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College Student Reactions to Holocaust Education From the Perspective of the Theme of Complicity and Collaboration

Azadeh Aalai[1]

Abstract

A colloquium series funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities explored complicity and collaboration during the Holocaust at a community college in New York. Student reactions to this theme were explored to measure their understanding of this atrocity. Twenty-three student participants of this colloquium submitted to in-depth, in-person interviews. A descriptive qualitative process enabled the researcher to identify specific themes that emerged regarding student growth. Student reflections explore the extent to which Holocaust education enables transformational learning at the college level, specifically in this case by exploring bystander behavior. Challenges of Holocaust education may be confronted by developing a focus for students to use as a framework. Results suggest a framework facilitates student growth and enrichment. This study is a reflection on practice regarding exposure to the Holocaust in higher education and its potential to stimulate transformation.

[1]Department of Social Sciences, Queensborough Community College, City University of New York (CUNY), Bayside, NY, USA

Corresponding Author:
Azadeh Aalai, Department of Social Sciences, Queensborough Community College, City University of New York (CUNY), 222-05 56th Avenue, M133A, Bayside, NY 11364, USA.
Email: aaalai@qcc.cuny.edu

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Holocaust education offers meaningful pathways for students to gain insights and enhance their understanding of the world. The Holocaust was the extermination of 6 million Jews by the Nazis. Lessons of these horrors inform reckoning with present policy and social injustices that persist worldwide. Last summer, 600 scholars signed an open letter to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) imploring them to retract their rejection in failing to acknowledge parallels between the present administration's immigration policy and this genocide (Knox, 2019). One salient aspect of the letter notes, "The very core of Holocaust education is to alert the public to dangerous developments that facilitate human-rights violations and pain and suffering; pointing to similarities across time and space is essential for this task" (Knox, 2019, p. 2). Lessons to be drawn from the Holocaust continue to reverberate. Thus, it is critical we continue to offer exposure for students.

The imperative of Holocaust education is justified given its applicability to present day. However, there are significant challenges posed for educators. The purpose of this article is to share how approaching the Holocaust through the lens of a specific theme can offer a rich perspective for U.S. college students' understanding. The educational program I developed enabled exposure of the Holocaust in such a way that may have facilitated transformational learning to the extent that students gained the ability to approach this event with a greater understanding of its complexity. Developing a more complex worldview and way of thinking is an important learning outcome that can reflect student growth. Through interviews with student participants of this colloquium series, I will share insights regarding how their understanding of the Holocaust was shaped by being presented to it through the framework of bystanders.

Bystander behavior was explored on a continuum of complicity and collaboration. Complicity is inaction by bystanders. Collaboration entails actively participating or facilitating Nazi crimes. The purpose of the theme was to get students to think about the role regular civilians played in enabling Nazism. The flip of this would be active protest or helping behaviors—often referred to as resistance and/or rescue.

My objective is exploring how presenting college students to the Holocaust attached to a framework allows them to reflect on it with greater depth and richness that is potentially transformative. Transformation here implies that students are expanding their way of understanding the world. While the specific theme that I chose was bystander behavior, this need not be the lens that other educators adopt. A theme has the potential to enable educators to avoid problematic Holocaust education. Problems include simplifying the atrocity, offering "easy" or packaged conclusions, and/or overwhelming students. The theme provides a theoretical framework/lens to facilitate comprehension, enabling students to better digest such

an overwhelming topic. Finally, this study aspires to expand knowledge of Holocaust education specifically in higher education.

Importance of Holocaust Education

The resonance of understanding the Holocaust today cannot be overstated. Holocaust education can offer students rich insight into one of the defining events of the last century (Korsen, 2019). Pervasive parallels persist between this genocide and the continued violation of others' rights and *othering* of marginalized groups. In creative applications of Holocaust education, researchers reflect on the transformative impact of exposure for prisoners. They identify common themes for the course that the prisoners grappled with, such as how did exclusion and marginalization culminate in widespread destruction. The instructors go on to pose this question: "And are the same underlying mechanisms of exclusion present and even pervasive in society today, in a post-Holocaust era?" (Pinkert et al., 2012, p. 61). In other words, there is opportunity to apply lessons of this atrocity to a wide spectrum of present-day injustices. Holocaust education enables students' exposure to the worst demonstration of state-sponsored discriminatory policies that if left unabated can escalate to mass violence.

Reflecting on what purpose we want our teachings to have for our students speaks to Holocaust education's potential. Wegner (1998) reflects, "One of the most important reasons why the Holocaust should be taught in schools is that the lessons from this dark page of modern history hold the potential of teaching civic virtue" (p. 168). Indeed, for education to be rich and useful, it must be infused with notions of morality and lessons regarding why democratic principles are important to uphold. Particularly timely given the rise of far right movements globally, Holocaust education highlights what catastrophes can befall a nation when their democracy is threatened, and they become vulnerable to authoritarian values/policies (Wegner, 1998).

In reflecting generally about our goals as educators, Hains and Smith (2012) identify that emotional development is equally as important as cognitive growth. Promoting both these competencies can "be accomplished by creating learning experiences that evoke emotion, provide practical application, and solidify new concepts with previous knowledge" (Hains & Smith, 2012, p. 359). In this regard, Holocaust exposure can be a potent catalyst for such enrichment. Past studies have demonstrated that "many students state that their study of the event is the most intensive and meaningful investigation in which they are involved during their academic careers" (Lindquist, 2007, p. 23). I have observed the emotional resonance with which students engage with Holocaust-related material and been witness to how questions of accountability and decision making are met with spirited dialogue by students as they weigh the reasons why bystanders may have chosen to remain silent in helping neighbors. There is generally not a consensus among students regarding what to do in many of the seemingly impossible scenarios we consider,

and such realities stretch students' efforts regarding how to reconcile what is considered "just" behavior with what may have been considered the "best option" at the time. Lindquist (2011) acknowledges, "Studying the Holocaust forces students to consider what it means to be human and humane by examining the full continuum of individual behavior, from *ultimate evil* to *ultimate good*" (p. 26). International scholarship on Holocaust education similarly identifies that the lessons of this genocide can be a valuable vehicle for promotion of prosocial behaviors and moral development (Starratt et al., 2017).

Challenges and Limitations of Holocaust Education

While there are significant resources for instructors looking to teach the Holocaust in the United States, there aren't as many studies aimed at curriculum in higher education. There is a debate within the field regarding how early is *too early* for Holocaust exposure in schools, given the sensitive and often graphic nature of the content. This makes it all the more curious that there aren't more curricula specifically designed for higher education. Even when younger students are exposed to the topic, it is often with a memoir—most notably *The Diaries of Ann Frank*—which while powerful, is limited in scope. While such stories can serve as significant vehicles for students to empathize with the experiences of victims, less mature students don't yet have the capacity to understand the larger historical context for them (Lindquist, 2010). The consensus appears to be that younger children are not yet ready for Holocaust exposure and to err on the side of caution regarding when to start exposure (Lindquist, 2010).

Learning from a catastrophe like the Holocaust is a long process that can persist throughout a person's academic career or even lifetime. In fact, depictions or narratives centered on the Holocaust are prominent in popular culture today.[1] Such realities perhaps give greater context to the declaration by Starratt et al. (2017) that "learning about the Holocaust is a lifelong experience" (p. 188). This rightly highlights that Holocaust comprehension can grow over time, particularly regarding its complexity. Holocaust scholars, for instance, identify that exposure during one's K–12 education can set a foundation for comprehension. In the case of Starratt et al. (2017), however, their work falls short of *expanding* on the role higher education can play in furthering insight. This is quite common with Holocaust education literature. College exposure will not be meaningful for students if it is just a repetition of what they were exposed to earlier in their education. Ideally, college exposure will *expand* on what students may have already learned, even correcting incomplete or faulty exposure from earlier.

At the college level, there is the greatest potential for Holocaust education to occur with a richness and complexity that can be meaningful. One of the benefits is that in higher education, students have greater cognitive sophistication to be able to analyze the Holocaust from a critical lens. While emotionality is certainly a part of the experience, more mature students can also approach this genocide from an

intellectual and critical perspective. This, in turn, enhances the likelihood that exposure to the Holocaust can have a transformative impact on students when they are exposed to the material as adults.

The challenge for educators becomes helping students confront the Holocaust in a way that enables them to enrich their perspective. Unfortunately, even at the college level, textbooks that cover the Holocaust are inadequate in covering its scope (Medoff, 1996). Additionally, Totten (1998) identifies that many curricula guidelines for Holocaust education at the lower levels are extremely weak, so modifying them for higher education will likely not be helpful. Weaknesses include presenting the atrocity in a simplistic way, teaching guides lacking depth or diversity in perspective and resources, or the curriculum may be superficial, like having students complete a crossword puzzle that has Holocaust-related words in it. Without proper resources for teaching such a heavy topic, a significant burden is placed on the instructor regarding Holocaust exposure in the context of higher education.

Not surprisingly, "confronting the Holocaust in a classroom setting involves a complex undertaking that demands careful planning as educators develop and present curricula on the subject to their students" (Lindquist, 2010, p. 77). Lindquist (2010) continues to identify the following common challenges regarding Holocaust education here in the United States: community, institutional, and societal pressures; the existence of the Holocaust denial movement; age-appropriate considerations; contrasting Jewish and non-Jewish perspectives; and the intensity of teacher involvement. To elaborate on just one of these specific challenges, for instance, the literature frequently identifies the intensity of student exposure; it's gravitas for both teacher and student (Lindquist, 2010; Williams, 2001). This very intensity can serve as a catalyst for significant growth and enrichment if directed effectively by educators.

Visual and video depictions of the Holocaust are examples of how the content can be intense for students. Not only is there an abundance of mainstream depictions of the Holocaust available today, through film, online resources, and so on, but historical footage itself taken by allies is compelling. This gives a new meaning to the apt "a picture is worth a thousand words" adage. The images/videos are graphic and often gruesome, particularly footage that documents the state of extermination camps as Allied soldiers liberated them—often there are emaciated corpses lining the railroads, entrances, and within the perimeter of the camps. Such footage stuns many students. This graphic exposure while inappropriate for younger students can be shown in higher education as part of a larger effort to openly and authentically confront Nazi horrors. Giving students the opportunity to share their reactions can serve as a catalyst for class engagement, while enabling them to grasp the high stakes associated with confronting this genocide. For instance, most students recognize that the scope and visibility of these extermination camps to the larger communities they were located in rendered them visible to bystanders living in the area—immediately shattering the illusion that neighbors didn't help because they were ignorant to what was happening.

As part of discussing the ubiquity of the camps, students are exposed to the notion of genocide as a *process*. As Nazism became more prominent, rules and norms within the society shifted against Jews, but the widespread discrimination happened in incremental stages. The extermination camps represent a radicalization of such a process. Such revelations can be applied to the world students are living in—in what ways are small acts of discrimination against groups happening unabated by the larger population? The immediate response of students that they would help in the face of social injustice in their communities had they been alive then is challenged in a social media age when abuses of power are regularly documented and disseminated publicly without social movements or resistance. The disturbing questions regarding our own complicity to atrocities happening within our borders allows students to grapple in an often uncomfortable—and more resonant—way with the question of how could something like the Holocaust have happened within a *civilized* nation? Rather than the Holocaust being a far-removed event from "long ago," within this framework it becomes an injustice reflecting radicalized policies that were able to develop in large part based on an apathetic public—not dissimilar to many injustices that litter our social media feeds daily and when met without resistance have the potential to escalate in severity.[2]

Holocaust exposure can get students to rethink not only their understanding of this genocide but also the way that they approach conflict and injustices in their own lives. This suggests transformation, although the literature does not explicitly link Holocaust education with transformational learning theory per se. For instance, in their literature review on Holocaust education, of all the reported findings that Starratt et al. (2017) note, transformation or other aspects of student growth that can be facilitated by this topic are *not* included in their overview. In fact, the most prominent study that explicitly fuses Holocaust education with transformation for its students was published in *Radical Teacher*, the earlier cited experience of prisoners who were exposed to the Holocaust (Pinkert et al., 2012).

Transformative Education and the Holocaust

Transformational learning theory identifies that growth and maturation can be critical aspects of the learning process. Hoggan (2016) identifies the potential for multiple types of outcomes with this type of learning, offering descriptions of, "shifts in basic premises of thought; shift in feelings; shift in actions; shifts in consciousness; altered ways of being in the world" (p. 64). Specifically, it is defined as "processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (Hoggan, 2016, p. 71). This type of learning has been identified as most likely to occur among *adult* learners (Merriam, 2004). This substantiates the importance of exposing college students specifically to the Holocaust. Maturation of students is associated with greater capacity for consideration of topics that are intellectually and emotionally challenging (Lindquist, 2006). Similarly, scholars of transformational learning theory

suggest that it requires a certain level of cognitive development (Merriam, 2004). While no specific methods guarantee transformation, most perspectives on this process suggest that an activating event can serve as a catalyst (Cranton, 2002). Exposure to the Holocaust appears to be ripe for such activation.

The notion of transformation is being used here in the context of Holocaust exposure, serving as a catalyst to challenge or alter a student's worldview and/or to enable them to develop a deeper appreciation for the complexity of human experiences. Transformation can occur by facilitating students to become more active subjects in the world or by experiencing shifts in how students make sense of or understand the world (Hoggan, 2016). The introspection and even discomfort triggered by the Holocaust through an innovative perspective has the potential to alter their view of the world and their roles in it. *How* Holocaust education is presented is critical, for, "in order to bring about a catalyst for transformation, we need to expose students to viewpoints that may be discrepant with their own" (Cranton, 2002, p. 66). Hoggan (2016) further expands that the change that occurs must reflect depth, breadth, and relative stability to constitute transformation. Given that exposure to the Holocaust oftentimes challenges students' assumptions about the world—to put it mildly—it certainly has the potential to elicit irreversible changes. The opportunity to explore student reactions of their exposure to the Holocaust from this perspective of potential transformation is the goal of the present study.

Developing a Theme as a Framework for Holocaust Education

What is the most effective means to present our students to this atrocity in a way that will resonate or trigger transformation, and how can we avoid some of the common pitfalls of Holocaust education? There is a significant balancing that must be done regarding the emotionality of the event and the objectivity with which it is presented. The numbers regarding deaths are so large in scope that it is hard for students to grasp. Within the confines of the classroom, this makes it imperative to expose students to individual stories and survivor testimony when possible to humanize the victims and enable the material to be manageable and resonate beyond mere statistics. This is also when showing actual footage or survival testimonies can be the most powerful or effective for students. Survivors themselves will testify to still not being able to fully grasp the magnitude of what they endured.

The realities of the Holocaust are also overwhelming. Williams (2001) remarks on an unsettled feeling of incompleteness that can accompany learning for students when she writes that "it is almost a truism of Holocaust education that this search doesn't lead to the completed, ticked-in, resolved experience of 'answers'" (p. 20). This grappling with how to make sense of the senseless is part of the process of learning students experience when confronted with this topic. The recognition that not everything can be fully answered or known, even with access to such a trove of

resources, reflects a particular potential for growth for students and teachers alike. In our role as educators, we can help to facilitate a deeper appreciation and understanding in students that not every experience or historical event is able to be fully understood or comprehended, that such is the very complexity of our experiences, the messiness of humanity, and the senselessness of mass violence.

Simplifying the atrocity or reducing it down to one story or experience is a challenge that educators need to overcome. For example, the website of USHMM advises to avoid simple answers to complex questions. There is a depth and a richness that can be explored regarding the Holocaust if educators are able to present it in a multifaceted way. My suggestion specifically is for educators to select a specific lens or perspective through which students can understand and attempt to make some sense of this atrocity. The framework also helps to temper earlier noted concerns regarding overwhelming material for students (while also avoiding simplifying the atrocity). This seems consistent with a criticism Lindquist (2007) makes.

In identifying a negative experience Lindquist (2007) had at an institute on teaching the Holocaust, he shares, "institute participants were inundated with a mass of information that was not framed around any central theme from which they could develop their own knowledge of the Holocaust's history" (p. 24). This criticism demonstrates that a framework can be important in offering organization and meaning to an overwhelming topic. I present the Holocaust from the perspective of bystander behavior, the impact of which I will explore in the present analysis. In fact, scholarship out of Germany has acknowledged that Holocaust education is deficient without a reckoning not only with the motives of perpetrators but also those of bystanders (Marks, 2007).

Present Study

This study is an attempt to bridge the gap between the Holocaust education literature and the transformational learning scholarship by exploring student responses to Holocaust exposure from the specific theme of bystander complicity and collaboration. Student reflections are a critical aspect of transformation, and they present rich opportunities to explore Holocaust education from this perspective.

Method

Colloquium Series/Alignment

As a recipient of an NEH grant, I implemented a yearlong academic program centered on the theme of "Complicity and Collaboration during the Holocaust" at the Kupferberg Holocaust Resource Center (KHC; see Online Appendix for description of events).

The KHC is a learning laboratory offering space for students and faculty to explore how the lessons of the Holocaust can be used to address the cultural, civic, and educational needs of our diverse community. It is an essential institution on

campus that in addition to having exhibits on display related to the Holocaust serves as a meeting ground for participants to convene and hear guest lecturers on timely topics or attend trainings/seminars. The NEH-funded colloquium centers on a different theme every academic year and is facilitated by a faculty member at the college. This faculty member becomes the designated Scholar-in-Residence,[3] tasked with coordinating guest lectures, seminars, and so on, based on their developed theme. Faculty are invited each semester to align one of their courses to the theme. All events are open to the public.

My alignment invited faculty to expose their classes to bystander behavior and the Holocaust in a way that fit with their courses. Faculty participants were required to include a description of complicity and collaboration in their Syllabi, design at least one assignment related to bystanders, and require students to attend at least one event at the KHC. In total, 18 faculty aligned their courses with the theme of bystander behavior. Faculty-aligning courses spanned a range of disciplines, with eight from English, eight from Social Sciences, and one from Nursing and Music. Faculty determined how to integrate the theme into their courses, with feedback as requested by the Scholar.

Procedure

Upon completion of the colloquium series, I conducted in-person interviews with student participants to explore how being exposed to the Holocaust from this theme shaped their comprehension. In addition to being in a course that was aligned, the minimal requirement for being eligible for interview was that the student attended at least one of the events over the course of the colloquium series. They were recruited via participating faculty who offered extra credit for their participation. All interview procedures went through institutional review board review/approval. While the interviews were exploratory, insofar as I was interested in student reflections driving the narrative, there were opportunities for students to demonstrate through their responses' potential growth. The exploratory nature of the interviews demonstrates a qualitative approach that was descriptive. There was no hypothesis testing; rather, the responses of students derived the themes that I will identify shortly.

A student intern transcribed the audio files into a 152-pages transcript. The Scholar specifically identified relevant topics that emerged, with particular focus on responses to questions regarding the central theme of the colloquium. I was particularly interested in how students answered questions regarding complicity and collaboration or other aspects of the role bystanders may have played in the Holocaust and how this appeared to impact their comprehension. Regarding the qualitative process, Gilgun (2005) identifies how this approach can be useful for researchers to get descriptions of lived experiences. She notes, "Such [qualitative] approaches are particularly useful for understanding meanings that human being attribute to events in their lives and, through discourse analysis, can aid in understanding cultural themes and practices and individual lives" (Gilgun, 2005, p. 40). Similarly, my approach to giving meaning to

student responses was grounded in allowing them to share their reflections on the colloquium series with minimal interference.

Students weren't explicitly asked whether they experienced transformation for fear of triggering social desirability or priming subsequent responses during the interview. The aspiration was that the colloquium theme had the potential to incite transformative learning. As such, it was a core concern to assess whether students demonstrated an understanding of complexity as it pertained to bystanders or a reframing of their understanding of bystander roles.

Participants

Twenty-three student participants were interviewed. The interviews were audio recorded. All participants with the exception of one consented to being audio recorded. Interviews were open-ended and largely guided by respondents.

Participants were undergraduate students exposed to course alignment with the colloquium. The ages of the participants ranged between 18 and 53 years. The mean age was 22. Twelve majors were represented. Most participants were female (19). One did not offer gender information. Only one student reported having had no knowledge of the Holocaust prior to exposure to the colloquium series.

KHC Fellows

Five of the students from the larger sample were student fellows. These students were awarded a fellowship that enabled them to work closely with the Scholar in exploring the theme. KHC fellows were required to attend every event being offered during the fall 2017 semester, while meeting with the Scholar once a week for instruction. Their instruction included required readings and a final project in fulfillment of their fellowship.

Four fellows were female and one was male. Average age was 21. These were the only students in the larger sample who had received explicit instruction from the Scholar. All remaining students in the sample were not students of the Scholar. Because this particular cohort was more immersed in the theme of the colloquium series, it was expected that they would likely demonstrate a richer knowledge of the topic (and perhaps greater potential for growth).

Results

Given that the interviews were exploratory, the themes that will be shared reflect an inductive structure. Special attention was given to responses on the colloquium series theme, any direct references to a specific event or visit to the KHC, and any responses suggesting transformation and/or growth. Student responses are shared below based on comprehension of the theme, reframing of Holocaust knowledge, and potential for growth.

Complicity and Collaboration

Complicity was correctly recognized by the majority of participants as passivity/inaction by bystanders. Fellows demonstrated greater richness and complexity when reflecting on the theme. In attempting to understand why bystanders engaged in complicity or collaboration, students oftentimes identified fear as a strong motivator. Looking for a motivation behind complicity and collaboration suggested that students were aware that these bystander positions permitted the genocide to occur. For instance, one student described complicity as:

> Going along with what's happening and not doing anything about it . . . you're still helping the cause.

Similarly, another student:

> It's more . . . a standby person like you basically see what's happening, but, you know, not saying anything—rather them than me . . . to collaborate, is basically being actively involved in it, with a chance of, hoping to gain something out of it.

These responses reflected the majority, demonstrating participants' general aptitude in discussing complicity.

In tandem with this recognition of complicity as inaction, students recognized that complicit bystanders enabled Jewish persecution. A student taking a criminal justice course made the parallel between complicity and being an accomplice to a crime:

> The word I am trying to use is like a crime, you know. You're not actually committing a crime, but you don't help the person . . . and [with collaboration] you are actively involved cause there's something to gain.

There appeared to be less clarity for students regarding the meaning of collaboration, which is a more complex construct to understand given that it blurs the lines between bystanders versus perpetrators. Four students in the sample demonstrated either inability to describe what collaboration was or offered inaccurate descriptions. For example, one respondent described it as "working together" while another stated:

> Like people going out of their way to help other people in need.

These students did not clearly understand collaboration as an extension of complicity, or as a more severe type of problematic bystander behavior.

Those participants who were fellows were more likely to see fluidity in the categories of perpetrators, bystanders, and rescuers, and to express struggling with how they understood the roles each played. They gave the most complete and accurate descriptions of bystander collaboration with responses demonstrating a greater richness and complexity to their understanding of the Holocaust. They also

indicated rethinking how they understood the Holocaust, suggesting transformation. For instance, one fellow remarked that "the line kind of blurred" when trying to distinguish between perpetrators and bystanders. Similarly, when considering a bystander who may have been given an order to kill a Jew or risk being killed himself, another fellow reflected:

> Because a collaborator could also be someone who, their life is also at risk but the person giving him the demands is telling him to kill the person . . . I don't know if he would still be a perpetrator or collaborator?

This recognition of blurred lines between categories suggests a potential reframing of how the Holocaust was comprehended.

Similarly, another fellow grappled with whether it meant that collaborative bystanders were similar to perpetrators:

> I think the people [collaborators] were like perpetrators in my point of view because they agreed to [follow Nazi orders]. They could have not. They could have resisted and say no but they actually followed. So, I feel like that's their intent as well . . . . If we follow someone, we follow their ideas . . . kind of like, not physically they're not giving the orders or instructions but they're somehow making the perpetrators' aim to be accomplished.

Another fellow reflected similar grappling with labels:

> There's also a weird grey area like a rescuer could also be a collaborator at the same time. Cause they'll be helping someone else and then reporting others.

This rethinking of categories regarding bystanders versus perpetrators hinted at transformation to the extent that it demonstrated a difficulty in rendering basic categories. It also defied simplicity in understanding the Holocaust. Such responses reflected a new way of considering the Holocaust. It isn't uncommon before a rich lesson for students to think that the roles individuals played during the time were more clear-cut.

In discussing bystanders, a fellow reflected on her experiences during the colloquium series:

> I think I'm just now more aware. I am always looking for connections between what I've learned and how I can implement that into school.

She went on to share an anecdote about participating in a conversation with family members victim blaming accusers of sexual assault. She shared that while in the past she may have stayed silent even though disagreeing with what her elders were saying, she felt compelled to speak out and defend the female accusers who were being disparaged by her relatives:

> And she [grandmother victim blaming] just looked at me and everyone was like really silent and I was like maybe I shouldn't have said anything. But before I would've just brushed it off but when I hear things like that now it bothers me.

As a follow-up, I asked this student whether she regretted speaking out since she was met by silence by her family, to which she responded enthusiastically:

> No, I felt great, actually!

Certainly, such a recollection sounds like a transformative experience for this student who spoke out, challenging an ingrained norm within her family dynamics. Unpacking her knowledge of what complicity and collaboration meant served as a catalyst for this fellow to further explore how these concepts can be applied to present-day atrocities that continue to occur. She saw her ability to speak out against silencing victims of sexual assault as a way to rally *against* being complicit within the context of rape culture.

In sum, fellows' responses to questions regarding the themes of complicity and collaboration during the Holocaust were rich in detail and demonstrated a complexity and sophistication surpassing responses of non-fellows. These students demonstrated perhaps the greatest potential in having experienced growth with their exposure to the colloquium series. The majority of respondents accurately identified complicity. Moreover, in recognizing the important role bystander decisions made in enabling the Jews to be persecuted by Nazi policies, students focused on the role of decision making by individuals who had the potential to save lives.

Rescue and Resistance Efforts

The flip of complicity and collaboration is when bystanders engaged in helping behaviors, often referred to as rescue and/or resistance. All students who remarked on being exposed to examples of rescue and resistance by bystanders reported not knowing about organized attempts to save Jews. The rescue efforts of community members in Le Chambon—a village in France that participated in a widespread campaign of resisting Nazism—was on display at the KHC during my colloquium series. In total, 10 participants from the sample specifically identified exposure to this exhibit when they came to the KHC for an event as being a significant aspect of their Holocaust exposure on campus and having never known about this rescue effort.

One student, in response to the helping behaviors of the villagers she learned about, remarked:

> In essence, we are all human.

She reflected that such solidarity likely drove the prosocial behaviors the villagers demonstrated.

Another participant shared being grateful to learn about Le Chambon, adding:

> It's more of knowing that with all the hell that they went through, there are good people in the world who would see a situation like that and find a way to try and take it into their own hands and make a better situation.

Her statement spotlights the importance of exposing students to the possibility of resistance against the types of oppression Nazism represented. The stereotypical Holocaust narrative often marginalizes the forms of resistance and rescue that some bystanders engaged in, offering an incomplete picture of the potential of bystanders to make a *positive* difference in the face of injustice rather than to be mere spectators or enablers. This furthers the narrative regarding our own agency in times of social injustice, which was also explored with students.

Another student indicated surprise upon hearing about helping behaviors by bystanders during the Holocaust:

> Before I didn't really know there was a lot of people that helped like that. I thought everyone was just being complicit, being killed. I didn't know there was actually a lot of people that were helping as well.

Such responses indicated that a focus on rescue and resistance efforts during the Holocaust is in contrast to how students are regularly exposed to this atrocity. Additionally, this uproots simple narratives of the Holocaust. For example, a fellow reflected upon exposure to resistance efforts by stating:

> The most important one is just, it was very black and white to me before, and really honestly now it is a lot more unclear.

This conflict hinted at a reframing of the student's ideas of the Holocaust, akin to how fellows appeared to be grappling with how to categorize the different roles people played.

It is possible that exposing students to rescue and resistance narratives can correct the faulty notion that somehow the persecution of Jews was inevitable or that regular civilians were powerless to rise up against Nazism. This presents students the opportunity to consider the significance of individual choices.

Agency

The way that students engaged with the concepts of complicity and collaboration and its flip, rescue and resistance demonstrated that they were grappling with how bystander decision making was related to enabling the Holocaust. Students were asked to reflect on how much control bystanders had regarding their fate and that of their neighbors, in addition to grappling with the inevitability of the Holocaust. Virtually all students rejected the inevitability of the Holocaust. This sentiment was

particularly pronounced for students who had been exposed to the exhibit about Le Chambon.

Only one respondent clearly demonstrated the problematic notion of the Holocaust as "inevitable." When reflecting on bystander behavior, he referred to their behavior as only serving to "delay" the unavoidable demise of Jews. Such a notion assumes lack of agency on the part of civilians during this genocide. He stated:

> The bystanders I feel, would have basically just kept a temporary pause to the impending danger . . . . It was something that was bound to happen.

Interestingly, this participant had a clear grasp of both complicity and collaboration and responded extensively regarding applications of the Holocaust to present-day global events. Despite this sophistication, however, he did fall into the trap of perceiving the genocide as inevitable—an outcome that USHMM explicitly cautions educators to counter. It was disappointing to hear such a conclusion from this student given that other students appeared to have reached an *opposite* reaction in response to the theme—namely that bystanders in fact *did* have agency and their actions often had impactful consequences for the persecuted group. It was unclear from his response, however, whether this conclusion was based on specific instruction from his professor or exposure to the colloquium series. This response reflected the minority, however, in demonstrating a problematic conclusion.

The majority of students acknowledged the potential bystanders may have had to change the course of history. For instance, one student noted that if bystanders had just been more active,

> Then, just the event would have been different as well.

This same participant went on to acknowledge that approaching the Holocaust from the lens of bystander behavior "made a lot of the curriculum easier to understand."

Such a notion aligns with the goal of presenting students to the Holocaust with a specific framework in mind so that they are better able to comprehend this atrocity. Moreover, linking bystander behavior with agency also has the potential to demonstrate for students that individual choices have consequences, and what we do matters. This is one of the overarching themes of USHMM, as a quote displayed prominently at the museum and on much of their learning materials is: "Your Choices Matter."

A nursing student grappling with the ethics of using data from Nazi medical experiments considered bystanders when she stated:

> When you go by themes [of bystander behavior] it's more detailed and I actually really liked that because I never really thought of what the people were thinking during the medical experiments . . . that last semester when we were doing complicity I was thinking, "oh wow, this is actually an aspect that I could have been thinking about this whole time." It just never clicked.

This student went on to reflect:

> I think [bystanders] have a lot more power than they think they do because not many people have the strength to be able to do that [speak out] in a situation where everybody's against you.

This response again challenges the assumption of inevitability. In particular, this student linked the theme of the colloquium series to individual agency in a way that is empowering and suggests that the decisions individuals make matter. Such a response could be transformative, particularly given the student's acknowledgment of concepts fusing together, or as she put it, clicking. Experiences of transformation in learning are often described as these "aha" moments where something the student is exposed to in the classroom *clicks* for them or shifts the way that they view themselves or the world around them.

Applicability

Reflecting on our choices as individuals also opens room to consider how bystander behavior during the Holocaust can be applied to present examples of social injustice. There was a consensus across students regarding applicability. In fact, using the role of bystanders as a springboard, there was an impressive array of responses to the question of applicability that students gave, ranging from U.S. foreign policy, bullying, #MeToo, ongoing genocides and violence across the globe, past genocides, and discriminatory policies of the Trump administration.

Cutting straight to the heart of the imperative in favor of Holocaust education given the current cultural and political landscape in the United States, multiple students reported parallels between the colloquium theme and policies or rhetoric of the Trump administration. One student remarked on the proposed Muslim registry being akin to forcibly wearing the Star of David. Another reflected:

> Even in today's standards, Trump is putting people down and other people are standing up for them. And I'm like, "oh that's happening and I don't really do anything."

She stated how many students assume that they would help others when they learn about the Holocaust, but that, "in reality they don't end up doing that." Her conclusion:

> So, this Holocaust theme that has been going on has made me really see, oh I say something but I'm not actually acting like that. It shows that I am a bystander like the people who were there during the Holocaust.

It is possible that this rethinking of the self as a bystander could be a catalyst for growth for this student. Another participant remarked that in the face of injustice:

> It makes no sense for us to just stand by and just watch. Like the bystander effect.

In fact, although the bystander effect was not explicitly noted in any of our specific programs other than a seminar on training individuals on how to overcome their default passivity response as bystanders (see Online Appendix), multiple students mentioned this psychological effect, in addition to the Lucifer effect.[4] The use of such language demonstrated a cognitive sophistication in connecting relevant social psychological processes to the Holocaust.

A fellow linked Trump policies to themes of the colloquium:

> It's pretty relatable. I mean with [Trump], I know that there was something where he said if you're Muslim, you should wear some type of I.D. or have some type of papers on you to tell them that they're Muslim . . . what's very awkward about people is that they say things are over in history, it never is over.

The end of this particular statement reminded me of the notion of Holocaust education evolving over one's lifetime, as this Fellow was making connections between present conflicts and past history. One student approached applicability from the perspective of inspiration when she shared:

> I guess as a college student I feel like it's really best to be exposed to like genocides or events such as the Holocaust because I feel like this is the time where people are most mature and understand more deeply these events that took place. I feel like college students are very on top of their curriculum, on top of their work to want to know more . . . . Especially if you're a full-time student I feel you're more prone to wanting to know more or wanting to gain more knowledge . . . . Let's say the Holocaust can inspire you to major in something that has to do with social work or helping people. That could be another reason for that to be more important to college students because then that can demonstrate something . . . give an example of how they can go in the world for real and actually make an impact.

This student identified maturity as being a critical feature that enabled her to better understand the Holocaust as a college student. Such a response aligns with the notion that transformative experiences may be more conducive for adult learners and that Holocaust education in particular can be beneficial within the context of higher education. She also identified how exposure to the Holocaust could impact a student's major or academic aspirations. This same student elaborated on how being in college impacts Holocaust exposure:

> Sometimes, especially as a college student, people see college as about the peak of their life. Have fun, party . . . when you get to learn stuff like that [rescuer behavior] it actually stops you. Something can change at any given point. When you're younger we don't really see that . . . . But once we're put in the real world there are problems that we have to be more aware of, that we have to watch for. So, I think it's more of an awareness this could happen at any time and you have to know how to be ready for it; how to prepare for it, how to help others in that time of need, as well.

This student's use of the word *change* in this context hints at transformation.

Discussion and Conclusion

Presenting students to the Holocaust from the theme of bystander behavior has the potential to offer depth and richness to their learning that could facilitate transformation. While Holocaust education literature is not matched up with pedagogical explorations of transformational learning, the area appears ripe for exploration. Gubkin (2015) writes that students themselves recognize the challenges that come with being exposed to the Holocaust. "At this point," he writes, "many students are frustrated. They thought they knew about the Holocaust, and what they are discovering is that the more they study, the less they know" (Gubkin, 2015, p. 112). Such was demonstrated by those student responses—and fellows in particular—who started to question how to categorize bystanders versus perpetrators. It was also demonstrated by student reactions to learning about rescue and resistance behaviors. Both responses further reflected a more complex understanding of the Holocaust.

Questioning one's prior assumptions is presented as a core feature of transformative learning (Cranton, 2002). Regarding reflections from Holocaust scholars, Lindquist (2011) identifies, "A third challenge is the studying of the *Shoah*[5] does not necessarily lead to definitive conclusions about why it occurred or what meaning, if any, can be made of it" (p. 118). Hence the difficulty in grasping collaboration, as it upends simple labels regarding who perpetrators were or what groups were responsible for the death toll. Perhaps the greatest testament comes from survivors themselves, who commonly note the *why* not being an appropriate question regarding their experiences, for it *just was*.

Auschwitz survivor Wiesel famously demonstrated this when he stated, "The more I know [about the Holocaust] the less I know, the less I understand" (Lindquist, 2011, p. 118). Educators need to become more comfortable with this discomfort if we are to transmit to our students there are no certain answers when confronting the big questions that studying the Holocaust leaves us to grapple with. Such could set a foundation for transformational learning. For example, Cranton (2002) identifies that while this type of learning can happen suddenly—in the form of an aha! moment as reflected on earlier—"other times, though, it is an incremental process in which we gradually change bits of how we see things, not even realizing a transformation has taken place until afterward" (p. 65). Holocaust educators who have tracked growth of their students during an entire semester of engaging with exposure oftentimes demonstrate this type of incremental growth in their students (Gubkin, 2015), although again, such analysis is not specifically framed within the context of transformative learning. Additionally, as noted earlier, the majority of these published studies don't specifically look at college-level exposure.

It appears that choosing a theme enables students' exposure to the Holocaust from a richer perspective, and this greater depth can in turn lead them to recognize greater complexity. A clear benefit that was demonstrated by virtually all participant responses was that the theme of bystanders was able to be applied to current events happening in the world. Such application demonstrates both the depth and breadth of

transformation Hoggan (2016) refers to as key markers of a transformative learning experience. Students readily and enthusiastically made parallels between bystander behaviors during the Holocaust and today. Those students who specifically participated in our bystander training, for instance, reported feeling more empowered to speak up against bullying, and better informed regarding why bystanders oftentimes remain passive. Perhaps this is why most students demonstrated accuracy in their descriptions of complicity, even while they struggled with the concept of collaboration. One fellow identified hearing the word *complicity* a lot that semester in the media.[6]

Finally, it became clear resources made available to students likely impacted the depth of their reported comprehension. Immersed fellows demonstrated perhaps the greatest depth of knowledge and understanding. However, some non-fellows similarly demonstrated deeper understanding, perhaps reflecting the extent to which faculty connected the colloquium event they attended to curricula in class. Many assignments in aligned courses were based on applying bystander themes to the world today, so this likely explains why all participants responded with depth and engagement to that question. Holocaust education can be enriching for students when faculty have greater institutional support. There are also other resources educators can draw on, many of which can be found online (Benedict, 2005; Lindquist, 2011). As Cranton (2002) concludes, "we can teach as though the possibility always exists that a student will have a transformative experience" (p. 71). Holocaust exposure can be another catalyst for this process. This also resonates with the notion of Holocaust education being a *lifelong* process—with this topic, there is the potential to be exposed to something new at any time.

In closing, the potential for transformation when exposed to the Holocaust specifically in higher education warrants further consideration, particularly given the state of the world today. Rather than having learned from catastrophic history, we see pervasive examples of atrocities persisting. Despite the mantra of "Never Again," genocides have occurred, the *othering* and marginalization of groups remains pervasive, and bystanders continue their complicity to social injustice. Similarly, resistance and rescue efforts appear no closer to becoming majority responses. Challenges of Holocaust education can be managed by selecting a relevant and applicable theme to use as a perspective, preferably one the educator has expertise in and is comfortable exploring. For this particular practice, bystander behavior became a significant framework that enabled students to organize and focus their understanding of the Holocaust and resonated with them in a way that demonstrated rich applications and reported insight.

Future research in the field of Holocaust education should more explicitly develop an assessment technique to measure whether benefits that students gain from exposure include transformative learning. This could go a long way towards bridging the gap between the pedagogical scholarship on this process of learning and Holocaust education literature that emphasizes an imperative to continue exposing students to this history but hasn't yet explicitly framed such benefits within the context of transformational learning. While there are no specific methods of

teaching that guarantee transformation, the literature and present research support the potential for Holocaust education to be a vital catalyst for student growth. When presented in higher education through a rich and challenging theme, such as bystander behavior, the benefits for students can be manifold and possibly include transformation.

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ORCID iD


Azadeh Aalai https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9360-9020

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Premiering in November 2019 on Netflix, the documentary "The Devil Next Door," chronicles a high-profile trial of a suspected former Nazi. This serves as just one of many examples of how the Holocaust has become a pop culture staple.
2. In an attempt to capture that Holocaust exposure remains both timely and resonant, an exhibit at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City about the Holocaust is aptly titled: "Aushwitz: Not long ago, not far away." This exhibit is open to the public until August 2020.
3. For purposes of brevity, this title will be referred to as "Scholar" in the rest of the text.
4. This term was coined by social psychologist Zimbardo, investigator of the Stanford Prison Experiment. The term implies that individuals can be compelled to engage in evil acts if they are placed in a situation or institution that promotes evil, even if their personalities are not pathological per se. The bystander effect is the tendency for an individual to be *less* likely to offer help to a stranger when in the presence of a large group of people.
5. The Hebrew term for the Holocaust, this literally translates to the "catastrophe."
6. In an interesting turn of serendipity, "complicity" was also chosen by some mainstream sources as the "word of the year" for 2017.

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Author Biography

Azadeh Aalai is an assistant professor of Psychology at Queensborough Community College in New York (CUNY). She also serves as an adjunct for the M.A. program in Psychology at New York University. Her research interests presently focus on Holocaust education and the psychology of bystander behavior during the Holocaust. Past research has focused on the intersection of media, mass violence, warfare, and genocide. She is a regular contributor for Psychology Today and other popular mainstream publications.