

The Role of the Creative Arts in Fostering Resistance, Resilience, and Survival: Lessons from the Terezin Holocaust Experience

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Abstract

The Holocaust represented one of the darkest periods in human history in the modern era. Cruel and dehumanizing methods of physical and psychological humiliation were used that eventually led to the murder of some six million Jewish men, women, and children. The concentration camp system became the vehicle for the deliberate and systematic destruction of the European population of Jews in what became known as the “Final Solution to the Jewish Problem.” The Terezin concentration camp became a “model camp” for Czech Jews, many of whom were “socially prominent artists, writers, scientists, jurists, diplomats, musicians, and scholars (Hájková, 2020). This article highlights vignettes of several artists and performers in Terezin to illustrate how the creative arts facilitated personal meaning, social interaction, and resistance. Research with elderly Holocaust survivors highlights their inner strengths and qualities of resilience that facilitated survivorship and well-being. Mental health and well-being of survivors demonstrates their ability to integrate traumatic memories as a part of a coherent life narrative. The relationship of creativity, adversity, and post-traumatic growth are reviewed as the perception of positive psychological change following highly challenging, adverse life circumstances. Finally, several recent studies document how the present use of the arts can promote increased self-understanding and self-reflection, and change behaviors and thoughts.

Keywords: creativity, creative arts, resilience, resistance, survivor, Holocaust, Terezin, Theresienstadt, trauma, adversity, stress, post-traumatic growth

Introduction

The period of the Holocaust has emerged as the most cruel and inhumane period in 20th Century history. This period was marked by destructive and inhumane behaviors which primarily targeted the European Jewish population for extermination. It was an assault on the physical, relational, emotional, spiritual, and psychological aspects of being human. The early T4 Euthanasia program began by focusing on other vulnerable groups (Berenbaum, 2001), including the terminally ill, those with physical and mental disabilities, individuals with mentally incapacitating disorders, children with various physical and emotional problems, and the elderly. This was the precursor to what was to become the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question,” a euphemism referring to the deliberate and systematic mass murder of European Jews by the Nazis. It resulted in the mass murder of some six million Jews and non-Jewish persons (Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, 2022) in extermination camps.

One such camp, Terezin (Jews referred to it as Terezin, the town’s name in Czech, while the Nazis used the German, Theresienstadt), was unique in the camp system. The major occupants of the camp were prominent Czech Jews who were celebrated artists, musicians, and composers of their time. It functioned as a transit camp where prisoners were deported before being sent to extermination camps. It also served as a propaganda vehicle to disguise the true nature of the “Final Solution” (Meckler, 2015). As the Nazis became aware of the propaganda value of the camp, it became a deceptive “model camp,” cynically referred to as a “spa town” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2022).

The camp was promoted as a “retirement center” where the Czech elderly and disabled German military veterans from World War I could live out their lives in relative safety. The camp was located 30 miles north of Prague in the Czech Republic. Due to the adverse conditions of the camp, 33,000 of the 140,000 Jews transferred to Terezin died of illness and disease. Of the 87,000 sent to extermination camps, only 5 percent survived (Ludwig, 1998). This included 15,000 children with only 132 survivors (Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 2022). Among the camps in the Nazi system, Terezin stood out due to the many prominent European Jews who were the upper class of society and included socially prominent artists, writers, scientists, jurists, diplomats, musicians, and scholars (Hájková, 2020; Ludwig, 1998). The camp also included members of the general population.

The creative arts became an important experience for prisoners at Terezin. Adolf Eichmann was appointed Director of the Camp in June 1940 and, unlike other camps, in 1942 he appointed Jewish Elders to oversee the daily management of the camp’s cultural activities (Administration for Free Time Activities). The “Jewish-run organization was responsible for a wide range of activities offered to the prisoners, including lectures, sports, chess, theater, cabaret, opera, jazz, and chamber concerts” (Ludwig, 1998, p. 160).

The Creative Culture at Terezin

Despite the horrible conditions in the camp, cultural activities were encouraged by the Nazis with relatively minimal interference. This limited oversight provided an atmosphere where the creativity of the artists could thrive. The value to the artist was the ability to create art, compose music, write and perform plays, even if carried out covertly, with a relative sense of

freedom. They had the ability to play music as several musical instruments were smuggled into the camp as early as the second transport.

As a cultural center, Terezin functioned as a showcase camp, a demonstration to the Red Cross and the world that the Nazis treated members of the community humanely. Hearing reports of negative treatment, however, representatives of the Red Cross contacted Nazi officials and arranged to visit the camp on June 23, 1944 (Hájková, 2020) and requested that they be allowed to inspect it. The Nazis, in preparation for this inspection and to continue their deception to the world, created a “beautification” campaign. They quickly deported 7,503 Jews to extermination camps making it appear less overcrowded. As the camp itself was transformed to demonstrate how well the inmates were being treated, flowers and grass were planted, prisoners were given new clothes and good food, and were housed in a clean bunkhouse with clean bedding. The Nazis went as far as to create the façade of shops, schools, and cafés, and the delegates were entertained by various cultural performances (Adler & Adler, 2017).

When Red Cross officials arrived to inspect the camp, they were introduced to prisoners who looked well and who had been briefed beforehand. This was designed to give officials a positive impression of the camp, making the Nazi propaganda campaign successful. In addition, the Nazis’ created a propaganda film, “The Führer gives a City to the Jews,” showing the positive treatment of the Jewish people under the protection of the Third Reich. The film included scenes of children playing, women interacting with each other, a men’s soccer game, an orchestra playing, residents tending a camp garden, and an audience for a lecture. Shortly following the making of the film, most of the people who were depicted in the film were transported to Auschwitz and perished in the gas chambers.

One resource addressed the following question. “What did the term ‘culture’ mean in this camp? It meant values that went beyond the mere physical survival of the community and were lived out and fulfilled as aspiration and creation, surpassing the minimal amount of vitally necessary achievement” (Adler & Adler, 2017, p. 517). The arts flourished with limited control and oversight by the Nazis. Scripts and musical presentations had to be approved by the Jewish Elders and then the commandant. As also pointed out:

The only times that high-ranking members of the SS [Schutzstaffel] showed a deep interest in the inmates’ art was when the artists broke one of the central prohibitions: contact with the outside world to disseminate information about the [camp]. At the height of the beautification campaign, the SS intercepted dozens of smuggled drawings that dramatically illustrated the misery of the [camp] (Hajkova, 2020, p. 174).

However, there were many ways in which inmates defied the Nazis due to being allowed to continue their work in the arts. There were clandestine programs in the camp, composed of readings, songs, and various artworks which served the other functions about life in the Terezin camp. As Goldfarb (1976) points out, the arts had three functions: escapist entertainment, the desire to hold on to tradition, and outlets for resistance. The relative freedom to create, under the extreme circumstances of incarceration, nurtured a level of resistance and survival in the camp, something that gave a sense of personal and collective meaning.

The exclusive nature of Terezin provided artists numerous opportunities to create and produce works from their creative experience. The relative freedom to create also granted more

clandestine aspects of art, a means of depicting the horrors of camp life. The Nazis also used the talents of inmate artists to achieve their own goals and commissioned artists to produce works of art that were copies of the old masters or portraits of SS officials (Hajkova, 2020). “Materials available for officially commissioned works thus provided supplies for secret sketches, portraits, and caricatures. Thus, official labor assignments enabled the artists to obtain access to paper, canvas, oil, and other supplies for their clandestine art” (Milton, 2001, p. 23). Furthermore:

The act of producing art also confirmed one’s sense of individuality; considering how to stage a play, interpreting a musical piece, or drawing were ways of expressing a distinct sense of self. Cultural activities can be understood as a life strategy, a reminder of individuality, a more convincing argument than the idea that art served as a strategy for survival. Did artistic activity sustain the spirit and promote survival in [Terezin]? Self-control over process and outcome, painfully absent in the lives of the inmates of the camp, could be momentarily achieved through creative work. A blank piece of paper provided a form of escape, access to memory and imagination, and a rare moment of privacy. (Dutlinger, 2001, p.1).

This personal sense of self, garnered through the creation of personal art, provided personal meaning under very challenging, adverse circumstances, and stress. Experiencing a sense of personal identity and meaning are powerful in one’s motivation to survive (Frankl, 1984).

Human Stories of Creative Expression at Terezin: Resistance, Resilience, and Survival

Interviews of survivors from the Holocaust offer a compelling assortment of individual and collective stories of resistance, resilience, and survival. The experiences of ordinary human beings thrown into extraordinary and adverse circumstances are illustrated through their art-making and performances. Artists and performers during the Holocaust have a unique story to tell and their artistic and creative works are testimonies to an experience of how the human spirit can function under extreme stress and even in the face of death. The enormity of mass extermination may be difficult to understand as an event. However, when confronted with the individual, personal, and human stories of survivors, we are quickly confronted with our own sense of humanity.

It is only in describing the individual stories of resistance, resilience, and survival that one can begin to capture the essence of the human experience of extreme trauma, adversity, and stress that draws us into the experience of being human ourselves. The human stories that have evolved and been brought to light in the aftermath of the Holocaust provide evidence of the meanings and motivations that people gave to their lives and that affected their survival during life in the camps. Life in Terezin depicts how, under the adversity of capture, deportation, and incarceration in concentration camps, the use of art and music provided a means where personal meaning and hope could contribute to the possibility of living another day.

Researchers have been interested in how people successfully cope with stressful and traumatic experiences and move on with their lives while other people are painfully affected and never seem to make an adequate recovery. While some individuals are affected by minimal stressful events which produce physiological, psychological, social, and interpersonal sequelae,

others achieve a psychological equilibrium and are more psychologically immune to intense traumatic events and disasters. The outcome of a traumatic event has to take into account a combination of risk and resilience factors (Bonanno, Brewin, Kaniasty & LaGreca, 2010; Bonanno & Mancini, 2010).

In a relatively small-scale study of aging Holocaust survivors, Reches & Sondaité (2017) outline the protective factors of resilience for survivors. The themes and subthemes that emerged from their study include *social support* (help that they received from close relatives and other people), *changes in values* (this included changes in attitudes toward people, life, and God), *circumstances* (“miracles” and coincidence), *integration of experience* (acceptance of fate, sharing experiences with others), and *self-reliance* (finding ways to survive, fighting for oneself and one’s family). These protective factors are both external (social support and circumstance) and internal (changes in values, integration of the traumatic experience, and self-reliance). Surviving can mean living to be a witness, to tell one’s story and to keep alive the memory of others and what they endured. Surviving may also have a more nuanced meaning in the context of resistance, whereas surviving may be as simple as living one more day or one more hour where the possibility of resistance and the hope of survival may be realized.

The ability to create works of art, compose and perform music, and write plays under very stressful conditions provides something meaningful that is psychologically effective for keeping the self relatively functional while in confinement. Ornstein (2006) presents the functions of creativity during incarceration as activities that permitted important functions of the self, making *emotional survival* and eventual *recovery* with a relatively intact mind more likely. The sketches and drawings served as witnesses to events that could not otherwise be visualized because there were no precedents for such events in the Western world. As detailed:

They had become invaluable sources of information for historians, and art also functioned as *internal resistance* against the effects of humiliation and degradation; passing jokes, singing songs, writing poetry, and creating caricatures created mental escape routes, and art created in camps and after the Holocaust, served as memorials for the dead (Ornstein, p. 391-392).

By drawing attention to the human stories of what individuals faced and how they coped with such horrific conditions, Holocaust art contributes to our understanding of approaches to resistance, resilience, and survival. The following stories are testaments to the human desire to find meaning and to provide a purpose to carry on with a sense of hope. Every survivor has an important story to tell. These stories from Terezin focus on the unique use of the arts.

Werner Reich was a teenager when he was sent to the concentration camp at Terezin. At 16, he was required to work at various jobs in the camp while younger children were able to play or engage in educational activities. In May, 1944 Reich was transferred to Auschwitz II (Birkenau) where he met a kind gentleman who shared a bunk with him. The gentleman, known to him as Herr Levin, produced a pack of playing cards that he shuffled daily. “And then one day, he showed me a card trick. I was amazed. It was the first trick I had ever seen. And then he explained it to me, in great detail” (Rauscher & Reich, 2017, p.101). Mr. Levin turned out to be a celebrated magician with the stage name “The Great Nivelli.” When the Nazis found out that he was a magician, they supplied him with cards and in return he performed for them

and taught them card and coin tricks. Reich acknowledges that, in part, this accounted for his survival in the camp.

Levin was then transferred to another camp. He survived the war, having lost his family in the gas chambers, and moved to New York where he resumed his magic performances. He died in 1977 (Rauscher & Reich, 2017). Werner Reich also survived, attributing his survival to “luck” and “looking strong and fit” for labor. He speaks to many groups today with the message of his own experience of how the kindness of Mr. Levin was also instrumental in his survival and how to treat others. He stated in a lecture, “So, if you ever know somebody who needs help, if you know somebody who is scared, be kind to them. Give them advice, give them a hug, teach them a card trick. Whatever you are going to do, it’s going to be hope for them. And if you do it at the right time, it will enter their heart, and it will be with them wherever they go, forever” (Reich, 2019).

Artforms have a variety of uses: some tell stories, others create symbols; some illustrate and document particular experiences and encounters, others heal. In an interpretive study of children’s artwork while in Terezin, Grossman (1989) signals the difference in themes between adult and children’s art. Adult artists depict the horrors of the camp with images that exposed the Nazi atrocities. Drawings include “a mountain of children’s shoes, the living skeletons of the aged, the transports, and the mortuary. We see the hunger and the sense of hopelessness and doom on the faces of the living dead. The art, by adults, is considered documentary. The artwork of children seemed to create a “rational world out of the madman’s dream which was life at Terezin” (p. 213). The themes depicted in children’s art include hunger and the longing for freedom as expressed in the many images of food, birds, butterflies, railroad trains, and windows. Many of the other drawings were of the Passover Seder and the themes of food, family, and freedom.

According to Etienne & colleagues (2019), “Art therapy strives to utilize a variety of forms of creative expression to allow individuals to identify and vocalize their inner thoughts, feelings and identity in a positive environment with the goal of improving their quality of life.” (p. 33). The account of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis is a case in point. Shortly after arriving at Terezin, Dicker-Brandeis organized drawing classes for children in their dormitories. Makarova (2000) quotes Dicker-Brandeis describing her approach: “The drawing classes are not meant to make artists out of all the children. They are to free and broaden such sources of energy as creativity and independence, to awaken the imagination, to strengthen the children’s powers of observation and appreciation of reality” (p. 31). Her experience with them exemplifies expressions of their internal worlds as powerful and effective psychological holding environments. In addition to the excellent art instruction, she also gave them freedom, an escape from the horrible reality of the camp (Hajkova, 2001). Dicker-Brandeis was deported from Terezin to Auschwitz-Birkenau October 6, 1944, and shortly thereafter died in the gas chambers with a group of her students.

What has become known in the Holocaust literature as the story of “The Girls from Room 28” (Brenner, 2009), tells the compelling story of Dicker-Brandeis’ students. These coming-of-age young women survived beyond the camps, though their teacher did not. Their experiences making art created interpersonal relationships and a close-knit community, contributing to their survival. The developmental tasks for these adolescent girls had to be navigated in less than adequate conditions for survival. However, their teachers were conscious of the need to protect

them from the daily stress and fears of incarceration by occupying their time with art-making (Wonschick & Dutlinger, 2001). Adults put forth considerable effort, due to their ability for self-government in the camp, to protect and nourish the youth and instill a sense of hope because youth represented the future. "Some 'room leaders' were highly educated. Many were teachers or artists. They were expected to mentor and care for the children, and to teach them values to prepare them for later life-life after the war" (Wonschick & Dutlinger, 2001, p. 63).

Hanka Wertheimer-Weingarten stated, "We were able to learn, draw pictures, read books, and talk a lot. We made plans for the future. What I enjoyed most were the long evenings when we would lie on our hard boards, in darkness. While most children were sleeping, some of us were awake and wondered how soon the war would be over, how we would return home and start a normal life" (Wonschick & Dutlinger, 2001, p. 72). Almost all of her family perished in the camps, except her sister, and Hanka herself was near death when liberated from Bergen-Belson. She survived the Holocaust and died in 2018 at the age of 89.

Anna Flach (called Flaska), continued as a singer, pianist, and professor of music after liberation. She was a talented singer and participated in many musical performances while in Terezin. She was part of a youth organization in the camp known as "helping hand" (*Yad Tomechet*) where she assisted the elderly with food and care (Brenner, 2009). She kept a journal called a "Memory Book" (*Gedenkbuch*), which contained aphorisms, drawings, pressed flowers, and dedication. Many of the inscriptions are words of farewell with her friends. While she remained in Terezin, many of her friends were sent away to Auschwitz where they perished. Flaska and her mother and sister survived the camps (Wonschick & Dutlinger, 2001; Brenner, 2009). She has continued as an educator and advocate of music.

Goldfarb (1976) reports that theatrical performances in Terezin ranged from dramatic readings in the barracks to full-scale productions. Theater may seem a surprising activity in a concentration camp. Tuma (1976) notes, "Heroism wasn't in the clandestineness but in the will to create, to paint, to write, to perform and to compose in hell" (p. 15). Peschel (2009) cites survivors' testimony suggesting that in the camp, theatrical performances functioned as social practice, increasing prisoners' resilience and ability to cope with unrelenting traumatic events.

One notable performance at Terezin was the children's opera, *Brundibár*, composed by Hans Krasa in Prague, 1938. The opera tells the story of a brother and sister who sing for money so they can buy fresh milk for their sick mother. *Brundibár*, a nasty organ grinder, steals their money. With the help of singing animals, the siblings recover their stolen money. Krasa and several members were transported to Terezin in 1943, where the opera was performed 55 times as part of the "free time activities" in the camp. The Nazis also exploited the opera for the Red Cross visit in June, 1944 and it appeared in the film titled, "The Fuhrer Gives a City to the Jews."

Rovit (2000) suggests, "But the simple tale may have provided Terezin audiences with an allegory for their situation. A brother and sister sing for money so that they can buy fresh milk for their sick mother. Existing production photos from Terezin show that the boy in the role of *Brundibár* wearing a Hitler mustache" (p. 111). In addition:

All of the children of Terezin were swept up in their collective hatred of a wicked organ grinder who refuses to let needy children sing for money in the district he considers his own beat. Animals finally advise the children to get together and fight the wicked man and

the evil Brundibár is finally defeated. Again, the marching song that expresses their victory became a substitute defiance of the evil the Jews were helpless to fight in the [camp]: “Beat your drum, we have won. . . We did not give in! We are not afraid” (Levin, 1968, p.485).

The performance of Brundibár provided inmates with the opportunity to covertly, in Czech, present a resistance message that Nazi officials did not suspect nor seemed to care about. Knowing that any detection of a message that was contrary to Nazi ideology could result in beatings or death, the performers knew the message they were conveying. Toltz (2004) highlights the seriousness of the risks of resistance:

The Czech libretto of *Brundibár* (using words similar to those of Czech cabaret and everyday Czech work songs) created a language barrier against any German objections, and invested the work with a special power of resistance, especially for the children who performed in it or saw it. This resistance is most strongly embodied in the words of the final song of the opera: “He who loves his father, mother and native land, who wants the tyrant’s end, join us hand in hand and be our welcome friend.”

Far from music acting as a tool of deception by the Nazis for the greater world, music for these survivors was a tool of resistance, survival, and nourishment (p. 45).

Brundibár was popular in the [camp] for three major reasons: inmates could see children enjoying a theatrical experience; the allegorical nature of the story of victory over a tyrant could be extrapolated to include the current political oppression suffered by the inmates; and the music was approachable, memorable, and enjoyable. Each melody in the work returns motif-style to represent characters (Brundibár, the animals) and situations (the quest for milk, the victory march) (Toltz, 2022).

There are numerous examples of resistance during the Holocaust. Krieger (2010) reports on the work of John and Mary Felstiner, who describe an aspect of art during the Holocaust as “*creative resistance*.” Counter to the perception of Jews as passive victims, the Felstiner’s argue for those artists during the Holocaust who demonstrated resistance through various works which included artists, writers, and musicians (Haven, 2010). The driving motivation of artists in the moment was the sense of creating something from within themselves that possibly could live beyond them. “It did not serve as much as another piece of bread. It didn’t kill one Nazi. It didn’t stop anything,” said Mary Felstiner. “But it gave them the morale to go another day. And when we look at these works, we see transcendence” (Krieger, 2010). Haven (2010) cites Mary Felstiner’s common feature of creative resistance, that “is that pushing into the future, that sense that we need to mark this moment because there must be a future out there that will look back on us.”

Artwork did not have to be exquisite, refined, or necessarily conform to the rules of artmaking. In fact, the Holocaust itself was so abhorrent and life-altering that it naturally became an object of artmaking for those who experienced life in the camps. Such a horrible experience would have unlikely become a subject matter that artists would have initiated. Artists’ creations can often be reflective of historical and cultural events as they trigger intense emotion from which art forms emanate. As Haven (2010) cites, “creativity” may be as simple as “a trace, a mark, or a scribble.” Marcel Chetovy, a teenager at the time, wrote on a wall at the Drancy internment camp that he and his father, Moise, were leaving the deportation camp in

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France for Auschwitz, “with very good spirits and the hope of returning soon.” They were never heard from again.

From 1942-1944, a group of defiant and resistant teenage boys in Terezin created and published a secret underground magazine titled *Vedem*, which in Czech means “In the Lead.” The magazine’s founder, Petr Ginz, was a 14-year-old child prodigy from Prague. The boys published 83 weekly issues (more than 800 pages), documenting life in Terezin. The articles, some humorous, some with hand-drawn illustrations, reported on life in the camp. Readings held on Friday evenings drew attendance from well-known artists and writers. During the Red Cross visit, the boys were openly critical of the “beautification” campaign the Nazis used as a deception to the organization. After the Red Cross staff left, transports to Auschwitz resumed. All but one of the boys involved in the *Vedem* project were sent to the gas chambers. The sole survivor, Sidney Taussig, had saved the issues of *Vedem* by stashing them in a metal box that he recovered after he was liberated (Krizkova, Kotouc, & Zdenek, 1995; Milton, 2001; Shey, 2017).

Music is integral to the cultural experience within any society. Its functions are complex for both the listener and the performer. Schafer, Sedlmeier, Stadtler, & Huron (2013), have identified several functions experienced by the listener, namely, *self-awareness* (music has an identity function where it helps people think about who they are), *social relatedness* (promotes the concept of social bonding and relating to friends), and *arousal and mood regulation* (music utilized as entertainment and emotionally, diversion).

During the Holocaust, music had a variety of functions for both inmates and the Nazi regime. As unusual as it may seem for music to exist in the camps, it actually was an important part of the culture of virtually every camp in some form or another. Historically, music was a tool used to indoctrinate and control Germans with their ideology of being superior, suppressing independence of thought, and racial hatred and prejudice. Known as *Entartete Musik*, it was translated as “degenerate” music, and was introduced as a threat to the German citizenry in 1937 (Ludwig, 1998). In Terezin, the Nazis permitted music as a cover for the more sinister goal of ultimately deporting victims to other camps for extermination.

Goldfarb (1976) addresses the theatrical performances and activities in the camp that were composed of songs and readings in the barracks. The inmates used their performances as a way to resist Nazi leaders. Resistance may be an internal attitude; however, the public performances communicated personal expression, meaning, and defiance, even when knowing the likely outcome could be their own death. The audience sat on their bunks while observing and listening to familiar performances. This offered opportunities to engage in such songs as Mordecai Gebirtig’s “Our Town is Burning.” Gebirtig was a Yiddish poet and songwriter. This song commemorated a 1938 clash between Polish and Jewish communities in Przytyk, Poland. However, the song represents, in the context of Nazi occupation, the opportunity to sing with an attitude of defiance because the Nazis would not necessarily understand Yiddish. Gebirtig died on June 4, 1942, while being marched to the Krakow train station for transport to the Belzec death camp. He and his family, among others, were gunned down by Nazi guards (Cohen, 2013).

Celebrated composer, Rafael Schacter and a group of performers at Terezin presented Giuseppe Verdi’s *Messa da Requiem*, a Catholic funeral mass, 16 times in the camp. Adolf

Eichmann and representatives of the Red Cross attended the last performance on June 23, 1944. The artists designed the production as part of the showcase and performed with vigor, despite most of them knowing their fate. The following day the entire ensemble of musicians and choral singers were deported to Auschwitz and died in the gas chambers.

The “*Requiem*” represented what the performers could not say directly to the Nazis. They were able to forget, momentarily, camp life and deportations and garner enough strength to better cope with the loss of freedom. Marianka Zadikow May, a survivor of Terezin, suggests that Schachter and his chorus may have been singing directly to Eichmann the words, “the day of wrath, that day will dissolve the world in ashes as foretold by David. . . When therefore the judge will sit, whatever hides will appear. Nothing will remain unpublished. We didn’t have weapons so we could not fight them--but we could fight them with singing” (Lowe, 2010).

Ironically, the very music condemned by the Nazis was allowed in Terezin. The Ghetto Swingers was a jazz group formed by Eric Vogel, a trumpeter who was sent to Terezin in 1942. As musicians in the camp, they “were forced to perform for the SS, on command and under inconceivable duress. The particular cruelty of this--desecrating and corrupting the creative impulse that fuels and sustains art remains wildly perverse, though Vogel was nonetheless grateful for any chance, however grim, to make the music that he loved” (Petrusich, 2019). Since Jazz was considered “degenerate” music under the Nazis, Joseph Goebbels from the Ministry of Propaganda realized its value to promote Terezin as the showcase camp. The Ghetto Swingers performed outside a café for the 1944 visit of the Red Cross.

Three months following the Red Cross visit, most of the Ghetto Swingers were sent to Auschwitz and to the gas chambers. Vogel was sent on a separate transport and reunited with a few members of the group. They were to play music for the SS from morning until night. The guitarist, Heinz Jakob “Coco” Schumann also described the band as offering deep, if temporary, relief from the panic of the camps. “When I played, I forgot where I was. The world seemed in order, the suffering of people around me disappeared--life was beautiful. Nothing was further from my mind than the wall that enclosed the camp, the emaciated men, women and children, the trains to the extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. We were a ‘normal’ band who played for a ‘normal’ audience” (Schumann, 1997, p. 42). Schumann was liberated from Dachau and returned to Berlin where he continued to play jazz. He died in 2018 at the age of 93. Vogel similarly recalled, “We were so concerned and so happy to play our beloved jazz that we had tranquilized ourselves into the dream world produced by the Germans for reasons of propaganda” (Petrusich, 2019). While being transferred to Dachau, Vogel dodged gunfire and escaped through the woods. He went on to program radio shows, book jazz festivals, and play music with friends. He died in 1980 at the age of 84.

Adversity, and Post-Traumatic Growth: How the Creative Arts Can Promote Survivorship

Holocaust survivors experienced one of the most horrific catastrophes in human history. As a traumatic life event, one’s ability to cope, adapt, and survive is a complex and multifaceted experience. Today’s Holocaust survivors, frequently children or adolescents, were often torn from their families. They became witnesses to the destruction of their homes and communities. Psychologically, one experienced a loss of identity (displacement, personal items confiscated,

and personal history lost), assaults on personality, social experiences and interactions, mistrust, alienation, and, in some cases, a loss of faith in humankind (Fisher and Gilboa, 2016). Garwood (2018) identifies issues of powerlessness, fear of annihilation, object loss, and torture as elements that Holocaust victims faced while incarcerated in the camps. Coping with the daily issues of stress that the camps created for victims was paramount in the way that some prisoners were able to survive through resilience.

The consequences of long-term traumatic sequelae related to extreme stress suffered in the Holocaust has been a topic of recent research (Preiss, et. al., 2022; Kahana & Kahana, 2001; Barel, Van IJzendoorn, Sagi-Schwartz, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010). These studies have highlighted how many elderly Holocaust survivors experience long-term traumatic affects into old age. Overwhelming maltreatment and torture that characterized the experience of survivors has also shown consistent evidence of psychological distress in comparison to a group of controls (Kahana & Kahana, 2001). Long-term stress and complex trauma resulting from exposure in the Holocaust causes significant disruptions to one's sense of self, social and interpersonal relationships. Although survivors of the Holocaust experience long-term pain from their past ordeal, they also demonstrate a remarkable ability to be resilient in adapting to their "personal, social, and communal life" (Barel, Van IJzendoorn, Sagi-Schwartz, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010, p. 694).

Elderly survivors of the concentration camp experience attribute their survival, in part, to participating in art and music. A factor associated with survivors' mental health and well-being is the ability to integrate traumatic memories as part of a coherent life narrative. Creating a coherent life narrative allows adults to come to terms with life as lived and learn to cope with later life losses. According to O'Rourke, et. al. (2015), reminiscing about the past has both positive and negative effects on mental health and well-being. Survivors who remember drawing upon their inner strength and coping resources during the Holocaust appear to have a strong sense of meaning, coherence, and good mental health in later life (Zeidner & Aharoni-David, 2014).

While earlier research focused on the pathological experiences of extreme stress, adversity, and trauma (Diamond, Ronel, & Shira, 2020; Frankl, 1984; Krystal, 1988), recent work has examined the internal strengths and the adaptive ability of survivors to cope by using their own inner resources (Barel, et. al., 2010; Corley, 2010). Research focusing on the internal strengths and adaptive qualities of living Holocaust survivors show that they are the most resilient and have led long and full lives (O'Rourke, et. al., 2015). Psychological resilience, termed *hardiness* by Kobasa, Maddi & Kahn (1982), is a pervasive belief that one can rebound from trauma effectively. Resilience in the face of adverse life events is the ability to have a *commitment to living* (engaging fully in daily activities), *embracing challenge* (belief that change, rather than stability, define life and living), and *perceiving control* (belief that one has the ability to directly alter the course of their life).

Survivors who were adolescents in Terezin recall favorable experiences about interacting with adults while engaging in various forms of art, music, and performance. Creating art is an exclusively human endeavor. Gabora (2013) has pointed out: "Creativity is arguably our most uniquely human trait. It enables us to escape the present, reconstruct the past, and fantasize about the future, to envision something that does not exist and change the world with it" (p. 1). Creativity represents a means of envisioning new possibilities, inspiration, and

transformation. Further, it functions as inspiration referring to being inspired by another's creative expression and the creative person's own sense of inspiration is expressed through the creative process. Simonton (2006) argues that creativity must embody two criteria: first, the demands of originality, novelty, and surprise; and second, adaptation. The expressive elements in artmaking are seen in the works of the various Holocaust artists: painters, novelists, poets, playwrights, musicians, composers, entertainers, and even a magician. "Societies can be linked and transformed through creative processes" (Corley, 2010, p. 543).

A growing body of literature references the relationship of growth, adversity, and creativity. Post-traumatic growth is the perception of positive psychological change that an individual manifests following highly challenging, adverse life circumstances (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Post-traumatic growth "can result from the struggle with loss" and the "positive change that the individual experiences as a result of the struggle with a major loss or trauma" (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001, p. 158). Research on the positive changes that accompany experiences of adversity has found that people report positive growth in five domains: interpersonal relationships, the perception of new possibilities for one's life, personal strength, spirituality, and appreciation for life. Further, the unique life experiences that highly creative individuals report suggest that traumatic and adverse experiences may play a critical role in fostering their creativity, and increased creativity can manifest post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

The ability for psychological growth (post-traumatic growth) following adverse and traumatic circumstances (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001; Forgeard, 2013; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) has been shown in victims who manifest resilience (Bonanno, Brewin, Kaniasty, & La Greca, 2010; Reches & Sondaite, 2017). Individuals engaged in creative activities during the Holocaust who were presented with opportunities to be expressive through art, plays, and music, even clandestine in nature, and who lived beyond the camp experience, regard those activities as helpful in their survival (Corley, 2010; Diamond, Ronel & Shira, 2020; Diamond & Shira, 2018; Fisher & Gilboa, 2016; Ius & Sidenberg, 2017).

Camic (2008) reports studies of psychologists documenting how the arts can be used to heal emotional injuries, increase an understanding of oneself and others, develop and demonstrate an increased capacity for self-reflection, reduce and alleviate psychological symptoms, change behaviors, and thinking patterns. Art engagement is an interaction between inner and outer reality and are formed cognitively, affectively, and unconsciously while interacting with the environment. A study by Forgeard (2013) provided support for a relationship between the experience of adversity and creativity, with self-perceptions of creativity constituting the psychological construct of post-traumatic growth. This adversity-creativity link has been empirically explored relating to adverse life events, psychological disorders, and physical illness and the subsequent experience of creativity. Following adverse circumstances, the perceptions of post-traumatic growth in the form of a creative experience can contribute to well-being.

Engagement in the arts has been described as goal-directed activity that operates as a diversion from physical and emotional pain (Malchiodi, 2005); and includes other benefits including: giving meaning, purpose and hope; increased confidence; a sense of achievement; pride and satisfaction; as well as confidence, self-esteem, and the ability to rebuild an identity beyond that of being a service user (Secker, et. al., 2007). Recovery in mental health is an

important concept when engaging in art for individuals who feel trapped in a “cycle of hopelessness and despair” (Spandler, et. al., 2007, p. 78).

Although art and performance existed in all the concentration camps, Terezin was unique. Frequently, clandestine in nature, creativity functioned as a holding environment during captivity and, for those inmates who demonstrated resilience and survived, it fostered growth into adulthood after the Holocaust. While resilience can lead to survival, survival leads to the potentiality for growth following the Holocaust. Many of those who survived the camps and manifest a level of resilience, were able to achieve some levels of growth and were able to find purpose and meaning in the future.

Conclusion

Artists and performers, captives in the Terezin concentration camp, have a unique story to tell through their art. Their artistic and creative works have lived well beyond their own lives to tell the larger experience of the Holocaust. The intensity of the trauma and adversity of capture, deportation, and incarceration at Terezin facilitated a culture where artists, performers, playwrights, and musicians were able to thrive, in part, due to their participation in the creative arts. Unlike other camps, the arts became a part of camp life. Some artwork, plays, and music were produced covertly. Participation in creative efforts, by the testimony of survivors, fostered resistance and resilience leading to survivorship in adulthood. Creativity played a functional role in the resistance, resilience, and survival of artists. It provided avenues in which meaning could be manifest from participation in the arts. Interaction with others who were artists provided levels of hope for the future, especially for children and adolescents.

Those who were adolescents in Terezin are documented as having more favorable experiences, with the adults who, as a community, set out to protect them from the overt horrors of the camp. In Terezin, the creative arts provided meaning for those individuals incarcerated and allowed them the potential to be resilient and survive, even if this meant surviving only one moment or one day longer. Although engagement in the arts did not guarantee an inmate's survival beyond the camps, the artwork, music, and plays provided personal meaning, social interaction, and hope--factors that increase resilience. The creative works that survived the camps are still exhibited and performed today, keeping the artists' memories alive. Creativity provided a pathway for resistance and potentially resilience and survival into adulthood. They took solace in using their imagination to produce art, potentially culminating in what is known today as post-traumatic growth. The relationship between the experience of adversity and creativity, with self-perceptions of creativity supports post-traumatic growth (Forgeard, 2013).

Resilience (Kobasa, Maddi & Kahn, 1982; O'Rourke, et. al., 2015), as a construct, highlights the use of an individual's internal strengths that allowed adaptation to the adverse conditions in the camps (Barel, et. al., 2010; Corley, 2010). The ability to be psychologically resilient in the face of adverse life events is the ability to have a commitment to living, embracing challenge, and perceiving control. Following adverse circumstances, the perceptions of post-traumatic growth in the form of a creative experience can contribute to an individual's well-being. Creative therapies, which includes art therapy (Etienne, et. al, 2019), as used today have generated enough success as to justify their use in medical, educational, and psychological settings. Attard & Larkin (2016) assert that creative therapies (art psychotherapy, dance

movement, body psychotherapy, drama, and music therapy) can enhance a person's creativity, emotional expression, communication, insight, and ability to relate to themselves and others.

Accepting an understanding of a resilience-based philosophy allows for informed implementation of strategies and treatment methods to build resilience. As health and human service providers, this requires turning our attention to people's inner strengths and their ability to overcome the psychological impact of adverse events. Using resilience-enhancing interventions can build survival and coping skills. Those skills, especially when used by older adults dealing with difficult life situations, can revolutionize clinical practice (Greene & Graham, 2009). Recognizing individual strengths and resilience is important in physical, emotional, and spiritual health interventions to foster future survival and growth.



*Terezin Memorial Cemetery
The Czech Republic*

Special Notation

The photograph at the conclusion of the article is that of the Memorial Cemetery in front of the Little Fort in Terezin in the Czech Republic. The photograph is in the public domain per Wikipedia Commons: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Terezin_CZ_Memorial_Cemetery_01.JPG

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