Grandsons Who Remember: Intersections of Holocaust Heritage and Contemporary Male Positioning

Master’s Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School or Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Departments: Near Eastern & Judaic Studies and Women’s & Gender Studies
ChaeRan Freeze, Advisor

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

Master’s Degree

By
Golan Moskowitz

May 2012
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis owes a great deal to the support, skilled guidance, and sensitive investment of Professor ChaeRan Freeze, whose advising and close mentoring have earned my great admiration and have been fundamental to my work and personal growth as a scholar. I am grateful to Professor Sylvia Fishman for being a reader, offering guidance along the way, and inspiring my thinking. I also offer sincere gratitude to Professor Ilana Szobel for her feedback and insights in conversations about post-Holocaust subjectivity and psychoanalytic theory.

Two generous awards funded this project – I extend heartfelt thanks to the Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry, as well as to Rena Olshansky for her grant supporting Research on Jewish Family Life. I would like to thank Rena, as well as Sylvia Fuks Fried and Miriam Hoffman of the Tauber Institute, for being remarkably supportive mentors and advocates for my professional development. I am honored to know each of them personally.

I thank Annette Koren at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies for speaking candidly with me about interviewing methodology. Anna LeMahieu, Mariel Boyarsky, and Tamar Moskowitz deserve my appreciation for carefully transcribing my interviews. Finally, I thank my family, friends, and other educators for the pushing, pulling, retreating, and supporting that has inspired in me the drive to live my own truth.
ABSTRACT

_Grandsons Who Remember: Intersections of Holocaust Heritage and Contemporary Male Positioning_

A thesis presented to the departments of
Near Eastern & Judaic Studies and Women’s & Gender Studies
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

By Golan Moskowitz

Research on the psychological wellbeing and self-positioning of HSG (Holocaust survivors’ grandchildren) remains limited and inconclusive. Given postmodern sensibilities that resist fixed identity categories, it would be hasty to generalize too much about the “third generation” as an identity group. But it is equally hasty to dismiss these grandchildren’s experiences from critical studies of post-Holocaust positioning. Situated in a discussion of HSO (Holocaust survivors’ offspring) studies and relevant theory in psychological, trauma, and gender studies, this project uses 24 semi-structured interviews with adult, male HSG to offer a preliminary collective biography and analysis of Jewish American HSG. It focuses on the subject positioning of contemporary Jewish American manhood as it interacts with varying internalizations of a shared Holocaust heritage. The concept of narrative is central to this project. HSG experience is, in large part, learning to locate oneself within the context of existing stories on personal, familial, and collective levels. HSG construct their own narratives in relation to their pre-history, fantasies that
may form in post-traumatic absence, cultural and historical narratives, and the firsthand experiences of coming of age as a contemporary Jewish American man raised in a household of HSO parents. The voices I bring together in this project show that HSG increasingly see their own subject positions as constructed by competing social discourses, such as commercialized gender ideals, family mythology and survival stories, and personal values regarding individual fulfillment. The postmodern zeitgeist offers critical reexamination of how and why subjects become limited or removed from their own potential to operate in the multiple discourses that characterize a particular time and place. Though disparate, HSG are united by a feeling of serious obligation or privilege – a kind of designation to responsibly handle the representative position of bearing the Holocaust legacy.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION........................................................................................................1

CHAPTER ONE: From Generations to Subjectivities...........................................9

What is the Third Generation?............................................................................9
Second Generation Studies..............................................................................11
Models of Intergenerational Transmission.....................................................21
Postmodern, Post-Holocaust Studies............................................................38

CHAPTER TWO: American Grandsons of Holocaust Survivors.................44

From HSO to HSG.............................................................................................44
HSO Research..................................................................................................46
My Research Sample......................................................................................48
“Third-Generation” Context..........................................................................51
Masculinity and Family Trauma..................................................................56
Reported Effects of Holocaust Heritage......................................................69
Emotional Internalizations.............................................................................80
HSO Mothers..................................................................................................82
HSO Fathers....................................................................................................87

CHAPTER THREE: Working Through in Public and Private....................92

Crypts and Postmemory..................................................................................94
Processing with Creativity and Fantasy.........................................................97
Making History as Working Through.........................................................109
Completing Circles and Bridging Gaps.........................................................112
Public Discourse............................................................................................116

CONCLUSION....................................................................................................122

Appendix.........................................................................................................127

Bibliography....................................................................................................131
LIST OF TABLES

Table of Interviewees.................................................................49

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS/FIGURES

Figure from Beyond Words (Miklós Adler).................................14

Figure 1 from Metamaus (Art Spiegelman)..................................19

Chart of prisoner markings used in concentration camps c. 1938-1942...71
(United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

Figure 2 from Metamaus (Art Spiegelman).................................80

Part Hole excerpt (Golan Moskowitz)..........................................94
INTRODUCTION

When I think of my Papa…I think of his demeanor and persona being pretty integral to his survival…a tough village boy who can be secretive and fend for himself very independently and fight his way through…

I don’t feel like him…It’s a problem in a certain way. I don’t want it to be a problem. It’s a problem on an internal level, because since he valued that toughness (“When I was a kid, you needed to know how to fight”)…Part of me wants to say, “Yea, but Papa, I don’t need to know how to fight.” And I want to believe that, but there’s part of me that doesn’t, because I respect him, and I respect what that attitude and that toughness did for him.

-Simon, HSG interviewee

To be a man in the legacy of the Holocaust, even in the third generation, is to grapple with the sometimes conflicting pressures of contemporary manhood, of undeniable social privilege in contrast to survivors, and a legacy that induces both vulnerability and strength. Third generation experience is varied, the schisms within that experience delimited by the experiences of survivors and those of the second generation, by the specific dynamics of family communication and developmental factors, as well as by public and institutional handling of the Holocaust. This study begins a preliminary collective biography for a disparate group united by a sense of responsibility to a dying legacy. The task of characterizing a social group is a daunting and slippery one. Given postmodern sensibilities that resist fixed identity categories, it would be hasty to generalize too much about the “third generation” as an identity group. But it is equally
hasty to dismiss these grandchildren’s experiences or to exclude them from critical studies of post-Holocaust positioning. I offer the lens of gender to illuminate how one might understand post-traumatic positions, like gender identity, as both internally and externally generated, experienced and performed, interacting with psychological control and the social implications of that control.

A careful study of how HSG (Holocaust survivors’ grandchildren) narrate and position their own lives may grant better understanding of how the Holocaust and other family traumas interact with twice-removed descendants of those legacies. Specifically, grandsons come into knowledge, whether factual or embodied, of their grandparents’ traumas as they simultaneously come into themselves as Jewish American boys and men. Often American HSG receive their most extensive Holocaust education when they move from childhood into what is marked in both Jewish and American traditions as early manhood, the years in which boys learn that they are no longer allowed to cry and that they must prove themselves by new social codes of endurance and independence. HSG narratives of coming into Holocaust knowledge intersect meaningfully with their coming of age narratives, thus merging or contradicting a sort of family mythology with their own initiation into positions of contemporary masculinity and adulthood.

I emphasize the importance of investigating subjectivity in all its messiness and conflict in order to gain deeper understanding of how people operate when circumscribed in multiple narratives and under various pressures. Interviews allow subjects to ruminate organically in their own words with a gentle, guiding listener. Sometimes they lead subjects to integrate their own ideas and make new connections as they answer questions that piece old information together into new narrative formations. The casual tone of
informal interviews may also allow subjects to articulate ideas in productively unconventional ways, as Joseph does when he visually imagines his position as a gay HSG to look like the pink triangle inscribed in a yellow star – the badge worn by homosexual Jews – or as Isaac does when he uses a quote from a popular television show to convey the ethos of what it means to be an American man. With a sensitive, invested interviewer and the option to remain anonymous, a guided personal conversation may generate self-reflection and processing unavailable through other research methods.

In *Doing Oral History*, Donald Ritchie writes, “Interviews are partly performance” (Ritchie 84). The self-consciousness and the desire to appear favorably that subjects often bring to an interview limit the reliability and representative nature of the interview. But these same obstacles lend insight into how these subjects actively position themselves within the tropes of sociocultural norms, as well as within the multifaceted narrative they know their interviewer to be constructing. Without reading in too much, the interviewer may interpret a subject’s manner of speech, posturing, pauses, stuttering, and repetitions as conveying something about how that person feels about what he is saying, which details he privileges, what causes him anxiety, and how he envisions his persona. With the hope of optimizing my subjects’ comfort levels, I allowed them to choose whether to speak with me via typed text, audio, or audio-video media, as well as whether or not to remain anonymous with a pseudonym in my study. At times I felt that the impersonal aspect of typed conversations yielded a greater willingness to confess feelings openly. At other times, depending on the subject, I found that the intimacy of voice and video encouraged subjects’ openness and also allowed me to better read intonations, emphases, and points of difficulty.
I found my interviewees by posting public announcements in “third-generation” Facebook groups, sending electronic messages to their members, using word of mouth, and posting a message on the Bronfman Youth Fellowships listserv.* I recognize that my small sample of 24 HSG consists only of those who had access to my posting and were willing to speak about their identities, which is a potentially uncomfortable and traditionally non-masculine activity. As an interviewer, I sought to create a safe space for subjects to openly explore aspects of what it means to them to be HSG, American, and male. I provided extensive written information about my project before speaking (see Appendix) and shared my own position as an HSG graduate student researching gender and post-Holocaust positioning. With the exception of one interview conducted in person (Alan) and six conducted in typed real-time Internet correspondence (Adir, Eli, Tom, David, Marshall, and Greg), I conducted all interviews through Skype* and recorded them with additional software.

My study asks questions about “postmemory,” a term Marianne Hirsch coined in reference to the experience of HSO. Postmemory “is defined through an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by the unbridgeable distance that separates the participant from the one born after” (Hirsch 2001, 10). It is the experience of those who “have grown up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the powerful stories of the previous generation, shaped by monumental traumatic events that resist understanding and integration” (12). Based on a number of my interviews I seek to extend this term, used to characterize second-generation experience, to particular experiences and trends that persist in post-

* http://www.bronfman.org
* A computer program that facilitates audio-video conversations via the Internet.
traumatic families through the interaction of at-risk subjectivity and larger-than-life, embodied origin stories.

A discussion of subjectivity in the first chapter illuminates how and why some HSG may feel that they embody trauma and a need for continued working through, while others do not. The concept of masculinity as a performance of a subject’s rational mastery, psychological control, and emotional immunity will figure importantly in this discussion. While many benefit psychologically from generational distance from the survivors, socioeconomic security, and sociocultural belonging, those who experience their subjectivity as conflicted, ruptured, or displaced, and thus less “masculine,” self-controlled, or mastered, become more vulnerable to internalizing the larger-than-life story defining their family legacy in paralyzing and deeply personal ways. The association between rational language and the “masculine” mastery of reality is key for this discussion and further explored below.

The field of trauma studies, as championed by Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and others, has shown how trauma itself challenges the idea of any discourse or symbolic order that attempts to be the definitive account for reality; traumatized subjects embody the failure of rational language to account sufficiently for meaning and experience. When drawing from traumatic narratives, or constructing narratives from post-traumatic traces, anxiety, desire, disorientation, and fantasy may color or complicate the logic of a person’s story. These complications to a rational system of singular discourse and reason highlight what Julia Kristeva has theorized to be the failure of collective language and symbols to account for the “semiotic,” those (often preverbal) components of self that do not translate neatly into the available shared symbols of social signification. The result of
this failure is a rejection or repression of those inassimilable meanings and expressions. The discarded semiotic then resurfaces within the “non-rational” discourses of art, poetry, and religion, as well as in the embodied rhythms, intonations, silences, and gestures that underlie a person’s use of language and social norms (Weedon 1997, 85). Historically, dominant discourses have privileged and granted the stamp of rationality to meanings and symbols they deemed favorable to those in power, and the semiotic realm of repressed and rejected aspects of self came to be associated with subjects not granted the privilege of discursive power – namely: women, foreigners, and other marginal people. In contemporary American masculinity, the feminine or emotionally expressive male has been denied social agency in order to demarcate the boundaries of acceptable masculine positioning in a discourse that traditionally favors heterosexuality and white, Christian patriarchal order. This discourse continues to resonate in the fabric of U.S. institutions and culture even as it negotiates with the currents of postmodern appeals.

The ways in which adult grandsons internalize and process their positions in the discourse of Holocaust heritage vary immensely. They range from proud ambition to defensive aggression, victim roles to empowered protector positions. Some HSG rally around “3G” organizations that commemorate their heritage, offer support, and generate social activism. Others set out on individual quests to find themselves and manage the weight of their internalized responsibility, guilt, or anxiety. They seek to fulfill grandparents’ unmet dreams, to chart and preserve family history, and to produce art that offers greater psychological coherence to conflicted positions and inassimilable feelings. Beneath these different HSG responses is often a desire to feel closer to the grandparents who, even when physically nearby and exuding affection, exist at an unsettling
psychological distance. The majority of the HSG whom I interviewed identify as marked by a specific responsibility or privilege – a representative role of Holocaust legacy that is usually a source of pride but also sometimes a burden. While most do not identify as exhibiting post-traumatic tendencies on a personal level, a considerable number of them do. In order to illuminate those positions of conflict and vulnerability, I turn to a discussion of narrative discourse and of the subject in flux.

The postmodern conceptual shift in what it means to be a human being – a sum of conscious and unconscious, articulated and inexpressible parts – represents a departure from humanism’s idea that people have essential identities rooted in sex, race, or any sociocultural category. Chris Weedon, a feminist poststructuralist, traces how the idea of the human position has evolved over time. The controlled feudal object becomes the fixed, rational modern person in control of his own meaning and tied to a limited identity rooted in designated systems of language and being. The modern person becomes the postmodern contemporary subject, who, conscious of the limitations of fixing human beings to defined structures, symbols, or discourse, is an active “site of discursive struggle,” taking part in the “battle for subjectivity” by resisting, choosing, and refashioning the meanings dictated by the various discourses in which one is inscribed (102). The postmodern subject is thus in a continuous process of becoming, of defining and revising oneself in relation to multiple and contradictory claims on reality.

For this reason, the concept of narrative and of how one situates oneself within particular narratives is an essential, unifying one for this project. Davies and Harre write, “Conceptions people have about themselves are disjointed until and unless they are located in a story” (Davies and Harre 1990, 57). The discourses and connected narratives
of American manhood differ from those of Eastern European family life, and both in turn may intersect and conflict with the languages of post-traumatic experience. In the interviews I conducted with HSG, I collected firsthand stories about what it means to grow up as a grandson of Holocaust survivors and as a Jewish American man. These stories turn to their pre-histories to situate their current lives in relation to parents’ and grandparents’ narratives, some about the Holocaust and its effects, others not. They also draw from the holes, silences, and fantasies that characterize post-traumatic experience. Moreover, subjects position themselves in relation to official narratives in historic and cultural representations, as well as in relation to what Kaja Silverman terms the “dominant fiction,” the norms, symbols, and narratives that set the terms for a person’s participation in society and culture. Part of “third-generation” experience is the process of locating oneself within or outside of existing stories while constructing one’s own narrative. My attempt here to locate and consolidate disparate HSG voices works to create a new multifaceted story about the experiential tropes of being an American grandson of Holocaust survivors.

There is much at stake in a project of grappling with the undefined category of HSG. Most important is the knowledge one may derive about how human subjects, as products of embodied family memory and narratives on personal and public levels, integrate, reject, or negotiate with heritages of trauma as they relate to present conditions of relative absences, responsibilities, and privileges.
CHAPTER ONE

What is the “Third Generation”?

In the context of post-Holocaust and trauma studies, the term “third generation” may refer to the current, postmodern era beginning at the turn of the twentieth century. This was a cultural moment in which grandchildren of Holocaust survivors came of age, long after the concept of the “second generation” as a distinct population with its own struggles was established and represented alongside survivors’ experiences in cultural and historic documentation. “Third generation” may also refer to the biological grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, the offspring of those parented by Holocaust survivors. Although the “second generation” has been established as a population with its own characteristics, it is not an entirely uniform group, and its children do not grow up in the same contexts. With this in mind, my study of grandsons of survivors requires some grounding in a discussion of “second-generation” dynamics, trends, and questions, even as it works against the idea of a uniform generational experience. I use the acronyms HSO (Holocaust survivors’ offspring) and HSG (Holocaust survivors’ grandchildren) throughout my study.*

The minority of HSG that feel like their subjectivity is invaded by traumatized HSO parents, or who feel personally lost, without roots, marginal, and incoherent relate

---

* As used by Miri Scharf (2007).
to their survivor grandparents and to Holocaust legacy with conflict and ambivalence. While they resemble more secure and normative HSG in desiring connection with their grandparents and feeling proud of their legacy, they sometimes understand that legacy as contributing to their own psychological disorientation and suffering in the family or within their sociocultural contexts. In these instances, the Holocaust becomes associated with considerable anxiety and questions about the grandchild’s self that elicit a deep need for continuing to work through. This working through continues to employ creative investments in the traumas and losses, but, as Gerd Bayer (2010) argues, it departs from the original generation of postmemory in its future-oriented attempt to integrate the horrors of the past into a comprehensive approach to contemporary reality as nuanced, subjective, and in perpetual motion.

Storytelling and the narration of self, though often gendered feminine, are key elements for working through traumatic effects that tangle the self in contradictions and threaten its coherence. Below I will review the psychological benefits of openly communicated and processed narratives, both for parents and children. Robyn Fivush discusses the important role of parent-assisted reminiscing of memories in developing the child’s capacity for self-narration. She notes that studies show children to have higher self-esteem when they can place their own lives within the context of a family history that provides a framework for understanding their own pre-birth histories (Fivush 2008). Davies and Harre credit narrative as the tool by which all subjects learn to balance and cohere selfhood out of the endless and contradictory elements that form us as people:

Conceptions people have about themselves are disjointed until and unless they are located in a story. Since many stories can be told, even of the same event, then we each have many possible coherent selves. But to act rationally, those contradictions we are immediately aware of must be remedied, transcended,
resolved or ignored…How to do being a particular non-contradictory person within a consistent story line is learned both through textual and lived narratives. (Davies and Harre 1990, 57)

The process of smoothing out or integrating contradictions in a potential self is particularly difficult and important for those who live with trauma, a heightened and threatening sense of internal paradox and contradiction. If masculine subjects, both survivors and their masculine descendants, define themselves in part by rational self-control, “irrational” or destabilizing narratives are understandably downplayed or rejected. But if these subjects are detached from, at odds with, or silent about narrating and emotionally opening themselves to their experiences, they are not included in the generating of vocabulary and narratives that help them to overcome their trauma and to extend larger social validation and recognition to their particular experiences.

Second Generation Studies

Forged in the legacy of trauma, post-Holocaust identity is sometimes steeped in contradiction. To varying degrees, Holocaust survivor offspring (HSO) internalize parents who are simultaneously resilient survivors and fragile victims; present in the postwar world but built of the old world; keepers of private, unspeakable memory but public symbols of world-changing history; life-giving but possessed by the dead. HSO may feel insignificant inasmuch as their parents are perceived as superhuman survivors, but also grandiose, inasmuch as they are expected to perform miraculous feats in keeping with their miraculous births. HSO may feel overwhelmed or antagonized by traumatized parents but also emotionally responsible for these caretakers who experienced agony and almost perished. Experiencing their lives as compensation for their parents’ tragic loss,
HSO may feel pressured to live with joy, independence, and vitality, yet they also understand this compensation demands them to be purposeful, sutured to parents and dead relatives, and extraordinarily accomplished. HSO may feel angry at survivor parents for not providing emotional security, yet guilty for having needs that cause survivors more pain and hardship (Shmotkin et al. 2011).

Shmotkin et al.’s review (2011) stresses the theme of contradiction as it applies to the inner representations of survivors and HSO. HSO are often conflicted by the mixed messages of their survivor parents, who, on the one hand saw them as treasured continuations of threatened life, and on the other hand, due to the parents’ own traumas, did not always grant HSO the independence or affirmation necessary to feel validated or emotionally secure. Internal representations and the ways in which they conflict with contradictory lived experience become sources of vulnerability, especially during stressful events. Shmotkin et al. reviews HSO experiences of inherited contradiction between normal exteriors in functional reality and sensitive inner worlds characterized by fragile self-perceptions, challenging world assumptions, and emotional preoccupations.

A conflict may arise between the desire to understand one’s parents and the inability to know how to survive the erosion of boundaries and emotional stability conjured by parents’ memories. As developing children, HSO often struggle to separate their own subjectivities from their parents’. As one female HSO describes, many felt a need to distance themselves from their parents because of a continuing inability to know “how and where to establish the appropriate boundaries that keep me from feeling like I’m being swallowed up by their incredible emotional neediness” (Stein 2009, 43). In a poignant scene in Gila Almagor’s Summer of Aviya (1989), an Israeli film based on
Almagor’s autobiographical HSO novel, a survivor mother waltzes in repetitive circles with her young daughter, Aviya, whose long hair she has shaved in a post-traumatic frenzy. Entranced, she tells Aviya that she has her father’s eyes. Gripping her dizzy daughter and deaf to Aviya’s fearful cries of protest, she waltzes increasingly faster. In other scenes, she unleashes her rage at Aviya for accidental clumsiness, trivial waste, and imperfection. Dependent on her suffering mother, the young Aviya must discount her identity as a child and a female to meet her mother’s hard demands, which Aviya has no choice but to experience as her own. Aviya’s losses as an HSO are perhaps most evident in the scene of her forced birthday party to which no friends show. In this scene, her survivor mother orchestrates a painfully controlled and artificial atmosphere of celebration for Aviya, who has long internalized a severe seriousness that leaves her friendless and instinctually resistant to fun. Shmotkin et al. (2011) suggests that internalizing parents’ unfinished mourning may impede the process of individuating, which may feel like deserting the fragile parent, especially when the child has been designated by the parent as a “memorial candle,” the parent’s replacement of dead relatives or connection to the lost world (Wardi 1992).

To be sure, some internal contradictions in HSO and HSG mirror processes in children of other kinds of immigrant families. Psychoanalyst Alice Miller notes that the immigrant child’s autonomy may be threatened if the parent, as cultural outsider, places excessive expectations on the child, as cultural insider, to redeem the family’s social isolation via special talents, beauty, achievements, and the like. Objectified in this way, the child may develop feelings of grandiosity, of possessing personal worth only to the extent that he fulfils these family needs and performs these extraordinary talents (Miller
1981, 35). Miller describes these emotionally exploited offspring as envious of others’ ability to live average, natural lives, to find satisfaction without constant attempts to earn admiration, unique recognition, and outstanding excellence.

In addition to redeeming parents’ cultural alienation, HSO are pressed to soothe parents’ psychological trauma. Survivors were not merely disoriented by their new postwar surroundings, but also by their own psyches, which had undergone experiences that could not be processed, explained, or often even articulated. By destroying what was most emotionally essential but leaving the subject’s body alive, trauma has the disorganizing capacity to make the familiar uncanny. Survivor artist Miklós Adler articulates this sense of the uncanny, or spiritual homelessness. In *Beyond Words*, a collection of his woodcuts edited and introduced by Saul Touster, a striking image depicts the return of liberated camp survivors to their towns; a contemplative man stands alone in the foreground, the faces of what may be his family emerging from the smoke rising behind him. The caption reads, “Home. Home?”
In post-Holocaust families, the child may experience his own kind of trauma as his brain resists internalizing the instability of his protector and provider. The HSO child actively resists internalizing his parent’s losses “of family, of home, of a feeling of belonging and safety in the world,” as these lost feelings are precisely what the child needs in order to feel protected, whole, and able to grow as a cohesive person (Hirsch 2008, 112).

In Ilany Kogan’s psychoanalytic study, a prominent theme in HSO is the experience of living in a dual reality, half one’s parents’ and half one’s own. This experience often involves a struggle to construct a selfhood that is separate, new, and coherent, as HSO often grew up in situations of parental role-reversal that made it difficult to separate their own subjectivities from those of their parents (Kogan 1995, 149). Kogan notes that since survivors did not always establish concrete, non-metaphorical ways of describing their traumatic experiences, they often blurred events together and complicated their children’s ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality (154). Eva Hoffman, an HSO writer, paints a picture of coming to understand reality as, at its core, a disorienting fantasy: “We who came after do not have memories of the Holocaust…Rather, I took in that first information as a sort of fairy tale deriving not so much from another world as from the center of the cosmos: an enigmatic but real fable” (Hoffman 2004, 6 in van Alphen 2006, 484). Freud wrote that fairy tales, like dreams, carry the symbols of the repressed unconscious, the id urges and inassimilable knowledge that can only be addressed and negotiated when obscured and disguised in the alternative realities of sleep and fantasy. It is not surprising that fantasies and nightmares figure so prominently in post-Holocaust testimonies.
Psychoanalysis understands the act of fantasy as a response to damage inflicted on the ego and as an obstacle to individuating an independent life (Kogan 1995, 149). Yet it is also important to see the subversive importance of fantasy in the face of realities that do not sufficiently attend to the losses, questions, and anxieties of survivors and their children. The act of fantasizing privileges emotions and inner drives (what Kristeva terms the semiotic) above quantifiable symbols of accepted representations, the laws of masculine authority (Lacan’s Symbolic), which tend not to account for the marginal. In the face of trauma, which widens the disparity between semiotic experience and symbolic outlets for making social meaning out of that experience, the subject may have to choose between self-repression and social incoherence.

Clinical psychologist Yael Danieli characterizes four major types of survivor families: victim families, fighter families, numb families, and “those who made it” (Berger 1997, 13-14). Danieli emphasizes the situational influence on post-Holocaust experience, claiming that most victim and numb families survived the camps, while most fighter families participated in resistance and partisan fighting. Danieli describes the HSO of victim and numb families as sensitive to others’ pain and overly careful not to hurt anyone. This kind of behavior, imagined as a kind of walking on emotional eggshells, is undeniably out of sync with normative American or Israeli masculinity. Given factors that would have determined who fought versus endured camp imprisonment, as well as how postwar social realities valorized the former and felt more disturbed by and ambivalent about the latter, perhaps victim and numb families had a disadvantage in the process of coming to terms with and cohesively narrating their experiences. It may be
that, offered less sociocultural validation, fewer victim and numb families mastered their narratives or communicated them openly to their offspring.

There is a general consensus that clinical studies, which spotlight the difficulties of those already seeking psychological treatment, do not reflect the entire populations of survivors, HSO, and HSG. But as Mazor and Tal phrase it, “clinical observations highlight the extreme aspects of a phenomenon that is present in everyone” (Mazor and Tal 1996, 107). We might understand case studies as sometimes extreme manifestations on a spectrum of relatively characteristic trends for those populations. Often these trends shape inner emotional representations but do not visibly hinder functioning.

Psychological studies have moved away from pathologizing a “survivor syndrome” to characterizing most survivors and HSO as largely functional, resilient individuals with complicated inner tensions. Barel et al.’s 2010 meta-analysis showed survivors to have comparable physical and cognitive functioning to controls, but higher levels of posttraumatic and psychopathological indications (Shmotkin et al. 2011). The studied trends of Holocaust survivors include anxiety; aversion to conflict or high energy, even in one’s children; mistrustfulness; overprotectiveness of children or possessions; obsessive behaviors, sometimes involving food, nourishing one’s children, or hoarding; belittling of offspring’s struggles in comparison to those of the war; emotional reserve, severity, rigidity, or fragility; lapses into past contexts; aggression; intense emotional bonding; guilt; depression; interpersonal and individuation problems (Shmotkin et al. 2011 and Wiseman et al. 2002).

While the majority of nonclinical HSO samples report no significant differences in personality, family dynamics, and mental health, studies indicate vulnerabilities in how
HSO, like their parents, experience their inner worlds below functional exteriors. Case studies emphasize sub-clinical guilt, depression, aggression, interpersonal problems, individuation issues, and identity conflicts (Wiseman et al. 2002), but also strong work ethic, high endurance, ambition, heightened empathy and sensitivity. Hogman’s 1998 non-clinical American study characterized HSO and HSG as purposeful, thoughtful, and empathetic people who believe in the preciousness of life and keep aware of social and political inequalities around them (Sagi-Schwartz 2008). Some studies suggest that HSO only exhibit the vulnerability of their inner tensions under extreme stress, such as in facing serious illness or war (Shmotkin et al. 2011). A recent review of findings from intergenerational HS family studies suggests that what is passed on from survivors to HSO to HSG is an interplay between resilience and vulnerability within self-perceptions, world assumptions, and emotional experience, even among the majority of well-adjusted families (Shotkin et al. 2011).

Strained, paradoxical, or contradictory representations of inner and outer realities complicate emotional and interpersonal experience. HSO may struggle to exist nonchalantly in a context of shared symbols that cannot fully account for their personal realities. Art Spiegelman, an American HSO whose comic book memoir *Maus* won the 1992 Pulitzer Prize, muses about his Polish survivor father Vladek in *Metamaus*, his book of commentary on the *Maus* project: “Vladek was never supposed to end up on a Rego Park street throwing a ball. It’s only the displacements of history that dropped him from outer space to there” (Spiegelman 2011, 25). A sketch from Spiegelman’s notebook starkly conveys the alienation of an American boy growing under a displaced father. Accompanying an image of father and son playing catch, the text reads:
MY FATHER – he used to call me “Butch” when he wanted to be affectionate. I was anything but a Butch. I don’t know how the idea first entered his head, but there was something very touching about his attempt to be American, and I reciprocated by calling him “Pops.” Once, we decided to play baseball in front of the house like other kids did with their fathers. It didn’t work out that well: my father had no idea how to throw a ball and, personally, I was terrible at baseball and therefore hated it. The fiasco only lasted about fifteen minutes – most of the time spent with one or the other of us chasing the ball. I think I remember other kids – Catholics who lined across the street – looked on us with contempt. At any rate we silently gave it up and went back in the house. We never tried anything like that again.

One clearly perceives from these words the sense of otherness, masculine inadequacy, and the lingering potential for victimization in the presence of the contemptuous Catholics looking on. Spiegelman’s meticulousness and perfectionism also shine through – his hatred for an activity that may paint him as failure (baseball) and thus confound what one may read as a lifelong need to be exceptional (as only the exceptional can compete for significance with a parent’s Auschwitz survival).

HSO and HSG accounts of internalizing family and Holocaust legacy shed light on how specific dynamics and mediating factors perpetuate or help work through aspects of trauma across generations. I take specific interest in the mediation of gender
positioning, family communication style, and sociocultural belonging. My study of HSG interviews will focus both on American belonging and on normative male gender in the contemporary American context as a socially and self-policed performance and posturing. Those who comfortably inhabit normative masculinity and “Americanness” may interact differently with their Holocaust heritage than those who struggle with or reject these factors, which offer potential security, psychological coherence, and sociocultural belonging to the Jewish American man.

Josh, a maternal-side HSG and a PsyD student focusing on relationships and attachment in HSG, believes based on his clinical research that

> So many of us just have this...emptiness, and this feeling that things aren’t quite right in the way that we grew up, and this underlying pain or anxiety, despite the fact that we’re basically functional people. [...] I think it’s an unspoken identity. There are certainly people I have met, certainly during my dissertation, who take a lot of pride in being third generation. [...] But, through my life, I have met people who...are third generation and just got them instantly.

The interplay of anxiety and emptiness to which Josh refers may be the HSG counterparts to the experience of HSO parents acting out, which may be experienced by their children as sometimes overwhelming and sometimes emotionally neglecting. Helen Epstein’s HSO interviewee Al paints a picture of the kind of transmission of emotional emptiness that may come from internalizing an emotionally absent role model. He reports thinking only in terms of “my mother,” not “my parents,” as his traumatized father was for him a passive and absent source of shame (Epstein 1979, 225). Al says, “He was completely out of it and I felt myself becoming the same way. I didn’t know how to act as a man. It was almost impossible for me to make friends with boys and, later on, with men. I had no concept of how men behaved together” (225). HSO who became emotionally cloudy or “empty” in this way sometimes raised children with similar difficulties if they acted as
neglectful, absent parents. Yet their children, HSG, have a greater rooting in their surrounding culture and greater access to supplemental resources. Coby, a 26-year-old HSG, describes an immigrant HSO father who, like Al, did not know how to be an American man. But Coby was offered more resources to supplement the absent model of American masculinity in his household:

My dad didn’t really play sports, or do any […] things that your American dad does […] He doesn’t do guns, and we don’t go out and water-ski, or… barbecue, or any of that kind of stuff […] I had a lot of insecurities […] It was more important for me to feel assimilated and to feel like I was fitting in. That was something that I was self conscious about and aware of. […] we just weren’t American. You know, we didn’t do a lot of the things that our neighbors did […] I knew that like my dad was not a man’s man. I knew that. He wasn’t [one] to like drink beer at the barbecue, or chat with the boys. My dad didn’t have any friends growing up. […] work buddy friends, you know. My dad doesn’t have that. […] And so that was what I saw as normal, and there wasn’t that… But, I think in my own experiences, I can’t say that I did not feel masculine at that age.

But what I am very thankful for, is my parents, they recognized this, and they were open enough in communicating with me and with my sisters about what we were into, and they wanted to give us everything, and so like we did ski school, seventh grade. […] my parents were like […] ‘We as people can’t give this to you, but we can give you those experiences.’ And so we got to sign up to go, you know, snowboarding in the winter […] I got to have those experiences through Scouts, and things like that.

Models of Intergenerational Transmission

Studied models of intergenerational transmission include biological, psychodynamic, sociocultural, and family systems models. In the following pages, I will explore the latter three models. It is important for my argument to note how gender identity and intergenerational trauma are learned, developed, and internalized in converging ways, sometimes lending to considerable relationships between gendered and post-traumatic positioning in HSO and HSG. One learns the values of endurance, self-control, self-sacrifice, and emotional conservation much in the same way that one learns how to
position oneself as masculine or feminine. Post-traumatic sensibilities, like those of
gender, may be both embodied knowledge, learned physically and implicitly, as well as
communicated knowledge, articulated explicitly as a tangible function.

❖ Psychodynamic Model of Transmission

Testimonies of those raised in the shadow of parents’ trauma convey a forming
subjectivity weighted by something internal but unknown, inherent but destructive to the
self. The child’s subjectivity recreates a relationship to his own intensified secrets,
anxieties, and potential for self-destruction, echoing the survivor parent’s relationship
between self and dangerous, inassimilable memories. HSO researcher Helen Epstein
famously describes the “iron box” she experienced as buried deep inside of her,
containing potent, “slippery, combustible things more secret than sex and more
dangerous than any shadow or ghost.” She sometimes imagined this “box” as a bomb, a
tomb, and a vault, associating it with the shapeless, nameless terror she only vaguely
knew to relate to her parents’ experiences (Epstein 1979, 9;11). Ilany Kogan describes
the HSO clinical patient as “suffering from a ‘hole’ in his psychic structure…on the brink
of ‘unthinkable anxiety’” (Kogan 1995, 157). Both the post-traumatic HSO and the
insecurely masculine subject are vacuous with holes and pregnant with a bomb,
inassimilable aspects of self that cannot be accessed or exposed. The resulting behavior
is a careful, continuous performance to keep internal threats at bay.

According to Abraham and Torok, the incommunicable and psychologically
unhinging nature of a traumatic family narrative registers, even as it is articulated into
words, as an embodied secret or anxiety, which the developing child cannot integrate and
thus relegates to a crypt, a buried chamber (Abraham and Torok 1994). This crypt, like Helen Epstein’s “iron box,” contains not the traumatic experience itself but the sense of secrecy, anxiety, and gaps in reality that result from it in the survivor parent’s modeled emotional performance. The child cannot deal with the contents of the crypt explicitly but feels he must preserve it, because, as the creed of “Never again” implies, the defining trauma that the crypt represents must never be lost, trivialized, or disowned, even as it can never be handled directly by a forming subject or by someone who did not experience the trauma firsthand. Though buried, the crypt may come to paralyze or entrap the HSO child’s subjectivity, becoming a central component both of the child’s identity and of his repetitive attempt at self-liberation, of freeing his subjectivity from the constraints of engrained second-hand impulses for secrecy, anxiety, and internal crisis.

The idea that one’s own subjectivity can carry within it something that is destabilizing, shameful, or inaccessible, but also emotionally foundational and personal is an idea mirrored in Judith Butler’s theory of subjectivity as it relates to gender and performance. Philosophical characterization of subjectivity and its resulting compulsion to master a repetitious performance in response to threat or interruption of self suggests

*Butler emphasizes an unprepared overwhelm and a sort of psychological death as the foundation of human subjectivity. She writes that the forming subject, even from infancy, experiences “me” first via the words of the other (initially the parent), who addresses the not-yet-individuated subject, thusly seizing him from himself. The nature of subject formation is in this way constituted by a social interruption quickly integrated into subjectivity. Butler states that the address of the other first appears as a source of overwhelm and then becomes the basis of the unconscious, the “not me” which animates my individuation. The address of the parent denies the possibility of a self rooted in complete, autonomous mastery, the fluid possession of all parts of self without shame or fear (Butler 2005, 50). It is the beginning of an education in how to be a social subject, ushering the human animal into the separate cultures of boyhood and girlhood, among other categorical divisions.
that trauma has something fundamentally in common with the very forces that shape subjectivity and how we are made to perform it. A central example, though usually not to the detrimental extent of the traumatized, is the gendered subject: unexpectedly faced with external demands for a contingent selfhood, one must shut off parts of the self in order to succeed in meeting those demands. Early on, one is told that one’s natural “gender-inappropriate” traits are not acceptable, are shameful. A forceful, unexpected threat to a girl’s “masculine” voice or to a boy’s “feminine” feeling is, as in trauma, a glimpse of the dead self. The brain and body cannot consciously accept the negation of their own components, especially those components understood as most valuable or personally defining. Those rejected parts do not disappear, but intensify in the unconscious, propelling the compensatory repetitions of behavior and posturing that embody an acceptable gender performance. While one might argue that this is in itself a kind of trauma, it is worth noting that it is especially traumatic when these restrictions fall on the parts of the self with which the child most strongly identifies. Thus, it is particularly traumatic for a sensitive child to have his emotional world disavowed. For HSO, the partial disavowal of one’s family story, bordered by instability and rupture, is traumatic in that it poses the potential annihilation of one’s basis for existing or of one’s parent’s defining pain.

We may then theorize gender identity, like trauma, as something that happens at first despite the brain’s existence, an externally generated halving of subjectivity that, despite the developing child’s fluid self-possession, confronts the child with the inassimilable death of certain parts or potential parts of the child’s experience of self. The child, a plastic conglomeration of potential expressions, is faced early with
restrictions on particular aspects of expression. It is not this restriction, but the resultant
overwhelm – the inability to assimilate or process this restriction, that shapes how
insistently subjects perform and defend respective masculinities and femininities required
of them. Aggressive acting out, for example, is perhaps less about asserting strength than
it is about the pain of losing one’s right to be vulnerable; it is less about being
“masculine” than it is about the threat of one’s banished “femininity” resurfacing. Post-
traumatic acting out similarly performs a repetitive set of behaviors, like hoarding or
hiding, to keep at bay the repressed or unconscious threats of experienced or internalized
endangerment. The very term “acting out” implies a performance. Often perceived as
erratic and self-destructive, it arises from an attempt to control the threat of confronting a
violated or rejected portion of self by performing what semblances of mastery remain
from without. Children raised in the context of parental acting out may come to
internalize the perceived threats and resulting compulsions as engrained lenses of reality,
a kind of personal discourse with its own inner logic. Unlike the shared, social meanings
of “appropriate” gender performance, post-traumatic family meanings, like queer gender
positioning in this respect, may be as socially obscure as they are personally defining.

It is difficult to parse out the separate factors that shape an internal gender
identity. Because gender is itself a set of social imaginaries linked to biological sex, it
does not neatly match any specific set of internal characteristics. Rather, it corresponds
to the expression and suppression of certain universally human characteristics, such as
vulnerability, emotional openness, resilience, force, and biological drives. Gender is an
externally enforced, sex-specific set of laws for handling the feelings, inclinations, needs,
and drives that are mostly common to all human beings. The conscious social and
personal efforts to suppress, to *not* know one’s own “feminine” traits perpetuates the fantasy of masculinity as itself a kind of trauma – a set of mythologized ideals that, born out of abjecting the “feminine,” both propel and destabilize the male, whose subjectivity is unknowingly defined by discovering that the “feminine” potential it also contains threatens the coherence of his external identity from within.

**Sociocultural Model of Transmission**

Sociocultural context and gendered public imaginaries influence the processes of working through trauma and positioning identity in post-Holocaust families. According to Kaja Silverman’s theoretical framework, collective trauma is directly involved in the social construct of normative masculinity, exposing it as bound to social conventions that may be violated or rejected. Silverman describes historical trauma as

Any historical event...which brings a large group of male subjects into such an intimate relationship with lack that they are at least for the moment unable to sustain an imaginary relation with the phallus, and so withdraw their belief from the dominant fiction. Suddenly the latter is radically de-realized, and the social formation finds itself without a mechanism for achieving consensus (Silverman 55).

If collective trauma may temporarily suspend masculinity, as a social construct, it may also unhinge subjects whose identities depend on that construct.

A lack of sociocultural belonging may intensify divisions between internal and external selves, and contribute to notions of a Holocaust heritage as unique, mystifying, and untouchable. Epstein writes that her parents’ experience of concentration camps became for her an “untouchable standard of fortitude” in the untroubled, secure American context (Epstein 1979, 20). Did those Holocaust survivors and their children, who struggled to adjust to the dominant fictions of their new social contexts, need to create for
themselves alternate fictions to accommodate the experience of trauma, social
displacement, and subjective clashes with new cultural imaginaries? Arlene Stein (2009)
argues that feminist consciousness raising groups championed postwar attempts to
articulate new post-traumatic subjectivities and to come to terms with massive trauma
and its effects on what Silverman calls the “dominant fiction.”

After WWII ended, Jewish refugees sought to reintegrate into both established
and new social contexts in the U.S., Israel, and elsewhere. Silverman envisions each
social context to operate by a different “dominant fiction,” consisting of the imagined ties
between the subject and the symbolic order of convention, which emerges to fix a
meaning for normativity with collective desires and identifications. Survivors entered the
dominant fictions of their new societies, sometimes with fervor and sometimes with
psychological reservations reflective of the traumas and drastic ruptures in their lives.
Many had lost parents, spouses, and children in the war, and many had suffered and seen
horrors that could not be processed. Social, cultural, and political differences across the
young state of Israel and the U.S. greatly influenced the adjustment processes. Certainly
the experience of adjusting to the American “dominant fiction” differed drastically from
adjusting to the Israeli one. To be psychologically secure in a culture of political conflict
that raises the majority of its children to be soldiers is not the same as to be
psychologically secure in most of the U.S. Israeli Filmmaker Eytan Fox observes an
enduring, problematic reliance on law at the expense of unconscious drives in post-
Holocaust Israeli subjectivity:

In my most thorough attempt thus far to analyze or deconstruct, to gain a true,
renewed understanding of the Israeli man, I got to the Holocaust...got in touch
emotionally with the realization that it begins there: ...our grandparents, at times
also our parents - who came from the Holocaust and arrived in Israel, tried to
produce a new Jew in the Sabra - strong and fearless, who would take upon himself our defense, and we were preoccupied with defending ourselves. But something very hard was being made inside [this new Jew], very complex emotionally, very stuck, very limited...who finds it difficult to be a human being. (Ginsburg 76)

While the forming Israeli dominant fiction favored a strong, healthy, militarized, and resilient Jewish subject, the U.S. sought conservative normalcy and social ease in its post-war years. Refugees approached their new nations with needs, hopes, and expectations that reflected undeniably gendered positionings. While some survivors sought out opportunities for rebuilding a life in line with the resilient, self-made masculinity of the American dream or with the toughened spirit of Zionism, some also sought to be cared for and restored from their traumas and injuries. Helen Epstein writes of Holocaust refugees in a militarizing and economically austere Israeli context, “many had expected Israel to be a mother, who would make up to them for their pain. Here they were disappointed” (Epstein 1979, 213).

Not all refugees could identify with the collective and militarized mentalities of the Israeli kibbutz and defense force or with the lighthearted, materialistic, and Protestant-rooted norms of much of U.S. culture. HSO Eric A. Kimmel describes American Jewry as “convinced of the benevolence of Heaven and the rationality of our neighbors…sleek, smug, sometimes self-pitying, but always self-indulgent” (Steinitz 1975, 24). In Maus, Art Spiegelman conceptualizes his father as coming from “Hell Planet,” dropped into Rego Park, New York from outer space. Helen Epstein describes most of her American HSO interviewees as loners averse to crowds, her own family as a severe “island,” her parents mistrusting of organized group activities and social coercion (Epstein 1979, 220; 155-7). Epstein grew up perceiving American Jewish life as
indulged, complacent, empty, affected, clichéd, forced, and disconnected from the seriousness of real pain and survival. She saw American kids as ignorant, immature goody-goodies disconnected from reality, their parents as bland, polite, and more interested in the rabbi’s feel-good sermons than in her father’s embarrassing and difficult stories of survival. Many HSO exhibited emotional ambivalence and a resistance to nonchalance or carefree behavior. Purposefulness, adherence to ethical obligation, and careful self-preservation are values passed down in post-Holocaust families, as is the aspiration to live life to the fullest, which often translates to having a happy family and a successful living. Many HSO struggled in the U.S. to experience American individualist life to the fullest without disappointing or abandoning survivor parents and the ethical responsibilities they represented.

**Family Systems Model of Transmission**

Natalie Krasnostein, a Jewish Australian writer, performer, and psychodramatist, and an HSG, writes,

> My mother and my grandmother have such different views and ideas compared to my own, and in that I feel simultaneously blessed and tormented. I am struck by the closeness and the conflicts, – the differences, the love, the laughter and tears, the messiness and the imperfection. Something is always in the air that is powerful and palpable and I can't put my finger on it, but I know I feel like crying at that moment and I just wish I could capture it and hold onto it forever – (Krasnostein 2006, 4)

A significant way in which internal contradiction or second-hand trauma is transmitted to offspring is in parental communication style. Children of survivors experienced their parents’ traumatic narratives as secret to varying degrees. Some learned all the details of their parents’ experiences, while some knew only that their parents survived. Some
experienced their parents as having overcome trauma and mastered their life narratives, and some experienced their parents as still traumatized and at odds with their own lives. Knowing one’s context is the first step to overcoming its psychological challenges. Robyn Fivush notes that studies show children to have higher self-esteem when they can place their own lives within the context of a family story that provides a framework for understanding their own pre-birth histories (Fivush 2008). Helen Epstein describes clinging to her parents’ stories, because they proved to her that her parents came from somewhere where they were known, vital, and understood, unlike in their displaced postwar American context (Epstein 1979, 165). When official histories and mainstream cultural narratives do not sufficiently provide such history, the quest to locate family origins and a sense of coherence or belonging often becomes a private, emotional one.

To state the obvious, open communication facilitates knowing. Wiseman et al. (2002) points out that empirical attachment studies at the representational level support Bowlby’s 1973 assertion: open and coherent parent-child communication from infancy to adolescence predicts well-organized and flexible internal relationship models (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999; Kobak, 1999 in Wiseman et al. 2002). When communication is open, accessible to both parties, and corresponds to a reality free of post-traumatic interruption, the child can be successfully assured that the parent is available to her, even amidst challenging external circumstances. Even in the subsequent generations, Jurkowitz (1996) shows open communication between HSO and their children to correspond with HSG that relate to the Holocaust legacy with less guilt, depression, and shame, and as less of a burden (Sagi-Schwartz et al. 2008). The parent’s ability to process and mediate his experience before communicating it openly is crucial. Family
theorists note the difference between the “presence of the past” and the “influence of the past,” the former engaging offspring firsthand in reenactments of trauma-related affective experiences, the latter channeling trauma into representations and insights in keeping with sociocultural norms, values, and reason (Bowen, 1972; Friedman, 1991 in Scharf 2007).

Psychological studies emphasize the benefits for survivors in learning to live with and accept the clashes, inaccessible paradoxes, and breaks experienced in their life narratives. Lomranz (2005) found that survivors who can live more easily with the contradiction, paradox, or inconsistency between the inassimilable traumatic world and the normality afterwards have better life functioning than those intolerant of the inconsistencies in their experience (Shmotkin et al. 2011). For those children and grandchildren on the receiving end of the narrated story, studies emphasize the benefits for HSO and HSG of a processed, openly communicated Holocaust history. In contrast, studies highlight the risks of experiencing the Holocaust as an unprocessed, taboo, and lingering threat to the emotional climate of the home. Jucovy terms this latter experience for offspring the experience of “knowing and not knowing” (KNK) their parents’ traumatic history, which is perceived primarily through parents’ nightmares, unsettling bodily rhythms, severe silences, and unpredictable outbursts.

A non-clinical Israeli study by Wiseman et al. (2002) found correlated risks of a KNK upbringing for HSO to include interpersonal distress, inclinations for conflict, emotional reservation, lower affiliation levels, anxiety, and perception of close others as unstable, hurtful, and controlling. KNK upbringing correlated with HSO daughters who are less individuated from their mothers and more domineering toward their fathers than
other female HSO and controls (Wiseman et al. 2002). Male KNK-HSO showed less individuation from their spouses than did other male HSO and controls. The study also revealed that KNK-HSO perceived mothers as more anxious than fathers. Jurkowitz’s 1996 non-clinical sample showed openness of communication between HSO and their children (HSG) to relate to lower levels of depression, shame, and guilt in HSG (Sagi-Schwartz 2008).

The process of working through trauma and its effects in later generations is itself a gendered process. According to studies, survivor fathers, more often than mothers, are characterized as silent and reserved, often unwilling to narrate their experiences. In Helen Epstein’s study (1998), more mothers than fathers narrated Holocaust memories, both their own and their husbands’, to their children (Reading 2002, 145). Open communication about personal experience, trauma aside, is the territory of an intimate, emotionally invested relationship and is thus traditionally gendered feminine and maternal. Because of biology and social norms, infants usually begin their lives more emotionally dependent on their mothers than on their fathers. Later as subjects, to fit the “dominant fiction,” children learn to suppress this early dependence, particularly those who strive to perform normative masculinity. Lacanian terms place the father’s approach as a facilitation of that kind of individuation through emotional suppression, as the infant’s introduction to social language and law, the first pressure to position oneself with an “other,” beyond the terrain of the symbiotic mother-infant relationship or the inner world of emotions, drives, and biological rhythms. Certainly these roles are not exclusive to male or female parent but correlate more with nurturing vs. socializing models that either or both parents may perform. But, generally speaking, parent-child relationships
often work to prepare children for identity formation and social success, and this means, in part, an understanding of oneself in terms of what society might expect from one as male or female.

Thus, the child’s emotional receptivity to parents and the kinds of parenting models they offer influences the child’s course of individuation and social integration as a subject. While one child may reject a troubled parent, building his own protective walls against him, another may yield to or chase after the traumatized parent who violates boundaries or withdraws. The social belief that involvement in parents’ emotional world complicates the development of masculine independence may shed light as to why males are more resistant to parental identification and as to why studies show female HSO and HSG to be more vulnerable than males to post-Holocaust psychological distress. Though females do not always emotionally invest in parents, they learn that they are supposed to. Males do not always comfortably differentiate from parents, but they learn that failing to do so could put them in serious trouble.

What does it mean to have a “masculine” or “feminine” disposition with regard to traumatized parent-child relationships? While it is traditionally feminine to work inside-out, to develop positioning through emotional relationship with parents, it is traditionally masculine to minimize parents’ emotional influence and to develop a functional public self in social symbols outside of the familial space. The emotionally receptive or “feminine” HSO that feels a parent absent, inaccessible, or fragile seeks both to care for the parent and, in doing so, to elicit the parent’s care in return. A position of postmemorial investment, like any emotional investment in parents, poses challenges to the “masculine” subject’s coherence. The difference between seeking connection to an
emotionally obstructed parent via the parent’s own history and pain, as in postmemorial investment in the family album versus the public and collective expressions of Jewish faith or custom is, I believe, reflective of gender identity development. From an early age, masculinity suppresses the memory of one’s dependence on parental nurture, setting socially enforced boundaries against male over-internalization of parents’ emotional worlds. Emotional dependence on one’s parents is discrediting and delegitimizing for the forming masculine subject, whose existence is rooted in independent competency and strong voice in the public sphere. Helen Epstein writes that while her brother blocked out the stories of their parent’s Holocaust past, she clung to them like treasure. This is not to say that male HSO and HSG do not experience postmemory, but rather that the risk of experiencing it poses greater threats to self-image as subjects expected to perform masculinity.

The HSO insistent on emotional connection with an inconsistent or inaccessible survivor parent may come to serve the parent in ways that complicate the child’s relationship to his own needs. Auerhahn and Prelinger (1983) outline this dynamic for the traumatized parent-child relationship in which “the child who attempts to comfort the parent by catering to his need for total empathy clings to an inaccessible parent and thus forgoes the fulfillment of his own emotional needs. The child initiates a kind of union with the needy parent in order to nurture him, while actually seeking parenting for himself” (Kogan 1995, 151-2). One female HSO describes feeling “totally negated and impotent,” existing as her father’s property and her mother’s salvation, no experience of hers valid or deserving sympathy in comparison with her parents’ unprocessed traumas (Stein 2009, 43). Writing of children who grew up meeting the needs of their insecure
parents at the expense of their own growth and validation, Alice Miller relays from her own clinical practice that this pattern appears mostly for firstborn children and children without siblings, and that it is a dynamic of objectification by the mother. This kind of child

was seen as the mother’s possession...What the mother had failed to find in her own mother she was able to find in her child: someone at her disposal who could be used as an echo and could be controlled, who was completely centered on her, would never desert her, and offered her full attention and admiration...What is missing above all else is the framework within which the child could experience his feelings and emotions. Instead, he develops something the mother needs, and although this certainly secures his life (by securing the mother’s or the father’s “love”) at the time, it may nevertheless prevent him, throughout his life, from being himself. (Miller 1981, 30)

Shmotkin et al. (2011) refer to previous studies indicating that those HSO most likely to internalize repressed or unprocessed feelings of survivor parents are the ones who develop strong identification with their parents, or those who were born as a commemoration of loss immediately after the war (Kellerman 2008; Wardi 1992). To experience one’s own identity as shaped by the unassimilated memories and traumas of one’s parents, one’s identity must be vulnerable or receptive to the emotional world of the parents to begin with. A psychological study showed that HSO who reported a high level of commitment to their parents also exhibited high levels of distress and low levels of well-being, while those HSO who reported low levels of commitment to their parents showed high levels of well-being, even higher than in non-HSO controls (Shafet 1994 in Mazor and Tal 1996, 98). The child who identifies strongly with the parent, looking to the parent as a center for self-understanding or offering herself as a therapeutic receptacle for the parent’s conflicted emotional life, will absorb more of parents’ contradictory experience of inner and outer realities. The kind of child that internalizes parental
traumas is the kind of child with enough sensitivity, emotional investment, or circumstantial desperation to commit emotionally to their troubled parents.

Israeli HSO photographer Yishay Garbasz describes growing up as the youngest child very close with her mother, Stella, who “passed everything about herself on to me” (Garbasz 2009, 136). In Her Mother’s Footsteps, Garbasz’s second major publication, pairs Stella’s written Holocaust testimony with photographs of referenced places as they exist in their contemporary conditions. Jeffrey Shandler’s introduction to the publication emphasizes the emotional internalization of mother by daughter, who expresses that her mother “lived inside me” as she completed the project. Shandler calls it a “personal project of deepening insight into her mother’s life as well as her own, lives that, at some level, are experienced as merged” (8). The photographic process is described in gendered terms, favoring vulnerability over force: “rather than me forcing a picture on the landscape,” Garbasz explains, she would “become vulnerable to the places I am trying to capture” (8). Garbasz, whose mother had a “habit of silence” about the Holocaust, is explicit about the continuation of Holocaust trauma, writing “It is everywhere, in everything…the trauma does not die with them. It continues on into the next generations. Neither life nor society equipped any of our families with the tools needed to deal with it” (136).

Van Alphen suggests that HSO investment in parental traumas is a potential displacement of their investment in the inaccessible parents themselves. Post-traumatic identification is thus a reaction to experiences of failed continuity or connection with (grand)parents. Marianne Hirsch states, “the trope of maternal abandonment and the fantasy of maternal recognition…is pervasive in Holocaust remembrance” (Hirsch 2008,
Helen Epstein’s “iron box,” her secret inner darkness or crypt, is not only a repository of second-hand trauma, but also an early-developed manifestation of loyal and intense devotion to her guarded mother, who periodically hid in the locked bathroom and contemplated suicide. A simultaneous investment in and disorientation by the emotional internalization of suffering parents renders the child disempowered, enmeshed, and emotionally vulnerable unless the child gives up on connection. The dynamic characterizes Nadine Fresco’s (1984) “vertigo,” Helen Epstein’s being “possessed by a history [she] had never lived” (Epstein 1979, 14), and Marianne Hirsch’s postmemory. Hirsch’s postmemory most explicitly describes the self-eradicating emotional investment of some HSO subjects in their parents’ pasts, revealing this positioning to be one in which the self is dominated, penetrated, and unable to know or to master the content with which it is impregnated:

transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right…To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation…to be shaped by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension” (Hirsch 2008, 107).

Some HSO describe “over-identifying with their parents and their traumatic pasts, fantasizing about their prewar and wartime experiences and reading obsessively about the Holocaust” (Stein 2009). Art Spiegelman depicts this impulse in *Maus I* and *II*, placing himself in Auschwitz uniform and standing a Nazi watchtower outside his present-day Manhattan window. In *Metamaus*, he reveals a startling amount of collecting, note-taking, and reading on Holocaust literature, exposing readers to the compulsive nature of his relationship to his father’s story. In a lecture given by Spiegelman at Northeastern
University in March 2012, he responded to a student complementing his great talents by insisting that what he has is great obsession, not great talent.

**Postmodern, Post-Holocaust Studies**

Cultural, trauma, memory, and literary studies in the postmodern era look at subjective experience and how subjects position themselves with available discourse, affect, and narrative. Davies and Harre emphasize the subject’s claiming of his own fluid positionality based on available tools of discourse, which is fashioned by political forces. The concept of claiming trauma as part of one’s positioning is troubled by the nature of trauma as itself an experience that defies claiming or representation in symbolic terms. Cathy Caruth calls trauma an “unclaimed experience,” because the glimpse of one’s own death is by definition something that the brain cannot claim, process, or accept, something that cannot happen in accordance with the brain’s existence. Caruth draws on Freud to propose that

> the breach in the mind – the conscious awareness of the threat to life – is not caused by a pure quantity of stimulus... It is not simply, that is, the literal threatening of bodily life, but the fact that the threat is recognized as such by the mind *one moment too late*. The shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced *in time*, it has not yet been fully known. And it is this lack of direct experience that, paradoxically, becomes the basis of the repetition of the nightmare. (Caruth 1996, 62)

If trauma is experience that refuses being known, anxiety is a bodily reaction to the absence of a known fear object. Freud writes that whereas the emotion of fear productively relates to a known or imagined object of threat, anxiety characterizes a state of unanchored neuroses related to the unknown. Trauma is by definition a reaction to what the brain insisted on *not* knowing (its own almost-death).
Anxiety is understandable in the aftermath of senseless brutality that violates the idea that one can know his life and experiences in a rational way. But in order to work through post-traumatic anxiety, one must find ways to make sense of living with the paradoxes and contradictions that inevitably exist between the traumatic world and the current one. Masculinity has, in part, taken its power from knowing. Surveying, classifying, defining, and knowing are precedents to mastering and controlling. According to Kaja Silverman, masculinity is, via its goal of mastery, especially vulnerable to the unbinding effects of trauma. The normative male ego is necessarily in desperate protection of its own coherence and insistently ignorant of the void upon which it rests. Trauma is for the male ego a threatening reminder of all subjects’ inherent lack (Silverman 61). Silverman describes traditional male subjectivity as resting upon an abyss, the void at the heart of all early subjectivity. Lacan’s Law of Language fills this void with the scripts of a society that offers its favored subjects the myth of mastery at the price of emotional expressiveness, vulnerability, and personal openness. Yet, contrary to the dominant fiction, as my study attempts to illustrate, internalized masculine positionings are not limited to males, and they are certainly not characteristic of all males.

In the shadow of massive trauma, the ultimate undoing of the subject’s capacity to rely on knowing, one begins to rely instead on persisting, surviving, ideologizing, believing, or sometimes on defiance. These are alternative models of masculinities in the aftermath of trauma. Feelings of endangerment or “emergency values” may lead some parents to harp on what they deem to be the essentials for survival, such as nutrition and academic success, missing the nuances of their children’s needs and emotional experience. Israeli HSO Etgar Keret’s paragraph-long story “Asthma Attack”
metaphorically addresses how “asthma,” or anxiety changes discourse: “Makes you realize how much a word is worth…It’s not like healthy people who throw out all the words waiting inside their head…A word is a lot, because a word could be stop, or inhaler, or even ambulance” (Keret 2010, 15). In her introduction to *Apples from the Desert*, a story collection by HSO Savyon Liebrecht, Lily Rattock writes of post-Holocaust Israeli families, “Self-preservation and personal security were the only meaningful causes in those families. Personal happiness and creative expressions of individuality were, by and large, discounted and ignored” (Rattock 1986, 17). In an interview with me, Josh, an American 30-year-old PsyD student whose maternal grandparents spent WWII in camps and hiding, shares the following experience of growing up lost and insufficiently validated under his Polish-born mother’s parenting:

> I was just so confused growing up about my emotional experience, and what I needed to do and what I didn’t need to do. I knew that I needed to be smart, but that was about it, you know. I needed to be smart and Jewish, but how does that fulfill you in any way, you know. It doesn’t mean anything, unless there’s more to it. […] being smart doesn’t tell me anything about your values, your politics, your sexuality, or… temperament, your personality… […] something like ‘You are smart and a Jew because of the Holocaust’ doesn’t give you any sort of deeper understanding of who you are…

Simon, a 27-year-old HSG similarly tells me that his survivor grandparents are “missing the sensitivity and kind of have blinders on to a way of living and thinking that I see as inherent to myself. I guess that’s part of the way in which I feel that my family hasn’t quite known me fully, and I realize that I can’t really expect them to…”

As mentioned above, Silverman describes the socially unbinding effects of trauma in terms of the subject’s relationship to the dominant fiction, the imagined ties between the subject and the symbolic order of convention, which emerges to fix a meaning for normativity with collective desires and identifications. Paradoxically, by dissociating the
subject from its experienced reality, trauma has the potential to interrupt or thwart the subject’s fixity to collective symbols, which have now failed to account for lived experience and thus fail to serve their purpose as safeguards against psychological chaos (Silverman 1992, 54). Reality is no longer experienced as primarily directed from outside-in, entrusting social laws and systematic fact, but now increasingly inside-out, defined by feelings that escape measure or processing in social contexts. Clearly the experience of trauma is detrimental for those who survive life-threatening conditions, and it may impair functioning or inner emotional processes. But, as reinforced by the emergence of psychoanalysis in the twentieth century, it is also an unusual opportunity for reevaluating social laws, boundaries, and symbols in order to reaffirm one’s relationship to self.

Literary scholar Ernst van Alphen uses Carl Friedman’s Nightfather to draw attention to how unprocessed survivor trauma infiltrates and disrupts the development of HSO capacity to know and represent physical surroundings and new ideas. Van Alphen notes the discursive problem this produces in young HSO children, who, still learning how to separate words from reality and fantasy from fiction, do not understand “where those stories stop and their own world begins” (van Alphen 2006, 479). In the Lacanian notion of the father as instructor in the symbolic language of the Law, the rules of culture and coherent participation in society, the silent father is, like the Israeli military ethos, one who models strength via suppression of inassimilable, unprocessed vulnerabilities. The survivor as Lawgiver may enforce a context of perceived threat, or it may offer no structure, painting the social world as chaotic or incomprehensible. The father in Nightfather, by verbally rehashing an unprocessed trauma, ushers his children into a
cognitive suspension that fails to mediate between inner and outer realities. Because he has not been able to work through or sufficiently represent his trauma in his own psyche, he remains victim to it, confusing and overwhelming his children, who look to him for knowledge as they form and grow. As van Alphen articulates, “the symbolic order into which they enter in childhood is fundamentally inconsistent or diffuse. They do not have clear frames of reference at their disposal with which they can easily make sense of the world” (482). Nightfather presents a picture of HSO experience as growing up without the tools to draw the line between memory and reality, imagination and knowledge. The lack of such tools is sanctified in the salient bonds of parent-child attachment and in discursive development, as even mundane words (i.e. “camp”) are quickly understood to hold a mystifying power that can disrupt normal reality via parental disengagement.

In my interview with HSG Evan Kleinman, I noted an echo of Nightfather in an anecdote about Evan’s early Holocaust education: overhearing his grandmother reference the camps, six-year-old Evan began talking about his own summer camp and was quickly corrected – No. This kind of camp was different…a dark, bad place. However, most of the third generation does not experience the problem of linguistic or semantic confusion in development, except via whichever effects are manifested in HSO parenting or via immigrant parents’ cultural displacement in some cases. However, a reversal tends to occur, in which the often-secure HSG begins to understand that he needs to integrate the traumatic, disorganized version of reality into his own safe, structured version if he is to understand or have a relationship with the survivor grandparents who exist across cultural and psychological boundaries. Evan describes a reversal of what we see in Nightfather, a process of relearning summer “camp” to accommodate the other kind of camp, a clue to
reaching his beloved grandparents, from whom he “always felt a little bit of a distance.”

The emotional initiation of the often privileged and secure HSG into the traumas that give his family meaning and origins is sometimes, as for HSO, through embodied cues, rhythms, silences, and outbursts in the home as trauma and its second-hand effects remain salient. And sometimes it is part of a process to achieve a relationship with grandparents or with HSO parents working through second-hand trauma.
CHAPTER TWO

From HSO to HSG

Postmemory is experienced through the interaction of two essential components: a larger-than-life traumatic story preceding the subject’s birth and an obstructed, insecure, suppressed, or threatened sense of self, which is then vulnerable to the effects of the monumental story. In many cases, via traumatized parental modeling, emotional inaccessibility, emotional overwhelm, overprotectiveness, guilting, and other imposed pressures or neglect, the dynamics of growing up with survivor parents facilitate the latter condition of an at-risk subjectivity in HSO. And the larger-than-life traumatic story may then rush in with the offer (or threat) of filling the evacuated, porous, or troubled subjectivity. While postmemory for HSO leads to a kind of inescapable sharing of parents’ subjectivity, in HSG it manifests as an identification with displacement, uprootedness, and psychological crisis; these elements, sometimes felt in one’s own experience of sociocultural alienation, gender failure, HSO parenting, or other personal difficulties, are given meaning and validation when understood in the context of the Holocaust legacy.

Most of what we know about second-generation exposure to trauma comes from childhood memories of survivor parents’ acting out, memories which weighed heavy on confused and overwhelmed HSO who lacked understanding or wider cultural validation for these experiences as their subjectivities were forming. This picture differs
significantly from the typical third-generation narrative, in which the ever-present feeling of family trauma (as noted by grandparents’ tattoos or foreignness, parents’ serious tone or anxiety) is buttressed by a careful system of education that gives these children an age-appropriate framework for understanding the Holocaust and braces them for the horrors that they will probably not learn until they are at least eleven or twelve. Whereas many HSO describe experiences of their survivor caretakers as all-consuming, or broken people against whom they could not distinguish their own distinct identities, most HSG benefit from a greater sense of security in their relationships with parents and inherit post-traumatic sensibilities as a means for connecting with survivor grandparents, post-traumatic HSO parents, and their own sense of heritage or roots. In other words, post-traumatic sensibilities are, rather than constituting HSG subjectivity, often actively pursued and adopted by HSG in order to belong and find meaning within a family legacy.

Though this appears to be true for many HSG, some HSG embody insecure or “at-risk” subjectivities early on, whether due to parents’ acting out second-hand trauma, or due to other sources of identity challenges. For these HSG, feelings of endangerment or post-traumatic anxiety seem to manifest more directly, both connecting them to their understanding of a traumatized heritage and burdening them as personally destructive forces in the present. In light of Kristeva’s theory of the symbolic and semiotic, discussed in the introduction, one may speculate as to why certain positions, via a history of denied subjective agency, are perhaps at greater risk for dispossessed or conflicted subjectivity, and thus for experiencing post-traumatic identifications when exposed to a
larger-than-life traumatic family story. My interviews offer insight into why some HSG
work through identifications with uprootedness, otherness, and psychological crisis,
while others more comfortably experience their heritage as a source of pride, endurance,
and ethical responsibility without psychological conflict.

**HSG Research**

Research on HSG is limited and varied. Some studies have suggested that most
HSG do not sense the tension their parents grew up with and feel safe to form more open
relationships with their grandparents, as facilitated by HSO parents (Bar-On 1995 in
Shmotkin et al. 2011). A recent meta-analysis by Sagi-Schwartz (2008) of 13 Israeli and
American studies reported that there was no evidence for tertiary traumatization in HSG.
Seven out of the eight U.S. studies in this meta-analysis were select samples, two of them
showing high rates of anxiety and depression in HSG. All Israeli studies were of
randomly selected samples. Sagi-Schwartz speculates in his discussion that protective
environmental factors generally save HSG from post-Holocaust trauma effects and allow
them to develop normally (Sagi-Schwartz 2008). Others claim that HSG feel continuity
and affirmation as an identity population based in family legacy and social justice

---

*Psychological studies assert that female survivors suffer post-Holocaust effects more
than male survivors do and that incidence of symptoms of psychological distress is higher
in female survivors than in male survivors (Lurie-Beck 2007). HSO populations also
show females more than males to be vulnerable to effects of parents’ trauma and to
experience them in higher intensity. As reflected in control studies that also show higher
levels of emotional distress and anxiety in females than in males in the general
population, Vogel (1994) suggests that this gender difference relates to the fact that
female development encourages involvement in parents’ emotional world, often
highlighting emotional solidarity and identification with parents, while male development
often highlights differentiation from them (Lurie-Beck 2007).
burdened by the Holocaust legacy and obligated to stand up for Jews and to be successful, as well as to perceive family ties as both tight-knit and conflicted (Sagi-Schwartz 2008). HSG may internalize parents’ excessive guilt and anxiety when relationships between HSO and survivors are strained (Kellerman 2009 in Shmotkin et al. 2011). A recent qualitative study of 142 Israeli HSG and their families offers that HSG, like their HSO parents, are functional individuals with sub-clinical sensitivities. These sensitivities correspond to the experience of having parents who focused on survival issues, lacked emotional resources, coerced their children to satisfy the parents’ needs, and were overprotective or hyper-emotional without sufficient mediation. Post-traumatic parenting may violate children’s needs for autonomy, competence, and emotional relatedness to parents, producing feelings of helplessness, fear, loneliness or desertion, and anger. Parental manifestations of these trends, in both survivors and HSO, included overprotectiveness, mentalities of saving resources and abstaining from pleasure, obsessive preoccupations with eating, pushing high scholastic achievement, and mutual parent-child separation anxiety. Though less intense for HSG than HSO in this study, these trends were most psychologically disorganizing when they were chronic, related to potent issues in children’s development, characterized by pre- or non-verbal communication, and when children felt helpless to counter or contest them (Scharf and Mayseless 2011). Scharf and Mayseless pose the following table of child’s need violations and their consequences, suggesting its relevance to both HSO and HSG children.
**Table 1. Basic Needs: Their Violation and the Probable Consequences Thereof**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Need</th>
<th>Violations of Basic Needs</th>
<th>Probable Consequences of the Frustration of the Need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Survival issues—beware of strangers, save money</td>
<td>Helplessness and fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear of loss of child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear of loss of parent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear of separation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overprotectiveness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatedness</td>
<td>Extreme neglect</td>
<td>Loneliness and desertion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abuse as a reaction to the need for protection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Coercion to please</td>
<td>Helplessness and anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role reversal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Push to achieve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coercion of feeding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**My Research Sample**

I interviewed 24 self-identified grandsons of Holocaust survivors.* Interviewees were located via Internet message boards in “third generation” Facebook groups, the Bronfman Youth Fellowships listserv, and word of mouth. Interviews were IRB-approved and lasted for one to two hours each, loosely following the interview guide included in the appendix. I use pseudonyms for all subjects except those who requested that I use their real names.

Subject age ranged from 18 to 42, the majority of them (14) being in their 20s, 5 in their early 30s, Brian 18, Jonathan 19, Marshall 42, and Max 40. One interviewee, Max, was both an HSO and an HSG (both his father and grandfather survived the camps).

---

* Included in the category of “survivor” are those who experienced concentration or death camps or Siberian exile; those who hid; those who fought as partisans or as soldiers for the Russian army; and, in one instance (Tom’s grandmother), those who escaped Europe before WWII but lost most of their family in the Holocaust.
Most identified as reform, conservative, non-denominational, or secular Jews; 3 were modern orthodox (Isaac [21], Marshall [42], and Chaim [27]). Aside from Greg (34), who was raised by a single mother, all grew up with both parents in their lives. Kevin and Seth grew up in divorced families. Nine interviewees had only maternal-side survivor grandparents, 10 had only paternal-side survivor grandparents, and 4 had survivors on both sides (Marshall [42], Greg [34], Gabe [24], and David [26]).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Maternal Grandmother</th>
<th>Maternal Grandfather</th>
<th>Paternal Grandmother</th>
<th>Paternal Grandfather</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adir</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaim</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coby</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evan Kleinman</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (and father)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabe</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny Ghitis</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* X = survivor
Half of the interviewees (12) were born in the U.S. to American parents. Of the other half: 2 had a parent born in a DP camp; 4 had fathers from Israel (3 of whom were first born in Europe or Russia); Josh’s mother was born in Poland; Eli’s mother lived in Germany until age 5; Ian’s mother was a Cuban immigrant; Simon’s mother was born in Israel; Adir was born in Israel and raised to age 4 there by Israeli parents; Danny Ghitis was born and raised to age 4 in Colombia to South American parents; Max’s parents were both from Eastern Europe, his father having experienced the camps, as well.

Subjects’ employment varied, including 2 unemployed HSG living at home, 3 undergraduates, 2 doctoral students, 2 freelance artists or filmmakers, New York City corporate lawyers and legal assistants, clerical assistants, journalists, editors, a naturalist at a Jewish nature center, and a founder of a major HSG nonprofit organization. Three subjects identified as gay (Adir [34], Joseph [26], and Alan [20]). Three were married (Josh [30], Chaim [27], and Eli [32]), and 2 were engaged (Evan [29] and Gary [29]).

As far as gender identity, most interviewees felt comfortable as males and identified with masculinity but made a point of also sharing that they are sensitive, emotional, and progressive or “postmodern” when it comes to gender roles, not falling into macho stereotypes. Some who identified as masculine also stressed qualities they felt might contradict that masculinity: Ian’s emotionality and sensitivity, the self-taught nature of Coby’s masculinity (his Parisian father was not a typical man in the American context), Gary’s intensity and tendency to second-guess himself, Max’s self-consciousness and academic nature, and Greg’s sentimentality and sensitivity (which he attributed to growing up without a father and in a post-traumatic family). Evan, Alan, and David emphasized their dislike of gender categories and their desire to discard them.
in favor of a focus on being human beings. About a quarter of the interviewees (Ben [19], Seth [26], Gabe [24], Alex [31], and Marshall [42]) emphasized their masculinity (i.e. being a “man’s man,” wanting to protect women, hanging out with guys, liking sports, wanting to make a lot of money, being confident, and not whining or complaining) without also sharing vulnerable characteristics or potentially feminine qualities of emotional sensitivity or insecurity. Though a number of interviewees described developmental struggles related to masculine performance, “late bloomer” narratives, and anxiety around early maternal attachment and early sensitivity, only Alan and Simon expressed significant problems regarding limitations on their gender identities in the present. Alan (20), who identifies as feminine, gay, and submissive says, “I absolutely struggle with knowing that I’m not as privileged as those as identify with a normative gender and… sexuality.” Simon (27) describes growing up feeling sensitive, attracted to emotional openness and creativity, and inadequate in sports and other expected performances of masculinity.

“Third-Generation” Context

The channeling of personal testimonies into collective history changed the way that descendants view their heritage. Early twentieth-century psychoanalysis popularized the pursuit of deep personal truth separate from traditional definitions of family, gender, and nation. Later in the century, humanistic therapy and early radical feminism infused western politics with the influence of subjective testimonies. Emphasizing the individual’s capacity for self-awareness and personal potential, consciousness-raising groups encouraged the sharing of testimony as a political tool (Stein 2009). The 1960s
began to erode the value of WASP authority and to highlight ethnic uniqueness, victim identity, and the performance of self-narrated testimony, in which popular culture was propelled by talk shows, memoirs, and films celebrating individuality and personal transformation. Ruth Franklin sees this “psychotherapy craze of the 1970s” as so significant that it “convinced Americans that validation is more important than analysis, sympathy more constructive than critique” (Franklin 2011, 217). The 1980s and 1990s subsequently saw the energetic rise of trauma and Holocaust studies and the widely accepted idea of a second generation identity. The 1990s also brought multicultural and constructivist thinking that replaced roles with identities, ideologies with collective memories – agreed upon narratives of shared values and anxieties (Assmann 2008, 52-3).

It is also important to consider that much of what it means to be Jewish after the widespread dissemination of Holocaust testimonies and their cultural integration converges with what it means to have, as a people, endured the Holocaust. "I feel like my grandfather and the Holocaust are the only things keeping me… at all, tied with Judaism,” confesses HSG Alan, a non-religious art major whose ties to Judaism rest solely on what his grandfather’s survival meant to his mother and grandmother. Another HSG, Ian, an academic who takes interest in the longer span of Jewish history, complains that “the Holocaust and Israel have too much of a purchase on Jewish identity in America.” HSG are not the only contemporary Jews who may experience their Jewish identity primarily through the Holocaust and what it means to have survived as a persecuted ethnicity or people. Across the board, post-Holocaust Jewish identity often exalts the value of family and Jewish continuity, the ultimate achievements and rewards of surviving a regime that sought to fragment and destroy the Jewish people.
Today, most American HSG are increasingly like their American Jewish counterparts without Holocaust heritage. They benefit from the remove of a generation, often devotedly applying the ethics of a Holocaust legacy on the firmer ground of a coherently American context. The passing of time and the relational distance from traumatized relatives in post-Holocaust contexts appears to allow post-Holocaust Jews to increasingly integrate into what Kaja Silverman terms the “dominant fiction” of their cultural contexts. A number of HSG seem less personally defined by their heritage than their parents did, relating to the Holocaust more electively, dispassionately, intellectually, or as the wider Jewish community relates to it. Alex, who does not feel significantly affected by his Holocaust heritage on a personal level believes that “a lot of the guys […] may have more of an interest in the Holocaust thing than necessarily doing a Jewish thing […] Because Holocaust isn’t necessarily Jewish – it’s a history thing.” Max shares that “part of the reason [the Holocaust] isn’t associated with anxiety for me is that I never experienced any of the kind of anti-Semitism or persecution in the United States that my dad personally experienced in his family, who were victimized by Germany and Eastern Europe.”

Not all American HSG, however, enjoy sociocultural belonging or emotional security as American Jews. Evan Kleinman describes an anti-Semitic incident of being called a “dirty Jew” by a middle school bully: “I couldn’t believe that [anti-Semitic incidents] exist, because I feel like they told us that it was something of the past. Because I’m around, you know, like, all of these liberal Jews – American Jews all day, and you feel like that’s the norm.” Josh shares, “I have perceived people to have little bits of anti-Semitism. You know, the way they talked about Israel, the way that they question
me about things, and it was a hot topic for me.” Isaac, a modern Orthodox HSG, tells of his HSO father, who was born in Europe,

he’s the kind of guy that every single movie he goes out and sees is anti-Semitic. He’ll find a way to make it anti-Semitic. […] and it’s rubbed off on me, big-time. […] I can see most things as anti-Semitic. And then I—I, uh, I see anything that is anti-Semitic and I freak out. I—I mean, I’m ready to run away into a woods and hide, you know. Because that’s what I—I learned growing up.

Seth, who spent some of his childhood in Israel, contrasts American Jewish life with a kind of ultimate Jewish sociocultural belonging in Israel:

all the national holidays are your religion, it’s not something that you have to arrange for a special occasion or you’re the only one on the block sort of thing. But it’s like everyone does it. It’s really uplifting. […] it just really enforces your beliefs. […]

Jews in general or being a Jew in America it’s like, you have to be a little stubborn […] you can’t bind to all the media, the different religions, because it’s so open. You have to be stubborn and really stick to you know, your belief system. It’s important to you. But in Israel, you can let your guard down, so to speak, because everyone does it […] at the end of the day there’s always a very nice, a very warm feeling in the social atmosphere. Everyone really cares for one another.

In the U.S., Seth describes experiencing “a lot of anti-Semitism later on, in college and even in middle school.” He struggled with the transition from Israel to the U.S. at age thirteen:

[In] Israel everyone was mostly Jewish and Israeli and as far as that, there’s like, there was no clash between religions and all of a sudden you come to the states and, you know, you’re the only Jew in your class people know and they try to pick fights with you and they do fight with you. You know, I don’t know […] were they all hate crimes or racial crimes […] But it […] singles you out in the U.S. […] I’m not the person to be afraid of where I come from so I would, you know, display with pride which probably caused more trouble

Without the security of sociocultural belonging in the American context, which is notably enjoyed by many Jewish Americans, one is perhaps less buffered from alienation and feelings of threat, as well as from connecting those feelings with an established heritage
of persecution and trauma. In other words, it may be easier to relate to the Holocaust and its legacy on an embodied level as a threatened minority than as a white American.

We cannot credit HSG’s greater security and lower traumatic indications solely to Americanization and generational distance. The ways in which the Holocaust was communicated to the third generation, as a result of these other factors, diverged from how it was communicated to the second generation. While the second generation often experienced their parents’ traumas from birth and developed defense mechanisms to cope with them, often struggling to separate their own subjectivities from those of their insecure caretakers, the third generation is consciously shielded from the horrors and resulting behaviors that so compromised their second-generation parents. Moreover, education systems and cultural representations supplement children’s learning of the Holocaust, often taking great pains not to retraumatize or overexpose young spectators. Many HSO have worked through their own second-hand traumas or have consciously worked around them when parenting their HSG children. HSG Joseph believes that he is empowered rather than overwhelmed by his Holocaust heritage because of the way it was communicated to him by his mother, who

never cried, or anything like this as she told these stories. And never was upset. She just told them as facts, and this is what happened. And I think that because of that, I was able to not - I see it as factual, as something that really happened. And I think a lot of people bring it to a fantasy world…

Yet even among those who did identify comfortably as American male subjects, a considerable number insisted that the Holocaust makes them different from other American Jews. Gary admits having a more “cynical” and ambitious outlook than most of his friends, which “has to do with my parents telling me stories, you know, my grandparents telling me stories, of how they lost everything.” He also relays that his non-
HSG fiancé’s ideas about their future children’s discipline and education are too lax for his taste – “the way I talk about things is much more serious than she talks about things.” Similarly, Evan Kleinman tells me,

even my fiancée, who’s […] Jewish, but not of Holocaust survivors… I – I notice a difference in her family and I notice a difference, culturally, in manner. Like it’s a different mentality […] I’ve observed this in my father, my uncle, my aunt. […] You’re careful […] you don’t ever want to complain about something, because what right do you have to complain […] to not be wasteful […] and you have to watch your back.

Masculinity and Family Trauma

As part of developing sociocultural belonging, gender assumptions and decisions made about shaping sons and daughters affect the ways in which traumatic legacies are conveyed to offspring. And offspring, in turn, may filter what they take away from their heritage in ways that allow them to identify with it in “gender-appropriate” ways. Self-narration, introspection, and articulating emotional wellbeing are socially discouraged in masculine performance. Males learn early on that they must avoid their emotional or personal interiors in order to develop and perform socially successful masculine identities. Studies indicate that in western cultures, mothers and fathers are more elaborative and emotion-focused when reminiscing with daughters than they are with sons (Reese et al. 1996 in Fivush 2008; Fivush et al. 2003 in Fivush 2008) and that, consequentially, girls tell longer, more detailed, and more emotionally-focused stories of preschool experience than do boys (Buckner and Fivush 1998 in Fivush 2008). Isaac, an HSG who interviewed with me, shared that his HSO father would occasionally entrust him with the “more frightening” stories not shared with Isaac’s sisters, under the assumption that these stories would change the way his sisters saw their grandparents.
One female HSO articulates feeling that in order to honor her parents’ losses she had to be good and pretty, to marry and have kids and a house, to listen instead of to speak, and to create a life that accommodated her parents’ memories of an old world she had never seen or understood (Steinitz 1975, 10). Deborah Schwartz, the HSO beauty queen in Epstein’s study, gave up personal dreams of law school and becoming a public figure in order to have children immediately, as this was “paying my parents back in a way for all they’ve given me” (Epstein 1979, 316).

Alan Berger writes in his study of literary fiction that ritual and religious formalities serve another kind of substitute for inexpressible emotions in father-son relationships strained by Holocaust trauma; a shared relationship to the Jewish past may work to fill an emotional gap between the generations (Berger 1997, 41; 116). Janet Jacobs writes that “amongst the most important strategies for establishing a separate sense of self has been the reinvention of ritual among the second generation” (Jacobs 2011, 354). If postmemory is, for its dependent, disorienting, irrational, and emotional aspects, a “feminine” positioning, then religious observance and public commemoration, along with serving in the IDF, may offer alternative, “masculine” outlets for connecting with removed or threatening survivor parents.

Sociologist R.W. Connell states that the contemporary western world conceives of gender in terms that reflect individualism and personal agency; that we view people as “masculine” or “feminine” to varying degrees as reflections of their individual personalities and characters (Connell 2005, 68). Hegemonic masculinities hold the individual male-bodied person responsible for successful subscription to normative masculinity and for rejecting the "feminine" qualities of vulnerability, emotional pain,
and intimate interpersonal skills. Stephen Ducat’s model of “anxious masculinity” suggests that, for most men, the culturally-enforced male repudiation of the feminine requires a drastic separation of boy’s emotional identification away from mother; this sanctions the boy’s entrance into masculinity with anxiety about losing connection to the warmth, sensitivity, and support with which all human infants initially identify and depend through their mothers.

That children more often receive empathic responsiveness from mothers as early physical and psychological nurturers than from fathers leads both boys and girls to incorporate their mothers (or their figure of initial nurture) into their initial sense of self (Ducat 2004, 30). Before age four, children understand gender as mutable, not fixed, and boys more often report wanting to grow up to be like their nurturing parent (usually mothers) than like their breadwinning parent. There is a fluidity of imagination and human identification before the imposition of social roles, schemas, laws, and ideologies. This fluidity, when unbridled, fosters the boy’s connection to the maternal into his conscious sense of self. Julia Kristeva’s theory of reaching an ability to live with threatening “others” through consciousness of the unconscious, the repressed “other” within one’s psyche (Kristeva 1989, 266), directly relates to the need for masculinities in a masculinist culture to access repressed and repudiated identifications with basic nurture and vulnerability (the feminine maternal), as experienced through boys’ identification with mothers. Hegemonic masculinity upholds strength, control, independence, and emotional repression, and it equates compassion, emotional sensitivity, interpersonal need, and vulnerability with a man’s failure. While the majority of men do not meet the ideals posed by such a model, Connell argues, the majority avoid the threat of
subordination via complicity with the social benefits that hegemonic masculinity provides for the male.

It is important to note that Jewish American maleness has its own genealogy separate from the ideals of disembodied, Protestant, western masculinity. In *Unheroic Conduct* (1997), Daniel Boyarin assembles a history of embodied Jewish masculinity rooted in ideals of intellect, spirituality, expressive ability, and gentle patience. Lawrence Fuchs credits this Jewish male difference to Torah study, the involvement and pressure of rabbis, and internalized religious responsibility. Fuchs writes a history of Jewish American fatherhood, stressing the significance of Jewish social tradition in eroding aspects of traditional American patriarchy as a whole (Fuchs 2000). To varying degrees, Jewish men have successfully assimilated into white male status, adjusting to the dominant fiction of a disembodied, rational, and emotionally restricted subject positioning, even if working to stretch the limits of that positioning. Holocaust heritage, however, directly recalls dehumanizing anti-Semitism and colors the Jewish male as a descendent of victims and fragile family narratives. For a contemporary third-generation Jewish man to actively identify with his grandparent’s Holocaust history, especially on an emotional level, and especially as conveyed by mother or grandmother is, perhaps, for him to negotiate a conflict between intimate bonds in fragile circumstances and self-sufficient, invulnerable traits expected under the influence of hegemonic masculinities. As Connell articulates, gender interacts with “position in the world order,” leading individuals to base conceptions of “masculine,” in part, on their own position in history and larger society (Connell 2005, 75). Positioning oneself in direct relation to genocidal victimization, especially through maternal identification, may inspire identification with
vulnerability and a sense of unrest within masculine complicity. Within contemporary
hegemonies that work to enforce a disembodied male subject ideal, Jewish male
identifications with personal or embodied Holocaust heritage, cause individual
negotiations between identifying with vulnerable roots and orienting as complicit men
benefiting in social systems that oppress and exploit the vulnerable.

What is important to note about U.S. masculinity norms in this study of traumatic
family legacy is that they require men to build themselves in contrast, rather than in
relation to caregivers and females. Intense identification with family history might thus
be more socially accepted when that history highlights strength or heroism, rather than
vulnerability, or when the subsequent identification fuels a toughened or aggressive
disposition. HSG Gary shares with me:

My grandfather fought with the partisans. And my grandmother, even though she
was a woman back in those days she still played a part in fighting the Nazis. Just
hearing stories about how she would create train bombs to blow up the tracks so
the Nazis couldn’t transport Jews, you know my grandfather had white dots on his
body from where he was shot, running away, […] sounds kind of like heroes to
me. So when all these stories were handed down to me as a young boy I
immediately grabbed interest, because I was like ‘oh my God, this is like a
superhero story’ […] That’s how I looked at my grandparents. And today it’s a
lot more realistic than something like superheroes. […] As I got older I
appreciated more exactly more what was involved with being a Holocaust
survivor and what my grandparents had to endure. This is going to sound crazy,
but sometimes when I’m having really trying times in my life, or when I’m really
stressed out, I always think back like ‘this is nothing; this is nothing compared to
what my grandparents went through,’ and that just calms me down. It gives me
strength.

When HSG Jonathan (19) talked about his desire to serve in the IDF, he expressed that it
would be especially meaningful to him in light of his grandparents’ history. His
identification with his grandfather’s experience over that of his grandmother, to whose
stories he had closer access, perhaps reflects the kind of masculinity with which Jonathan
approaches his family history. With aspirations to become an Israeli soldier, he seeks to embody a manhood like that of his father, a man Jonathan describes as both a gruff car mechanic and a family man willing to lay down his life to protect his children. Jonathan wants to enact the protector role, and he is most able to do so not by getting into the intimate psychology of his grandparents’ traumas but by enacting defense, the IDF being the most tangible manifestation of such defense. His drive for the power to protect a Jewish nation seems directly related to what he imagines as his grandfather’s oppressed masculinity as an eighteen-year-old man losing seven younger siblings and both parents to the Nazis:

The problem was that there was no state of Israel, no country with a strong Jewish identity…with an army…If you could have told him at that time that ‘in sixty, seventy years from now, your grandson is going to be on the front lines as an infantryman in the modern Jewish army,’ you know, I think that’s an unbelievable thing. And I definitely want to take a part in it. I want to be a part of it.

Like Jonathan, Greg (34), who founded a large metropolitan HSG organization, also finds a potential for strength in his difference as an HSG. Greg’s desire to claim a position of authority comes through in his ideas about Israel’s significance: “as a grandchild of…I feel I have a unique place in Jewish history/future. I have a good image of the Jewish timeline…and Israel is a big part of that.” Greg describes himself as an independent activist, opposing anti-Israel protestors and thinking about Israel daily. Though Greg claimed that he never felt insecure about how others might perceive his masculinity as a grandson invested in his grandparents’ traumatic past, he did seem pressed to rationalize or justify his Holocaust investment. He admitted, “at times I’ve wondered if I dwell too much on the fact that my family were victims…and that Jews were/are victims, and I’ve
concluded that I don't... it's a high bar to ‘obsess’ about something like family getting massacred, and I haven't obsessed.”

HSG Kevin does a good job articulating something important about masculine performance:

my mom always told us to be really nice and, like, overly apologetic at times. And I think, like, over time, I learned that I have to toughen up a little bit and just make a decision. [...] she always wanted me to please her, and I think more recently, I’ve been like, ‘I’ve just got to do what’s best, you know, in my own life. I’ve got to do what’s best for me’. Sometimes I’ve got to make my mom unhappy, but you know. That’s what being a man is.

If successful masculine performance involves emotional differentiation from caregivers and suppression of the vulnerable traits that elicit or require such care, an emotional investment in the Holocaust legacy or in the unfinished processing of family trauma may, like any family burden, pose a frustrating obstacle for the stark emotional separation demanded in masculine development. When imparting a traumatic heritage has the effect of threatening the masculine claim to emotional preservation, autonomy, and power (which becomes especially salient in early adolescence), reactions of frustration, anger, and even violence may ensue. Many HSG learn most extensively about the horrors of the Holocaust around ages eleven to thirteen, an age accompanied by boys’ initiation into early manhood. The juxtaposition of learning both family or collective trauma and learning the assertive, non-emotional, and strong expectations of male adolescence may induce a kind of identity crisis. Or, for those HSG that learn their family traumas earlier on, the arrival of puberty may present new outlets for or obstacles to dealing with difficult, long-held emotions related to Holocaust heritage and family losses. HSG Isaac, who learned his grandfather’s traumas as frightening bedtime stories, recounts his own
process of violent deflection beginning at age eleven:

When I started physically growing, that’s when I started getting angry…originally it was anger at the Holocaust…probably a six- or eight-month period I remember I was just angry that the Holocaust happened, and I would lash out at most people about it…but I would disguise it in ‘No, I don’t like this food, Mom! I hate you!’ and all this stuff…it was always in the back of my mind – how could they let them do this? How could they let the Nazis come in and kill their wives and children? How could this happen?

To elaborate on his sensitivity to how others treated or referred to the Holocaust, Isaac recounts that when he was fourteen, "one person made a Holocaust joke once, and I—I very severely damaged him. " Isaac remembers that his male cousin who did not have Holocaust ties “never really understood my violence…I would snap, and I would start beating a kid up, and he wouldn’t get it. He would not understand. Not many kids did, looking back on it…none of my friends really understood what that was.”

Fitting their legacies into a framework of masculinity norms and ideals may help ground HSG in feelings of pride and empowerment, but it also may generate defensiveness or aggression and may obscure or limit those narratives that do not contribute to those ideals of empowerment. A great nephew of the famed Bielski partisan brothers shares with me that he distances himself from his family’s heroic narrative specifically because of the macho revenge fantasies it invites and because of the way it shadows the experience of his grandmother, the Bielski partisans’ sister, who spent the war hiding in various locations. He explains that, while the Bielski partisans’ story is “a beautiful, powerful, and incredibly inspiring story,” it isn’t actually my grandma’s story, and I’ve always had a little bit of a grudge that my grandma’s story was obscured (by no one’s fault…by no means the fault of the brothers), but, you know, even my father…that was the story: how these Bielskis killed Nazis and all that stuff, and my grandma…it was downplayed. It wasn’t like it was ignored, but everyone wanted to talk about the heroism […] the day the bombs started falling, [my grandmother] went off on her own. She was
16 years old and found a way, hiding in various places…it’s a little bit unclear whether she was at France any given point, in parts of Russia…but she lived out the war essentially on her own, not with the partisans. That said, so she doesn’t have the partisan story; she only found out about it right after the war…she came to America, and she met up with her brothers, and they told her what happened - the story, […] and it grew into this great narrative that only in the past two decades historians started to look at. […] As I was maturing and becoming more self-aware, young adult, I became much closer with [my grandmother]. […] We would do Sunday brunches, and she would do borscht and cook all these Eastern European foods, and she lived very close to us, so I saw [her] all the time, and became very close to her. She died my senior year of high school.

He explains that his relatives repeatedly tell the stories of his great uncle Zus Bielski’s violence against Nazis, and “it gets more elaborate at each retelling.” For this great-nephew, “the heroism becomes too much of a lurid fascination, that people want to know Jews killing Nazis, you know, *Inglorious Basterds*,* that type of mentality. But I don’t think that’s the proper reaction to the Bielski story.” Rather, what he values is the moral strength modeled by Tuvia Bielski, whose character, played by Daniel Craig in the feature film *Defiance* (2008), says “I’d rather save one old Jewish woman than kill ten German soldiers.” Moreover, his personal inclinations as an “emotional guy” who tends to bond more with women than with men lead him to take greater immediate interest in his mother’s family story of Cuban immigration, on which he wrote his thesis, than in the Bielski Holocaust story.

For a number of my interviewees, a family legacy of Holocaust survival is something that increases or adds to the already present social expectations that exist for them as males. Unlike Isaac, whose initial feeling of powerlessness led him to aggress, Simon, a gentle HSG who grew up averse to sports and normative masculinity for its

---
*A 2009 feature film by Quentin Tarantino in which a group of Jewish American soldiers, under the command of a lieutenant played by Brad Pitt, commit brutality against Nazis during WWII in occupied France in order spread fear among the Third Reich.*
policing of emotional openness, felt that his grandparents’ survival was an added pressure on him to embody those unwanted parts of his male identity. He states that although the legacy sometimes “helps me to feel proud of my identity and to see that I have – or that I should have – the capacity to be resilient,” it is sometimes “a burdensome weight that goes against my inner voice, so that can make it difficult to live as my individual self and identify as myself.” Simon, reflects on the inherently masculine behavior required to survive, even after the war. His maternal grandparents “had more of a need to be masculine… to hunt out [a] living.” He shares that “there’s a lot of emotion-hiding in my family… openness is something I’ve seen my grandparents hide, and my mother also.

There may have been a lot of times where there could have been tears, but instead there was a stiff mouth, and I guess in seeing and experiencing that, I kind of learned that that’s a value… to even tame the emotion using the strength.” He describes the dissonance of being a gentle, creative person under a tough survivor grandfather and father:

he had to fight. And he had to fight his way over to America. And he had to fight his way when living in Israel, because he was in the army. And he had to struggle for making a living for his family in America when they came here. And my – my father did not grow up with a – such a privileged life either […] So, for me to grow up with this kind of stability and, like… the kind of love that I was given – at least the amount of love… It gives me… Like, I don’t have that sense of need to be that classic male, I guess…There’s – there’s the pressure for it, but, like, it’s almost more like in theory. Like in theory, you’re a young man […] These are the examples in your family that you have to go from, but they are coming from a very different place. […] I have, sort of ongoing resentment […] having to do with what my grandfather and father did. Which is to […] work hard and build a family… Yeah, I’m trying to figure that out… I think it’s because… like, despite the pride that they… seem… to… carry around… their – their masculinity… that there is – that they’re, like, missing something. That they’re, like, missing the sensitivity and […] have blinders on to, like, a way of living and thinking that I see as, like, inherent to myself.
The model Simon feels pressured to inherit is a hypothetical one – a masculine resolution that does not suit his own values but that remains complicatedly essential to his contested identity.

To express emotions that conflict with a successful performance of masculinity, most men come to rely on culturally orchestrated moments of exception, such as the arts, commemoration ceremonies, or trips to the death camps (i.e. March of the Living). HSG Chaim (27) and Jonathan (19) both cite the Holocaust commemoration context as one of the only times they witnessed their fathers cry. Chaim also remembers feeling ashamed when he cried at a second-grade Holocaust memorial ceremony at school: “I knew that it was this terrible thing […], and my grandmother and all of this these things… And – and I remember that being a source of shame…you know, for my, you know, surrounding classmates, because it obviously wasn’t, you know, a boy thing to, you know…to cry or whatever.” David (24), who is expressive and resists gender stereotypes, tells me that his dad and him both cry on Yom Hashoah. Isaac, a masculine, 21-year-old undergraduate who aspires to become a firefighter, shares from his participation in March of the Living:

I did not cry at any of the camps except for Treblinka. And, you know, everyone around me was weeping […] And then we get to Treblinka, and I was like, okay. Wow. And now, I started crying. And that was one of those times where I was like, ‘male role, male role, male role,’ and then what I’m supposed to feel. At Treblinka. That’s okay. […] this is fine, you know. And, um, it was a very emotional experience. But it was one of those times that I said to myself, you know, screw the—the—the gender norms and whatnot, this is one of those times that the eight-year-old in me gets to cry again.

While Isaac’s experience illustrates how the orchestrated Holocaust ritual may become a point of cultural exception, in which the usual rules of masculinity policing may not always apply, it also emphasizes the strictness by which that policing usually operates. Isaac’s language suggests that, whatever emotional outpouring he allowed himself at
Treblinka, he was not able to cry as himself, the grown man that he was, but only as the “eight-year-old” contained within himself. Thus, an emotional investment in the Holocaust becomes, on a certain level, potentially entwined with feelings or behaviors repressed by the laws of masculinity. When discussing his masculinity more generally with me, Isaac relays a common trajectory of transitioning out of a sensitive, emotional position into a guarded one.

I’ve become sort of commercialized in masculinity, where it’s become now, you know, I mean, growing up fighting, and growing up not crying and all of that stuff has become a major aspect of my masculinity as a thing. Like, I—I oftentimes say, like, there’s a line from a TV show called American Dad where, uh, where he goes to his son, ‘You don’t have feelings, do you? Women have those, they come from their ovaries.’ And, uh, and, I—I would say that, you know, in general, I don’t let my feelings be shown. With my girlfriend or with my mom or with my sisters, I can let down my guard. But in general, I do not let down my guard for anyone […] since I was about, uh, seventeen. […]

[Before that] I was a much more emotional kind of guy. […] [Other guys] didn’t know they were being emotional, I would say. They were just being—feeling like they felt. But I lived with three sisters and dealt a lot with—girls. Because I was a very, uh, mature-looking kid. So, I, um, so because of that, I recognized, uh, how open I was being. […] now I do not play vulnerable. I play, uh, don’t come near me. No, not actually. But I play, you know, just, I’m a completely normal guy who loves to laugh and have fun, but if you want to talk about my issues, good luck. Because I’m not going to talk to you about my issues. Back in the day I would talk about my issues […] now it’s, I’m your friend, we’re friends, let’s just keep it at friends and you don’t need to know every aspect of my life.

Isaac believes that while most boys learn a transition into emotional guardedness, he experienced it as especially blatant or jarring, as his unusually mature build and closeness with his sisters made him self-conscious about a contradictory experience of being emotionally expressive and becoming a young man at the same time. He interestingly refers to his masculinity as “commercialized,” showing awareness of the constructed, popularized, and marketed aspects of what it means to be a man in contemporary America. He draws from a popular cartoon, American Dad, a kind of epitome of
culturally sanctioned American masculinity. These terms draw to mind how Art Spiegelman paints his strained relationship with his Polish survivor father Vladek, describing a forced game of catch with him as “his attempt to be American” and “some kind of manufactured occasion for us to try to bond as father and son.”

One might go as far as to put the concept of a “commercialized” society, which popularizes the idea that emotional investment is female and shameful, in conversation with what HSG David refers to as “the enormity of social movement,” which he connects to the threat of collectively sanctioned atrocities. Specifically, a central lesson David takes from his paternal-side Holocaust heritage is:

public opinion can be very strong and dangerous, and I am not someone who can control it. I can do small things to try and make my community better, but I cannot stave off the enormity of....social movement

He extends his critical perspective on public ideals when he responds to my question about how he feels about his gender identity:

I've always tried to make sure I can define that as much as possible. I'm not an athlete, I am not a womanizer, I don't drink, and I'm not here to make tons of [money]. I try and define my own sense of what it means to be a man/human [, and] it's very much blended with being a human/adult. To be a caretaker of my family and others, to work hard to take care of myself (earn [money], exercise, eat well), to be a public sharing honest person, and to be a lifelong all-the-time learner. […] I can control what I can, and can't control what I can't (which is most things). The Holocaust, like everything in life, reminds us of that basic rule, and perhaps compels us to control whatever we can in the 'right' direction. You know, the 'repairing the world' stuff. […] I am leading a group of teenagers at my synagogue about what it means to be a Jewish man. I've learned my bit about gender and Judaism […] I happen to be an ardent believer in all things egalitarian. We should be growing into better people, not focusing on men or women. […] I think that the myth of 'athletics, alcohol, and money' is stupid, and I'm not for it. Individuals are welcome to seek out what they'd like, but not because it's fulfilling a male role/norm. […] My grandfather carried tons of pain with him! As does my father. The negative effects are tremendous on their personal lives, which, I'd rather them have never had. [My father is] someone I care about. If he cries, I cry.
The social force of Nazism and of hegemonic American masculinity systems are far from comparable. Yet it stands that the ideals of American manhood, which David describes as womanizing, drinking, making money, and athleticism, do not make sufficient space for those who internalize or invest emotionally in traumatic family heritage. Or, rather, these ideals and their social power favor non-emotional solutions to emotional predicaments. They favor sublimating vulnerability and empathetic identification into the fashioning of oneself as a strong provider, protector, and creator, as one who controls emotional threat and ensures against future pain. Though inspiring and desirable for some, this masculine ideal does not suit every man’s self-image, and, as I further explore below, it may inflict considerable psychic tension for those HSG who privilege their emotions or who feel at odds with masculinity standards. For these latter HSG, the task of self-situating within family and dominant cultural narratives is a conflicted one.

**Reported Effects of Holocaust Heritage**

Interviewees varied in articulated effects of their Holocaust heritage. Responses ranged from feeling that the Holocaust had no effect on identity to experiencing it as the central most important identity factor. The majority considered it a significant part of who they feel themselves to be. Most interviewees related to the Holocaust on an embodied, emotional level, while 5 (Ian, Max, Gabe, Tom, and Eli) described a disembodied intellectual relationship with their heritage. Often the former correlated with lifelong conscious identification, the latter with developing interest in adulthood, coinciding with mature values and interests, and searches for personal adult meaning in the world. Regardless of these differences, most grandsons were firm about the pride,
strength, and benefits derived from their Holocaust heritage. Several attributed feelings of personal gratitude and values of persistence, ambition, family bonds, Jewish communal responsibility, and cautiousness to their heritage. A number of them, however, articulated ambivalence or mixed feelings about their heritage as both important and distressing. And a minority, from within the group of grandsons who internalized with emotional vulnerability, experienced their Holocaust heritage as primarily an obstacle or a debilitating force in their lives.

Many interviewees perceived their third-generation position as a kind of rank or marking, and they responded to that marking with mixed reactions. Some clung to the privilege, difference, or exceptional quality of this identity. Jonathan (19) admits the he "felt that I was in an elite group, a special group, as opposed to the other kids who didn’t have grandparents who were survivors." He calls his Holocaust heritage "probably the most important part of my life” and insists that "it wasn’t something engrained in me; it’s something that I wanted, that I brought out of myself, and that I sought after." Simon (27) describes feeling proud of his grandparents’ pins and other tokens of recognition for their survival and his grandfather’s service in the war. Josh (30) shares, “I liked that [my mom] would come in [to speak to the class]. I felt – you know, maybe special that, you know, we have this story to share.” Joseph uses the terms of badge markings to express how he feels especially unique as a gay HSG:

I think if you asked my brothers […] they would definitely still say that whole part about being special and, like, being ‘one in a million’... But I definitely think being gay and, like - it’s just, like... It’s making who I am... […] When I’m at, like - at a Holocaust museum, and you see the different stars and different colors of stars... and there’s the - the two yellow triangles to make the star of David for the Jews, and then there’s a color for, like... for... for, like, mentally handicapped […] I remember seeing […] if you’re gay, you had a pink triangle. And if you were a - a gay Jew, you had a pink triangle - two pink triangles making a star of David.
And I remember that - seeing that as the ultimate, like [...] for a Nazi, I feel like they got points, in regards to killing Jews and things like this. And, like, giving - getting a gay Jew was, like, a high point. [...] So I feel like I’m a - sort of like a rare breed, or something like that... And so I think that adds to the ‘one in a million’ - the special feeling that I feel.

Some HSG feel self-conscious or anxious about what the marking of HSG implies. Max (40) feels uncomfortable pulling out what he referred to as the “Holocaust card,” since it “would somehow suggest that my opinions would be more valid than other people.” Coby (26) also understood that a post-Holocaust identity is “a big bomb to drop on somebody,” and thus not something to share with everyone. There is also discomfort associated with outing oneself as an HSG, as it brings with it a certain level of expectation or responsibility. Coby shares, “if I were to go around just talking all the
time, it would force me to… be a steward of my legacy, and then I would have to act in a way that would reflect how I’m being perceived […] where I stand in Judaism and my heritage has been a lot about not wanting to draw attention to myself for being different.”

Most subjects reported generally secure, happy, and healthy positioning. Those who did exhibit or report psychological distress usually indicated experiences of anxiety, nervousness, aggressive impulses, frustration, grief, or early developmental struggles. These reports cannot be generalized or necessarily attributed to post-Holocaust experience, but it may be useful to make note of them. Brian (18) volunteered that he was diagnosed in elementary school with generalized anxiety disorder and Tourette’s after suffering from enduring fears about robbers and outside danger. Josh (30) described his battle with anxiety and the years of therapy that were needed to help him through a damaging relationship with an abusive HSO mother. Greg (34), who grew up with a single HSO mother, told me a bit about his developmental struggles, which included an inability to speak until he reached the age of five, with the help of therapy. Danny Ghitis (29) cites that he grew up feeling almost like a survivor himself, suffering nightmares and anxiety. Evan Kleinman (29) tells me that he felt like he was under an enduring “black cloud” of grief and feelings of powerlessness after what he describes as a traumatizing exposure to graphic Holocaust history. Simon (27) lists anxiety and difficulty with his family’s emotional repression. Seth (26) and Isaac (21) describe defensive tendencies and violent episodes in relation to their Jewish identities in the face of perceived anti-Semitism.

Important factors related to differences across HSG experience were: the manner in which the Holocaust was conveyed to the grandson, the psychological security and
emotional sensitivity of the grandson, the grandson’s sense of sociocultural belonging, and the grandson’s conception of what it means to be male. Those who related to their heritage more philosophically or intellectually often recall a calmly articulated Holocaust education with less emotional salience or sensitivity. Conversely, most of those grandsons who related to the Holocaust more emotionally than intellectually remembered feeling sensitive to childhood internalization of the Holocaust and articulated a relationship to their heritage that spotlighted anxiety, defensive aggression, or sometimes a sustained sensitivity, creativity, or expressiveness; often the differences in emotional response to a sensitive or troubled internalization of the Holocaust corresponded to how the grandson viewed and positioned himself in relation to masculinity and sociocultural belonging. Those who confidently embraced masculine identity and the protective roles that it entails were more likely to exhibit anger and aggression, but also unwavering pride and a sense of being strongly rooted in their identities. A minority who struggled with masculinity and felt rootless or marginal in their sociocultural context identified with the uprootedness, alienation, and psychological crisis of their grandparents’ traumas. Necessitating a process of working through, these feelings ranged from those of unsettling grief and overwhelm to feelings of personal endangerment.

A common theme across most interviews was the central importance of the nuclear family, even at the expense of other relationships. Family continuity and closeness are experienced largely as safeguarding what grandparents survived to preserve. Simon describes the pressure to live out his grandparents’ value of family closeness, which sometimes gets in the way of his own desires:

I’ve also wanted at various times… and often, […] to move away from my family. You know, partially, just because I’m drawn to California… for example.
But there’s a sense of, like, family closeness that they valued so much… and they had such a small family in the States that of course, you know, their two daughters living in New Jersey with them, or near them, is, like, a way to keep this small family community together.

Isaac tells me, “I could never, ever date a non-Jewish girl. Ever. Because Hitler wins, is the way I see it. Is the way that I was raised to see it. If I don’t have a Jewish kid, Hitler wins.” Kevin’s grandmother, whose surviving brothers are her only remnant of her pre-war life, emphasized the preciousness of sibling relations:

Her two brothers survived. They were in the camps together and they always helped each other, and watched out for one another, and snuck food for one another. So, I remember my grandma telling me that, you know. Always telling us, ‘Your brother’s your best friend and he’s everything to you, and you have to take care – you guys always have to be good to each other.’ It was almost like – because I think she loved her brothers probably more than her husband in some ways. Like, there’s such a bond with her two brothers who survived. And she always got really upset if my brother and I fought, because I think she placed a lot on her sibling relationships.

Most of my interviewees were also passionate about current events or Jewish history, especially regarding Israel, and were invested in keeping informed from all sides of these issues. Alan, a 20-year-old liberal arts student and HSG, offers:

I am sensitive to the specific social inequalities. But social inequalities that was – that I learned about when I was growing up, like… the Civil Rights Movement in the 60’s. […] I’ve been taught in Hebrew school and over time that we’re – as Jews, we should be sensitive to all… struggles – social inequality – struggles, because we are not privileged people, as Jews.

Greg, a 34-year-old human resources employee at a law firm, states:

knowing that history motivated me to learn more about geo-politics especially about Israel…which took time...maybe the last 10 years, I've become a self-styled expert. […] I have a unique place in Jewish history [and] future; I have a good image of the Jewish timeline…and Israel is a big part of that.

Most interviewees were also committed to working hard, saving, and reaching high achievements, crediting their heritage as motivating or sustaining their endurance.
Gabe, a 24-year-old working for a defense contractor, states that what he most values from his HSO father’s example is “hard work and treating others with respect.” Joseph (26) shares, “the big thing that we always talked about was saving money. ‘Always have money in the your pocket,’ my grandma always says.” When asked about influences of the Holocaust on his lifestyle, Gary, a 29-year-old corporate lawyer in Manhattan, responded:

I worked since I was sixteen, and I’ve always saved my money, because I have no idea what’s going to happen, just in case Doomsday comes and I need cash to take care of things, family members, whatever…I’ve always worked and tried to save and build. I never really got a nice car; I’ve kind of always just been low-key with some stuff, and I think maybe that has to do with my parents telling me stories, you know, my grandparents telling me stories, of how they lost everything, and you try to invest for the future […] That’s how I look at life. “I don’t want to go out tonight,” or “I don’t want to go on vacation,” because I want to work and I want to make money, because I want to build something for the future.

**Embodied Effects**

Herbert Gans argues that the Holocaust has become more of an anachronistic symbol for Jews to use for Jewish interests than an embodied, lived heritage. He notes that the Holocaust was first largely repressed in suburban American Jewish communities until it became “more historical and therefore a less immediately traumatic event” and that it is now a symbol of group destruction activated against rising intermarriage rates, declining religious participation, and a privileged complacency removed from anti-Semitism (Gans 2010, 11). My interviews do offer evidence that, while the Holocaust does often reach privileged, Americanized, and secular HSG anachronistically as something of a symbol, Holocaust heritage remains deeply embodied and internalized for many grandchildren. Usually this internalization extends bodily relation to the survivor
grandparents into physical inheritance in the present. Max, both whose father and
grandfather survived the Holocaust, considers that “it may be easier for me to think of
myself as inherited a certain kind of physical resilience from my dad having a similar
body to my dad and being similar in some other ways.” Corporate lawyer and HSG Gary
relates his physical drive and endurance in sports and fitness to his grandfather’s survival:

if my bloodline was able to survive that, then I don’t see why I can’t accomplish
anything I set my mind on. […] if you really want to go deep into the psychology
of third-generation Holocaust, whatever, growing up it was always kind of like do
whatever you want to do. My grandfather was able to cross like a huge river on
horseback, getting shot at, not knowing how to swim, so he actually had to tie
himself to a horse, you know, so I’m not going to be scared of anything. […] So,
yea that’s kind of been my mindset with everything, and, silly as it is, that’s
always been my mindset with sports […] if there was a bigger guy, I wouldn’t
really be scared. […] I always played with reckless abandon, because I was never
scared. […] I always have like an engine on me. Like the coaches would say, you
just have unlimited energy.

Isaac, whose most salient memory from stories about his grandfather’s survival is when
his grandfather smacked a Nazi in the face on a bus after the war’s end, tells me that
being a large kid allowed him to defend his family, sisters, and Jewishness when
necessary:

I was about 5’8” when I was twelve. And so I was a big kid. No one else had hit
puberty yet; I was the tallest kid in my class for a good number of years […] I
always won in fights […] people would say something about my family, people
would say something about my sisters, or people would say something about my
girlfriend, and I would—I was known to just lose it […] And it kind of just
became this thing where it was, you know, kind of like, this is what I do. This is
what I’m supposed to do. […] When I was thirteen, a kid flipped me off, because
I was Jewish. I was wearing a kipa. He flipped me off, I asked him, ‘why’d you
do that?’ He says, ‘cuz you’re Jewish.’ And without thinking, I nailed him across
the face. And then I stepped over his body and went to my tutor.
Growing up overfed and overweight led Gary to devote himself to fitness and athletic ambition. He describes his transformation in terms fitting his assessment of his own post-Holocaust characteristics of endurance, perseverance, and intensity:

when I was ten years old or eleven, I was kind of like, ‘ugh, I want to play soccer. I want to play lacrosse. I want to play basketball. And all the guys, all my friends that play have a great time. They’re skinny; they’re not overweight like me, Ma, I want to be faster, I want to be quicker.’ […] So I’ll never forget, for a whole entire year I worked my butt off. I lost like thirty-five or forty pounds when I was twelve years old, right before my Bar-Mitzvah […] I was working out like a madman every day. And my parents’ friends, my family, everyone thought that I was like obsessive with it. People were worrying that I had some sort of eating disorder. […] And after I lost all that weight and made the soccer team, that kind of like fed the fuel. It kind of gave me more fuel to keep going and I became a really good athlete […] I always have like an engine on me. […] my determination and my concentration, I don’t know where I got that from. Maybe it was from the way my parents…I took less ons from some parts of my life, and I applied it to fitness, and losing weight, and getting in shape.

29-year-old HSG Evan Kleinman describes a similar manifestation of his heritage in bodily endurance:

Let’s say that I’m running on the treadmill and, like, I’m just dying, you know. Like, I just can’t take it. I hate running, but I force myself to do it, and… and I say, well, hey… if my grandfather was able to, you know… walk in marches without shoes and without food in the cold, you know – you know… don’t be a wussy and not able to run 20 minutes on a treadmill, you know.

Conversely, Simon understands post-Holocaust anxiety to pervade his bodily expression, especially in the area of his mouth and jaw. When asked about whether he has internalized any post-Holocaust effects, he answered: “I think it translates into fear for me in some ways that I can’t even explain… That… you know, just, like, kind of a bodily level sometimes.” Simon links his own bodily fear with his survivor grandmother’s rigidity when challenged about her ideas or understandings. He describes her “need to be right. […] that voice of ‘No.’ That rejection to agree or be swayed. […] she wouldn’t budge. Her lips would get very tight… she’s kind of like… just shaking her
head no, just a lot of, like, ‘No, no, no’.” Simon sees a direct inheritance of this anxious rigidity passed from grandmother to mother to himself:

There are times when I see that come out in my mother and I will see her mouth tighten up in similar ways. Sometimes I wonder if my mother knows that that’s happening. Just, you know, even little instances. […] I’ve experienced a lot of anxiety in the past few years. And I’ll find that I’m – I’ll have – I’ll, like, lose control of my jaw in a sense and start shaking. And I think of my mother and Nana when I have that feeling. You know, I associate it with… with some, like – there’s a feeling of insecurity that I think I didn’t know about my grandmother having.

Cases of exception help illustrate the generally accepted picture of the third-generation. Not all HSG learned the Holocaust in level-headed, factual, clearly articulated, age-appropriate dosages as secure white American boys. Some HSG, more similarly to their parents, grow up either very exposed to traumatic effects, very sensitive to it, or both. They consequently have a harder time separating the Holocaust and its aftereffects from their subjectivities and emphasize the burdensome aspect of their legacy more than other HSG. Interviews suggest that insecure parenting, early explicit education, and sociocultural alienation, including with regard to gender performance, make emotionally receptive HSG more vulnerable to their grandparents’ and parents’ traumas.

Food and eating came up in several interviews. The pressure to eat much and waste little was associated with inherited post-Holocaust anxieties. Brian’s grandmother “always got angry when there was food left on the plate.” Simon tells of his grandparents, who wanted to avoid heavy psychological burdens, “they just want to give me cookies and have things be nice for me, […] I was given a lot of… cookies. [Laughs.] And really, like, a lot of desserts and food. Like, being given lots of food.” He lists the
pressure to eat enough as one of the effects of his Holocaust heritage. According to

Gary’s grandparents,

‘if you don’t have something in your mouth there’s something wrong with you.’
Whenever I go to my grandparents’ house, it’s like ‘Eat, Tatale, eat, eat eat.’
Like everything was based around food in my family.[…] Yea, so if you weren’t
like ten pounds overweight, there was something wrong with you. Like the way
my dad used food and eating…on that side of the family, the funny thing is people
on my dad’s side are all overweight, and I don’t know if that has to do with being
from Europe…I don’t know what it is, but it’s just funny. Kind of like at a young
age, I realized, this is so silly. I’m not hungry. Why am I eating just because
Grandma’s telling me to eat? Like I can only eat so much.

Chaim similarly shares:

my father, growing up in a family of – of survivors, they were forced – almost
forced to eat. My– my grandfather was a butcher, and his wife just cooked and
cooked and she was a Hungarian cook. And everyone had to eat incredible
amounts, just because maybe tomorrow, there wouldn’t be food. Obviously, that
was absurd, but that’s how they grow up. And subsequently, that’s kind of how I
grew up, […] needless to say, all of my aunts and uncles and my father were all…
overweight… Maybe my uncle is even obese, I don’t know. But… this is clearly
connected. Like, there’s no, you know, coincidence…The third generation – some
of them are overweight. Not all of them.

Isaac tells me that his HSO father “eats very quickly. He eats very, very quickly. And
whenever you ask him, ‘yo, Abba, why do you eat so fast?’, he says, he looks you right in
the eye, and says, ‘I wanna finish before the pogroms come.’ And yeah, he’s probably
kidding, but not all the way kidding, you know what I mean?”
Emotional Internalizations

A number of HSG are like Gabe, Tom, and Max, who understand their third-generation position through a less emotional lens, resist even attempting to empathize with experiences so distant from their own or to imagine themselves in their grandparents’ shoes. But some HSG do experience post-Holocaust identity primarily as embodied, related to their personal or emotional nature, rather than as an external fact about their background. Many of these grandchildren see their post-traumatic or surviving identity as a function of their relationships with their HSO parents, which are highly emotionally significant to them. Most of those grandsons who identified with the Holocaust on a primarily personal or emotional level perceived parents as troubled,
frustrated, or weighed down by the Holocaust heritage and internalized the feelings of displacement, otherness, and vulnerability to psychological crisis that lingered below their HSO parents’ emotional surfaces.

Sometimes emotional investment in the Holocaust is instilled early by parents acting out their own second-hand traumas, or by explicit early exposures to unfiltered Holocaust images and stories. Whether received willingly or reluctantly, emotional internalizations are characterized by the drive to put oneself in one’s grandparents’ shoes.

Kevin tells me about his grandmother, who lost her family as a child,

I’ll put myself in her shoes, and I can’t imagine what it would’ve been like to go through something like that. I’ll get really choked up […] And… even, like – I remember trying to watch some Holocaust film. Some Holocaust films I could watch, but I remember seeing “The Pianist” with Adrian Brody. I saw it in college, during my senior year, and I had to, like, turn it off after 20 minutes. Because then, you know, I’d get nightmares and it’d just be too, like, overwhelming.

Isaac, who went through a period of frustration and aggressive outbursts in early adolescence, recalls emotional investment in his HSO father’s exciting and fear-instilling ritual of Holocaust bedtime stories about Isaac’s grandfather:

I was in a room with three girls [sisters], and we were telling the story and I was—I was, you know, the whole climate was very nervous. But, um, I would say that who I became started with that, started with that nervousness, started with that healthy—I think it was a healthy, kind of like, ‘holy crap,’ you know, ‘is Zayde going to be okay? What happens next?’ Um, and then afterwards my dad would put us to bed, and be like, you know, the Nazis are all gone. And we—we would feel better. We wouldn’t feel all the way safe because, you know, this happened. But that will always stick with me, in that, you know, that thing in the back of my mind, when I was eight years old, that was like, this could happen again.

Danny Ghitis, who had a “heavy Holocaust education,” recalls a Hebrew school teacher whom he admired as a strong role model:
she was, you know, this amazing woman and charismatic […] she told us things […] pretty bluntly. […] the horrors of the Holocaust without any sugarcoating […] it was pretty victim-heavy, […] pretty intense in terms of: ‘this is what happened to us,’ and making us feel like […] we are responsible […] for carrying on the memory of the Holocaust and almost carrying on the burden of surviving […] So that always stuck with me also, you know this kind of responsibility or burden that I carry as a living Jew that, you know, I am--I am, uh, kind of a--an endangered species and at any point it could be taken away from us and, uh, you know, that was drilled in my head repeatedly.

HSO Mothers

Of the 13 HSG with HSO mothers, 6 described considerable emotional difficulties in relation to their mothers. Alan describes his mother as having a cold exterior with a nagging and overly concerned personality. Simon (27), Kevin (29), Greg (34), Danny Ghitis (29), and Josh (30) describe growing up with anxious mothers who either emphasized the traumatic aspects of the Holocaust and resulting anxiety in the present or acted out their own second-hand traumas at their sons’ expense. Simon characterizes his mother as inquisitive, strong-willed, and inducing insecurities for him by making him consider what others think of him. Tom tells me that his mother was sometimes helpful and caring, sometimes severe and short-tempered. Danny Ghitis describes his mother as anxious and “hysterical,” enforcing his own early anxiety and black-and-white thinking about good and evil, imagining Poland as a place one should never visit. Kevin describes a single mother who identified strongly with second-generation experience, talked a great deal about the Holocaust, and, having suffered abuse from her survivor mother and stepfather, leaned too much on Kevin, who internalized the Holocaust as disempowering and would get “choked up” and sad imagining what his grandmother endured. He tells me that he’s had a “recent transformation” in which he realized: “my number one goal in life isn’t to, like, make her happy. It’s to make… me happy.” Kevin calls his mother, who
was born in a DP camp, a worrier who leaned on him emotionally. He tells me about growing up overly polite and devoted to pleasing her:

I think I was a little bit more... worried about pleasing my mom growing up than some of my other friends [...] a little bit more a Mama’s boy at times. [...] it’s more just like a recent transformation where I’m like, ‘Okay, you know, I’ll just going to do what I have to do’. And I’m going to be polite to my mom, but not my – my number one goal in life isn’t to, like, make her happy. It’s to make... me happy [...] I got into a bad relationship. Well, a lot of bad – I had a relationship with a girl where [...] She didn’t like how I interacted with my mom. And suddenly, I realized, ‘Okay. I’ve got to worry about my life. Because I’m trying to please my mom and it’s getting in the way of a... you know, healthy male-female adult relationship’. [...] I think my mom didn’t get enough love and attention at home, and my grandma wasn’t always good at giving her enough love and attention. And she kind of looked at me and my brother as the people who could give her love and attention, sometimes. And we tried, but, like, we weren’t – you know, I wasn’t – you know, that’s not what sons are supposed to be doing. So, she kind of sought the love and attention from us that she didn’t get from her mom all the time.

Josh describes his mother as physically and emotionally abusive and as starkly intolerant of his energies and life decisions: “[My mother] could be incredibly loving, and protective, and really there, but at the drop of a dime, she would just yell, and slap, and just – something would trigger her. [...] growing up was... it was... it was... yeah. It was very, very hard with my mother. [...] When it came to actually protecting me from my mother, [my dad] couldn’t do it...” Colored by his mother’s threatening, “abusive” outbursts, Josh’s relationship with his mother was tumultuous in his adolescent years: “I would try to avoid being home. I would...purposely piss her off because I was – it was my only way of rebelling...” His identification with the Holocaust legacy, as filtered through his troubling relationship with his mother, produced ambivalence and guilt, and culminated in a major personal contribution to the legacy – in his case, a psychology dissertation on relationships and attachment in HSG. However, in his case, the Holocaust legacy remains stifling to his identity, associated with his mother’s “superficial”
takeaway messages, which, as discussed above, he perceived as obstacles, rather than reinforcement, for self-actualization: “You will be a Jew because your grandparents survived the Holocaust. You will not marry a goy. You will […] go to Hebrew school and have your Bar Mitzvah and do all the Jewish stuff because your grandmother […] was in the Holocaust.” Josh confesses, “I don’t think I derive any pride from being a Holocaust survivor anymore, or from a family of Holocaust survivors. I see it as more of a burden than anything else.” He describes his mother as force-feeding him a traumatic family past with superficial, paralyzing life lessons:

the main effect of the Holocaust on my male identity or masculinity – is that it’s been a confusing thing that I really have had to deconstruct it from the beginning and figure out what exactly does it mean to me and for me, because… I was just so confused growing up about my emotional experience, and what I needed to do and what I didn’t need to do. I knew that I needed to be smart, but that was about it, you know. I needed to be smart and Jewish, but how does that fulfill you in any way, you know. It doesn’t mean anything, unless there’s more to it.

Simon similarly describes a lack of emotional recognition in his family: “I feel close to these people, but somehow there’s a lot missing emotionally…My grandparents would give me basic levels of wisdom…but I don’t really feel like they knew me all that well.”

Greg, a 34-year-old HSG, expresses mixed feelings about the way his mother assigned him documentaries and books about the Holocaust as “homework,” which competed with basketball games for his attention. His relationship to his heritage developed as a mix of perceived burden and acknowledged importance, ultimately leading to an exceptional level of social activism. When discussing his personal life, Greg admits considerable guilt about how his own needs have competed with his ideals: "I've [been] a very selfish person….and only recently have I looked beyond me." This recent inclination has included founding a major metropolitan-based HSG organization
and becoming a devoted advocate for Israel, both independently and within nonprofit work. Josh’s relationship to his heritage is similar, beginning with his mother’s intense emphasis on the Holocaust, even at Josh’s personal expense:

I was kind of inundated with Holocaust education from very young. My mother’s parents are survivors, and...as is pretty typical of our – my generation, if there was a Holocaust movie, I had to watch it. If there was a Holocaust book, I had to read it. If there was a Holocaust article, it would, you know – my mom would cut it out from the paper and, you know, put it in my room to read... And, you know, I was kind... of both welcoming it and pushing it away at the same time, because I was interested, but the forced nature of it wasn’t appreciated all the time.

Greg, who grew up in a home of women, with a single mother, a nanny, and a successful older sister, holds complicated feelings of loss and anger toward a “bounder” HSO father who left his HSO mother and whom Greg never knew (Greg’s father, in turn, also never knew his own murdered father), and Greg claims to measure himself more against friends, mother, and sister than against any kind of father figure. He describes himself as a “late bloomer” with regard to his boyhood maturation and describes his younger self to me as a sensitive boy who was close with his mother and sister, liked to draw, felt “different,” had to defend himself against bullies, and felt socially insecure. Greg directly links his sensitivity and childhood insecurities with pressures of his maternal-side Holocaust heritage, as transferred to him via his mother, who assigned him extra homework to learn about the Holocaust. He shares that during his Bar Mitzvah ceremony, he “complained that I had so few friends coming...and my mom responded that I should be grateful I have all this family, since she had no family growing up...they were all killed...so those lines she told me stuck with me.”

When the Holocaust legacy is perceived as a burden or comes at the expense of one’s own personal validation and significance, a degree of “masculine” detachment from
that legacy and the family’s emotional investment in it may work to ward off retraumatization or self-erasure. The great nephew of the famous Bielski brothers mentioned above expressed some ambivalence and discomfort surrounding the highly publicized and almost mythological quality of his family history. The Bielski brothers were Polish partisan fighters whose story became an academic book, a trade book, and a major Hollywood film starring actor Daniel Craig in 2009. Their great nephew tells me, “I kept my distance…because if you wanted to get to know me, I have my totally own stories, and that’s part of my family history, which I’m happy to talk about, but I don’t think you would get a great sense of knowing who I am by knowing that past.” A HSG (of unspecified gender) in Kahane-Nissenbaum’s study (2011) shares the following experience of his maternal-side Holocaust heritage as self-invalidating:

My mother was very consumed with the Holocaust. I think for us, it often translated into feeling like our feelings were sometimes invalidated - because our problems could never compare […] My mom's work focuses on holocaust research - uncovering and sharing the stories of individual Jews. It’s amazing work and moves many people. But growing up, having the house filled with photographs (everywhere) of Holocaust victims and each night at dinner hearing the recently learned stories definitely cast a shadow on the house. How could I complain about an issue at school when she just finished talking about some horrible story from the camps? But […] it was hard because sometimes I did need to feel like I could talk about the “insignificant” details of my life without feeling like I was being petty to complain about x, y, or z, when in reality "compared to the people in the Holocaust" I had so much. […] Over time, I became very immune to anything holocaust related. If my Bubbie (grandmother) wanted to talk about it that was different […] and for her I would always listen. But […] I just began to block it all out and when anything came up holocaust related, I didn't want to hear about it. […] And of course then my mom resented that and thought I was being selfish - but really I think it was self-preservation. I think it definitely put a strain on my relationship with my mother. (Kahane-Nissenbaum 2011, 55-56)
Simon, who was a colorful and creative child, tells me that his strong-willed mother instilled anxiety in him about how others perceive him. He believes a personal effect of his Holocaust heritage on him is

“Fear – […] of what other people will think… of things… You know, I think about the kind of questions that my mother asks. Which again, you know, like… I also say that they are typically mothering, but the point is – things like, ‘You’re not – do you really want to go out, like, wearing that shirt? Are you really going to wear that? […] ‘Like, ‘Do you really want to do that?’ Kind of, like, drilling that voice of, like, you know, ‘Is that – are other people going to… What are people going to think?’”

**HSO Fathers**

Of the 14 HSG who grew up with HSO fathers, 10 of them note considerable emotional rigidities or challenges in their fathers’ personalities, but they usually also respected, identified with, and admired them. Interviewees often viewed their HSO fathers as tense, nervous, easily frustrated, and strict, but also as hardworking and resilient. Alex calls his father difficult to be around, cold, and reticent. Coby describes his father as hardworking, easily frustrated, and raised to feel guilty about having fun. Seth describes his father as a stubborn Israeli who was easily upset. Gary calls both his father and his paternal grandfather authoritarian patriarchs but takes pride in being compared to his grandfather. HSG Isaac describes his father as always being emotionally distant, “nervous,” attuned to all things anti-Semitic, and eating quickly, as though the food would be taken away if he didn’t finish it fast. Yet he also warmly recalls his father’s bedtime stories and family commitment and tells me that he has adopted much of his father’s perspective in adulthood. Ian describes a strong-minded, argumentative, and larger-than-life personality in his father, with whom he butts heads but also has a close relationship. Max describes his father as poor at dealing with frustration but immensely
knowledgeable and resilient. Adir calls his father unemotional and a workaholic, but more accepting of his homosexuality than his mother is and more similar to himself. Chaim describes his (recently deceased) father as gentle and warm but as reserving a special hatred or anger for the Nazis. Of his father’s involvement as a second-generation group organizer, Chaim shares,

I knew that it was around this issue [...] this baggage that my father was very clearly carrying along with him [...] when we were looking through my father’s things... he – we – we found an essay that he had written at that – during that period of time [...] he mentioned something about [...] [‘]the Nazi’s, more commonly known as the Nazi fuckers who did terrible things to my parents[‘] [...] and it was very jarring to read that, but, like, I very clearly understood what he was saying because I could... I could – like, he was a very gentle man, but he... he had a very particular place in his heart reserved for the Holocaust and the terrible things that happened there...

It is noteworthy that HSO fathers’ shortcomings were less emotionally detrimental than HSO mothers’ in HSG perceptions. In fact, having an HSO father and a non-HSO mother correlated with feelings of personal resilience, competence, and empowerment. This potential finding supports Miri Scharf’s finding in a 2007 non-clinical Israeli study, which showed Israeli HSG to benefit psychologically from having HSO fathers. Scharf’s study showed that when only the father was an HSO, the HSG perceived his relationship with his parents more positively than other HSG and even controls. HSO mothers presented more psychological distress than did HSO fathers or controls of either sex. Having an HSO mother correlated with more HSG psychological distress and more negative perceptions of his relationship with his parents. Marriages of two HSO correlated with sons who felt less accepted by and less encouraged to be independent by their parents, who performed less successfully in the army, and who were more ambivalently attached in their close relationships than other HSG or controls.
Though mediated by factors such as personal sensitivity, sociocultural belonging, and the way in which they learned the Holocaust, most of my paternal-side HSG interviewees felt more empowered than saddened or defeated. Coby is an example of a paternal-side HSG who does not feel the need to process the trauma: "instead of something that I’ve been working through, emotionally processing what that means and how… what does that mean for me and how should I feel about that… I’ve just more accepted that as fact." Max similarly shares of his father and Holocaust education:

I don’t remember it coming as a shock at any point. So I think he was just matter-of-fact about it. He’s told me that as an academic he dislikes some of what he calls the metaphysical interpretations that have been made of the Holocaust, but he’s perfectly comfortable talking about the facts of the matter, what happened to him, what happened to other people that he knew […] there wasn’t a sense of something that couldn’t be talked about or a subject that was kind of touchy to talk about there.

David’s relationship to his heritage, though coming from a father described as more open and emotional than others, lends more to family closeness and loving appreciation than to traumatic feelings.

My interviews also support Scharf’s idea that HSO men may choose more emotionally supportive and nurturing wives; almost all of HSG with Holocaust heritage exclusively on the paternal side describe their mothers in terms such as kind, loving, accepting, easier to get along with than father, emotionally involved, sensitive, supportive, and patient. This is contrast to HSO mothers, who are additionally described by most of their sons as worrying, anxious, nagging, stubborn, short-tempered, hysterical, and needy. HSO fathers seemed less distinguishable from their non-HSO counterparts. Having an HSO mother and a non-HSO father correlated with HSG feelings of grief,
anxiety, guilt, and personal dispossession. They tended to experience the Holocaust as more central to their identities and more emotionally salient. This may be a testament to the powerful role mothers often play in the child’s forming subjectivity, at least in this population raised mainly in the 1980s and 90s. Emotional security and resilience in paternal-side HSG may also reflect differences in communicating the Holocaust in these households in comparison to in maternal-side households where the trauma may be more subtly detected in mother-son relationships from earlier ages. As discussed earlier, mothers more often communicated Holocaust stories than did fathers; moreover, the apparatus of Marianne Hirsch’s “postmemory,” which overwhelms the subjectivity from inside-out, are gendered feminine, experienced through embodied ruptures of the maternal function.

Mediating factors like sociocultural belonging, personal sensitivity, and the ways in which the Holocaust is learned play crucial roles that may create cases of exception. Evan Kleinman fits the model of the paternal-side HSG raised by a secure, caring mother and a father who was both a role model and less emotionally accessible. Adir, a paternal-side HSG, fluctuates between relating to the Holocaust objectively and crying about it. His Holocaust education involved a life-changing conversation with his grandmother about her traumatic experiences when he was nine-years-old, around the same time he suffered bullies as a sensitive and “nerdy” child. Similarly, Evan Kleinman’s personal sensitivity and firsthand experiences with bullying and anti-Semitism as a young adolescent provide a backdrop to his Holocaust education, which he describes as traumatizing, leaving him under a “black cloud” he needed to work through. Though his internalization of the Holocaust was perhaps more emotional and thus more personally
challenging than some other paternal-side HSG, after his process of creating a
documentary film about his grandparents, he does ultimately relate to the Holocaust
primarily as a source of strength, optimism, and empowerment. Isaac, a paternal-side
HSG who similarly internalizes the Holocaust emotionally as a sensitive child, goes
through a difficult process of aggressive acting out but eventually comes to think of his
heritage as primarily strengthening and affirming. Kevin, by contrast, a maternal-side
HSG who consciously positions himself as a man by embracing independence from a
single mother whose needs drain him, works through his traumatic heritage by getting
involved in a third-generation organization but insists that the Holocaust will never be
empowering for him. Joseph, however, also a maternal-side HSG, feels predominantly
empowered by his heritage, which his mother took pains to convey to him in an
unemotional, factual tone, and which he has come to dually associate with a more
personally empowering identity as a Jewish gay man, a kind of would-be super-survivor
in his own right.
CHAPTER THREE

HSG testimonies paint a picture of the third generation as set on different psychological quests. Differences in embodying what it means to be a grandson of a Holocaust survivor and a contemporary American man largely reflect personal narratives of positioning and the manifestation of trauma in a particular family’s experience. It is a different thing to experience trauma firsthand from HSO parents’ abuse, as Josh describes, than to inherit the twice-removed anxiety-laden gaps and nerves in familial communication resulting from grandparents’ unassimilated trauma, as Simon does. It is different to internalize such gaps in a position of privilege and secure subjectivity as Gabe and David do, than in a position of vulnerability, early development, or considerable alienation, as Danny Ghitis and Evan Kleinman do. It is different to relate to one’s heritage as factual history, like Max does, than as embodied memory, as Gary does. It is not surprising that HSG diverge in how they identify with and work through their traumatic family legacy. Those for whom the Holocaust is history are largely confident about their identities and engaged in questions about the Holocaust’s wider ethical and philosophical implications. Those for whom the Holocaust is embodied family memory are sometimes on a quest to convert this memory into researched, recorded, and archived history; sometimes generating creative work in order to help them merge contradictory relationships to reality; sometimes completing a symbolic circle as active and meaningful participation in the legacy and connection to grandparents; and
sometimes devoting their lives and work to emphasized values of family, defense, Jewish identity, and keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive.

My research supports the idea that HSG are functional, accomplished individuals who tend to internalize different recognizable post-Holocaust values correlating with such mediating factors as personal sensitivity and emotional receptivity, the manner in which they learn the Holocaust, their sociocultural belonging, and their relationship with parents. HSG subjects repeatedly credited their heritage as providing them with traits of endurance, ambition, and sensitivity, as well as values of saving, working hard, appreciating family, and continuing its legacy and memory. Some also included anxiety, self-consciousness, feeling different or special, feeling rootless, defensiveness, and loneliness. HSG sometimes continue to exhibit internal conflicts regarding the responsibilities they feel they have to their survivor grandparents and emotional strains in relation to their HSO parents. Interviewees expressed greater security in their HSG identities when they were able to accomplish a sense of perceived coherence for those identities. Sometimes this perceived coherence came in the form of creating an artistic project that “closed a circle” or dispelled crippling anxieties; sometimes it came in the form of fashioning oneself as a strong, aggressive, and defiant protector or fighter in line with certain post-Holocaust values; sometimes it manifested through organizational leadership and social activism; and sometimes it came in the form of building a Jewish family and upholding the value of close family bonds.
Crypts and Postmemory

Three years ago in a graphic narrative looking deep into my own childhood experience of alienation as a sensitive HSG mystified by my maternal grandmother’s trauma and its hold on my mother, I wrote, “I was at once the shyest and most secretly bossy kid in the second grade (in the whole school, maybe). What was it in me that tightened, demanding I wrap and protect it?”

I would argue that the concept of the crypt as a kind of distinctly indirect, yet insistent post-traumatic internalization of reality’s collapsible and disastrous potential is something that, offered emotional pathways, may extend from HSO to HSG.
For some HSG, the Holocaust may continue to function as an obsession in as far as it holds the key to a genealogy of a twice-removed, yet deep-rooted commitment to the psychological entrapment that stands in for inassimilable trauma that cannot be abandoned. Isaac admits that the Holocaust is “a major part of who I am,” elaborating, “I talk about it all the time. Absolutely all the time. And a girl actually asked me, she said, […] for Christmas, could you not talk about […] the Holocaust?” Jonathan perceives his Holocaust commitment as both intrinsic and self-motivated:

there’s a lot of kids who went through the same education that I did who aren’t nearly as enthusiastic and passionate about these things the way I am. I think a lot of it is sort of an intrinsic nature thing […] I’d say the larger percentage of it is more like an intrinsic nature kind of thing. It’s not really, it wasn’t something engrained in me; it’s something that I wanted, that I brought out of myself, and that I sought after.

Those who enjoy the security of third-generation American male positioning (Silverman’s “dominant fiction”) as a buttress to the psychological crypt they preserve are more confident renegotiating the crypt’s destabilizing contents in explicit, proactive ways, such as joining the IDF (Jonathan), journeying to Poland to lay a gravestone for a murdered relative (Evan), or even striving to become a firefighter (Isaac). By contrast, HSG that have what I term an at-risk or vulnerable subjectivity, whether via sensitivities that queer gender identity, compromised family structures, or geographic uprootedness or immigration, may continue the HSO postmemorial struggle to figure out who they are beyond the crypt and how they might function as themselves. Their personal struggles in the present may be mirrored and given meaning within the family legacy of uprootedness, suffering, and psychological endurance. Creative outlets are often useful for these HSG, as art allows for the expression of affective experiences not (yet) available in the terms of
language and culture. As David Grossman writes, a writer is someone who feels claustrophobic in the words of others (Grossman 2008, 19).

As discussed in Chapter Two, postmemory, a term Marianne Hirsch coined in reference to the experience of HSO (Holocaust survivor offspring), “is defined through an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by the unbridgeable distance that separates the participant from the one born after” (Hirsch 2001, 10). It is the experience of those who “have grown up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the powerful stories of the previous generation, shaped by monumental traumatic events that resist understanding and integration” (12). Postmemory is experienced through the interaction of two essential components: a larger-than-life traumatic story preceding the subject’s birth and an obstructed, insecure, suppressed, or threatened sense of self, as plagued by the “crypt,” which is then vulnerable to the effects of the monumental story. In many cases, via traumatized parental modeling, emotional inaccessibility, emotional overwhelm, overprotectiveness, guilting, and other imposed pressures or neglect, the dynamics of growing up with survivor parents facilitate the latter condition of an at-risk subjectivity in HSO. And the larger-than-life traumatic story may then rush in with the offer (or threat) of filling the evacuated, porous, or troubled subjectivity. But postmemory is not exclusive to HSO. Twenty-nine-year-old, Brooklyn-based photographer Danny Ghitis, a grandson of Holocaust survivors on his mother’s side, tells me in an interview that he grew up feeling almost like he himself was a Holocaust a survivor. Filmmaker Evan Kleinman, whose paternal grandparents are survivors, shares that an enduring “black
cloud” hovered over him after internalizing his family history, an internalization he describes as in itself traumatic – shocking and inassimilable.

**Processing with Creativity and Fantasy**

Fantasy helps create alternative fictions when the dominant fiction does not have room or resources for a particular experience or story of origins. While HSO fantasy was usually a result of direct exposure to traumatized parents with mysterious anxieties, HSG fantasy is generated by the incomplete or idealized nature of communicated Holocaust stories. Gary and Isaac mention absorbing family Holocaust stories like they would superhero tales. Kevin says of his grandmother’s stories, “they’re not, like, real-life stories. It was almost like a movie, like, ‘That’s not me. That isn’t my life’. Like, it touched me in some ways, but in other ways, it just felt so distant.” Jonathan Safran Foer’s novel *Everything is Illuminated* is a prime example of HSG magical realism in imagining an inaccessible and traumatized family narrative through a lens of the fantastic. Philippe Codde argues that HSG writers’ “almost obsessive return to mythology and fairy tales in the literary recreation of their grandparents’ era” uses traditional ideas of the myth as painful origin story in innovative ways that are specific to the inheritance of an irrepresentable past (Codde 2009, 62).

The creative impulse in post-traumatic work originates from an inscrutable origin story. When one has gaps and holes for roots and does not find sufficient compensation socioculturally for self-positioning, identity crises may ensue. In his interview with me, twenty-nine-year-old photographer Danny Ghitis, who was born in Colombia to South
American Jewish parents, shared an experience of growing up without the security of sociocultural belonging:

I’ve always felt like I’ve had an identity crisis, not feeling like I belong in one place or another, sort of, you know, floating along, which is kind of what has led to my career with constant exploration of culture and my own identity through other people’s identities, always […] moving around, curious, asking questions, unsatisfied, and that definitely comes from moving around a lot while I was developing…I was moving every few years…this constant transition…I got used to that momentum. And when I was finally in one place, I never really felt completely grounded in that spot…having immigrant parents, speaking a different language at home, and also having half my family in Israel […]

Evan Kleinman, who perceived his survivor grandparents as very European, expresses that he grew up in New York feeling not completely “white” and not always socially accepted. He felt that his family, more than other Jewish families, stressed the need for one to watch one’s back, to be aware of one’s surroundings and ready for hostility. He tells me that he thinks American Jews without Holocaust background in their family seem much more American-like. […] you could meet me and – and speak to me, you’d be, like, ‘Oh, you’re just another American person.’ But I actually don’t feel that way […] I know a lot of white people. I have a lot white people are friends. But […] a group of people who are supporting white people and are chanting ‘White Power’ – they’re not talking about me. So then – then already, I – I don’t feel white, I don’t feel Caucasian […] in the 30’s in Madison Square Garden, they had Nazi rallies. And […] a lot of […] universities were closed to certain other groups of people, Jews being one of them. […]

Evan’s sensitivity also derives in part from his rocky relationship with masculinity pressures. He describes a difficult transition from Jewish day school to public school in seventh grade:

I was also […] sensitive, coming from Hebrew day school, being so sheltered, I think that that almost made me, like, a sensitive… male, which […] doesn’t really help you so much in terms of masculinity is concerned in public junior high school […] my mom is very sensitive – I think that I’m more sensitive a lot of times. […] my dad is not very emotional, but my mom is. I think I lean more towards the emotional […] I definitely had a harder transition than the other three people that I knew who left [Jewish day school] at the same time as me going into
public school. That probably had to do with masculinity [...] they were a little more developed than me at that age, I remember [...] I was made to feel different [...] that kind of made me realize, ‘maybe you’re not so… you know… on the masculinity scale, you might be below a five.’ [...] I try to break down those definitions, I try to be ageless, I try to be genderless when I can…

Both Ghitis and Kleinman are sensitive artists with lifelong feelings of marginality in the American context and relationships with their Holocaust heritage that were marked by personal trauma, necessitating artistic projects of working through. Their stories combine vulnerable or shaky early subject positions with an embodied inheritance of the Holocaust through its inescapable presence in the family. Evan discusses how his grandparents spent most of their lives unwilling to talk about their pasts and occasionally blurtling out heavy bits of information related to the deaths and losses that had surrounded them in the 40s. His reaction to hearing their eventual testimonies for the Shoah Foundation left him stunned, unable to integrate the overwhelming information:

I – I - it just seemed like I – it just seemed so unbelievable to me, like, the details of this kind of thing [...] But there was also a sort of trauma that comes with it, because you don’t really understand it, but [...] you’re made to feel kind of afraid [...] that’s kind of instilled in you [...] I’ve definitely spent a bit of time trying to overcome that…

Danny Ghitis cites his grandmother’s fragility regarding her past, his mother’s emotional sensitivity to the issue, and his own nightmares as sources of his own kind of second-hand trauma:

[My grandmother] never spoke about it growing up. It was sort of indirect stories about her from my grandfather, from my […] parents […] It was always like walking on eggshells whenever it came to the Holocaust, because she was one of those people who kept it inside and had nightmares […] it’s pretty inescapable for me, you know? It’s not like I’ve had much of a choice […] growing up. I was exposed to it. I don’t think I had much of an option as to whether to accept it or not, because it was all around me pretty often. […] I’ve had dreams and nightmares and, uh…um, my whole life related to the Holocaust…
Like Kleinman, who describes his Holocaust education as itself traumatic, Danny Ghitis recalls a heavy-handed Holocaust education that stuck with him, made the Holocaust feel present, and led him to feel like an “endangered species”:

[The Holocaust] has been a part of my life as long as I can remember, the idea, the Holocaust being this terrible thing that happened to us, and I say “us” because […] it was always very clear that […] it wasn’t just some faraway piece of history like the destruction of the Temple or some ancient war, but it was just always very present. […] We learned the horrors of the Holocaust without any sugarcoating. […] It was pretty victim-heavy, […] pretty intense in terms of […] making us feel like we are responsible for carrying on the memory of the Holocaust and almost carrying on the burden of surviving as the next generation. So that always stuck with me also, you know this kind of responsibility or burden that I carry as a living Jew that, you know, I am--I am, uh, kind of a--an endangered species and at any point it could be taken away from us and, uh, you know, that was drilled in my head repeatedly.

For Kleinman, the Holocaust trauma and the powerlessness he felt in response “was like always this black cloud that I felt hovering above me.” When he first heard his grandparents’ extensive interview testimony for the Shoah Foundation, Kleinman was thirteen, a year younger than his grandfather was when he lost all of his family and had to bury his younger brother in an unmarked grave (this is the great uncle for whom Kleinman lays a headstone in Poland during his documentary). In the same year that he heard his grandparents’ testimony, Kleinman had an experience that intensified his post-Holocaust anxieties by making them feel even more present. He describes a traumatizing first exposure to anti-Semitism that left him a changed person:

The same year that they showed me was the first year that I first experienced […] a pretty traumatizing… […] someone […] calling me a dirty Jew, who was way bigger than me and very intimidating… in junior high school. So it’s not like… obviously, it wasn’t, like, a persecution, per se. But […] from that moment on, I think I was a changed person, actually.

In line with the art of postmemory, HSG working through continues to employ creative investments in the traumas and losses, but, as Gerd Bayer (2010) argues, it
departs from the original generation of postmemory in its future-oriented attempt to integrate the horrors of the past into a comprehensive approach to contemporary reality as nuanced, subjective, and in perpetual motion. HSG Danny Ghitis, who grew up influenced by admittedly black-and-white ideas about good and evil in the Holocaust describes his photography project *Land of Os* (2010) as, in part, the therapeutic diffusion of his own over-identification with his grandparents’ trauma, his own compulsion to suffer, and his rigid initial assumptions about Eastern Europe. Kleinman describes his documentary *We are Still Here* (2011) as a response to the “black cloud” of anxiety, guilt, and fear of what he describes as his traumatic internalization of his Holocaust heritage, a response that allowed him to make room for his own creative, vital subjectivity in his experience of a Holocaust-infused present.

Hirsch argues that HSO postmemorial art that displaces and recontextualizes the same repeated traumatic images often works through second-hand trauma by helping HSO better model their traumatized parents with whom they struggle to identify:

compulsive and traumatic repetition connects the second generation to the first, producing rather than screening the effect of trauma that was lived so much more directly as compulsive repetition by survivors and contemporary witnesses,” and “In repeatedly exposing themselves to the same pictures, postmemorial viewers can produce in themselves the effects of traumatic repetition that plague the victims of trauma. Even as the images repeat the trauma of looking, they disable, in themselves, any restorative attempts (Hirsch 2001: 29; 8).

In other words, the second-generation postmemorial need to identify with and understand traumatized parents may manifest in a kind of acting out – a repetitive use of established traumatic images. One of the most striking aspects of Art Spiegelman’s canonized *Maus*, as well as in *Metamaus* his commentary on the work, which includes extensive scans of his notes, interview tapes, and sketches, is the obsessive repetition with which
Spiegelman was able to, or perhaps entranced to achieve in producing his graphic narrative. Repeated exposure to and use of these images provides a vicarious experience of traumatized compulsivity, an enacted repetition as a means for connecting with the emotionally or psychologically removed survivor (grand)parents. Thus, while the survivor’s compulsion to repeat is, in Freudian terms, an attempt to master actual lived experiences of violence, terror, or loss, the HSO compulsion to repeat, according to Hirsch, is a drive to bridge the psychological gap between the traumatized parent and the consequently disoriented child who perpetually clings to the same iconic, haunting images that offer him entry into his parent’s world.

HSG postmemorial art comes after the extensive documentation of Holocaust narratives and the integration of post-Holocaust identity into discursive positioning. So even if it starts with iconic images of past trauma, it tends not to obsess over repeating those images and keeping details in immediate memory. Unlike during the first three decades after WWII, the concept of being a second- or third-generation survivor is now widespread, and even those HSG born to traumatized families have extensive exposure to clearly articulated language about Holocaust history in classrooms, museums, and elsewhere to buttress and supplement what they internalize at home. As Danny Ghitis tells me, “growing up, I think I saw every documentary and film related to the Holocaust in school.” As Kleinman shares, knowing one can look up any forgotten details in a grandparent’s interview transcript is “like a huge sigh of relief.”

In an analysis of two HSG films, Marceline Loridan-Ivens’ *The Birch Tree*
Meadow*(France, 2002) and Robert Thalheim’s And Along Come Tourists* (Germany, 2007), Bayer writes that third-generation cinema is moving beyond the phenomenon of HSO postmemory. This is evident, Bayer argues, in its decreased urgency to remember specific details and in its shift in focus from past narratives to future-oriented ethical questions. Bayer suggests that HSG filmmakers attempt to make the past relevant to the present, imbuing their films also with implicit messages about the difficulty and necessity of so doing. The films emphasize the incorporation of the Holocaust legacy into everyday life, even as the Holocaust remains resistant to symbols of language or image. Like Thalheim’s film, HSG photographer Danny Ghitis’ project Land of Os contemplates how Auschwitz can be reintegrated into normality after becoming the symbol of Nazi evil. And like Loridan-Ivens’ film, Evan Kleinman’s documentary gives the grandchild an active role and treats the return to the traumatic site as a moment of triumph. Evan states in the film that “A Kleinman walking down the street [in Poland] – that’s like a sense of victory.”

Relieved of the anxiety of needing to remember every detail, HSG seek connection with their grandparents and work through their legacies in ways that more safely speak to their own identity struggles and needs. With Holocaust narratives integrated into established history, post-traumatic identification in HSG points to new anxieties about carrying a difficult, embodied heritage in an increasingly secure and

---

*The Birch Tree Meadow* follows Myriam, a French Jewish Holocaust survivor who returns to visit Auschwitz sixty years after her imprisonment there and makes the acquaintance of a young German photographer who is also on a personal journey and whose grandfather was an S.S. officer.

*In And Along Come Tourists*, writer and director Robert Thalheim explores his own experience of working in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum as his civilian service in the 1990s. The film centers on a friendship that develops between the civil service worker and an elderly Holocaust survivor.
privileged contemporary context that is only meaningful with that heritage personally intact. As Traps writes in her recent review of Andrew Winer’s *The Marriage Artist*, “third-generation representations insist on reincorporating that history into the experience of the present, which otherwise threatens to slip into meaninglessness” (Traps 2010).

Both Ghitis and Kleinman center their projects on a return to the site of traumatic loss – Ghitis to Oświęcim, the town of the Auschwitz camps, and Kleinman to the Polish towns of his grandparents’ childhoods and to the site where his grandfather buried his own brother in an unmarked grave. But what these artists do with the visual spectacle of traumatic loss is not compulsive repetition but bold reclamation of the terms of reality – for Ghitis, working through is about making the present less rigid and threatening; for Kleinman it is about making room for his own active place in relation to his grandparents and their traumas. The takeaway message of Kleinman’s film, as he narrates it, maintains the grief and rupture of his family past while proposing a drive for future-oriented creativity in its memory:

> I have learned that it’s okay to cry about what they went through, but tears are not enough. We have to take power from these stories. If the phrase ‘never again’ holds any bearing, then it’s up to us here today to take all the pain and all the suffering and use it as motivation to do something great. How else do you let the world know that you are still here?

In his interview with me, Kleinman offers that “living happy” is “the best revenge.”

Kleinman also plays with the terms of reality, letting us see the mundane vision of present-day Polish life as juxtaposed with the emotional, even spiritual investment he brings to it. Driving from Warsaw to Lublin, where his grandmother was born, Kleinman imagines an idealized old country of cultural origins. The barren, neutral countryside visible out the window of the moving car meaningfully conflicts with Kleinman’s
narration, accompanied by the tune of a fiddle: “Leaving Warsaw, we watched the urban landscape turn into countryside. I keep thinking about how many of these towns were all once *shtetls*, Jewish villages where the delicious smell of *kugel* would have been teeming out the windows, merchant carriages rolling down unpaved streets, Yiddish being spoken.” During the filming, Kleinman is able to internalize the sites of his grandparents’ losses, which contain such crippling intensity in his family mythology, as both “sacred” and mundane. The burial site where he lays a headstone for his great uncle is for Kleinman both “the holiest ground I’ve ever walked on” and, as far as we can see on camera, an indistinct, quiet yard without present threat. The traumatic imaginary of the Holocaust story becomes this real, unremarkable location. But simultaneously, the reality of being there is experienced in the imaginary or spiritual terms of the “sacred” (“the holiest ground”).

HSG art largely seeks to employ its own present and creative experience rather than a repetitive consumption of traumatic traces as a means of achieving closeness with or understanding the survivor. Though driven by deep identification, Kleinman’s return to sites of his grandparents’ trauma is marked less by compulsion than by reflection and affirmation of his own place within his family legacy. Interestingly and somewhat paradoxically, the creativity of the HSG artist can itself bridge the distance between survivor and grandson, at least in the grandson’s self-image. Kleinman takes pride in being a creative problem-solver like his grandfather, who needed to be creative in order to survive. The documentary is itself an act of problem-solving, a way of dealing with the weight of internalized post-Holocaust trauma with creative processing:
Life is about being creative, in everything. […] I really […] enjoy […] thinking of ways to cleverly […] accomplish things […] nothing is supposed to be easy. We are supposed to be able to figure out clever ways to accomplish things. […] I definitely take that […] from, you know… my grandfather’s being a Holocaust survivor […] because he had to be creative a lot. […] he gets off a boat with a… pregnant wife and a one-year-old son, and now after going through the Holocaust has no family, now doesn’t speak any English, and has to go find a job and feed his family that night.

Ka-Tzetnik’s famous statement that Auschwitz is another planet resonates in the title of Danny Ghitis’ project *Land of Os*, which sounds like a reference to the surreal Land of Oz. As HSO Eric A. Kimmel articulates it, “for the average American Jewish child today the Holocaust is hardly any more real than the land of Oz” (Steinitz 1975, 23). But “Os” here refers to Oświęcim, the Polish town in which the remains of Auschwitz stand. *Land of Os* is a project consisting of thirty photographs of contemporary life in this town. Ghitis visits the space surrounding Auschwitz, the mythologized epicenter of Holocaust trauma, to harvest a living reality that both diffuses the traumatic one and affirms the enduring centrality of that trauma in the post-Holocaust imaginary. By capturing visual scenarios that both elicit and dispel post-traumatic anxiety, situating familiar icons of terror into more nuanced, fluid, and contemporary contexts, he contributes to the working through of those possessed by family traumas preceding their births. With titles like “Parking lot at Birkenau,” “Watching friends play,” “Fence between museum and apartments,” and “Punk rocker at Auschwitz,” he offers a vision in which traumatic identification with the site of loss can coexist and negotiate with alternative perspectives, changes, and shades of gray. Ghitis describes his point of entry as follows in his artist’s statement:

Most travelers are unaware Auschwitz is in an old Polish town called Oświęcim. Those who do notice – a nearby shopping mall, high school sweethearts holding
hands, nicely-dressed families headed to church- are faced with an impossible question: how can life exist in the aftermath of such overwhelming evil?1

More personally, Ghitis shares in his interview with me, that as a child learning the Holocaust horrors in an emotionally charged context, he developed assumptions about Germany, about Poland, about Eastern Europe, about the places where my ancestors came from, and what people are like now. […] I remember my mother saying, you know, some things are just black and white. You just can’t—those people just don’t deserve our respect. And, […] at the time, I was like, yeah […] Who are these people to, you know, to live in—in such a place, and continue living normally. It should be […] preserved only as a memorial. And after having gone, I realized that she was very much wrong…

The photographs in Land of Os vibrate. Highly saturated clothing, fire, balloons, and flowers negotiate with the grays and browns of camp remains and barren landscape. Visual symbols of danger and anti-Semitism evaporate as quickly as they suggest themselves. In “Controlled burn near Birkenau,” the first photograph of the series, a line of blazing orange flames parallels the winter horizon of wooden barracks and bare trees. A man stands in the center of the frame, his head bent, face in hand. One first reads him as despairing, his agonized gesture fitting expectations of what it means to visit a concentration camp. Yet one quickly notices a figure bent in shadow on the periphery of the frame, purposefully patting a rake against the controlled flames. The central figure is no longer a pained witness but a neutral agricultural laborer, perhaps shielding his eyes from the smoke or wiping sweat from a tired brow. The vibrant flames now refuse to connote the destruction we seek in images of the concentration camp; they are flames of productivity, of present vitality. Like an optical illusion, the image hums, wavering between the traumatic reality we expect to find in an Auschwitz photograph and the living, sometimes unremarkable, human reality that the camera finds there. In

“Rollerblading past Birkenau,” a young woman in tight mauve pants, skates by, her head at the horizon line, meeting the line of old camp barracks. Her gaze is directed forward on the road ahead, not on the site of past horror beside her. After all, were she to turn her head and pay Birkenau the respectful attention we might initially expect of her, she might trip on her rollerblades. The photo forces us to confront the reality of life continuing, even in the face of what happened, though not at the expense of signifying the salience of its memory.

Ghitis’ need to adjust black-and-white assumptions about Eastern Europe, which he first internalized as threatening even for him in the present, leads him to a therapeutic conclusion that negotiates a way to live currently both without feelings of personal endangerment and without forgetting or dishonoring the traumatic experiences that define his family’s legacy. Responding to comments on the December 2010 web publication of Land of Oświęcim as a visual essay in Burn Magazine, Ghitis shares that “In the end living in Oświęcim was very therapeutic, and helped me see the Holocaust beyond traumatic personal impact and more as a broader human theme.” In our interview Ghitis articulates the message he takes away from his project:

we don’t have to continue suffering because our grandparents suffered. We have to respect and memorialize and learn so that we can prevent it and be sensitive to it. But that doesn’t mean that, you know, because our grandparents were Holocaust survivors, that we are Holocaust survivors. No, we are—we’re not Holocaust survivors […] And that—it seems, it seems like an obvious thing to say, but I think for a long time I almost saw myself as a Holocaust survivor. Which is, I think, uh…terrible for a young person […] that has nothing to do with the Holocaust, really.

Modern-day Poland […] lives, in a way, in the shadow of the Holocaust every day. But they have to keep living, because that’s where they live […] this trip to Poland recently really was also on an emotional level one of the first times that I confronted it on my own terms. Rather than being told what to think or how to approach something, it was me going to explore it, kind of in a raw, unfiltered
way. [...] And that helped me process things, and I feel a lot—a lot better about my relationship to the Holocaust than I did before.

As Ghitis’ and Kleinman’s interview testimonies convey, the symptoms of the postmemorial condition—of feeling like one is surviving rather than living, and that one is defined by traumatic events one never directly experienced—are not limited to the second generation. Rather, they arise out of an interaction between a vulnerable or dispossessed subject position and an overwhelmingly meaningful or significant preceding traumatic narrative, whose inaccessible nature charges it with lasting power. These artists’ work demonstrates that HSG postmemorial art uses present and future-oriented demystification to depart from HSO postmemorial art of past repetition. It continues to acknowledge and respect the traumatic readings that define the postmemorial position, while opening space for third-generation creativity and vitality in a contemporary world not ruled by perpetual threat.

Making History as Working Through

The ability to understand the Holocaust as primarily historical, rather than embodied, comes in part from a familial situation in which HSO parents convey the past as influential, rather than as present and threatening. It also comes with the increasing privileges that characterize a generation born comfortably as Americans in a culture that validates, commemorates, and archives its traumatic heritage. Several HSG interviewees processed early anxieties related to their heritage by seeking as much concrete information as possible about their family’s past in order to gain a sense of where they came from, thus granting themselves a circumstantially denied history. Part of Kleinman’s documentary project We Are Still Here is the project of making his
grandparents’ Polish hometowns “more than just names on a map.” HSG Chaim went to archives to research his family history and made a website that extensively documents this history with text and photographs. In line with Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, Chaim’s approach depends on creative investment in a fragmented past. The website’s introduction states,

many holes still remain including names of brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles whose records simply didn't survive the passage of time or the destruction of the Nazis. We can never truly reconstruct the past, but with a little imagination and an appreciation of the spirit of the times, we can perhaps still hear the distant calls of the Yiddish shopkeepers out on Kupiecka Street hawking their wares to curious passersby.

Chaim’s project is also a kind of completed circle, as his HSO father passed away in the recent past. The acknowledgments on the website begin with Chaim’s father: “First, to my father Frank Kutnicki, z"l, who, along with hundreds of thousands of other children of Holocaust victims, grew up in torment knowing (and not knowing) what atrocities had been committed to their parents.” In our interview Chaim shares a narrative of anxiety-ridden gaps in reality passed from survivor grandparents to HSO father to himself. Chaim’s genealogical research helps him feel a greater sense of mastery over these gaps and gives him a feeling of closure that links him to his father:

my father would tell me about how, you know, in the middle of the night, they would wake up to their parents screaming, […] because they were having all sorts of nightmares and stuff. And no one knew and no one understood. Only the parents understood each other, but – but – but the kids, they couldn’t believe, because they grew up in New York, what everyone was screaming about and what nightmares they were having. So that was – so that was the – part of this mystery that was kind of passed down to me… […] there are other personal elements of, you know, my father passing away recently – that he never… realized who – he never got this chance to understand this part of his family history, and so I kind of got to do that for him.
Chaim tells me that for his uncles, as well, the website he created is “closure for them, to some extent – to finally know about – about their family.”

Joseph conveys the urge he feels to facilitate a recovery of lost knowledge that might provide therapeutic closure for himself and unite him with his survivor grandmother:

when I met someone in Israel, I met someone who was also... from Bialystok, and I was, like, very interested in maybe, like, if, like, her family hid with my grandmother for two years. Things like that. It’s just, like - I want to be able to, like - for me, it would be amazing to be able to find information for my grandmother to know... Like, to - to have some sort of understanding. I think that she has closure with everything. I think for me, it’s just - for closure for me…

HSG David’s travels to Poland with his father helped him to “see the places that are really as far as I can go back....in my family history…to walk the walk.....understand a bit more about where my freedom comes from and the strength that my dad's dad had.”

He emphasizes the importance of knowing one’s past and feels unsettled by Zionist rejections of the past:

I've always felt it's crucial to understand where you've come from, if you want to have a chance at figuring out where you're going. It always seemed crazy to me that everyone went to visit Israel, but few went to Eastern Europe. Many people don't seem to deal well with the messy and sad past, and yet are ready to embrace bright futures. That doesn't make sense to me. I think I've had much exposure/training in trying to gauge the big picture, which requires understanding a lot of sadness, and learning about a lot of things in the world that suck. And sure, my family is very honest. And I was lucky that my grandfather instilled a sense of...well, he wanted to tell his story, to know where/how we came from and wanted questions. We're question askers.

The message that stays with him from his processing is both empowering and cautionary regarding the individual’s limits in the face of collective forces:

it was very empowering in that sense. but also, it reminds me of the weakness, that none of us are truly safe (not Jews, I'm saying anyone) public opinion can be very strong and dangerous and I am not someone who can control it/ I can do
small things to try and make my community better, but I cannot stave off the enormity of... social movement

A number of other HSG returned to Eastern Europe to trace their family’s lived history and to learn about the destruction of Jewry where it took place. Marshall describes an uneasiness being in Germany on the government-funded trip he took to visit his grandmother’s childhood home. This discomfort was offset by his German host’s kindness and hospitality. Tom, Isaac, and Danny Ghitis mentioned participating in March of the Living with differing reactions. Isaac, a masculine and defense-oriented young man, describes crying at Treblinka in a moment of cathartic, socially sanctioned release. Tom describes being drawn to Israel in the several days spent there at the Zionist-bent conclusion of the trip. Danny Ghitis describes the trip as traumatizing and problematic in its framing of the Holocaust narrative as moving from a dark Europe of ashes to a utopian Israel presented as a land of light.

Completing Circles and Bridging Gaps

Although HSG often have more privilege, mobility, opportunity, and security than did survivors and HSO in their youth, many HSG who remain invested in the legacy of survival endure a consequential internal struggle to find meaning, belonging, happiness, and purpose, which arises in part out of the dissonance between their difficult heritage and their comfortable present lives. There is often also a struggle to gain emotional access to and mutual understanding with these important survivor relatives who often sit across boundaries of trauma, language, and culture. Emotional investment in their Holocaust legacy may put them at odds with their privilege. Simon, associating his grandparents’ hardened values with masculinity, articulates:
Despite the pride that they seem to carry around, their masculinity...they’re missing the sensitivity and kind of have blinders on to a way of living and thinking that I see as inherent to myself. I guess that’s part of the way in which I feel that my family hasn’t quite known me fully, and I realize that I can’t really expect them to, but I’ve always felt different in some way. And I – I’ve come to associate that with privilege pretty strongly. Like, I have this privileged upbringing, which nobody else in my family has had, besides my brother... So they’re not familiar with it, so they can’t relate and they have to learn how to express that... So, like, my – like, my sensitivity, I – I guess I associate with – with the privilege

Emotional or psychological distance between grandson and survivor was a notable theme in HSG positioning and the need to work through third-generation identity.

Isaac compares his survivor grandfather to his other grandfather:

My other grandfather on my mom’s side is a very normal, standard, grandfather/grandson relationship. You know, ball games and whatnot. But my—my grandfather on my dad’s side, was always very...I don’t know what the word is, I guess it’s, uh—I wouldn’t say distant. But he’s always just kind of...something’s in the back of his mind. And so you could tell that, like, he may not have been fully there all the time. [...] It was a bit of a—it was a weird, it was a weird thing. But, I mean, I took whatever I could get, really. And, and ran with it, and I was happy with that. So, like, we would get our haircuts together, things like that. And, uh, we visited him once a year in Miami. And he was, uh, whatever I could get, really, I would be happy with, because he was, uh—I recognized from all the stories how amazing he is. And so I thought to myself, you know, I should—I should take what I can get.

HSG Alan’s only survivor grandparent, his maternal grandfather, was almost entirely inaccessible to him, emotionally. He was not even supposed to call him “Grandpa”:

it was tough enough to have a dialogue with him in general... He was – he was my grandpa, and he obviously loved me, but he wasn’t my grandpa. Nobody – like, my mom didn’t even call him ‘Dad.’ He was [Jake]. [...] I don’t really know why, but he told her, like, ‘You can call me [Jake]’. [...] I called him [Jake]. [...] He didn’t really understand his own strength. He’d, like, squeeze us and, like... pinch our—pinch us and, like... tease us. But that was all he knew how to do. He didn’t really know how to show affection and love [...] he lost so many people that he loved, that it was really hard to let himself get to that level again. And he just experienced so much pain and suffering that that could be why.

---

2 pseudonym

113
Lacking a deep emotional connection to his grandfather or to Jewish identity in general, Alan feels less able to imagine the Holocaust through his relatives’ experiences than through the narratives of persecuted homosexuals, as Alan experiences firsthand what it means to be alienated or disenfranchised for his sexual orientation. However, a close relationship with his grandmother, Jake’s wife, who named Alan her “hero” (his birth gave her motivation to get through her surgeries) keeps him ambivalently tied to his religion and legacy of survival.

Alan’s case is not the typical example of transmitted obligations for family continuity, as the survivor distances himself dramatically from the role of parent and grandfather, almost denying his family entry into his narrative of survival and trauma. Yet the very distance between Jake’s story and Alan’s seems to further emphasize what Alan believes to be the central influence of the Holocaust on his identity: sensitivity and concern for social ethics, as well as an emotional commitment to Jake’s wife, with whom Alan is close. “I can’t put myself in my grandfather’s shoes,” Alan expresses, “because I know that I would never have behaved that way. I feel that […] it’s…more feminine to be fearful than it is to be masculine. And in that sort of situation, I would be very fearful.” Alan’s personal narrative spotlights the disadvantages, anxieties, and discrimination connected to a gay male identity, as well as the guilt-ridden, but warm relationship he maintains with his grandmother, who keeps him connected to Jewish identity and his grandfather’s legacy. Alan’s creative work, as a painting student, attempts to negotiate this potential conflict. He describes two paintings he is working on simultaneously: “a painting of…myself […] sitting in – on my bed, naked, in a dark room, on my phone, like, touching myself” and “a painting of my grandma. […] me
thinking about that…experience of looking into the sun. And the warmth. And the brightness. And…translating that to how I feel about my relationship with my grandmother.”

During the course of our interview, Simon struggles with his ambivalent feelings of pride, guilt, anxiety, defiance, and inadequacy in relation to his maternal grandparents, who are definite role models but also heralds of hard, masculine values that conflict with his own personal ones. His grandparents value Jewish identity, but not Jewish observance or rituals. His grandparents value resilience over emotional openness. He gives one illustrative story about his grandfather after the war:

they lived three doors down from an Orthodox synagogue, and… My grandfather would mow the lawn on Saturday mornings as the Orthodox Jews were walking to shul, because he was, like, you know, just because… he was not Orthodox. Like, ‘I am a Jew and I live in America and I can do what I want. I – I fought for the Israeli army for 10 years. I saved Jews’ lives in a Nazi uniform in the Holocaust.’ […] that story just sticks with me so much… So […] values is the question here. And what I’m kind of getting at here with the story is that there is a mix of values here, right. Like there – there has always been a strong sense of value in Jewish identity and pride in being a Jew. […] A lot of the time it was, you know, opposed to the dogma, like, […] the religiousness, […] was specifically rejected… in that – you know, kind of clinging to the identity and consistently rejecting the… observance element of it.

Simon discusses his own personal struggles with cultural values, expressing resistance to gender categories and confusion about his relationship to Jewish observance and ritual. He imagines that if his grandfather knew he had tried wrapping tefillin, he would have reacted with alarmed disapproval. But ultimately Simon finds it therapeutic to draw connections between himself and his admired grandparents in ways that allow him to assert his own values and needs. We notice together at the end of the interview that, in the very act of rejecting the cultural norms he associates with normative gender and certain Holocaust ethics, Simon channels his grandfather’s character of resisting dogma:
But it’s funny, because, you know, I’m also thinking now, my relationship to most of those cultural norms is similar to my Pop-pop’s relationship with the norms of Orthodoxy […] which he rejected, you know. And those are kind of, like, that’s the gevurah, that’s the strong, dogmatic element of the – of the Jewish life. And what my Pop-pop was embracing by mowing the lawn on Saturday was, you know, ‘What I value about my Jewish identity is – is my freedom and my family.’

Sometimes the seemingly trivial physical or dispositional similarities shared by grandsons and their grandfathers were a source of identity strengthening and therapeutic unification of their history. Gary tells me:

I tried to identify with my Zeyde the most out of anyone in my family, because everyone says ‘you have very…your personality sometimes is like your Zeyde’s.’ And the way people in my family talked about my Zeyde, and the way my father’s friends that grew up with him in Brooklyn talk about my Zeyde…I wish he was still alive today, because he just seemed like such an amazing man; nobody would mess with him. He was a very serious man. He was also the type of man, the way my father’s friends described him, […] He was always the type of man who could just take care of things; he was like a man of action. […] I kind of strive to be like that myself; I try to be a beacon of hope for some of my friends today and my family, I try to be that support for people the way he was to the entire family.

Isaac, who is an observant Modern Orthodox Jew, recounts his father’s claim that amid all of the horrors of the Holocaust, Isaac’s grandfather questioned God’s existence only once – a detail that motivates Isaac to maintain his own unwavering faith.

**Public Discourse**

The decisions scholars make regarding which stories to tell matter greatly for the kinds of positions and subject models we make socially available and for the public, intellectual understanding of history. Public representations gave survivors coherent narratives through which to comprehend and relate their private, inassimilable traumas to the extent that was possible. A major leap in the late twentieth century was the
integration of the personal and the subjective into the political, collective realms of U.S. society. Considering traditional and developmental factors that have characterized the public sphere as male and the private sphere as female, it is not surprising that this inside-out work was championed by feminist consciousness raising groups in the 1970s and projects like Helen Epstein’s *Children of the Holocaust*. Arlene Stein notes that the organized, discourse-generating HSO groups and politics of the 1970s were led and attended mostly by women (Stein 2009).

Pascale Bos emphasizes the human tendency to read autobiographically, to privilege stories in which we can imagine ourselves favorably. Gary Weissman writes that the domination of Holocaust studies by male scholars has led to a predominantly male Holocaust literary canon, because these scholars more readily related to and valued male testimonies (Bos 2003, 57). Considering that the communication of Holocaust narratives is, according to research on HS families, predominantly female, how is it that in the postwar years males both dominated public narratives and remained personally silent? This question brings me to discuss the important distinctions between public, cultural memory and personal, embodied memory.

Jan Assmann separates “communicative” memory from “cultural” memory; the former relates to personal, direct experience and affective transmission across three to four generations of survivor descendants, while the latter relates to formalized, collective, ritual, and archival embodiments of the memory (Assmann 1997 in Hirsch 2008, 110). Cultural memory provides accessible narrative models to shape discursive practice and personal positioning. It is the territory of the historical and the “objective.” It is the public stage traditionally reserved for males of power. Assmann theorizes that while
communicated memory is inter-generational, constituted via inner workings of the family, collective memory is trans-generational, mediated by shared symbolic systems, rather than by embodied experiences of home and family (Assmann in Hirsch 2008, 110).

Public discourse often reflects the needs and ideals of its political context. Many have written on the ways in which the Israeli state favored the narrative of public, heroic resilience in the historical and cultural representations of its pre-1960s formative years and how it thus silenced and marginalized its Holocaust refugees (Solomon 1995 in Shmotkin et al. 2011). Raz Yosef has connected this favoring with Zionism’s gender project, a project of shaping a masculine Jewry. Interestingly, as the U.S. expanded its discursive activity to include ethnic and victim identity tropes in the 1960s, Israeli discourse became increasingly constricted as the nation entered prolonged states of war. David Grossman characterizes Israeli discourse of this period as increasingly coarse, slogan-ridden, passifying, and restricting. Israeli preoccupation with the Holocaust as identity symbol, evinced through public memorial days, school curricula, higher value placed on the aging survivors, and media discourse, has been increasing since the 1960s.

For better or worse, even personal narrative and discourse are produced in part by the symbols and tropes made available by the discourse generated in the public sphere. Aleida Assmann writes, “we cannot think, communicate, and act outside of symbolic and cultural frames” (Assmann 2008, 69). Judith Butler articulates the phenomenological idea that “the very possibility of linguistic agency is derived from the situation in which one finds oneself addressed by a language one never chose” (Butler 2005, 53). Marianne Hirsch writes, “family life, even in its most intimate moments, is entrenched in a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection
and by a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the transmission of individual and familial remembrance” (Hirsch 2008, 114). Art Spiegelman can only tell his father’s story in *Maus* by relying upon public images of Auschwitz and contested historical details about the camps. 24-year-old HSG David tells me, “I’m told [my grandfather’s] experience was much like that Daniel Craig movie.” If Holocaust memory, like all collective memory, is increasingly homogenized through generations of cultural and historical lenses, and we are increasingly aware of its constructedness, the question becomes: how do we approach and employ such constructed memory?

Marianne Hirsch (2008) believes that in the case of the Holocaust, we must infuse public memory with personal, embodied memory. Even on the collective level, the Holocaust must remain somewhat emotional and unknowable, as it was for the families that experienced it. How can the Holocaust memory rely on public symbols when its collective history is obstructed by Nazi destruction of archives, lost documents, and burned records, and when “multiple ruptures and radical breaks introduced by trauma and catastrophe inflect inter- and trans-generational inheritance”? (Hirsch 2008, 111). Hirsch advocates for the personalizing work of postmemory, which, whether experienced as direct or affiliative, has the potential to reactivate public, institutional, and historical memory with self-conscious personal investment, with empathetic involvement in available narratives. This kind of investment is inherently gendered, as it favors emotional positionality and interconnectedness, values abjected in masculine subject positioning. Hirsch asserts that as time and distance weaken links to direct exposure to traumatic effects, “familial and, indeed, feminine tropes rebuild and reembody a
connection that is disappearing, and thus gender becomes a powerful idiom of remembrance in the face of detachment and forgetting” (124).

Pascale Bos (2003) stresses positionality in Holocaust studies via the silencing power of certain positions, such as the survivor subject, who may be reduced to a saintly authority. It is important, she warns, not to lose sight of the notion of identity as inherently “problematic, always in flux, always under construction,” regardless of how close or authentic one’s ties are to the Holocaust. Additionally, one must self-monitor and analyze one’s own affective investment in the Holocaust so as not to over-identify and erase boundaries between one’s own subjectivity and that of the survivor.

Like the larger Jewish community today, HSG diverge on whether to privilege a celebration of survival or a mourning of loss. HSG Kevin expresses frustration with those who see the Holocaust as explicitly empowering or as inducing celebration:

there are some people that talk about it, and they talk about how the Holocaust was empowering. And I always think that’s a little bit weird. […] Because I don’t think it’s empowering. […] Yeah, some people were talking like, ‘Oh, they survived it. And now it’s like every day is a holiday, because they lived through it’. And it doesn’t make sense to me, because you – you – it seems like cognitive dissonance. To go through something so terrible, and then they’re describing their grandparent, you know, are making a life … like, they’re celebrating. I guess, like, how they’re celebrating life and not mourning. I get, like, that it’s, like, we need to balance the book. So I remember, like, listening to something like that and, like, all right, it doesn’t – it didn’t jive with, like, my family interpretation or, like, my family – my grandma was always very upset and bitter and – not – she wasn’t an upset and bitter person, but she was never willing to ever forgive the Germans. […] Or have some sort of, like… I can just get past this and I’ll smile everyday. So, when I heard other people – when I heard another person telling the story of how her, like, grandparents were always smiling everyday and, like, you know, counting their blessings, it seemed a little bit, like… Maybe that’s just how they coped with it, but that struck me as, like, really different from how my grandma thought of it.

Kevin’s discomfort resonates with larger cultural tensions about how to acknowledge the insurmountable cataclysm of the Holocaust in such a way that is both respectful to
survivors’ experiences and productive for generating both vitality and remembrance in future generations. We see this question arise in response to such controversial decisions as Jewish artist and HSO Jane Korman’s decision in 2009 to publicize a video of her children and survivor father dancing on Auschwitz’s grounds to Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive.”3

CONCLUSION

As the survivors pass on and the Holocaust becomes increasingly historical, it is important neither to trivialize it nor to over-identify with or exploit its symbolic power. HSG live in an era both fearful of apathetic forgetting and sharply conscious of Holocaust exploitation and misappropriation. Bearing legacies of monumental atrocity and survival, HSG feel it is their task to keep a foot critically in the present as they carry forward the pain, absence, trauma, strength, pride, and celebration of those who survived. Reinvesting in embodied, empathetic positioning may preserve the emotional salience of traumatic heritages. Yet doing so often requires a departure from traditional masculine ideals that privilege reason over emotion, self-preservation over interconnectedness. HSG who question or challenge American masculinity may more ably empathize on their own terms. For some others, the traditionally masculine qualities of protection, authority, and self-control are central to how they position themselves in relation to their heritage.

Though gender is not always a salient issue for those HSG struggling with post-traumatic identifications or ambivalence about their heritage, it is a useful springboard for discussing how post-Holocaust subjectivities may struggle with or accommodate the symbols of dominant discourses. By suggesting similarities between internalizing trauma and internalizing gender identity, I have attempted to argue that a post-traumatic subjectivity, like a gendered one, involves a kind of severed relationship with real
personal possibilities, a negation of all aspects of self that conflict with an alternate reality, whether this be the “rational,” symbolic one or the emotional, semiotic one. Like the acting out that results from inassimilable traumatic experience, continuous performance of prescribed gender roles works to ward off internal, suppressed threats to a subject’s social coherence. A postmemorial HSG, preserving his HSO parent’s unprocessed crypt and sensitive to her anxieties, may come to reject masculine aspects that forbid the carrying of parents’ emotional worlds, as these aspects threaten his sense of self. Or he may make a radical break with the parent and transition into a masculine identity defined by this break, as HSG Kevin described doing after a series of unsuccessful romantic relationships. An emotionally independent HSG may follow the normative path of American masculine development and come to his interest in the Holocaust as an adult, through the “rational” tools of history or the socially sanctioned emotional revival of a grandparent’s death or of starting his own family.

Though disparate, HSG are united by a feeling of serious obligation or privilege – a kind of designation to responsibly handle the representative position of bearing the Holocaust legacy, no matter how simple or painfully fraught this designation is for the individual HSG. Postmodern sensibilities emphasize self-conscious subject positions responsibly aware of the discourses and ideas that shape and limit them. The male voices I bring together in this postmodern era show that grandsons of survivors increasingly see their own subject positions as constructed by competing social discourses, such as commercialized masculinity, family mythology and survival stories, and personal values regarding individual fulfillment. HSG Isaac notes the way he plays into a male role marketed by American television and culture; Evan Kleinman and David stress that
gender is fake and worth resisting; a great-nephew of the famed Bielski partisans distances himself from the machismo-generating aspects of his great-uncles’ exalted story. Contradictions between discourses of equal personal value invite emotional stress and vulnerability to post-traumatic identifications for HSG, such as for Simon who juggles his grandfather’s emphasis on emotional reservation and his own yearning for emotional openness and expression.

As a group, HSG are more comfortably American than were HSO. Their development and their lives stand farther away from the survivors than did HSO. And their schools and sociocultural environments often validate Holocaust heritage and carefully monitor Holocaust education. Whether due to greater familial distance from survivors or due to more comfortable embodiment of contemporary American norms and sociocultural privileges, most HSG are, rather than enmeshed with survivors, applying their heritage to their own present lives. But greater environmental and familial buffers also create considerable schisms in HSG experience, separating those who come to relate to the Holocaust as history versus as embodied family trauma. HSG who feel traumatized by Holocaust education, sensitive to their parents’ inherited anxieties, or socially marginal appear more at risk for experiencing the Holocaust heritage as directly embodied, burdensome, and as a source of personal struggle. These latter HSG are more likely to have been sensitive children and to have a female HSO parent – perhaps a testament to the emotional receptivity of children to their mothers’ feelings and semiotic cues. An embodied relationship to family trauma may come with its difficulties and a continued need for working through. Without sufficient “masculine” positioning, or sufficient reconciliation with the discourses of the symbolic, social realm of “dominant
fiction,” it is difficult to obtain the individuation, subjective confidence, and instrumentality that protect the self from enmeshment, obscurity, or collapse in the process of working through traumatic effects. But it is important to remain critical of dominant discourses and aware of their influence on subject experience. Insisting on maintaining empathetic, living relationships to the Holocaust, Marianne Hirsch and others resist those discourses that begin to situate the Holocaust as disembodied history.

The discursive politics of the 1970s and 80s largely worked to provide subject cohesion, social legibility, and empowerment to the insufficiently articulated position of the postmemorial HSO (Stein 2009). The 2000s have extended these symbolic benefits to HSG as they form their own “3G” groups and organizations. An officially recognized and validated identity position offers a level of distance, strength, and safety from the emotional threat of traumatized (grand)parents. A strong, fixed identity also sits well with traditional American masculinity, which values rational instrumentality and independence and wards off the vulnerable messiness of openness and emotional interconnectedness. But when it perpetuates a repression of post-traumatic effects, such as anxiety, mistrustfulness, and interpersonal difficulty, it may lend to posturing a fixed, defensive post-Holocaust masculinity built on maintaining control of its own internal crypts or threats. Those attuned to postmodern sensibilities understand selfhood as a constructed and performed position in flux, rather than as a fixed identity. For them, personal positioning requires continuous learning, questioning, communicating, and reevaluating. Sometimes with the aid of creative processes, historical research, or self-narration, these HSG come to see the Holocaust as important to but non-definitive of who they are. They strive to see the shades of gray and intersections that offer them the
potential for being both post-Holocaust and present-minded, vital human beings. The postmodern zeitgeist offers critical reexamination of how and why subjects become limited or removed from their own potential to operate in the multiple discourses that characterize a particular time and place.
Appendix

Information Form

Grandsons Who Remember: Intersections of Holocaust Heritage and Contemporary Male Identities
Golan Moskowitz, Student Researcher, MA Candidate
Near Eastern & Judaic Studies and Women’s & Gender Studies, Brandeis University

1. Who is responsible for this study? The study is being conducted by Golan Moskowitz (518-330-7642 or Golan24@brandeis.edu), a graduate student at Brandeis University in Waltham, MA. It is under the supervision of Dr. ChaeRan Freeze (781-736-2987 or cfreeze@brandeis.edu), Professor of Near Eastern Judaic Studies and Women’s & Gender Studies.

2. What is the aim of the study? This research will investigate contemporary Jewish male experiences of Holocaust heritage. Specifically, it will explore the position of survivors’ grandsons who willfully honor or identify with the narratives of their family Holocaust histories. Men who consciously identify with the suffering, trauma, or strength of their survivor grandparents may offer rich insights into how heritages of vulnerability and endurance influence contemporary Jewish masculinities.

3. Why was I chosen? You were chosen either due to your publicly self-listed participation in a third-generation organization or via word-of-mouth from a friend, family member, or other community reference. Subjects for this research are Holocaust survivors’ grandsons who either value or identify with their grandparents’ Holocaust experiences in some significant way.

4. What will be involved in participating? After you sign the release form, you will have the option of then taking a short break, of scheduling the interview for a later time, or of proceeding to the interview immediately. In-person interviews will then take place in a location decided upon by you and the researcher (Golan Moskowitz). Location options may include your home, workplace, synagogue, school, or any other location that feels sufficiently safe and private to both you and the researcher. If you opt for an online interview, that will take place in a real-time Internet messaging program agreed upon by you and the researcher (i.e. Skype, Google Chat, or AOL Instant Messenger). Each interview will take approximately 1.5 hours to complete and will be followed by an opportunity for you to ask any additional questions, express any concerns, and state any preferences regarding the researcher’s use of the information, as agreed upon in the release form.

5. What are my rights as a participant? Your participation is completely voluntary. There is no compensation for this interview. You may ask any
6. **Who will know what I say?** The researcher promises confidentiality of this recorded interview and, upon request in the release form, will use a pseudonym (fake name) when quoting or discussing any information from the interview transcript in his work. Additionally, he will not use any information in his work that you ask him not to. Only Golan and Professor Freeze will have access to the transcripts and recordings, which will be kept in a locked container and a private folder on Golan’s computer.

7. **What’s in it for me?** As a participant, you will have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss issues of personal value to you, as well as your own personal position. This may be both difficult and therapeutic. The interviewer, also a grandson of a Holocaust survivor, is committed to being a sensitive and approachable listener, and he is grateful to you for your willingness to help him with his research. You are welcomed to contact him in the future to inquire about his research and to request access to any publications that result from it.

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject please contact the Brandeis Institutional Review Board at [irb@brandeis.edu](mailto:irb@brandeis.edu) or **781-736-8133**.
Informed Consent and Information Release Form

Code #_____________
(For investigator use only)

1) I ______________________________ assert that my age is ______ years and that I have discussed with the investigator Golan Moskowitz the nature and confidentiality of his study. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the interview and the project, and, if asked, those questions were answered to my satisfaction. I have read the information form and understand that I am able to end participation in this study at any point without consequence. I give permission to the investigator Golan Moskowitz to record and transcribe my interview with him through: (please mark one)

_____ video recording of my image and voice
_____ voice recording without my image
_____ text recording via Internet chat (without image or voice)

2) I agree that all rights to the above-selected style of recording (whether audio or video) belong to the investigator Golan Moskowitz. I understand that he will be using a transcribed, edited and written version of interview recordings including this one as the basis of a Masters paper for Brandeis University’s joint MA program in Near Eastern & Judaic Studies and Women’s & Gender Studies.

3) I grant the investigator Golan Moskowitz all rights to use:
(please mark one)

_____ this recording and the text transcribed from this recording
_____ only the text transcribed from this recording

for academic papers, oral presentations, conferences, academic publications, and for any other scholarly purposes. I understand that the transcription process involves minor editing for purposes of clarity and for making spoken language readable (i.e. changing “wanna” to “want to,” fixing distracting grammatical errors, or correcting typos in the case of interviews conducted through Internet messaging).

4) The interview of your transcript will be transcribed, edited and quoted in a way that will protect your identity through the use of a pseudonym. However, if you do wish to be identified, you may initial your consent below:

_______ Use my real name and identity.

_____________________________________                                   ___________________________
Research Participant                         Date

______________________________                                                 ___________________________
Golan Moskowitz, Investigator            Date
518-330-7642 (golan24@brandeis.edu)
Interview Guide

1. BACKGROUND:
   a) Tell me briefly about yourself and your background…
   b) What are a few words that describe your personality?
   c) Education/what did you learn about Holocaust/Zionism
   d) What kind of books/films/classes influenced your understanding of Holocaust survivors?
   e) Family upbringing/childhood
   f) Jewish education/exposure/religion
   g) To what extent did you feel American? Did parents fit in?

2. THIRD GENERATION IDENTITY:
   a) Tell me about your personal relationship with your family Holocaust history…
   b) What got you interested?
   c) To what extent are you interested?
   d) Which relatives experienced it?
   e) Who connected you to that history? How much authority does that person have for you?
   f) What do you feel or think about it (the first emotion or thought in response to meditating on that history)?
   g) How do you situate yourself in that history? Is there one grandparent or family member in particular that you pity, admire, or identify with in that history? Tell me about that story.
   h) To what extent does that interest influence your identity? Has identifying with the Holocaust heritage changed or shaped anything about your life (i.e. course of action of way of thinking)? How would you describe the personal effects of identifying through it?
   i) How many other 3G-ers do you know?

3. GENDER IDENTITY
   a) Describe your sense of your own gender. How does your gender identity compare to that of other male peers or family members?
   b) What do you think makes a man masculine? What is your definition of masculinity?

4. GENDERED RELATIONSHIP TO HERITAGE:
   a) To what extent is your heritage a sensitive issue for you?
   b) How much does being male affect the way that you identify with your grandparents’ experience or how that history affects you?
   c) How, if at all, does your gender identity and society’s expectations of male gender affect the process of honoring fragile or emotional family narratives for you?
   d) What does embracing family heritage (whether the strong or delicate aspects of it) do for you emotionally, personally, or psychologically?
   e) To what extent does connecting with your heritage affect how you feel about your gender identity?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Generations.” PhD diss., School of Psychology and Counseling. Queensland University of Technology.


