

Finding Humanity: An Art Therapist's Inquiry into the Art and Artists of the Holocaust

by

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Finding Humanity: An Art Therapist's Inquiry into the Art and Artists of the Holocaust

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Abstract

This article style dissertation is an art therapist's investigation into the art and artists of the Holocaust. The three articles it contains appear in the chronological order of the author's inquiry: first theory, followed by research and, lastly, implications for practice. The author defines the art of the Holocaust as a unique phenomenon of interest, emphasizing its abundance and detailing the content of the work, then makes thematic connections to art therapy theories, concluding that the art of the Holocaust resonates with humanistic approaches to art therapy. The research study comprised a phenomenological inquiry into the experience of creating artwork during the Holocaust, applying Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological analysis to reach a collective description of the phenomenon. Five participants—four survivors of the Holocaust and one child of a Holocaust survivor—were interviewed and provided a narrative account of their art making while interned in camps or ghettos. The study results suggest that making art was both purposeful and beneficial to the artists. Specifically, art making served the purposes of providing a witness, leaving a legacy, and retaining a sense of humanity. Benefits included reinforcement of a non-prisoner identity, affirmation of existence, sense of hope, feelings of safety, and an ability to develop or embody relationships. The themes that arose in this study can be used to guide clients in art therapy practice within the existential philosophy of logotherapy, which emphasizes meaning making to facilitate healing and personal growth.

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Dedication

In memory of Halina Olomucki, whom I wish I could have met.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

A panel discussion at the 2016 annual conference of the American Art Therapy Association titled “Art Therapy in the Real World” (Betts, Duncan, Kalmanowitz, McGuire, & Rosner David, 2016) discussed a broad application of art therapy pedagogy. The panelists described the ways that they utilize their art therapy training to reach the needs of people in typically nontherapy settings, including refugee camps and military hospitals, and explained how they have applied what they learned in the classroom as graduate students to their work in “the real world.” Listening to this panel, I thought of my doctoral research on artwork from the Holocaust and considered how I had approached things differently than the panelists described. Rather than apply art therapy theories to nontraditional settings, I sought to learn from a nontherapy setting to inform my art therapy practice. By studying the organic and instinctive process of art making within an extreme situation, I hoped to ascertain what such artists gained from creating and apply these benefits to art therapy practice.

The atrocities of the Holocaust are widely documented. Survivors, oppressors, and liberation troops alike have testified to the sequence of events in 20th century Europe that led to the murder of six million Jews and millions of others from marginalized populations whose only crime was not fitting the Nazi ideal. The remnants of Nazi ghettos and concentration camps can be toured today, further corroborating testimonies regarding the horrific conditions. However, awareness of the artwork created by those oppressed during this time of genocide is limited, even to those who lived through the Holocaust. This body of artwork offers unique insights into the experience of the era.

May (1975) explained, “If you wish to understand the psychological and spiritual temper of any historical period, you can do no better than to look long and searchingly at its art” (p. 52). In this vein, art historians and educators have adopted the term *visual culture* to shift the emphasis of artwork from the aesthetic to the historical context and call attention to the potential meaning of artwork within a particular time period (Cherry, 2004).

Artwork created during the Holocaust by those who were targeted by Nazi persecution is an example of visual culture. The artworks’ primary significance is the context within which they were created and the insight they provide into their creators’ psychological experience.

Gussak (2004), an art therapist and educator who is well versed on the Holocaust, recognized this work as visual culture upon visiting the Terezín memorial. He described the experience of viewing Holocaust artwork as an awakening, asserting that it may be more informative than any other resources meant to convey the reality of that history. In many ways Gussak’s deepened understanding, which he gained by viewing this artwork, parallels the practice of art therapy. As an art therapist, I can read clients’ charts and understand their immediate needs for seeking treatment; however, the artwork that they create in our sessions allows me to see more of the individual behind the symptoms that individual may present. Artwork made in art therapy sessions evokes the humanness of my clients. Kramer (1998) described art therapy as giving form to experience. When looking at and discussing clients’ artwork, I have a concrete depiction of the intangible and subjective experiences they choose to express. I catch a glimpse of their strengths, passions, fears, and all the other idiosyncrasies that make them unique. And with this

information, I can appreciate and approach them as individuals rather than as an esoteric cluster of symptoms.

I believe that it would not be appropriate to equate the struggles that many contemporary art therapy consumers encounter to the years of torture endured by people during the Holocaust. What I posit instead is that art therapists can gain knowledge from the phenomenon of art making that occurred during the Holocaust to inform our theories and practice. Understanding Holocaust artists' drive to create art may help us to better address the fundamental concerns of existence that our clients face. After all, in drawing, painting, sculpting, and collaging, Holocaust artists gave a form to unimaginable experiences. The places associated with the Holocaust (e.g., cattle cars functioning as transport, barracks, and gas chambers) are among the bleakest environments ever documented in modern history. And yet, in that darkness, some found light. Their art gave "soul to a soulless place" (Gussak, 2004, p. 159) and allowed them to retain their humanity. In viewing their art, we can appreciate it not simply as a means of documentation, but as proof of the individual's existence (Leclerc, 2011) within the masses of loss and catastrophic world events.

My knowledge of artwork from the Holocaust has guided my practice as an art therapist. I visited the Terezín memorial months before I began pursuing my master's degree in art therapy. The artwork I saw on display immediately resonated with my interest in art therapy. I learned more about the artwork created by those targeted by the Nazi regime across Europe and began to draw parallels between different artists, in varying settings. Alfred Kantor's description (1971) of his need to draw remained the same throughout his internment in five separate locations, and his experience appeared to

be consistent with the testimonials of other survivors. This insight led me to view the idea of art making during the Holocaust as a unique phenomenon of interest. Each testimonial I read had a similar feel. They all suggested a universally experienced benefit to making art while incarcerated.

I was struck by the juxtaposition of construction in the most destructive of environments and felt that the Holocaust art phenomenon could elucidate certain benefits we see as well in art therapy. The creative impulse seemed to have awakened an increased desire to not just exist, but live, and I wondered if art therapists could do the same to support their clients' in need. However, it seems that few art therapists are familiar with the breadth of the body of Holocaust art that was produced. Although this work has been the subject of scholars in art history and culture studies, there is very little art therapy literature on the topic. Art therapy scholarship is limited to the study of specific artists to illustrate the function of witness (Leclerc, 2011), the legacy of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis in particular (Kramer, 2000; Makarova, 2001; Wix, 2003, 2009), and Gussak's (2004) description of his experience viewing artwork at the Terezín memorial. I want my contribution to this literature to be centered on the testimony of actual surviving artists. I wanted to hear their stories firsthand to better understand why they chose to make art and their experience of creating it, and to draw insights from them to those of my profession. Their work highlights the act of creativity as a life-giving response in the midst of genocide. I wanted to speak directly with those who had chosen to engage creatively, some at the risk of their own life.

I implicitly felt that the phenomenon of Holocaust art exemplified Frankl's (1946/1973) assertion that meaning making is paramount to human existence. By

searching within, despite a world of uncertainty, these artists found motivation to continue living. To validate this notion, and to delve into the lived experience of the artists, I began a phenomenological inquiry into the experience of art making during the Holocaust.

I believe that it is beneficial for art therapists to access resources outside of the professional paradigm of art therapy to help understand, hear, and respond to their clients' existential concerns. It goes without saying that the art created in the camps and ghettos of the Holocaust wasn't made to ameliorate psychiatric symptoms or achieve clinical goals or competencies. Instead, it appears to have been made in an attempt to strengthen the humanity of the artist. Making art allowed these artists to be seen and heard, to prove that they were sentient beings who had hopes and fears, the capacity to love, benevolence, and dignity, regardless of the oppressive circumstances in which they lived. In essence, making art allowed the artists of the Holocaust to resist systematic dehumanization by their Nazi captors (Leclerc, 2011).

My research is an investigation of the narrative accounts of art making that had occurred in an extreme historical moment, when existence was "provisional without limit" (Frankl, 1946/1973, p. 98). Artwork from the Holocaust documents how art making affirmed the artist's existence when that existence was extremely tenuous. The inquiry had two goals: to honor these artists by sharing their stories and helping their legacy live on and to uncover how art making supported them in the face of extreme adversity, so that I could guide my clients in navigating their own struggles.

This article-style dissertation presents my research in the form of three manuscripts organized as theory, research, and practice. In Chapter 2, comprised of the

first manuscript, I introduce the reader to Holocaust art as a phenomenon of interest and theorize, based on my review of relevant literature, why people may have created art during the Holocaust as relevant to art therapy practice. I categorize the artwork found in this discourse thematically based on content and explain why this artwork is relevant to art therapy.

Chapter 3 details the phenomenological research study. The qualitative interviews I conducted with Holocaust survivors Samuel Bak, Yehuda Bacon, Frederick Terna, and Judy Jacobs, and Miriam Alon, the daughter of Holocaust survivor Halina Olomuski produced data that were analyzed using Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological-psychological method to uncover the essence of the artists' experience. The results are that art making provided these artists with a sense of comfort and hope while reinforcing their sense of identity. The art-making process also allowed the artists to retain a sense of their humanity, affirm their existence, and serve as a witness.

Chapter 4 presents a manuscript with case vignettes to illustrate how this research has been applied to and has impacted my practice. I connect the research to the logotherapeutic concept of a spiritual dimension—the uniquely human aspect of individuals that, according to Frankl (1967), can remain intact regardless of external factors. I also describe how I have incorporated a logotherapeutic technique into my clinical work to support my clients' spiritual dimensions.

Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by summarizing each manuscript and linking the research study to the overarching theme of humanity. The term *humanity* in this regard refers to uniquely human qualities, including compassion, empathy, creativity, imagination, ambition, humor, and faith, as well as the ability to identify a sense of

meaning in one's life. I assert that art making supported Holocaust artists to maintain their sense of humanity, which is a principle that can therefore be applied to art therapy to support clients in their own struggles. I elaborate on how the phenomenological attitude has impacted my work with clients in recognizing their humanity.

Chapter 5 also provides a discussion of my original goals and how this research allowed me to achieve them. As I had initially identified, I was able to honor the artists I met by sharing their stories and their artwork. I was able to ascertain how the creative process benefitted those interned in camps and ghettos. Finally, I found this knowledge applicable to my clinical work with clients as they reconcile, overcome, and heal from their own difficulties.

CHAPTER 2

Artistic Resistance During the Holocaust and Relevance to Art Therapy

Abstract

This paper aims to re-introduce the art therapy community to the breadth of the artwork of the Holocaust and relate it to art therapy theories. Tens of thousands of artworks have been documented as being created in camps, ghettos, and places of hiding during the Holocaust. Although the content ranges in subject matter, the body of artworks as a whole supports the notion that creativity is a powerful force in supporting resilience, hope, connectedness, and identity. The author argues that despite the fact that it was not created in a therapeutic context, the artwork of the Holocaust resonates with humanistic theories of art therapy as it highlights the transformative effects of the creative process.

Introduction

“To be creative in the situation of the Holocaust, this is also a protest.”

—Alexander Bogen, survivor (as cited in Costanza, 1982, p. xvii)

Between 1939 and 1944, Nazi authorities and their collaborators deported millions of Jews, and others deemed undesirable, from across Europe to ghettos and extermination camps. Those who attempted to oppose the Nazi regime were also arrested and typically deported. With the goal of total elimination, inhabitants of the ghettos and camps lived in overcrowded, unsanitary, and overall dehumanizing conditions, surviving on minimal amounts of food and often separated from their families. In many camps, inmates had their entire bodies shaved and were forced to wear stark uniforms. Their names were taken away and replaced by numbers, either worn on their clothing or tattooed onto their arms. Davidov and Eisikovits (2015) stated that “life in the camps

resulted in a reduction of the consciously recognized sphere of identity” (p. 88). All sense of identity and purpose was taken away, only to be replaced with suffering, degradation, and despair.

The Nazis viewed their victims as less than human and mostly unworthy of life. In this paper I use the word *victim* to refer to those persecuted by Nazi oppression, in order to be consistent with the terminology that most Holocaust scholars use. In the context of Holocaust study and education, the word victim has a specific meaning; The Breman Museum of Jewish Heritage defines victim as “one who is intended for persecution or death” (n.d.). It is important to define this term in order to fully grasp the cruel and inhumane way Nazi oppressors regarded their captives.

Despite dehumanization, some ghetto and camp inmates resisted through art. Artists of varying ages and nationalities, imprisoned throughout Europe, turned to art making in response to Nazi oppression. Although many artists created their work to document the brutality that occurred, self-preservation was a significant motive as well (Moreh-Rosenberg, 2012, 2016). Holocaust scholars and art historians have documented approximately 30,000 works of art created during incarceration (Amishai-Maisels, 1993; Blatter & Milton, 1981), although this number is believed to represent only one-tenth of the total works produced (Bohm-Duchen, 2013). Artifacts from the Holocaust, such as letters, diaries, and artwork, are regularly being discovered by museum curators; therefore, any current count of documented artworks is unreliable. Additionally, much of the artwork created in camps or ghettos was lost or destroyed at the end of World War II. For example, the artist Zoran Music recovered only 35 of his almost 200 drawings after a bombing in the Dachau laboratory where he worked (Costanza, 1982).

There is limited scholarly exploration of the vast amount of artwork from the Holocaust and no single theory of Holocaust art. Art historian Monica Bohm-Duchen (2013) mentioned that although this body of artwork has been given more attention in recent art history research, there have been minimal attempts to address the question of why and how Holocaust artists chose to engage in creative pursuits. Publications from the art museum at Yad Vashem conceptualize the motivation to create as a type of cultural or spiritual resistance (Moreh-Rosenberg, 2012, 2016), which is a sentiment that Holocaust art historians also have discussed (Costanza, 1982; Sujo, 2001). However, this position isn't universally accepted. Langer (1996) challenged the notion of cultural resistance, given its limitations. He argued that such phrasing confines the artist's experience to something that viewers can tolerate, as an attempt to "redesign hope from the shards of despair" (1996, p.52).

Art therapists such as Wix (2003, 2009) and Leclerc (2011) have studied artwork created by victims during the Holocaust. Their scholarship acknowledges pioneering art therapist Edith Kramer, who worked directly with Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, an art teacher in the Terezín ghetto. Building on what Wix, Leclerc, and Kramer have described, in this paper I attempt to develop a theoretical perspective on why those incarcerated in Nazi camps and ghettos may have chosen to make art. I pull from literature on the topic of Holocaust art, information disseminated by museums housing the artwork and museum archives, and my own embodied experience viewing such art both in print and in person.

Although not created under the guidance of an art therapist, nor within the parameters of a conventional studio, the artwork of the Holocaust nevertheless can be informative to the contemporary art therapist. This body of work exemplifies the innate

creative impulse and its ability to support spiritual growth. Investigation into Holocaust artwork can remind art therapists of the humanistic values upon which the field was founded and provide insight into the depth of what art making can offer to those in need. The examples included here demonstrate how art making can develop and nurture resilience, free will, identity, connectedness, and hope. They attest to the power of creativity, which is a deep-seated value of art therapy (Hinz, 2017).

Art Making in Camps and Ghettos

Artwork has been documented from ghettos and camp systems that existed during World War II (Blatter & Milton, 1981). The camps in this context refer to concentration camps, extermination camps, and internment camps, which had differing objectives but were universally dehumanizing, overcrowded, and bleak. As one might expect, an abundance of the artwork from such locations depicts the brutality of the victims' living conditions; starvation, violence, suffering, and death predominated in the camps and ghettos and therefore became common themes in the artwork of those who lived (and died) there (Amishai-Maisels, 1993; Costanza, 1982). Still, many artists chose to look past reality and convey glimpses of beauty. While drawing in the Terezín ghetto, Charlotte Buresova aimed to "oppose the disaster with beauty" (as cited in Amishai-Maisels, 1993, p. 4). Buresova chose to document the lively cultural life in the ghetto. Her paintings of dancers and musicians served as a contrast to the suffering that surrounded them (Rosenberg, 2009). The art teacher Friedl Dicker-Brandeis encouraged her students in Terezín to find and capture beauty whenever possible (Makarova, 2001; Wix, 2009).

The significance of this artwork does not lie exclusively in the content but also in the arduous process of creating it. To fully appreciate these images, one must understand the challenges the artists faced. In extermination and concentration camps artistic pursuits were typically prohibited, so the artists worked secretly, destroying or hiding their work after completion (Bohm-Duchen, 2013). If caught, artists faced severe punishment, such as torture or death (Langer, 1996). Obtaining materials to work with also was a challenge. Some artists were able to access materials through ghetto or camp job assignments (Green, 1978). Others scavenged for suitable materials, using whatever could be found to make their mark, keenly aware that it could be their last. Tiny scraps of paper that today might be easily discarded were savored in the camps and sometimes even offered as gifts or currency between artists. Blatter and Milton (1981) detailed the lengths artists went to obtain materials, citing the use of hair, feathers, or straw for paintbrushes. Rust and soot were used as pigment and stored in discarded toothpaste tubes found in the guards' trash (F. Terna, personal communication, September 5, 2017). Ukrainian artist Jacques Gotko used a tire and ink he found in the Compiègne internment camp to create linocut prints (Blatter & Milton, 1981; Moreh-Rosenberg, 2016; Figure 1). Regardless of the despondent environment in which they were forced to live, or perhaps because of it, prisoners worked with found objects in creative, innovative ways.

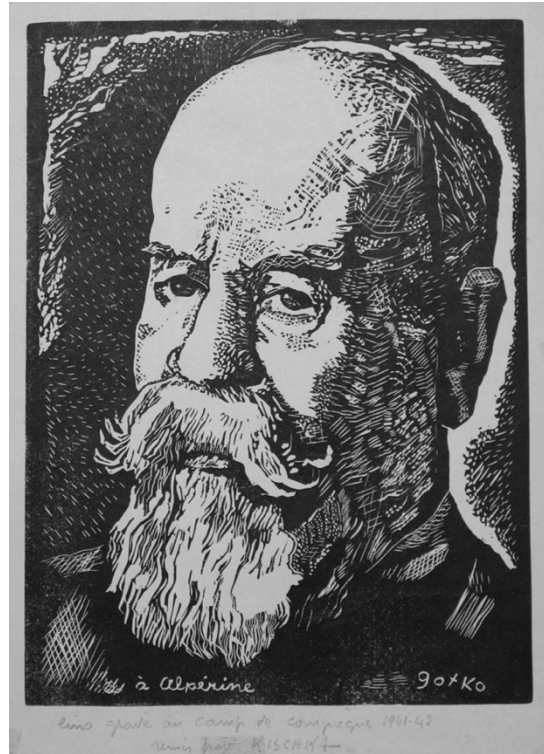


Figure 1. Jacques Gotko, *Portrait of A. Alperine*. Royallieu-Compiègne camp, France, 1941–1942. Linocut on paper. Published with permission from the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum Art Collection, Western Galilee, Israel.

Although many artists created their work to document the inexplicable cruelty that occurred, several historians believe that self-preservation was a significant motive (Amishai-Maisels, 1993; Moreh-Rosenberg, 2012, 2016). Bohm-Duchen (2013) argued that the impulse to create art was to “restore some sense of humanity and dignity, even sometimes, a semblance of normality, to the most de-humanizing of environments” (p. 192). Art making is a human act that allowed those targeted by Nazi oppression to define themselves as human. This assertion appears evident in the work of Czech artist Hannah Messinger who, in the Merzdof labor camp in January 1945, stole fabric and thread to make a bra for herself (Figure 2) as a means of maintaining personal dignity (Berenbaum & Mais, 2009). She had been incarcerated in three camps over 4 years, but through this act still refused to lose her sense of self-worth.



Figure 2. Hannah Messinger, *Stitched Bra*. Merzdorf camp, Germany, 1944. Published with permission from the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center, Gift of Hannah Messinger. Photography by Jesus Mejia.

Art making within the context of the Holocaust reinforced an identity apart from that of victim or prisoner. While offering a distraction, creativity also served to link the artists to their previous identity (Bohm-Duchen, 2013). In her exploration of works from Ravenbruk, Leclerc (2011) argued that the art process provided a way to maintain a pre-war sense of self as it reminded artists of their past identities. The concept of identity within the setting of the Holocaust extends beyond character, personality, and experiences; it encompasses the artist's sense of humanness. As Kantor (1971), who drew with any materials he could find in the Terezín, Auschwitz, and Schwarzheide camps, explained in his pictorial memoir, his "commitment to drawing came out of a deep instinct of self-preservation" (para. 31). By taking on the role of artist or "observer" (Kantor, 1971; Kramer, 2000), Kantor was able to separate himself from his prisoner identity and envision himself as the man he was prior to deportation.

Categories of the Artwork

From a review of existing texts on artwork from the Holocaust, five categories can be identified based on the content of the work: portraits, landscapes, depictions of brutality, inmate interactions, and scenes of life prior to the war. An examination of these categories offers insight into why artists may have created and furthers the viewers' understanding of the realities of existence in camps and ghettos.

Portraiture

The creation of portraits was especially common in camps and ghettos throughout Europe, and in fact portraits comprised one-quarter of all paintings and drawings estimated to have been produced by Holocaust artists during the war (Rosenberg, 2009). Portraits were often drawn at the request of fellow inmates in anticipation of death and their desire to document what was left of their lives. In detailing individuals' faces, the artist "gave [them] back [their] soul—the very quality the Nazis sought to eliminate" (Moreh-Rosenberg, 2012, para. 1).

Portraiture offered a sense of permanency and allowed those targeted for death to be "among the living, at least on paper" (Olomucki, as cited in Sujo, 2001, p. 10). This sharply contrasted with the Nazis' view of their captives as insignificant, as well as with the fragility of camp and ghetto inmates' being (Amishai-Maisels, 1993; Rosenberg, 2009). Many examples of portraits drawn during the Holocaust include the artist's name, the subject's name, the location, and the date. These inclusions were risky not only because they identified those who were participating in a prohibited activity but also because they concretely put both the artist and the subject in a place in time, affirming their existence (Leclerc, 2011). Rosenberg (2009) explained that portraiture offered proof

of existence to both artist and subject at a critical time when that existence was fragile. Portraiture also encouraged camaraderie between inmates through engagement, recognition, and witnessing of another being, which affirmed a sense of humanity. Engagement between artist and subject created a bond and bi-directional witnessing (Leclerc, 2011) that was crucial for their mutual self-construction.

Portraits captured subjects' particular qualities and depicted them with dignity (Bohm-Duchen, 2013). Individuality and likeness of the subject are key features in the work of Polish artist Franciszek Jazwiecki, who alone drew portraits of 114 fellow inmates at Auschwitz-Birkenau and kept most of his drawings hidden in his clothing. On his motivation to draw, Jazwiecki (as cited in Stiftung Neue Synagoge Berlin, 2005) stated:

I drew portraits in the camp as a way of finding a short-lived happiness and first and foremost, as a way of forgetting. These pictures I drew in secret helped me forget, they drew me into another world, the world of my art. I was aware that drawing was punished with death and it was not that I was brave, more that I simply ignored the risk, because I could not resist creating my own world. (para 8)

A subcategory of portraiture is Nazi-commissioned works. This category of artwork differs in that it was created specifically for Nazi use and not out of the artists' own desire to create. Though the artists who produced these works did not have to do so in secret, the nature of the work was morally problematic. The artists were often tasked with creating propaganda posters disputing the realities of camps and ghettos (Green, 1978) or making art for Nazi cruelty. In Auschwitz, artist Dina Gottlibova was selected

by the notorious Nazi doctor Josef Mengele to paint portraits of the prisoners he used for genetic experimentations (Robinson, 2015). Through this commission, Gottlibova strived to commemorate the life of Mengele's victims. Stationed in the artists' workshop at Terezín, Charolette Burseova was tasked with reproducing classic paintings for Nazi guards (Rosenberg, 2001). One guard was so impressed with her portrait of the Madonna that he advised her to never complete it; as long as the painting was in progress, Buresova would remain useful, rather than disposable like other ghetto residents. This commission ultimately kept her safe from deportation to the death camps.

Landscapes

Scenic views and depictions of artists' surroundings, such as landscapes and genre paintings, historically have been prominent subjects in European painting (Janson, Janson, & Marmor, 1997) and continue to be relevant in contemporary studios. This preference persisted in the makeshift studios of camps and ghettos, as evidenced by depictions of nearby mountains, courtyards, and barracks. Sujo (2001) suggested that images of mountains and sky represented an escape from confinement, as well as a survival instinct. Placing camp scenes, and subsequently the artist, against known images such as the Pyrenees Mountains may have been an attempt to document where the camps were. Including recognizable landmarks and even country flags further supported the desire to document and offer proof of where the artists were imprisoned.

Artists may have also depicted landscapes as a chance opportunity to observe and document beauty. Karl Schwesig (as cited in Sujo, 2001) described his desire to paint while he was interned at the Saint-Cyprien transit camp:

One loaf of bread a day for nine people, no soap, no clean clothing, we can't sleep because of the fleas, we sleep on the earth, we have no cooking utensils (just a tin) or cutlery (just a wooden spoon). Degrading accommodation . . . I wish I had some watercolours to paint the impressive mountains and vineyards. (p. 36)

The extent to which Schwesig experienced this “degrading accommodation” allowed him to recognize the natural beauty surrounding the camp. Frankl (1959/2006) noted one such occasion for appreciating beauty when he described watching a sunset one evening in Auschwitz and remembered “how beautiful the world could be” (p. 40). It could be argued that the recognition of beauty served to assuage the artists’ fears and restore their faith.

Landscape drawings and paintings also allowed artists to address the contradiction between the splendor of nature, as Schwesig indicated, against the grim realities of their living conditions. Shen-Dar (2003) noted that landscape paintings from the Gurs camp conveyed this polarity through the use of color. Artists such as Leo Breuer used dull grays and black to depict internal areas of Gurs, such as the barracks and soil, while filling the sky and mountain range in the background with rich colors.

The reminder that an outside world continued to exist may have been another motivation for artists depicting landscapes. Terezín survivor Helga Pollack recalled art lessons with Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, “We would draw from the window—the sky, the mountains, nature . . . That is probably especially important for prisoners: to see the world on the other side, to know that it exists” (as cited in Makarova, 2001, p. 214).

Interactions Between Inmates

The inhuman conditions in the ghettos and concentration camps at times resulted in conflict between prisoners. Levi (1986) described the ritualistic and protective ways in which prisoners split food rations, always concerned that one could be taken advantage of. Nomberg-Przytyk (1985) recalled a barbaric incident on a crowded transport to Ravensbrück in which female *kapos*¹ killed and removed other prisoners in order to grant themselves additional standing room. That lives were lost for the sake of an extra foot of



Figure 3. Lili Andrieux, *Together—for How Long?* Gurs camp, France, 1942. Published with permission from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, image courtesy of Lili Andrieux.

space highlights the normalizing of inhumanity in the fight for survival. Although the constant struggle for life resulted in cruelty, numerous drawings have been documented that depict camaraderie and tenderness between prisoners, instead of adversity (Figure 3). Camaraderie allowed individuals to retain a sense of decency and benevolence (Davidov

¹ *Kapos* is the term used for camp prisoners whom Nazis trusted and therefore assigned to supervise other prisoners. *Kapos* were forced into complicity by threat of death.

& Eisikovits, 2015); depictions of such bonds testify that these qualities remained intact. Kimor (2002) noted that works such as these convey a sense of closeness and genuine concern shared between inmates, as they depict the social normalcy of rapport and support.

Scenes of Life Before the War

Lively, sometimes-colorful images of life prior to the war affirmed a sense of hope and a determination to return to that reality. Terezín artist Bedrich Fritta drew a series of images for his son's third birthday (Amishai-Maisels, 1993; Green, 1978), which depicted how a 3-year-old should celebrate: ice cream cones, trips to a park, and freedom of movement. While in hiding in Poland, 6-year-old Nelly Toll painted watercolor scenes of a joyful, imaginative world (Moreh-Rosenberg, 2016). With her mother's encouragement, Toll's pictures combined memories of her past life with fairy-tale elements, a contrast to the war-torn city they had fled. Notably, Toll later emigrated to the United States and eventually completed a master's degree in art therapy from Hahnemann University in Philadelphia.

Depictions of Brutality

The aforementioned categories of artwork suggest that some artists were able to transcend their bleak surroundings by creating artworks representing beauty, human connection, and fond memories. Other artists felt the need to document the obscene conditions that comprised their reality by drawing the violence, corpses, and emaciated prisoners around them in order to "depict the genocidal impulse that was beyond the imagination" (Langer, 1996, p. 59). Drawing these and other disturbing scenes of daily life may have represented an attempt to reconcile or make sense of the surreal

environment. Some artists, such as a group employed in the Terezín technical department, were motivated to use art to document their experiences (Green, 1978) in the hopes that the works would be discovered and serve as evidence against Nazi perpetrators.

Arts Contributing to Community

Although many artists worked independently, particularly in concentration camp systems, some artists created communally, developing a culture of creative engagement. Originally a small town that was evacuated to serve as a Nazi ghetto, Terezín (or Theresienstadt in German) was known for its artistic culture (Dutlinger, 2001; Langer, 1996). Theatrical performances, concerts, and regular drawing lessons brought ghetto inhabitants together in a form of cultural resistance. Langer (1996) credited this activity with providing a sense of inviolability and sanctity in an uncertain environment.

Some of Europe's most talented artists, performers, and musicians were imprisoned at Terezín (Dutlinger, 2001). Recognizing this talent at their disposal, Terezín guards employed artists (organized into design departments) to create Nazi propaganda. These appointments offered certain amenities such as extra rations of food and exemption from exhaustive labor, although the commissioned artists were prisoners and treated as such. As a means of challenging that helplessness and fear, artists in Terezín used their talent as a silent form of resistance. When not under close watch, the artists created works depicting actual life in the ghetto (Figure 4). Knowing that creating such work was prohibited and could result in extreme punishment or death, they carefully hid their art. Green (1978) explained that by doing so artists "kept alive not only the glowing embers of creativity, but did not shy from making their art a weapon" (p. 77). When the Nazis

discovered the artwork, they killed, tortured, or deported the artists to Auschwitz, along with the artists' families (Green, 1978).



Figure 4. Karel Fleischmann, *Living Quarters—Sudeten Kaserne*. Theresienstadt Ghetto, Czechoslovakia, 1943. India ink and wash on paper. Published with permission from the Yad Vashem Art Museum, Jerusalem. Gift of the Prague Committee for Documentation, courtesy of Ze'ev and Alisa Shek, Caesarea, Israel.

Prisoners at the Gurs internment camp in France also developed an artistic community.

Situated by the Pyrenees Mountains, Gurs served as an internment and transit camp under the Vichy regime in France (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.).

Approximately 22,000 prisoners passed through Gurs between 1940 and 1943 while contending with shortages of food and water and a looming uncertainty regarding their future. In an attempt to retain dignity and humanity, prisoners focused on creative endeavors whenever they could. Beginning in the fall of 1940, prisoners transformed one barrack in each block of Gurs into a “cultural center” for performances, lectures, and art exhibits (Rosenberg, 2002; Shen-Dar, 2003). Though uncertain of their fate, artists and viewers could revel in the comfort of community, “sharing a common fate a singular

desire: not to lose the human spirit” (Shen-Dar, 2003, p. 96). Among artworks that exist from Gurs is a reproduction of an illustrated booklet that Trudl Besag created for a fellow inmate’s 65th birthday (Slutsky & Weininger, 2016). On each page a drawing depicting the poor conditions in the camp is placed alongside an idealistic contrasting drawing. As a birthday present, the booklet authenticates the prisoners’ ability to retain their humanity and consideration for each other. As an archive, the artwork attests to the resilience and optimism that gave inmates hope.

The Choice to Create

Apart from content, the decision to make art, even clandestinely, can be viewed as a function of free will. Those targeted in the Holocaust were barred from the luxury of choice, as they had been uprooted from their previous lives and forced into deplorable conditions. Families were frequently torn apart and prisoners watched their loved ones suffer, knowing they were helpless to act. Death camps in particular were “designed to diminish and annihilate one’s freedom of choice and sense of responsibility” (Davidov & Eisikovits, 2015, p. 88). Considering this experience of complete powerlessness, one can surmise the appeal of artistic creation regardless of the known risks. Creativity allowed for decision making, which Davidov and Eisikovits (2015) argued was crucial in avoiding ““muselmann status.” *Muselmann*, a term common in the camps, referred to individuals who had resigned themselves to death. Although all prisoners suffered from physical and cognitive limitations, the *muselmann*’s identity, their spirit, became obsolete. However, the capacity for decision making strengthened the spirit, as it represented a degree of hope and will. Frankl (1959/2006) argued that in any situation individuals have a choice in their existence. The act of drawing or painting represented a

choice, a conscious resolution to act, and therefore provided some motivation to keep living (Miriam Alon, personal communication, September 25, 2017).

Implications for Art Therapy

Although the context of art making in the camps and ghettos of the Holocaust is distinct from that of contemporary art therapy, there are important aspects that apply. Firstly, art therapists across the globe work with a spectrum of populations in need of support. Though the specifics of the individuals vary, the need for healing is universal. Secondly, when circumstances are particularly dire, art making may provide a sense of liberation and community building (Kapitan, 2009). Furthermore, the trauma that is the result of political persecution is making its way into art therapy caseloads today, which renders the study of the art of the Holocaust an important resource for art therapists working with such populations.

Based on their work in war-torn countries, Kalmanowitz and Lloyd (2005) asked how the art therapist can dare suggest art making to one who has endured extreme suffering. The offer of paint or markers can seem insignificant to an individual who has lost everything. Nevertheless, art therapists continue to find art therapy to be useful to individuals caught in political violence (Kalmanowitz & Ho, 2016; Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005). The art of the Holocaust reinforces the claim that art making can contribute to survival in even the most devastating conditions. That some Holocaust artists made an effort to create art suggests that this consideration, this seemingly insignificant offer of materials, can indeed be life giving. Three theoretical areas of art therapy, discussed below, support this assertion and can be drawn upon in contemporary practice.

Portable Studio

Kalmanowitz and Lloyd (1999, 2002, 2005) conceptualized the *portable studio* as a construct that serves the process of creating a psychological space for art making in any environment. The portable studio functions for the art therapist as an internalization of the framework of an art therapy session that is safe for participants to be reflective, creative, and able to attain a context for the present, past, and future (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005). The physicality of the space is insignificant; what matters is that the space facilitates creativity and ultimately allows participants to “transcend their situation beyond the boundaries of the environment” (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005, p. 139).

Despite that their environments were inherently unsafe and insecure, some artists during the Holocaust were able to internalize their own potential, conceivably reflecting this notion of the portable studio. While hiding in the infirmary at Auschwitz, artist Alfred Kantor (1971) sketched his hometown of Prague, as well as interactions he witnessed across the camp, with the intention to eventually expose “the true nature of this place” (para. 30). In doing so, he arguably was able to integrate his present, past, and future and briefly transcend the limits of Auschwitz. Kantor’s art process was beneficial in that it allowed him to hold together conflicting realities (Thompson, 2011). Of this experience, he wrote: “I could at least detach myself from what was going on in Auschwitz and was therefore better able to hold together the threads of sanity” (Kantor, 1971, para. 31). Accessing his internalized concept of the studio reinforced Kantor’s personal history as well as his sense of drive, aspects that Nabarro (2005) observed can contribute to psychological survival.

Trauma Treatment

From his experience as an art therapist working with hospitalized psychiatric patients, Thompson (2011) observed that art can offer “reparation, redemption, integration, and mastery of even the most disturbing traumas” (p. 39). He argued that even near-death experiences can provide opportunities for growth, which people who have been traumatized can recognize in their artwork. Camp and ghetto inmates regularly witnessed death and lacked security in their own ability to survive. These “nadir experiences” (Thompson, 2011, p. 39) appeared to have motivated some of them to create. On why he drew while “fighting day and night,” survivor Alexander Bogen (as cited in Costanza, 1982) stated:

Each man, when standing face to face with cruel danger, with death, reacts in his own way. The artist reacts with his means. This is his protest! This is my means! He reacts in an artistic way. This is his weapon. (p. xvii)

When exposed to death all around them, some artists became overwhelmed by a need to honor the deceased (Amishai-Maisels, 1993). This is evidenced in the works of Zoran Music, Aldo Carpi, Leon Delarbre, and Paul Goyard, who were inmates at different concentration camps. Despite their depictions of emaciated and bruised bodies, these artists also detailed faces and even facial expressions, to remind viewers of the lives that were lost. Music (as cited in Amishai-Maisels, 1993) described the “tragic beauty” that he recognized in the corpses at Dachau, which led him to capture what he imagined as their final breath (p. 52).

Kalmanowitz and Lloyd (2005) contended that “spontaneous art making” (p. 47) as well as formal art therapy encounters can thwart the negative impact of traumatic

experiences. Art making offers those experiencing trauma a sense of mastery over their situation (Appleton, 2001) while offsetting “feeling shattered and alone” (Shore, 2007, p. 185). In the creative communities of Gurs and Terezín, prisoners were able to come together through their art making, strengthening their connection to each other and ultimately their sense of humanity. Creative self-expression in response to trauma can reaffirm the self (Shore, 2007), permit individuals the ability to address the magnitude of emotions they experience (Jones, 1997), and re-present the traumatic experience to the self (Leclerc, 2011). Shore (2007) asserted that art making allows traumatized individuals to accept and tolerate opposing realities. The concept of meaning making from opposing realities in artwork can be identified in the camp landscape paintings, which include the austere exterior of barracks and barbed-wire fences against the colorful sky and mountains. In a camp or ghetto, traumatized artists could express the horror that they had witnessed and experienced while also affirming that they were still alive and recognizing that a “glorious existence” (Shen-Dar, 2003, p. 97) could still be possible. By making art in response to tragedy, Holocaust artists were able to accept and reconcile their unbearable reality while resolving to survive.

Meaning Making

According to Frankl (1959/2006), survival in an extreme environment is only possible if an individual can identify with a sense of meaning. Meaning can offer stability and grounding in a chaotic world (Hoffman, Stewart, Warren, & Meek, 2009) and is therefore “the ultimate coping mechanism” (p. 260). This stance has been echoed in the art therapy literature (Appleton, 2001; Kalmanowitz & Ho, 2016; Moon, 2009; Wilkinson & Chilton, 2013). Appleton (2001) observed that an art therapy group supported

adolescents in identifying a personal meaning in response to a traumatic event. Wilkinson and Chilton (2013) asserted that creativity can “illuminate purpose and meaning” (p. 5), leading to an improved quality of life.

According to existentialist thought, meaningfulness comes into fruition by an individual's actions in response to circumstance (Frankl, 1946/1973). Making art is an active response and therefore can lead to individuals finding meaning within their experience. Testimony from Holocaust artists supports this notion as it related to their motivation to make art. Xawery Dunikowski, after beginning to draw in Auschwitz, found that “life once again acquires meaning and purpose” (as cited in Amishai-Maisels, 1993, p. 4). For Halina Olomucki, drawing her scenes of Auschwitz “became an extraordinary force that carried me to survival.” (as cited in Amishai-Maisels, 1993, p. 6). Dachau survivor Zoran Music drew to capture the beauty he was able to observe in the dead, noting, “I felt the irresistible urge to draw, so that this tremendous and tragic beauty might not escape me (as cited in Bohm-Duchen, 2013, p. 193).

The recognition of meaning is critical in accepting and moving forward from traumatic circumstances (Frankl, 1946/1973; Schneider, 2015). Kalmanowitz and Ho (2016) described how art making contributes to a newfound sense of personal meaning by allowing for an increased awareness of the self as separate from a traumatic event. Individuals thus can identify themselves in the context of trauma and chaos while simultaneously differentiating themselves from it.

Conclusion

The art from the Holocaust provides evidence of the transformational power of creativity (Leclerc, 2011). Artists created works authentically as a means of savoring

dignity, cultivating community, and affirming identity. Though in many instances the risks were great, the need to create was somehow greater. Making art allowed camp and ghetto inhabitants to retain a tenuous grasp on their humanity and transcend their environments to achieve a sense of meaning. This function affirms art therapists who find that the response to political violence should be less focused on shock and destruction and more on helping individuals survive (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd (2005). The art created during the Holocaust illuminates the individuality and humanity of those who suffered. The artwork serves as a reminder that those targeted by Nazi oppression were humans, capable of creation and expression. It forces viewers to recognize the individuals who suffered within a mass genocide (Leclerc, 2011) and appeals to us on relational and interpersonal levels. Through their art we recognize a capacity for resilience as well as a discovery of meaning. The fostering of humanity through art is the goal of many art therapy settings today. Therefore, the study of Holocaust artists, their motivations and works created, offers important evidence on which to support art therapy practice.

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CHAPTER THREE

A Phenomenological Inquiry Into the Art of the Holocaust

Abstract

This paper describes a phenomenological inquiry into the art and narratives of artists of the Holocaust. The author interviewed four Holocaust survivors and one child of a Holocaust survivor, each of whom provided a narrative account of their experiences of creating artwork in camps or ghettos during World War II. Phenomenological analysis was used to reveal a psychological structure or essence of these artists' experience of creating artwork in a concentration camp or ghetto. This psychological structure is based on identity, autonomy, comfort, hope, affirmation of existence, and witnessing, all of which may be relevant to contemporary art therapy practice.

Introduction

Since the end of World War II in 1945, more than 30,000 pieces of artwork created during the Holocaust have been documented (Amishai-Maisels, 1993; Blatter & Milton, 1981), although it is estimated that this number only represents a tenth of the total works created (Bohm-Duchen, 2013). These works were created by individuals in camps, ghettos, and places of hiding throughout Europe. Art supplies were sparse and in most camps any humanizing pursuit, such as art making, was typically prohibited; still, people found ways to create. In a climate consumed with survival, each intentional act seemed motivated by the promise of living another day. Evidently, the decision to make art suggests that art making contributed in some way to survival (Leclerc, 2011). That some prisoners took the time and risk to make art indicates that the act benefited their existence in some way.

Many of the artists did not survive the Holocaust. Some were murdered when their clandestine artwork was discovered (Green, 1978). Those who did survive are in their final years or have passed away. I wanted to capture the stories of these survivors firsthand, while they are still alive, to honor their experience and the tenacity of their very existence. As a Jewish woman, and as an artist, I feel a connection to these artists and want their stories to be remembered and learned from. Though they endured great suffering, I hoped to find a sense of meaning in their experiences, which can come by sharing their stories and educating the public about the Holocaust.

In this study I aim to shift the lens of Holocaust artwork to center on the people who created the work despite their treacherous environment. Although not extensive, much of the literature on the art of the Holocaust is written from the perspective of the researcher viewing and interpreting the works. I believe that an inquiry into the organic, self-motivated example of art making that occurred during the Holocaust offers a unique and quickly dwindling opportunity to capture first-hand testimony from the artists themselves regarding their motivations and purposes. That individuals interned in camps and ghettos made art, fully aware of the inherent risks, such as torture or death, suggests that somehow the benefits outweighed the risks.

With this research, I sought to uncover the essence of the phenomenon of creating art in World War II camps and ghettos. I began by asking what the experience of art making during the Holocaust was like for the participants in the study in order to understand what art therapy clients might also be receiving from the creative process. Ultimately, this study suggested that creating artwork during the Holocaust allowed

individuals to retain a sense of identity; provided a sense of autonomy, comfort, and hope; affirmed a tenuous existence; and allowed artists to express what they had witnessed.

Literature Review

The term *Holocaust art* encompasses three categories: artwork made by people who were targeted by Nazi persecution during the Holocaust, artwork made in response to the Holocaust, and artwork destroyed by the Nazi regime during Hitler's rule (Amishai-Maisels, 1993). To date, art historians (e.g., Bohm-Duchen, 2013) and Holocaust scholars (e.g., Presiado, 2015, 2016; Rosenberg, 2002, 2009) have been the primary researchers of Holocaust art. Contemporary researchers typically reference texts such as Blatter and Milton's (1981) *Art of the Holocaust* and Costanza's (1982) *The Living Witness*, which both provide a comprehensive overview of artworks made in ghettos and camp systems across Europe. In a later text, Amishai-Maisels (1993) identified works created during the Holocaust along with artist testimony, and also examined the impact this artwork has had on the world of visual arts since 1945. The texts written by Blatter and Milton and Costanza, as well as academic articles by Rosenberg, are the primary texts cited in literature on this topic. More contemporary works (Benvenuti, 1984/2016; Langer, 1996; Sujo, 2001) reference the aforementioned texts while also including testimonies, poetry, and writings from surviving artists reflecting back on their experience. Other literature on Holocaust art is written about specific ghettos or camps (Dutlinger, 2001; Green 1978; Gutterman & Morgenstern, 2003; Rosenberg, 2002) or specific artists (Leclerc, 2011; Makarova, 2001; Steinberg & Bohm-Duchen, 2006).

Many art therapists connect the art of the Holocaust to the legacy of Dicker-Brandeis, who was Edith Kramer's teacher and whose work in Terezin foregrounded that of art therapists, as she guided traumatized children through a creative process to help them transcend the realities of ghetto life (Wix, 2003). Kramer worked directly with Dicker-Brandeis prior to immigrating to the United States in 1938 and incorporated her mentor's philosophy into her work with children. Dicker-Brandeis's unfinished manuscript, *Art as Therapy With Children*, became the basis for Kramer's 1971 book of the same title, which she dedicated to Dicker-Brandeis.

A few art therapists have researched or written on the subject of art making during the Holocaust. Leclerc (2011) examined the connection between witnessing and trauma through the work of two artists in the Ravensbrück camp. She identified three overlapping trajectories in these artists' work: the paradoxical relationship between creation and destruction, the recognition of humanity between the artist and the artist's model, and the function of the viewer as "witnessing the witness" (p. 87) in response to what the artist saw and felt compelled to depict. Gussak (2004) remarked on his experience viewing the artwork on display at the Terezín memorial. He asserted that witnessing artwork created by residents of the ghetto "made the people real" (Gussak, 2004, p. 161) and found the artwork more informative than any other resources meant to convey the reality of that history. Seligman (1995) discussed theater activity in concentration camps, which she related to dance/movement therapy. The majority of the art therapy literature on Holocaust art, however, is about the legacy of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis (Kramer, 2000; Makarova, 2001; Wix, 2003, 2009).

In learning about Dicker-Brandeis's work, I became familiar with hundreds of other artists who created artwork on their own while confined in camps and ghettos. There is evidence that individuals produced artwork in many of the camp systems and ghettos throughout Europe (Amishai-Maisels, 1993; Blatter & Milton, 1981). The current study is about those artists. My purpose was to bring attention to their stories and make a place for them in the art therapy literature.

The reality of creating art in the abysmal environment of Nazi camps and ghettos offers a striking juxtaposition. As explained by Bak (2001), "a waiting room for the horrors of the death camps seems an unlikely setting for something meant to liberate the spirit and bring it joy" (p. 20). Having encountered the abundance of artwork made during the Holocaust, it became clear that art making was prevalent in a wide range of camps and ghettos. Thus, I conceptualized the topic of Holocaust art as a unique phenomenon of interest and began to inquire into what the artists experienced when they made art in these settings. I was interested in the experience itself of creating in an environment of destruction and therefore chose phenomenological research methodology to address this question: What was the experience of creating artwork in a camp or ghetto during the Holocaust?

Method

Participants

Although there is a body of artwork created post-Holocaust by survivors of the genocide (see, e.g., Presiado, 2015), the scope of the study focused on the self-reported experience by survivors of creating artwork during the time they were interned in camps and ghettos. Inclusion criteria was limited to survivors of the Holocaust who were still

alive and able to engage in conversation about their experience. Because I would be asking the participants to discuss an egregiously painful portion of their lives, the selection criteria limited the sample to individuals who were willing to discuss these experiences. Fortunately, the individuals I interviewed generously shared their accounts. For many of them, telling their story is “the call, a responsibility to speak” (Y. Bacon, personal communication, September 26, 2017).

Five participants were recruited as a convenience sample, three of whom had been interviewed by Hilary Helstein, the director and producer of the 2009 documentary *As Seen Through These Eyes*. I contacted Helstein, who in turn gave me the contacts of Yehuda Bacon, Samuel Bak, and Frederick Terna. From the literature review I had seen artwork by Halina Olumucki, which I found especially poignant. Therefore, I contacted the art museum complex at Yad Vashem (the world Holocaust museum in Jerusalem) to locate Olumucki. Unfortunately, she had passed away in 2007; however, I was able to obtain contact information for her daughter, Miriam Alon. Though not a survivor herself, Alon has written about her mother and was able to serve as a secondary source of information for the study. I attempted to locate the fifth participant, a Holocaust survivor mentioned in an article from the *Jewish Journal* (Arom, 2017) who fit my criteria. However, because the survivor was experiencing declining health, I did not have the opportunity to interview him. Instead, I reached out to an art therapist, Sherri Jacobs, who was quoted in the article. Coincidentally, her mother-in-law is a survivor who participated in spontaneous art lessons while interned in Bergen-Belson. Jacobs put me in touch with Judy Godos-Jacobs, who agreed to be interviewed. Below is a biographical description of the five participants who consented to be in the study, as shared by them in

their interviews, which I later verified with the Yad Vashem and United States Holocaust Museum and Memorial archives.

Yehuda Bacon. Born in Czechoslovakia in 1929 to a traditional Jewish family, Bacon began drawing under the guidance of artists in Terezín's technical department. In 1943, he was sent to the family camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. At age 14 he was assigned a job in the wagon command, where he transported goods throughout Auschwitz. This role exposed Bacon to the entirety of the camp. He made sketches of areas he saw, such as the crematoria. After liberation he drew detailed images of the gas chambers to submit as evidence in the Eichmann trials.

Samuel Bak. Samuel Bak was born in Vilna in what was then Poland to an educated, cultured, Jewish family. In 1941 Germany occupied Vilna and ordered all Jews to the Vilna Ghetto. There the poets Avrom Sutzkever and Szmerke Kaczerginski invited 9-year-old Bak to participate in an art exhibition organized by ghetto residents. They also gave Bak the *Pinkas*, the official record book of the Jewish community. Over the next 2 years, Samuel filled the margins and empty pages of the *Pinkas* with his drawings. Bak published a biography in 2001, *Painted in Words*, which he referenced throughout our interview.

Frederick Terna. Frederick Terna was born in Vienna, Austria, in 1923. At age 18 he was sent to the forced labor camp Lipa. The camp was closed in 1943 and most prisoners were sent to Terezín. While in Terezín, Terna found scraps of paper and began to draw what he saw around him. He was praised for his work by professional artists in the ghetto, but warned that the pursuit could be punished by death. Still, he continued to draw and made his own ink by scraping carbon off the bottom of sinks and mixing it with

water. Terna was sent to Auschwitz in 1944, followed by Kaufering, a sub-camp of Dachau. He attempted to draw with sand and dirt on piles of wood during 12-hour labor shifts and still incorporates sand in his artwork to this day.

Miriam Alon. Although not a survivor herself, Alon has written and given presentations about her mother, Halina Olomucki, who was born in Poland in 1919 where she grew up with an interest in art. She continued to draw and paint in the Warsaw ghetto. In May of 1943, Olomucki was deported briefly to Majdanek, and soon after that to Auschwitz-Birkenau. There she volunteered to paint signs for the barracks and managed to save the supplies she used for her own artwork.

Judy Godos-Jacobs. In June 1944, at age 7, Godos-Jacobs boarded the Kastner train from Budapest to Bergen-Belsen where she was interned with other passengers for 6 months. Her mother, a designer, organized spontaneous art lessons for the children in their barracks. Drawing with sticks in the dirt, Godos-Jacobs recalled depicting butterflies and flowers, which she viewed as symbols of hope.

Research Design

Phenomenological research is credited to Husserl, who sought to examine lived experiences through immersion in their properties or characteristics (Husserl, 1970). In particular is the use of *epoche*, meaning that *a priori* judgments and assumptions are suspended in order to fully view the pure structure of a phenomenon. The purpose of phenomenological inquiry is to “explicate the essence, structure or form” of a lived experience (Kirby, 2016, p. 23) by searching beyond the surface of a narrative to extrapolate a meaning structure of what is occurring in a given situation (Giorgi, 2009). Because of the striking juxtaposition of the creation of art in the abysmal environment of

World War II camps and ghettos, I believed that this historical experience could be framed as a unique phenomenon to yield important insights today. In particular, I was interested in the artists' experience of creating in an environment of destruction. This focus is congruent with Betensky (2001) who viewed art therapy phenomenologically as an "authentic experience" (2001, p. 122) in which clients bring an expression of their life experiences into being and "see unrealized possibilities or untapped potencies" (p. 124).

Procedures

To obtain rich qualitative data that depicted the phenomenon, I interviewed the artists directly, which ensured that I would hear their first-hand descriptions and subjective experience of the phenomena. I initially had arranged to conduct these interviews in person, not only to obtain verbal accounts but also to experience the whole of each individual. Time and travel limited this plan; however, I was able to conduct three semi-structured interviews in person, one via Skype, and one via phone. I brought a consent for participation form to the in-person meetings and emailed the consent form to the other participants prior to our scheduled interview time. Participants understood that their participation was voluntary and that they could end the interview at any time.

In each interview I asked the participant to simply talk about their experience of making art during the Holocaust (or, in the case of Alon, to talk about her mother's experience). I asked occasional questions based on what participants had reported in Helstein's documentary film, as well as follow-up questions based on what they mentioned during the interview. I made an audio recording of each interview using a recording application on an iPad and took notes regarding the participants' facial expressions and other nonverbal cues when relevant. The study was reviewed and

approved by Mount Mary University's Institutional Review Board.

Data Analysis

The transcripts from the five interviews were analyzed using Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological method, which consists of five steps. The first step is for the researcher to assume a phenomenological attitude by bracketing out preexisting knowledge or expectations. Giorgi (2012) instructed the researcher to not bring any information apart from the present data into the analysis. However, it must be noted that because I was already immersed in the subject, bracketing was quite challenging. I already had seen many of the participants' artworks in exhibitions, which was an experience that was both inspiring and haunting. For example, I had paid attention to the nuances of the artwork, such as the intensity of pencil marks and brush strokes; I imagined camp prisoners leaning over tiny scraps of paper, trying to express the enormity of their situation onto such a small, flimsy surface. I thought about the scrounged-up materials as the only tools of expression and autonomy these prisoners had.

For the second step, I listened to the recordings and transcribed them by hand while noting subtleties, such as changes in tone, intakes of breath, or long pauses. I continued to bracket out my own assumptions and set them aside, each time returning to the data as if new to me. This constant practice helped me to read the transcripts with a clear and open mind, relatively free of preconceived assumptions or agendas.

The third step is to identify meaning units in order to condense the data into what is directly relevant. Giorgi (2009, 2012) advised researchers to mark each point in which they experience a shift of meaning in the transcripts. A typical shift would be when a participant detailed a specific person or place. The particular challenge of this step was that each participant periodically spoke tangentially during the interview. Participants

also frequently alternated their descriptions of art making art during the Holocaust and after it. Therefore, I modified the method by rereading the transcripts and bracketing out descriptions of anything that fell outside of the focus on art making, in order to remain attuned to the phenomenon of interest.

I noted when a participant's tone shifted from angry to nostalgic, from helpless to empowered. I also highlighted unusual word choices. For example, when discussing his transport from the Terezín ghetto to Auschwitz, Yehuda Bacon said he brought his artwork along but "it perished" (Y. Bacon, personal communication, September 26, 2017). His use of the word *perished* stood out; in the context of the Holocaust, *perished* is typically reserved for people, not items (Levi, 1986). By describing his artwork this way, Bacon indicated that he put great importance on it, possibly even equating it with a living being. This process of "lingering and amplifying" (Finlay, 1999, p. 303) on language and tone forced me to slow down and engage in the discourse of the interviews.

The fourth step of data analysis is to transform the meaning units into psychologically sensitive descriptive expressions. Giorgi (2009) recommended that researchers use a third-person perspective as a reminder that they are analyzing the experience of another person. Phenomenological research encourages the researcher to dialogue with data in lieu of a conventional coding approach (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018). To understand the essence of the act of art making I created a dialogue by assuming the perspective of the artwork, as if it were hanging on the wall overseeing each interview. Reflecting on the meaning units I had identified, I considered how the artwork might "respond" to our conversation and wrote one or two brief descriptive statements from the perspective of the artwork. Finally, I reduced each description into a concise existential-phenomenological statement.

Once these statements were identified, I tested their internal validity through imaginative variation (Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Kapitan, 2018). I wrote and rewrote each statement multiple times, each time varying the frame of reference and wording while also considering whether they were applicable to more than one participant. I noted whenever a variation altered the meaning, or essence, of the statement. Giorgi (2009) noted that the meaning “collapses” when words that describe it are not aligned with its essence. The subtleties in word choice allowed me to pinpoint precise meanings.

The fifth and final step in the data analysis is to synthesize the general psychological structure of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009; Kapitan, 2018). The psychological structure does not define the phenomenon but rather depicts how the phenomenon was lived (Giorgi, 2009, 2012). In describing the phenomenon, the psychological structure answers the phenomenological research question and therefore provides the results of the study. Although the psychological structure is developed through individual accounts, it is assumed to be thematically generalizable; that is, as applicable, in theory, to multiple individuals involved in the phenomenon.

Results

The purpose of this study was to identify the essence of the experience of creating art during the Holocaust for a sample of survivors. Table 1 presents the results, beginning with the seven descriptive third-person statements, the variables that were identified in the interpretive process of imaginal variation, and their synthesis into a general psychological structure of the phenomenon of interest. The following summary statement describes the experience of creating artwork in camps and ghettos during the Holocaust:

Creating artwork in a camp or ghetto became a responsibility to serve as a witness because the artwork might become the only remaining witness. The physical act of art making, and the resulting work, proved that the artist existed, even if no one else did. The artwork promised a legacy in the midst of annihilation. In a landscape of uncertainty, with a constant threat of death, the art-making process became a constant, standing in for lost relationships. Despite the great risk if caught, art making allowed artists to transcend danger and experience a degree of safety in doing something familiar and comfortable. The act of creating gave the artists a sense of beauty and served as a reminder that beauty and brightness could exist in the world. The artist identity was critical in distinguishing the artists from other captives; it nourished their spirit and allowed them to stay human. The artwork that remains, even if only in the artists' minds, is a reminder of what they endured and is proof of their humanness in the face of such cruelty.

Table 1

Results of the Phenomenological Data Analysis of the Holocaust Artists

Existential-phenomenological statement from the perspective of the artwork	Imaginative variation	Summary statement of essence
I am burdened with the tremendous responsibility of witnessing what happened.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I have a duty to serve as a witness. ▪ I have a responsibility to share what I saw. ▪ I am motivated by a desire to be a witness. ▪ I must live, so that I can be a witness for those who didn't. ▪ If I am not a witness, who will be? ▪ I exist, and others do not, so I am the only witness. ▪ I am heavy with these memories. 	The artist and artwork were both physically frail and small, but carried the responsibility to be a witness. Both existed to serve as a witness.

You need me to define yourself as human.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ You rely on me. ▪ You require me. ▪ I help you become human. ▪ I give you a sense of humanity. ▪ I take away your humanity. ▪ You want me to make you human. ▪ I distinguish you as human. ▪ I give you an opportunity to feel like a human again. ▪ Without me, you are just a shell. 	Being an artist distinguished an individual from others. Art making was an identity and a need beyond the basic needs for survival, making the artist a more complex, dynamic being.
I am all you know and am your only constant in this landscape of uncertainty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I am familiar when nothing else is. ▪ You don't know what to expect, but you know how to make me. ▪ You exist when I exist. ▪ You know me, but nothing else. ▪ I make everything more familiar. 	There is a comfort in doing something familiar, such as art, when the future is so unknown. Even though there is a risk in creating, making art feels safe because it is known.
I am a reminder of your experiences and I will always be with you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I will never leave your mind. ▪ I am a part of you. ▪ I prove that everything happened. ▪ I am a reminder of your strength. ▪ I am a reminder that you survived. ▪ I make you relive your experiences. ▪ You lost everyone, but you have me. 	Making art was necessary to remember every detail, and reminded artists that they had already gotten through so much. The art could serve as a reminder of people and places that no longer exist.
I affirmed your existence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I proved that you were there, even if you no longer exist. ▪ I cast doubt on your existence. ▪ You exist because of me. ▪ I affirmed, declared, stated, swore, made factual, pledged, guaranteed, maintained your existence. ▪ You will always exist because I exist. ▪ In order to have disappeared, you had to first exist. 	Artwork offered a sense of permanency—its tangible existence was permanent even if the individual's existence was not. It proved that the artist, and others, had lived in the world.
I gave you light.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I am your only source of light. ▪ Without me there is darkness. ▪ Without me you have nothing. ▪ All the light you have comes from me. ▪ I remind you of light. ▪ I help you remember light. ▪ I am a reminder that lightness can exist. ▪ You find light in me, remembering that it can exist. 	Art served as a reminder that a sense of light was still possible, and therefore gave a sense of hope.

I keep you safe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I put you in danger. ▪ I make you feel safe, even though you are not. ▪ I allow you to overcome your fears. ▪ If you are with me, then you are safe. ▪ I let you feel safe. ▪ I give an illusion of safety. ▪ I let you transcend danger in order to feel safe. 	There was a paradox in doing something dangerous in order to feel safe. When making art, the artist could transcend danger and experience a brief sense of safety.
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Discussion

This study aimed to understand the experience of creating art during the Holocaust. The results suggest that the artists in this sample who had created art during the Holocaust were motivated by the need to serve as a witness, to leave a legacy, and to retain a sense of humanity. The experience offered a reinforcement of a non-prisoner identity, an affirmation of existence, a sense of hope, a feeling of safety, and an ability to develop or embody relationships. These artists found comfort in doing something familiar amidst deep uncertainty. Although creating often required great risk, the actual process of making art felt safe and allowed artists to momentarily transcend the danger that surrounded them. Artwork offered a sense of permanency; its tangible substance felt permanent even as the artist's existence was not. It proved that the artist, and others, had existed in the world. The artwork itself ultimately became a reminder of what those targeted by Nazi oppression endured. It validated the resilience of these individuals in the face of cruelty and provided a sense of meaning within suffering. If, as Hinz (2017) articulated, creativity is a human right, then engaging in creativity allowed these Holocaust survivors to remain human in the most dehumanizing of environments.

The psychological structure that describes the essence of the experience of creating artwork in a concentration camp or ghetto is constructed from the elements of

witnessing, identity, affirmation of existence, comfort, autonomy, and hope. In the following paragraphs I elaborate on each of these elements.

Witnessing

The deep need to serve as a witness was a common motivator for these and other artists creating in captivity across Europe. Bacon explained, “I wanted to be a witness. I was a child, and I thought, what can I do? I have to be a spokesman for the children’s soul which does not exist anymore” (Y. Bacon, personal communication, September 26, 2017). Bacon also referenced artists in the Terezín design department who utilized their access to art materials to depict the horrors of life in Terezín (Green, 1978), stating that those artists “wanted to give a witness into what [was] really happening. They had the same desire as me. ‘We must tell’—even though they paid with their life” (Y. Bacon, personal communication, September 26, 2017). Alon recalled a quote from Halina, her mother: “My observation, my need to observe what was going on, was stronger than my body. It was a need, a driving need” (as cited in Rosenberg, 2001, para. 6). This need to serve as a witness is congruent with Leclerc’s (2011) findings that the role of witness was critical for Holocaust artists.

Comfort

Life in a ghetto was unpredictable, as deportations to death camps came without warning. Prisoners in camps were at the mercy of a guard during daily selection. Although the act of making art was not safe, a feeling of safety emerged in the routine of drawing or painting. Godos-Jacobs recalled that her mother’s desire to comfort children in Bergen-Belsen led her to organize art classes—“it was something that she knew how to do” (J. Godos-Jacobs, personal communication, September 1, 2017)—suggesting that her

mother also benefitted from the comfort of doing something familiar. Alon expanded on this notion regarding her own mother's drawing process: "You are doing something, so you must do that, not because you chose, not because you want, because you must. And if you stop, everything falls apart." She emphasized that when her mother was drawing "nothing could happen to her" (M. Alon, personal communication, September 25, 2017). The content of Olomucki's works also reflect a sense of comfort. She repeatedly drew mothers embracing their children and women holding each other for warmth (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Halina Olomucki, *Mother and Child*. Poland, 1939–1945. Published with permission from the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum Art Collection. Western Galilee. Israel.

Hope

Although the environments that these artists created in were bleak, some artists found that drawing instilled a sense of hope. Godos-Jacobs recalled, "I had always loved butterflies and flowers. I think they were symbols of beautiful things you couldn't have in the camp. So drawing them reminded the kids that they could have hope" (J. Godos-Jacobs, personal communication, September 1, 2017). She elaborated that art was a

mechanism for lifting morale. It made the children feel better about themselves. “In a sense it allowed for transcendence; it transported us out of this misery, at least temporarily” (J. Godos-Jacobs, personal communication, September 1, 2017).

While interned in the Vilna Ghetto at age 9, Bak sketched a portrait of Moses (Figure 6), which he later attempted to sculpt out of clay. He recalled his goal of displaying the image of Moses in the center of the ghetto, for all residents to be reminded that the Jewish people had previously suffered persecution and were ultimately saved. “I knew that Moses was the great liberator of enslaved and oppressed Jews,” Bak said, continuing, “It was he who led them out of Egypt, and therefore I figured that it would be very auspicious to create for the ghetto a sculpture in his honor” (Bak, 2001, p. 18). Bak’s drawing of Moses was an effort to remind his fellow ghetto residents to retain hope for salvation.



Figure 6. Samuel Bak, *Moses (From the Book Pinkus)*. Vilna Ghetto, Lithuania, 1943. Published with permission from the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum.

Affirmation of Existence

Existence in camps and ghettos was tenuous and, according to Frankl (1946/1973), “underwent a deformation” (p. 93). Many people recalled the disorienting reality of witnessing fellow prisoners fall prey to death. Talking about his close friend, the young artist Peter Ginz, Bacon stated:

I saw him marching to the gas chamber. I was in Auschwitz and I knew exactly who would go to the gas chambers. I knew him and I saw him—I couldn’t speak to him, it was forbidden—but I saw him with other children marching. (Y. Bacon, personal communication, September 26, 2017)

Art making served as an affirmation of the artists’ existence and concrete proof that they had survived another day. Alon reported that fellow inmates begged her mother, Halina, to paint their portraits “so that people won’t forget them” (M. Alon, personal communication, September 25, 2017). When the line between life and death was precarious, art making affirmed that the artist, and those around them, had existed. As Bak (2001) described, “genuine artists tried in the bleakest of times to reassure themselves of their humanity and give value to their existence” (p. 20). In retrospect, Bak wondered if the poets who gave him a book to draw in had this intention:

When they gave the book to me they had some thoughts that at that age I wasn’t able to grasp. That maybe this child is condemned to death and he will not survive, maybe what he has to give, within the limits of what he can create, this will remain. (S. Bak, personal communication, October 11, 2017)

Autonomy

Engelking (2005) described how prisoners in camps and ghettos lived under

totalitarian oppression that resulted in a lack of choice or decision making in almost all aspects of their existence. Creating art, however, provided a unique opportunity to experience some degree of autonomy. Godos-Jacobs shared that by engaging children in art lessons, her mother “felt that if she could distract them and lift the morale, then she would have accomplished something” (J. Godos-Jacobs, personal communication, September 1, 2017). Frederick Terna explicitly described the sense of autonomy he felt by drawing:

If one’s life is sort of in a straitjacket of a concentration camp, with all the restrictions, well, a white sheet of paper and a drawing tool, there I am in control . . . that gave me an autonomy. That was what was pushing me, not the outside world. (F. Terna, personal communication, September 5, 2017)

By creating art, prisoners were able exert a semblance of control in their mostly bound existence.

Identity

The importance of identifying as an artist was pervasive throughout the study’s interviews. Bak spoke about his reputation as a talented 9-year-old artist in the Vilna Ghetto. Rather than describing himself as a victim or a weak helpless child, Bak repeatedly called himself “a little prodigy” (S. Bak, personal communication, October 11, 2017).

Alon described her mother’s identity as an artist, saying, “It was such a big part of her.” She elaborated: “Without that, she would have to find another way, but it was such a big part of her identity that if she didn’t draw, she would lose herself. It wasn’t a part of her, it was her” (M. Alon, personal communication, September 25, 2017). Remaining

active in one's artist identity reminded Holocaust survivors that they served a purpose and allowed them to find meaning.

In some instances, art making provided individuals with a new identity. Terna explained that he never considered himself an artist prior to drawing in Terezín, but decided: "This is what I do, and if I survive, I will probably become an artist" (F. Terna, personal communication, September 5, 2017). When everything he knew had been destroyed, Terna used art to create a new reality for himself. Even at age 95, Terna continues to paint and exhibit his work.

The artists in this study described benefitting from the creation of artwork during the Holocaust. Although their situation was extreme, the benefits they derived from art making may resonate with or support contemporary art therapy practices. Bak explained, "Everything was amplified, so the artistic ego was amplified. This is how it was, the existence within the terribly destructive reality of the ghetto. It was somehow ruled by impulses that people also had in normal life" (S. Bak, personal communication, October 11, 2017). Bak's words suggest that the psychological needs of fellow prisoners became heightened, radical versions of their needs prior to captivity. Contemporary consumers of art therapy also need to bear witness, to gain hope, to feel that their existence is affirmed, to find comfort, to feel secure their sense of identity, and to experience autonomy. If art making offered these benefits to individuals in extreme trauma and life-threatening conditions, then it can certainly support the myriad needs of individuals suffering today.

Four of the five artists I interviewed continued to make art after liberation. Bak, a professional artist, stated that "my art therapy is my work. And I think that doing art is for many artists a therapy" (S. Bak, personal communication, October 11, 2017.) Terna

concluded our interview by saying that he is an artist who “lives with the past and deals with it” through art.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to this study, including a small sample size and the need to rely on narrative memory to recall events that occurred decades ago. I could not directly observe the phenomenon I was researching; it had occurred 70 years earlier. Thus, I could only rely on the participants’ accounts of the phenomena. Moreover, I observed that the interviews cued the participants to share a well-rehearsed story of their experience. Even though they were comfortable divulging this story, they clearly did so in a rote manner. I recognized certain phrases in my interviews that I had heard participants say before, almost verbatim, in documentaries and testimonies.

This discrepancy required me to more carefully qualify the study results by taking into account the distinction between lived experience and both the memory and narrating of that lived experience as told and retold and elaborated over time. For example, while searching the literature I came across a vignette about Yehda Bacon saving his potato rations in Auschwitz to create a stamping tool. I brought this up when I first contacted Bacon and he responded with laughter. He told me that that it had never happened. He explained that stories from survivors are occasionally altered and embellished as they are passed along anecdotally, and he requested we meet in person so that I could hear his story directly from him.

Miriam Alon, the daughter of Halina Olumucki, reported that some of her mother’s stories and written notes differed slightly from those of the Yad Vashem archives, a discrepancy Alon assumed was the result of historians attempting to make

sense of confusing, fragmented, and inconsistent documentation. The validity of data and its generalization are two issues that Holocaust scholar Tec (2000) discussed in relation to the confounds that may present in accounts that are constructed from survivor memory. Tec argued that is impossible to make generalizations about Holocaust experiences from the memories of a sample of survivors, given that there are millions of accounts that perished in the Holocaust and therefore cannot be accessed or used to verify those who survived.

Due to the serious implications of any research that involves experiences of the Holocaust, it is worth elaborating further on this point. Tec (2000) explained that, firstly, the lapse in time since the Holocaust make it difficult for survivors to accurately reconstruct chronological events. Tec noted that it is especially difficult for those who were children during the Holocaust to recount specifics such as date and chronology of events. Furthermore, the samples of testimony that scholars do have access to represent only those individuals who survived and are able to share; the experience of others, such as those who perished, or who choose not to disclose their accounts, are both vast and unattainable. Thus, it must be noted that these latter accounts actually make up a minority of the total victim experience and therefore cannot be used to form generalizations about the Holocaust.

As Tec's (2000) explication makes clear, the details of some of the experiences reported by the participants in this study may contain information that is potentially different from what has been documented in other sources. However, I corroborated their stories with recordings of their own verbal testimonies housed within the Yad Vashem archives when available and I sought out supporting archival information where possible.

In any event, the results reported here serve to present phenomenological elements that were synthesized from descriptive data directly provided by the participants.

Another limitation of the study was the unavoidable subjectivity I experienced when engaging with my participants. Although I attempted to bracket out information that I already knew about each individual and their circumstance, it was difficult to bracket off what I had previously read about their lives. As previously stated, I became interested in this body of Holocaust artwork by having seen it personally. The artwork left a powerful imprint in my mind, and although that imprint motivated my research, it also hindered my ability to fully adopt the phenomenological attitude. Due to the power of the subject matter, I could not fully bracket out what I already knew about the Holocaust, the artwork made, and what I had previously read about my participants.

Conclusion

Nazi ghettos, labor camps, and concentration camps were organized to dehumanize and torture, with the ultimate goal of annihilation. Creativity would appear to be entirely contrary to such an environment and yet it occurred. The artists who participated in this study had suffered through different camps and ghettos across Europe but shared similar experiences of art making in captivity. Engaging in artistic pursuits did not guarantee survival and in some instances hindered it. However, art making did benefit the artists in some capacity and perhaps made their abysmal reality more bearable. By creating artwork while in captivity, these artists were able to affirm their sense of existence; retain a sense of identity; gain a degree of hope, comfort, and autonomy; and serve as a witness for those who perished. By exploring the experience of art making for

those in desperate need of healing almost a century ago, we can better appreciate what our clients may gain from art therapy today.

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CHAPTER 4

A Logotherapeutic Approach to Art Therapy as Informed by Holocaust Artists

Abstract

This paper illustrates a logotherapeutic approach to art therapy drawn from a previous study of artworks from Holocaust survivors and their first-person accounts of how art making while interned in camps or ghettos fostered the spiritual dimension of their lives. The spiritual dimension is defined and described within the existential philosophy of logotherapy. Case vignettes from the author's art therapy practice illustrate how logotherapy can be incorporated into art therapy.

Introduction

My first job out of graduate school was as an art therapist on an inpatient eating disorders unit within a large behavioral health system. Art therapy had long been a major component of the unit's programming and a valued element of patient treatment. I worked with patients in groups and occasionally individually and was always able to share their artwork in daily rounds with interdisciplinary staff. In these meetings I noticed that my patient reports, including their artwork, were different than those of my counterparts in other disciplines. Although the psychiatrist, family therapist, and psychologist typically discussed the challenging aspects of our patients' illnesses, my reports often highlighted another side. The artwork I shared provided depth of insight into the whole of the patient and beyond the parameters of the disorder. I felt that the patients' engagement in art therapy illuminated a unique, unseen aspect of them that was often eclipsed by their illness. Art making seemed to ignite their spirit and their artwork invited me to experience them more fully.

This realization that patient artwork may uniquely elucidate the humanness of an individual was informed by exposure to artwork created by those targeted by Nazi oppression during the Holocaust, which served to foster a sense of identity unrelated to their dehumanized status. I had visited Terezín, which had served as a Nazi ghetto during World War II, just months prior to starting a master's degree in art therapy. I was surprised to see an abundance of artwork on display, all created by individuals while they were imprisoned in the ghetto. I learned that tens of thousands of works had been produced by those targeted by Nazi persecution throughout Europe during the Holocaust (Blatter & Milton, 1981) and was deeply impressed with such evidence of the creative impulse that could remain intact during a genocide. Art therapist Leclerc (2011) asserted that artworks from the Holocaust must not be viewed and forgotten, but rather recognized as a testament to the cruelty that prevailed. The viewer has a responsibility to acknowledge the destruction and cruelty of which humanity is capable. I also believe that it is important to find a sense of meaning in the suffering that was endured. In this vein, I have sought to build upon Leclerc's seminal work by examining the art of the Holocaust from first-person narratives and draw from evidence of creative persistence (Leclerc, 2011) to inform my art therapy practice.

Recently, I conducted qualitative research in which I interviewed four Holocaust survivors who had created artwork while interned in camps or ghettos and one person whose mother had created artwork during the Holocaust. Having learned that they had gained certain benefit from creating art, I have since reflected on whether art therapy clients might attain a similar benefit. In this article I expound on how essential themes from the study of artists who created during the Holocaust currently guide my clinical

work. Specifically, I will discuss the relevance of the theoretical framework known as logotherapy and illustrate how it informs my art therapy practice.

Theoretical Framework

The importance of meaning making is not an uncommon theme in the testimonies and writings of Holocaust survivors (Frankl, 2006; Levi, 1986; Nomberg-Przytyk, 1985; Patterson 1998). Most notable is Frankl, a pioneering psychiatrist who wrote an autoethnographic memoir of Auschwitz and later studied the construct of suffering, which he claimed afforded a sense of meaning and purpose that was life enhancing (1959/2006). Frankl had begun exploring existentialism in psychotherapy in the 1930s while working in psychiatric clinics. Like other existentialists, Frankl was concerned that psychiatry and psychology had become consumed by science and neglected an individual's spirituality. He conceived of *logotherapy* as a "meaning-centered psychotherapy" (1959/2006, p. 98), stemming from the Greek word *logos*, which implies reason or intent. In logotherapy, clients strive to develop a future-oriented meaning of self, thereby breaking away from maladaptive patterns and behaviors that negatively impact their lives (Frankl, 1959/2006). Meaning in logotherapy, thus, is associated with a stable mood, positive outlook, reduction in stress, and stronger self-awareness (Schulenberg et al, 2008).

Frankl (1946/1973) conceived a tridimensional ontology of logotherapy as located in three realms: biological/physical, psychological, and spiritual. The biological and psychological dimensions are evident in all mammals; a living being has both a physical presence and cognitive, psychological abilities. However, an individual's essence lies within the spiritual dimension, which Frankl (1946/1973) believed was "specifically

human” (p. xi). This dimension encompasses the unique characteristics of an individual, including values, passions, and—most importantly to psychotherapy—meaning. Frankl (1946/1973) asserted that the spiritual, noetic dimension should be explicitly included in psychotherapy.

Scholars have asserted that creating artwork provided a sense of meaning to those who did so during the Holocaust (Monnig, 2014, Moreh-Rosenberg, 2016); art making strengthened the artists’ spiritual dimension. Art making helped them to access a sense of meaning and purpose and thus their spiritual essence could remain intact regardless of physical and emotional limitations (Martínez & Flórez, 2015). The physical and emotional dimensions of ghetto and camp prisoners deteriorated as a result of malnutrition, beatings, inadequate hygiene, and humiliation. However, by making art they were able to retain their unique essence by engaging authentically, transcending their circumstance, reconnecting with their sense of identity, building resilience, and affirming their existence (Bohm-Duchen, 2013; Moreh-Rosenberg, 2016). These are all aspects that logotherapists attribute to the functioning of the spiritual dimension (Hoffman, 2009; Wong, 2009). By engaging in art making during the Holocaust, artists’ spiritual dimensions were able to thrive.

According to contemporary existential psychotherapists Ortiz and Flórez (2016), the spiritual dimension in the therapy context consists of two capabilities: self-distancing and self-transcendence. Self-distancing includes the ability to view oneself objectively and to perceive a future different than the present. Self-transcendence includes the ability to maintain individuality regardless of surroundings, the ability to be motivated by values, and the ability to commit to a cause. Narratives from the artists I interviewed

affirmed the characteristics of both self-distancing and self-transcendence. In creating artwork as a means of bearing witness (Leclerc, 2011), they assumed that a future was possible, even if they were not a part of it. In that future they would be recognized, through their artwork, as having existed. The need to serve as a witness, which was pervasive in their narratives, suggests a responsibility or commitment to a cause. In particular the artist identity appeared to be critical in distinguishing the artist from others, which reflects the ability to maintain individuality. The act of self-transcendence was also evident in that art making allowed these artists to psychologically evade danger by performing something familiar and comfortable to them.

Despite that existentialism originated in the early to mid-20th century in parallel to the events leading up to and beyond the Holocaust, its theory and logotherapy are still being elaborated today in the psychotherapy literature (see, e.g., van Deurzen, 2007, 2012; Lowenthal, 2011; Martínez & Flórez, (2015); Schulenberg, 2015, 2016). In contrast, the theories and practice of existentialism have not been updated and integrated into art therapy literature since its introduction by Moon (2009). Moon's articulation of existential art therapy was guided by Yalom's (1980) and May's (1975) assertions that creativity can help address and reconcile existential concerns, of which Holocaust art stands in evidence.

Application to Practice

The study of Holocaust art supports a logotherapeutic framework that I have incorporated into my work. That is, the emphasis of my practice includes helping my clients develop and nourish their spiritual dimension. According to existentialism, a sense of meaning is essential for persevering through hardship (Frankl, 1959/2006, 1969/2014;

Schulenberg, Hutzell, Nassif, & Rogina, 2008). The discovery of meaning from adversity or suffering is what I strive to help my clients achieve. In the throes of distress, many individuals have experienced prior traumatic events that impact their current daily struggles and their existence as a whole. Even though it cannot change their past experiences or their current realities, art therapy can guide them to access and nurture their spiritual dimension in the face of adversity. To retain a sense of humanity and to facilitate spiritual growth, I aim to help my clients accept and realign themselves with the unstable, often painful aspects of their existence (Schneider, 2015).

The goal in existentially-oriented therapy isn't to ameliorate a condition but rather to help people "develop a new relationship to a shocking part of themselves" (Schneider, 2015, p. 22) in order to continue living through such pain. Likewise, contemporary logotherapy, according to Leontiev (2016), "fulfills clients' needs to comprehend, to make sense, to reconstruct the general vision of the world, to have an orientation, to realize their potential, to reach authentic living" (p. 284). Accordingly, the client is encouraged to accept their new position by developing a willingness to continue living within their changed life construct. Through art making, individuals gain acute awareness and contemplation, and therefore can begin to identify meaning within the experience, which makes the new reality of their existence more tolerable.

Logotherapy was originally positioned to supplement traditional psychotherapy (Costello, 2016; Southwick, Lowthert, & Graber, 2016) and often has been considered ancillary to other therapeutic philosophies and modalities (Leontiev, 2016). Frankl (2014) drew the distinction that "psychotherapy endeavors to bring instinctual facts to consciousness" whereas logotherapy "seeks to bring to awareness the spiritual

realities” (p. 43). Although psychotherapy has evolved in the years since Frankl’s original writings, his clarification remains relevant, especially in the U.S. health-care system, which is geared toward symptom amelioration rather than spiritual growth. To illustrate, in the following section I will share case vignettes from my clinical practice as organized by the main benefits of art making articulated by the survivors of the Holocaust who participated in my research. The majority of clients in my practice have been diagnosed with disordered eating, general anxiety disorder, and/or depression. Some have experienced traumatic events and a few struggle with ongoing PTSD symptoms. They are predominantly white females between the ages of 12 and 45 who are in high school or college or who work full time. Each of these examples could be viewed through a psychodynamic or trauma-focused lens, or an entirely different philosophy; however, my intention is to demonstrate how a logotherapeutic approach can be incorporated into art therapy by mobilizing the inherent qualities of an individual (Graber, 2004) to promote well-being.

Case Vignettes

Witnessing

Artwork that reflected the need to serve as a witness was a common motivator for artists creating in captivity across Europe (Leclerc, 2011). Although the clients in my practice have not witnessed the same degree of destruction, some have expressed a related sense of burden from what they have experienced and seen. An example is the case of Kelly (pseudonym), who came to art therapy one year after ending an abusive relationship. She presented as driven and bright; at the time of treatment she was a biology major in college with a strong group of friends and a new, healthy relationship

with a significant other. However, she felt haunted by memories of her abuse and became increasingly concerned about other women in abusive relationships.

In one session Kelly painted a large, wide-open eye surrounded by shades of blue and purple. She explained that the eye represented “watching all of these things happen to me and not doing anything.” A trauma-focused therapist might suggest that this painting was a depiction of dissociation, especially given Kelly’s explanation of watching herself in addition to her traumatic history. However, viewed as an example of self-distancing and self-transcendence, Kelly could see herself as a witness rather than a victim. She was able to conceptualize herself apart from her abuse and recognize that she did not have to be abused again. Although she struggled with PTSD symptoms as the result of past abuse, her words resonated with the burden of her witnessing. The painting of an eye wasn’t solely about her experiences being abused but also conveyed how she was helpless to do anything but watch as her reality crumbled. Through art making, Kelly was able to rise above the weakness she felt as a victim of abuse and view herself as a survivor. Recently, I learned that she had taken on a leadership role within her university. She said that her work in art therapy had “pushed [her] to take action and make a difference.” She had been able to transcend her powerless experience as a victim to a place of advocacy for others.

Identity

Creating artwork within the context of the Holocaust allowed individuals to transcend their prisoner identity, even briefly, to retain a sense of who they were prior to captivity (Amishai-Maisels, 1993). In doing so, artists were able to reconnect with their authentic self and bolster their sense of identity. A profound loss of identity is also

common to many psychiatric patients. Clients may enter therapy feeling more aligned with their psychiatric symptoms than their authentic self (Morris & Willis-Rauch, 2011). Mental illness is frequently stigmatized and those who struggle can become consumed by the label of their diagnosis (Overton & Medina, 2008). I have worked with clients who can easily rattle off a list of their symptomatic behaviors but struggle to define themselves outside of their diagnosis. To counter this identity, I attempt to guide my clients to reconstruct their sense of self. As Kapitan (2009) described, art can be a liberating force that demands recognition of and confrontation with the very existence of one's self. In so doing, a sense of identity can emerge as separate from a client's diagnosis.

I have observed that for clients with eating disorders, many struggle to identify themselves outside of their disorder, as it has consumed them emotionally and physically. To help see this distinction, Molly (pseudonym) was asked to create two portraits: one of both herself and the other of her disorder. Using magazine images, she collaged a full portrait of her disorder, leaving very little empty space on the page. In contrast, the portrait of herself was almost completely blank. She admitted that she struggled to see herself as anything other than an anorexic.

I made Molly's collage accessible for viewing during each subsequent session. Whenever our work led her to identify a characteristic that was specific to her self, as opposed to her disorder, I asked her to represent it in some way on her collage. For example, when discussing her college classes, Molly mentioned that although she had been attached to the idea of earning a science degree, she was genuinely enjoying a particular class that led her to consider switching majors to a humanities field. She

admitted that she had never felt passionate about her science classes but pursued that major because it felt high-achieving and therefore admirable. The perfectionism that drove her disorder also influenced her initial choice of major as something she felt she had to do. I pointed out that her new area of interest was an example of an authentic part of her, something unrelated to her anorexia. Eventually, Molly's self-portrait became a mixed-media piece filled with imagery that comprised her non-disordered identity. She recognized her unique qualities and was able to see in her artwork that she was far more than her disorder and had an existence outside of it.

Affirmation of Existence

The Holocaust survivors I interviewed faced death on a daily basis and described their existence within a camp or ghetto as tenuous. Even though the clients in my practice aren't regularly confronted with the threat of death, many question the quality—and often the very point—of their existence. An adolescent client, Allie (pseudonym), came to art therapy one afternoon intent on depicting what she described as a “chair left on the side of the road.” She spoke about passing discarded furniture on a curb, waiting to be hauled away, and wondered out loud if others would ever want it. She described a chair she had seen sitting in the rain and, because she had no need for the chair, she was overcome with worry for it. I suggested that she paint the image because it appeared to be meaningful to her. As she painted the image of the abandoned chair, Allie shared that she occasionally worried about her own existence and whether others viewed her as someone “worth salvaging,” or whether she, too, would be “left out in the rain” someday.

In her painting Allie confronted what Sousa (2015) described as the *dimensions of existence*. Although there was substantial evidence that she was loved and highly

regarded by the people in her life, Allie felt insignificant and questioned the value of her existence. She contemplated her life's purpose and whether she had the potential to achieve meaning or to discover that her existence was disposable. Although nonexistentially oriented therapists might view Allie's concerns primarily as a symptom of depression, I acknowledged for her the paradox that is part of the existential exploration (Reker, 2000) in which she might ponder her capacity for meaning. By asking Allie to paint the imagery of the chair and talk about what resonated in it for her, she was able to engage in an art process that facilitated contemplation of her worries rather than pathologized her fears.

Comfort

In my study of Holocaust artwork, I have come across a number of surprisingly bright and light-hearted images. Amalie Seckbach, for example, painted watercolors of flowers and surreal landscapes in the Terezín ghetto, which Rosenberg (2009) noted were contradictory to the reality of the ghetto. Dicker-Brandeis encouraged children to depict beauty from their memory or their imagination, to counter their bleak environment (Makarova, 2001; Monnig, 2014; Wix, 2009). Some artists seemed motivated to draw in order to comfort themselves with memories of a better life. Testimony from survivor Judy Godos-Jacobs supported this assertion, as she recalled the bright subject matter of her artwork contrasting with the abysmal environment of the Bergen-Belsen camp, stating that her drawings were a reminder of the bright life she'd once had (personal communication, September 1, 2017). I was reminded of these brighter works when a client, Elissa (pseudonym), wanted to draw Olaf the snowman, a Disney character. Her desire initially seemed odd to me, thinking that an animated snowman seemed regressed

for a woman in her twenties and was incongruent with the heavy topics she usually discussed while she drew. Elissa had recently visited her hometown and spoke about how disappointing the trip had been. Both of her parents are addicted to drugs and she was disappointed that they hadn't stayed sober during her visit. She left their home feeling hurt and dissatisfied, and angry that she didn't get to spend quality time with them.

As she drew, Elissa talked about the conflicting feelings she harbored toward her parents. In recent years they had been in car accidents, had encountered legal trouble, and had been written off by most of their extended family. Elissa felt genuine concern as well as responsibility for their wellbeing, but also intense anger at them and a hopelessness that they could ever change. Then I asked Elissa why she wanted to draw Olaf and whether he related to her parents at all. She replied that Olaf was loving and supportive to everyone no matter what, characteristics she exhibited toward her parents. She also reflected on an annual trip she had taken with her parents to Disney World as child, noting that "there were some good times, too."

From a logotherapeutic perspective, it seemed that Olaf may have represented the warm and comforting aspects of her family, which she was able to remember even when her parents were at their worst. With this insight, the image was no longer out of place; instead I recognized it as an attempt for Elissa to comfort herself in response to her painful and disappointing visit. I asked if her parents liked Olaf, too, and though she couldn't answer definitively, she added snowflakes around the character using a technique that her mother had shown her. The snowflakes, like Olaf, seemed juvenile on the surface, but the associated nostalgia was clearly a comfort.

Resiliency

Creativity and imagination are among the characteristics of people who are described as resilient (Worrall & Jerry, 2007). The art of the Holocaust offers evidence that resilience was cultivated in the camps or ghettos through the use of creativity. The artwork also served as a reminder to people of what they had already been through and of their capacity to continue fighting for survival. Art therapy clients often perceive their struggle in therapy as evidence of their capacity to survive. Tara (a pseudonym) had contacted me 2 years after termination to return to art therapy. Her mother's cancer was no longer in remission and chemotherapy was proving ineffective.

Tara described feeling overwhelmed and scared, so I asked her to draw that feeling. Using chalk pastels she filled the paper with disconnected, abstract shapes in reds and oranges. The resulting image looked like a puzzle that had been pulled apart, with the pieces in close proximity but no longer connected. Tara explained that she felt as though she "fell apart every day" but recognized that she always put herself back together.

After she completed the drawing, we talked about her mother's condition. Tara sensed that her mother had given up hope and was resigning herself to the fact that her cancer was terminal. Tara stated that she didn't know if she could endure her mother's death and questioned her own ability to pick herself up yet again. I acknowledged the reality of her situation and agreed that losing her mother would be devastating. After sitting with that heaviness, I asked her to look at her artwork again and consider how she had been able to put herself back together in the past. We recounted various times that Tara had felt as though she was falling apart, as depicted in her drawing, and how she

always managed to put herself back together. Using her drawing as a metaphor, Tara was reminded of her capacity for resilience.

Hope

Noticing that her younger sister was also struggling in response to their mother's illness, Tara brought Leah (pseudonym) to one of our sessions. Tara was concerned that Leah felt detached from the rest of their family and thought that engaging in art therapy together would help Leah feel more connected. At age 12, Leah wasn't given as much information about her mother's condition as her older siblings. She felt confused and worried about her mother's prognosis, and she worried that she couldn't rely on her parents or family to provide her the details she wanted. Leah did know that plans for treatment were frequently changing and that her mother was in immense pain. She stated that watching her family with the minimal information she had ultimately made her feel hopeless.

I recalled the interview I had with Judy Godos-Jacobs, who had found a sense of hope through drawing butterflies and flowers in the Bergen-Belsen camp, saying "I think they were symbols of beautiful things you couldn't have in the camp. So, drawing them reminded the kids that they could have hope" (personal communication, September 1, 2017). Drawing images from her past had helped Godos-Jacobs access and define hope within her harsh and uncertain surroundings. The imagery reminded her that beauty could exist in the world and offered hope that she could one day experience it again. Depicting these symbols of hope reinforced Godos-Jacobs's hope in the future.

Because Leah felt lost and hopeless, I asked her to think of an image that had made her hopeful in the past. Leah responded that seeing the sun rise made her feel

hopeful and she began painting a memory of a sunrise she had seen on a recent camping trip. She recalled feeling full of hope and energy as she watched the sunrise. As she painted, Leah talked about how the sun was the one certainty in her life; it rose every morning and she always knew it was in the sky, even if she couldn't see it. She used a range of colors to depict the sky, explaining that she could count on the sun to exist regardless of how the sky appeared. She experimented with clouding the sun using other colors and seemed relieved when she could still see the image under coats of paint.

As Leah painted, her affect changed. She applied the assurance she felt toward the sun to her parents; though they weren't always transparent with her, she could count on them to be supportive and to answer her questions. She also began to recognize that if her mother did pass away, her impression on Leah would outlast her own mortality. The hopeful image of a sunrise reminded her of times she had felt hopeful in the past and she embraced the idea of hope once again.

Discussion

In all of the above cases as the therapist I was of course powerless to change the circumstances these clients had lived through. I could not erase Kelly's history of abuse, answer Allie's questions about her existence, deny the impact of Molly's disorder on her life, send Elissa's parents to rehab, or find a cure for Tara's and Leah's mother. However, by engaging them in art making to access and develop the attributes of their spiritual dimension, I was able to help them find greater meaning and make their existence more bearable. The unyielding power of the human spirit is a function of one's capacity to access the spiritual dimension in an attempt to overcome adversity (Wong, 2009). Logotherapy isn't an approach that searches for pathological symptoms or illness; rather,

it provides a framework to support clients in recognizing and achieving their human potential.

Despite the inhumane conditions in camps and ghettos, people in the Holocaust who made art were able to retain their humanity by engaging in a pursuit that, although dangerous, paradoxically strengthened them spiritually (Moreh-Rosenberg, 2016). Making art in camps and ghettos or in hiding didn't change the grotesque circumstances that those individuals endured. Although their creativity supported a type of psychic survival (Moreh-Rosenberg, 2016), it did not ensure physical survival. In fact some artists were brutally punished when their Nazi captors found their works (Green, 1978). What art making did offer was an opportunity to engage authentically by contemplating, exploring, and ultimately sharing their lived experience. The artists assuaged their suffering by finding a sense of meaning and purpose.

Schneider (2015) asserted that psychotherapists may limit their capabilities if they focus primarily on such as "secondary conditions" (p. 23) such as poor emotion regulation, brain imbalances, and irrational thoughts, and thereby neglect an exploration into deeper dimensions of existence. He argued that humankind's "precariousness as creatures" (p. 23) is the root of mental health concerns and therefore should be examined in therapy. The artists of the Holocaust engaged in this very type of deep self-exploration, showing that art has the power to lead an individual to that deeply contemplative place. By incorporating logotherapeutic philosophy into art therapy practice, I don't limit this work to psychiatric symptoms and causes but rather invite clients to engage in an exploration of their spiritual dimension. In this way art therapists might consider the

capacity art has to evoke the spiritual dimension and engage clients on an existential level.

I initiated a study of artwork from the Holocaust with the implicit feeling that it would reveal benefits that are connected to art therapy theories. In interviews with survivors, I learned from their own words that art making bolstered their sense of identity, hope, comfort, autonomy, and resilience; an affirmation of existence; and an opportunity to serve as a witness. These benefits contributed to a personal sense of meaning and reinforced spiritual dimensions. In recognition that these themes are inherent aspects of humanity, I have since structured my clinical work to help build these capacities within my clients. If, as Wong (2009) wrote, “the human spirit is the most important resource in psychotherapy, because it is the basis for recovery and resilience” (pp. 86–87), then art therapists and other practitioners can strive to develop and support the noetic aspect of their clients’ existence. In doing so, we invite our clients to access their spiritual dimension and be led to healing.

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Chapter 5

Conclusion

Taken together, the three manuscripts that comprise my doctoral research (Chapters 2–4) have a unifying theme of humanity. In this context the word *humanity* refers to the qualities and capacities that are unique to humans, such as compassion, empathy, creativity, imagination, ambition, humor, and faith. Additional qualities include the ability to perceive beauty, engage with others, and identify a sense of meaning in one's life (Schulenberg, Hutzell, Nassif, & Rogina, 2008).

The ability to maintain a sense of humanity, regardless of external dehumanizing factors, is accentuated by the artists of the Holocaust. Although the artwork has been studied by other scholars as important evidence of visual culture from historical, cultural, and art historical perspectives, it also evidences the tenacity of human characteristics that are often witnessed by art therapists. The situation of the Holocaust is unique and unparalleled; however, the act of retaining human values in a dehumanizing situation through art is relevant to art therapists in myriad environments.

Theory

The manuscript written for Chapter 2 was synthesized from a comprehensive review of the literature that I conducted in order to qualify for doctoral candidacy by illustrating deep familiarity with the conceptual terrain of my study. I examined the literature on Holocaust art in general and in the art therapy literature. I sorted the thematic content of the artwork I had seen in books and in galleries by their aesthetic content, which helped me examine the possible motivations for creating such works. I asserted that art making had a humanizing effect on the artists, as it allowed them to retain a sense

of who they were prior to incarceration, which helped them to spiritually resist the dehumanizing acts of the Nazis. In some instances, art making supported a sense of dignity and helped to build a sense of community. The choice to make art emphasized individuals' ability to maintain free will. These features—a strong sense of self, feelings of dignity, connecting to a community, and the capacity of freedom of choice—are all inherently human characteristics. By making art, Holocaust artists were able to embody this humanity.

I then presented a theoretical perspective that was based in art therapy theory, which emphasized the bolstering of humanity through creativity as linked to examples of Holocaust art. In particular I noted Kalmanowitz and Lloyd's (1999, 2002, 2005) construct of the *portable studio*, which encourages participants to transcend their bleak environment and restrictive physical space to engage in art making by internalizing the comfort of an art therapist and studio space. Regarding trauma, which has been written about extensively in the art therapy literature, I located some theories that support personal growth and highlight the resilience of art making in response to tragedy. I also reviewed theories of meaning making grounded in an existential construct that serve to sustain an individual's sense of humanity. I suggested that further investigation into the art of the Holocaust could support a humanizing approach to art therapy practice.

This review of literature allowed me to delve deeper into the extent of Holocaust art, beyond Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and the artists of Terezín. In doing so, I learned about the structure of Nazi camp systems and the various ways artists were able to create while interned. My review of relevant literature helped me to conceptualize art making within the Holocaust as a unique phenomenon of interest, as I saw how abundant the practice

was in camps across Europe. I began to question the motivation of the artists and how they benefited from creating artwork, which helped me formulate my research question. Synthesizing this knowledge with related concepts in art therapy literature also pushed me out of the confines of clinical practice, which had limited my perspective on art therapy practice.

Research

In Chapter 3 I detailed the field-based phenomenological study I conducted with a sample of surviving Holocaust artists. Using Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychological method, I analyzed the content of these interviews and synthesized the themes into a psychological statement that I found was essential to the phenomenon of creating art during the Holocaust. I then deconstructed this statement into the elements of witnessing, identity, affirmation of existence, comfort, autonomy, and hope.

Upon review of my transcripts, the rehearsed nature of the participants' interviews stood out to me. The survivors I interviewed are willing to share their stories and have done so many times, primarily in educational settings. In contrast, according to a curator at the United States Holocaust Museum and Memorial, the topic of the Holocaust evokes for the general public memories of black-and-white photos of walking corpses in striped uniforms (K. Schuster, personal communication, March 7, 2018) and similar horrifying imagery. Given these images, it is unsurprising that people often listen to survivors' tales with an expectation that the most gruesome details of their story will be included. Although the survivors have been free for decades, they are continually asked to detail the most dehumanizing experience of their lives. Their story is often flattened to one of

starvation, hurt, and loss. The nuances of their account can get lost in favor of a sensationalized account of how they defied death.

In his writings on interpreting the narratives of Holocaust survivors, Greenspan (1999) noted the difference between tragedy and atrocity, and how that discrepancy makes survivors' stories difficult to both tell and hear. He explained that the Holocaust as a whole is taught, and therefore conceptualized, as an atrocity, characterized by mass death and degradation. Greenspan classified survivor's narratives as tragedies, marked by a smaller number of individuals and a more structured sequence of events. He stated, "in tragedy victims are still identifiably living and human, not atrocity's doomed, defeated, or walking dead" (Greenspan, 1999, p. 87).

The problem lies in how a survivor shares their tragedy as immersed in an atrocity. How can they tell what happened specifically to them when there is so much more to the story as a whole? I surmise that some survivors have become accustomed to the expectations of their listeners and therefore have structured their narratives in such a way that their unique experience is both conveyed and also matches the publicly familiar context of the Holocaust as atrocity.

The horrific details are critical to Holocaust education because the mass scale of atrocity must be fully expressed. However, the atrocity of the Holocaust is made up of millions of individual tragedies that can get lost in the overwhelming numbers of death and destruction. Greenspan (1999) quoted a survivor he has interviewed multiple times about witnessing one man's death in a work camp and how that experience differed from what the survivor had witnessed later in an extermination camp:

People hadn't become ciphers yet. They were still, up to that moment, human beings. With a name, with a personality. And when they were gone, their image was retained. But the mass disappearing into the gas chambers-, they're just a mass of people going-, like in a slaughterhouse (p. 87).

The individual stories of survivors can be seen as atypical of what is expected from Holocaust testimony (Greenspan, 1999) since the focus is on the few rather than the masses. The human qualities of the individuals are overshadowed and often don't fit what is envisaged about the Holocaust. But these individual tragedies are what is so imperative for Holocaust education, as they are accessible and relatable and can ultimately evoke compassion and empathy. The diary of Anne Frank is an example of this; situated within the Holocaust, it tells the story of one family from an adolescent girl's perspective. Readers can relate and feel genuine compassion for the Frank family because the perspective is narrow and, to an extent, familiar. Exposure to individual accounts of the Holocaust can potentially enhance understanding and empathy, as these smaller scale stories are easier to comprehend than mass extermination.

Because my study centered on the unique experience of art making in Nazi camps or ghettos, I sought out these individual stories. Inquiring about their artwork, I invited my participants to share their distinct story from their exclusive perspective as both artist and survivor. I did not regard them as nameless victims who were indistinguishable from the masses but as artists. They were able to talk about what humanized, rather than dehumanized, them. I did not ask follow up questions about the Holocaust as a whole but limited the focus on their experience creating art, which made space for their individual story to be emphasized. 94-year-old Frederick Terna eagerly walked up the three flights

of stairs in his home to his studio to expound on how he had improvised brushes and pens in Terezín. He pointed out the jars of sand he collects to add texture to his work, as dirt and sand were the only materials he could access in the Kaufering work camp. He commented that he was glad we met in his home so that he could demonstrate how he had managed to make his art in Terezín.

I was grateful to be in Terna's presence and to absorb all that he was willing to offer. I was struck by how committed he was to making his artwork in the ghetto and how that commitment has stayed with him throughout his life. Terna seemed genuinely excited to share his process with me, which was a response to my genuine interest in learning about it. The materials and techniques he used in Terezín, as well as the other artists who influenced him, aren't just a part of his captivity but make up his identity as an artist. During his time in Terezín, his artistic identity helped to humanized him. In showing me his studio and materials, Terna conveyed himself not just as a Holocaust survivor but as an artist. Terna, and the other artists I interviewed, were able to maintain a sense of humanity despite their dehumanizing circumstances. By interviewing participants about their art, rather than limiting our discussion to their suffering, I encouraged them to share one of the few, but major, humanizing aspects of their experience that has shaped their identity to this day.

In reflecting on this study I am keenly aware of the limitations that I faced. I wanted to understand the phenomenon of making art within the Holocaust but, due to the massive data that qualitative research produces, I was limited to a small sample. Because over 30,000 works of artwork have been documented from the Holocaust, it would be impossible to describe the essence of the phenomenon from just five accounts.

Additionally, the passage of time can distort one's memory and narration of events, making some aspects of the survivors' accounts potentially contestable.

What I was able to do, however, was to verify the results of my study against what has been documented and discussed in the literature. The psychological statement of essence that I arrived at was consistent with the writings of Holocaust art scholars (Bohm-Duchen, 2013; Moreh-Rosenberg, 2016). Conversations I had with curators at Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Beit Terezín, as well as Holocaust art scholars Elena Marakova and Geirdre Jankeviciute, also supported my results. Both Yehuda Bacon and Frederick Terna mentioned interactions with the artists in the Terezín design department, including Leo Haas and Bedrich Fritta, whose accounts are heavily documented in Holocaust art literature (Green, 1978; Blatter & Milton, 1981; Costanza, 1982). Bacon and Terna's interactions were consistent with the literature and this consistency supported the validity of my claims. While it is impossible to make any generalization about the Holocaust from a small sample comprised exclusively of survivors narrating their accounts from decades ago (Tec, 2000), I can say that the phenomenological themes I identified were corroborated by literature and findings of other Holocaust art scholars.

Practice

Chapter 4 detailed how I apply the information gained in the research study to my clinical practice. I shared case vignettes from my practice illustrating the themes identified in the psychological structure that was the result of the research. This manuscript did not attempt to make a false equivalency between the experience of creating art during the Holocaust to the experience of an art therapy session. Rather, I

illustrated how the humanizing themes that arose in my study may be relevant to clinical art therapy practice today. I supported these examples with the existential framework of logotherapy, which emphasizes the importance of personal meaning making in particular. According to Frankl and other logotherapists, a sense of meaning is a uniquely human capacity (Frankl, 1946/1973) and is critical in overcoming suffering (Wong, 2009). Using these tenets, I guide my clients in art making to support and nourish this ability.

I recognized that a client's artwork can be humanizing during my first art therapy job on an inpatient psychiatric unit. In my professional growth since, I have gained the confidence to follow my clinical judgment and now incorporate a logotherapeutic philosophy in my work. When considering how I apply my research to practice, the same image came to my mind. I envisioned a flower growing on a patch of grass. The flower has the full capacity to grow and bloom, but it can be thwarted by environmental conditions such as wind, storms, and herbivores. Although those factors impact the flower, they are not a part of the flower. I think clinicians can spend too much time and energy addressing these impeding conditions and not enough time looking at the actual flower and the capacity it has to grow. As trite as this analogy may seem, it helped me articulate how art making may have been used by individuals in camps and ghettos, and how it can be utilized in art therapy practice today. I have situated my practice to respond first to the human needs of my clients and now put less emphasis on the labels they bring into the session.

Practitioner-Based Research

I expected my research findings to have an impact on my clinical practice and they did. I was surprised, however, to find how well the research methodology I used

would translate to my clinical work. The *phenomenological attitude* has helped me to understand why I think with the lens of an existential-phenomenological approach to art therapy and psychotherapy and why it is so important.

During their initial assessment, I now tell my clients that although I may have spoken to their parents or other treatment providers, I want to hear their narrative of their experience from their own voice. I don't fully bracket out what others have shared with me about my clients but I do try to consider the lived experience of my clients within their world. This gives me insight into their perspective and helps me to better understand why they make the choices they do, especially when some of those choices are harmful.

Giorgi stated that the descriptions of experiences shared by participants in a phenomenological study are an "opening into the world of the other that is shareable" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 96). I think this notion translates well to art therapy, as clients can depict their lived experience through art. When sharing artwork, a client invites the art therapist into a part of their inner world, allowing the art therapist to better understand the client's reality. The artwork adds another dimension of expression to the therapeutic relationship and can further both the art therapist's understanding of their client and the client's self-insight.

Concluding Thoughts

As I conclude this project, I have reflected on my original goals and whether they were achieved. I believe that they were. Not only from the writing of the articles that I plan to submit to academic journals, but other experiences I have had to disseminate this information. I have been able to share stories with and beyond the art therapy community. Beit Terezin, a museum dedicated to the memory of Terezín that is located on a kibbutz

in Israel, requested transcripts of my interviews with Frederick Terna and Yehuda Bacon for their archives. I also showed reproductions of artwork from each of my participants in an exhibit at Notre Dame of Maryland University in the spring of 2018. I have been since contacted by other organizations about showing the exhibit in their galleries.

The second goal of my research was to understand how art making supported individuals while in the midst of a severely traumatic experience. I hoped that contributing this knowledge to art therapy literature would inform art therapists in practice. I wanted to show how to support clients to grow in spite of the struggles they contend with. With the philosophy and language of logotherapy, I illustrated the concept of art supporting an individual's existential needs in practice.

I was introduced to the phenomenon of Holocaust art around the same time that I was introduced to art therapy and the two have since been entangled in my mind. The chance to delve deeper into the subject has allowed me to better articulate how the art of the Holocaust has become such a critical component of my art therapy practice. I first searched for qualitative commonalities between Holocaust art and art therapy: Both are examples of an outlet or expression, both relate to mastery, and so forth. These comparisons, however, were surface level and based only on what I had read or surmised. In completing a phenomenological inquiry, I was able to access a more profound sense of the phenomenon of Holocaust art. In doing so, I recognized that the artists were able to uphold the most human aspect of their existence. Dissanayake (1995) asserted that art is a human behavior. I agree and propose that art is also a quality of humanity that can support individuals regardless of their environment.

I hope that art therapists reading my research are able to recognize and appreciate the ability art has to humanize individuals even in the most dehumanizing of situations. By engaging in art-making, art therapists are able to guide clients to reclaim and bolster a potentially lost or faded sense of self.

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Appendix

Informed Consent Form for Participants

INFORMED CONSENT

What is the Relevance of Artwork Created in the Holocaust to Art Therapy Theory and Practice?

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring artwork created during the Holocaust and its relevance to the contemporary practice of art therapy. This study is for doctoral research and will be conducted by a licensed and board certified art therapist. Participation will consist of a brief, semi-structured interview asking about your experience in the Holocaust, or your knowledge of artwork from the Holocaust. Please take whatever time you need to discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish to. The decision to join, or not to join, is up to you.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to participate you will be asked questions about your Holocaust experience, or that of a relative. You may refuse to answer any or all questions. Questions will be opened-ended and you can answer in as little or as much detail as you choose. If you prefer to write your answers, instead of verbalize them, you may. The interview will not last more than one hour.

You can stop participating at any time. The investigator may stop the interview at any time if she judges it is in your best interest. She can do this without your consent.

CONFIDENTIALITY

You can choose for your identity to remain confidential. Please select which of the following, if any, you will allow the investigator to disseminate in subsequent publications and/or presentations:

- ☐ Your full name
- ☐ Your maiden name
- ☐ Your date of birth
- ☐ Your country of origin
- ☐ Camps or ghettos you were interned in
- ☐ Titles of any artwork you created during the Holocaust
- ☐ Your title
- ☐ Place of employment
- ☐ Additional information such as

☐ Please keep all identifying information confidential.

RISKS and BENEFITS

This study involves the following risks: Discomfort or emotional distress due to the sensitivity of the topic. There may also be other risks that cannot be predicted.

It is reasonable to expect the following benefits from this research: Your testimony will educate future generations about the Holocaust, and bring awareness to the suffering that individuals experienced. There is no guarantee that you will personally experience benefits from participating in this study. Others may benefit in the future from the information found.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

Please contact Dr. Chris Belkofer if you have questions about the study, any problems, unexpected physical or psychological discomforts, any injuries, or think that something unusual or unexpected is happening.

For questions about your privacy and rights, please contact Maureen Leonard.

Consent of Subject (or Legally Authorized Representative)

Signature of Subject or Representative:

Date:
