

SHORT PAPER TWO

Short Paper Two:

A Critical Analysis of *The Contribution of Psychology to the Study of the Holocaust*

Pursuant to the Requirement for LEAD535: Principles of Academic Writing

by

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Of the 11 million European civilians, who died during the Second World War, six million people died simply because they were Jews; the scale is staggering when considering the fact that eighty percent of the European Jewish population perished or was exterminated at the hands of the Nazis within the six year period of the war (Krysińska & Lester, 2006, p. 141). It is difficult to understand the scale and depth of the collective trauma suffered by the Jews during the Holocaust or Shoah. What are the psychological ramifications of the Holocaust and how do people deal with its aftermath? These questions are considered by Karolina Krysińska and David Lester in their article which addresses the contributions that psychology has made to Holocaust research. Their study (Krysińska & Lester, 2006) deliberates findings derived from “empirical research and clinical observations concerning the long-term consequences” arising from the trauma of the Holocaust suffered by European Jews (p. 142).

The authors examined research concerning the long-term effects of the “KZ/survivor syndrome” (Konzentrationslager or concentration camp syndrome) which expressed itself somatically in physical maladies (headaches, chest pains, digestive problems), psychologically in mental disorders, cogitatively in mental impairment, and socially in the breakdown of social and interpersonal functions, such as “withdrawal and alienation” (Krysińska & Lester, 2006, p. 143). The authors pointed out that research into this area focused primarily on “problems and weaknesses” of individuals and for this reason researchers looked at the adaption skills of survivors.,. They next turned their attention to Second Generation issues found among the children of Holocaust survivors. They characterized these issues as “secondary” or “vicarious traumatization,” which they noted result in extended “changes in the individuals’ attitudes towards the world” and those around them (p. 147). Interestingly, the most extensive section of Krysińska’s and Lester’s article (2006) deals with “attempted and committed suicide” by Jews

across five distinct phases of the Holocaust: persecution, deportation, life in ghettos and concentration camps, and among survivors following the war (pp. 149-154). Lastly the authors address the issue of what psychological help is available for the survivors of the Holocaust and to their children (pp. 154-155).

In assessing the article, it is clear that Krysińska and Lester (2006) undertook a difficult subject and examined one discipline's contribution to the study of the impact of the Holocaust on the Jewish people. Their treatment of the empirical research and clinical studies appeared to be comprehensive as they attempted to answer their research question regarding psychology's contribution to the study of the Holocaust. It is important to note that one unexpected outcome of their study was the impact that a traumatic event such as the Holocaust has on someone who has not directly experienced it. Krysińska and Lester (2006) report that secondary trauma has been seen among "professionals working with trauma survivors" and concluded that the transmission of the trauma "does not necessarily require direct contact with survivors" but may arise from merely "working with documents, movies, photographs and other objects connected with trauma" resulting in traumatization vicariously (p. 147).

It appears from the article that the authors employed a qualitative case study design for their research method because they examined case studies derived from first-hand interviews of Holocaust survivors and their children along with printed artifacts originating from the period of the Holocaust (suicide notes, secret newspaper articles, etc.). The researchers relied upon samples drawn from Holocaust survivors and their children; however, researchers noted that although psychological symptoms may be observed "in many Holocaust survivors, survivors are not a homogenous group" (Krysińska & Lester, 2006, p. 144).

In the study (Krysińska & Lester, 2006) no specific method of data analysis was described due to the fact that the authors were presenting cumulative findings from various psychological researchers who were examining Holocaust survivors and their children. Much of the research relied on first hand interviews conducted following the Second World War as early as 1946. The authors did not outline any procedures for establishing the validity of the research conducted. The only relevant ethical issue to emerge from the study was not related directly to the research but centered on the gross injustice committed by Nazi Germany against an innocent group of people – the Jews. As the authors of the study (Krysińska & Lester, 2006) clearly indicate, European Jews had for centuries suffered persecution at the hand of their neighbor; however during the era of the Second World War and the Holocaust promulgated by the Nazis, the Jewish people endured “the most severe and unprecedented oppression and terror” in their history (p. 142).

I found that this article presented a great deal of research concerning the psychological aspects of the Holocaust that I have not yet considered academically. I have read a great deal of biographies and history regarding the Holocaust and at times I have seen and felt the trauma vicariously. Now I understand how secondary trauma functions which gives me greater understanding. It is perhaps for this reason that I have embarked upon my journey to speak to the injustice of the Holocaust today. I lead a non-profit organization that deals in a specific manner with the issue of the Holocaust by remembering and caring for desolate and forgotten Jewish cemeteries in Poland, restoring them to honor that they once had, and reconciling the broken relationship that exists between Jew and Christian. Judith Lewis Herman describes I believe what I am doing in this way; she writes, “remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are

prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (Kronendorfer, 2012, p. 308). For me I see in the quote what has become my life purpose.

References

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