

Crazy Stupid Courage: The Psychology of Grit

Source: [The Mind Unleashed](#)

by [Gary Z McGee](#)

November 2, 2018

“I love the fall of those brave enough to fail for the right reasons. Fuck the easy glory of mere excellence. The only legacy I will accept is to know that however far I got – it was as far as I was capable of going. I want to drown in my own sweat knowing there was nothing left.” ~Jared Singer & Anthony Ragle

Ask yourself: would you rather be considered courageous and stupid or cowardly and smart?

Sure, the ideal is courageous and smart, but that is rarely an option if you're wanting to be courageous. Why is it rarely an option? Because doing the smart thing is usually safe and rarely courageous. Because to be considered courageous there needs to be some level of sacrifice involved. Because courage is usually predicated upon doing something where you are afraid, you are outnumbered, you are overwhelmed by the odds, or you are in some kind of danger.

Personally, I'd rather be considered courageous and stupid than be a coward sitting up in an ivory tower in my vain smartness judging through insecure hindsight bias. Because there's a fine line between courage and stupidity, but it usually depends on the resulting social perception of the situation.

Think about it: imagine you are in a great battle defending your homeland from violent invaders. Everyone is afraid to confront the enemy, so you decide to *courageously* jump up and yell, "Today is a good day to die!" and you charge into the fray. If you win the day, you are considered courageous. But if you get shot right away, you are considered stupid.

In the result where you win the day you are considered a hero and people will commend you for your courage. But in the result where you got shot right out of the gate people (usually "smart" cowards) will say things like: "*He should have waited for a better time,*" or "*What an idiot. He got shot because he didn't wait for the order to charge,*" or "*There are rules of engagement and he didn't follow them, so he got shot.*"

But, here's the thing: neither result changes the fact that what you did *was* a courageous act. Whether you won the day or got shot right away, you were *still* courageous. It is only people's hindsight bias that changes things.

That's the power of perceptual psychology. Especially social psychology. It can actually change the way we view history. A biased subjective opinion can change a concrete and objective fact. Scary stuff. But it happens all the time. Every single day our perceptions are being hijacked by our hindsight bias.

Here's another example (this is a tricky one): Imagine you witness, from the beginning of the incident, a male cop unlawfully detains a pregnant woman and then violently assaults her after she challenges his authority. So, you decide to courageously defend her by first giving the cop a verbal warning to stop punching her and, second, by tackling the cop away from her after he doesn't comply.

Can you feel the hindsight bias creeping up in your mind as you go through all the possible outcomes of this scenario? There's almost no scenario where you are not going to jail,

because of the way the justice system is set up, but going to jail doesn't negate the fact that you were courageous. You faced down danger. The odds were stacked against you. You overcame your fear of authority. Courage; courage; courage. But was your courageous act stupid? Perhaps.

Let's break it down. Let's say one scenario is that the detainment of the woman ended up being lawful. Let's say she stole a candy bar. She hid it in her purse. It turns out the cop was justified in his detainment. But, was he justified in his assault? Is there any scenario where he is justified for punching a pregnant woman even if she is slapping away his blows and resisting arrest? Let's save that for [another article](#)...

So, you're sitting in jail and you find out the cop was justified in his detainment. Was your courageous act more or less stupid? Careful now. That hindsight bias can really do a number on your reasoning. Think it through. How could it be more or less stupid? It was courageous regardless of stupidity or smartness. You just did the brave thing of defending a pregnant woman from being beat up for fuck's sake!

Now, I'm sure some of you are reading this thinking, *"The author is an idiot. It is always stupid to interfere in a cop's job. No matter how wrong it seems."*

To which I say, *"Tough shit! I will still choose stupid-courage over smart-cowardice if I've determined, through my own reasoning, intuition and moral judgment, that someone physically weaker needed help against someone physically stronger."* Bottom line. Call me, or any other courageous person, stupid if you want to. Our conscience will be clear. Whereas you will always be wondering if you did the right thing (over the smart thing) or not.

The psychology of courage and grit isn't about stupid or smart. It's about mettle and guts. It's about forthrightness

and honor. It's about compassion and love. It's about candor and nerve. It's about doing the right thing despite cultural conditioning and hindsight bias. Smart and stupid are mostly irrelevant.

As the great Robert A. Heinlein stated, *"I am free because I know that I alone am morally responsible for everything I do. I am free, no matter what rules surround me. If I find them tolerable, I tolerate them; if I find them too obnoxious, I break them. I am free because I know that I alone am morally responsible for everything I do."*

That's courage.