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Life After the Ashes
The Postwar Pain, and Resilience,
of Young Holocaust Survivors

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WASHINGTON, D.C.

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MONNA AND OTTO WEINMANN LECTURE SERIES
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THE MONNA AND OTTO WEINMANN ANNUAL LECTURE focuses on Holocaust survivors who came to America, and on their families. Born in Poland and raised in Austria, Monna Steinbach Weinmann (1906–1991) fled to England from Vienna in the autumn of 1938. Otto Weinmann (1903–1993) was born in Vienna and raised in Czechoslovakia. He served in the Czech, French, and British armies, was injured in the D-Day invasion at Normandy, and received the *Croix de Guerre* for his valiant contributions during the war. Monna Steinbach and Otto Weinmann married in London in 1941 and immigrated to the United States in 1948. Funding for this program is made possible by a generous grant from their daughter Janice Weinman Shorenstein. The Monna and Otto Weinmann Annual Lecture is organized by the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

In the mid-1980s, Robert Krell, my good friend and the 1997 Monna and Otto Weinmann lecturer, convinced me that I actually am a Holocaust survivor despite not having been in a concentration camp. I had avoided that fate by being taken in 1944 into a Red Cross orphanage in Budapest, with false Christian papers, accelerated instruction on how to behave during a Catholic mass, and exhortations never to reveal my name, background, or other signs of being Jewish.

Having been convinced, in 1991 I attended the first international gathering of child survivors in New York City (see Marks, 1993). Much to my surprise, there I met an old friend and fellow social psychologist, Ervin Staub. It turned out that he, too, was a child survivor from Budapest. During my professional career I had read many articles about Holocaust survivors, and I had been imbued with the general consensus that the overwhelming majority were irreparably scarred by their experiences: unable to pursue successful occupations, unable to have close emotional relationships, and deeply neurotic if not borderline psychotic.

I knew that *I* refuted this prognosis; but Rob and Ervin were also child survivors and had become well-known behavioral scientists. Each of us held a full professorship at a major North American university, had a normally happy family life, and—as far as I could tell—was in good mental health. Adapting and oversimplifying Sir Karl Popper's reasoning about black swans and white swans (1934/1959), I could argue that it takes only one healthy, successful

survivor to disconfirm the theory that all survivors are devastated beyond repair; and now I had three such disconfirmations. I also noticed that much of the literature was based on clinical interviews and other anecdotal research, a method well-known to be susceptible to various biases and research artifacts (e.g., Helmreich, 1992; Suedfeld, 1996a).

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

My scientific roots are in experimental psychology, and I rely on data that are systematically collected and statistically analyzed. So I began to collect objective, quantitative data on both child and adult survivors of the Holocaust. During the past ten years, my research group has conducted a number of studies based on videotaped oral histories and written self-report measures, thus using both qualitative and quantitative material but basically numerical methods to understand the material. Let me briefly summarize our research methodology. Our data come from videotaped oral history archives in Vancouver and in Columbus, Ohio; from questionnaires administered at five gatherings of survivors and their families, and from a non-Holocaust survivor comparison group. The videotapes were analyzed by a variety of quantitative content analytic systems, and the questionnaires were scored according to standard instructions. Both kinds of data were then processed through statistical analyses. We break down the data as follows:

Survivors

1. “Identified” vs. “hidden” survivors: “Identified” means that during the time of the persecution the authorities had identified them as Jews and they were either in camps, slave labor programs, or ghettos. “Hidden” survivors were either physically concealed—in rooms, as was Anne Frank, or in forests, underground bunkers, sewers, and other such places—or in “open hiding,” not physically concealed but hiding their Jewish identity. Many had false papers identifying them as Christian. A high proportion were children passing as non-Jews and sheltered by Christian families, monasteries, convents, orphanages, and other kinds of group homes.

2. Child vs. older: People who were fifteen years or younger at the end of the war were categorized as child survivors.

3. Time period (videotaped interviews only): The “before” period was prior to when the war affected the country in which the survivor lived; the “early” Holocaust was from when the Nazis first occupied or dominated the country where the survivor lived, up to the point where the interviewee was removed from home. This usually meant being deported to a camp,

moved into a ghetto, or going into hiding. The “late” Holocaust period was from removal from home until liberation. “After” was post-liberation to the time of the interview.

Comparison Group

Members of the comparison or control group were Jewish volunteers, in the same age range as the survivors. These volunteers had lived in North America or other safe places before 1945, and they were living in North America at the time of the data collection. Control-group members filled out our paper and pencil measures only. The individuals were recruited through Jewish organizations in Vancouver, Miami Beach, and Columbus.

LIGHT FROM THE ASHES

In 1996, the International Society of Political Psychology held its annual conference in Vancouver, the city that has been my home for thirty years. As part of my contribution to that meeting, I organized a symposium to consider how a particular set of childhood experiences affected the later life of an individual (Suedfeld, 1996b). Because I knew that several of the members of the Society had either survived or fled from the Holocaust, I wanted my colleagues to reconsider the widespread assumption that early trauma causes irreparable psychic damage. Given that the potential speakers had grown up to be respected social scientists, it was clear that even the most massive and widespread traumatic event of our time had not destroyed their lives; but that outcome left unanswered the questions of what effects the Holocaust did have on them and, more broadly, on other child survivors.

Through Ervin Staub and others, I found several more colleagues who fit the criteria. Several turned me down: they didn’t want to think about those unhappy times, or they didn’t want to reveal themselves so personally and painfully at an open forum. I was disappointed, but eventually recruited four participants. I intended only to organize and chair the session, introduce the speakers, and maintain an orderly discussion period. I am one of the many survivors who were, and in many cases still are, reluctant to talk about their experiences even to their families and certainly in public.

Much to my surprise and dismay, both the speakers and the audience insisted that I become an active participant and tell my own story. This gave me a much more sympathetic fellow feeling for the people who had declined my invitation. But, in all honor, I could not refuse what I had urged others to do, so we wound up with five speakers.

The session was crammed with people who had come to hear the life stories of colleagues and friends they had known and respected, personally or through their publications,

for many years. It was the first time I had ever seen tears from audience members at a scientific symposium. Several were so moved as they learned about the horrors through which some of the participants had lived, and as the audience felt the painful forthrightness with which those events, and their consequences, were presented. We were all reminded that, although two-thirds of Europe's Jews died during the Holocaust, the speakers were drawn from the fewer than ten percent of children who had survived.

At the end of the session, and during the rest of the meeting, people kept coming up, thanking me, and persuading me to follow up the symposium with something more lasting. These suggestions eventually led to the publication of the book, *Light from the Ashes: Social Science Careers of Young Holocaust Refugees and Survivors* (Suedfeld, 2001).

The book contains autobiographical chapters by seventeen people whose early life was disrupted by Nazi persecution. Six Jewish youngsters spent the entire war in German-dominated countries, as did one Christian child whose father eventually died in a concentration camp because he was a prominent opponent of the Nazis. Ten others, including one from another anti-Nazi Christian family, became refugees. All eventually emigrated from Europe and pursued research careers in the humanities or social sciences.

I asked each author to describe his or her childhood and youth, and to trace the influence of those experiences to who and what the person became: professionally, personally, and societally. I deliberately invited people whose research was not focused on the Holocaust, and the majority were like me: they had never thought about how the Holocaust might have affected their eventual choice of discipline, research topics, and theoretical and methodological approaches. Some had done their best to avoid thinking about their Holocaust experiences—and some of the people I invited declined because they preferred to continue avoiding such thoughts.

The lives of the contributors, before, during, and after the war, are impressive in their diversity. Whether they survived by pretending to be Christians, or lived in hiding with relatives or foster families, or fled to strange foreign lands—Britain, America, Australia and, in one case, China—and no matter where and in what field they wound up, they were able to discover connections between those early events and their adult self. In retrospect, their (actually, I suppose I should say “our”) values, personality, emotions, politics, close relationships, and scientific work were seen as connected organically to the children we had been. All of us lost family and home early in life; some of us lost even our identity. We survived a varied range of dangers and privations, and had to rebuild our life in a new country, a new culture, a new language, and often with new people.

In contemplating the book to which we all contributed, I think about it in the context of my broader research on survivors of the Holocaust. In what follows, I shall use some of the chapters in *Light from the Ashes* to illustrate the findings of the wider-scale research project.

One striking finding has been that many of my interviewees considered the years after the war to be as traumatic as the Holocaust itself, and sometimes more so. Some, separated from their family, feared never to see them again—a fear that only too often was confirmed. Having lived through the siege of Budapest in a Red Cross orphanage, I was terrified after liberation that I would be lost forever. I was passing as Christian, under a false name unknown to my family, and my current orphanage was only the latest in a series of bombed-out shelters, far from the original address where they had left me. Thus, even if my relatives had survived, I was convinced that they could never find me; increasingly convinced as the months rolled by and other children were reunited with their families. Unlike so many of my cohort, I was lucky: an aunt and uncle, following a list of all Red Cross children's shelters in Budapest, did eventually stumble on the right one.

Although my mother did not return from Auschwitz, my father survived forced labor and a concentration camp, and came back to take me to America. For those children who were left alone, the adjustment to years in an orphanage, or to foster families who were not always welcoming, could be worse than life during the war. Some of these children found loving, warm foster parents and siblings; but others were abused, neglected, and rejected, sometimes shunted from one family or one orphanage to another until they grew up. One of our interviewees, orphaned during the Holocaust, was the subject of a postwar custody battle between his Christian foster parents and his dead father's sister. The latter won the fight, and then put him in a Jewish orphanage. She didn't want him; she only wanted to make sure he'd be brought up Jewish. Another, a young teenager at liberation, was placed with relatives who felt that he was forced on them. Although his intelligence was, if anything, superior, they managed to get rid of him by committing him to a home for the mentally disabled, where he was kept until he was old enough to go out on his own. Several felt safer with their Christian rescuers than with parents returning from concentration camps, and resisted integration into a family and religion that meant nothing but danger.

The process of emigrating to the eventual place of settlement could be long and hard, as people waited for visas, passports, affidavits of support, and other forms of help. Sometimes, this process took place in Nazi-indoctrinated communities among whom it was still dangerous to be a Jew. Hadassa Black-Gutman, one of the contributors to *Light from the Ashes*, wandered from Ukraine to Poland to Czechoslovakia to Germany to Australia, a journey that took five

years and occasioned three name changes, learning three new languages, and persecution by antisemitic teachers and children all along the way. René Goldman, another contributor, was orphaned in France and indoctrinated in a Communist orphanage. Thus indoctrinated, he migrated to his parents' original home, Poland, before studying in China and ending up as a Canadian Sinologist.

My father and I spent three years in Vienna waiting for a visa to the United States. He put me into an expensive boarding school, which he could afford because he was working for the U.S. Army and had access to dollars, food, and Army surplus clothing. What he did not realize was that the only Viennese who could afford to send their children there were those who had done well under the Nazi regime. Having relaxed my vigilance with the end of the war, I was soon discovered to be Jewish by my antisemitic schoolmates, and spent the next year or so in one fight after another.

Even arrival in a more tolerant country had its difficulties. Learning still another language was less of a problem for most than becoming familiar with the nuances and unspoken assumptions of the culture. I remember laughing when a classmate claimed to be related to Roy Rogers—I *knew* that Roy Rogers was a fictional character in the movies. I laughed when another child said she was part American Indian—I *knew* that when a people were defeated, they were exterminated, and that therefore there could be no Indians, even part Indians, left alive. In turn, my class laughed at me when I had my first turn at bat and then didn't know which way to run the bases, or when I automatically kicked at a ball instead of hitting it over a net. Eric Klinger, another contributor to the book, went from soccer in Austria to cricket and field hockey in Australia to baseball, basketball, and football in the U.S., all between the ages of six and ten.

THE FINDINGS

I will discuss the contributions to the book, as well as some of our research findings, under four major headings: long-term reactions to the Holocaust, personal relationships, work, and adult personality.

Long-term Reactions to the Holocaust

Working with child survivors, and being one, poses an interesting paradox. Much of the material that concerns us as researchers and research subjects, or as autobiographers, relates to the distant past, our early youth; but we are now in our late middle age, in our 60s or 70s.

Thus, in dealing with the Holocaust, our childhood recaptures our mind; in dealing with our present, we confront the limited span of years still to come.

How do we look back on our childhood, more than fifty years after the end of the war?

Robert Krell has pointed out that after the war, the sufferings of children caught up in the Holocaust were often dismissed not only by other children but by adults, frequently including their own parents. They were told that their experiences in ghettos or in hiding could not have been as bad as those of concentration camp survivors; besides, children can't really remember things clearly; and even if they did, they would forget them soon enough. Many of our interviewees have said that this disdain, and the silence it enforced, were among the most difficult emotional problems they experienced after the war (Krell, 1997).

With the passage of time, many of these problems have eased. We have become more comfortable with our new language, culture, and compatriots; many of us, although by no means all, have become less stressed by our memories or even by talking about them. As we approach and enter old age, however, we find ourselves thinking more about the past, often a painful process. The mature reinterpretation of things that happened long ago can lead to forgiveness and peace; but it can also lead to the realization that some things we accepted as inevitable, or for our own good, were neither.

With advancing age, retirement, and the emptying of the home nest, more child survivors have begun to participate in survivor gatherings and organizations, written their autobiographies, and agreed to be interviewed for oral history archives. For our research subjects and the contributors to the book, doing the interview, writing the chapter, or filling out the questionnaires often initiated a process of greater openness to their own memories and emotions, as well as to communication with other people

Thinking about the Holocaust

Survivors are thinking more about the Holocaust than they have allowed themselves to do for five decades, but, perhaps inescapably, most still find it incomprehensible (Table 1).

Table 1. **Thinking About the Holocaust**

<u>Category</u>	<u>Child Survivors</u>	<u>Controls</u>	<u>Adult Survivors</u>
• Influences my present life	12.81	10.46	12.00
• Intrusive thoughts about it	7.46	5.12	7.44
• Have tried to make sense of why it happened	2.76	2.72	2.94
• Think I know why it happened	2.33	1.77	2.46

(Mean times mentioned)

Many survivors, however, have some clear ideas about what enabled them to survive. They recall dealing with problems in a rational practical way, rather than by denial or other palliative strategies (Suedfeld, Fell, & Krell, 1998; see Figure 1).

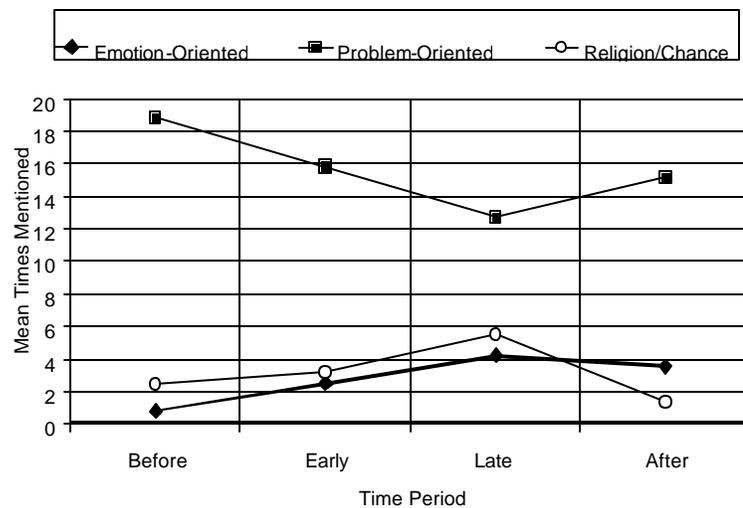


Fig. 1. Coping Strategies

Control subjects, trying to explain why some people survived the Holocaust while others did not, tend to attribute it to the personal qualities of the survivors, such as psychological strength. Survivors themselves, while recognizing the importance of such qualities, are much more likely also to cite external factors in their environment. Child survivors especially acknowledge the help of other people. This seems obvious: very few children could survive even in a normal, peaceful environment, without such help (Table 2).

Table 2. **Factors in Survival**¹

<u>Category</u>	<u>Child Survivors</u>	<u>Controls</u>	<u>Adult Survivors</u>
• Social Support From...			
➤ Family	44	10	28
➤ Friends	5	0	10
➤ Gentiles	36	0	8
• Being Secretive	6	3	5
• Being Careful	6	0	8
• Fate/Luck/Chance	49	26	50
• Aryan Appearance	10	0	3
• Hope/Persistence/Determination	9	19	25
• Courage/Patience	5	10	3
• Good Health	4	7	3
• Psychological Strength	3	13	3
• General Internal Factors	24	35	60
• General External Factors	96	68	78

(Percent mentioned)

But it also seems that this help was given, or arranged, at the initiative of others: As Figure 2 shows, asking for help is not highly ranked in how child survivors coped with problems during the Holocaust, nor since then (see also Suedfeld et al., 1997).

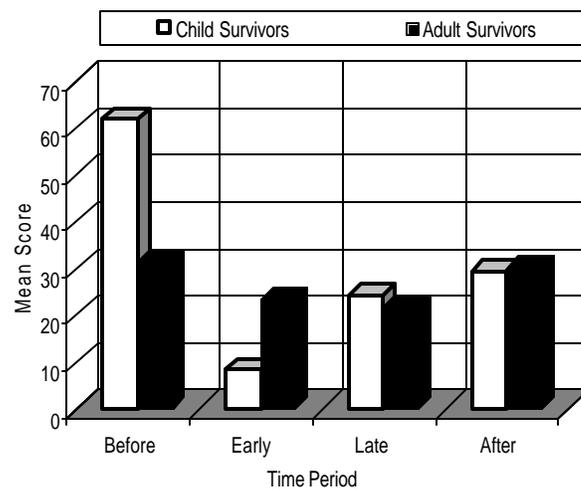


Fig. 2. Seeking Social Support

¹ Survivors were asked: “What factors were important in your surviving the Holocaust?” Comparison subjects were asked: “What factors were important in whether or not a person survived the Holocaust?”

Personal Relationships

Throughout this paper, I occasionally refer to the sequence of psychosocial crises described by psychologist Erik Erikson (1950, 1959, 1975, 1982). He viewed such crises or conflicts as occurring throughout the life span, each marking an important transition and each having either a favorable resolution that contributes to further psychosocial growth and development, or an unfavorable one that hampers such growth. Our research treated the crises as important conflicts regardless of their chronological or sequential appearance in the taped interviews (Suedfeld et al., 2002).

One of these crises is trust versus mistrust toward other people (Figure 3). During the war, Jewish children and those whose families dissented from Nazi politics learned that other people, especially adults, were dangerously unpredictable. Parents disappeared, leaving them among strangers. Strangers could change from being helpful to being deadly enemies, for reasons the child could not understand; or, as many of our interviews showed, an antisemitic murderer could for some unfathomable reason become the protector of one particular Jewish child. Even the country upon which they had bestowed their first patriotic loyalty threatened them. For example, Karl Butzer, one of the political refugees who contributed to the book, fled with his family to Britain in 1937. Describing the German bombing of England, he wrote: “[The German] planes with the undulating engine noise were my people. But if they won and ‘got’ us, my people would hurt us. So I hoped the raspy British engines would win” (Butzer, 2001, p. 374). I remember having a similar psychological conflict during the Allied bombing of Budapest.

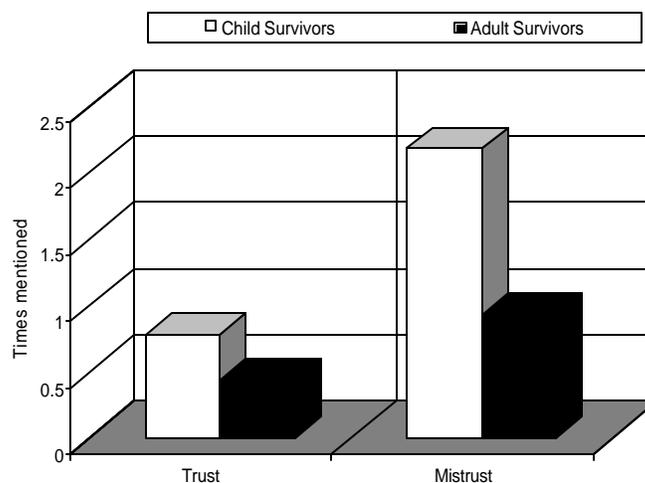


Fig. 3. Eriksonian Crisis: Trust vs. Mistrust

Without exhibiting the paranoia and antisocial personality patterns predicted by some experts, child survivors have grown up independent, self-reliant, and wary. Many share a generalized skepticism about other people. As a logical corollary of mistrust, child survivors tend to have little faith in the benevolence of people, or the world in general—even less than do adult survivors (Figure 4).

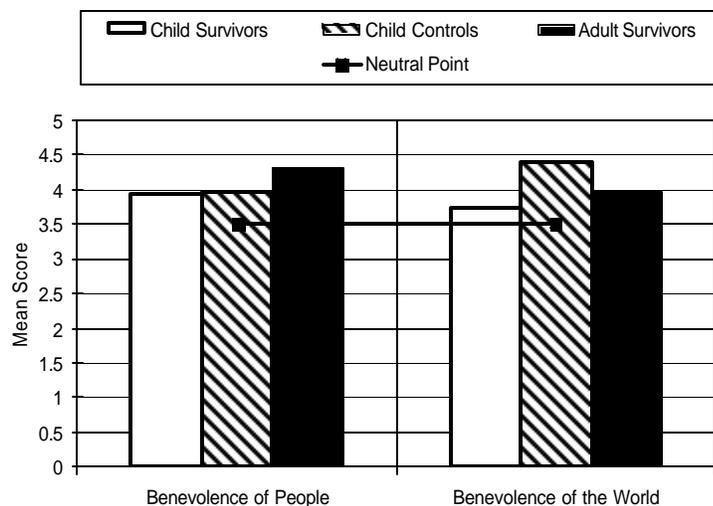


Fig. 4. Benevolence of People and the World

At the same time, they have very strong attachments to their own family and social circle. Their responses in regard to Erikson’s conflict between intimacy and isolation are shown in Figure 5.

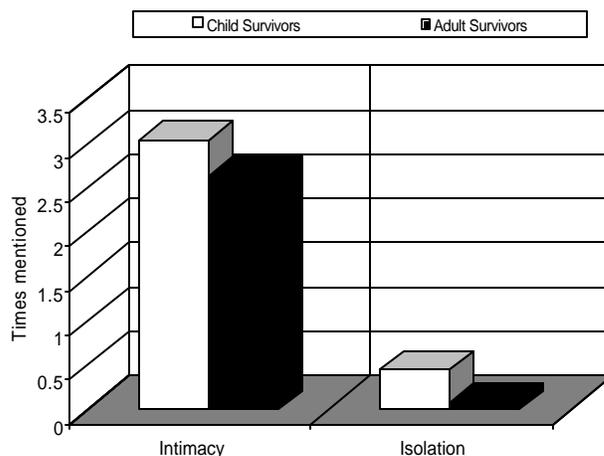


Fig. 5. Eriksonian Crisis: Intimacy vs. Isolation

Child survivors overwhelmingly feel intimately connected with others. Almost every chapter in *Light from the Ashes*, and almost every videotaped interview, emphasizes the importance of love, affection, support, and caring among the survivor's childhood family and friends, as well as between the survivor as an adult and his or her spouse, surviving parents, uncles and aunts, children, grandchildren, friends, and colleagues. This reaction is not indiscriminating: child survivors also describe unhappy relationships and encounters with xenophobes and antisemites, but they describe their relationships in mostly positive tones. The survivors also consider themselves to be good and loving parents—although their children sometimes feel intimidated by the parents' mysterious and frightening past, insistence on educational achievement, and dedication to their own work.

Work

Work, of course, is another major aspect of everyday life, and one where child survivors were expected to find serious difficulty. The people in *Light from the Ashes* are all successful researchers with doctorates, most of them with impressive lists of publications, awards, and appointments. They are obviously drawn from a narrow segment of child survivors in terms of their work history. What does a broader picture look like?

The devotion of child survivors to becoming educated was an important part of their success. Upon emigrating, most were put into school grades below the norm for their age because they spoke little or no English. Some, who stopped in several countries before finding a final refuge, went through this experience repeatedly. Yet, most caught up: one of our interviewees completed eleven grades in three years. Jack Lomranz, whose chapter in the book is entitled "A Wandering Jew as a Social Scientist," went to school in Germany, China, Israel, and the U.S., getting his bachelor's degree at night while supporting his survivor mother and his own wife and child. In fact, despite financial and linguistic hardships, the proportion of child survivors who earned at least one college degree was about as high as among North American-born comparison subjects, and much higher than the population norm (Suedfeld, Paterson, & Krell, 2002; Table 3).

Table 3. Educational Achievement

<u>Level</u>	<u>Child Survivors</u>	<u>Controls</u>	<u>USA Population Norm</u>
Finished Elementary	3	NA	11
Finished Secondary	14	8	38
Gymnasium	3	NA	NA
Trade/Technical School	11	3	NA
Some University	11	22	17
Undergraduate Degree	19	30	} 19
Graduate Degree	41	38	

(Percent of people responding)

Just as education was of great importance in their childhood and adolescence, so during adulthood, work formed an important component of their identity and a source of self-esteem. The relevant Eriksonian conflict (industry vs. inferiority) (Figure 6) shows their emphasis on devotion to work.

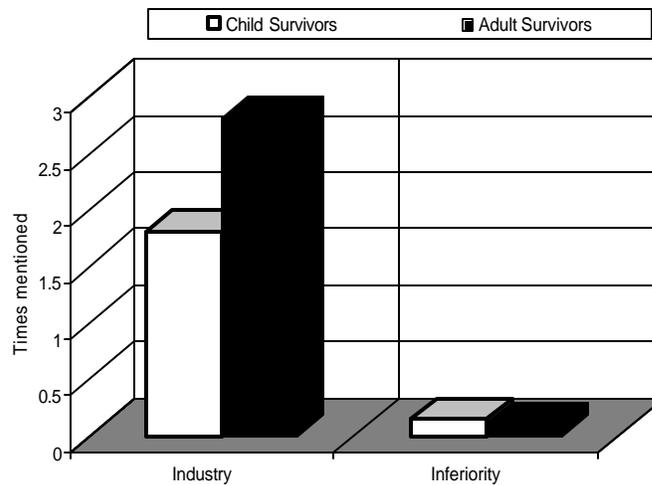


Fig. 6. Eriksonian Crisis: Industry vs. Inferiority

On average, child survivors pursued occupations that were less prestigious than those of the control subjects. Still, the child survivors' status on an international scale of occupational prestige (Ganzeboom and Treiman, 1996) was at the level equivalent to "software engineer; computer programmer; engaged in business activities": solidly in the middle to upper-middle

class, not a negligible achievement for people whose past was so disrupted and whose future had been predicted to be so bleak (Figure 7).

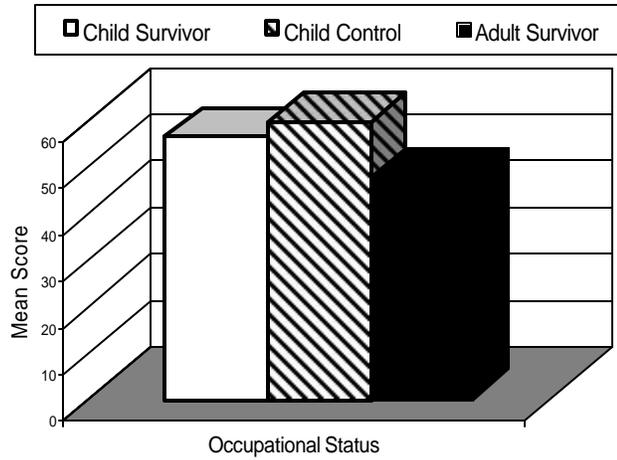


Fig. 7. Occupational Status

Most of the interviewed child survivors were not very interested in the convenience or monetary rewards of their occupation. Their most valued job characteristics were: interesting work, using their skills and talents, helpful/friendly co-workers, helping other people, and being useful to society. Note that all but one of these—friendly co-workers—deal with intrinsic rather than extrinsic values (Figure 8).

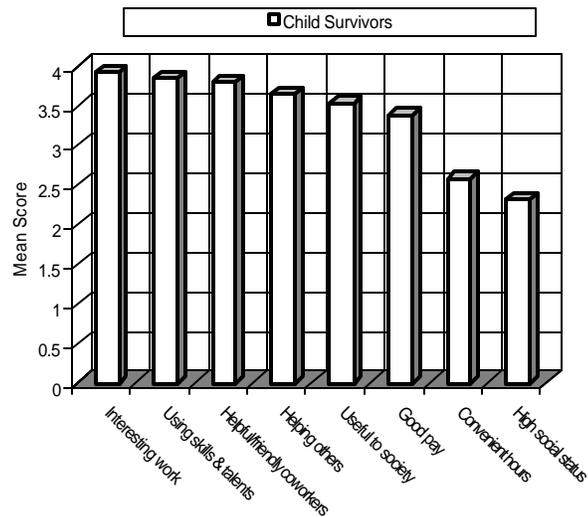


Fig. 8. Work Values

So far I have been talking about group averages. But we also found that, within particular occupations, many individual survivors were quite successful. The eminence that some have reached in their chosen professions is impressive, and is distributed across a variety of life pursuits. Many young survivors eventually accomplished extraordinary achievements. Just a short list of those who have name-recognition in North America includes eminent authors (Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi), scientists (Roald Hoffmann, Nobel laureate for chemistry), businessmen and entrepreneurs (George Soros and Jack Tramiel), soldiers (Maj. Gen. Sidney Shachnow, U.S. Army, Retired), statesmen (Representative Tom Lantos), filmmakers (Roman Polanski), and clergy (Israel Meir Lau, the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel, and Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger, the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris).

Personality and Mental Health

How have child survivors adapted in the fifty-plus years since the war? One inescapable conclusion, based on the evidence, is that we are not the psychologically and socially crippled group that some people, including many mentalhealth professionals, expected us to be.

During the war, Jewish children learned about rejection, denigration, fear, and anxiety; about the physical traumas of injury, hunger, cold, and exhaustion; and, perhaps most intensely, about being separated from their parents and placed with adults who were unknown and unpredictable. Younger children, who did not understand what was going on, felt that their parents had abandoned them. Many of our interviewees mentioned informers—not only known antisemites but also nuns, family friends, and even fellow Jews—who gave them up to the Nazis. As I have already mentioned, their experiences after the war were no more reassuring about the wisdom of depending on other people.

What do child survivors value? Self-direction—autonomy, independence—is a primary value that appears in both the interview tapes and the chapters of *Light from the Ashes*, with security close behind (Table 4). The contributors to the book greatly value achievement, and place notably higher value than the average interviewee on stimulation and universalism, which refers to “understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of *all* people and for nature” (Schwartz, 1992, p. 12; emphasis in original).

Table 4. Personal Values

<u>Value</u>	<u>Light from the Ashes</u>	<u>Interviews</u>
Achievement	48	32
Stimulation	25	12
Self-Direction	47	34
Universalism	34	11
Benevolence	20	21
Security	34	34
Spirituality	29	27

(Mentioned by percent)

Child survivors are aware that the world is neither fair nor predictable (see Figure 9); but although their satisfaction with their life is, on average, lower than the satisfaction reported by adult survivors and by controls, it is still well on the positive side of neutral. There is one exception: to no one's surprise, child survivors agree that they wish they could change some aspects of their life (Figure 10).

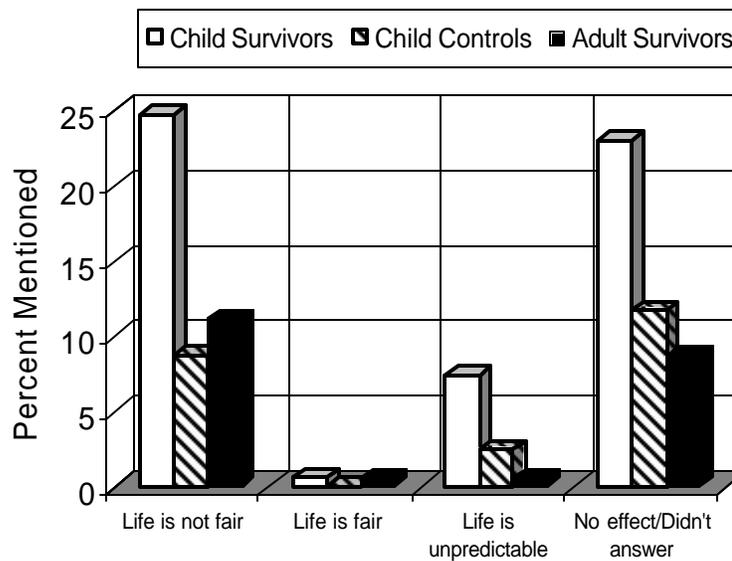


Fig. 9. Fairness and Predictability of Life

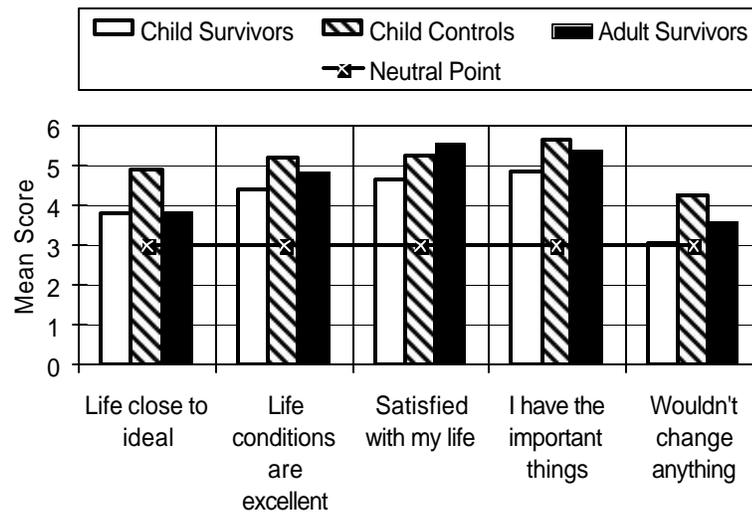


Fig. 10. Satisfaction with Life

None of the groups shows much consensus on expectations from life (Table 5), but the child survivors' emphasis on self-reliance differs substantially from that of other groups.

Table 5. **Expectations from Life**

<u>Expectation</u>	<u>Child Survivors</u>	<u>Controls</u>	<u>Adult Survivors</u>
You must be self-reliant	9	1	1
Expect the worst	5	5	4
Expect goodness	1	0	1
Don't expect anything	4	0	3
Expect less than you put in	4	1	1
No effect/Didn't answer	33	14	11

(Mean times mentioned)

What do they believe in? Well, it isn't religion. Figure 1 illustrated that their accounts of coping during the Holocaust did show an increase in reliance on supernatural protection. But that diminished after the war. In the long run, the religious beliefs of most were weakened, if not destroyed, by their experiences (Figure 11).

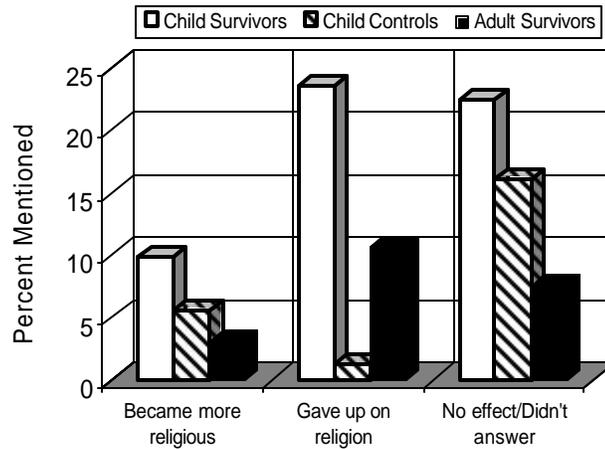


Fig. 11. Changes in Religious Beliefs

They do not seem to have a very high opinion of themselves: their self-worth is lower than that of adult survivors and the control group. In view of their success in adapting to a series of challenging circumstances and building solid families and careers, this finding was one of our major surprises (Figure 12).

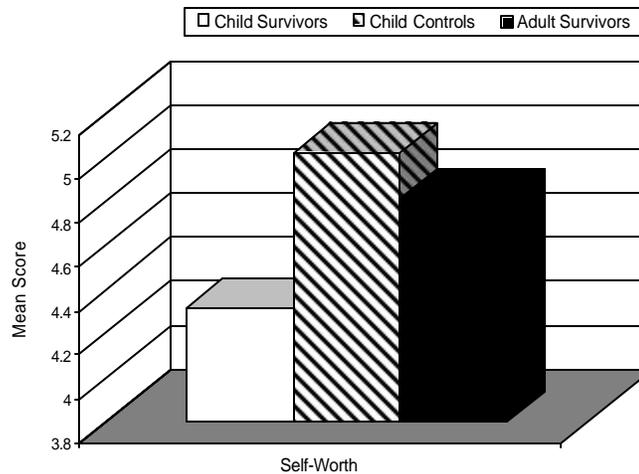


Fig. 12. Self-Worth

One long-term after-effect of their experiences is a heightened aversion to the emotion of anxiety (Figure 13). Perhaps anxiety was so acute and long-lasting in their childhood as to make it even more unpleasant than it is for most people; in any case, they try to avoid both its psychological and physiological signs.

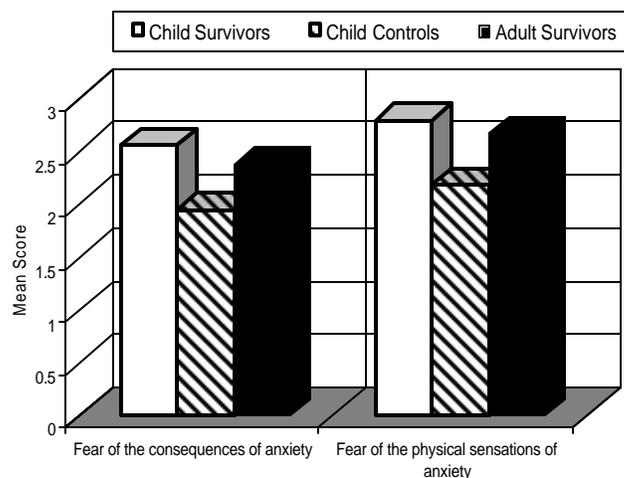


Fig. 13. Anxiety Sensitivity

What about the infamous post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which according to popular myth afflicts all trauma survivors? The symptoms that make up this psychiatric diagnostic category include, among other problems: repeated intrusive memories of the traumatic events, nightmares and other sleep problems, flashbacks, repressed memories, emotional constriction, outbursts of anger, and difficulty in concentrating. The data (Table 6) refute previous assumptions about post-traumatic stress. Forty percent of the interviewees report no symptoms at all, 30% report one, and for two or more symptoms the frequency of report drops to 0–10%. In essence, the full-blown psychiatric PTSD syndrome is absent. The most frequently mentioned symptoms, mentioned by fewer than one-third of the respondents, are hardly signs of serious maladjustment. They are: distress at reminders of the Holocaust and avoidance of thoughts, feelings, and conversations related to it.

Table 6. Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms

<u>Number of Symptoms</u>	<u>Percent of Survivors</u>
0	40%
1	30%
2	10%
3	10%
4	10%
5	0%
6	0%

This is not because the child survivors are unwilling to admit that they have problems. In fact, quite a few of them acknowledge getting psychological help, for example from vocational or marital counselors. They are less given to litigation; and having survived so much, they may feel themselves invulnerable to disease and seldom consult doctors or pharmacists (Table 7).

Table 7. Seeking Professional Help

<u>Help Received</u>	<u>Child Survivors</u>	<u>Controls</u>	<u>Adult Survivors</u>
Educational Help	16	27	0
Legal Help	19	60	4
Medical Help	19	84	35
Religious Help	8	22	0
Pharmaceutical Help	3	32	4
Psychological Help	35	27	22

(Mentioned by percent)

I have referred to the fact that even the youngest survivors of the Holocaust are now approaching old age. On the whole, they seem to be facing it with serenity. Erikson’s next crisis opposes generativity—a concern for future generations—to self-absorption. Our chapter contributors and our research participants feel great concern for future generations, rather than being focused on their own problems and future (Figure 14). This concern extends far beyond their own families, and is perhaps most clearly characterized by the driving urge to prevent others from suffering as the survivor did. Many survivors are active in Holocaust education in the schools, as well as in a spectrum of other volunteer activities.

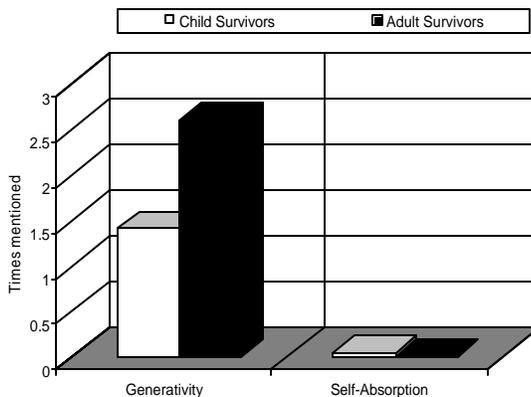


Fig. 14. Eriksonian Crisis: Generativity vs. Self-Absorption

The research areas of the contributors to *Light from the Ashes* reflect these concerns. They are heavily weighted toward three topics. One is understanding and helping children at risk, ethnic minorities, and a variety of vulnerable groups. These groups have included street children in Europe, North Africa, and the U.S.; women with unwanted pregnancies and their unwanted children; and aboriginal and immigrant children in Australia, among others. Another major topic is analyses of and interventions for people who had to deal with emergencies and disasters, or who experienced traumatic stress in combat, in terrorist activities, or in organized persecutions. The third topic of concern is the general area of intergroup violence, conflict, and reconciliation, from the first contacts between Europeans and indigenous Americans through the wars and quasi-wars of the twentieth century.

The last major psychosocial conflict, according to Erik Erikson, is how one looks back on one's life as its end approaches. Erikson poses the choices as integrity versus despair: the perception of one's life as a worthwhile, integrated whole, rather than as meaningless and disconnected. In spite of the upheavals and dislocations of their early years, the child survivors in our research, almost without exception, find that their life has been comprehensible, meaningful, and satisfying (Figure 15).

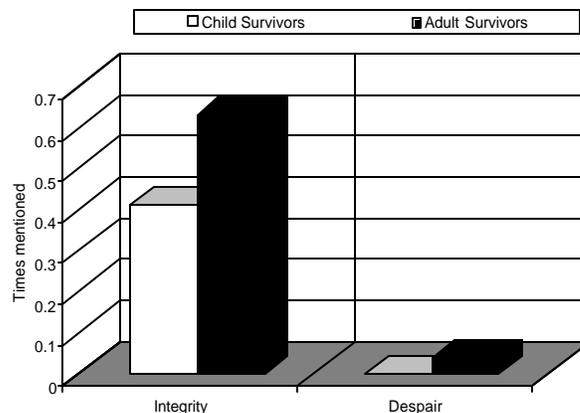


Fig. 15. Eriksonian Crisis: Integrity vs. Despair

Conclusions

Both our research data and the chapters in *Light from the Ashes* come primarily from child survivors whose physical and mental health is sufficiently good that they lived until at least the 1980s and were willing and able to write a chapter, to be interviewed, or to attend a gathering. By definition, we could not collect information from those survivors who were severely and permanently psychologically crippled, nor from those who died earlier, from whatever causes.

On the whole, the child survivors included in our study are doing pretty well, although they do have a skeptical view of the benevolence and trustworthiness of other people. They are independent-minded; their problem-solving approaches are rational and problem-oriented (Suedfeld et al., 1997, 1998). Their educational and occupational achievements are impressive, especially considering all of the disruptions they had to overcome. What they value most about work is its intrinsic satisfaction, not its material rewards or prestige (Suedfeld et al., 2002).

The child survivors' family lives are generally positive, and I would guess probably no worse than any other group of people living in the same culture and the same places. The expectation that child survivors would be predominantly or universally maladjusted is simply wrong. Their mental health seems generally good: although they have a few problems, such as lower self-esteem, they suffer from few if any of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Now in their 60s and 70s, they view their life with contentment and acceptance.

In contrast to the early pessimistic predictions about the future of child survivors, we now know that many, perhaps most, have overcome the most severe effects of trauma and have been leading essentially normal lives. What Hemmendinger and Krell (2000, p. 177) recently wrote about children who survived Buchenwald applies to the entire cohort: "Who could have thought on April 11, 1945, that any child of that barely living remnant, representing so many murdered children, would succeed against such overwhelming odds to live a productive and meaningful life? Not the experts."

It is perhaps unfair to blame the experts. No psychologist or psychiatrist had ever before faced patients who had gone through such well-organized, relentless, and multi-faceted persecution, and there was no foundation of previous experience upon which to base predictions. Based on what was known in 1945 and 1946, and the parlous state of the recently liberated survivors, the prognoses were reasonable. Therapists and social scientists then, and—with much less justification—many of their successors even to this day, focused on the unprecedented horrors experienced by the survivors of the Holocaust. They also saw the emotional reactions that may have aided in survival, and interpreted them as symptoms of psychiatric disturbance rather than as what they were: adaptations to bizarre conditions, which would not necessarily persist once those conditions disappeared. The experts did not realize, and some still do not fully appreciate, the resilience and hardiness of the human spirit that has enabled survivors to live through and recover from those horrors (see Suedfeld, 1997).

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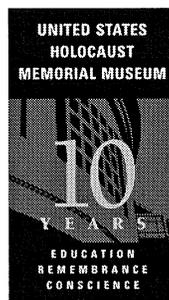
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