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Carrying on Kurt Lewin's Legacy in Many Current Domains Lewin Award 2015

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It is a great honor for me to receive this honor in the name of my professional model and idol, Kurt Lewin. I want to begin by sharing some of his unique history, which may not be widely known. Then, I will outline some of my research programs that were influenced by Lewin's pioneering thinking, experiments, and social applications. Part of my generalist orientation also comes from appreciation of the breadth of his interests. I shall describe my research on: social influence, time perspective, evil, shyness, everyday heroism, and using films to share social psychology to the general public (as in the new Hollywood movie of The Stanford Prison Experiment). I will also touch upon some of the curious coincidences in our life stories.

Lewin's Critical Biography

Kurt Lewin was a German-American Jew, born in a little town in Poland in 1890. Sadly, he died of a heart attack at the too young age of 56, in Massachusetts. His career in America began in 1939, when he was one of the European social scientists invited to participate in the American Psychological Association's 47th annual convention held at Yale University. His presentation there on racism and discrimination of minority populations had such an impact that the Chairman of the Stanford Department of Psychology (also attending that conference) invited him to visit Stanford University as a visiting scholar, which Lewin accepted.

(There is a curious image from that convention in the American Psychological Association's (APA's) *Monitor on Psychology*, September 2016, p. 96, of Clark Hull and Edward Tolman enjoying a moment of levity with Kurt Lewin, by seeing who could stick out his tongue the longest! Lewin is not shown joining in with them. See: Facemire & Smith, 2016.)

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The Hebrew University had offered him a full teaching position in 1933 (the year that I was born). Lewin was delighted by this academic opportunity: "The idea of working in Palestine fills my heart with joy, my wife and I are happy about the prospect of raising and educating our children in Palestine." Interestingly, this is what his research agenda would have been in those early days of social psychology—still an exciting agenda to this day: The psychology of dealing with our roots and the reactions to Jewish immigration; the psychological problems of mass immigration to Palestine from different countries, and the comparative studies of the psychology of Jews inside and outside Palestine. However, his financial demands were too great and the University could not afford to hire him.

In 1934, he quit his chair at the University of Berlin, because he recognized the dangers of the emerging Nazi government. He accepted a contract, curiously, from Cornell University's School of Home Economics. One of the first research studies that he conducted was observing the differences between how mothers fed their children and how nurses fed foundlings ("foundlings" was the name of orphans then). Lewin's research assistant, in those days called a "bursary boy," was not a psychology student, but a communications major doing the job only for the money. I met him some years later, and he described observing behind a one-way screen the behavioral reactions, and then making notes about the differences between the feeding patterns of the mothers and nurses. That boy's name was Allen Funt! When I asked him who was the researcher he was working for, he could only recall it was some "German guy." Pressed for further recall, he did remember it was, "Kurt somebody . . . Why? Was he *anybody*?"

Interestingly, Allen Funt would go on to become a master of disguised observation in his epic *Candid Camera* series, which was the most popular program in America on Sunday nights for many years. I worked closely with Allen Funt in creating several programs of *Candid Camera* for Psychology classes on DVD format, that I made for use in both Introductory Psychology and Social Psychology courses.

In 1935, Lewin moved on to another kind of a strange place called the Child Welfare Research Station in Iowa. In 1940, he became an American citizen that he was really proud to be, and he always made clear that his name was Lewin, not Levine. Sadly, in 1944, his mother died in a cattle car en route to a Nazi concentration camp. This left him with a profound sense of learned helplessness because he was not able to help her survive. From 1945 to 1947, the Research Center of Group Dynamics was created at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and he and that center then moved to the University of Michigan. He died shortly after that in 1947. As I said, he died much too early, like Stanley Milgram, who died at the age of 50, also of a heart attack. Another curiosity, Stanley Milgram and I were high school classmates at the James Monroe high school in the South Bronx, in 1948–1950.

I have also tried to emulate Lewin's personal accessibility to his students, who liked him very much, as revealed in this excerpt:

"Although Lewin was still struggling with learning English, he was again popular with students, gathering an informal weekly lunchtime meeting that the students nicknamed 'the Hot-Air Club.' He had a lively sense of humor and enjoyed telling jokes; in addition he never rejected students or colleagues for disagreeing with him. One of Lewin's colleagues later recalled, people could move out of Lewin's immediate circle even during his lifetime and still maintain ties with him and others in his circle. . . . I think Kurt was quite right in saying that he didn't want to develop a school of psychology; he was merely trying to develop a language for the representation of psychological phenomena" (Gale Group, 2015, pp. 20–21). "In an article published in 1945, Lewin stated, 'We must be equally concerned with discovering how people can change their ways so that they learn to behave better.' These discoveries, however, depended on experimentation" (Gale Group, 2015, p. 25). (Contrast Lewin's democratic social orientation to that of Sigmund Freud's autocracy with students and colleagues alike.)

Leon Festinger was Lewin's most talented group dynamics student (although he distained T-Group efforts in business). Festinger taught at Stanford University from 1955 to 1968; in 1957, he developed cognitive dissonance theory. I met Festinger when he visited Yale University where I was then studying with Jack Brehm, one of his first students to do a dissonance-related thesis. I graduated in 1959, and my dissertation was the first study of dissonance theory as it relates to attitude change—its predictions bested Hovland and Sherif's latitudes of acceptance/rejection formulation. In 1960, I went from Yale to my first job at New York University, at its Bronx campus. In 1968, I published *The Cognitive Control of Motivation*, which summarized my view that an expanded dissonance theory took in all motives, as shown in a host of research studies from many laboratories. I also was conducting research on the psychology of affiliation, which helped clarify some of the inconsistencies in Stan Schachter's theorizing about the role of anxiety and fear in social affiliation (Schachter, 1959). (Schachter had been another of Festinger's students at Michigan.) In addition, I continued my interest in attitude change and persuasion, which was a central focus of my Yale training with my mentors, Carl Hovland, Irv Janis, and Hal Kelley.

Turning Social Psychology Knowledge into Political Action

I tended to be apolitical at first, because involvement in politics was a distraction from my full-time teaching load and overseeing several research programs that I had started. Nevertheless, I got involved as an anti-Vietnam war activist, and organized one of the nation's first colleges all-night antiwar teach-ins in about 1965. That activism continued when I got my next job at Stanford University

in 1968—replacing Festinger who came to New York's New School for Social Research.

I was even more involved in antiwar activities during the next few years, as the Vietnam War escalated. I organized thousands of students in a variety of proactive programs against the war. Robert Abelson (my Yale stats teacher) and I published an unusual manual called *Canvassing for Peace* (1970), in which we tried to teach people, especially young students, how to get out votes for the political Doves who were antiwar, against the Hawks who were prowar. With my graduate students, Ebbe Ebbesen and Christina Maslach, I wrote two editions of *Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behavior* (Zimbardo & Ebbesen, 1969; Zimbardo, Ebbesen, & Maslach, 1977)—both social and political actions.

Lewin reminds us that social action, not physical action, is steered by our perception of events and activities. Recall Lewin's psychological tactics of getting personal action commitments to try eating glandular meats that worked better than an informative lecture to do so. That action-oriented research was new in psychology, and it helped change some eating habits of Americans in World War 2, to get Americans to eat inexpensive, healthy, available glandular meats, which most Americans disliked. As you know, one of Lewin's most famous lines is: "If you want truly to understand something, try to change it."

Subsequently, I did investigations of Brazilian military and police torturers in Brazil. We interviewed them in jail, with my colleagues Martha Huggins and Mika Haritos-Fatouros, in order to understand the personality and the particular social situations in which these ordinary individuals all did these horrific tortures, often ending in bloody murder of thousands of anti-fascist dissidents. Our findings were reported in *Violence Workers* (2002). So this was another example of Lewin's formula: Behavior is a function of the Person \times their Environment.

- I should mention in passing, that there was a period of about 10 years, in which American Secret Service agents trained torturers around the world, in torture technology. Any national leader who proclaimed to be against communism or socialism (usually fascist dictators), America was right there to give them tactical support.

On Time Perspective

Lewin was the first psychologist to have an intense and fascinating interest in the concept of time perspective. As early as 1942, he wrote a chapter on time perspective and morale. Consider some of his time-synched views:

- "The individual may see his future as too rosy or too bleak; frequently the character of the psychological future vacillates between hope and despair. But, regardless of whether the individual's picture of the future is correct

or incorrect at a given time, this picture deeply affects the mood and the action of the individual at that time” (p. 80).

- “Actions, emotions, and certainly the morale of an individual at any instant depend upon his total time perspective” (p. 80).
- “The setting up of goals is closely related to time perspective. The goal of the individual includes his expectations for the future, his wishes, and his daydreams. Where the individual places his goals will be determined fundamentally by two factors, namely, by the individual’s relations to certain values and by his sense of realism in regard to the probability of reaching the goal” (p. 86).
- “Practically everyone of consequence in the history of humanity in religion, politics, or science has been dominated by a time perspective which has reached out far into future generations, and which frequently was based on an awareness of an equally long past. But a large time perspective is not peculiar to great men. A hundred and thirty billion dollars of life insurance in force in the United States offers an impressive bit of evidence for the degree to which a relatively distant psychological future, not connected with the well-being of one’s own person, affects the everyday life of the average citizen” (p. 81).
- His take on the time-related psychology of imprisonment is clear in this statement. “Not present hardships in the usual sense of the term, then, but rather certain aspects of the psychological future and the psychological past, together with feelings of being treated fairly or unfairly, are most important in determining the amount of one’s suffering In solitary confinement, too, it has been frequently reported, one of the most painful experiences is the uncertainty as to how much time has elapsed. Once again, it is not a present hardship but certain characteristics of the time perspective, which lend the situation its anguish” (p. 82).
- “Positive time perspective is a time perspective guided by worthwhile goals, meaning future orientation, is one of the basic elements of high morale, at the same time the process is reciprocal: high morale itself creates long range time perspective with in turn sets up worthwhile goals, if an individual perspective is too rosy or too bleak, frequently the character of his psychological future vacillates between hope and despair. Group morale depends on time perspective as much as does individual morale” (p. 85).
- According to field theory, any type of behavior depends upon the total field dynamics including the time perspective at that moment of action, but not future time perspective nor past time perspective. Thus, field theory itself is focused only on present fluid dynamics.
- In 1946, Lewin wrote: “The main differences between developmental stages are: (1) an increase in the *scope* of the life space in regard to: (a)

what is part of the psychological present; (b) the time perspective in the direction of the psychological past and the psychological future; (c) the reality-irreality dimension; (2) an increasing *differentiation* of every level of the life space into a multitude of social relations and areas of activities; (3) an increasing *organization*; (4) a change in the general *fluidity* or *rigidity* of the life space" (Lewin, 1946, p. 797).

In commenting on one of the social climate differences between democratic, autocratic, and laissez faire groups, which Lewin pioneered with Lippitt and White (1939), again time perspective arises as part of the explanation. "In *laissez-faire*, contrary to expectations, the space of free movement was not larger but smaller than in democracy, partly because of the lack of time perspective" (p. 293).

Quantifying Time Perspectives

Following Lewin's focus on time perspective, I developed the first reliable, valid, and easily measured assessment of time perspective, which is now being used as the standard measure by hundreds of researchers around the world. There are six major time zones in which people live. Two focus on the past (Past Positive or Past Negative), two on the present (Present Hedonism and Present Fatalism), and two on the future (Future Positive and Transcendental Future). It is known as the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI). The 56-item scale now has a shorter version of 15 items, and 36 of its items have proven to be "universal," in so far as people from more than 20 different nations responded to them similarly. Thus, it is an ideal scale for any cross-cultural research. John Boyd and I wrote a journal article describing the scale and its robust correlations with dozens of other constructs (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), and then we wrote our full length treatise of the "centrality" of time perspective in shaping individual lives and national destinies, *The Time Paradox* (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008).

I helped initiate the International Time Perspective Network a decade ago, along with Anna Sircova, then a graduate student at Moscow State University (she continues as its president). We currently have more than 250 active members from more than 40 countries around the world, including both young and established researchers from many backgrounds. All of them are passionate about time in psychological and social phenomena, are very open to dialogue across different disciplines, and are eager to apply our knowledge about time to solving various real-life puzzles.

Sircova coordinated a large cross-cultural study, cosigned by members from more than 25 countries, presenting the cross-cultural validation of the ZTPI, with 26 samples from 24 countries ($N = 12,200$; Sircova et al., 2014). Since then, the Network has organized more than 12 international symposia at five international conferences. Nicolas Fieulaine of Lyon University, France, vets all translation

requests and creates a standardized protocol for all to follow and to share their results openly. In 2012, our Network organized the first International Conference on Time Perspective in Coimbra, Portugal. The second conference was held in Warsaw, Poland in 2014, and the third was held in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2016. Members of the Network collaborated on an edited volume about Time Perspective Theory (Stolarski, Fieulaine, & Van Beek, 2014).

Time Perspective Therapy

Separately from this research effort, I began collaborating with Rick and Rose Sword, two clinicians working in Hawaii with military veterans who were dealing with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We developed a form of “time therapy” that has been helpful to these vets, and its curative effects are described in our book, *The Time Cure* (Zimbardo, Sword & Sword, 2012). It is a therapy about the future. It focuses more on achieving a brighter future than focusing on a negative past, in order to create a happy present life. Time therapy is a breakthrough cognitive psychotherapy, based on my time perspective theory, and made operational by the Swords in their treatment center. Our time therapy program with pre–post data of 32 vets from all recent U.S. wars indicates that, on average, we achieved cures in eight sessions; 80% significantly less depression, 70% significantly less anxiety, and 52% significantly less PTSD symptoms. These improvements persisted over the 4 years of our follow-up period, and not a single one of the veterans has attempted suicide (during that same time period, the suicide rate in the military was about 15%).

The Stanford Prison Experiment

For many years, I have been known primarily for the classic study that I conducted, the *Stanford Prison Experiment*. It was a vivid demonstration of the power of situational forces to dominate personality and to lead people to behave in ways that they would not have done normally (visit: www.prisonexp.org). Recently, it has reemerged as a powerful Hollywood movie of the same name, which has been shown throughout the United States and is now being distributed globally. That now famous, or infamous, study was one that I conceived along with two graduate students, Craig Haney and Curtis Banks, and one undergraduate, David Jaffe. The study was part of my earlier focus on understanding the forces of evil, by trying to create some of them in controlled laboratory settings.

The details of that 24/7, 6-day study of college students role-playing prisoners and guards are presented in 10 chapters of my book, *The Lucifer Effect* (Zimbardo, 2007), which received the William James book award from APA, and is translated into 24 languages. The rest of the book documents evil of wars, terrorism, and the Holocaust, and summarizes all psychological research on aggression and moral

disengagement. It also includes a special analysis of the Abu Ghraib Iraq Prison horrors, where American prison guards tormented and degraded Iraqi detainees in their custody. I was called as an expert witness for one of those guards, and used a situational/systemic argument in support of his receiving a less severe sentence for his guilty deeds—which worked to reduce his sentence from 15 years to only 4 years hard time.

Shyness as a Self-Imposed Psychological Prison

In prisons and other restrictive settings in real life, the authorities are the ones who take away a person's freedoms. What is curious about shyness is that people voluntarily give up their freedom—freedom of association, freedom of speech—and then they think less well of themselves, and their self-esteem plummets. I use the metaphor, shyness as a silent prison. I was the first person to systematically investigate shyness in adolescents and adults, taught courses on shyness, did multimethod research, then created a shyness clinic (Zimbardo 1977) to treat this widespread disorder that causes many personal, social, and professional problems for shy people of all ages. Our shyness clinic was the first to be devoted exclusively for treatment of shyness-related personal problems. It is still in practice at Palo Alto University, almost 30 years later. In addition, I wrote two popular trade books that included self-help exercises: *Shyness: What It is, What to Do About It* (1977) and *The Shy Child* (Zimbardo & Radl, 1981). Another way to be a social change agent is to package evidence-based findings on a social problem into books for the general public, and simultaneously to learn how to work with the mass media to get your message out broadly beyond the confines of academia.

The Heroic Imagination Project (HIP)

Two events dramatically changed my professional life course to shift from evil to goodness, from understanding villains to inspiring heroes. The first was that I wrote a last chapter for *The Lucifer Effect*, in which I raised the question of, whether ordinary people could be trained to become heroes. The second was my talk at the TED conference in 2008, in which I first publically discussed the idea of forming a foundation to systematically study the nature of everyday heroism. Many influential people in the audience embraced that ideal, and encouraged and supported me to move forward with that venture. I will now give an overview of the formation of this nonprofit foundation and its growing presence and impact around the world.

I have been on a mission to totally challenge a narrow set of traditional beliefs that heroes are special people, not comparable to ordinary mortals. Examples are usually male warriors acting alone against enemies that they defeat with battlefield bravery. Instead, I offer an inspiring alternative for the ordinary mortals. Anyone

can become a hero who stands up, speaks out, and takes wise and effective actions to oppose evil of all kinds, to help others in need, and to defend moral causes, while being aware of potential risks. To realize that vision I created HIP as a nonprofit (501 c-3) organization in San Francisco, founded in 2008. HIP's purpose is to promote everyday heroism as: (1) an antidote to inhumanity, corruption, and evil; and (2) a celebration of the positive potential of human nature.

HIP's mission is to teach people the skills and awareness they need to make effective decisions in any challenging situations they may encounter. HIP does this by translating research findings from social psychology and related fields into knowledge, tools, strategies, and exercises that help individuals and groups take effective action at crucial moments in their lives. HIP 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 (www.heroicImagination.org).

HIP's Lessons: Understanding Human Nature

We have developed an innovative educational program that is designed to make every student think of him or herself as: (1) a social change agent, and (2) an effective teacher who can transmit to others the lessons he or she has just learned. The key feature of our educational program is the use of a series of provocative videos that stimulate discussion between students working with a partner and in a dynamic relationship with their teacher. Each lesson also involves critical thinking exercises, including analysis of obstacles to good intentions and then the determination of effective solutions for each such barrier. Currently, we have six such lessons, each organized around a central domain of social psychology and/or cognitive psychology. Each lesson is 2–3 hours long, but can be subdivided into smaller units. The six lessons are: Mindset, The Bystander Effect, Prejudice and Intergroup Conflict, Situational Blindness, Conformity and Peer Pressure, and finally, Adaptive Attributions and Stereotype Effects.

Our educational programs are in many Oregon community college Psi Beta chapters, where their students were trained to deliver the lessons to high school students in their region. In addition, we are in community colleges in southern California and in a number of schools in Flint, Michigan. But our major impact is global, where I go to many countries to conduct trainings of teachers, graduate psychology students, professional trainers, and volunteers. We are flourishing all over Poland; Sicily, Italy; Bali, Indonesia; Geelong, Australia; and now in Tehran, Iran; and soon in Shanghai, China.

However, I am delighted to focus finally on our huge success in Hungary, where social psychological knowledge is having a transformative impact not only on students, but also on the general public, and in businesses. I think Kurt Lewin would be pleased by such a development. Over the past 3 years since the founding

of the *Hero Square Initiative* in 2013, a family-like team has gathered to make helpfulness a social norm in society. Around 60 volunteers contribute to this project. The project has taught the Bystander and Growth Mindset lessons to parents and leaders to inspire Hungary's youth (ranging from kindergarten to university age). There are four to five trainings each month and 15 volunteer trainers. A total of 1,200 teachers have been trained at nearly 1,000 schools, and ~30,000 students have received our training! Videos of their Bystander inaction training episodes are often shown on television to teach the public how to be helpful to others in need, versus being passive and disengaged.

On the Demise of Guys

Recently, I discovered something that Lewin could not have envisioned: how technology is destroying intellectual initiative and social engagement of our youth. Many young men are now living in a self-contained world of virtual reality, while giving up life in ordinary social reality. This current generation of teens through 20-year olds is having their brains digitally rewired. They are becoming addicted to playing video games on their computers and cell phones, supplemented by addiction to freely available pornography online. The consequences are dramatic: failing academically, giving up on spending time with friends, and losing romantic interest in real women.

I first reported these phenomena in a brief TED talk, "The Demise of Guys," in 2011, which went viral with millions of viewers. I then wrote a TED E-book (with the same title), and later expanded it into a full-length trade book, with my co-author Nikita Coulombe—entitled *Man (Dis) connected* (Zimbardo & Coulombe, 2015, in the United Kingdom) and *Man Interrupted* (Zimbardo & Coulombe, 2016, in the United States). We document how and why technology has sabotaged what it means to be male. We also offer many practical solutions, from individual to social to system levels of engagement, which need to be put into play to remediate what could be a major waste of a generation of youth who become negative consumers and not positive creators of anything worthwhile. How will this new drama play out when the player/viewer is also wearing 3D Virtual Reality goggles? Stay tuned for those answers.

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