

COLLECTED STORIES IN THE LIFE NARRATIVES OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

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This research investigates the use of stories that are found through vicarious experience and told in a life narrative in order to communicate the meaning of the personal past. Through the interpretation of the life narratives of Holocaust survivors, we argue that stories outside of direct experience, collected stories, form the background of personal narratives. Collected stories are pieces of social interaction and context that are integrated in our presentation of the past, and self understanding, because they are personally relevant to us and congruent with the situation of telling. These stories have the potential to lose the indications that they are outside of direct experience and become indistinguishable from other stories that draw upon direct experience. Collected stories serve to situate our stories of the past and identity within a cultural horizon of sense and meaning.

As social scientists, we know that words have multiple meanings. Words are the voice of a person as well as the voice of a social group living in a particular historical epoch and culture. The articulation of a personal history and life world, so called life narratives or life stories, can be meaningfully approached from the perspective of the person or the social group. Looking at the life of a single individual, one can understand the significance of words as part of a personal biography that culminates in the present and extends back in time to early childhood (and possibly birth—or before). From the

perspective of the social world, one can interpret words as the product of participation in a shared intersubjective space. In the voice of a person, the spirit of an era and social group can be heard.

Each of these perspectives adds to our understanding of the meaning and experience of being human. But there is something missing. There appears to be an imaginary boundary that prevents us from putting together what we know to be true about collectivities with our knowledge of individual lives. The two are in conversation but it is difficult to think through problems of social reality that rest in the area separating the social science disciplines focused on individuals versus those that are focused on groups. The current research is directly addressed to the exploration of this in-between space. The primary question that we will address is how and why do shared stories become part of an individual's life narrative?

Our work on the life narratives of Holocaust survivors has led us to a revised understanding of stories told in the midst of conversations about life and the past. In the process of reading and interpreting the transcripts of twenty conversations, we realized an interesting fact. Survivors recounted both stories of direct and vicarious experience in their life narratives. The first sign of, what we call, a *collected story* was during a dramatic exchange with one of our interviewees, Mike. During the interview Mike related the story of a particularly brutal guard named the hangman, recounted below, and his complete control over concentration camp prisoners. However, Mike leaves out an important part of the story. He never met the hangman but, as we found out later in the interview, only heard stories of the hangman's brutality. Unable to fully understand why Mike would tell a story that was not part of his direct experience and the implications of including such a story in a personal narrative, we gathered more examples of collected stories in our transcripts that, unlike Mike's story, provided identifiers as being outside of direct experience.

Collected stories are the individualized articulation of stories that were not discovered through direct experience but were, rather, vicariously encountered. They are the stories of others. Not "my experience" but "her experience" is recounted in a collected story. In spite of its origins from "outside" the person, collected stories are personally salient and are important enough to be told as a part of personal history. But what becomes of authorship if we are in the habit of including stories that are not fully ours in telling our life narrative? As readers, we might not even be able to determine

if a story has been experienced or collected. Sometimes the marking of a story's origins, as collected, are represented within the narrative. However, sometimes a collected story is so central to one's understanding of the past that such markings disappear and "her story" is told as if it were "my story."

Collected stories are related to what Maurice Halbwachs (1952/1992) has called "collective memory," but there are significant differences. Halbwachs argued that memory is not the direct recall of the past, but all memories are supported, and altered, by the context in which they are recollected. Although Halbwachs was clearly interested in applying his concept of collective memory broadly, to both the influence of social participation on the recall of experience (direct and vicarious) and the social frameworks that rewrite collective understandings of the past, this second area of concern has been most influential (Hutton, 1993). Researchers have applied Halbwachs' collective memory, with great success, to numerous historical events and historical figures in order to show that the social nature of memory results in a peculiar vulnerability (e.g., Connerton, 1989; Novick, 1999; Schwartz, 2000; Young, 1993; Zerubavel, 1995). Like Halbwachs, researchers on collective memory argue that, "In reality the past does not recur as such, that everything seems to indicate that the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present (pp. 39–40)." Shared symbolic resources and concerns of the present day shape the manner in which groups (social, ethnic, religious, etc.) understand the past.

Our distinction between collective memories and collected stories is conceptually warranted. In considering collected stories, we are taking the complimentary point of view in regards to theorists of collective memory. Although collected stories are found in the social world and are subject to social dynamics, we argue that there is an additional element that must be considered. From the perspective of a life narrative, it is clear that social and personal processes are relevant to why found stories are remembered and told by individual actors. As Schutz and Luckmann (1973) point out, social meanings are not simply imposed and repeated, but social meanings have a subjective character; they are modified and integrated within a life narrative for personal reasons. Collective memories are the property of social groups who talk about, and reconfigure, defining moments of group history through the frame of present day concerns. Of course, the sharing of collected stories could contribute to the making and sustaining of collective memories and, conversely, collective memories often serve as the inspiration for collected

stories. However, this brings us to another important distinction, collected stories are not necessarily shared by all members of a social group. The possible stock for collected stories is much larger. Collected stories are found in conversation or cultural products and could equally be spread across an entire social group, nation state, or only shared between two individuals. The essential commonality is that collected stories take up the experience of another and bring it within the frame of one's life story. It is this appropriation of social experience that determines a collected story.

Survivors in Context

Our interest in the cultural and social circumstances of Holocaust survivors is itself a historical phenomenon of recent years. Early research on Holocaust survivors, performed mostly by clinical psychiatrists, tended to emphasize the traumatic impact of concentration camp experience on the psychic life of survivors (Chodoff, 1974; Koranyi, 1969). Attempting to procure compensation for survivors from the West German government, psychiatrists argued that the extreme circumstances of the war (including camp experience, forced labor, starvation, humiliation and the loss of friends, family, and community) were sufficient to overcome the defense mechanisms of healthy individuals and cause the gross display of symptoms (Lederer, 1965; Marcus & Rosenberg, 1988). They argued that a constellation of debilitating symptoms, with the newly created diagnostic label, the "survivors syndrome," resulted from the Holocaust experience (Niederland, 1961/1968).

In the 1970s, with the prohibition on speaking about the Holocaust in public forums in decline (Cole, 1999; Novick, 1999), a new form of looking at survivors emerged. There are continuities with the psychiatric image of survivors as broken individuals. However, rather than focusing on symptoms and pathology, researchers, and the public alike, began a close exploration of, and reverence for, the words and memories of survivors. Beginning in the late 1970s, numerous organizations with the mission to preserve the "memory" of the Holocaust surfaced in order to videotape the "testimony" of survivors. Steven Spielberg's organization, Survivors of the Shoah, which began late in the game in 1994, is the most famous and the largest of these oral history archives, housing over 50,000 unedited videos. There are dozens of lesser known groups with a similar philosophy throughout the United States and the

world. The words of survivors, in the form of oral “testimony,” have become a political and educational tool as well as a subject of investigation.

The political capital of survivor testimony is often calculated in terms of its efficacy in combating the anti-Semitic denial of the Holocaust by “let[ting] those who were not there hear from those who were (Lipstadt, 1990, p. 219).” Annette Wieviorka has argued that the function of testimony has changed direction from describing the events of the war to protecting against forgetfulness by keeping the events of the Holocaust “before our eyes (1994, p. 24).” Geoffrey Hartman (1994, 1996) has been one of the most eloquent spokesmen for the usefulness of survivor testimony as a way of defending against, what he calls, the “assault on truth.” Although survivor testimonies are fraught with the difficulties of remembering events that occurred a long time ago, a problem in the recollection of all past experience, testimonies contain their own kind of truth. As he explains:

The conviction has grown that local knowledge, which speaks from inside a situation rather than from the outside in an objectifying manner, can provide a texture of truth that eludes those who adopt a prematurely unified voice . . . Even if pure spontaneity is an illusion—especially forty to fifty years after the event—it is bad faith to simply substitute the dry tones of the academic historian for the voice of witnesses (Hartman, 1996, p. 135).

Hartman does not overstate the veracity of survivor testimony as a strict historical record of events. Rather, he affirms the truth value of testimony in another sense. These accounts add a dimension of truth, which is missing from the language of “academic historians.” Hartman’s notion of testimony is strongly connected with the motivation to keep the emotional experience of Holocaust survivors before our eyes as an object of consideration.

In launching a new medium to view survivors, the movement to videotape survivors telling about their war experiences provided a new perspective for researchers studying survivors’ lives. The potent mixture of words and images, erupting in streaming video, as survivors publicly recounted their most private experiences, captivated the attention of several researchers. The question became what is the meaning of Holocaust memories for survivors? Does testimony have a function for survivors in establishing a sense of coherence or integrity, or not? Two perspectives can be discerned.

For psychiatrist and survivor, Dori Laub (Felman & Laub, 1992), recounting Holocaust memory, in testimony, is a way of recovering the reality of the experience and working through the experience of trauma. Laub has ar-

gued that the process of giving testimony, and being listened to, is a mode of reintegrating, however incompletely, those events of the past that continue to live inside the survivor. Giving testimony is a way of reaffirming the self that witnessed the events of the war, but remained silent in the post-war years, in order to recover a semblance of wholeness. In a similar vein, Holocaust memories, for Lawrence Langer (1991), continue to maintain an uncanny presence in the survivor's life; they are memories "whose mental eyes have never slept (p. xv)." However, Langer takes a different stance on the usefulness of giving testimony in order to reclaim a sense of wholeness and integrity. He argues that talking about the Holocaust only serves to break apart the coherence of the survivor's day-to-day existence. Recalling the Holocaust is an unpleasant exercise in which feelings of shame, humiliation, and anger rise up and overwhelm the survivor. These memories, which continue to exist in an unprocessed form at the core of the survivor, resurface during testimony, obstructing the survivor's ability to construct a meaningful narrative of the past. The harsh reality of the experience beckons survivors to repeat and re-experience the most emotionally devastating aspects of the catastrophe.

In recent years, a competing manner of understanding survivors has emerged that, in contrast to research on trauma or testimony, emphasizes the effect of later life experiences on how survivors understand the past. This group of scholars, while recognizing that painful memories constantly challenge the survivor's sense of integrity, argue that the post-war context has offered survivors an opportunity to understand their past in a new, and perhaps more viable, light. Some researchers have argued that we have to understand not just the symptoms of survivors but also their resilience and success in America and Israel (Hass, 1995; Helmreich, 1992). Jacob Lomarnz (1995) has gone as far to suggest that survivors possess a "paradoxical self," at times fully able to cope with the troubling legacy of the Holocaust and at others experiencing a sense of despair. Henry Greenspan (1998) has shown that even when acting out past events that cannot be described, recounting the past is a way of expressing one's individuality and finding a sense of selfhood. Others, such as Dominick LaCapra (1994), have criticized researchers for denying that survivors have the ability to work through their Holocaust experience and come to some form of resolution. For LaCapra, "Working-through as it relates both to the rebuilding of lives and to the elaboration of a critical historiography, requires the effort to achieve critical

distance on experience through a comparison of experiences and through a reconstruction of larger contexts that help to inform and perhaps to transform experience (p. 200).” We have previously argued (Schiff & Cohler, 2001), that survivors use experiences after the war (such as success in marriage, family, business, etc.) in order to reinterpret the meaning of their survival. In an act of reading the past backward, many survivors, at least at moments, are able to consider the experience of living through the camps in a purposeful manner. However, the contextualist perspective owes the largest debt to the work of James Young. Young’s contribution to Holocaust studies has been to lay the grounds for an interpretation of survivors, which emphasizes how conventions and current social expectations shape memories. In his study of Holocaust literature, film, and poetry, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, Young (1988) argued that more attention should be paid to understanding the rhetorical, literary, devices used in the creation of works of art and documents of the Holocaust. The Holocaust is no exception to the process by which we figure the world according to our intentions in storytelling and cultural practices. Like Young (1988), we argue that, “rather than coming to Holocaust narrative for indisputably ‘factual’ testimony . . . the critical reader might now turn to the manner in which these ‘facts’ have been understood and reconstructed in narrative (p. 10).”

Situated Stories

Although the concept of collected stories was born from our work with Holocaust survivors, the concept is broadly applicable to life narratives of all varieties. The link between the person and shared stories is more than a footnote in the study of narrative psychology. The social world figures large in the creation and presentation of stories of ourselves and is constantly slipping, sometimes imperceptibly, into our speech and self understanding. Our stories, as our conception of the world at large, would be thinly detailed accounts with little connection to others if we relied upon our personal experience as the sole means of constructing the substance of a life narrative. Collected stories are not the only means by which people bring the social world into their thoughts and speech. Rather, it is one way that we situate ourselves in the world and the content of the social world becomes part of us and our stories of the past.

In situating collected stories in the life narratives of Holocaust survivors, we inquire into how and why collected stories are found and told. We find that there are two primary processes at work in collecting and telling stories outside of direct personal experience, *encountering* and *resonance*. An individual must be able to come into contact with a story or meaning in order to tell about it; the meaning must be knowable in some way or “encounterable.” However, encountering a story is not the only determinant of whether or not a collected story is told. Stories are collected and told for personal reasons, they have a place in the life narrative of the person speaking and fit with their viewpoint on the world and intentions in storytelling. In other words, cultural knowledge resonates for particular individuals in particular situations. Finally, any account of collected stories would be incomplete without an examination of the *authorship* of collected stories. Following the thought of M. M. Bakhtin (1981, 1986), we suggest that the border that separates “her story” and “my story” is a fluid boundary that is easy to cross.

Encountering. Collected stories are predicated on the possibility of encountering. In order to collect and tell a story from outside of direct experience, some route of access to the story must exist. We must be able to find or encounter it. The problem of encountering speaks, in part, to those collective symbolic resources, collective memories, that are available to individuals in a given time, place, and social location, and in part to face-to-face encounters with strangers and intimates. Stories are not equally encounterable. James Young’s (1993) comparative analysis of Holocaust memorials and monuments in Germany, Poland, the United States and Israel is a good example of how even the same historical event can promote unique interpretations and, therefore, rework the potential stock of vicarious narratives. Each country, with its particular social and political concerns and relationship to the victims, configures their remembrance in different ways. For example, Israeli monuments tend to emphasize heroic episodes such as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Polish memorials often attempt to blur the religious identity of the Jewish-Polish victims in order to emphasize the victimization of the Polish population in general.

Not only does the range of encounterable stories change across social groups, but the passing of history is also a significant consideration. As the concerns of a society change over time, stories change, but also the structure of often-told cultural stories are altered in order to give narratives a different

form and meaning. Therefore, a story encountered at one period of history is often distinct in form and meaning from the same story encountered at a later period of time. Yael Zerubavel's (1995) important work on Israeli commemorative narratives is one of the clearest examples of how story structure changes over time in order to form new narrative meanings. Zerubavel argues that commemorative narratives, while often remaining faithful to the record of historical events, can radically change in meaning depending on factors such as the choice of where to place a narrative ending. For example, it is possible to change the sense of a story by "extending" or "curtailing" the ending of the historical record of events. By including events that happen after a narrative sequence or shortening the plot line, tragedy can be turned into triumph and victory into defeat.

It needs to be emphasized that stories shared across an entire nation or culture are not the only resources for encountering meaningful shared stories. Groups of people with common interests, needs and problems (social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, peer group, family, and so on) are also in the business of sharing stories of experience that could serve as the basis for a collected story. In fact, one of the most frequent ways of finding stories is through face-to-face encounters. Stories that are shared between two individuals could concern experiences of a personal nature or they could pass along values and ideas that are shared by a community. Much of our knowledge of the world is, in fact, mediated through others (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). From the perspective of collected stories, there is no essential difference between a story that is shared among all members of a culture and a story that is shared only between two people. Both kinds of stories, national and dyadic, recount circumstances that we did not live through but come into contact with through the encounter with persons and texts. They are ways of extending our knowledge of the world, and how we tell about that world in a life narrative, beyond the limitations of our own limited experience and bringing that knowledge under our domain as a part of ourselves.

Resonance. The defining feature of a collected story is not the fact that one has encountered a story. On any given day, consider the number of stories of others' experiences that we read about in the newspaper or in a novel and hear about on television, radio, or from a friend. These stories of others' experiences do not all become collected stories. Rather, shared stories are collected and told by individuals for a reason—they are relevant to some

aspect of a person's life and situation. The concept of resonance is meant to convey congruence between what is found in culture or social relationships and personal meaning. It is this sense of fit or resonance that motivates us to collect and tell shared stories.

The reasons are diverse for why a shared story is taken-up and told as part of a life narrative. A collected story might be related to other beliefs that the individual holds to be true or serve as an informative example. A collected story might be the only way of filling in the essential details of our lives. It is plainly true that all of us rely on collected stories in order to tell about our experiences early in life. How many stories of childhood begin with "my parents tell me that . . . ?" Finally, collected stories are relevant to certain contexts. In this article we are interested in collected stories in life narratives. It is important to consider the relevance of collected stories as it pertains to the situation of telling one's life narrative.

A pertinent example of resonance comes from the writing of Roy Schafer (1992) on the role of narration in the psychoanalytic dialogue. Schafer reformulates psychoanalysis as a joint effort, between analyst and analysand, to rewrite a self narrative that is no longer viable for the analysand. There are a number of plausible alternatives that the analyst can suggest, depending on her theoretical orientation, for interpreting why the patient feels devitalized, depressed, or anxious. Schafer argues that what is important is not which competing master narrative (Freudian, Kleinian, Self Psychological, etc.) that the analyst uses to inform her proposals, but how the negotiated interpretation fits or works in the analysand's life. The meaning of cure or insight is revised to "refer to those retellings that make a beneficial difference in a person's construction and reconstruction of experience and adaptively active conduct of life (Schafer, 1992, p. xv)." Analysis is successful when a negotiated interpretation makes a difference to the life of the analysand, it works, or narrates the past better, in other words, the interpretation resonates.

Resonance is not only what works for a particular individual. People share identifications, common roles, interests, problems, and positions in the social world, therefore, we can think about how social understandings resonate across groups of individuals. Bilu and Witztum (2000) provide an excellent example of the meeting of individual experiences with shared symbolic resources for a community of individuals, Israeli parents who have lost a child in war. Bilu and Witztum describe the usefulness of a culturally figured myth, which functioned, at least publicly, to allay the pain of losing a child

by granting an honorific status on parents who have made the ultimate sacrifice to state building. “The collectivity glorified the fallen and bestowed on their bereaved relatives material and symbolic rewards. In turn, the bereaved committed themselves to the ethos of sacrifice and the socially sanctioned modes of commemoration.” The myth of the “living monument,” the symbolic designation for such parents, publicly represented the importance of extreme personal sacrifice for collective goals. The wars in 1948 and 1967, Bilu and Witztum (2000) argue, were popular wars for the Israeli public in which soldiers fought heroically for the purpose of collective survival. In that historical moment, collective goals were most salient to individuals and pain might be publicly articulated through the social discourse on the living monument. However, over historical time, identification with the myth has changed. In times when popular support for war has diminished, such as the 1973 war, that was publicly criticized for heavy losses that might have been preventable, and the war in Lebanon, believed unnecessary for survival by many Israelis, the tendency to publicly sanctify the loss of a child declined. Once the match between collective goals and individual needs, resonance, faded, so did the usefulness of the myth.

Finally, collected stories are relevant not only to personal needs but to the situation of telling. Elliot Mishler (1986, 1999) has argued that speech must be understood as part of the dialogic context where interviewer and interviewee work together to negotiate coherence and meaning. Barbara Johnstone (1990), similarly, underscores the importance of situation as one of the key determinants for why certain stories are told. According to Johnstone, stories are pertinent to particular “rhetorical contexts” or “rhetorical situations.” Which story is told and how one goes about telling it are influenced not only by the speaker, her life experience, and storytelling intentions, but also by who is listening. Applying these ideas to a conversation between two bureaucrats, Charlotte Linde (1999) noted that stories of second-hand experience were employed in order to create an institutional record and defend against legal actions. In other words, collected stories, like all speech, are tailored to the situation in which they are told and are congruent with the immediate demands of context.

Authorship. A tension exists between “where” collected stories are encountered and the reasons “why” they resonate with personal experience. Collected stories are narratives that were created out of the raw material of

another person's experience and, to some extent, they continue to carry with them the imprint of this perspective. Yet they are also my stories, suited to my purposes, which reveal something about my experience, are part of my life narrative and convey my perspective on the world. For collected stories the question of proprietorship looms large. Are collected stories yours or mine? This in turn raises a larger issue, who is the author of my life narrative?

When thinking about the issue of authorship in collected stories, we find it helpful to consider the thought of M. M. Bakhtin (1981, 1986) on language. Bakhtin was a sensitive observer of the manner in which meaning is shaped through social practices. In pursuit of language pragmatics, Bakhtin argued that the proper unit of linguistic analysis is the concrete utterance (a complete thought or speech turn). By focusing on the utterance rather than a discrete unit of syntax, Bakhtin was signaling the importance of "words in use," as social actions, for the determination of word meanings (Wertsch, 1991).

For Bakhtin, the meaning of words is not fixed but a social production that is constantly created and recreated in the act of conversation or dialogue with other human beings. Words respond to previously used words, utterances answer to other utterances. Responses can be to the immediate situation; the actors on stage answer one another in a fluid dialogue. Words can also respond to distant dialogues and word uses, even those dialogues that we never took part in. Some articulations might be so dominant, that subsequent utterances must carry associations with this past voice. The utterance, "Just Do It," is so dominated by associations of sweating women and men wearing Nike shoe's that any subsequent use of these words cannot be anything other than farcical.

One of the central tensions in Bakhtinian thought derives from the ability of individuals to express their will in language and the force of previous articulations to dictate the possible meaning of words. At the same time that certain aspects of any utterance are completely novel, language also affords and constrains possibilities for sense through the relationship of each utterance to the meaning of past utterances and the genres provided to a speaker by her place in a language community. Speaking is a process of breathing new life and meaning into words that are already saturated with sense. And to some extent, the act of giving words new voice stretches the limits of the word. "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294)." What

existed outside of our private domain must be wrested from its context in order to shape these words for our purposes, but an inevitable tension and “otherness” remains. Thus, each utterance, as Bakhtin argues, has the characteristic of multivocality in which several contexts and meaning systems are recalled in conjunction with the present (Wertsch, 1991). Several voices resound in the use of a single word.

Although we are constantly in the process of using other’s speech, other’s words, without attributing authorship, as Bakhtin has pointed out, there are some linguistic forms that indicate the integration of other voices within our own. In the final sections of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, a work that is, in a very Bakhtinian fashion, variously attributed to Bakhtin and Voloshinov (Wertsch, 1991), Voloshinov (1973) presents a structural argument for the representation and integration of the speech of others within one’s own narration. “Reported speech is speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time also *speech about speech, utterance about utterance* (italics in original, p. 115).” Reported speech is the representation and integration of dialogue from another time and space within one’s own narrative voice; examples include direct and indirect speech. Rather than continuing to exist outside, words that were spoken by others are brought within the flow of one’s storytelling, in some way marked that they come from another time, place, and speaker. Voloshinov writes, “Reported speech is regarded by the speaker as an utterance belonging to *someone else*, an utterance that was originally totally independent, complete in its construction, and lying outside the given context (italics in original, p. 116).” The dialogue, which took place in the past, becomes integrated within the voice of the author and the conversation is embedded textually. In direct and indirect speech, the words of another are intentionally brought into one’s own and explicitly marked.

The collected stories that we will review share characteristics with direct and indirect speech. In fact, a collected story is an instance of reported speech by definition. We would not be able to recognize a collected story as such if the structural marks, implied or actual, that a story is outside of direct experience completely vanished. However, as we will show, a story may easily lose its markings as being outside direct experience and become indistinguishable from other stories told in a life narrative. Quotation marks in a story, symbolizing a reference to the original storyteller, can lose their place, thereby covering over the fact that the story was collected rather than

experienced. We suggest that there is nothing malicious about such a loss but a positive achievement. In telling collected stories, the storyteller gains new options for expressing the conditions of their life and identity through the acquisition of intersubjectively shared knowledge. The storyteller is not lying but expressing a condition that they feel resonates through their personal history and themselves, the story describes something true which their own experience might have difficulty communicating or completing.

METHOD OF STUDY

In depth interviews with twenty survivors of the Nazi concentration camps were conducted by the first author between September 1995 and December 1996. Survivors were, on average, 72 years old at the time of the interviews and spent a period of time in a Nazi concentration camp, between 1942 and 1945, when conditions in the camps were at their worst. One interviewee was not imprisoned in a camp but narrowly escaped the murder squads in the East. In total, we spoke with 13 women and 7 men. They were born in several countries across Europe: Poland, Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, and the Ukraine. Participants were found through local rabbis, Holocaust museums, and personal connections. Because some survivors are more practiced tellers of their Holocaust experience, speaking to groups of school children and other organizations, we sought out survivors with varying levels of involvement in the Holocaust community.

A wide range of subjects were discussed during the interview including: life before the war; ghetto and camp experiences; feelings of loss; reasons for coming to America; profession, marriage, and children. In addition, interviewees were strongly encouraged to express their reflections and opinions as well as recount experiences. This was an attempt to combat the prevailing model of interviewing Holocaust survivors which encourages survivors to keep strictly to the facts of their experience and to suppress reflective thought. Specific questions were designed to probe for interpretations of survival, the Holocaust, and reflections on God.

Interviews required between three and six hours and were usually completed in the home of the interviewee. Relationships were warm and the afternoon usually involved about a half an hour of casual conversation before and after the interview as well as coffee and cake. At times, the interviewer,

a Jewish male, sensed that interviewees spoke to him as they would a family member of succeeding generations, such as a grandson. At points this “grandson transference” was palpable. One interviewee went as far to suggest that his grandson should meet with the interviewer because of the many common interests that they purportedly shared. Survivors not only attributed the qualities of family members to the interviewer, but some interviewees also expressed the wish that this conversation would be a forum for communicating their life experiences to others. One interviewee commented that part of the purpose in telling her story was so that the interviewer could now be a witness to the experiences recounted in the course of the conversation. Even after her death, the interviewer could continue to testify to the facts of this survivor’s life.

COLLECTED STORIES

In the following, we explore the dynamics between the social and the personal through a close analysis of collected stories. We present several examples of stories found in interviews with survivors of the Nazi concentration camps that problematize our conception of what is individual and what is collective. The stories we present were chosen for a particular reason. Each story betrays its origins in the social world for our contemplation. We suggest that these stories are of a certain category of storytelling, *collected stories*, that we all possess in our repertoire of possible stories to narrate about ourselves and the world around us. By definition, collected stories are not the recounting of direct experience but the re-telling of stories that have come from outside ourselves, by virtue of our contact with others and sharing experience with them. In each of the texts, and our discussion, we pay close attention to our theoretical concerns with encountering, resonance and authorship that are at issue in all collected stories.

A Remarkable Story

One of our interviewees, Sarah, recounted the following story:

My father was very depressed. And somebody told me, this guy, I think so, that this guy who was, because he had a barber shop on the first floor and the guy, the guy had a wife and two children. And they were expelled together with us and they went to Treblinka . . . I met him after the war on the streets of Czestochowa. I think

so. He recognized me but we didn't see each other for three years and he told me that he was in the same cart as my parents. And he told me that my father didn't say anything during the whole way to Treblinka. He didn't say a word to anybody but he was sitting on his knapsack and in front of him. He kept my picture and he was looking at my picture the whole way. They were 24 hours, they were on the train to Treblinka and he was only watching my picture, he didn't say a word even to my mother. This he told me, "I have the obligation to tell you this. I didn't know that you will be alive and that I will meet you." He met me on the streets . . . he recognized me, he called me, I didn't recognize him, he called me and "I have to tell you this," because this was remarkable. "Nobody only he was sitting in the car with your picture in his hand and not saying a word to anybody." And this was something when he told me.

The story of Sarah's father regarding her picture on the train to Treblinka, a place from which Sarah narrowly escapes, is brought to her by another person. It is a story outside "first-hand" experience, but yet, it becomes an integral part of the story of her being, a heartfelt aspect of her life narrative and identity.

Although the origins of the story seem clear enough, several grammatical elements are important to note. The story of Sarah's father is embedded within the story of meeting "the barber who lived on the first floor," a chance meeting that took place three years after the war. In fact, there are two stories. The first is a story of discovery and the second the story of her father's death. By calling attention to the story of discovery, Sarah clearly marks the origins of what she relates as being outside of her personal experience. It is also interesting to note that the story of meeting the barber and the story of Sarah's father on the train to Treblinka are repeated twice. During the first telling, words of the barber are narrated in Sarah's voice using a form of indirect speech and the second in the form of direct speech in the voice of the barber. The grammatical markings of a collected story within the frame of a personal narrative are clearly displayed. There is no mistake that this story is collected.

The structure of the story points to the larger significance of Sarah's father in her life narrative and suggests a reason why it was presented. The special relationship between father and daughter is doubly emphasized through the narrative of how Sarah recovered the story of her father's death. The narrative of Sarah's silent father on the train becomes even more powerful when contextualized within her whole life history. Before the war, Sarah's father believed that Germany would never invade Poland. Once the Nazis entered,

he heard a rumor that men, Jews and Poles alike, would be killed if they remained in town and fled to Warsaw. Sarah's mother refused to leave her aging parents behind and the family remained in the German occupied part of Poland. Sarah repeats that her father was "depressed, destroyed" after his experience in Warsaw. She says, "he didn't come home the same person. He didn't have any hope . . . other people were living in some illusions, he didn't, he was absolutely sure that we would be killed."

We should understand Sarah's story of the train ride as an expression of her father's silent emotion for his daughter. In the story, there is something of Sarah's father that is kept alive. The connection between father and daughter excludes all other relationships and even excludes language itself. The barber's obligation is to tell what has not been said. In the heart of the story lies the impenetrable silence of Sarah's father and with it his connection to his daughter. Through the communication of this silence, father and daughter are able to share something profound and disturbing, from which we are barred entry.

Finally, through repetition, structure also serves to highlight the remarkable nature of finding the story, finding her father's last thoughts. The silence of Sarah's father on the train is remarkable. It is remarkable that Sarah haphazardly encountered the barber and heard his story. Sarah hears a whisper from a lost past—the last moments of her father's life. She has a strong personal image delivered while the fantasies of other survivors are limited to what they know about the killing process in general. The barber fills in this gap in Sarah's life narrative, allowing her to work through, at least partially, the death of her father by possessing this crucial episode of his life and in it his affection for her. In a sense, Sarah now also possesses his eternal love; she was his last thought. We are also fortunate to be told how Sarah received this story. Indeed, Sarah leaves us a trail to find the origin of this collected story and the tools to understand why it is important to her sense of self.

A Fact of Life

During our interview with Mike we were told this story without preface or qualification. The story was invested with emotion and detail.

There was a German we use to call the hangman. He would get replacements every few weeks because the camp got empty. He'd kill 'em. When you walked, marched to work, he would put his foot out and you would fall. Then he would shoot you.

He was crazy, nuts, sick in the head. He would . . . You eat ten people at a table. You eat soup. So you take one of the ten and would hang it right in front of you and he got a big kick watching the nine fighting over the soup. I mean fighting furiously like you see lions in the field, fighting life or death. He got a big kick.

What is unusual about this story is not the brutality of the guard, the hangman, or whether the events in question actually took place. Rather, Mike never experienced these exact events—at least not first-hand. Strangely enough, Mike never met or saw the hangman. This fact was discovered only later in the interview. In response to a question about Mike's movements from camp to camp, Mike explains, "When I came in, it was 3 days after the hangman was taken away." A little surprised at Mike's response, the interviewer asks, "So you only heard stories about the hangman?" He replies, "Yeah. As a matter of fact, this one guy here, made it, he lived under the hangman."

Structurally, the story of the hangman is indistinguishable from the rest of Mike's life narrative. He gives us no indication that he is switching from his direct experience to what he has learned from other people. Only when the interviewer is confused about the sequence of Mike's life story is this crucial information provided; "I was not there." By not letting the listener know otherwise, Mike narrated these events as if he witnessed the brutality of the hangman first hand. There are no quotation marks, metaphorical or real, that would distinguish between lived experience and a collected story. The story is fully integrated into Mike's own life history and is narrated without any indication of the story's origin.

Should we reject Mike's story because he did not experience the terror of the hangman but is relating what he heard from others (probably upon entering the camp where the hangman reigned)? Is this a breach of the factual nature of Holocaust "testimony" or the conventional assumptions of memory?

The question of fact is really beside the point. We believe that Mike presented the above story because it represents the possibility of such conditions, a different kind of factuality than a lived fact or a testimonial reality, but what we can call a *fact of life* rather than a *fact of experience*. According to Mike, this is not a single occurrence but a pervasive fact of camp life of which he was a party. The story of the hangman represents an ongoing institutional situation during the war that exemplifies the brutality and indifference of people of all sorts, Germans and Jews, and their potential contact and confrontation with Mike. Furthermore, we are convinced that truth is not missing from

Mike's account. There is a process by which the story has been transmitted, although it remains hidden from us. Mike even offers us some kind of proof, this "one guy who made it."

If one moves from the particular story of the hangman to the whole of Mike's life narrative, it is evident that the hangman also fits with a larger theme. Mike's life narrative is filled with stories of Germans, even Nazis, who helped him and, conversely, Jews who do not respect non-Jews and often fill stereotypical roles. They are stories that are contrary to our expectations of what happened in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. In the frame of Mike's life narrative, all these stories serve to prove the point, what Mike calls his "concept," that people can act in ways that are the opposite of what is expected in a given situation. It is not that all the actors in Mike's stories behave contrary to the accepted rules; many Germans, as in the case of the hangman, perform brutal deeds and discriminate against others based upon hatred and the dictates of the situation. However, it is the contrast between the two, moving back and forth between the rule and the exception, the violent and compassionate, that establishes Mike's concept. People could act differently, then and now. In this light, the story of the hangman is a central story in Mike's life narrative and equally important to other stories that were derived through lived experience.

It is within the context of demonstrating his concept that the story of the hangman fits. Immediately following the story of the hangman, Mike tells a different kind of story. After the hangman left, a man named Wolf took over and Mike tells us, not one man was killed in a year. The hangman represents a potential situation that Mike could have entered and a demonstration of his larger "concept" that is displayed in the contrast between the hangman and guys like Wolf. The hangman is Wolf's foil and their juxtaposition helps to communicate and reinforce Mike's concept and the reason for including this particular collected story.

The St. Louis in Story

The collected stories that we discuss in this section were discovered in the process of coding the interviews for how survivors understand the Holocaust. The coding system was developed through the application of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992). We began by coding two interviews for how survivors interpreted the Holocaust and then our analysis

was expanded to include additional transcripts. With the addition of new transcripts, our coding scheme was refined and altered. The main themes that emerged from the analysis were incomprehensibility, pro-memory, pro-Israel, and abandonment. It is important to underline that no direct questions were asked to elicit these themes. A summary of each theme, along with a representative quotation, is presented in Table 1.

This set of themes for understanding the Holocaust includes possible solutions, which could have stopped the murder of Jews (pro-Israel), as well as ways of preventing similar catastrophes from recurring (pro-memory). There is a means of coming to terms with those events by keeping away explanation and understanding (incomprehensibility). Not understanding, emphasizing the magnitude of the Holocaust and its place in history, becomes a mode of understanding and keeping the memory alive. Finally, for these American survivors, there is an urgent moral lesson about what happens when Americans remain aloof to human suffering (abandonment).

Our thematic analysis also yielded an unanticipated discovery. Six of twenty survivors told the story of an event that neither they nor any member of their immediate family experienced. They recounted the story of the ill-fated voyage of the SS *St. Louis*. Not only were they never on the ship, but the story of the *St. Louis* was not “encounterable” in its current form until decades after the war. In other words, survivors could not tell the story of the *St. Louis* as an indictment of American complicity in the murder of Jews from the headlines of the day because this storyline was not yet developed and could not be developed until after the diverse set of events, which happened throughout Western and Eastern Europe, had been collected into a commemorative narrative called the “Holocaust.”

Although the historical record of events is never just a set of facts, some basic details about the *St. Louis* are necessary. The *St. Louis* was a refugee ship that left Hamburg, Germany, in May of 1939 for Havana, Cuba, with 930 German Jews. The Cuban government refused to honor the landing permits of the refugees and the ship languished between Havana and Miami for eleven days. The passengers formed a committee and sent a telegraph to President Roosevelt asking for his help. The White House did not respond. The ship sailed past the Florida coast and back to Europe where the American Joint Distribution Committee had arranged for asylum in four Western European democracies: Great Britain, France, Belgium and Holland. The real tragedy occurred when the Nazis overtook these countries, with the obvious exception

TABLE 1
Description of Themes on Understanding the Holocaust

Theme	Description
Incomprehensibility	<p>An expressed inability to grasp the enormity of the Holocaust or the fact that such an event was possible.</p> <p><i>It is almost impossible that some people go around and talk between each other, do you think there was a Holocaust like that? Do you think that people can go on and kill in a very sadistic, to use barbarism against other people, could you believe that? Could you understand that? See they talk between and it is not understandable, it is unbelievable not to understand, but it is unbelievable, but it is, it happened. It is a fact, it happened. Nobody could believe unless somebody goes through (Jerry).</i></p>
Pro-Memory	<p>Through the telling and retelling of Holocaust stories, the world will learn about murder and brutality and never commit such an atrocity again.</p> <p><i>And then, if we wanted never to happen again, we have to talk about it so it wouldn't happen again. And there was so much talk about it and writing about the Holocaust, that, and you know, time heals. Now that it healed, it healed, but you never forget. (Anita)</i></p>
Pro-Israel	<p>If Israel had existed as a Jewish homeland, the Holocaust would have been prevented. A strong Israel is needed to prevent future Holocausts.</p> <p><i>If he, a person like Hitler, he wants to come to power, had to come with kinda ideas, politics were playing a lot things in it. The first idea was his, was to start with the minority, the minority was the Jewish people. We didn't have a country at that time either. Now, if anybody doesn't like me I pack my suitcase and I'm going to Israel. At that time I didn't have nobody. Like orphans. The Jewish people were orphans all over the world. They didn't have no place where to go (Jack).</i></p>
Abandonment	<p>The Western world ignored the mass murder of European Jewry when they could have intervened and is therefore partly responsible.</p> <p><i>Why the whole world didn't say a word? Let's save the Jew. It's, it's unbelievable, unbelievable. What they did. For what? For when? Don't tell me that Hitler did it on his own, England knew, France knew, America knew. Canada. All the, the whole world. They all knew. Why they were sleeping? Why they didn't do anything? Why the American Jews didn't demonstrate, let's help, let's do something. Why the rabbis didn't demonstrate? I condemn all of them. Why, why? Six million Jews to take? What do you say to that? (Simcha).</i></p>

of England, and the passengers of the St. Louis shared the same fate as the rest of Western European Jewry (Berenbaum, 1993).

The following are two examples of the St. Louis story as told in the course of our interviews:

Ben: Although Hitler had in mind..did not have in mind to kill all Jews. They were talking they're going to send us to Madagascar, but there came another solution and we talked about that solution, who did it and why they did it. Politics was involved. You can see. What do I have to talk? Look what's happened here. There were 500. How many were on the boat? Here near Florida, they sent them back.

Interviewer: The St. Louis?

Ben: How many were on the boat? 800 people. They send them back to be gassed. What did they know? They had seen Florida. They had seen Florida and they didn't allow them to come in. What more is needed? They sent them back to be burned, exterminated, right on our shores. Which the whole world knows about it. (Ben)

You know I'm questioning the world. Why weren't you out there do something? Get involved. But the world did not care. This is my opinion. The world did not care. And we didn't have a country and that too had to do with it. The Jewish people had no place to go, nobody wanted us, you know that nobody wanted us. The Jewish boat, St. Louis, was here in the shore, in New York. They had to turn around. They went to Cuba. Cuba is not far. Cuba didn't want them. They had to go back to Germany. The people were taken to death camps because nobody wanted to let in the boat with the children. Nine hundred children were on the boat. Nobody wanted them, because they were Jewish. So, no talk to the world. How cruel can the world be? The world was so very cruel at that time. Thank God the world has changed some. (Esther)

All six survivors who tell the story recount the fact that the St. Louis was forced to return to Europe. All six mention that either President Roosevelt or America didn't want to let the passengers in. We will have more to say about this later, but American inaction is a salient point for American survivors in conversation with the younger generation of American Jews. The fact that all of the passengers were settled into one of the hospitable democracies of Europe was never mentioned. Rather, almost all of the stories included a direct connection between being sent back to Europe and death in the gas chambers. Statements such as Ben's "They sent them back to be burned, exterminated, right on our shores," and Esther's "The people were taken to death camps because nobody wanted to let in the boat with the children," are typical. It is worth stating again that the St. Louis set sail in May of 1939, several months after the Anschluss but well before the beginning of the war

in September 1939. Furthermore, the camps in Germany, brutal as they were, were not yet devoted to systematic murder.

It is important to realize that this version of the St. Louis story, strongly indicting American inaction, is but one of many possible stories that can be told about the St. Louis. There are others. As Peter Novick (1999) argues in his sensitive analysis of *The Holocaust in American Life*, the meaning of the story of the St. Louis has changed shape over time.

In early 1939 the American government was unwilling to admit the Jewish refugees on the German line *St. Louis*, stranded in the Caribbean when their Cuban visas were canceled—a dismal episode in American history. With no foreknowledge of the Holocaust that was to follow, it seemed no more than the equivalent of the United States, a half century later, turning back Haitians, which is bad enough. And the *St. Louis* story appeared to have a happy ending, as the passengers avoided return to Germany and were given refuge in Belgium, Holland, France, and England; only the last, in the event—but again, who knew?—proved a real haven (p. 50, italics in text).

In 1939, when the St. Louis set sail, it was impossible to understand the incident as part of the wholesale murder of European Jewry. The Holocaust was still in the future. At the time, the story can even be said to have a “happy ending.” Only by placing the story of the St. Louis within the commemorative narrative of the Holocaust, thereby “extending” the ending in Zerubavel’s (1995) sense through the murder of six million Jews, does the story of the St. Louis achieve the moral significance that we now see in the story. It is only decades after the Holocaust that the St. Louis finds its way into a uniquely American story of the Holocaust.

The story of the St. Louis has been the subject of various works on the refugee process (Wyman, 1968), America and the Holocaust (Morse, 1967), the reaction of American Jews to the Holocaust (Lookstein, 1985), and the American Joint Distribution Committee and World War II (Bauer, 1974, 1981). However, these historical works could in no way account for the popularity and meaning of the St. Louis story in America’s collective memory. In most cases, the story of the St. Louis is a marginal note. For example, David Wyman’s (1968) influential work on the refugee crisis before the war, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938–1941*, contains only one paragraph on the ship. Arthur Morse (1967), a CBS reporter turned historical writer, in one of the first texts critical of the United States for not acting fast enough in defense of European Jewry, is an exception, devoting

a chapter to the story of the ship as an example, among many, of American inaction. However, the meaning of the St. Louis was still sufficiently pliable in the mid-1970s to be the setting for a story of international intrigue. Rather than inaction or abandonment, espionage is the main thematic thrust of the story of the St. Louis found in the historical novel *Voyage of the Damned* (Thomas & Witts, 1974) and the Hollywood film based upon the book (Fryer, 1976). Unless the reader is paying attention to the insignia and the uniform, the difference between the Nazis and America's cold war enemies is easily missed.

The story of the St. Louis, as a primary symbol of the damage caused by American indifference, has emerged in recent years. Films featuring the testimony of survivors of the St. Louis (e.g., Lefkowitz & Partos, 1992; Gelbert & Jeanneau, 1994) and a PBS documentary, *America and the Holocaust: Deceit and Indifference* (Ostrow, 1993), which features a short sequence on the St. Louis, have certainly been important means for presenting the story to students and the public at large. However, it is, perhaps, the centrality of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in shaping the commemorative narrative of the Holocaust that has had the widest influence.

Since its opening to the public in April 1993, more than two million people have visited the USHMM each year (Cole, 1999). The museum has become a cultural center for the study of the Holocaust and a profound object of shared consideration, a point of focus for reflection and national discussions. Certainly, the USHMM tells the story of the events that happened during World War II but from a distinctly American perspective with American concerns. The appropriation of the Holocaust story is what Michael Berenbaum (1990), who was very influential in planning the content of the museum and later served as the Research Director of the USHMM, calls the "Americanization of the Holocaust." Berenbaum's allusion of "Americanization" applies to the way in which the Holocaust story is appropriated into the American national myth and the unique interpretation that emerges through the collaboration. In a very real sense, the story of the Holocaust is imported onto American soil and fertilized with American preoccupations.

However, it is not only the story of America as liberator that is told in the museum. As Edward Linenthal (1995) describes, the USHMM's permanent exhibit on America and the Holocaust:

This exhibit is one of the pieces of evidence in the permanent exhibition that the indifference of the Western Allies contributed to the staggering numbers murdered in the Holocaust. One of the early “civic-responsibility” arguments made to justify the existence of the museum was that Americans had, after all, been complicit as bystanders. That lesson was perhaps the most important to learn, so that coming generations would not again be willing to stand by in the face of overwhelming evil. In addition, for survivors and government officials, the museum represented a penitential response, an official, albeit belated, recognition of the nation’s role as complicit bystander, a way of including some of the shame of the nation within the boundaries of memory, coexisting with more comforting memories of Americans as liberators (p. 218).

Linenthal is correct that one of the primary goals of the museum is to recount the story of Western indifference. Stories relating to the role of the Americans in the Holocaust contextualize the larger narrative of Nazi persecution and murder and provide a justification for the kind of commemorative narrative that is displayed at the USHMM.

The story of the St. Louis achieves a special resonance within the frame of an American museum to the Holocaust, especially one claiming the obligation to explore the role of the United States. As Michael Berenbaum (personal communication) has noted, the St. Louis is the museumgoer’s first exposure to the notion that America abandoned the Jews during the Holocaust. The power of this event is derived from the rhetorics of place; the majority of the events took place over “there” but the St. Louis was “here.” In the frame of the USHMM, the story of the St. Louis becomes the Holocaust in America. As the poster at the museum reads:

Sailing close to the Florida shore, passengers could see the lights of Miami. United States Coast Guard ships patrolling the waters ensured that no one jumped to freedom. The German captain, Gustav Schroeder, appealed in vain to the United States for permission to dock . . . The St. Louis headed back to Europe. Belgium, the Netherlands, Britain, and France each accepted refugees, but hundreds of them were killed later during the Holocaust.

Rather than taking place on foreign soil, the events of the St. Louis dramatically unfold in American waters just off the coast of Florida and, in the commemorative narrative of the USHMM, concisely demonstrate America’s failed responsibility.

However, the availability (encountering) of a symbol does not determine its use. If repetition were the sole motivating factor, we would have to question why the other fourteen survivors did not include a reference to the St. Louis

in their interviews. In fact, there is a significant pattern to the inclusion of the St. Louis in a survivor's life narrative. The St. Louis is part of a point of view on the Holocaust that includes other themes on the meaning of the Holocaust. In other words, the St. Louis is a story that resonates with other elements of a survivor's stance on the world and goals in telling their life narrative.

In order to elaborate on the on the significance, resonance, of the St. Louis story for survivor's life narratives, we return to the thematic analysis on how survivors understand the Holocaust when we discovered this collected story. What is interesting about this set of themes, and their association with the story of the St. Louis, is that their appearance is patterned or clustered within individuals. In other words, we found that survivors who spoke about the St. Louis also articulated other themes in this cluster. The story of the St. Louis appears to be part of a larger point of view about the Holocaust that certain American survivors have adopted in talking about their life narratives. The collected story of the St. Louis is personally meaningful, it resonates, because it helps to articulate a relevant aspect of the survivor's identity as an American survivor who views the United States as partly responsible for the Holocaust and considers it their duty to tell the story of the Holocaust so that it never happens again.

As Table 2 shows, survivors who chose to tell the story of the St. Louis in the course of a natural conversation also tended to view the Holocaust as incomprehensible, to view the United States as culpable by not acting soon enough to save Europe's Jews, and to say that keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive is crucial to preventing future holocausts. These themes are part of a package of related notions that assign meaning to the Holocaust, provides the rationale why others should listen, and outlines actions that will prevent future disasters. Telling the story of the St. Louis presupposes a more comprehensive narrative on the Holocaust and what should be learned from this historical experience. The story of the St. Louis resonates with other held beliefs about the Holocaust. It fits within a particular discourse on how the Holocaust should be understood.

Not only does the story of the St. Louis resonate with other beliefs, but also survivors are convinced that this is a story to be told to young Americans. The story fits with the storyteller's intentions and the situation of telling. Through telling the story of the St. Louis, survivors are trying to make an impact on the lives of young Americans. The message to them is that the

TABLE 2
 Pattern of Themes on Understanding the Holocaust
 Themes

Interviewee	Age	Sex	Place of birth	# of themes	Incomprehen- sibility	Pro-Memory	Pro-Israel	Abandon- ment	St. Louis
Ben	73	M	Poland	5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Esther	72	F	Czech.	5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jack	77	M	Poland	5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Anita	75	F	Lithuania	4	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Carol	73	F	Germany	4	Yes	Yes	—	Yes	Yes
Jerry	79	M	Poland	3	Yes	Yes	Yes	—	—
Saul	79	M	Poland	3	Yes	—	Yes	Yes	—
Simcha	71	F	Ukraine	2	—	—	—	Yes	Yes
Neil	72	M	Poland	2	—	—	Yes	Yes	—
Pearl	72	F	Poland	2	—	—	Yes	—	—
Sarah	70	F	Poland	2	—	—	Yes	—	—
Deborah	68	F	Czech.	2	Yes	—	—	Yes	—
Dana	69	F	Hungary	0	—	—	—	—	—
Leah	62	F	Germany	0	—	—	—	—	—
Lisa	72	F	Germany	0	—	—	—	—	—
Malcha	70	F	Hungary	0	—	—	—	—	—
Max	70	M	Germany	0	—	—	—	—	—
Mike	70	M	Poland	0	—	—	—	—	—
Ruth	66	F	Hungary	0	—	—	—	—	—
Rebecca	72	F	Poland	0	—	—	—	—	—
Total					7	7	9	10	6

Holocaust was born of indifference to others. It happened on American shores and Americans must assume some of the blame. The story is something that has been collected, later, after the Holocaust, and is responsive to post-war life in America. Would survivors speak about the role of the United States in the St. Louis affair as passionately without some connection to the American soil? Without some investment in America? To the American dream? Or to a non-American? There would be a different lesson to learn and a different story to collect and tell.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we explored the relationship between the social and the personal in life narratives through the interpretation of the collected stories of Holocaust survivors. Collected stories are narratives that are not a part of direct autobiographical experience but are the storied experiences of others that are found and told. Our theoretical account of collected stories includes three elements: encountering, resonance, and authorship. Encountering and resonance speak to the relationship between collective ideas and personal experience in accounting for how and why shared stories come to be told in a life narrative. Authorship is our attempt to sort out the issues of proprietorship that the inclusion of found stories in a narrative about the personal past inevitably raises.

Whether shared between two or two million individuals, collected stories are found rather than directly experienced. Each possesses a story, revealed or not, of how it was encountered. We come into contact with collected stories in encounters with people and texts in history and culture. Texts are sometimes encountered directly (such as going to a museum or seeing a film) or mediated through another (our friend tells us about her museum going experience). We have documented the way that our collected stories were encountered. Sarah found the story of her father's journey to death through a chance meeting with a former neighbor. In fact, the act of encountering this pivotal story became part of the story itself and provided the markers for distinguishing this story from narratives of direct experience. Mike was less forthcoming about where or how he encountered the story of the hangman. In fact, he covers over the crucial detail that he never lived under the hangman's rule. He encountered story of the hangman from those who were "there," most likely upon entering

the camp where the hangman reigned. The six survivors who told the story of the St. Louis learned about the incident through film, television, museums, or survivors who knew the story of the ship, after the war was finished. As we have shown, the story of the St. Louis, in its present form, was not encounterable before it was placed in an Americanized commemorative narrative of the Holocaust.

As we have argued, collected stories are not merely the repetition of encountered stories. Considering an average day in our lives, the number of stories of vicarious experience that we encounter is staggering. Each of the collected stories that we presented was collected and told because the survivor found the story personally relevant within the context of their life and life narrative. Our metaphor for this idea is that collected stories resonate with the point of view of the speaker, personal meaning, and the situation of telling. Collected stories can be used to complete details in a life history, to demonstrate authorial intentions, and to show dearly held meanings. Sarah used the story of her father as a way of completing the history of her family's devastation during the war. In the same manner that Charlotte Linde's (1999) interviewees told stories of vicarious experience because a were relevant to the context of protecting the institution from lawsuits, in part, Sarah tells the story of her father because it is a pertinent story to her life, and therefore, relevant to the context of telling her life narrative. Sarah's story also provides her with a sense of personal meaning, she possesses a story of her father's continued love, a love that defies his murder. Mike used the story of the hangman in order to demonstrate a *fact of life*, the institutional history of the camp in general, which Mike could have experienced had he arrived three days before. Perhaps even more importantly, the story of the hangman is another example of Mike's "concept" and fits with one of the primary intentions in his storytelling. Finally, for those survivors who recounted the story of the St. Louis, it is one element of a general schema for interpreting the collective tragedy of the Holocaust. The St. Louis reveals the complicity of the Americans in the murder of Europe's Jews and the story is especially pertinent now that the interviewees are Americans, are speaking to a young Jewish American, and feel responsible for the next generation of Americans. Collected stories are not used without reasons or simply repeating what is encountered as a member of society and culture. When we take the stories of others and make them our own, they serve to complete and articulate our understanding of the world and ourselves.

Although we see an essential similarity between collected stories of all kinds, there are some differences, which are highlighted in the number of people who tell a collected story. Some stories recount experiences that, apparently, are important to only one person, such as the final journey of Sarah's father, while others, such as the St. Louis, are important for whole groups of people, American survivors but also Americans in general. We believe that this difference is only apparent. However, this is not to say that we don't take this difference in scale seriously. When groups of individuals collect and tell the same story, perhaps another way of defining collective memory, it indicates a shared perspective on life or identity. On the one hand, telling the identity of an "American Holocaust survivor" might entail the collection and articulation of certain types of narratives, such as the St. Louis, which formalize the lessons that Americans need to know about the Holocaust and mark identity. On the other hand, there is no reason to suppose that Sarah's story, now entering public discourse, is any less "collectable" than the story of the St. Louis. For those who have lost a parent, especially Holocaust survivors, there is the potential for Sarah's story to become emblematic. It is important to comment on how widely shared a collected story is, however, we believe that their overarching similarity is crucial to emphasize. For Sarah, Mike, Ben and Esther, each of these collected stories served to bring content from the cultural world, already in story form, inside their self descriptions and self understanding.

The authorship of collected stories is indicated in various ways. Some come with explicit markings, recalling the origins of the story as found, others possess no structural indicators. Following Bakhtin, we understand stories like words in language, easily traversing the border between the collective and the individual. Our life narrative is composed of those stories that we might have more proprietorship over, such as those autobiographical experiences that define certain segments of our lives, and others we might have less or even no authority to tell. In each collected story the voice of the story's origins is at play. Sarah's story is the most clearly marked collected story that we presented. The story of Sarah's father contains both elements of direct and indirect speech. By marking her story in such a way, she retains some authorial distance from it. She indicates, in syntax, that this is her story but she is not the originator of such a story. The echoes of the barber's voice and experience are clearly heard in her words. Ben and Esther mark the story of the St. Louis as common knowledge. The authoritative voice of history

speaks in concert with Ben and Esther. The St. Louis is a story “to be told” to others (to other Americans, to American Jews, etc.) so that such things will never happen again. However, one of the most intriguing prospects of the current inquiry is that collected stories can be left unmarked—borders are at least partly erasable. Mike shows us that collected stories could enter into our life narrative, and self-understanding, so completely that the traces are not revealed except by accident. He is aware that the story is not from his own experience, but chooses not to reveal this fact. Or perhaps, to Mike, this is an inconsequential detail. Still, there is no reason to believe that Mike is lying; the hangman *is* part of his story. It represents something of his experience; a description of the camps before Mike arrived, part of the history of the institution to which he was subject.

Collected stories can go underground, obfuscating the meaning of authorship or ownership in life narratives. Although we might think better of ourselves and our power to author or construct ourselves, our life narrative is a melody of voices appropriated from a myriad of contexts, not just on the level of the word or plot structure, but at the level of the story, too. To use the language of Dan McAdams (1996), my life narrative is not just the authoring of the “me” but it is process of giving voice and blending the “with me” or “alongside me,” sometimes silently, with stories of the “me.” Though we may write our story in isolation and never mark the details, our life narrative is a jointly authored production.

Our analysis of collected stories has implications for our understanding of the words of Holocaust survivors. We have argued that stories told about the personal past are sometimes the result of vicarious experience rather than the telling of experiences that we have witnessed with our own eyes. We mean nothing malicious by pointing out this fact. The truth of the death camps and the Holocaust is not a question. Indeed, these stories of vicarious experience can be just as veridical as stories from direct experience. However, we believe that the choice of the word “testimony,” that is pervasive in descriptions of accounts by Holocaust survivors, is a mistaken choice of terms. We have provided an additional voice to a growing consensus of scholars (such as Greenspan, 1998; LaCapra, 1994; Novick, 1999; Young, 1988) calling for the reconsideration of the words of Holocaust survivors. Survivors are not saints, sanctified through the fire of the Holocaust, but real people who have suffered through extreme circumstances during one of this century’s defining events. We should consider survivors’ words in the same light as the words of

other human beings. They are recountings of past events that are fashioned, in part, by the context in which they are created.

This research also adds to our understanding of the social aspects of memory. As Halbwachs (1952/1992) and a cadre of theorists and researchers (Conner-ton, 1989; Novick, 1999; Schwartz, 2000; Young, 1993; Zerubavel, 1995) have argued, memories are recalled and recreated through our contacts with other people and our presently held beliefs about the world. This idea is at the heart of our theoretical outlook and is explicitly found in our conception of encountering. However, we argue that in addition to cultural and social relationships, we must also consider the person. Taking up a cultural idea, meaning or story, perhaps to be told as part of a life narrative, implies a meeting between shared resources and private considerations. Research on shared understandings can not proceed without acknowledging the salience of both the social and the personal in creating and sustaining collective discourses. A social science that does not speak about persons, results in theories about disembodied collective mentalities. A social science that does not speak about context overstates the power of individual authorship, creating fantastical descriptions of isolated individuals engaged in the process of meaning making.

Finally, we believe that the idea of collected stories is an important contribution to our understanding of life narratives. By integrating context in our ongoing narrative of life, collected stories form the background upon which all stories of the past are told. Our life narrative is not only built upon first hand experiences or memories, in the proper sense, but collected resonances of culture are also an integral part of our past. The life narrative is something of a mix of memories and not memories and sometimes we prefer not to distinguish between the two. In "recollecting" the past, we gather personal memories. However, in this process of re-collecting our selves, we also collect and integrate shared experience into a story of the past that makes sense. When speaking about the past we benefit from the totality of our lived experience, social and personal. Collected stories are small fragments of the social world, of culture, that appear in our self conceptions. We are constantly in conversation with others. In a very real sense, it is this wider version of ourselves, as members of a social world, that becomes part of the text of a life narrative.

Telling about the past is much more than finding and processing the information stored in our brain's long term memory. We have argued that through

participation in a social world with others, stories are encountered and are available for our use. Depending on how the story fits with other aspects of a person's life and intentions, how well it resonates, this found story could be told within the frame of a conversation about the personal past. In other words, collected stories are encountered stories that resonate. Collecting and telling stories of the past, we are able to locate our lives in relation to the lives of others in horizons of shared meaning and experience. A new voice is layered upon the old, and the story can come to represent our point of view, an aspect of our consciousness, and a possession of our subjectivity.

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