



### **Episode 41: The Hero Child, with Liz Higgins**

Liz Higgins (00:02):

Hey, y'all! Liz Higgins here, and welcome to the Millennial Life Podcast, where my main goal is to share conversations that will inspire you and drive you toward the life and relationship you desire. I'm here to share what I've learned as a licensed therapist and relationship coach specializing in millennial relationships and wellness, as well as transformative conversations with other professionals. Thanks for listening and enjoy today's episode!

Liz Higgins (00:34):

Hey guys! Thanks for joining me today. So... a couple weeks ago, I shared on the podcast that I'm trying on something new. I'm going to bi-weekly - every other week episodes. Reclaiming some time to really circle in energy, space, and just, just headspace, I guess, to other elements of my business, family, and preparing for the next shift of life that is the school year. So, doing that... And really grateful to have you joining me today. I want to talk today about being the hero child, and the mirror that is entrepreneurship and your committed relationship. Okay. So a couple of weeks ago - actually this week - I had an episode come out on The Private Practice Startup podcast, which was so much fun to record. And I'll put a link in the Show Notes to that episode, if you want to listen to it.

Liz Higgins (01:31):

And while it's geared towards entrepreneurs in the therapy field, I think it is absolutely relatable for anybody. And it has me on this thing that I want to talk more about today, which is (really and truly) how being an entrepreneur, being a business owner, creating something in that realm, is truly a mirror and forces you to do your own work. Because it truly does. And if you are moving through life and business without clarity on that fact, I am going to bet that at one point or another, you probably wanted to throw in the towel. Probably felt really untethered, uncertain, incapable, just resentful... Maybe even, I think, at our worst. In this dynamic of being an entrepreneur and business owner, things can be really, really hard. Sometimes there is scarcity that we're faced with. There are issues, there are relational challenges with teams and people that we will come into contact with and work closely with. And all of these things, all, all of these things (on every level for me) bring you back to this one invitation: which is grow relationally. Level up who you are in this dynamic, in this relationship, in this process... And personal development is an incredible thing.

Liz Higgins (03:00):

And there are so many resources out there. And what's really badass - I think - about entrepreneurs in general is that it's a whole component... generally speaking, a whole component to a healthy entrepreneur is

one that has really gone down that path of introspection. Learning about the self, exploring the psychology of people... And it's a beautiful thing. And I've been down that path too. There's been books that have been incredibly helpful, courses connecting to other entrepreneurs... Some may even say they're, they're a different kind of being. And I really believe that to a certain extent. The reality is that we are all human. We all started out in this world as completely vulnerable, sensitive, dependent, little sponges. We all started out as children. And the incredibly important thing to know (and recognize) about yourself is that that's when you learn who to become in your most formative years - relationally speaking.

Liz Higgins (04:06):

Your most formative years are impacting who you are as an entrepreneur, who you are as a consultant, who you are as a therapist, who you are as a coach, who you are as whatever it is you do. The origin story is significant. And as I've grown and embodied more of my own work, and done the work, and been in this field (that I'm just continuously grateful to be in because it has really grown me up in a lot of ways I didn't even know I needed), I've come to this realization, in fact, that I can't even really work with people in therapy, in coaching, (in any format!) without bringing the significant piece of who you learn to become. The template you learned to live out relationally to the table. We have to have it there. So I'm going to share with you today a little bit, um, a little bit about myself in this realm.

Liz Higgins (05:05):

Okay. And I'm going to reference a couple of things. So I'm in training through the Healing Our Core Issues Institute, which is really an incredible process. (And I'll probably have to spend a whole other podcast, one of these days, really explaining what that process is. And maybe I'll get Rick or Jan on here to talk about that with me (the founders).) But I'm deep into their program, which is having me look at that relational template - who did I learn to become? What were the less than ideal relational experiences that I had? What was the takeaway? What were my core woundings from all that? And what we look at through the Hawkeye Model is the role that you took on in your childhood. And the three options there are going to be the Hero Child (or the Mascot), the Little Kid (that's the poster child... They've got it all together, the good kid, the perfect kid.)

Liz Higgins (05:58):

And then we've got the Lost Child. (The one that kind of disappears, learns to withdraw, learns to be invisible, to essentially survive the dynamics in the family environment, the life environment growing up.) The third one is the scapegoat child who kind of gets plastered with that label of being "the problem". And there's a lot of over-focus - negative focus, I should say - on the scapegoat child, okay? Center of attention, but not in a good way. And often feeling that they just could never get it right. So those are the three, um, the three roles that a child could take on... We're talking about this from a relational and developmental level. I have decided... for me, over the years, as I've done this work in therapy, as I've looked at who I am in my relationships, how I can be in my job, in my work as a therapist, a business owner and entrepreneur, I am SO a Hero Child.

Liz Higgins (07:01):

Okay. The Hero Child. I want to clarify - this wasn't like, one day my parents came around and said 'Hey, you're going to be the Hero Child. Okay? Because we think you're perfect, and this and that. And yada, yada yada...' No. That's not how it goes. And so much of this is cultivated on a very unconscious level for the child. But paired with the fact that I was (generally speaking) an empathic little human. I'm pretty attuned and aware to what others are feeling. Really connected to the experience of my mom and my dad just having, like, a

heightened attunement to those kinds of things. Being very sensitive. Characteristically speaking, I was a real sensitive person. I was sensitive and shy and yeah... I would just kind of say that I was permeable as a little child. And this is not about pointing out all the ways that your parents screwed you up, and blaming them.

Liz Higgins (08:00):

I want to put that out there! But I am going to talk about some of the things that I came out of my family of origin experience having a feeling (relationally) and how that's shown up for me in entrepreneurship, in my own marriage, in every element of my life. The things that get hard directly correlate back to some of these core woundings, core needs, and core learnings that I still have to cultivate. So with the Hero Child, there comes this sense of false empowerment in that little one. Okay? And remember this please - subconsciously, subconsciously. I wasn't walking around... In fact, when I reflect on it, like, I didn't want to be the center of attention. I was really good at music. I was really good at performance. I was involved in a lot of different things. I was even homecoming queen at my high school, but I didn't like to be in the center of attention.

Liz Higgins (09:00):

I loved relational connection. I loved my friends, spent so much time with them. Huge source of joy, just so much fun to be social, be with friends... And be, in some elements, just my authentic self, you know? Really easy to connect with others. And I think that those were positives that I gained from my family of origin experience. Just having parents that were really friendly, outgoing, kind to others, and that kind of thing. But the dark side of it all, the shadow side of the Hero Child, is that there is this sense that you start to take on of 'I don't want to disappoint anybody. Especially parents, especially caretakers.' So being good, being good was messaging that I internalized from a lot of different directions. Um, I want to point out that I mentioned, you know, I didn't think that I... I wasn't a kid that bullied others.

Liz Higgins (09:57):

There was no grandiosity in me growing up, but that is something that I deal with relationally in my marriage. I can be very quick in my marriage to react out of this Hero Child place that I've learned to be in by really going one up and by really taking on and putting on this outfit of 'I feel like I have all my shit together on this and you don't.' And I bring myself up into this grandiosity (which is non-relational and kind of perpetuates this internal knowing that I'm trying to convince myself of 'I am better than okay.'). And I want to make a connection back to the Hero Child who often takes on this role of not wanting to disappoint the caretakers, not wanting to make mistakes. I hated messing up. I was the poster child perfectionist. And I know that on a pretty deep level about myself, I can get very perfectionist-y with certain things.

Liz Higgins (11:13):

And I would think, I would say that that absolutely goes with the relational dynamic of wanting to please others. Wanting their approval, finding the sense of self and being a good listener for others, helping others, taking care of others. And you see that in my personal history! I was a student helper in junior high and high school. I was a peer helper. I was a close friend. I mean, you know, for those of you listening, who can identify with this, relate to this, it's like.... You're the one that friends always kind of went to to talk about their stuff. And there was joy in that. I loved being that (and doing that) relationally for others. Um, it is a huge area where I think I developed my self-worth. And that in and of itself is not a bad thing, not a bad thing at all.

Liz Higgins (12:02):

It's a beautiful thing. It's what led me to be (I think) such a compassionate and deep therapist with others. And for those of you who are - or who know - very empathic people, it is, it's a true gift. It's a true gift. But what tends to happen with the Hero Child is there's this, there's this element of containing yourself. You show up so well for others, you perform so well for others, but who you really are (your deepest needs, beliefs, feelings, vulnerabilities) stays a little more contained. And for me, I always had a family dynamic where I could go to my parents. I could go to my parents and talk about stuff. I could even talk to my sisters about things! But that lands for me. I definitely did keep parts of myself, um, pretty deeply internalized, I think. And, and with the Hero, there can be that temptation, I guess, to do things that you feel like you should be doing rather than the things that, on a much deeper level, you know, are in alignment with who you are.

Liz Higgins (13:17):

Okay. And I'm saying that as a, you know, mature, 30-something year old, functional adult here that is consciously reflecting on these things. As a kid, I had no idea that this is what was happening in me. And, you know, with my development. But as I look through the characteristics of this Hero Child, it is so incredibly on point for me when I look at who I am in my present day adult relationships and in my marriage. So the interesting thing about the Hero Child relationally is that they kind of become anti-dependent. And what I really mean by that is they just learned to get shit done. They take care of themselves. There's not a real true dependency there. Okay? So, think of it as, like, on this deep, sort of dark level, there's this sense of, 'I'm not going to ask for help.

Liz Higgins (14:16):

I can do it all myself. I can handle things.' You know... just maybe feeling like, no, one's really there for you on the level that you may need. So just containing that. Containing that, keeping it in, having your stuff together and not needing to take that from others. Maybe even feeling that that would be a burden to others. So, you continue to show up, you continue to take action. You continue to do. I've spoken to lots of different clients who identify with the Hero Child role in their system growing up. And, um, some versions of this have looked like a sick or unavailable parent... That there was a lot of focus on that parent and the experience they were having there. And so this Hero Child learned to kind of put those deeper needs for connection, vulnerability, and space to be held there aside. They were almost gone.

Liz Higgins (15:12):

We say in our field, needless/wantless, needless/wantless. And those little ones learned to show up. To show up, to turn up and to get shit done. They became little managers, little performers, little straight A students, business owners... People that have gone out into their life and created incredible things and developed a lot of self-enabled security (financially and otherwise). Okay? So, it's how your particular dynamic played out where you will define, like, what was that role you really took on. But for the Hero Child, they go into action mode typically. And there's a lot of ability to show up for others and to get stuff done, but not necessarily have truly intimate and truly healthy relational connection to others. So, as I've grown, as I've now been married and with my husband there for over a decade, when I'm at my worst, the things that I can do, (and I see this stemming from the Hero Child I became long ago) is I can go way into overdrive. And the worst part of me wants to come out and say, 'you never do anything.

Liz Higgins (16:32):

You never show up in the way that I need. You can't do it. You're a failure. I can't trust you if you can't show up for me in these ways.' And I pull back and I start to decide that only I can do the things that need to be done this way. And I take control. I take control. I find control. I become controlling of others in honestly pretty direct ways... Which would be under that umbrella of how I learned to moderate myself growing up. I, I didn't really. It was sort of the extreme for me growing up of containing, containing these parts of me. And in my adult relationships, they have sort of unleashed. Or they can unleash when I'm at my worst. Relationally, I can feel so hurt and so resentful. And let me back up and say that what I access first is going to be the resentment.

Liz Higgins (17:31):

What is underneath that resentment is typically feeling hurt, feeling this wounding when others don't see or acknowledge the efforts and the hard, hard work that I put into certain things in my life. And that shows up in marriage, that has shown up in my business. That has been something I've had to cultivate a real awareness of because, because it manifests so quickly. And, and if I'm not aware of it, I can start to make that a problem and a barrier to being able to connect and work with others, and develop, and grow, and train, and become better. So I'm really proud of myself that I'm very aware of this element. But, what you want to understand about all of this is that the role you took on at a very young age relationally does impact, it does color, the needs, the expectations, the activations, and the reactions, the behaviors that you have in your relationship and in your business.

Liz Higgins (18:38):

This is what I'm finding to be truer than anything else: it boils down to that ingrained coding in ourself. Okay. And so a part of the process here is not just trying to change all this and not be this way. It's acknowledging there's a deeper invitation here to get to know this part of you. To befriend this part of you, to be compassionate to this very part of you, otherwise it will run you ragged. It will take you all over the place in your business decisions, in your life decisions, and absolutely in your love decisions. Hero Children can tend to be kind of avoidant relationally. They can tend to be kind of dismissive of others. They're used to being in this empowered state where their identity came from creating stability in the system they came from, or at least putting that on, taking that on. Feeling a sense of validation for being in that role - being the one that could be successful, that could do things well, that could not get in trouble, that didn't make mistakes.

Liz Higgins (19:56):

And that translates into a bit of a discrepancy when it comes to true connection and true intimacy, which requires vulnerability, all of you. The dark sides, the shadow sides. Okay? And so, if any of this resonates, start to try this thought process on that this may be your invitation to dive deeper into yourself and, and... The hope and the gift there is that it could really transform the way you are showing up in relationship, the way you are showing up in your business even. And I believe this is the work of life. This is why I'm literally talking about this, doing this work. This is why I'm so excited to be launching a program soon for entrepreneurs - in their relationship functioning - to look at this stuff and to grow and absolutely transform. Okay. So stay in touch! And listen for more, 'cause I'm going to talk more about the roles on the podcast, as well as what we do and how to kind of cultivate this better sense of self in relationship. Okay! I'll talk to you guys next time.

Thanks again for listening to the podcast. If you like the show, leave us five stars or write a review. If you're interested in learning more, sign up for my free e-book "The One Barrier to Commitment All Millennials Face" at [millenniallifecounseling.com](http://millenniallifecounseling.com).

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