

Parenthood and the Holocaust

by

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Abstract

Families are social systems that both develop and carry on the value system and socialization process for its young members within the society in which they live. It is, therefore, not a coincidence that when the Nazis planned the total annihilation of the Jewish people, they focused their attack on the discontinuity of the Jewish family support system. In light of their extreme (and often – successful) efforts, it is remarkable to discover how Jewish families, or the remaining parts of families, in ghettos, in the camps, in hiding and in the Partisans, withstood these pressures. Parenthood during the Holocaust is the story of what people transmitted to their children under the most extreme circumstances, and how the children who survived the war developed their own concepts of parenthood out of the void or the bits and pieces with which they were left. Clearly, the variance is as huge as in any diverse population, and not all that was transmitted had only positive value. This paper focuses on different aspects of parenthood and their long-term consequences and is based on the analyses of interviews with and testimonies of survivors of the Holocaust and with their children and grandchildren.

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Introduction

The “success” of Nazism is usually measured by the damage that was inflicted on the battlefield and in the annihilation of the Jewish people and other groups that “threatened” pure Aryan blood. This paper concentrates on a much deeper impact of their acts, one that the Nazis themselves probably did not anticipate. The focus of this study is on the emotional coping abilities of Jewish families who came under Nazi attack and destruction, as well as on the on-going long-term impairment of the emotional relationships within the families of their victims who survived the persecution. This impairment not only affected them, but their children and grandchildren as well.

In order to examine the consequences of the Nazi persecution on the families of both the victims and the perpetrators, we must begin with the concept of *parenthood*. Parenthood has many functions; among these are the expectation of caring for the physical, economic, social and psychological needs of the children, until they are mature enough to take care of themselves. Today we recognize that many of these needs extend beyond adolescence. Furthermore, the time that one cares for a child, and the *types* of caring (e.g. economic vs. psychological) may differ both within and between cultures. For example, in Western societies although we usually expect children between the ages of eighteen and twenty one to become formally independent of their parents, we often find that parents (and children) are not yet prepared to completely “let go” emotionally for many years after this age.

What happens when the capacities of parents are seriously impaired, due to an external massive destruction, such as the Holocaust? During the Holocaust, in a very sudden manner, the familiar framework of life was disrupted. Hundreds of thousands of families could not go on functioning as they had beforehand within their homes, living as they were used to, according to their traditions and socioeconomic status. With little early warning - much of which was ignored - the families were forcefully evacuated by the Nazis and sent into ghettos and camps. Many people were immediately put to death and many others were forced into harsh conditions of hunger, disease and hard labor. How did parents and children survive, physically as well as emotionally? Did they succeed in maintaining the expectations of parenthood,

and if so, how? How did the sense of impaired parenthood influence the establishment of new parenthood of the survivors after the Holocaust? These issues will be the focus of the present inquiry.

The idea for this study stems from three origins:

Results from psychological studies that, on the whole, highlight the problematic interpersonal relationships found between the survivors and their children.

A nine-hour interview with a child survivor - whom we shall call Anat² - that presents a unique life-story and reconstruction of a mother-daughter relationship during the war. This interview led us into the issue of parenthood during and after the Holocaust.

Global analyses (Rosenthal, 1993) of interviews from Ben Gurion University and testimonies from Yad Vashem that related to the concept of parenthood.

Before taking a close look at Anat's story, we will review some of the major findings of the traditional psychological literature on parent - child relationships in families of Holocaust survivors. We will then present a new comprehensive approach – a historically contextualized psychodynamic approach that we used when we began looking into the question of parenthood during and after the Holocaust. Following that, we will turn to the major themes concerning parenthood that emerged during our global analyses of interviews with survivors and survivors' testimonies at Yad Vashem. We see our work as constituting a first step toward a deeper inquiry that will follow and look into the different historical and current social contexts in which these themes took place and evolved. It is our hope that these analyses will not only provide insight into the elements of parenting that were salient during the Holocaust, but will also provide a landscape against which the post-war parenting of the survivors took place.

The Psychological Literature On Interpersonal Relationships In Families Of Survivors

Traditional psychological and psychodynamic research has focused on parenthood after the Holocaust. For example, this literature suggests that

² - All the names in this manuscript are pseudonyms.

many survivors, in their desire to rebuild their family life as quickly as possible after the war, entered into loveless “marriages of despair” (Danieli, 1988). As a rule, these survivors remained married even though they lacked the emotional resources necessary for the development of intimacy (Charny, 1992; Danieli, 1988; Davidson, 1980; Freyburg, 1980) which may have made it difficult for the survivor-parents’ to provide proper nurturance for their own children. Many parents who survived the war were found to be emotionally unavailable to their children’s emotional needs (Krystal, 1968; Wardi, 1990), perhaps due to a connection between problems of nurturance and their inability to mourn their dead (Kestenberg, 1972, 1980). Preoccupied with the issue of life and death, these parents often suffered from feelings of self-hatred and worthlessness. When these feelings remained unchanged, they hindered the development of a positive self-image in their children – one of the hallmarks of nurturance.

Studies that have looked at communication styles within families of survivors have found two main patterns. Some survivor-parents either excessively exposed their children to their horror stories, or alternatively, were uncannily silent about their experiences, while using guilt-inducing, non-verbal and indirect styles of communication with their children (Davidson, 1980; Greenblatt, 1978; Hass, 1995; Rakoff, 1966; Robinson & Winnik, 1981; Solomon, 1998). These types of communication often scared the children (Bar-On et al., 1998), leading them to engage in frightening fantasies, or to develop other disturbed psychological states (Baracos & Baracos, 1973; Davidson, 1980; Fishbane, 1979; Lichtman, 1983). Through these communication patterns, the parents transmitted their own traumas to their children (Wardi, 1990).

Sometimes survivor-parents would send out mixed messages to their children. For example, children were simultaneously told that it was important to enjoy life, while constantly mourning the dead (Kestenberg, 1972,1980) or to strive for the attainment of personal material wealth, while emphasizing humanitarian values (Bar-On et al., 1998). Other survivor parents criticized their children, while telling them that they were the survivor’s sole reason for living (Roden & Roden, 1980). In a number of cases, the children got the

message that they had to constantly remember the past, while their parents refused to talk about it (Bar-On et al., 1998; Hass, 1995).

Some survivor-parents were found to project their own aggressive fantasies onto their children, thus unconsciously encouraging them to be overly aggressive (Baracos, 1970; Baracos & Baracos, 1973; Krystal, 1968). Similarly, many parents transmitted their distrust of the external environment to their children, instilling in them the fear of people outside of their family unit (Danieli, 1988; Lifton, 1988).

Survivor-parents have also shown a tendency to be over involved in their children's lives. This is exhibited by parents who try to force their child to fit into a certain mode (Sonnenberg, 1974) or to be high achievers (Rose, 1983; Trossman, 1968). Research has found that survivor-parents are often overly sensitive and anxious about their children's behavior (Sigal & Rakoff, 1971; Sonnenberg, 1974) and over-protect them, to the point of suffocation (Baracos & Baracos, 1973; Nadler, Kav-Venaki & Gleitman, 1985; Trossman, 1968). This behavior makes it difficult for their children to become autonomous, and if a child does manage to separate, he or she is often seen as betraying or abandoning the family (Danieli, 1988; Davidson, 1980; Freyburg, 1980; Krystal, 1968; Shoshan, 1989; Zilberfein, 1995). It has been suggested that the reason for this over-involvement is due to the survivors' overwhelming feeling that their children exist in order to replace everything that was so traumatically lost (Kestenberg, 1972; 1980; Klein & Kogan, 1986; Roden & Roden, 1980; Trossman, 1968; Wardi, 1990).

We see that much of the psychodynamic literature concerning the parenting abilities of the survivors is rather bleak. However, this conclusion is not universally shared and sometimes openly criticized as based primarily on clinical samples (Bar-On, 1995). For example, studies conducted by Zlotogorski (1983, 1985), Furshpan (1986) and Sigal and Weinfeld (1989) - in which children of Holocaust survivors were compared with children of non-survivors - point to variability in the interpersonal relationships in Holocaust families. Furthermore, recent literature on the long-term effects of the Holocaust on three generations (Bar-On, 1995; Chaitin, 2000a) has shown that while problems often exist between survivor and child, there are also

clear signs of strong, positive interpersonal relationships between survivor-child, child-grandchild, and survivor-grandchild. Today, more historically and socially oriented scholars assert that survivors had problems parenting *not* only due to the irreversible “damage” that was incurred during the Holocaust, but due to social-cultural messages that the survivors encountered when they immigrated to their new countries after the war. Perhaps the strongest meta-message was the *conspiracy of silence* (Danieli, 1981), a societal norm which kept the survivors from speaking publicly about their experiences. In general, however, most of the literature that looks at parenthood after the Holocaust has tended to paint a rather unhappy picture of the survivors’ ability to provide their own children with a “normal” family life. Perhaps, therefore, it is important to suggest a different perspective that will attempt an examination of parenthood before, during and after the Holocaust. This proposed perspective, the basis of our work, helped us examine anew an interview that was undertaken with a child – survivor who experienced and constructed a positive experience of parenthood during the Holocaust.

A Historically Contextualized Psychodynamic View on the Value and Analysis of Testimonies

Research into the Holocaust has resulted in divisions of humanity into categories of survivors, bystanders, perpetrators and rescuers. Furthermore it defines individuals as belonging to specific generations, such as the first, second and third generations, within each of these categories. The Holocaust has also reinforced separate disciplinary perspectives. Questions related to the Holocaust are predominantly addressed by two major approaches: The historical-legal perspective relates to the factual basis of what happened during the Holocaust, and by doing so, provides the historical and social context of the Holocaust. Later, decades after the war, a traditional psychoanalytical perspective began to take root, a perspective that addresses the individualized aspects of victimization and its after-effects. While both approaches suffer (or enjoy) mutual exclusiveness, due to this division, it has not been easy to discuss complex issues, like parenthood, within one comprehensive approach.

Since it is our belief that a more comprehensive approach is needed in order to understand the complex issues that arose out of the Holocaust, we would like to suggest a different framework that combines the historical-social and individual aspects into a historically and socially contextualized psychodynamic approach. The need for such an integrative approach can be associated with the changes that have taken place in theory development and social construction of the collective memory. An integrative framework is especially relevant to research based in countries where the society has identified itself or has been identified by the categories of victimhood (including both the victim and the victimizer), specifically Israel and Germany. Using this framework, we will focus here on the question of parenthood.³

The question – to what extent can we rely on testimonies when we try to learn about the Holocaust – has been discussed extensively, especially within the historical discipline (Guttman, 1990; Friedlander, 1992). This discussion has focused on the question of validity: Can we trust testimonies in terms of validating what had happened there and then? We know how memories can distort historical facts (Spence, 1980). The dominant tendency that developed in relation to Holocaust testimonies has been the pragmatic one: When there are no documents or other more reliable sources, one may have to use testimonies, albeit reluctantly (Bauer, 1982; Bankier, 2000). This reluctance has been evident in cases where the interviewers were not willing or able to really hear what their interviewees tried to tell them (Langer, 1991).

The opposite approach, often associated with post-modernism, asserts that the “facts” are not what is important, but rather the *reconstruction* of these facts in the human mind. In other words, it is what people make of the “facts” that is of consequence to their lives. Therefore, this reconstruction and significance is more valid than what had actually happened to them (Ram, 1995; La Capra, 1994).

³ - The first author discusses elsewhere three other questions from the perspective of this historically contextualized psychodynamic perspective in relation to the Holocaust: Who counts as a Holocaust survivor? Who suffered more? And why did the Jews refrain from taking qualified revenge on the Germans after the war? (Bar-On, in preparation).

These two approaches are usually presented as being mutually exclusive (Bar-On, 1999). Most of the psychodynamic literature cited above, being heavily oriented toward the individual, reinforced this mutual exclusiveness, as it did not relate to the question of historical facts (Spence, 1980). In a way, this division allowed historians to deal with the historical facts, creating space for the psychologists to focus exclusively on the impact of the events on individuals and their families (Bar-On, 1999).

We would like to present here a more comprehensive approach that tries to integrate historical facts, the psychological impact on the people involved and the social context in which these facts were reconstructed and deconstructed over and over again. When we look at parenthood, we see that it had different historical, social and cultural meanings during the decade of the thirties in Europe, depending of the context (Ofer, 1998). One cannot easily compare the concept of parenthood among poor religious families in Poland to those of secular prosperous Jewish families in France or Germany. These families, in turn, greatly differ from the notion of parenthood in modern-day Israel, which must also take into account, for example, the differences between secular European Jews and traditional families who came from North Africa or Asia.

The Nazis set up one fate and context for all Jews, regardless of their social and cultural diverse backgrounds, by trying to annihilate their physical and psychological existence. However, if one wants to understand how families and individuals, coming from such different social and historical backgrounds, coped with the external attack on their existence, the original separate characteristics should be taken into account. In addition, in order to understand parenthood after the war, we must include in our analyses the Israeli (or other) political and social context in which the survivors settled, and the dynamics of Israeli society that have occurred over the years and generations. Only within such a comprehensive approach will we be able to follow subjective meanings, while analyzing the reconstruction of past events in the memories of the survivors, concerning the social phenomena of parenthood during and after the Holocaust.

By approaching the concept of parenthood from this comprehensive approach, we perceived the existing psychological literature, that was

individually and family oriented, as often disregarding social and historical contextualizations. We assumed that the contextualizations of parenthood during the period of the war was important and could be inferred from the survivors' testimonies.

We decided to start our journey by reading the testimonies and interviews, using combined methods of global analyses, abduction (Rosenthal, 1993) and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Together, with the help of three of our students, we read through the interviews looking for salient themes that appeared when the biographers talked about their family experiences before, during and/or after the Holocaust. As we read, and reread the interviews, we raised hypotheses concerning the interviewees' perceptions of their family life and of parenthood, based on their presentation of parents and self. We also looked at the ways in which their traumatic experiences influenced them, when the child-survivors became parents themselves, or when they reflected on their parents, in the case of children and grandchildren (if they talked about these issues). Through these methods we identified common themes and issues that will be presented here. We are aware that this is only the beginning of a longer process, in which the characteristics of the specific historical and cultural different contexts will have to be introduced. Furthermore, we are also aware of the need to take into account the changing current social and political contexts in which these testimonies and interviews were produced. With this, we assume that the common themes that we identified are an important beginning in this long road to come. Therefore, we wish to emphasize that the present paper is only a starting point and should not be viewed as conclusive in any way.

We will start our presentation with an interview with Anat that began us on our journey to the concept of parenthood during the Holocaust. After analyzing the interview, we looked at about 60 biographical interviews that had been conducted with survivors and their families at Ben-Gurion University since 1990 and approximately 95 testimonies that were gathered from the Yad Vashem archives during the fall semester of 1999-2000.⁴ We conducted

⁴ - The testimonies were chosen from the Yad Vashem archives by using the following key words: Parents, children, family, mother, father, son, daughter,

global analyses (Rosenthal, 1993) on these interviews and testimonies that led to the identification of the themes presented in the following chapters. It is important to emphasize that the testimonies and interviews did not specifically focus on the question of the family relations or on parenthood, but on the life story in general or on life experiences before, during and after the Holocaust. Therefore, what interviewees said about parenthood and the family can be seen as representing their spontaneous need to talk about these aspects. There was a difference between the sampling of the interviews at Ben Gurion University, which was a randomized sample of survivors, and the testimonies of Yad Vashem that were chosen on the basis of the key words related to family recollections (see footnote #3). This difference will become clear when we discuss the interviews with the members of the second generation; in which family relations related to the Holocaust background was one of the foci of these interviews.

Anat's Story – A Different View

The over-all bleak picture outlined in the traditional psychodynamic literature does not mesh with Anat's recollections of her relationship with her mother during the Holocaust. Anat told a life story that began with her memories from the age of three, when her mother hid her in a cellar in the Warsaw Ghetto. Her mother, who was in the underground, had the job of smuggling Jewish children out of the ghetto, putting them into foster homes in the Aryan sections of Warsaw. Anat's story was unusual in that it contained many details of emotional child-memories that she could recall from a very young age and narrate to us. When we analyzed the interview, we asked ourselves if these detailed emotional memories were related to the way Anat's mother was able to take care of her daughter's emotional as well as physical needs.

We know that Anat and her parents came from a well-to-do family background, partly secular and professional, partly orthodox. From Anat's story, we can infer that her mother was well integrated into Polish Aryan society. Although Anat's mother died nearly 50 years ago, shortly after their

siblings. We wish to thank Ms. Bella Krechner for her help in conducting this search and the secretaries of the International Studies Institute for their help in photocopying them.

arrival in Israel, Anat continually referred to her mother as if she were still alive, accompanying her wherever she goes.

This special relationship that developed between daughter and mother appears to have protected Anat throughout her experiences during and after the Holocaust. In spite of the fears and bad events that befell her, Anat grew up with a kind of assurance that she knew what to expect from people who were “like her mother” and what not to expect from others “who were not like her.” Perhaps, Anat was lucky enough or had the ability to reach out and find the ‘right’ people who would protect her and help her move forward.

Looking at the interview one can ask: How did Anat’s mother, under the most difficult circumstances, have the wisdom, the love and the courage to do what Anat told us about? How did her mother’s behavior affect Anat’s own choices, when she married and became a mother in her own right? To what extent is this story representative of what happened during that era between other victims and their children? Since these questions were not addressed in the literature, we believed they still needed to be answered.

Analyses of historical documentation and oral testimonies have suggested that during the Holocaust, many of the victims could not take care of their descendants’ physical needs (e.g. Auerhahn & Laub, 1998; Friedlander, 1979; Gutman, 1990; Langer, 1990). More so, they usually had to sacrifice the latter’s emotional needs first (assuming that they were aware of these needs prior to the Holocaust) in order to secure their physical survival. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that up until after the Second World War, there was no accepted family educational or psychological theory concerning what was essential, in terms of emotional needs and survival, and how emotional survival both differs from and complements physical survival. The breakdown of the family, due to the external events of the Holocaust, made it impossible for parents to take care of their children, first of all emotionally and sometimes also physically.

The emotional void and disruption that was created by the sequence of extreme violence and humiliation (that, in some cases, began long before the extermination process itself), created an “art” of physical survival which could be managed under most extreme conditions. This survival was often achieved

at the expense of total emotional blocking. After the Holocaust ended, this blocking was very hard to soften and work through due to the fact that the processes of physical rebuilding and security construction demanded tremendous energies and long sequences of time.

The traditional psychodynamic approach suggested that many of the emotional impairments and conflicts were not worked through among the survivors after the war. At times, they even became more severe. Survivors often asked themselves: Why did I survive and not my sister or parents? What does it say about me if I stayed alive and they did not (Levi, 1988)? This extreme distress, accompanied by judgmental approach of and silencing by society at large, helped maintain and intensify the emotional blocking that had taken root during the Holocaust (Bar-On, 1995).

In the light of this massive impairment, Anat's story (presented in part below) sounds somewhat like a miracle. There are a number of possible explanations concerning how survivors like her succeeded in recreating some kind of physical and emotional equilibrium. First, these families probably had positive experiences of economic stability and emotional bonding before the Holocaust. These early experiences helped the survivors understand what to look for, thus, enabling them to choose the "right" person - in cases that they had an opportunity to do so - when external events started to destroy their family existence. Second, people like Anat were perhaps lucky enough to go through the extreme conditions of the Holocaust accompanied by at least one family member with whom they had good emotional rapport already prior to the traumatic experiences. This could have been a parent, a sibling, or another parental figure that continued to provide the needed good emotional rapport. Third, sometimes even their oppressors, for a variety of reasons, kept the victims safe. At times, an emotional tie that could help maintain some kind of emotional life for the survivor accompanied this act. Being protected happened through friendship, or other kinds of emotional bonding, and could ease the experience of living in a camp or ghetto by lending it some emotional positive significance.

In some cases, the positive emotional bonding was not legitimated and was accompanied by negative feelings of guilt or moral judgment. For example,

there is the reported case of Dvora who was “daddy’s girl” (Bar-On, 1995). When the Gestapo arrested her father following the occupation of Paris (he was never to return), she became the “black sheep” of her family. Dvora’s mother (divorced by her husband shortly prior to these events) and her brother ridiculed her and humiliated her, due to her close relationship with her father. In this case, as in others, emotional survival was often connected to a severe internal emotional conflict. However, once the extreme conditions were replaced by a normalized physical existence, new relationships enabled the revival of memories of positive earlier experiences. In addition, through therapy, the conflict could slowly be resolved and worked through (Bar-On, 1995).

Due to the complexity involved in resolving the past trauma, physical and emotional needs were often found to be in conflict with one another. This is especially true in the case of the generation that was born shortly after the end of the war. As noted above, during this time, when the extent and finality of the loss became clear, many survivors married in the Displaced Person (DP) camps out of despair. While, on the one hand, there was an urgent need to recreate a home and a family, on the other, this was often at the expense of emotional caring, holding and working through. Let us now listen to Anat’s voice before we continue with our analysis.

My Mother and I: Anat’s Narration⁵

“...a number of years ago, it became clear to me that I could talk about children's embroidery...I was a child when I began embroidering, in that cellar where my mother hid me in the Warsaw Ghetto, while she used to smuggle children out of the ghetto. My mother taught me, I was three and she didn't teach me to embroider...I know by the way that she embroiders...I never saw her embroider, and neither did I ever see what she made... Afterwards, I will show (you) a doll that she made me then ...And I thought to myself: embroidery in Judaism, it isn't only Shabbat covers and tallith bags... that people use for praying and carrying out of the mitzvot... I am not a religious

⁵ - The interview that lasted nine hours was conducted in three sessions by Nurit Zamish in February 1995.

person whatsoever and I have ...a very strong opposition to religion. I think that religion clogs peoples' brains...I have religious embroidery students... and they tell me that it cannot be that I am not a religious person. And I always ask them "why?" Then they say: "Because you think like a religious person". So, I ask them: "But what is my (way of) thinking?" ...they tell me: "...You believe in some sort of superior force, and that is being a religious person".

But I don't believe in any superior force... perhaps they want it that way, perhaps they also love me a bit... so then it doesn't make sense to them that I am so non-religious... I have the feeling that if someone depends on a superior force, he simply gets hurt, because there is no superior force. And if a person doesn't think that she really exists, perhaps she (her mother) is alive...all of a sudden...it becomes clear that she (her mother) is alive somewhere. (She examines me with a stolen look). No, I know that she is dead, I sat next to her when she died. And it is clear to me that she died...but her spirit lives with me all of these years. She arrived with me to Israel, and two weeks after we arrived, she died in my aunt's (her sister's) home. Because she came (here) after she went through very hard torture, really horrible things and she had become a mere shell... She was much younger than I am today...I don't believe in omnipotent forces, but I have some sort of feeling that my mother's spirit resides with me and that she counsels me... what I should (do) what I shouldn't (do), and I talk to her often. I have places where I go and I talk to her there. Don't think I didn't go crazy... I know that some of those discussions are between me and myself, but I need mother, and perhaps I will miss her even when am 80 years old. I will always want to be with my mother...

And that's the part that...really bothers me about my children who are growing up, because there is some sort of confusion between us...and it's really hard to know, who is the parent and who is the child. Once I am the parent and once I am the child and they are the parents ... when my daughter...yells and gets angry with me. She is generally a very gentle and considerate child, but sometimes she has the need to rebel, so at that moment, I feel like a child whose mother is throwing her out, a rejected and

pathetic and sad and poor child, whose mother is leaving and may not return...that is something that I can't...control. ...Today I am 54 and I don't succeed in controlling that...all of the attempts... and...the thoughts and the voice saying "Stop it, what's happening to you? What is this, this is your daughter who is growing up needs to get angry, (when) she comes back from a trip, and she has a hard time making this transition from her friends to home... Accept her as she is." And I don't succeed! All of the soul searching didn't help me with this... Perhaps there is...another level... that...needs to be destroyed, perhaps there is some other level that I haven't reached and I don't know that it exists within me. I truly feel that I am incapable of bearing their anger and the feeling that they want to break away from us...because somewhere at that moment ... everything gets turned upside down! ... instead of me being the parent, I become the child that they want to leave...

In the lecture about children's embroidery, I spoke about how mother brought me those things, different materials...hiding in the ghetto. Once she brought me a few pieces of wool...she was near German headquarters and she began playing with a dog and she took the sweater that was under him...she ...took it apart ...it had a lot of patterns and...colors.... she ...made little balls, each color separately. My mother washed them and gave it to me in a box... that she found...(it) had German writing on it with a name of a famous chocolate factory... she wrote on it with coal, there was no pencil no pen and there was nothing with what to write... I have that box to this day, and it has written on it "My embroidery and handiwork". I was 3 years old and she gave that to me and she told me: "I gave you a fancy box, do you know what's written on it? It says here: 'My embroidery and handiwork'. And here is a needle." And she gave me a spoon that she had made a hole in "And see what colors you have!"...all of those colors... were all ripped and faded, and the dirt didn't wash away either, but I was happy, I thought that I had...a treasure. I wanted to talk about that in the lecture. I entitled my lecture "Children's Embroidery - An Educational Look at Embroidery". I thought that nobody talks about such a subject. Today, there's almost no children's embroidery. I said my mother taught me to relate to needle and thread and to

see something with no pattern or materials, to see a treasure in it...I can make my mark on it, I can make...beautiful things out of it.

...(excitedly), when she would come back from her excursions, when she would go for a day...for two days, for three days, she would leave me something to eat like cooked cabbage ...carrots, cooked potatoes, that was a feast, sometimes bread...there was...dry toast. ...I would always wonder where did she get it. How did she get it? She would always laugh and say: "Don't ask, just eat". She would hug me and laugh... and ...say: "There is no need to ask, (you) need to eat". And I thought, how does she know? And I too want to be a mother like that, who knows where to bring bread from...she knew from where and I didn't know...she would tell, later on when I had grown up a bit and I was 7 - 8. Then she would tell me how she would get it...she would often leave Warsaw, and on the main road... she put stones...villagers' wagons... would enter Warsaw to sell...their things on market day...they would simply bump on these stones and things would fall. After the wagon had disappeared, she would run and collect (the things) and bring (them)...she had all kinds of methods. Perhaps she invented them and perhaps not, but I got a piece of thread that she found hanging on some tree and she would tell me: "You can't imagine where I found this. I was walking and all of a sudden I see (it), hanging on a tree". I didn't see trees during that period, so she would draw ...on the floor what a tree looks like and what a flower looks like, because I never saw them. She would draw for me on the floor what leaves looks like that float in the wind...she would tell me: "Do you know what that is like? It's like this" (she blows). She would do this (she blows) on (my) hand. "It blows the leaf" and she would draw its movements for me on the floor, with a piece of coal. She would draw...how a villager sits on the wagon...and she would draw for me a group of children that she took out...

In the lecture...I talked about how my mother brought me materials, and when I grew up I also worked with children, and in the same way I gave them clean materials. I ...also used cardboard for work that was very aesthetic, (it was) white, as well as brown cardboard. And I let the children embroider. I would make holes in the cardboard exactly as my mother did for

me. I asked a carpenter to make me needles out of wood. He...made needles that weren't sharp and that were big like this and the children did wonderful embroidery.”

Anat had just returned from a trip to Poland very excited and angry with her fellow Israeli tourists who could not relate to what they saw in her way:

“It hurts me how we (Israelis) act in Poland today...I... don't come to cry. And whoever is still mourning, let him mourn! But, if I were to hate the Poles today, that won't help my mother's 11 brothers rise from the dead... I won't have a mother and I won't be able to say good-bye to her...It won't help. For me today to go to Poland and to call them sick people and to yell at them (that they are) despicable and bastards and evil and stupid ...won't help me. It will do the opposite. For me to do exactly that, what I don't want them to do to me...this vengeance has no purpose. It has a purpose when the person wants to express his lowest emotions and they are legitimate, in my opinion. But this reminds me a bit of how a child annoys his mother... he walks behind her and annoys her, and she can't get rid of him, she tries moving and with a little bit of humor... and he (won't stop) annoying her until she gives him the swat on the behind, that's the way it is...but that isn't educational, it's... for her to express her emotions. It's permissible to get angry. One needs to cry, but to keep things in proportion. He can go to Poland and say: "These Poles are garbage." He can say it to himself, but do so with reservations... among all of the Poles, there were also people who saved (lives), and that is certainly no small matter... I don't know whether I would have saved a child, if I knew that my children's' heads might be traded in the exchange. And I saw what they (the Nazis) did to my mother, I was 5 years old, and I stood behind a chair... and I saw what they did to her (her voice gets stronger), when they didn't know that she was a Jew. They thought that she was a Polish woman who was hiding a Jew (my father) whom they caught there... I saw her eye fall out because of their beatings...”

At this point, Anat understands that she started her story from the middle and she wants to restart it from the beginning:

...I was born in 1939 in the spring and the war broke out when I was 3 months old and my mother...was a teacher. My father was an art historian and his articles are published...Much is written about him, and he is very highly admired. My grandfather was a religious butcher... I have a picture of him and my grandmother. She thought it wasn't enough to study in a Cheder and...that girls should study also, and she simply...side stepped him. She brought them a French teacher and a German teacher...and they learned Russian in school... one must know languages, and...other things, not just...religious studies...(so) the children became very educated and had ...professions. One girl was a doctor and two were dentists. That wasn't so simple in Poland during that time, for the Jews, and even more so for the girls. One of the girls became a pharmacist and...my mother was a teacher. She was very successful...she tried to apply all of the most progressive ideas about education...it was the "latest thing". Freedom for the child and to understand a child, today there is no argument about that, but then... when the war broke out ... when the order was given that the Jews need to move into the ghetto, grandfather wanted all of us to be together... grandmother had already passed away, not because of the war, she simply died, and one of the sisters who was a pharmacist was already married. My mother was still living with her parents because she wasn't married yet. She was one of the younger sisters. The son who was a doctor...was the oldest, he was married and he lived apart from them. The sister who was the dentist immigrated to Israel a few years before... and my mother tried to convince my grandfather, that there is no need to go live in the ghetto...the German...army wants the Jews to live in the ghetto...but we are not going to live in the ghetto. And grandfather said: "What are you talking about? All of the Jews live there. It will be like it always was." ...And he ...insisted. In the end, they all went to live in the ghetto... they lived there in crowded conditions... I was already 4 – 5 months or perhaps even a bit more... We lived in one apartment, the grandfather, my father's mother, my mother, 2 younger brothers, Uncle Vaslek who had children, and

the sister who was the pharmacist, her 2 sons, who were 11 year old twins, and me...the baby. My father, right at the beginning of the war, the Germans took him and held him in better jail conditions. He wrote a lot about the architecture of synagogues and the Germans arrested him right away, and they tried to use his knowledge... they conquered a country... and my father was supposed to give them information... and the German historian would write down everything that he would say. So the connection with us was broken. Mother knew approximately where he was, but not exactly, because they would take him out every day and bring him back to jail in the evening... my mother joined the Jewish Polish underground in Warsaw. She was a leftist, and she worked taking children out of the ghetto. Children who were alone, there were all kinds of arrangements to take them out and to get them organized in convents, with families in the country, all kinds out of the country. My mother tried very hard to convince my grandfather to escape from the ghetto. She would say: "I help so many people and I want to help you too. I want to save you." And he would only say: "God will save me, God will save all of us". And my mother said: "God will save whoever saves himself". But grandfather didn't completely understand it. Mother told him: "Cut off your ear locks for now, and take off your skullcap. But he did not agree. And finally they were all taken away and only I and my mother remained. And then she decided to hide me in that cellar.

She used to tell me that she would come back and then she would leave me there. Sometimes two or three days would go by and she still wouldn't come back. But she would always tell me: "I promise you that I will come back" When I was already a mother myself, (I thought) how can a person promise a child a thing that he is completely uncertain about. I thought to myself, perhaps she did that, not only for me, but for herself as well. That she must come back because she promised. She can't give up... she promised. Perhaps that can explain why, with such passion, she would promise me that she would come back. She wanted me to tell her that I agree that she go. She would say to me: "There are five children, if I don't save them the Germans will kill them. So, do you agree that I save them?" ...she would tell me: "My sweetheart, tell me that you agree". Then I would cry and scream: "I agree..."

(Anat says this in the voice of a child crying.) *And she would go, and not return, sometimes, for a number of days...she would leave me something to make on a piece of cardboard with holes and string and I would sit and sometimes the food would run out if she didn't come back... But, I always knew that she would return, and it was as if she was always with me, even when she really wasn't.*

Once all of the food that she left me ran out I was very hungry. I had no idea what to do anymore. I would sit up there on that pile of wood, and I saw two children sitting there on the sidewalk and they sang something to themselves in Yiddish. And people began giving them bread. And I said: "Perhaps I will go outside and sing something and they will give me (food)." And at that moment, I felt as if my mother was holding me and telling me: "No! You're not going outside...it is forbidden to go outside". And I didn't go out... I was really in great trouble and I ate pieces of plaster from the wall. I don't know how much time went by, perhaps a day, perhaps two. It became dark there quite early and it was dark for a long time, and then all of a sudden, I remembered that my mother put on the other side, a box. And she said that: "We need to save this for a black hour"... And I thought: "What is a black hour? Maybe it's now?" So, I will open up that box and there must be food there." I tried to climb up the other pile and there weren't any steps there, so I fell and I got hurt, and a piece of wood fell on me and ... the box also fell, and when it fell, the top opened, and from inside of the box, out came worms! Afterwards, I understood that there were dry pieces of toast... but the whole box was full of worms, and I ate those worms with such gusto! ...I made sure that they wouldn't get far away from me...

...My mother was buried here in Jerusalem and I don't know where her grave is. You must be asking yourself, what kind of a disgusting person am I that I don't know where my mother's grave is. And once, when my son asked me where she is buried...he told me: "You don't know where your mother is buried?" I said to him: "no" "But mother, why?" So I told him: "to me - she isn't dead. And my husband tried to help me out and he said: "You know, the person who needs the grave isn't the one who died, it's the one who is alive. Whoever died is already dead but whoever is still alive is the one who needs

the grave. He needs to go cry at the graveside, to remember the dead person and to know that he comes there once a year and puts flowers there"...that's how he explained it to our son. "Mother doesn't need it, because mother's mother always lives with her...she is with us here. Mother thinks about her 24 hours a day." And my son understood this. He asked me ..."And when you die, then what?" I said: "When we die you will do what you feel like doing. I wish for you that you'll pass through all of the developmental stages of life, that you will part from us at the age when you should part, and that we won't be alive anymore, when you will be able to manage with only a grave not like me, because I didn't understand and accept the fact that I don't have a mother. I wasn't at all at the age when it is possible to deal with this issue, and my entire life, from the beginning, is spent waiting for mother, this expectation that mother will come and mother will bring food and mother will bring a piece of clothing, that mother will cover me."

Anat goes back to her memories:

...Once some child sat down very close to the window. He was ... resting...he fell over on his side. I thought he was sleeping...He simply died ...then I saw a rat gnawing at his foot... and I thought to myself "Oy, if I fall asleep, that's what will happen to me... so I can't fall asleep." And I would wake myself up and I had a stick...I don't know what strength, when I think about my children. I think about my son, I can't imagine, when he was three years old, I thought...Was I like that? I have the feeling that I was never, really, three years old...

That fear of those rats was one of the things that scared me very much. I never saw anyone try to peek into that storage room... I sat there and I also knew that I need to hide if someone was to...break the window...if I become exposed at that moment. Mother explained to me what I need to do in a case like that. "Do not go outside under any circumstances..." And after mother hadn't come back for a number of days, I was sitting in that cellar, and all of a sudden, I saw someone open the door...So I hid...in the coal... It was stacked in such a way that I could sit there without them noticing me. I sat down...and

did I shake with fear. And I saw a man coming down the stairs and come into the room! It was a seventeen years old boy, but I thought that it was a grown-up, because he looked big to me. He began calling out my name, and that frightened me even more and I thought how does he know my name? I didn't move, I didn't let out a sound...I grabbed the doll... and he walked around for a few moments and saw nothing, and he tried to call me...he didn't see anything and he left.

He went up the stairs and closed the door. (In a soft voice) After he closed the door, I didn't know what happened to me, but I began to cry. I was so nervous, I began crying, not loudly, but he heard my sobbing, and he came back in. I was full of fear that he would find me, I wanted to go back into the hole. But a piece of wood moved, and it dragged with it another one, in short there was a mess and he caught me immediately and told me: "Why are you making so many problems for me?" I came to take you. Your mother sent me." But, I didn't talk... and I didn't want to go with him. And he told me: "Come here, look, I have a sack, get into the sack and I will take you..." and I (didn't want to) at all. Then he said: "Your mother sent me...!". I told him: "No, my mother will come. Mother will come and she will take me." Then he said: "Mother can't, mother is injured. And I came to take you." (This) was three days before the uprising of the ghetto. I didn't want to go with him, and in the end he told me: "You must come with me. I don't know what I will do with you if you don't come with me... get into the sack now!" But, I didn't want to...he told me: "I will take you to mother now, and you will ask her if she sent me or not". And that made sense to me. So I said: "Good. Okay. " And he said: "... quickly, we've wasted enough time..."... I had to sit under a (fake piece of coal)... so he told me: "Do you know how coal acts? I told him: "No"... "It doesn't talk, doesn't cry, doesn't make a sound... It simply lies there...And if you have to make pee-pee, make pee-pee. Nothing matters...don't talk, don't call out, don't yell... Can I trust you?" I told him: "Yes". So he said: "Good, if you'll be ... a very good child, then you will see your mother very soon."....

...He put me into that sack, and the sack was very dirty on the outside from coal... And we began walking with me on his back. We walked for a very long time. All of a sudden, I remembered that my doll remained there in the

storage room! I began yelling to him: "Sir, sir" And he (said) nothing! And I began hitting him a bit on the back, and he (did) nothing. (He) continued, and I began hitting him harder I saw that he wasn't responding, I began yelling! ...and he couldn't go on because I was really screaming. He went into some dark alley, opened up the sack, and took off the cover, (and) said to me: "Tell me, are you crazy? Do you want them to kill you and me?!" Then I told him: "I don't care! The doll my daughter" She was called Jozia...So he told me: "Leave me alone about dolls. Now you are driving me crazy about dolls. I am making such a big effort...do you think, that this is so easy?" ...I told him: "Won't we go back to take my child?" Then he told me: "Of course we won't go back, get into the sack quickly, and we're off! And if you yell, you'll see what I'll do to you." I got out of the sack. I threw away the coals...And...I screamed at him: "What a disgusting person you are. Do you think that a mother can leave her child forever? Never go back for her? What kind of person are you? That is unacceptable...I am going back." and I began walking! And he got so scared and said: "Okay...we'll go back and take the doll. Get into the sack and behave ..."

And we went and brought her...he walked all that way back...we reached someplace on the Aryan side, one of the suburbs of Warsaw, and there was mother really injured. She had helped a group of children escape and they shot at them and some of the children were killed and she was wounded. But she couldn't walk around with a bandaged arm and bandaged shoulder on the street. So she sent him to bring me. And when he told her the story about the doll...she hugged him and told him: "You went back with her only because you are a child yourself. You should have given her slaps on her bottom!" And I heard that. I said: "No! No! A mother can't leave her child." My mother cried and hugged me, and hugged me..."

Anat 's story did not end here. Her full story still remains to be told. Today the doll is part of a children exhibit at Yad Vashem, where a video presentation of Anat runs in parallel.

Parenthood Themes in Yad Vashem Testimonies and Biographical Interviews

Analyzing the interview with Anat led us to the realization that her construction of her relationship with her mother was exceptional in its depth and width. As we know from much qualitative research, it is sometimes the exception that teaches us about the rule (Rosenthal, 1993). After analyzing Anat's interview, we became aware of how her interview differed from so many others that we had conducted and read, and as a result, to the theme of maintaining emotional memories. We then searched for additional common themes related to parenthood in the other biographical interviews and testimonies that had been conducted with survivors at Ben-Gurion University and at Yad Vashem.

We had many more testimonies of children talking about their parents, than we had parents' testimonies telling us about their children's childhood during the Holocaust. This could be related to the fact that very few parents who had children during the Holocaust survived and/or gave testimonies about aspects related to their own parenthood. In one sense, therefore, our information about parenthood is formulated mostly from the perspective of the children.

Relating to the importance of different perspectives, we can cite a set of testimonies gathered at the Yale Fortunoff Archives. A mother tells how she and her five-year-old son returned home alone after having been imprisoned in a work camp in Romania and their husband/father had died in the camp. The mother describes how they walked up the stairs to their apartment and how her son ran into his room, opened his toy cabinet, and found all of his toys as he had left them before they were sent to the camp. A few hours later, her son gave his own testimony, unaware of what his mother had just told. In his interview, he also recalled that same day, how he came home, ran up the stairs to his room, opened the toy cabinet, and it was empty... The historian would ask – were the toys there, yes or no? The individual - psychologist would ask: to what did the mother attribute the perseverance of toys and to what did the son attribute their loss? We suggest that the difference in their two memories is not incidental and shows why such cross interviewing is important.

We analyzed only one set of interviews of a mother and a daughter concerning their experiences during the Holocaust. In those interviews we could see how the daughter told us in much greater detail about events that happened with her mother and could be related to her caring and love. Her mother had less detailed memories and was much more apologetic and concerned with her guilt feelings of not being a “good enough mother” (Winnicott, 1971).

Ayala, a student at Ben Gurion University, carried out joint interviews with a fellow student in 1991. They interviewed Ayala’s grandfather, his four children (including her mother - two of her siblings were already born in Israel) and his eldest four grandchildren (including her brother). When Ayala’s mother was a baby, she was given to a Gentile patient of her grandfather, shortly before the liquidation of Antropol Ghetto in Poland. Ayala’s grandparents joined the partisans, and when they came back after the war, they had to go to court in order to get their child back. Through this family profile we learned how every sibling (including Ayala’s mother) developed a different perspective of the past events in the family and how these perspectives still affect their lives today, both in the second as well as in the third generations. It is, therefore, important to remember that single perspectives may be biased and it is difficult to know which direction the bias takes until we hear the different accounts of the same events.

The following themes of parenthood were gleaned through global analyses of the interviews. Although there were many other issues that appeared in the interviews that related to the concept of parenthood, the four themes that impressed us as being the most salient ones were the following:

- 1) The potential for emotional memory
- 2) The salience of the family and the focus on caring for each other or failing to do so.
- 3) Idealization of the parents or family unit.
- 4) “Parental mistakes” - The difficulties in understanding parental decisions that were made during the Holocaust.

The potential for emotional memory

Based on the analyses of the interviews, it appears that child-survivors who had a close emotional relationship with a significant other before, during and after the traumatic experiences have maintained more vivid and emotional memories than those who were left physically and emotionally alone. When we say vivid, we also mean a variety of emotions – including conflicting ones – as they appear in children’s memories, under less traumatic situations (Winnicott, 1971). When we examine Anat’s narrative, for example, we see that in spite of the fact she was alone for long periods in the ghetto, witnessed the severe beating of her mother and had several other traumatic experiences as a very young child, Anat also had the positive experience of her mother always returning to her. In fact, her mother remained with her until the last day of her life. While there are signs in Anat’s interview that she also feels anger toward her mother, due to feelings of fear and desertion, these are interwoven with a deep admiration and a strong sense of protection by her mother. By no means are we trying to advocate here that Anat’s experiences helped her become an independent person, in the regular psychological sense. It is beyond our knowledge if such independence can at all be achieved under these circumstances. However, we wish to claim that through the type of creative contact, love and wisdom shown by her mother, Anat maintained an emotional liveliness in her memory and reconstruction of her mother, that served her later in life, as a an adult woman and as a mother.

A second example comes from Olga (Bar-On, 1995: Chapter three). Olga talks about her anger toward her Gentile father, which was still evident at the time of the interview, due to his fear during the Holocaust concerning what would happen to him if she was recognized as being Jewish. However, Olga’s subjective feelings are only part of the story. It is important to recognize that in spite of her father’s fear, he was responsible for rescuing her by providing her with a safe home in the Aryan part of Warsaw while her mother and siblings remained in the ghetto to be later deported and gassed in Treblinka. Olga idealized and mourned her mother for many years, expressing anger only toward her father. This story highlights another aspect of the complexity of parenthood during those times. Olga’s anger can be interpreted as the natural reaction of a teenager whose family’s internal conflicts (her parents’ divorce

prior to the war) was suddenly invaded by the external events of the Holocaust. However, had Olga not been lucky to have the physical protection of her Christian father, we doubt whether she would have been able to recall the feelings connected to those days or speak of them at the time of the interview.

Yael Kedar-Levine (Bar-On, 1999: chapter seven) talks about her interview with her father who lived through the entire war with his younger brother and parents. At the time of the interview, his parents were still alive. The family first lived in hiding in Poland and then was smuggled into Hungary where they were eventually caught by the police and arrested. The family managed to escape deportation and settled in Israel after the war. For many years, Yael's father silenced the stories of his childhood during the Holocaust. When she finally interviewed him, for a university seminar, her father narrated many moments of his childhood in a very open and emotional way. It sounded as if he had been finally given a chance to reveal all that had been stored in him for many years until his daughter was mature enough and able to listen. For example, Yael's father recalled how his parents sent him and his brother to buy a loaf of bread when they were in hiding. When the two boys passed near a cemetery, they heard Germans executing Jews by shooting, and as a result of their fear, dropped their money. Yael's father told her that he was "more afraid of his parents than of the Germans" because he lost the money for the bread, returning home empty-handed.

A final example of the ability to recall strong emotional memories comes from the Yad Vashem testimony with Dov. This interview, which contains many references to the relationships within his family, focuses mainly on his relationship with his mother. At the end of the testimony, he also talks about the type of parent that he is to his own children. Even though most of his memories express negative emotions, the intensity with which he speaks leads us to believe that the ability to recall and willingness to openly express negative emotions connected to one's parent during the Holocaust reflects closeness, even if the parent-child relationship was a problematic one. For example, when recounting the train ride that he, his mother and baby sister took from Zagreb to Split to meet his father Dov says:

“...She told me that if I dared to speak English or open up my mouth, she’ll break a stick over my head...and she’ll ‘take care’ of my bottom...” When German soldiers came into their compartment, he remembers: “She was white, she was frightened, I felt the fright that we are threatened, the family is threatened and then they left...”

Later on, when Dov speaks of the kind of father he is, he connects his style of parenting to his experiences during the Holocaust:

“...I believe that I am cruel, I lose sensitivity, you go through a childhood that is not so nice (I believe) difficult things are not something that need to frighten you. I cannot stand when they (his children) are afraid of something being difficult...of course, it’s a mistake, there’s no doubt that it’s the wrong response...it doesn’t have to be like that, you have to be a soft man who gives kisses and hugs, I don’t know how to do that...but it’s easy for me to help out in times of distress...it’s easy for me to help when the distress is real...”

Based on these and other examples of emotional memories, both positive and negative, we suggest that such memorized and conflicting feelings, usually so difficult to recall and verbalize, were related to some feeling of physical and emotional safety that the parents had provided their children with during the traumatic period. In contrast, we have examples from the interviews with Genia, Ze’ev and Anya (Bar-On, 1995: chapters one, two and four), three survivors who were alone during the terrible times in the ghetto, in the camps, partisans and in hiding. These individuals have difficulties recalling emotional or conflicting memories. This difficulty is not only a loss for them or for us as their listeners. Perhaps more importantly, it is the loss of their descendants who grew up with less open emotional support, compared to the children of Anat, Olga or Yael. However, in order to develop our hypothesis into an assertion, we need to look at the interviews with the children as well.

Placed between these two extremes are the survivors who went through the war with a member of the family, but who demonstrated very little emotionality

in their narratives. For example, we have the testimony from Yad Vashem of Batya, a Hungarian survivor, who was sent with her entire family in Auschwitz. Batya has a very difficult time expressing emotions about anyone in her family. Her report-style of narration is short, ending each short sequence with “that’s all”. A second example comes from Ruth, a survivor from Athens, who lost her mother and brother to Auschwitz, and lived through the war with her father in hiding in the mountains. Ruth has almost no memories of this period, even though she was a young teenager at the time. Ruth’s interview is often punctuated with the statement: “I don’t remember, I was only 12...” Aside from her difficulty in remembering her wartime experiences, her interview is almost completely devoid of emotions. This seems to be related to the fact that as a young child, Ruth had almost no contact with family members outside of her nuclear family and appears to have been insulated, in general, from the outside world. It could also indicate that she did not have a very close relationship with her father prior to the war and during their common experiences during the Holocaust.

In sum, we can tentatively put forth that the expression of emotional and detailed memories may be related to the existence of emotional closeness with a significant other, be it good or problematic.

The salience of the family and the focus on caring for each other or failing to do so

The issue of caring (both its success and failure) is almost a universal theme in the testimonies and interviews we analyzed. We asked ourselves if this was associated with the Jewish tradition of family cohesiveness or if the high level and expressions of caring was only a symptom of these post-hoc interviews and testimonies. Anat told us how much caring she felt from her mother during the most extreme times. Through Anat’s reconstruction, we learn how her mother both knew what Anat’s needs were and how to meet them, despite the limits imposed by the need to be in hiding and the dangers they were facing. Anat presents us with a child’s perspective (the story with the doll in the cellar, the embroidery, making nature come alive in the cellar, etc.). However, as an adult, Anat was also able to critically reflect on her mother’s words when she

thought about the impossible promises that her mother made her (“I will always return: How could she promise that to me?”).

Anat never actually separated emotionally from her mother. We learn that she refuses to visit her mother’s grave and that she has daily “talks” with her concerning her problems. Though by traditional psychoanalytic standards this behavior could be viewed as hampering the process of independence, in terms of a mother-child relationship, it is very difficult for us to judge what would have happened to Anat if this “childish” construction of her mother would have failed then or vanished later.

The testimonies from Yad Vashem include many references to the importance of keeping the family together no matter what and the focus on caring for each other or failing to do so. These issues were expressed in the testimonies given by Simon, a Czech man who survived the war with his parents and brother. They also appeared in the testimony of Menachem, an only child, who was born in Budapest. Lili, a survivor from Balassgyarmat Hungary, presents herself as someone who spent much of the war helping family members make it through the war. Finally, Bobbie, Juli and Arlene - a mother and two of her daughters who survived the Holocaust together and lived through the camps of Majdanek, Plaszow, Bialichka and Auschwitz – also talk about this issues at length. One thread, which appears to run through these different stories, is the caring and the close relationship that these survivors had with their families before the war began.

In Simon’s interview, for example, he speaks of the close relationship that he had with his nuclear and extended family before the war stating that: “...we definitely had a good and happy life.” In 1942, when the family had to leave Bratislava and move to Nova Masto, his parents kept him informed of what was happening and their plans:

“...(The hard times) did two things...it ...shook our feeling of safety that was under our feet, but on the other hand, father and mother as well always emphasized that we would go on. That is, it was hard but we will stand up to it...we will do everything for you, and you can feel secure with us. They also kept their promise... we always had that feeling ... that we are in a protected

position, that they worry about us... the hard times made us very close... we always had the feeling that as long as we are together, that is the goal of life... it became our life's goal..."

Even when 11 year old Simon and his brother were separated from their parents in Auschwitz, and later had to survive on their own in Birkenau and Buchenwald, Simon continued to emulate his father, taking care of his younger brother as he believed his parents would want him to. Simon remarks:

"...Of course I took care of him...as soon as father left it was clear that I am the one responsible for what happens to us... we did everything together... we even tried to go to the bathroom together..."

Menachem, who was 14 when the Germans occupied Hungary, also speaks of his activities which were aimed at helping out his family (and others as well). Menachem states:

"...When they heard that I had connections to the International Red Cross, they asked me to get them documents, there was nothing easier... we simply wrote their names, the consulate signed... and during my next visits (home), I brought each one, without exception, and I think that some people and my mother among them was saved from being expelled from the house..."

In Menachem's case, his entire family lived through the war and immigrated to Israel within three years of one another in the fifties. Therefore, the family remained close not only during the war, but after the war as well.

Lili's story contains many references concerning how her parents took care of her and her four brothers and sisters both before and during the war. According to Lili:

“...We grew up with a lot of love and much culture...until the age of 10 ... 12 ... everything was fine, later on, I also have the feeling that my parents saw the bad things coming and I was little and very sensitive, they tried...to hide it from me, because they knew that they are unable to give more than they gave...”

Lili appears to have learned the lesson of helping others and the message that had been passed down in her family that the strong ones must help the weaker ones. In her interview she makes numerous references to how she cared for others. For example, after the family was sent to Auschwitz, where her mother and brother were killed upon arrival, Lili's older sister contracted meningitis. Lili recalls how she sneaked into the infirmary:

“...I remained, the nurse left, the doctor left, they all left and I remained in the empty building with 12 sick women who had tuberculosis and my sister was one of the women, after work I would always go and help the doctor, I gave out the medicine...I found potatoes and cooked...”

The final example comes from the triple testimony that was conducted at Yad Vashem with Bobbie, the mother, and her two daughters, Juli and Arlene. For this religious family, the Holocaust began in 1938 when they were incarcerated in Germany and ended in April 1945 when they were liberated by the Americans near Berlin. While the daughters' interviews are mostly filled with praise for their “courageous” mother, there are subtle signs of disappointment in their father who was

“...An only son...my father was very much indulged...he was very observant... he didn't have the 'skills' to start crawling... my mother... was able to maneuver a little bit better, her background had prepared her better for this... he loved luxury, loved elegance... needed a maid for himself...”

According to Juli (who does most of the talking in the interview), the children made the decision that the daughters would be responsible for keeping the women alive and that Ira, the older brother, would be responsible for keeping Chaim, the younger brother alive. Indeed, five pages of the interview are dedicated to Juli's recollections of how her mother, Bobbie, stressed the importance of keeping clean in the camps in order to enhance their chances for survival. While Juli, Arlene and Bobbie did manage to stay together and support one another (Juli even made sure that they got three consecutive numbers in Auschwitz), when Ira got sick in Plaszow and was put in the infirmary, Chaim was shot. The women were afraid to tell Ira what had happened to Chaim, and waited for him to get better before they told him of his fate. As Juli notes:

"...He was so bitter, he cursed me, he cursed himself and he never ever forgave himself for not saving Chaim... it shadowed the rest of his life... (he said) I never want to be responsible for anybody again, so when he married... she was very independent, they never had children... (he said) I don't want to be responsible for anybody..."

This passage highlights the painful price that some of the survivors paid for "failing" to keep other family members alive and their perspective on parenting. While the other children (who did survive the war) went on to get married and have children, Ira sentenced himself to a life without children, as punishment for letting his family down.

When summarizing the issue of caring for family members during the Holocaust, we see the supremely high value placed on keeping the family alive. We note that caring did not always extend only from parent to child, but from child to parent and from sibling to sibling as well. In cases where the family member believes that she or he had a hand in keeping another family member alive, it is often related to strong family ties that were characteristic of the family before the war began. Furthermore, these individuals transmit the message that their success was partially due to both personal and family strength. However, in cases where this mission "failed", self-punishment is

inflicted, sometimes to the extreme point of not having children of one's own. We do not know if the caring was only a post-hoc reconstruction, imposed on the traumatic memories in order to make them sound more "humane," or if they reflected a reality of family strong mutual commitment and caring that actually occurred during the traumatic events. However, during the testimony or the interview, the notion of parenting is associated in the mind of the child-survivor with the memory of caring under those severe circumstances. This is the point that we wish to emphasize here.

Idealization of the parents

Idealization of parents was another theme that appeared in many of the interviews and testimonies. While it may seem similar to the earlier discussion of caring, it differs in the sense that idealization attempts to prevent negative emotions from surfacing. In this sense, therefore, idealization is closer to a defense mechanism than the two themes discussed earlier. For example, Anat expressed idealization of her mother. She attributed her with beauty, assertiveness, sensitivity and almost total powerfulness. Anat told us, at the outset of her interview, that she did not want to be a "weak and helpless girl". She yearned to be like her mother who could go in and out of the ghetto, bringing back bread and always knowing what to do. However, Anat did not only idealize her mother. Her words also reflected a later more mature and critical understanding of the child's feeling of her mother's omnipotence, reversed by the harsh conditions with which Anat had to cope. In addition, her story highlights her own extreme fears and guilt feelings (evidenced, perhaps, by her belief that she might have played a part in her father's discovery and capture by the Gestapo). Anat recalls her own misgivings (e.g., yelling at the boy who came to get her to take her back to the cellar to get her doll). We also hear, through her voice, however, her mother's acceptance of these deeds as a child's normal reactions to the extreme stress under which they were living. Through Anat's reconstruction, we get the feeling of a deep relationship that developed between mother and daughter. This dyad withstood the most extreme conditions and traumas and, later on, helped Anat develop strategies for choosing people and priorities in her own life. We do not hear in her voice

the need to rebel and disassociate oneself from one's parents, as is usually expected from teenagers and young adults. Again, we believe that we have no right to judge what should be counted as "normal" behavior and emotional maturity under these extreme conditions.

Other evidence of idealization of one's parents came across in the Yad Vashem testimonies of Bobbie, Juli and Arlene. For example, Juli opens her testimony with this introduction of her mother:

"...I just wanted to introduce my mother and to point out that all three of us are here thanks to her courage and thanks to her faith... the motivating force for survival was my mother... who never for one moment lost faith and it's really her courage, her story that saved not only us, her own children, but also many hundreds of women... whom she infected with her faith... this is my very brave and wonderful mother..."

The idealized picture of Bobbie, as presented here by her daughter, however, does crack at times in the interview. There are segments where the daughters express disappointment and anger. For example, Arlene mentions her anger at Bobbie for "abandoning" the children by placing them in orphanages for awhile until she managed to save enough money to take them out and care for them. Later on, Juli also talks about how *she* was responsible for saving her mother from being selected for the gas chambers, by distracting Mengele for a few moments and not the other way around. It appears as if the daughters feel the need to present an idealized picture of their mother, perhaps, in order to help them explain to themselves why their parents acted as they did during the traumas of the Holocaust. The daughters can only hint that the mother occasionally let them down and was not able to protect them from the Nazi persecution. Interestingly enough, the father, who was killed, is not presented in an idealized manner, as evidenced by the relatively few references made about him in the interview (e.g. *"...he didn't have the 'skills' to start crawling...he loved elegance...needed a maid for himself..."*).

A third example comes from the testimony at Yad Vashem of Nicole, a child survivor from Antwerp. From the onset of her interview, a great deal of respect

and idealization of her parents comes though, especially where her mother is concerned. Here too, however, idealization is mixed with small signs of anger, perhaps due to the feeling that Nicole felt that she was somewhat less important to her mother than her work. Nicole tells us:

“... In 1933...she (my mother) went back to Germany and she... pulled her parents out...she said (to them): ‘you’re going back now’, somehow my mother could see the scenario, what was going to happen...and she forced her parents to come back with one of her sister...my mother was involved in many...things...B’nei Brit...she worked for the Jewish Committee...she was home...but I always had an au pair...to take care of me...she was completely dedicated to her work, not to motherhood, I didn’t see my mother that often, but when I did...she always carried the whole world on her shoulders...”

We can only conjecture how the picture of a mother “carrying the whole world on her shoulders” affected Nicole understanding of what it means to be a parent. Perhaps, as in Anat’s case, Nicole also learned during the Holocaust that a mother’s duty is not only to her own children, but to others as well. Although Nicole does mention her father’s bravery as well, it is the mother’s story that is stressed. Toward the end of the testimony, Nicole talks about the effect that she thinks that the past had on her children:

“...For the longest time, I kept it very...quiet and didn’t even talk about it, I didn’t want the children to be oppressed... my mother was talking a lot about the war... I didn’t want to do that to my kids, so they really didn’t know too much for a long time... I have one daughter who is affected... she is very much into all that, she goes as a guide, every years she takes yeshiva girls and boys to Warsaw, to all the concentration camps... she has a compulsion and so I guess I must have talked more about it than I think...I tried not to burden my children too much...”

In this passage, there is another small crack in the idealization of her mother. While Nicole believes that talking about the Holocaust may “oppress” her

children, and as a result she tried to refrain from doing so, she notes how her mother “talked a lot about it.” This could be another subtle sign that while Nicole may idealize her mother for her actions with other Jews, she feels that as a parent, she may not always do what is best for a child’s peace of mind. Based on Anat’s interview and the testimonies from Yad Vashem, we may need to question the validity of current theories of development in light of the alternatives which faced children during that time. We must now ask whether an idealization of parenthood or alienation from one’s parents hampered the child’s psychological well-being. Many Holocaust survivors were not as successful as Anat when it came to holding on to such positive feelings of parenthood. However, it does appear as if for many of them, idealization of their parents served as a defense mechanism that helped them, perhaps, to blame their parents less for not being able to protect them from the horrors that they had to endure during the Holocaust. One cannot decontextualize the question of normalcy or psychological well-being. This brings us back to the necessity of a historically contextualized psychodynamic approach that takes into account the specific historical and social circumstances while discussing psychodynamic individual or family processes.

“ Parental mistakes” - difficulties in understanding parental decisions during the Holocaust

In many of the interviews and testimonies, the issue of understanding certain parental decisions arose. At times, the survivor expressed the notion that their parents acted strangely, or made ‘bad’ choices, thus putting themselves or other family members in danger. This is a difficult issue for the survivors to express, since it puts their parents in a bad light. One recurrent theme concerns the lost chance of escape due to the parents’ “inability” to foresee the future. For example, Olga tells us how her mother missed out on the opportunity to escape from the ghetto, when her husband came to rescue her and her children, because she did not want to leave her own mother. When Olga’s grandmother could not obtain a work certificate and, as a result, realized that she would have to go into hiding in order to avoid deportation, she decided to commit suicide. Olga witnessed her dying. Although Olga

never criticizes her mother or grandmother's decisions in the interview (expressing anger only toward her father), we can imagine that these events had a great impact on her. Olga's mother showed total submission to her own mother's needs, even when it meant that she might be giving up her own life and that of her children, for the sake of keeping the family together. This is an example of the cruel decisions parents had to make, reminiscent of the Styron's book *Sophie's Choice* (Styron, 1980).

In another interview, Anya (Bar-On, 1995) tells us how her father believed that the Germans were decent people that would never harm the Jews. He decided to remain in his hometown in Poland telling her: *"Don't worry, we know the Germans. Everything will be fine"*, although he urged Anya to flee (he was afraid that the Germans would arrest her for being a Communist). Clearly, her father's false belief concerning the Nazis burdens Anya to this day, as she is the only one of the family who survived due to his decision to send her away on her own.

Batya, a Hungarian survivor who was interviewed in Yad Vashem, tells an interesting story about her father's attempt to keep out of the work camps.

"...in '42...he made himself 'crazy.' He got papers for that, from the most famous professor, and he paid for that with all of his energy. He tried to hang himself with his belt from the door. My mother didn't go with him. Because she was always laughing from the shows that he put on, so my sister went with him...in the end, he got off due to that..."

On the one hand, it appears as if Batya understood the absurdity of the situation, and realized that her father's actions saved him from a bad fate. On the other hand, however, we have to ask ourselves how her father's 'attempted suicide' affect the way that she, as a fourteen-year-old, looked at him as a parent. Was she truly able to understand her father's behavior? Did she think of her father as being creative, crazy or effective? While we have no one answer, it is important to note that this memory stands out from the rest of her interview in which she stresses that: *"...it was hard. Most of the time that I remember...were hard times, I don't remember the nice times for some*

reason...” In our opinion, Batya did have difficulty understanding her father’s actions, and, therefore, vacillated between seeing her father’s actions as being sound, on the one hand, but dangerous, on the other.

Moshe, who was also interviewed at Yad Vashem, was born in 1932 into a wealthy family in Yugoslavia. He also speaks of the “bad” choices that his parents made, and especially those of his father, during the war. Moshe expresses some anger toward his parents for not escaping when they had the opportunity to do so and toward his father for not saving himself. After the family was put into a ghetto, his father was taken to a camp. Moshe and his mother were allowed to periodically visit his father “...where he was sort of in charge of the barrack with the sick and old people...”. Later on, when the family obtained false papers, and had the chance to escape, Moshe and his mother tried to persuade his father to join them. According to Moshe, his father said: “...how can I leave these people? You go...” and that was the last time that he saw his father. At the end of the interview, Moshe says outright: “...our parents weren’t smart enough...since they were killed. In terms of money there wasn’t a problem, there was the opportunity (to save ourselves)...” In Moshe’s eyes, therefore, his parent’s were partly to blame for their own deaths, a fact that he appears still unable to forgive them for.

The interview with Yitzchak, a survivor from Sarajevo, provides further evidence of the difficulty that children sometimes had understanding the problems that their parents had in functioning and in making ‘better’ decisions. As a result, the parents began to look ineffectual. Yitzchak states repeatedly throughout the interview that, due to the war, his parents gave up trying to parent him and that he could depend on them less and less. The following passage highlights the complexity of the situation; while Yitzchak appears to be angry with his parents for “being in shock”, he is unable to provide a clear answer whether or not he would have behaved in the same way if he had been the parent. He says:

“...my parents, I guess, didn’t have kids on the brain...we were very free, my mother worked all of the time, during the day and night... my mother was in shock that her father had been taken, and her sisters as well...and they killed

her daughter (Yitzchak's sister)...my mother was in shock from this whole situation...I had to manage by myself...my parents were in shock...when I look back, I try to think whether I would have acted in the same way with my children during such troubles, I have the feeling that they lost their head..."

A final example comes from the interview that was carried out with Brigitte, a Polish survivor. According to Brigitte, her father, who was always the decision-maker in the family before the Holocaust, made all of the wrong decisions during the war and lost his ability to trust in his judgment. His 'failures' began with his refusal to let Brigitte join her husband who had escaped into the USSR, and continued when he let her brother go to the police station to report himself, and as a result, was later shot. According to Brigitte, part of the reason for the 'wrong' decisions was due to her parent's desire to protect her and because they were unable to openly share their fears with one another. Brigitte states:

"...my brother came home and told my mother and father, they were worrying...my mother gave him lunch...I had such a bad feeling about it...the tragedy was so great that we didn't talk to each other because we didn't want to worry one another...I gave him my father's handkerchief...I didn't say a word, we never saw him again...we respected our father very much and he was very smart...we never thought of doing anything without asking him, he had the last word, so I thought if I ask father what to do (whether to try to escape or not), he'll know for sure...because a father knows everything. Right? So I said: 'Daddy, what are we going to do?'...he was completely broken, he had lost that fantastic son of his, by such a mistake, because if he would have been smart, we didn't have to let him go to jail...but my father said...I'm sorry to tell you, do whatever you can...don't ask me, I don't know how to live life like this', at that times I realized that I'm all by myself...my father is no father anymore...my mother was terribly depressed..."

In Brigitte's words we hear how her concept of parenthood fell apart: *"...at that times I realized that I'm all by myself...my father is no father anymore..."* This

is a very harsh acknowledgement and is accompanied by puzzlement and helplessness. At the height of the chaos, Brigitte realized that her father could no longer continue functioning as a father, in terms of taking care of his children in the best possible way. If in the previous quotes we presented examples of how people struggled with maintaining a positive perspective of parenthood, here we hear how it collapsed.

From Brigitte's and other testimonies we learn that when the children perceived that their parents had lost their ability to trust their instincts and judgment, this had the effect of shaking the children's belief in their parents. This often left them with the feeling that they were totally "on their own". This discovery led to a new perspective concerning their parents. The children reacted with sadness and fear or the belief that their parents had become ineffectual and, therefore, could no longer function as "true" parents did. One should, however, be guarded concerning the conclusion, as the interviews and testimonies were given many years after the Holocaust. That is, when the children talk about their parents' decisions in their interviews and testimonies, and judge them as being right or wrong, this is being done in retrospect and is based on the outcomes of these decisions and behaviors (positive or negative). Today, it is difficult for us to state to what extent the same decisions could be perceived as having been the "right" decisions, if they had been the parents' decisions at all, if the circumstances or outcomes been different.

Before leaving this theme, we would like to mention one more instance of "parental mistakes" that was salient in the interviews. This is the case of parents leaving their children with foster families, or in hiding, in monasteries, convents or orphanages, when they believed that by doing so their children had a better chance of surviving. When the children would talk about these experiences, many of them expressed – either manifestly or latently - the feeling that this was "wrong" behavior and that by doing so, their parents had abandoned them. While, as adults, they can give a rational explanation why their parents made the decision to leave them with others, it is clear that this is an understanding reached at a much later stage, when they were no longer children. An example of this comes from the interview with Juli, Arlene and

Bobbi (noted above), in which Juli hints at her mother's abandonment of the children when she left them for a while in an orphanage. A second example comes from the Yad Vashem interview with Naomi, a child-survivor of the Warsaw ghetto, who describes in an extremely emotional sequence of how her mother took her to live with a Christian family, when the liquidation of the ghetto was near at hand. Although, as an adult, Naomi understands that this is what saved her life (her entire family was killed), it is clear that this act is still perceived by her, on some very deep level, as abandonment by her parents.

Having looked at these four salient themes that appeared in the interviews and testimonies, it is now time to take a look at how the survivors' understanding of parenthood, based on their experiences during the Holocaust, might have influenced the kinds of parents they were to their own children. Most of the testimonies from Yad Vashem did not include references to parenting after the war. In the following section, we will bring examples from the Yad Vashem interviews and from interviews carried out with survivors at Ben Gurion University, in which they speak about their post-war understandings of parenthood.

Parenting After the Holocaust

The post-war physical and social recovery of most of the Holocaust survivors was remarkable, though only a few of them came out of the Holocaust with most of their family members alive. Within five years, hundreds of thousands of survivors, many of whom were gathered in DP camps in Germany between 1945-1948, immigrated to Israel⁶, the United States, England, Canada, Australia and other countries to make new lives for themselves. This fast physical, economic and social recovery was motivated by a strong wish to "normalize life" after the traumatic period they suffered in the ghettos, camps or in hiding while under the constant threat of annihilation. Survivors married,

⁶ - During the first years after the Second World War, Israeli commissions gathered the survivors in Europe and brought them by ship illegally to Mandatory Palestine (Gutman, 1990). Most of these boats were caught by the British who transferred them forcefully to camps in Cyprus. The survivors finally arrived in Israel only after the state was established on May 15, 1948.

had children, went to work and tried to prove to themselves and others that they succeeded in returning to normalcy (Bar-On, 1995).

Two major social trends can be identified. Many survivors developed their own communities, in which they lived mostly among other survivors, while others tried to assimilate into the new culture, almost hiding their previous identity as survivors of the Holocaust. Even in our university seminars⁷ in the eighties, these trends could be identified in the following examples. At the first meeting, one of our students said that his parents were Holocaust survivors, but for him this was “normal.” He recalled that it was only when he entered high school and had a chance to visit his new friends’ homes outside of his neighborhood, that he realized that one could open the curtains in the living room. Across from him sat a student who said: “I am a second generation Holocaust survivor. I do not believe that such an identity exists. I came to listen to what you are talking about.”

Parenting *after* the Holocaust was affected by the survivors’ motivations to normalize life and by external social alienation and distancing (Bar-On, 1995). These two processes created what is known today as the “conspiracy of silence” (Danieli, 1980) or the “double wall” phenomena (Bar-On, 1995). Often, children of Holocaust survivors could not make sense of what was behind this silencing wall. In addition, many of them grew up without grandparents or extended families. We hear in the children’s story-telling how they had to create family members in their imagination in order to develop a more relaxed sense of family life or parenthood (Gutfreund, 2000). In our understandings of parenthood after the Holocaust, that were based on analyses from our interviews, we found many signs of emotional hardships that represent what survivors went through during the Holocaust but did not succeed in working through. We will examine how some of the survivors and their descendants talked about the kinds of parents they were, and how they relate these post-war behaviors to the Holocaust experiences. Whereas in the first section we concentrated on the child-survivors’ stories, here we will look

⁷ - For 10 years we gave a year-long seminar at Ben Gurion University on the psychosocial effects of the Holocaust on second and third generations. In the seminar students interviewed survivors and their descendants and we analyze the transcribed interviews during the seminar.

at interviews with their descendants as well. We will ask to what extent did the interviews and testimonies provide new insights for our understanding of parenting in the shadow of the Holocaust?

Difficulty for survivor-parents to be available to their children's emotional needs

As was reported earlier in the review of the clinical literature, this is an issue that was often raised by survivor-parents in their interviews. For example, there is the case of Dov, mentioned above, whose testimony lends support to the findings concerning survivor-parents inability to be emotionally sensitive to their children. As Dov notes, he has difficulty being sensitive to his children, after having experienced his mother's insensitivity to his emotional needs during the war ("*...I believe that I am cruel, I lose sensitivity, you go through a childhood that is not so nice ...there's no doubt that it's the wrong response... you have to be a soft man who gives kisses and hugs, I don't know how to do that..."*).

In contrast, when we examine Anat's life story, we can conjecture that her wartime experiences with her mother contributed to her sensitivity to her own children's needs and emotions. This sensitivity, however, is mixed with her awareness of her difficulty at sometimes separating her own emotions and needs from those of her daughter's. As Anat told us:

"...my daughter...(who) is generally a very gentle and considerate child ...sometimes has the need to rebel ...at that moment I feel like...a rejected and pathetic ...child whose mother is leaving and may not return...that is something that I ... don't succeed in controlling...(my) voice saying "Stop ...this is your daughter who is growing up and needs to get angry...Accept her as she is." And I don't succeed! All of the soul searching didn't help me ... I truly feel that I am incapable of bearing their anger and the feeling that they want to break away...because ...at that moment ... everything gets turned upside down! ... instead of me being the parent, I become the child that they want to leave..."

While we do not have corroborating evidence from Dov or Anat's children, we can turn to interviews with other families, and see how survivors and their descendants talked about their sensitivity to one another. One good example comes from Neta, a second-generation woman. Neta's mother, whose first husband was drafted into the Red Army and killed in battle, escaped with her baby daughter from Lvov into the USSR. Neta's father also suffered traumatic experiences - the Germans killed his first wife and baby as he hid in a nearby forest. While Neta perceived her mother as being a supportive, nurturing and caring parent, she presented her father as a man who was incapable of providing his daughter with her emotional needs. Neta told us:

"...(my mother) really got over it...she's a more optimistic type of person, full of life's joy. She took charge of her life, she went to work ...she would take us to movies, to plays. She is so full of life! And she didn't talk about it so much...She said: 'I won't mourn my entire life, I will begin my life all over.' And he (father) did mourn his entire life. He barely talked to us ..she was the one with initiative to enjoy herself and to live. He was steeped in the past ..."

Neta placed her parents into two categories – her mother who decided that she wouldn't "mourn her entire life" and her father who was "steeped in the past". She connected her mother's joy to the love and warmth that she felt as a child and to the belief that her mother "got over" the past. At the same time, she saw her father's retreat into his inner world as reflecting his inability to come out of the past, and as a result, made him unavailable to her as a father. It is interesting to note that the intergenerational transmission of this combination of closeness and retreat has been manifested in Neta. Evidence of this transmission comes from the two interviews undertaken with Amnon, Neta's son, when he was sixteen years old and when he was twenty-five. While on the one hand, Amnon stressed that he could always have heart-to-heart talks with his mother, he was also acutely aware of the ever-present pain that is always close to the surface. On this point, Amnon says:

“...my mother felt...that she has to carry the pain of the entire family on her shoulders ...even when she’s happy, she has to remember that grandma ...had a hard time ...she has to remember that most of the family was killed in the Holocaust ...there ‘s always ... trauma in the back of the head...she felt that she had to hold the family together, and that’s why we are also closer (to her side of the family) ...my mother...part of...life is the part of suffering...”

A final example of emotional availability to one’s descendants, and its reverberations in successive generations comes from the Yad Vashem interview undertaken with Naomi, a child survivor from Warsaw. Naomi was the only person to survive her family that included her parents and younger brother. Her testimony, which contained many early detailed emotional memories of her relationship with her mother, also contained many traumatic recollections of being hidden behind a closet with a Christian family that barely fed her and rarely talked to her for over a year. After settling in Israel and getting married, Naomi had three children. Naomi describes her relationship with her first child, Michelle:

“...when I began being a mother, it was very hard for me to think about my childhood. When I saw Michelle, at ages 5, 6, 7, she was wonderful and an active child, full of energy...I had hate attacks...I think that I needed psychological help when I was a mother...I did things that I don’t understand, due to the terrible anxiety over them...and the anxiety closed out the possibility of being soft...today I am so sorry about that...I had no model of how one behaves at home...I didn’t see how it is to be a mother...I began reading and working on myself...”

From these and other examples, we can see that the ability to give oneself emotionally to one’s child was a long-term and difficult process that demanded many years of dealing with and reflecting on the past. While many survivors became parents themselves at young ages, in order to rebuild a semblance of family life, they faced two obstacles. Not only did they, as young adults, have the “usual” problems of learning what it means to be a nurturing

parent, but they had the further burden of performing this function successfully while still being immersed in their own recent family traumas. In our opinion, the interviews and testimonies that we reviewed add the importance of the time-perspective factor. That is, as the survivors became older, and in some cases, grandparents, they exhibited the ability to openly reflect on their past “mistakes” (Bar-On, 1995; Chaitin, 2000a).

Communication patterns and their effect on the second generation

Here we will provide a few examples of different styles of communication that, in our opinion, often led to a deeper understanding of the past, in spite of the problems that these patterns often caused. We will begin with Fanny, a child survivor from the Ukraine who gave testimony at Yad Vashem in 1995. Fanny experienced the death of her mother when she was a child and great disappointment in her father who abandoned her during their escape into the forest during the Holocaust in order to save himself. As a result of these events, according to Fanny, she grew up without the knowledge of what it meant to be a parent. When Fanny had children of her own, she told them about her wartime experiences. She states:

“...when my children were young, I was very young, I ...had very little in terms of a background that boasted literature or education. I remember that I would tell them my forest stories...like the Grimm fairy tales...I never thought that they would take it so personally. In hindsight, I understood years later that I burdened them with a burden that was too difficult to bear...I think that I transmitted a lot to my children. I hope not too much pain. But I think that I also transmitted the good within me and not just the hate and the anger...”

From this example, it appears as if Fanny, who herself was burdened with a “burden that was too difficult to bear” – the early death of her mother and desertion of her father – communicated her traumas to her own children. We assume that, in part, her style of communication to her children was a reflection of the communication patterns that had characterized her family of origin. Without parents who could help her deal with her fears (and indeed,

her father even added to them), as a young mother Fanny passed on her fears and anger to her own children. It was only many years later that she was able to see that her “story telling” was too much for her children to bear.

A second example comes from the Yad Vashem testimony with Aliza, a survivor from Czechoslovakia. Aliza, who spent most of the war in an orphanage, separated from her mother and step-father, presents herself as someone who is full of fears and who had communicated these fears to her own children. From her testimony, we get the impression that she believed that she began communicating these fears to her children, even when she was pregnant with them, and that her daughters also passed on these fears to their own babies. Examples of this come from Aliza’s remarks concerning her travel to the hospital to give birth, during a Syrian air raid:

“... I became hysterical...the Israelis didn’t understand my hysterics and reactions since not much has been written about us, we who spent the years of our youth under indescribable conditions and ended up without parents or family...”

Later on, when she talks about her relationship with her three daughters, she adds:

“...I believed that I had not passed on to them my fears, but they say that I have, we talked a lot about that time...my mother used to speak to the...girls in more detail, when my daughters had children of their own, their fears became stronger, my oldest was afraid she would lose her baby, the middle girl was over anxious with her children, the youngest went for psychological help...”

A third example of the effect that excessive talk about the past had on children of survivors comes from the interview with Neta. When Neta talks about her father’s non-stop reminiscing, one hears the pain in her voice and gets a feeling for the all-pervasive effect that it had on her life.

"...every morning, I would get up, I would hear his stories. He would tell stories every morning before work... I didn't have a quiet morning! ... it's impossible to listen to the stories, it's depressing. I began coping with it then, to say: 'Why does this happen to me?' 'Why do other people have better mornings?' You know, sometimes, when you have a good morning, the whole day goes well. And I always had bad mornings! I ...didn't even have an appetite for food. .. I didn't want to eat...I think that's the reason that I didn't have an appetite... I would put the pillows over my ears in order not to hear him. .. I understood everything that he said, and I couldn't not listen. And when he went to work! I was so happy that it was ... quiet ...I felt... a little bit different than other people,...it's very hard for me to analyze it...what exactly bothered me...because, from the social aspect, I had good...friends...they didn't see that I was different, but I often felt that I was a bit different inside..."

As has been noted, however, many survivor-parents chose not to talk about their Holocaust experiences, preferring to keep the burdens of the past to themselves. How does evidence of this silence reflect ideas of parenthood after the war? One example comes from the Yad Vashem testimony with Vered, a child survivor from Holland. From the young age of 11, Vered was on her own, hidden by Dutch farmers, after her parents and younger brother were *"...sent to Sobibor and...immediately taken to the gas chambers. At least they didn't have to suffer beforehand..."* From the interview, one gets the impression that Vered felt that she never had the opportunity to be a "normal child", since she always had to be on best behavior in order to avoid being turned out by the families who were keeping her. At the end of the interview, Vered talks about her silence about the past:

"...I hardly ever talked about the past. I answered questions, if I was asked. If my children asked about the war, I told them, but we...spoke very little about it...I don't think that I brought my children up any differently (than non-survivors). I made the same mistakes, not too many I hope, as other mothers..."

It appears as if Vered tried very hard to give her daughters the “normal” childhood that she missed out on. She believed that by not talking about her past, unless specifically asked, she would make the “*same mistakes...as other mothers...*” Whether or not she succeeded, we can only conjecture.

The interview with Naomi provides a final example of how some silence, mixed with non-verbal messages and hysterical responses to behavior had a complex effect on the relationship between her and her children. While she wanted more children, her husband, an Auschwitz survivor, convinced her not to, since:

“...my husband said that I am crazy enough with three, I was a terrible mother, nervous, I was under stress, because I didn’t want to give up my job...and I would come home to three wild children ... (although we talked about the war) my kids weren’t too interested in hearing...each one responded differently...Michelle...we didn’t talk about it too much then...we didn’t want to burden them, but she knows who she’s named after...Roni...is a kind person who is deep and is very interested...I asked him: Roni, what do you want for your bar-mitzvah, a trip, a present?...he asked to invite his close friends to a trip to Jerusalem and I got goose bumps from this, he wants to go to Yad Vashem and to find the names of his grandparents. We made a happy camp fire, we put the kids into a truck...I don’t know why, but we didn’t get to Yad Vashem...we didn’t want to...we tried to help them forget, we didn’t want to expose the children to all those terrible things...”

As can be seen, the impact of talking or keeping silent about the Holocaust did not always have a predictable effect on the successive generations. We would like to suggest here that the complex patterns of communication, which were, of course, always accompanied by many other behaviors, could both distance a parent from his or her child, yet also bring about a closeness, not only to the parent, but to the past as well. In our opinion, while there is no doubt that these mixed messages were associated with the transmission of some of the trauma to the younger generations, they

also appeared to have infused many of the younger generation with a desire to learn more about their family past.

Transmission of aggression and/or distrust of the external environment to their children

While we came across almost no examples of displaced aggression to non-family members in our analyses of the interviews and testimonies, we did find evidence of transmission of distrust of the external environment. An example of such a transmission comes through in interviews undertaken at Ben-Gurion University with Chava and her children (Chaitin, 2000a). Chava, who came from a small town in Poland, escaped from a ghetto with her younger brother, joined the partisans and (miraculously) met up with her husband (whom she had married at the onset of the war) when she escaped into the Soviet Union. After the war, Chava learned that her family that she left behind was killed in an *Aktion*. According to her son, Grisha, who was born in 1943, and her granddaughter, Einav (born in 1972), Chava often stressed the belief that non-family members were not to be trusted, and this was especially true of the Germans and the Poles. For example, as Grisha notes, he did not go to Germany for many years, due to his mother's hatred of anything German. However, after the Six-Day War, when Germany sent military aid to Israel, Grisha changed his mind:

“..you need to separate what happened in the past from the present, you don't have to punish a country. I changed my mind and I looked at what was happening with the rest of the countries during that period. France, for example, didn't help Israel and Germany did. I said it isn't rational, there is no point to boycott Germany over what they did in the past. Now they are helping Israel...and afterward I visited Germany a number of times...when I went there, I didn't have a problem interacting with the young people, but I definitely had the feeling when I looked at the older people then, I always said to myself, it's interesting what they did... during the period of the Holocaust...”

While Grisha no longer has a distrust of all German people, he makes it a point *not* to inform his mother when he travels to Germany, in order not to upset her. In a similar manner, his daughter, Einav, who participated in an Israeli-German student exchange group, told her grandmother that she was going for a two-week vacation to France and even had a friend mail Chava a postcard from Paris. As Einav stated in her interview: *“...I knew that it would destroy her, so I went to Paris instead of to Hamburg...”*

In the interview with Fanny, the survivor from the Ukraine mentioned above, however, the transmission of distrust of the Germans appears to have passed from mother to son without changing form. Fanny talks about her son who has been a security guard on El Al planes for many years. As she states: *“...he told me that when he gets to Germany...I remain on the plane, just to be safe, not because I’m afraid of them, but because I’m afraid what I might do to them...”* In this short passage, we also have a sign of displaced aggression onto “Germans”, which appears to be a direct result of Fanny’s Holocaust experiences.

In the interviews undertaken with Tom and his 24 year-old daughter Ganit, second and third generations of Auschwitz survivors, the theme of distrust in non-family members is quite salient (Chaitin, 2000a). Although Tom’s mother, Rebecca, has never agreed to be interviewed (and his father died when Ganit was three years old), we can gain some insight into her perspective of strangers via the interviews done with Tom and Ganit. This father and daughter make numerous references to Rebecca’s distrust in anyone, Jewish or German, Israeli or not, that does not belong to their family. For example, Tom said:

“...they are suspicious of those around them. I don’t know if this is something that belongs to the Diaspora or to the Holocaust. ...If somebody that my mother doesn’t know will come ask her for something, she won’t relate. Of course, if her son or grandchildren come ask, she will give everything, but to just anybody, she is suspicious of everyone. She checks out everything, even the simplest things she needs to know and see...”

Even though Ganit gave her own separate interview, she makes a similar reference to her grandmother. When she talks about how her grandmother reacts to getting a letter in the mail, she noted:

“...when she gets a letter, she gets all hysterical. Who’s writing to me? What do they want? I tell her that it’s just an advertisement for a musical evening...but why is she writing to me? Does she think I can go? I can’t go. What does she want from me...?”

While Rebecca’s reactions to strangers appear extreme to both Ganit and her father, in their interviews as well there is a hint that this distrust has been transmitted to them, at least to some degree. For example, when Ganit talks about the acceptance procedure for graduate school, she states that she does not believe that people get in on merit alone, but rather depending on “whom they know”. In other places in the interview, when Ganit talks about the relationship between her parents, the children and Rebecca, Ganit mentions that family members tend to keep secrets from one another, ostensibly, to protect one another. Based on the salience of this theme in this family, we would like to set forth the conjecture that Rebecca’s descendants may have trouble putting their trust into others in general, even if it is more pronounced with outsiders. However, since up to now Rebecca has refused to give an interview (perhaps another sign of distrust in strangers?), this hypothesis must be viewed with caution.

Based on these examples, it appears as if distrust of non-family members, and especially Germans, continues to be a theme found in interviews with survivors and their descendants. While some of this distrust has been transmitted from generation to generation, in some cases, the younger generations see this distrust as belonging to the past and, as a result, do not appear to show extreme signs of distrust as have been uncovered in the more clinical-based literature.

A tendency for survivor-parents to be over-involved and over-anxious concerning their children’s lives

This is the final theme that has often been documented in research with survivor-parents. In the frame of decontextualized psychodynamic approach, one could interpret these themes as a kind of “abnormal” behavior of parenting after the Holocaust. However, when these behaviors take into account the experiences that the parents had during the Holocaust, they can be interpreted as a “normal” delayed reaction to an abnormal situation. This is how our historically contextualized psychodynamic approach would view and interpret such behaviors.

When we examined our collection of interviews, we found that for many of the children of survivors, over-involvement and over-anxiousness in their lives was part of their daily routine. We will present here two family examples – one from Chava’s family and one from Senna’s (an Auschwitz survivor).

Chava, who is aware of her high level of anxiety concerning her children, expresses in her interview the belief that she is incapable of doing anything about it. Chava talks in one breath about how her love appeared to be suffocating her son, Grisha, and about her constant worries and her nightmares. Chava says:

“...Grisha made us have another child because he didn’t want to be alone....he felt that we were stalking him and that’s why he wanted a brother. You can’t describe what he got from us., what warmth and love. But it must have been too much and because of that he asked for a sibling...I have a wonderful family, with wonderful grandchildren, excellent son and daughter and I have a lot of comfort. That’s our reparation for the hard years that we had ...but ...I am frightened of my shadow and I really suffer. For my whole life I have been jealous of those who have brothers (she cries)...there isn’t a night that I don’t dream the Germans...are killing me, stalking me, I’m impatient. I have a lot of illnesses. I need to say Thank you God (she is crying).”

Noa, Chava’s daughter who was born in Israel, also reflected this over-anxiousness in her own interview. According to her, she has often felt the pressure put upon her by her parents, and especially by her mother, to live up

to their expectations and to be “the perfect daughter”. Noa repeatedly talked about the importance of arranging her life around her parents’ needs, behavior that has added no small amount of anxiety to Noa’s life as well:

“..today I try to do as much as I can for them. I really try. They eat here at least once a week and if I tell you how many times a day I talk to her on the phone, you won’t believe it. At 7:30, when I get to work, at 9, 11:30, at 4 and at 8 in the evening. If I, god forbid, am ten minutes late, she (mother) starts going crazy. The problem starts when I go abroad. And that costs me a lot. The last time that we were abroad, she almost fainted when I called. She (imagined) seeing Rami (her husband) on the...news squished on the road ...There’s nothing to be done. You need to understand her...”

The second example comes from the interviews that were carried out with members of the Rosenberg family (Chaitin, 2000a). As Emda (second - generation) and Felice (third generation) note, much of their lives revolve around Senna’s needs and moods. Senna, who lost her entire family during the war, barely lived through Auschwitz. Like Chava, Senna is also aware of her over-involvement and over-anxiousness in her children’s lives. While she, too, does not believe that she is capable of change, she does state that her behavior was not always in the best interest of her descendants. Throughout her interview, Senna never made one negative remark about her children, emphasizing how they are her sole reason for living.

“...(after everything) ...there is also...a ray (of light) ... I look at my daughter, when I look at my grandchildren then you say ‘here, after everything, you achieved something in your life, you achieved something, because in Auschwitz, with those troubles, when you wanted to commit suicide already’, I didn’t think that I was capable of having healthy children, because I was skin and bones, but here, it’s a fact that the children are well educated, each one in his field, she is a school counselor...my beautiful daughter ... and the granddaughter that I love the most is studying in the university and she is

going to be a psychologist...whatever she will be, she is my treasure for ever until eternity..."

There is no doubt that Emda and Felice feel the all-encompassing love bestowed upon them by their mother/grandmother. And while it makes them feel special, they are often frustrated that they are called upon to arrange their lives to meet Senna's needs. Emda tells us about the anger she felt during her childhood:

"...I suffered ...from spastic bronchitis, so, they forbade me to jump (rope) or to play...because afterwards I would have a very strong coughing attack...I liked to...run in the...sand dunes that surrounded the neighborhood, we would climb up and roll down...When I would come home I was very red from the exertion and after that I would have a coughing attack as well...my parents forbade me to jump rope, to play and to run. Don't run, don't roll, and there was a lot of anger about this...it made me feel very pressured, because...if I was playing outside and I knew that my father was coming back from work, I didn't want him to see me jumping rope. I guess that all of the worry and the fear and all of the anxiety was over a daughter that was born after the terrible tragedy...that they both experienced..."

While Emda learned to understand and accept her parents when she was older, she chose to raise her daughter in a very different atmosphere, one of almost complete freedom. When Felice, Senna's granddaughter, talks about her grandmother, the love and understanding are also mixed with hints of anger that she feels toward Senna when she has to change her plans to suit her. For example, when Felice was on a trip to the Far East, Senna had a stroke. As a result, Felice cut her trip short to come back home to be with her grandmother. While she felt relief that her grandmother was doing better, this relief was mixed with anger at her for "suggesting" that Felice's trip had caused the stress which brought on the stroke.

"...I really wanted to continue traveling, I was really enjoying myself...I ... was managing...and (after I heard about the stroke) I decided that I was coming back ...and I had it very ...hard to decide, it was very sad for me... and we came back and my grandma ...had a period that was hard, but now she's fine, and I think that I was angry, it was uncontrolled, I didn't want to get angry with her...she didn't blame me, but she said that she wanted God to kill her and that was the reason that she got the stroke, so I can't leave...my grandmother doesn't want us to leave...and I know that that's the way it is....it's very hard to think about, but ...in an indirect way, I caused her stroke, because I wanted to have a trip..."

As has been seen, for many of the survivors, over-involvement and anxiety concerning one's children appears to continue to reverberate for many years, even, at times, reaching the third generation. In our opinion, this over-involvement could have caused difficult separation problems in some cases. There is, however, evidence that once the younger generations were able to understand its source and to deal with it, they could also openly express their anger or frustration, at least in some degree, thereby reducing its on-going negative effects.

A Final Note

This paper summarized the analyses of approximately 100 testimonies and interviews with Holocaust survivors. We see its main contribution in its identification of the themes related to the stories that survivors tell about their relationships with their parents *during* the Holocaust, that have not been identified as such until today. The main themes that we identified were:

- 1) The potential for emotional memory;
- 2) The salience of the family and the focus on caring for each other or failing to do so;
- 3) Idealization of the parents or family unit;
- 4) "Parental mistakes" - The difficulties in understanding parental decisions that were made during the Holocaust.

In our opinion, these themes can be understood as types of *preservation mechanisms* that helped the survivors preserve the memories of their families, families which were so brutally threatened, attacked, and destroyed during the Holocaust. In addition, these themes help us understand the ways in which the survivors construct their sense of self, as children, and later on as parents themselves, and how they construct their sense of parenthood, as they recall and narrate stories from their traumatic family past.

In this study, we also analyzed more than 50 interviews with members of the second and third generation of Holocaust survivors. We identified the following themes related to parenthood *after* the Holocaust:

- 1) Difficulty for survivor-parents to be available to their children's emotional needs;
- 2) Communication patterns and their effect on the second generation;
- 3) Transmission of aggression and/or distrust of the external environment to their children;
- 4) A tendency for survivor-parents to be over-involved and over-anxious concerning their children's lives.

While this list of themes does not present a new trend – these motifs often appear in the clinical psychological literature of descendants of survivors - we approached it here from a different, more historically contextualized interpretation. We suggest that, after the Holocaust, when the finality of the catastrophe became apparent, it was often very hard for survivors to reestablish a sense of parenthood. This is because their own childhood family experiences were so outside modern-day Western psychological ideas concerning “normal childhood” – whether the survivors lived through most of the war with loved ones, or whether they went through most of it on their own. As a result, when the Holocaust victims became parents, they often had only their own sad and traumatic Holocaust experiences, upon which to draw for guidance. Given that their parenting took place in a completely different social, cultural and political context – that of Israel during the fifties, sixties and seventies - it is not surprising that the victims often realize, and are able to talk about the fact, that they had trouble being “normal” parents.

When looking at interviews with the third generation, one does find some evidence of change in the perceptions of a number of the survivors concerning their ability to be parents and grandparents. That is, many of the survivors were able to (re)establish their sense of parenthood, to some extent, when they saw that their sons and daughters had children of their own and when the grandparents established close and warm relationships with them (Bar-On, 1995). However, even this change was not exclusive; as recently as the late nineties, some of the members of the third generation expressed similar problems to those that confront their parents (Chaitin, 2000b).

Our analyses did not include examination of diaries and letters of survivors or victims that could shed additional light on the concept of parenthood,⁸ nor did we make any attempts to statistically prove our claims. What we did do, however, was to create an initial global map from which one could go on with further research. For example, one could start to test specific hypotheses by asking the following questions: Do grandchildren, whose grandparent-survivors have more emotional memories (connected to a parental figure during the Holocaust), deal with the past differently than grandchildren of grandparents who do not have such emotional memories? What happened to the offspring of families in which parenthood collapsed during the Holocaust, like in the case of Brigitte? We can also now look at specific settings where parenthood was probably practiced or perceived differently (e.g. a specific ghetto; an extended family who survived the camps, families in which there were members who fled to Russia, and survived there; religious versus non-religious factions of the same family etc).

As we listened to the survivors' voices through their interviews, we became aware of our growing admiration for what many of the individuals, who were parents during the Holocaust, appear to have succeeded in passing on to their children. While there is no way of "proving" that what the child-survivors told us actually happened during the Holocaust (nor did we set out to do so),

⁸ - One should, however, be aware that each additional source provides different insights as people may express one aspect of their family life in their diaries, another one in their letters to family members and a third in their testimonies and interviews that usually took place years later. However, a cross-examination of these sources should be of value and is worthwhile examining in future research.

through the children's reconstructions of their past, we learned that the parents often transmitted a sense of parenthood to their children, as they lived through the trauma.

However, we did not fool ourselves into thinking that there were no problems. For, in these voices, we also heard fearful stories of aggression and cruelty of parents to their children (and vice versa) that happened before, during and sadly after the Holocaust as well. When we came across instances in which the children-survivors appeared to be glorifying their relationship with their parents, we understood this to be a kind of post-hoc corrective effort that demonstrated how the concept of parenthood served as an anchor that the child-survivors clung to as they rebuilt their life after the Holocaust.

Studying the aspects of construction of parenthood both during and after the Holocaust leads to many complex issues and new questions. As we noted in the introduction, based on the present state of research, it would be presumptuous of us to claim that we have represented the full magnitude of the complexities of these issues. However, it is our hope that this paper can provide a "first chapter" into the understanding of the essence of parenthood during the Holocaust and its aftereffects so many years later. We believe that by conducting further analysis of interviews and testimonies with survivors and descendants of survivors, as well as reading their diaries and letters, we will be able to attain a fuller picture and to arrange the themes that we pinpointed here into a comprehensive theoretical framework. We hope that such a historically and socially contextualized psychodynamic perspective will also be of use for scholars and clinicians that are engaged in the study of other instances of prolonged social trauma, in which individuals act cruelly and inhumanely to others.

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