

Dignity and Defiance:  
The Resilience to Repair and Rebuild in Response to Despair

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Scholarly attention within the humanities and social sciences has converged on aspects of trauma and its aftermath, especially the effect of trauma on personal and cultural formations of identity (Brenner, 2004; Garland, 1998; Herman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; La Capra, 2001; Van der Kolk, McFarland, & Weisaeth, 1996). A communication lens applied to stories in the direct voice of those who have actually endured trauma and its aftermath can provide unique insight into the quality of these ordeals and the processes by which they are experienced, incorporated, mediated, constructed, and transcended. As much as the stories of trauma are riveting, we are interested through our study of trauma and communication in how sense is made of trauma and how, as researchers, we engage with such information. This article traces the practices of researchers to understand how resilience is communicated, utilizing a collaborative team approach to study the deepened life histories of Holocaust survivors and their family members.

We focus on those whose task it is to listen to the words and the silences in survivor families, the silences because the legacy of not talking about deeply held painful secrets is often as powerful as the impact of telling the trauma. To be more accurate, we turn our attention to the multiple listeners who comprise what we call the Transcending Trauma Project analysis teams. The Transcending Trauma Project (TTP), under the auspices of the Council for Relationships in the Division of Couple and Family Studies in the Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at Jefferson Medical College, has examined coping and adaptation in Holocaust survivors and their families. The project has conducted 275 in depth life histories of survivors, their children, and grandchildren in order to understand how they were affected by the Holocaust yet managed to rebuild their lives after the war. These life histories have yielded identifiable family patterns that contribute to healthy or problematic development in survivor families.

Here we examine the process of analyzing the Transcending Trauma Project interview data. Analysis is done in the following way: first, the original one-on-one interview is conducted with a survivor or family member. Then, after the interview is transcribed, the analysis team is formed to include the original interviewer (when possible), a clinician, and a third member who is typically an adult child of Holocaust survivors but not related to the family under scrutiny. The team members may thus have several roles, e.g., as a therapist and a child of survivors. One of the three team members serves as the facilitator for the triad and, as such, listens to the tapes and is tasked with hearing the words, noting the silences, and raising questions about the affect that pervades the interview. If the original interviewer is a member of the triad, she or he can comment on the interaction with the survivor or family member during the interview itself. In addition to the facilitator reviewing the tapes, the other two triad members read the written transcript and complete an extensive protocol developed by the research team for the project that requires them to parse the interview according to the project's themes, among which include family dynamics, cultural values, meaning systems, coping and survival mechanisms, faith, and identity. These team members write page numbers and quotes on the photocopied protocol to indicate where in the interview transcript certain themes appear. There are, then, two sets of tapes and transcripts--those of the interviews and those of the triadic analyses, plus the protocols completed by the triad members.

Before we continue our discussion of the triadic analysis, let us say a few words about the interviews themselves. Survivors are asked in the interviews about the methods they used to cope, and the ways in which their beliefs, attitudes, and values affected their will to live and to start over and rebuild. Circular questioning (Hoffman, 1993; Tomm, 1987a; 1987b) is used to probe not only the respondents' internal experiences, but also their understanding of the internal

experiences of significant others, be it about the war, about post-war life, faith, memories, strategies for coping and adapting, and how they understand the impact of the Holocaust on their lives. This is a powerful, often affirming experience (also see Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, about questioning strategies and the dialogic process) for the interviewees.

Because the Transcending Trauma Project interviews ask questions that others have not posed before about how survivors rebuilt their lives, the interviewees are often speaking from their inner selves for the first time. Goldenberg (2002; 2003) has found that interviewees and interviewers have been transformed by the process, and triad members are similarly affected as the research proceeds. Interviewing and analysis are clearly not seen as neutral, consistent with the shift from an empirical stance to an interpretive one (Creswell, 1998; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). Conquergood (1991) reminds us with the work of Geertz (1983), Turner (1986), and Clifford (1988) of the cultural performativity of lived experience and, indeed, through our study of the narrative data (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006) we see that interviewees and researchers alike construct their interpretations of events.

In the analysis process, we address the gaps that Briggs elucidated in his cogent analysis of the need for methodological refinement in how interview data are utilized, so as to prevent “the danger of coming up with narrow or erroneous interpretations” (Briggs, 1986, p. 105). One important step, according to Briggs, is to constantly recheck conclusions based on interviews against perceptions that other participants bring to the analysis. This avoids what he calls “the commonsensical, unreflexive manner in which most analyses of interview data are conducted” (Briggs, 1986, p. 102). Instead, he views the interview and its analysis “as a social interaction and a communication event” (Briggs, 1986, p. 102) as the interviewer, the facilitator, and all research team members engage fully with the data material. Because of the difficult material

shared in the interviews, which we did not want to revisit with this mainly elderly population, we did not go back to the interviewees to reconfirm our findings. However, each participant received a copy of their interview transcripts and tape, and all interviewees were invited to a TTP conference where preliminary findings were publicly shared and discussed.

The authors of this study, each of whom served as participants of various analysis triads and themselves experienced the impact of the dialogic analysis protocol, became interested in how collaboration improves the analysis of the Transcending Trauma Project interview data. We believe that the methodological choice to use triad team analysis, what we term multi-layered tellings, has an impact on how it is possible to understand the communication of trauma in new ways. One author, a daughter of two Polish-born Holocaust survivors, found that her involvement as a triad group member ensured a more nuanced view of responses and attitudes that were not readily available to the others. At the same time, her assumptions about normative family dynamics based on her status as a second-generation offspring of Holocaust survivors were challenged by the case discussions. Thus, a deepened view emerged of the human response to trauma with finer gradations along thematic options. Each story retains its uniqueness while finding a place on a spectrum of hope.

The other author, a daughter of Jewish, American-born parents whose families had emigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe before World War II, joined the project through an interest in how Holocaust narratives are told to different listeners. She prefers to be the facilitator of the triad teams so that she can actually listen to the voices of the survivors and their family members on the audiotapes, feeling that she gains more insight into the emotions and sensemaking of interviewees this way. She has learned that the legacy of the Holocaust experience is transmitted in a way that is more pervasive than what she absorbed growing up

Jewish in the United States, not of a survivor family, yet she can bring to the triads insights about some issues that go beyond direct legacy to a more generalized Jewish or even immigrant experience.

The general question we set for ourselves was the following: how is communication, particularly communication of trauma, differentially observed or analyzed when collaboration is the *modus operandi*, versus when one individual is the sole researcher or observer. This issue emerged as we began to work as members of triad teams, intensely reviewing the Transcending Trauma Project interview data with our colleagues and utilizing the project's protocol of analysis, and later as we began to look more closely at the analysis process. The analysis itself is active, co-created by the researchers as they review the interviews, which themselves represent a co-construction of narratives.

While the process of analysis is constitutive, the triad team does not lay claim to a new reality, but rather a deepened one that is grounded in the interview and the experience of the interviewee. The triad process begins with impressions of the interviewee, and then moves into how the interviewee describes him or herself, other family members, and his or her experiences. The approach is a systematic one that always starts with the survivor, and then moves outward to other family members. The interview text is at the core of any further analysis. There is also an underlying commitment to trying to understand the individual within her or his family system, as connections are drawn by members of the team. Because we have interviews with multiple family members, conjectures can be corroborated by close reading of the interview data. A completed family analysis and summary typically involves two to six family members, although the database includes several larger extended families. At the end of the protocol, the triad reiterates the themes that emerged as most salient in the interview of each family member, and,

once all the family members are analyzed, across all of the interviews in one family. The impressions and the themes are, it seems to us, examples of collaborative interpretation and sensemaking that allow the triad members to enter the life and world of the interviewee, while holding their stance as researchers (see Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). We include all impressions and themes at first, regardless of whether they are addressed more or less vociferously, because we are interested in the texture and variety of all responses. A final list of themes is generated at the end of the analysis of an interview, to capture the process of transformation as the researchers discuss the entirety of the interviews.

The systemic thinking inherent to the project allows the triad members to keep questioning initial impressions until consensus is reached on key patterns. The final list of themes are the ones that resonate throughout the interview or that the team feels are important to note as characterizing this interview. Examining the analysis transcripts shows that defining metaphors emerge over time through the repeated triad sessions, as sense is made of the family system. Among the Transcending Trauma Project team members, these descriptions comprise a set of images that give shape to the large body of qualitative data the project has amassed. The images crystallize the team's understanding of how particular individuals coped. They might become examples that illustrate a point for further writing or analysis, such as: "Building life on the fault line," for how one survivor sought to rebuild amidst a drastically changing world; "the girl at the screen door," about a young girl who watched from the door to her family's small inn as invaders came into the town and as residents fled; and "on a different plane," representing how one survivor adapted by perceiving things very differently from those around her. As the TTP team members talk about eventual book projects, they joke that these phrases can serve as chapter titles. They might also indicate "tags" for the research ideas that TTP members are

working on. For instance, team members have engaged in research on the mediating parent, mother-daughter relationships, family secrets, tolerance, and faith.

As triad members engage with the interview texts and begin to compare analyses, what emerges is the evolution of a process of communication among team members that, in turn, has concomitant influences on conclusions ultimately reached about the families in the project. In other words, new layers of possible meanings are unraveled and rewoven leading to results that are unanticipated, exciting, sometimes even exhilarating. Apart from the nature of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, there is evident a now conscious listening and reflexive sharing mandated by the participatory nature of the analysis. As members of the team take up a researcher stance, they are carried to a far richer set of possible interpretations about a particular family and its communicative practices, confirming Fitch's view that "data and analysis should include consideration of inferences and interpretations, as well as concrete phenomena" (1994, p. 36).

Although she takes a fairly narrow view of qualitative research, Fitch's point is well taken that we ought to "privilege the inferences of subjects or informants over those of the researcher, to the extent that can be accomplished" (Fitch, 1994, p. 37). The TTP interviews privilege the perspectives of the interviewees and do not question the veracity of the Holocaust accounts that are given, for it is the meanings attached to those memories that most concern us. The triad, with its members' varying perspectives, provides another set of interpretations, building on the corroboration afforded by consensus from the different standpoints that triad members bring. The collaborative methodology we employ provides an opportunity to reveal a multiplicity of interpretations and viewpoints, something missing in a single interpretation. It also provides an opportunity for each member of the team to test assumptions and interpretations



against those of other team members. Because of the composition of the teams, we feel we have multiple perspectives to offer on the data. This helps to ensure that the people who speak or whose speech is analyzed in the text gain their full multidimensionality through the analysis process. As a team, we feel that we have addressed the concerns of Greenspan (1998) and others who ask for a consideration of the interplay of survivors' narratives with their perceptions of who their listeners are. The constitution of the triad team forms a coherent and comprehensive holding environment in which to contain and create interpretive possibilities hitherto left unsaid, even as they are known by the survivors whose lives we are studying.

In this article, we describe a sense-making process in which triadic teams of researchers re-examine transcripts of interviews with Holocaust survivors and their family members to develop new insights about how the interviewees dealt with trauma and rebuilt their lives. The emphasis on co-constructed understanding of coping and communicative strategies within these families, whereby interviewers and interviewees reach a more in-depth articulation of these legacies, results in a different (and, we would argue, richer) view of trauma and its aftermath. Themes such as those that emerge from the interviews sampled here were compelling to the triadic team members, and the discussion and analysis of the research findings in the framework of the team analytic process sparked further questioning and elaboration based on the experiences and backgrounds of the researchers present on the team. While team members explore their own serious issues while encountering the survivor family through the interview data, all along it is the forcefulness of the data that remains our major focus. Any measure of self-disclosure or self-exploration is welcome, but only in the service of clarifying the power of the voices of our interviewees. Thus, this research protocol invites resolute reflexive team

process on behalf of uncovering more complex interpretations of interview data, while never compromising the significance of the interview materials first and foremost.

The triad method of analysis is a constantly reflexive process, where the initial perceptions of each individual contributor are questioned over and over again. Not only does this approach, based in the layering of subjective responses to the data, break down the “otherness” of the survivor; it also naturally helps members of the analysis team maintain and bring forward their own humanness in relation to the life stories being examined. While this co-constructionist perspective is neither new nor limited to multiple researchers, it is an approach that to our knowledge has not been utilized before to understand the intergenerational transmission of trauma in Holocaust survivor families. Our intent throughout this process is to activate empathic immersion in and attunement with the reality of the interviewees in our study (Kohut, 1959; Mitchell & Black, 1995). In the triad situation, then, we hope to ultimately reach the human connections that link researcher to subject, listener to teller, and witness to survivor. A clear expectation of triad participants is that they engage their own personal histories as they struggle to understand the families they study. Triad members make associations to their own lives as they shift focus back and forth between generations in one family, between interviewer and interviewee, between interviewee and researcher. In the sections that follow, we offer several examples.

The evolution of how an interviewee comes to be understood and described by the triad analysis team is very poignantly and powerfully exemplified in almost all cases within the project’s corpus of analyses. In one family, as the team continued to unravel the on-the-surface behaviors and attitudes of Sidney, an adult son of survivors, the portrait of this man shifted radically. Sidney is known widely in his geographic region, and those who have heard him speak

can see him as loud and brash. He immediately polarizes people because of his extreme political views that he will raise whenever he can. His views come from his deep convictions, but interactionally they can get in the way of relationships. In this family, Sidney and his survivor mother were interviewed. We learn through the interviews that Sidney's father (who had died long before) was cold and unaffectionate, while the mother was supportive, but continued to treat him as a child. Through the analysis process, the team, according to one member, began "allowing him to be a more complex person.." (ACOS SKM, p.39)<sup>1</sup>. The interviewer, also a member of the analysis team, responds and is followed by the others:

I: More human than he would appear.

C: And working hard to respond to his life circumstances.

COS: I feel he's very three-dimensional. (ACOS SKM, p. 39)

These conclusions are all quite different from the assessments brought to the team by each investigator in earlier stages of the analysis when the responses to Sidney's life decisions and behavioral choices had not yet been fully developed and shaped through the collaborative analysis and personal reflection that marks the triad process.

Sidney was initially described in the triad meeting as "extremely intense" (p. 1),

I: The conversations are always about politics, constantly about politics. You can try to bring in other conversations, but it always comes back to politics...and how the papers are always one-sided...and he is OBSESSED, absolutely obsessed, and driven, and works around the clock....(ACOS SKM, p. 1)

One of the team members reported on his attendance at a Passover holiday meal:

He was so antsy....He couldn't wait till it was over.... he was very impatient, he was going like this (tapping his fingers on the table). He was yawning. And we said...this is awful. (ACOS SKM, p.2)

He is seen here as impatient and unlikable, especially because he doesn't seem to appreciate the contributions of the children at the Passover Seder, a holiday ritual meal that especially encourages participation of the younger generations.

Because of the systemic path taken by the research team toward elucidation of themes and metathemes, the team members developed more empathy and understanding through the process of circular questioning through the analysis. This technique, the same one that is used in collecting the interview data, is similarly employed in the triad process to encourage moments of self-reflection to be returned to the group, and then explored and changed again. For example, in this analysis, a triad member asks:

COS: What does his wife do with that? Do you know at all from your [interaction] with them? I'm curious. (ACOS SKM, p.5)

Or, on page 6,

COS: What did she do...when he was so antsy?

Further on, the members query each other about their interpretations of Sidney, first about Sidney's relationship with his father:

C: Do you see him as tough on his father as he perceives his father being on him? (p. 14)....

I: Do you think [Sidney] feels this way? That he's not going to get bumped off, or nothing's ever going to happen to him? I wonder if he worries about himself.” (ACOS SKM, p. 34)

This process of clarification is explored by Bion (1961, reprinted 2004), who has contributed an insightful synthesis of individual and group behaviors to explain how “what the individual says or does in a group illumines both his own personality and his view of the group . . .” (p. 50). In the triad group, comments are shared, reverberations are articulated, and there is a dynamic, ongoing exchange that offers different lenses on the data because the divide between researcher and researched is broken down, crossed over, and reconsidered.

In a second example, the triad seeks to understand a woman who was on the first Kindertransport from Germany to England. At first the researchers see her as very self-assured and assertive. One triad member finds her charming and likeable. She has a sense of purpose, giving back to the community, helping displaced children find families to live with, later earning a degree and running her own children’s organization. The team learns that she lives her life by her father’s message that she would always know the right thing to do. As the researchers proceed through the protocol of analysis highlighting the many positives in her life and personality, they realize that the woman, let’s call her Edith, while incredibly resilient, also cuts herself off from her feelings. The analysis again takes the team beyond the public persona of the interviewee, and beyond the Holocaust experiences discussed in the interview. The group notes that as a child, Edith felt listened to and heard by her parents, involved by them in a nurturing and culturally rich environment, but significantly, she was not able to allow her children to be heard, to act as children. They attribute this to her own childhood and adolescence being stripped from her by the Holocaust. When discussing Edith’s son, who developed many problems as a young adult, a triad member responds,

I: She didn’t know what it was like for children and she didn’t allow them to have a childhood. (AS EPE, p. 13)

Another triad member says:

**COS:** I think the umbrella impression is that this child did not have whom to talk to. In contrast to the mother, who even though she was brought up in a Germanic home, had a childhood of being heard, that was my sense of this child [Edith's son]. This child was not heard. I didn't have a sense that he could really turn to his parents. (AS EPE, p.13)

The triad discusses Edith's reported difficulties with both of her children, her divorce from an uninvolved but very charismatic man, and Edith's ongoing sense of being alone or an outsider. Throughout this analysis, triad members brought in their own experiences with troubled children and divorce, going back and forth between their own outlook on the human experience and their researcher stance in an attempt to bring into focus the narrative of this one survivor. The triad tries to reconcile Edith's accomplished life, despite personal problems with her son and a divorce, with her lack of emotion. From the analysis itself:

**I:** Right. Perfect. There's no repertoire. There's automatic pilot, duty, it could be worse. What's the situation, duty, it could be worse. And it's a healthy role.

**C:** She turns that into adaptable immediately. She doesn't feel the sense of being overwhelmed was my impression of her. As soon as she's overwhelmed, she switches on to adaptable, functional, busy work, work, whatever activity.

**COS:** I don't get the impression that she even is in touch with...When she sees trouble, I don't think that she ever feels overwhelmed. She says in here that there was no time for feelings.

**C:** I intuited from (I)'s question-when she asks a feeling question, she doesn't want to get in touch with it because she might get overwhelmed, so she just goes

into functional, adaptable, factual, rational....For her, I think the Germanic background reinforces that as opposed to a more Eastern European shtetl kind of mentality. I think that's the cultural Germanic...that cultural, ethnic type.

**COS:** Here's a thought--if we're investigating qualities of resilience as distinct from endurance, she is tremendously capable of enduring, but that's not the same as resilient.... Let's consider that maybe what goes into a woman includes a wide range of defense mechanisms.

**C:** I think that's a given almost. Keeping busy is an adaptive defense mechanism. As I just said, you get self-satisfaction. You have social connections. You feel productive, part of society. Keeping busy is a very adaptive mechanism. (AS EPE, pp.51-52)

The triad allows the complexity of human behavior to be revealed and apparent contradictions to be identified and understood. The process allowed the triad to gain the insight about Edith's inability to express emotion. Moreover, this example shows how the researchers move from a specific case to the project level, raising questions to be explored with other interviews and analyses. As particular team members work on other analysis triads and in the monthly TTP meetings, such issues are brought up for discussion. Additional examples might be brought in from other triads, or a recollection from an earlier project meeting. In these ways, again, the TTP methodology allows connections to be made beyond the particulars of individual survivor experiences.

In a third example, attention to the triad members' thinking and verbal exchanges complements the focus on the survivor and the survivor family. The ensuing discussions of the survivor grandmother (Survivor Freida), the adult daughter of survivors (COS Sally) and her two

daughters (GOS Abigail and GOS Jess) create a fuller analysis based on observations and conceptualizations that benefit from the TTP's multi-pronged approach.

In Sally's experience growing up with two survivor parents, the dynamic was one in which the mother told captivating stories of pre-war life and family. Sally's mother survived horrific Holocaust experiences, including degrading sexual episodes and witnessing people being shot and killed all around her. For Sally to have a mother who told delightful stories that brought alive a very different time and place was remarkable. Through the stories, Sally and, in turn, her daughters, were given a sense of almost knowing these people who had long been dead.

Sally also experienced a very critical, angry father, and witnessed a marriage between her parents that was often volatile. Sally herself is a wonderful storyteller, steeped in professional research of her own, but unable to fully live in the present. She divorced her husband, much to the dismay of her father. Transmission and impact of trauma, major foci of TTP, are both explored in the following dialogue among triad members.

C: So as I was saying, I see Sally floundering in the world essentially alone, living alone. And what she knows is this very deep, respected legacy from where she comes. And it is in her memories and it's in her memory through her mother. And the life that she, the larger context that she belongs to has been completely eradicated. And I think that she has been defining herself relative to that legacy, just the next step, and there's nothing in this context and in this world that validates that about her. And I mean that in terms of large, extended, loving, supportive, compassionate family. Intense learning, study, knowledge, practice, steeped in Judaism. ... What I see about this is the slight two degree shift from Frieda's life makes it dysfunctional in today's world. (End tape one) And of



course, the losses, which are of course enormous. But in her functioning, it's a perfect life. You bring it down to the next generation, and it's not a clone of that. There are DNA changes. The slight changes make it completely dysfunctional in this world. So that Sally's very bright and dysfunctional. She's connected in dysfunctional ways. She's been lucky, and pushes it. She has had, she's not indigent, but she's dysfunctional around money. All of the places where her mother excelled she's completely dysfunctional around. In that one generation....

I: So a piece of that is probably the fact that the genetic heritage is both mother and father, and her father had a lot of extremely difficult wired-in problems....

COS: That's what I think. I think it's in the clash between her memory and reality. Her inherited memory and her current reality always clashing.

I: And maybe in that are the seeds of the sort of self-sabotaging.

COS: Yeah. And complete dysfunction. At each turn, the reality hits her and she's not what her mother grew up with.

I: And she's not who they have been.

COS: That's what I'm saying.

C: She's never measuring up. (AS FWA, pp. 21-22)

The triad sees that the grandmother (Survivor Frieda) has transmitted values and memories to her granddaughters. The daughters, interviewed while in their late teens, are clear about their relationship with their mother. The sisters bonded together to face their problematic mother and deal with the legacy of their grandmother's memories. Talking about the granddaughters, the triad comments:

I: They didn't have empathy and attention....The kids didn't have that from mom. They had a little bit from dad later, and they had it from grandmom, and they had it from each other. But they had enough space for her. (Sally) had no space....If you have a mother (Survivor Freida) who talked about the goodness of life before, you would expect to see more positives in (COS Sally), based on the descriptions of her mother. And the real descriptions of her mother. But what we saw in that is that the positive itself was so big, that it squeezed her. You usually think of the negatives as being big and not giving a kid any space. Here we really saw that the positives were so big that it didn't give (COS Sally) enough space....(AGOS AWB, p. 48)

The triad in this case had explored serious issues of their own while encountering the survivor family. Trauma in their own upbringing was discussed alongside the traumas endured and continually communicated by the grandmother (survivor) and COS (mother). At one point in the analysis of the COS, the team turns off the tape because the discussion that ensued was not in service of understanding the survivor family.

Though triad members felt that their conversation at that juncture was highly personal and did not want to share it with others by having it taped, at the beginning of the next meeting, the team expressed their ensuing realization that what appears initially as dysfunction is what is necessary to function under conditions and contingencies of a family's life. Thus, the voice of the survivors and their family members assembled in the interview encounter blends with researchers' thoughts and feelings in communicative contexts shaped by the collaborative methodological process of triadic team analysis. The transcript reads:

I: Continuing analysis of (COS Sally). I would like to make an attempt...to put words on our decompensation last time we met....We all went some place very deeply within ourselves in response to (Sally) and what we were saying about (her), and it's too clear a phenomenon not to comment. . . . (ACOS SWA p. 50-1)

C: Well, I think as I recall last time I was here, I was talking about finding a peaceful place, or finding a place to rest, or something like that. And I connected to her because although my parents weren't larger than life, which is the way I view survivors and what it must be like to live with these people who climbed out of pits and just did these Herculean things, I feel that I absolutely can understand what it's like to grow up with people who fill the air with tension and anger and there's no room, and there's no peace. So what is that like to try to find a peaceful place? So people do it in different ways. And I think that's what a lot of her running might be. And I don't think she's ever going to find it. I just feel like inside her head she's just so unpeaceful. She can't find a place, she can't even visualize a place. And that's very sad. I think that's very sad. (ACOS SWA, p. 52)

The distinct and valuable contribution to the field of the approach we describe advances communication scholarship that employs qualitative methodology. Our emphasis, throughout this work, is on the authorial voice of the research participants who generously agreed to share with us their memories, their descriptive statements, and their feelings. The analytical triad promotes intensive and extensive exploration of the interview data, as described in this article, and the findings are no doubt different because of this commitment to a process of multi-layered collaboration. Paying attention to the array of emotions evoked by the interview necessarily

involves getting in touch with aspects of our own inner lives as researchers, and we argue that the willingness to reach for these rather than seek primarily to ignore them as certain models of research would propose (see Ellis & Berger (2003); Ellis, Kiesinger & Tillmann-Healy (1997) for excellent discussion on these points) makes our work and our results different. However, we are always clear that the interviewees lead the process, and that their voices are the ones we heed. In this research, as in good clinical practice, the underlying assumption is that knowledge resides within the individuals whose lives are being examined.

The differential access to the data that allows the lens on Holocaust families to be opened in new ways, we feel, is an outcome of the triad methodology of the Transcending Trauma Project. This methodology engenders a parallelism between the subject and the researchers, since the subjectivity of each researcher is welcomed and utilized in the creation of new layers of meaning. However, this development does not mean that the researchers are without consciousness of their role as researchers. On the contrary, in the triad process, the configuration introduced by Laub (1995) of the listener as third witness is especially valid. Indeed, each member of the triad team assumes a researcher stance that places that member in a critical pose vis-à-vis the interview data. If anything, the analysis process underlines the importance of maintaining a trained, rigorous perspective, even as one's own experiential moments are incorporated into the ever-evolving narrative. Laub says clearly that there are "three separate, distinct levels of witnessing in relation to the Holocaust experience: the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience, the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others, and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself" (Laub, 1995, p. 61). Indeed, as analysis team members witness each others' witnessing of the survivor family, and the awareness of their role as researchers in studying the relationship between text and interpretation is

heightened, we come upon a reconsideration of the impact of this engaged researcher stance for how communication research may proceed. Our process creates a transparent record of the consensus building process among team members that results in a collaborative effort to generate interpretations and thematic findings.

When we examine the triad analysis transcripts and compare these with the transcripts of the original interviews, we see that researchers, like interviewees, go through waves of engagement. In his piece on the analytic process, Poland (2000) delineates a similar evolution in a therapeutic context when he describes how an analyst engages with a patient by moving between witnessing and interpretation, a choice that is helpful in understanding our triad methodology. He identifies a process by which the analyst maintains a stance that is as an “observing presence” or a “comprehensive witness”, or elsewhere a “beholder...grasping and respecting both the patient’s meaning and the meaningfulness of those meanings....” (Poland, 2000, p.20). This is not unlike the roles that researchers associated with the Transcending Trauma Project have assumed within the context of the triad team as survivor families are discussed and analyzed.

For example, in the analysis of Edith, the researchers built a sense of trust with one another that allows them to explore Edith’s reactions in comparison to their own as they try to understand how and why Edith responded in various ways. The researchers do not devolve into a therapy session among themselves, yet they insert pointed comments and reflections. The triad members call this the birthday party example:

I: Her defense is really intellectualization, studying, giving of herself, having a mission, working, not thinking about the terrible things that happened to her. Page 74, she tried to let people in, and then found she couldn’t trust them, and then

spent life devoted to her work. So page 74 must be ...the birthday party..... It starts on line 19. "My son was two years old...opposite our apartment house was a little park with a sandbox, and so on and a swing set...And the mothers agreed to come at four o'clock for a party." And she put him in for a nap and she told him about the balloons and everything. And four children were invited and when he woke up "it was four o'clock, it was 4:15, 4:30, etc. And no one showed. No one showed. And you can imagine the little two year old, he was able to understand, you know, the disappointment and so on. So the next day I went down to the park and I confronted them. And they were very abashed and they said, 'Oh, we couldn't come.' I was going to remain living there for another year or two and I wasn't going to, you know, make any kind of waves. And all I said was, 'You couldn't or you didn't want to?' And with that I got up and left. I never went back to the park... ." Boy, the wall went down then.

C: That is so painful.

COS: And by the way, I think it also tells us a lot about the son. My assumption is that people have [unintelligible] in a childhood that are very critical, and that create wants, and then the question becomes then maybe that's what you call mazel (luck), or a piece of mazel, whether or not life reinforces that rawness or not. So what's his first dramatic experience? Nobody shows up. So any time somebody is not there, i.e. the father, it only reinforces that early experience.

C: But wait a minute. This has a lot to do with how she handled it. These people didn't show up. If she were the father in *Life is Beautiful*-did you see the movie?

COS: They're playing hide and seek or maybe their car broke down or something.

Not to worry-we have more to eat for us. How should we celebrate? What song should we sing? Let's make a party out of it.

C: She doesn't find the silver lining in it. She doesn't make lemonade out of lemons.

COS: Because she's too damaged herself.

I: You would have been able to do that?

COS: No, but I would have done something. I would have done...

I: I would have said, okay, let's go have the ices. But in my heart, I think I would have been...

COS: But what you feel in your heart and what you acknowledge to your child...After all, a two year old is a two year old. Disappointment, no disappointment. They don't have feelings of the same level as an adult, and she projected adult feelings on to him.

C: What I wonder about is does this become the story that he hears over and over again, so that when he's six and he's eight, he knows the story of the birthday party that nobody came, and he wonders, am I defective?

COS: And she always wanted him to feel part of something and he never did.

C: Does that come from hearing...does he internalize this story and say...

COS: I don't think you could put your finger.

C: Is that part of the mythology that builds up around somebody's life?

COS: On one level, this story seems to have some profound connection with the rest of his life. That's the interesting part.

C: All our children hear stories that we've told about them when they were younger, and how they interpret that, whether we meant it that way or not, I think plays out in their internal visions of themselves, and I think this becomes one of the stories.

I: It's a very interesting question. (AS EPE, p. 43-44)

It is as if the triad members create a climate of comfort that allows the members themselves to reflect upon their own lived experiences as they come to understand the "researched" and their own selves simultaneously. Triad members can do this work without being in the survivor's place, and still gain an increased understanding of an interviewee. However, the depth of understanding and empathy is enriched by the willingness to report on one's own similar or related experiences. We believe that this enables the researchers to see the Holocaust survivors and their families as parallel to and in community with the interviewers. The interviewees (especially survivors) have the privilege of experience. The interviewers and analysis team members have the privilege of witnessing and sharing the experience, as well as the responsibility of attempting to understand.

The disclosure that might be generated by a survivor's story does not happen in the interview, as in the interactive interviewing process described by Ellis et al. (1997), but it is bumped to the triad as a way of moving the team to greater understanding. While the findings of the TTP are about resilience and coping, there is a certain amount of deference to the Holocaust experience. At times, the clinicians on the triads offer language typical of their profession, such as "dysfunctional," yet this helps to see patterns that those not clinically trained might miss. The clinicians, in turn, have noted that their work as members of the Transcending Trauma Project triads has taught them to practice in a different way as therapists. They report being able to listen



differently. One of the clinicians in the TTP team noted that the team and the analysis process “taught you patience. Not stepping into work through a particular point that would strike you normally” (Impact on Clinical Work. Transcription of taped discussion among three TTP team members who are mental health practitioners, June, 2005, p. 2). In her capacity as a therapist, she continues, she is better able to “witness with others [and] that gives me an opportunity to witness myself” (p. 4). And, thanks to the team analysis process, “it’s okay to just be with and not to get from A to B; just being with A is a good enough place” (p. 4). Another clinician concurs and sums this up as “letting [the client] just be and you staying attached” (p. 1). She further comments that the triad process encourages this capacity to listen intently and intentionally from multiple perches:

We start with multi-layered tellings and retellings of the stories of people’s lives.

The first telling is like the witness, like we sit as an interviewer interviewing; they tell us their life. And then we come back to the triad and we do a retelling of a telling: the first retelling...And then there’s a retelling of the retellings. In the analysis group, we kind of went over it over and over again, and the retellings of the retellings. (p. 3)

From these observations, it appears that the analysis triad provides a place for exploring and articulating the dynamic transitions each member experiences as survivor stories are encountered, recounted, re-evaluated: between being an outsider and an insider, between being a listener and a speaker, between witnessing trauma and beholding resilience.

The methodology discussed in this paper necessarily engages the Transcending Trauma Project researcher, even those who are reticent at first to join the spiraling layers of discussion and dialogue. By affirming each team member’s critical contribution to the interpretive process,

and by encouraging past personal and professional experience to be part of what each member brings to the table, we go about the business of analysis in the same ways we go about the business of collecting our data: with respect for the multiple factors that characterize human life and, thereby, individual attitudes and beliefs. This perspective allows each of us to gain understanding of the processes by which individuals and groups make sense of their own experiences, how they incorporate others' experiences into their own frames of reference, and how survivors go on after trauma. By highlighting the process of meaning construction in the team, we simultaneously clarified the communicative aspects of the intergenerational transmission of trauma and resilience. Again, the results of the Transcending Trauma Project are not a catalogue of traumatic experiences, but more thematically based investigations that emerge when themes are found in numerous interviews.

We acknowledge that, as researchers, we are affected in our ability to accomplish our work by our own personal histories as well as by our responses to the life histories we analyze, and that how we understand the life choices of other people builds from our grasp of our own personal narratives (Fonagy, 2001) and vice versa. One of us is a daughter of Holocaust survivors; the other is not. The qualitative complexities associated with survivors' responses that the triad analysis teams tried to unpack led Author 2 to explore other sources for elucidation of attitudinal and behavioral choices that the interviews revealed (e.g., cite removed for review process). Psychoanalytic views of trauma and identity, as well as studies that examined the emotional underpinnings of decision-making practices of groups and leaders provided additional explanatory dimensions. For Author1, years of studying issues related to gender and a simultaneous line of research investigating communication related to health issues (cite removed for review process) led to a focus on trying to understand the human capacity for resilience.

What we are describing, in sum, is the “hermeneutic circle, that is, the circle of understanding,” such that as we try to “understand the ‘other’ we learn about (our) ‘selves’” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 714).

Our continued development as communication researchers exploring the impact of collaborative analysis on understanding interview data gathered from Holocaust survivor families has been simultaneously affected, then, by our roles as witnesses to the traumatic histories of the families we study, as well as by our roles as witnesses to the witnessing of our colleagues. From our grounding in the communication discipline, we focus on what is said, how it is said, and the multi-layered construction of meaning. We are informed by work in the feminist paradigm (Langellier & Hall, 1989; Reinharz, 1992; Wood, 2007) and acknowledge the work using dialogic communication processes in research (Pearce & Pearce, 2003), as well as analytic reconstruction (Blum, 2007) and hope to use those frameworks explicitly in further analyses of the Transcending Trauma Project. Bloom (1997) says that we each have a fundamental responsibility to find a way to bear witness to the pain and suffering all around us with the aim of establishing a community that is responsive to the basic human need for safety and well-being. The Transcending Trauma Project contributes to that goal because we listen to each other as we listen to, for, and about others.

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### Footnote

<sup>1</sup>The Project uses some abbreviations to identify transcripts and roles. In interviews of family members, COS indicates child of survivors, S is for a survivor, and G is for a grandchild of survivors. The transcriptions of the analyses of the interviews are identified with a capital A for analysis. Initials are project-specific initials to identify the interviewees as follows: ACOS XX refers to the triadic analysis of the interview of COS XX. In transcripts from the analysis, the speakers are identified as the role they fulfill on the triad, such that I=interviewer, COS=COS, and C=Clinician. First names have been changed to protect confidentiality. Six Transcending Trauma Project transcripts of triadic analysis sessions were used in this paper, two of survivors (AS EPE, 65pp., AS FWA, 119pp.), three children of survivors (ACOS SKM, 81pp., ACOS SWC, 103pp., ACOS JWT, 46pp.), and one grandchild of survivors (AGOS AWB, 49pp.). Page lengths of the double-spaced typed transcripts of the tapes are also provided.