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A Conference on the Educational Transformation of Today's Emerging Adults Into Tomorrow's Extraordinary Heroes

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Making Heroes: A Conference on the Educational Transformation of Today's Emerging Adults Into Tomorrow's Extraordinary Heroes

We propose hosting a conference devoted to advancing theoretical and applied research in the area of heroism education of emerging adults in high schools and universities. This conference aligns with our mission at the *Heroic Imagination Project*: To develop and implement research, education, corporate and public initiatives to inspire and encourage everyday heroism. We seek to encourage research on empowering young people to take heroic action during crucial moments in their lives. Our conference will advance our understanding of the science and practice of educating youth to act with integrity, compassion, and moral courage, heightened by an understanding of the power of situational forces.

Our plan is to organize and host a 2-day conference in San Francisco, California in the spring of 2018.

Purpose and Significance

We live in a world that desperately needs heroes. Humanity faces global problems such as war, poverty, and climate change that beg for heroic leadership. More localized problems such as bullying in schools and rampant street crime also require ordinary individuals to step up and do the right thing. Our future relies on educating emerging adults – individuals in high schools and universities – *to take responsibility* for solving these problems, *to know how* to solve them, and then *to implement those solutions*.

Research on heroism is only a decade old. Franco and Zimbardo (2006) wrote a highly influential article on the “banality of heroism”, and later they offered a pioneering delineation of many of the conceptual principles of heroism (Franco, Blau & Zimbardo, 2011; Franco, Efthimiou, & Zimbardo, 2016). At the same time, Larry Walker and Jeremy Frimer were conducting outstanding work on moral exemplars (Frimer, Schaefer & Oakes, 2014; Frimer, Walker, Lee, Riches & Dunlop, 2012; Walker & Frimer, 2007). Inspired by these pioneering scholars, Scott Allison and George Goethals began synthesizing work on heroism and leadership (Allison & Goethals, 2011, 2013, 2014; Goethals & Allison, 2012). In Europe, Kinsella, Ritchie, and Igou (2015a, 2015b, 2017) embarked on a sophisticated social cognitive approach to understanding lay-perceptions of heroes.

Inspired by Zimbardo's work, Matt Langdon decided to run a heroism conference for a broad audience. Named *The Hero Round Table*, the conference series aims to communicate the goal of bringing disparate voices together to promote heroism around the world. The inaugural conference was held in November of 2013. The conference was a success in its goal of connecting people. Many projects and partnerships were created during and after it. For many, it was the first time that the heroism activism community felt like an authentic social movement. As of mid-2016, five Hero Round Tables have been held, including events in Australia and the Netherlands. More countries are hosting their first Round Table in 2017.

While many hero trainers and practitioners attend the Round Table conference series, they rarely have opportunities to dialogue with scientists who study heroism at colleges and universities. Our conference will bring scholars and practitioners together with the principal mission of using theory to improve educational practices, to better develop heroic mindsets and behavioral repertoires to conquer challenging societal problems. Our conference aims to improve the science and practice of heroism training in emerging adults. Moreover, our conference seeks to encourage greater dialog between theoreticians and practitioners of heroism science, with the goal of advancing new and innovative research on this topic and to establish an infrastructure for ensuring future collaborations between scholars and hero trainers.

Overview of Relevance to Educational Research

The premise underlying our mission is that people's decision to take heroic action can be taught. Heroism is not the province of caped crusaders, but a trainable, cultivatable mindset that plays itself out in everyday situations. By explicitly teaching individuals the principles of social psychology, namely the degree to which the parameters of a situation influence how people act, we can prime our minds to recognize and overcome our natural tendencies to go along with an action-reluctant group norm, and instead unleash our personal potential for courageous social action.

In founding the *Heroic Imagination Project*, Dr. Philip Zimbardo has created a dynamic organization devoted to teaching ordinary people how to take positive, effective action in challenging circumstances in all their life contexts. Dr. Zimbardo and HIP have been on a non-stop mission to offer an inspiring program of positive transformation lessons to ordinary people. The *Heroic Imagination Project* trains young people to be *Heroes-in-Training* by doing daily deeds of goodness, caring and kindness, thus translating the private virtue of compassion into the civic virtue of heroism.

Dr. Zimbardo has developed these unique programs that have been adopted globally at all levels, ranging from individuals and schools to cities and even entire nations through ministries of education. Here are the *Heroic Imagination Project's* six initial core lessons, which have been taught to thousands of students around the world since the project's launch in 2008:

- 1. Mindset** – Helping people shift from a fixed, static mindset—a belief that one cannot change one's abilities or personal characteristics such as intelligence—toward a dynamic, growth mindset—a belief that one can improve aspects of oneself with practice, time and effort.
- 2. The “Bystander Effect”** – Teaching people how to overcome the social forces that prevent them from taking action in unclear or emergency situations, and gain the skills to instead act wisely and effectively—to be the One who always helps others in need, or defends a moral cause.
- 3. Prejudice and Group Perception** – Promoting awareness of our human tendency to make negative assumptions about other people and groups, and conversely gain resilience when they experience prejudice and discrimination from others.

4. Adaptive Attributions – Helping people reduce or eliminate the effects of stereotype threat and unhealthy attributions on their learning and performance.

5. Situational Awareness – Teaching how group influence and situations affect decision-making, and offering strategies to address social situations mindfully.

6. Social Conformity – Helping people gain awareness of their automatic tendencies to conform to group pressures in social situations, and replace them with healthy pro social behaviors.

This curriculum of the *Heroic Imagination Project* has been successfully implemented in Community Colleges in Arizona, Oregon, and California; at California State University; in Flint, Michigan's schools and community centers; at the Los Angeles Police Military Academy; at the San Francisco YMCA; in the San Ramon High School district; in 1500 high schools in Budapest, Hungary; in middle and high schools in Poland; in Sicily; in schools throughout Indonesia; in Geelong, Australia; in Tehran, Iran; in schools in Sweden, Ireland, UK, Portugal, Ireland, Jakarta, Morocco, and Argentina; and in China.

(A paragraph here on other hero educators/trainers?)

Conference Curriculum and Program

Our conference program will consist of three sessions devoted to advancing theory, advancing applied practices, and bridging theory with application. We will build into our conference program a clear plan for activities that support dialogue and collaboration among our conference participants. Our explicit conference goal is to foster a learning environment that is collaborative and focused on developing new, innovative theories and methods of educating everyday people to become heroes.

I. Session on Theories of Heroism and Heroism Development

Our aim with this session is to disseminate knowledge gleaned from the latest theoretical advances in heroism science. We seek the most internationally acclaimed scientists in heroism science. At the conclusion of this session, we will devote significant time to identifying gaps in our understanding of heroism development. Moreover, we will allot time for the planning and development of collaborative projects among these scholars. Speakers include:

Jeremy Frimer, University of Winnipeg
The Role of Group Dynamics in Creating Heroes

Lawrence Walker, University of British Columbia
Development of the Personality Traits of Heroes

Roderick Kramer, Stanford University
Strategies for the Creation of Moral Courage

Zeno Franco, Medical College of Wisconsin
How Ordinary People Become Heroes in Times of Crisis

Scott Allison, University of Richmond
The Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Transformation of Average People Into Heroes

Elaine Kinsella, University of Limerick in Ireland
Situational and Personality Factors in the Development of Heroism

Ari Kohen, University of Nebraska
Promoting Heroic Behavior and the Most Choice-Worthy Lives

II. Session on the Application of Theory and the Training of Heroes

Our aim with this session is to disseminate knowledge gleaned from the latest educational practices of hero training in schools. We seek the most internationally acclaimed practitioners of heroism science. At the conclusion of this session, we will devote significant time to identifying gaps in our understanding of the practice of heroism training. Moreover, we will allot time for the planning and development of collaborative projects among these practitioners. Speakers include:

Matt Langdon, Founder of the Hero Round Table
Creating A Hero Conference Series That Makes a Difference

Adi Seal, Founder & CEO of Nitkan
Promoting Self-Awareness, Positive Human Connection and Cultural Transformation

Bill Roller, Co-Founder of The Berkeley Group and Family Institute
Educating People to Follow Their Conscience in Collective Action

Ellie Jacques, Co-Vice President at Hero Town Geelong
Best Practices in the Training of Children and Young Adults to Become Heroes

Sylvia Gray, President at Hero Town Geelong
The Transformation of an Ordinary Town into a City of Heroes

Brian Detweiler-Bedell, Lewis & Clark College
Training and Developing Emotional Intelligence as a Pathway to Heroism

Olivia Efthimiou, Murdoch University
Educating Ordinary Citizens to Produce Enlightened Public Policy

Michelle Werning, Hero Construction Company, Bonn, Germany
Constructing Heroes Who Make a Difference in Germany

Wendy Addison, SpeakOut-SpeakUp
Speaking Out and Speaking Up: Educating Ordinary People to Whistleblow

(Add Speakers from Hungary, PAU, Sweden, Sicily, etc)

III. Session on Bridging Theory with Application and Practice

Our aim with this session is to encourage the sharing of information and increased dialogue among scientists and practitioners of heroism science. We seek the most acclaimed and distinguished scholars who can integrate and synthesize the considerable volume of theory and practice of heroism science and education. At the end of the session, a significant time block will be devoted to fostering lasting collaborations between theorists and educators. Speakers include:

Philip G. Zimbardo, Stanford University and Heroic Imagination Project Founder
Strategies for the Creation of Moral Courage

Mihaly Csikszentmihályi, Claremont Graduate University
Turning Deviant People into Social Heroes in Everyday Life

Martin P. Seligman, University of Pennsylvania
Heroism Science and Positive Psychology Can Produce Flourishing Individuals

Expected Outcomes and Products

Our mission is to host a conference that will have far-reaching effects that go well beyond the two-day meeting itself. Specific outcomes include:

- **Book.** We will ask conference participants to submit chapters for an edited volume summarizing our conference findings and recommendations. We have contacts with major publishers who would be willing to publish and disseminate the book worldwide.
- **Special issue of *Heroism Science*.** One of us (Scott Allison) will edit a special issue of the journal *Heroism Science*. The special issue will be devoted to the bridging of theory and practice in heroism education and training.
- **Collaborations.** Our conference format will produce new collaborate projects between scholars and practitioners. We will raise money for small grants to support such collaborative work.
- **Shared data bases on HIP's website.** Research data collected from projects initiated by our conference will be uploaded to HIP's website and will thus be available to researchers and practitioners around the globe.
- **The "Everyday Heropedia".** We will track all acts of heroism directly attributable to training received from our conference's innovations in hero education. These heroes and their heroic acts will be documented in an online *Everyday Heropedia* that we will create.
- **The beginning of a biennial conference series.** We view this conference as the beginning of a biennial conference series devoted to understanding and transforming

educational practices in heroism training.

■ **Development of Evaluation and Assessment Tools and Best Practices.** A high priority for us is to develop standardized tools and measures for evaluating the effectiveness of hero training methods and modules.

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