twofold: First, to confirm that Yoni, as an ordained hero, is indeed characterized by high levels of the three HERS dimensions, namely, SaS, SaQ, and HI. Second, to evaluate the level and shape of his distress.

Second, RZ and SI coded each of the letters for the presence/absence of the following categories: SaS, SaC, HI, and distress. Next, we calculated the percentage of agreement between RZ and SI out of all of the letters coded. We then focused on the letters RZ and SI agreed on and extracted hypothesized mechanisms of the effect of SaS/SaC/HI on distress. These hypothesized mechanisms were then represented in a flowchart translatable to mediation analysis that may be conducted in the future with appropriate data.

5.2 MEASURES

5.2.1 Shahar's Heroic Self Scale (SHERS; Shahar, 2013)

This is a self-report questionnaire assessing heroic self-representation. The SHERS is comprised of nine items, with three items for each component: self-as-savior (e.g., "I have a profound need for saving people from their plight"), self-as-conqueror (e.g., "I have a profound need to conquer difficult challenges"), and heroic identification (e.g., "It is important for me to view myself as a hero").

5.2.2 Center for Epidemiological Studies – Depression Scale (CESD; Radloff, 1977)

This is an extensively used 20-item measure of depressive symptoms centered on depressed mood. Participants indicate how often they experienced depressive symptoms in the past 2 weeks using a 4-point scale. The CESD usually derives a single depression score based on the sum of all items, with an original clinical cutoff of 16 and a more recently established cutoff of 23 (e.g., Henry, Grant, & Cropsey, 2018). Importantly, a second-order factor structure was revealed for the CESD, composed of a single, 1st-order factor, and four 2nd-order factors representing depressed affect, anhedonia, somatic symptoms, and interpersonal symptoms (e.g., Chin, Choi, Chan, & Wong, 2015). In the present study, we calculated both a sum score and sum scores for the four subscales.

5.2.3 The State Anxiety Inventory (SAI, Spielberger, 1972)

The SAI is a 20-item measure of anxiety (e.g., “I am anxious”). Respondents are requested to rate their endorsement of each item on a four-point scale. Teichman and Melnik (1968) adapted this instrument for use with Israeli adolescents and adults and established norms of this scale. A single sum score is used in extant research, as in the present study.

6 RESULTS

6.1 INTERRATER AGREEMENTS AND INDEX SCORES

6.1.1 SHERS-heroism

In Table 2, we present our completion of the SHERS on behalf of Yoni. Originally, we sought to estimate interrater agreement via the Intraclass Correlation (ICC). However, as is evident below, our agreement concerning the SHERS reached a ceiling, rendering the ICC, or even the Krippendorff's alpha coefficient (Kalpha; Krippendorff, 2013), irrelevant for this instrument. Therefore, we dichotomized our responses to the SHERS and reverted to the

traditional percept agreement. We rendered > 4 responses as “1” and scores of 4 or below as “0” (see parentheses in Table 2). The percentage of agreement was very high. The agreement between GS and RB was 100%, and between RZ and SI, and GS and SI, it was 77%. Moreover, the three of us agreed on 25 of the possible 27 responses to the scale (9 items times, 3 scorers), constituting a 92.5% agreement.

Table 2

Raters' Responses to SHERS-Heroism.

SHERS Item #	Content	RB	SI	GS	Means
1	Need to save others	5 (1)	6(1)	6(1)	
2	Need to conquer challenges	6(1)	6(1)	5(1)	
3	Need to see self as hero	5(1)	6(1)	6(1)	
4	Thoughts of saving others	6(1)	6(1)	6(1)	
5	Thoughts of conquering challenges	6(1)	5(1)	6(1)	
6	Identifies with heroes	6(1)	5(1)	6(1)	
7	Invests time in saving others	5(1)	4	5(1)	
8	Invests time in conquering challenges	6(1)	4	5(1)	
9	Would behave as a hero	6(1)	5	5(1)	
SaS	Items 1,4,7	5.33	6	6	5.77
SaC	Items 2,5,8	6	5.33	6	5.77
HI	Items 3,6,9	5.66	4.33	5	4.99
Means		5.66	5.22	5.66	

With respect to index scores, Yoni's were much higher than the means reported in Israeli et al. (2018), a sample that is representative of adult Jewish Israelis. This was as expected. Moreover, an examination of Yoni's average SHERS scores within assessors and his

SaS/SaC/HI scores across assessors revealed a strong convergence. The average of the scores for SaS, SaC, and HI were very high (5.66, 5.22, and 5.66 for RB, SI, and GS, respectively). Similarly, across assessors, the average scores of SHERS dimensions were very high (5.77, 5.77, and 4.99, for SaS, SaC, and HI, respectively). This is consistent with our construal of Yoni as an epitome of the Ordained Hero.

6.1.2 CESD-Depression

In Table 3 we present our completion of the CESD-depression on behalf of Yoni. Calculating an interclass correlation coefficient of agreement (ICC) using SPSS, we found that our agreement was subthreshold, $ICC = .58$. When the ICC was re-calculated for the four CESD subscales, only the Depressed Affect subscale yielded an adequate agreement, $ICC = .92$. Looking at the index CESD scores, we saw that both RB and GS scored Yoni way above the stringent cutoff (42 and 30, respectively), whereas SI scored Yoni slightly below the stringent cutoff of 22 but above the original cutoff of 16 (i.e., 19; see Radloff, 1977).

Table 3

Raters' Responses to CESD-Depression

CESD Item #	Content	RB	SI	GS
1	Bothered	3	0	2
2	Poor appetite	2	1	0
3	Blues	3	2	3
4	As good as others (R)	0	3	0
5	Keeping my mind on what I am doing	2	1	1
6	Depressed	3	2	3
7	Everything is an effort	3	1	1
8	Hopeful (R)	3	1	2
9	Life is a failure	1	1	1
10	Fearful	1	0	0

11	Sleep restless	3	0	2
12	Happy (R)	3	1	3
13	Talked less	2	0	0
14	Lonely	3	3	3
15	People unfriendly	2	0	2
16	Enjoyed life (R)	1	2	3
17	Crying spells	0	0	0
18	Sad	3	1	3
19	People disliked me	2	0	1
20	Could not get going	2	0	0
SUMS		30	19	42

Note. R = reversed.

6.1.3 SAI-Anxiety

In Table 4 we present our completion of the SAI-anxiety on behalf of Yoni. Calculating an interclass correlation coefficient of agreement (ICC) using SPSS, we found that our agreement was adequate, $ICC = .77$. The index score of the three authors – on Yoni's behalf – was above the cutoff (i.e., 62, 49, and 62, for RB, SI, and GS, respectively; see Julian, 2011).

Table 4

Raters' Responses to SAI-Anxiety

SAI Item #	Content	RB	SI	GS
1	Calm (R)	4	3	4
2	Secure (R)	2	1	1
3	Tense	4	3	4
4	Remorseful	2	2	4
5	At ease (R)	4	3	4
6	Upset	4	3	2
7	Worrying	3	4	4

8	Composed (R)	3	3	4
9	Frightened	2	2	2
10	Comfortable (R)	3	3	4
11	Self-confident (R)	2	1	1
12	Nervous	4	3	2
13	Jittery	2	1	1
14	Edgy	4	3	4
15	Relaxed (R)	4	3	4
16	Content (R)	4	3	4
17	Worried	4	3	4
18	Overexcited/Embarrassed	2	1	1
19	Happy (R)	4	3	4
20	Pleasant (R)	3	3	4
SUMS		64	51	62

Note. R = reversed.

6.1.4 Coding Yoni's Letters

Of the 261 letters published in the book, 13 letters were identified by SI and 16 by RB as consisting of both one or more of the SHERS dimensions and emotional distress. The 13 letters identified by SI were also identified by RB, constituting a respectable 81% agreement. These 13 letters served as the data used to generate hypotheses regarding the mechanisms accounting for the impact of heroic self-representations on emotional distress.

Table 5

Coded Themes of Heroic Self-Representations and Emotional Distress in Yoni's Letters.

Page	Date	Addressee	Heroic Identification	Self as Conquerer	Self as Savior	Distress
14-15	8.4.63	Koshe		My friend—I'm a very good student; I've overcome the language problem and the rest of my difficulties in school. I've found that if I want to learn something, I can do it very well. All it takes is a little work and effort.		Write soon, or else I'll sink into a depression and perhaps not live to see the beloved Land, its dear people, fathers and sons, etc.
15-16	20.4.63	Rina			I know I took an interest in each person, in his problems and aspirations... Perhaps I'll never return to it, but I feel that its successes and failures are mine, even when I cannot influence the course of events.	I live, but in a world that's shattered and ruined. I study, but I don't learn a thing. Why am I like this and not different? I'm sorry that I'm not like the others. In that case, it would have been better not to have been born at all.
17	21.4.63	Rina		Sometimes it is good to believe that man is a giant, a force before whom nothing can stand.		I am consumed from within. I live without purpose, aching and crying out. I despair.
18	4.5.63	Rina		I want to intervene, correct what's wrong, put things straight, create new things—but I can't.		Today I see no sense in even signing a letter.
20-22	23.5.63	Rina	I do not fear it because I attribute little value to a life without a purpose. And if I should have to sacrifice my life to attain its goal, I'll do so willingly.	I only know that I don't want to reach a certain age, look around me and suddenly discover that I've created nothing, that I'm like all the other human beings who dash about like so many insects, back and forth, never accomplishing anything, endlessly repeating the routine of their existence only to descend to their graves, leaving behind them progeny that will merely repeat the same "nothingness".		Here—I have little contact with people my age, I have no interest in them, and I don't need them. I am not part of them.
31	12.2.64	Koshe	Please prove to me that I'm wrong Show me that at least one of the people I know is really worth knowing.			Koshe, I want to live. I want to hold on to something, to find some meaning and reason in life, and I can't.
176-8	17.1.69	Parents	When I live my life as I'm doing now, I resemble the man who ignores the keg of explosives in the hope that it won't go off, thereby sealing his fate. It's hard for me to bear the thought that I'm alive thanks to others who protect me with their own bodies while I'm left to play the role, so to speak, of the civilian. And this is indeed merely playing a role, for I'm unable to live like this in times such as these. There's a war on right now. At this minute, throughout today and tomorrow. I'm seriously considering returning to		So the primary reason, above all else, is the grave security situation and my firm conviction that I, as a son of this people and this country, am obliged to do everything in my power at this time.	In the light of all this it's not surprising that I find civilian life almost intolerable.

			the army for a stretch of time... You, too, Father, gave up your private life and for years devoted yourself fully to the struggle for the state... You knew what you had to do, and what's more, you believed you had to do it, and for this reason you acted as you did.	
179-81	16.2.69	Parents	I have been torn between my desire to go on with my present life, and my conviction that my duty to my country, to my people, and above all to myself dictates that I go back to serve in the army... I won't be faithful to myself, and I will betray that inner summons that calls me forward, if I fail to do so.	I have been torn between my desire to go on with my present life, and my conviction that my duty to my country, to my people, and above all to myself dictates that I go back to serve in the army. Not only am I restless, but I feel that by continuing with my present way of life I'm being untrue to myself.
208-9	18.4.72	Parents		I may be wrong, but it seems to me that at the moment the best thing I can do to help the situation is to be in the army, and thereby contribute toward the security of us all. After four and a half years of married life, it's hard to get used to living alone without the woman one loves; but it seems that one can get used to anything. It's more difficult to reconcile yourself to the separation as a reality. I grow pessimistic about our ability to hold out—and to improve the State in the long term with a population like this. If we're not destroyed from without (a hypothetical assumption, of course, as I'm 100 percent certain it won't happen), we'll be destroyed from within.
245	12.4.74	Tutti	A pity, that. It wouldn't hurt if I had someone to come back to.	It's interesting that I don't even feel any urge to get away, and the truth is that I don't quite know where to go. A pity, that. It wouldn't hurt if I had someone to come back to. A few days ago I thought of you for a long time, and felt a stab of pain. It strikes me that whenever I think of you, I remember the times when I gave you sorrow and pain. And again I regret them, and my lack of understanding. There's no telling when the next shell will come, and you ought to expect one any moment. As a result, it's a dog's life
247-8	27.4.74	Bibi	Don't get the idea that all this is depressing. All in all, it's a minor war, and the Syrians will not change a thing by it. It calls for a lot of patience, perseverance, and steady nerves—and nothing else... I'm certain they are going to become an excellent battalion, and I don't expect any particular difficulties.	
266-7	1.2.75	Bruria	There's no novelty, no suspense, nor the sense of adventure that comes with danger. There's a system here that requires a tremendous investment of work, in order to preserve what we've achieved so far and to improve it further in order to win the war, in order to	I was sad when I talked to you. Now the sadness has faded a little, and it's remote hovering, touching but not quite touching. I feel a special sort of sadness when I'm with you, yet not entirely with you; for instance, when we're talking on the phone. After a while I

prevent the world from annihilating us. That's important, in that I believe.

rang up Tutti and told her I was in the army and was sad—because I wanted to be with you. And she was very surprised, because I'd never told her that there were times when I had found it hard in the army. Perhaps I didn't have it so hard in the past, because by now I've been in the army for so many years, and lately I've begun to miss the tension and the interest that I used to feel in the earlier period. Still, I sometimes had bad stretches even then, but I never told her anything about them... It adds a whole dimension of sadness to a man's being. Not a momentary, transient sadness, but something that sinks in and is forgotten, yet is there and endures... It's not that I'm "fed up" with my army work; it isn't that at all. I'm working in the same manner and at the same pace and with the same standards as always, yet I find that my interest is diminishing. There's no novelty, no suspense, nor the sense of adventure that comes with danger

278	2.12.75	Father	Every now and then I ask myself whether I'm personally contributing anything to Israel's defense besides words, and my answer (and it's small comfort) is that in my own way I'm doing a great deal. It's not the mere fact that I'm serving in Israel's army, but the specific task I'm fulfilling, and the positive results accompanying it.	Every now and then I ask myself whether I'm personally contributing anything to Israel's defense besides words, and my answer (and it's small comfort) is that in my own way I'm doing a great deal. It's not the mere fact that I'm serving in Israel's army, but the specific task I'm fulfilling, and the positive results accompanying it.	I feel the noose tightening around us—slowly but unceasingly. But enough of that. I really didn't mean to get into this depressing subject
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In Table 5 we present the coding of these 13 letters. For the benefit of the international reader, the coding is presented in English and examples are taken from the English version of *The Letters*. However, we note here that the coding was done in Hebrew based on the original Hebrew version of *The Letters*. Coding in Hebrew is available from the authors upon request.

As shown in the supplementary material, the raters agreed upon 4 SaS themes, 7 SaC themes, and 7 HI themes. Some of the themes appear in more than a single SHERS dimension.

The content of the SHERS themes in *The Letters* strongly corresponded to the descriptions of the SaS, SaC, and HI constructs by Shahar (2013). This is hardly surprising because, as alluded to in Shahar (2013), Yoni's character was one of the sources that inspired the development of SHERS. Be that as it may, an examination of the SHERS themes surfacing in *The Letters* informs and enriches SHERS. Thus, in a letter to his friend Rina from June 15, 1963, Yoni writes: *"I do not fear it because I attribute little value to a life without a purpose. And if I should have to sacrifice my life to attain its goal, I'll do so willingly."* ("it" referring to death). This statement strongly corresponds to HI and is quite chilling given that this is exactly what happened in Yoni's life and death.

Six years thereafter, in a letter to his parents from February 16, 1969, Yoni produced another chilling HI and SaS statement:

I have been torn between my desire to go on with my present life, and my conviction that my duty to my country, to my people, and above all to myself dictates that I go back to serve in the army... I won't be faithful to myself, and I will betray that inner summons that calls me forward, if I fail to do so.

One can see how the identification with the heroic quest to protect Israel by a young man with infinite talents who could actually accomplish everything, both shaped – and sealed – his fate. Yoni identified with heroic values because he believed he could actualize them. This is reflected in statements alluding to his SaC. From a very young age, he was aware, not only of

his extraordinary talents, but also of his ability to work excruciatingly hard to put them into action. This is already apparent reading the first letter in the book, to Koshe, Yoni's childhood friend, on April 8, 1963:

My friend—I'm a very good student; I've overcome the language problem and the rest of my difficulties in school. I've found that if I want to learn something, I can do it very well. All it takes is a little work and effort.

Shortly thereafter, he wrote to Rina on April 31, 1963: "*Sometimes it is good to believe that man is a giant, a force before whom nothing can stand.*"

Yet, Yoni learns relatively quickly that even if he has extraordinary talents and is able to put them into action, his impact on the world is limited. In a letter to Rina on May 4, 1963 he stated: "*I want to intervene, correct what's wrong, put things straight, create new things—but I can't.*" Thus, even a mega-conqueror has limitations and these limitations are profoundly distressing. In the same letter, he wrote: "*Today I see no sense in even signing a letter.*" Ordained heroes do not take limitations lightly. They experience them as gravely offensive.

Of the four identified SaS statements, three reflected Yoni's quest to protect and save Israel. This, however, should not be taken as an indication of Yoni's lack of interest in people, on the contrary, in an early letter to Rina from April 20, 1963, Yoni wrote:

I know I took an interest in each person, in his problems and aspiration [referring to the scouts he instructed in Israel]. ... Perhaps I'll never return to it [the scout regiment], but I feel that its successes and failures are mine, even when I cannot influence the course of events.

Yoni does not make allowances for himself with respect to his inability to better other people's lives. Again, he experiences this inability as highly self-offensive.

The content of distress in *The Letters* is highly revealing. Yoni himself uses, somewhat half-jokingly albeit repeatedly, the term, depression. There is also a repeated mention of death,

primarily as it pertained to lack of meaning, and loneliness features overwhelmingly in the letters. Relatedly, estrangement and alienation are also salient. Consider, for instance, an early letter to Rina (April 20, 1963):

I live, but in a world that's shattered and ruined. I study, but I don't learn a thing. Why am I like this and not different? I'm sorry that I'm not like the others. ... In that case, it would have been better not to have been born at all.

Again, to Rina shortly thereafter (May 23, 1963): "*Here—I have little contact with people my age, I have no interest in them, and I don't need them. I am not part of them.*" In a letter almost a decade later (April 8, 1972) to his parents, after his divorce from Tutti (Tirza):

After four and a half years of married life, it's hard to get used to living alone without the woman one loves; but it seems that one can get used to anything. It's more difficult to reconcile yourself to the separation as a reality.

Two years thereafter (February 1, 1975), to his romantic partner Bruria:

I was sad when I spoke to you. Now the sadness has faded a little, and it's remotely hovering, touching but not quite touching. I feel a special sort of sadness when I'm with you, yet not entirely with you; for instance, when we're talking on the phone. After a while I rang up Tutti and told her I was in the army and was sad—because I wanted to be with you. And she was very surprised because I'd never told her that there were times when I had found it hard in the army. Perhaps I didn't have it so hard in the past because by now I've been in the army for so many years, and lately I've begun to miss the tension and the interest that I used to feel in the earlier period. Still, I sometimes had bad stretches even then, but I never told her anything about them... It adds a whole dimension of sadness to a man's being. Not a momentary, transient sadness, but something that sinks in and is forgotten, yet is there and endures.

Finally, fear and anxiety, clearly identified using the SAI, were present in the letters but only with respect to the fate of Yoni's beloved country, i.e., Israel. With respect to Israel, it appears that Yoni was haunted by a sense of doom that threatened the country's demise, primarily from outside foes (i.e., Arab countries) but also from within. These utterances reflected Yoni's urgent need to act to protect Israel.

Consider, for instance, a letter to his parents from January 17, 1969 (two years after the Six-Day War): *"In the light of all this [the security situation] it's not surprising that I find civilian life almost intolerable."* Also, to his parents a month thereafter (February 16, 1969): *"Not only am I restless, but I feel that by continuing with my present way of life I'm being untrue to myself."* Again, to his parents three years thereafter (April 18, 1972):

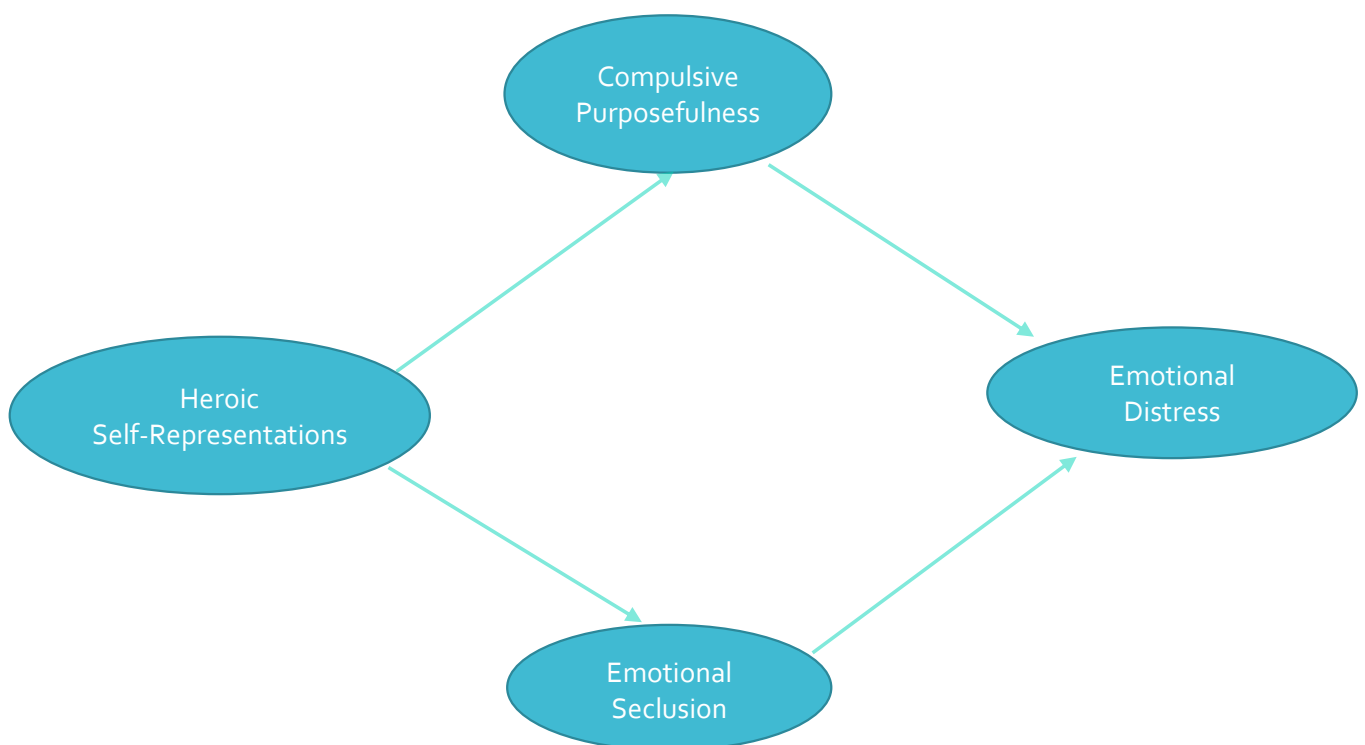
I grow pessimistic about our ability to hold out—and to improve the State in the long term with a population like this. If we're not destroyed from without (a hypothetical assumption, of course, as I'm 100 percent certain it won't happen), we'll be destroyed from within."

Close scrutiny of the agreed-upon coding led us to identify two mechanisms underlying the potential effects of heroic self-representations on distress. These are compulsive purposefulness and emotional seclusion. A flowchart illuminating the centrality of these mechanisms appears in Figure 1.

The first mechanism, compulsive purposefulness, pertains to a very powerful, often rigid, insistence on acting in order to realize a difficult goal. In the short run, this imbued Yoni with a sense of strength and meaning. In the long run, however, Yoni felt that even his talents and determination were often not enough to attain his goals (for instance, surviving and thriving in the USA while his interests were in Israel; or protecting Israel's security). When this happens, the imbued sense of strength and meaning are removed, paving the way for an overwhelming sense of hopelessness and meaninglessness.

The second mechanism, emotional seclusion, pertains to Yoni's sense that, because of either geographical barriers (i.e., being away from Israel), demographic and cultural obstacles (being a young Israeli in the USA), and most profoundly, his unique character traits, he was doomed to feel different and estranged from others, which culminated in profound loneliness.

Figure 1: Hypothesized mechanisms of the effect of heroic self-representations on distress.



7 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the mechanisms that impact heroic self-representations on emotional distress while espousing a psychobiography of Yoni Netanyahu, one of Israel's most famous fallen military heroes. To that aim, we utilized an extraordinarily rich, publicly visible, archival material, the letters Yoni wrote to people close to him starting from the age of 17 until his death at the age of 30. These letters were assembled, edited, and published by Binyamin and Iddo Netanyahu, Yoni's younger brothers.

To examine the mechanisms' causal factor X on outcome Y, one first has to demonstrate that X and Y exist. This was relatively easy in Yoni's case. *The Letter* served as a source, with X as heroic self-representations using HERS theory (Shahar, 2013) and Y distress being operationalized via symptoms of depression and anxiety rated by the three authors using the CESD and SAI, as well as by extracting themes of distress from the letters. There were clear indications of SaS, SaC, and, most noticeably, HI in *The Letters*, both as rated by us using the SHERS and as gleaned from the contents of the letters. Such content was echoed in HERS theory (Shahar, 2013). There were also clear indications of distress, as gleaned by our agreement on Yoni's elevated levels of depressed affect and anxiety, and by the content of the letters, which reflected powerful experiences of sadness, morbidity, loneliness, alienation, and estrangement, and tremendous fear for the fate of the State of Israel, accompanied by a gnawing sense of doom.

It is very interesting that, despite the fact that the three authors are highly knowledgeable regarding depression research and treatment and HERS theory, and despite reports, albeit contested, of Yoni's clinical depression, the three of us *did not* reach an agreement as to Yoni's depressive symptoms, as assessed via the CESD. However, we did reach an agreement as to Yoni's elevated levels of depressed affect and anxiety. Our consensus conformed to the definition of anxious depression (e.g., Ionescu et al., 2013), which is characterized by the presence of worry, irritability, and preoccupation with fatigue and sleep, possibly present among high functioning individuals. As alluded to by Blatt (1995) and Shahar (2001, 2015), such high functioning individuals stun people when their plight is revealed because the sufferers are so outstanding and accomplished. Both Blatt and Shahar have emphasized the role of self-critical perfectionism in these individuals' inner world. Indeed, self-critical perfectionism emerges as a formidable dimension of vulnerability with a host of psychopathologies (Shahar, 2015; Smith et al., 2021; Werner, Tibubos, Rohrmann, & Reiss,

2019). Correspondingly, Yoni did not only embody heroism, he was a self-critical perfectionist. This, for instance, can be seen in what he wrote to soldiers in his Armored Battalion, on the eve of stepping out as their commander:

I believe that there can be no compromise with results. Never accept results that are less than the best possible, and even then look for ways to improve and perfect them. I believe that the greatest danger in the life of a unit is to lapse into self-satisfaction. I would like the men of this battalion always to be a bit worried—perhaps there is something else we might have done, something we might have improved and didn't.

Yoni's words speak for themselves. Future research should address a possible link between heroism and self-critical perfectionism.

The demonstration of the powerful heroic self-representations alongside emotional distress in Yoni's life paves the way for generating a hypothesis aimed at identifying mechanisms of the effect of the former on the latter. By coding each of the letters for SaS, SaC, HI, and distress, we believe that we were able to identify two tentative mechanisms of this effect (see Figure 1): compulsive purposefulness and emotional seclusion. Note that, for a mechanism to be viable, it has to stem from the causal factor (in this case, heroic self-representation), and impact the outcome (in this case, distress; see Davis, 1985). Both tentative mechanisms satisfy this condition, particularly when Table 1 is invoked, identifying Yoni as an Ordained hero, namely, a hero who has been expecting himself to become one.

7.1 COMPULSIVE PURPOSEFULNESS

While *the absence of a sense of purpose and mission* is devastating (e.g., Shahar et al., 2006; Yalom, 1980), Yoni's life and letters exemplify why being obsessed with purpose may also be detrimental. Specifically, the fact that one is consumed by purpose may deplete the hero

of his/her resources, leading to marked distress. Note what Yoni writes in his last published letter:

I keep asking myself: Why? Why now of all times? Is it that my work doesn't absorb, doesn't hold me? Wrong! On the contrary, it possesses me and I don't want it to. I do things because they have to be done, and not because I want to. And the same haunting question returns—can I let myself live like this, work like this and wear myself out? And the answer is always that I must persevere and finish what I have begun—that I have an obligation not only to the job, but to myself as well—but how do I know if I can hold out for another ten months?

The existential therapist and theorist Irving D. Yalom (1980) invoked the term "compulsive heroism" as an unconscious defense against the awareness of death, and the term "crusadism" as an unconscious defense against a sense of meaninglessness. Both defenses are effective at the outset and even over an extended period of time. At a certain point, however, for reasons that are not completely clear, both defenses run their course, paving the way for the kind of exhaustion that culminates in emptiness, which is a severe form of emotional distress.

Compulsive purposefulness summons exhaustion. If one is an Ordained Hero, one cannot afford to spare effort or resources in the quest for realizing one's mission. This means that an Ordained Hero is likely to be extremely busy and, consequently, extensively tired. This would be an understatement for a soldier serving in the Israeli Sayeret Matkal, which is equivalent to the British SAS and the American SEALs or Green Berets. To command Sayeret Matkal would be even more exhausting. Indeed, throughout his letters Yoni alluded to his fatigue and lack of sleep. What we know today about the depressogenic effect of lack of sleep was not known when Yoni was an IDF soldier, although, even if this was known then, the ethos of a commando officer does not include allowances for "making up for lost sleep." Moreover, the heroism->effort/exhaustion->distress cycle was likely present before Yoni enlisted in the

IDF, simply because Yoni was a leader long before becoming a soldier. For example, he was known in Jerusalem as an avid leader in the scout movement and invested much of his effort in this movement. It was time that he could afford to give, being unbelievably smart and, therefore, did not need to put effort into his studies.

As well, compulsive purposefulness involves a keen vision. Ordained heroes believe they know what is right and what is wrong, what is good vs. bad for the public they wish to serve. Ordained heroes are also being prepared, by themselves, family, and society, to tackle adversity. In the course of this preparation, they develop a clear sense of how adversity should be handled. This increases the likelihood that Ordained heroes' inner lives will be replete with a strong sense of urgency, stemming from the realization that danger is looming, juxtaposed against the conviction that identified steps should be taken to combat such doom. In Yoni's case, for him the most important thing to protect, perhaps the only thing that could be threatened, was the Jewish State. The letters convey a strong sense that Yoni *knew* how Israel should be defended and that the IDF was the principal resource for such defense. As a commander, Yoni appeared to know what to do during very stressful situations and he was able to instill his soldiers with his conviction. However, the army and society are large entities, and they seldom operate the way "they should." This, for the Ordained hero, creates a built-in mental frustration as there appears to be a constant gap between reality and ideology.

7.2 EMOTIONAL SECLUSION

Commandos are solitary persons, "lone wolves" of sorts (see Skoglund, Brekke, Steder, & Boe, 2020, for an empirical support). Yoni was even more so. The son of a history professor who belonged to the then "wrong" side of the political aisle, the revisionist segment. He was a professor who, despite his documented accomplishments, was denied tenure at Hebrew University (arguably because of his convictions). Therefore, Yoni was – borrowing from

Heidegger's notion of thrownness – thrown into emotional seclusion by birth (Heidegger, Macquarrie, & Robinson, 1962). Add to this the fact that, after carving a niche for himself in the scout's movement, Yoni was forced to move with his parents to the USA. While in the USA, Yoni wrote to his friends in Israel about his growing sense of emotional seclusion and alienation. He had no problem excelling in school and, being so talented, was probably admired by his classmates and teachers. Nevertheless, as he writes, he did not belong. He was constantly homesick and yearned to come back. Since the family was ardently Zionist, leaving the USA to enlist in the IDF was a family dictum, enabling Yoni to return to his preferred physical and mental territory. Then, however, he was without his parents and brothers whom he cherished, and was already consumed by a sense of mission – to defend Israel – that was strong enough to distinguish him from his peers. Moreover, the ethos of heroism does not easily lend itself to seeking social support, any more than it lends itself to seeking sleep. To add to this, the role of emotional seclusion, alienation, and lack of social support in emotional distress has been extensively documented (e.g., Cohen, 2004; Joiner, 2005).

7.2.1 Conclusion, Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Beggan's (2019) review of the detriments of heroism was very timely. Heroism – manifested in both deeds and images – is extensively coveted by individuals, groups, and cultures. That this coveted existence is also embedded with adverse effects that impact individuals, groups, and cultures, is largely overlooked and needs further attention. In all likelihood, both outcomes of heroism are genuine. Heroism is, or can be, constructive and inspirational but at the same time is, or can be, anti-social and/or distress provoking. The realization that personal and societal processes include both risk and resilience is a relatively recent area of study within the field of psychopathology (Shahar et al., 2012), and is readily applicable to heroism research.

In the first iteration of our psychobiographical investigation of Yoni Netanyahu, we were able to confirm that our target person, a renowned military hero, harbored powerful heroic

self-representations throughout his short life, corresponding to the three dimensions identified by the HERS theory: Self-as-Savior (SaS), Self-as-Conqueror (SaC), and Heroic Identification (HI). We also confirmed the public impression that Yoni dealt with considerable emotional distress throughout his life, although we were silent with respect to the question of whether this distress meets the criteria for a diagnosable depressive disorder. Nor do we suppose, as noted above, that this question is very important. What *is* important, we believe, is to examine the quality of such distress. We found that, in Yoni's case, it assumes the shape of anxious and depressed affect but does not include other key dimensions of stereotypical depression. Our findings are highly consistent with previous studies that also employed the psychobiographical methodology, which attest to the link between leadership and psychological pain (Ghaemi, 2012).

We analyzed Yoni's letters with the hope of generating hypotheses concerning possible mechanisms that underlie the effect of heroic self-representations on emotional distress. Two such tentative mechanisms were identified: compulsive purposefulness and emotional seclusion. These mechanisms, explicated above, strongly correspond to three theoretical formulations that serve as an inspiration to HERS theory. The first is Blatt's polarity theory, which was described in the Introduction section. Recall that this theory construes interpersonal relatedness and self-definition as the two central vectors in personality development and psychopathology (e.g., Blatt, 2008). It seems that our two identified mechanisms correspond with the two personality vectors: emotional seclusion with relatedness and compulsive purposefulness with self-definition. The second theoretical formulation was our psychodynamic analysis of heroic self-representations (Israeli et al., 2018; Itamar & Shahar, 2014), whereby we construed these representations, particularly HI, as a grandiose, defensive, and compensatory personality organization erected against painful feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Such compensation is amply revealed by the Ordained heroes compulsion around

'projects" (crusades) and distancing him/herself from others (compulsive self-reliance). Arguably, the Ordained hero pays with exhaustion, frustration and irritation, as well as loneliness, to create meaning in life.

The third theoretical formulation is that developed by Shahar et al. (2012), which problematizes the clear distinction between risk and resilience constructs and processes. We argue that risk and resilience are dialectically related, such that constructs and processes that are considered risk factors also include elements of resilience, and vice versa. As noted by Shahar (2013), the three HERS dimensions abide by this postulate, rendering the Ordained hero an incredibly adjusted, albeit vulnerable, individual.

The various limitations of this psychobiographical work need to be acknowledged. As in all psychobiographies, we focused on a single person, thus generalizability is suspect. Moreover, we treated Yoni's letters as a whole without examining different developmental periods. We identified only 13 letters in which both HERS dimensions and distress appear. Different teams of raters might have identified more letters, increasing the putative database. Our completion of self-reported questionnaires "on behalf of Yoni," although considered common-practice in psychobiography, is speculative nonetheless. As well, we restricted ourselves to the assessment of HERS dimensions and distress, although many other personality processes could be examined using *The Letters*. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, although this article is predicated upon the assumption that heroic self-representations (and heroism more generally) causes emotional distress (or other downsides), the psychobiography methodology could not be used to rule out the inverse possibility, namely, that downsides (stress) or distress may bring about heroism and/or heroic self-representations. To establish the causal direction among heroism, heroic self-representations, and distress, a longitudinal, multi-wave panel study is needed. Fortunately, all of these limitations could be addressed in future analyses of Yoni's letters and his life, and we intend to do just that.

The strengths of this investigation should be noted as well. *The Letters* constitute a very **rich**, publicly available, archival material that thus far has not been examined psychologically. The life and death of Yoni Netanyahu had a profound impact upon both the Jewish and Israeli (and Jewish-Israeli) culture, rendering his psychobiography potentially relevant in the understanding of this culture in general, and of the Tzabar ethos in particular. Finally, the undisputed status of Yoni's heroism enables probing further into this heroes' soul, focusing on the ways in which a hero construes his own self and the mental prices of such construal.

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9 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.