

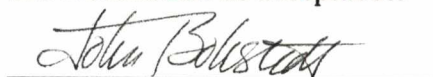
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Lisa White Smith entitled "Refining Resistance: Responses in Auschwitz." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Sociology.



Sherry Cable, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

**Refining Resistance:
Responses in Auschwitz**

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Lisa White Smith
May 1996

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmothers
for their faith and encouragement,

Mrs. Belle Kreis White
and
Mrs. Freeda Hall

and to my children
for their patience,

Andrea
Nichole
and
Walker T

*With the hope that each generation
will remember to listen to the experiences of the generations before.*

Acknowledgments

Although this work, its imperfections and assumptions are mine, I have benefitted from the advice, criticism, and encouragement of many people. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Donald (Chip) Hastings; his sometimes blunt criticism is rarely disputable and his willingness to provide constructive editorial comments is invaluable. Likewise, Dr. Gilya Schmidt's enthusiasm is contagious as I seek her advice as a mentor and a friend.

The members of my committee shaped many aspects of my educational outlook, both in and out of the classroom. Dr. Sherry Cable taught me the value of vivid examples and non-traditional perspectives. Dr. John Gaventa's insight on the subtle dynamics of power encourages me to contemplate its role in all social relationships. And finally, Dr. John Bohstedt's historical outlines are imbedded in my mind and always valuable in my work. To all three, I owe my appreciation.

Finally, my husband Walker provides me with exceptional support through his encouragement, patience, and understanding of my educational pursuits. His well-founded advice about university dynamics, publishing papers, and academic life in general are invaluable. I sincerely appreciate the innumerable opportunities he gives me.

Abstract

Analysis of "resistance" during the Holocaust is severely circumscribed by a mainstream definition of resistance which is limited to revolts, rebellions, or other overt acts of defiance against an oppressor's will. This study is based on the premise that resistance is better described as a continuum ranging from behavioral acquiescence to revolts. By refining the definition of resistance, it becomes possible to study any acts by the victims of Auschwitz which had the intended effect of defying the Nazi oppressors' goals. The clarification of this definition diminishes the perception of victim passivity in conditions of extreme oppression--including but not limited to the Holocaust. Furthermore, the strict separation of people by sex in Auschwitz provides a somewhat unique opportunity to study how women and men vary in their social responses to oppression.

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Introduction

The Holocaust as a Case Study for Resistance

The Holocaust is often referred to as an isolated episode of genocide--an event of the past albeit recent. As such, it is generally considered a subject for historians rather than sociologists. But the components that built the Holocaust "killing machine" were all distinctly social. A powerful government attempted to destroy entire communities of people, fueled by the racist ideology of a charismatic leader during a period of economic and social instability. Technological advances, the exploitation of mass media for inflammatory propaganda, and misuse of legitimate authority converged to create a deadly oppression. The destruction was so vast and unspeakable that "genocide" was coined to attempt description (Porter 1982, 2).

Extensive sociological research pivots around issues of power (Bachrach and Botwinick 1992; Barnes 1988; Lukes 1974), conformity and/or obedience to authority (Asch 1958; Milgram 1974), resistance (Scott 1990), and even why resistance does not occur (Gaventa 1982). Yet, sociologists have barely scratched the surface of Holocaust studies (Bauman 1989; Berger 1993, 1995; Linden 1993; Pawełczyńska [1973]1979; Remmling 1993), and genocide studies (Fein 1979, 1993; Harff and Gurr 1989). Research on the Nazi atrocities can shed insight on the social dynamics of oppression and resistance strategies used elsewhere by the powerless against the powerful--but not if we act as if it is beyond the pale of sociological inquiry.

Listening to the experiences of Holocaust survivors (and vicariously to the experiences of those who did not survive) can potentially lead sociologists to a greater understanding of human reactions under extremely oppressive and threatening conditions. The victims, at times, have been portrayed as if they were a homogeneous grey-and-blue-striped mass. This stereotype misrepresents the reality; its acceptance further perpetuates the veracity of Nazi myths and efforts to eradicate a segment of humanity and eliminate diversity. Instead, Holocaust victims, who were considered *lebensunwertes Leben* (literally translated: lives unworthy of life), were from all social classes; most were Jewish, some were not. Men and women, young and old alike were pre-judged by the Nazis and their collaborators to be unworthy of life, based solely on a misguided but nonetheless socially-defined categorization system.

Nazi goals varied somewhat from one persecuted group (Jews, gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals) to others.¹ Nevertheless, common Nazi goals existed within the Auschwitz complex (Berenbaum 1990, 20-45; Pawełczyńska [1973] 1979, 15-23; Feig 1990, 161-178), including: 1) forcing conformity through dehumanization [shaved heads, reference to prisoners by number only, base living conditions], 2) squashing resistance *per se* with deprivation, absolute control, terror, and retributive murder, 3) fracturing community solidarity through separation and near-constant relocation, and 4) subjecting prisoners to heavy labor with inadequate

¹ For a more complete discussion about variations in the Nazi persecution of specific groups, see *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews and Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*, edited by Michael Berenbaum (New York University Press, 1990).

sustenance for survival to maximize production profits and minimize destruction costs (in Michael Berenbaum's words, "reducing the human beings to consumable raw materials expended in the process of manufacture" [1990, 26]).

Some paths in Holocaust research challenge the notion that women's experiences were identical or parallel to the experiences of men (e.g., Laska 1983; Milton [1984]1992; Ringelheim [1985]1992; Rittner and Roth 1992; Tec 1984). The risk of immediate death on arrival in Auschwitz was greater for women (Ringelheim [1985]1992, 394), and pre-camp socialization influenced different reactions to the camp conditions by sex (380). Furthermore, women entered the camps with a *different* set of resources (knowledge, relationships with other people in and out of the camps, skills, life experiences) than did men. Concurring with the argument that women's experiences were different from those of men, I argue that resistance by females is unlikely to be identical to that of males.

The goal of this paper is twofold: first, to gain knowledge and understanding about what constitutes resistance to oppression from victims' experiences (*not* to offer excuses for a lack of different reactions, or to analyze the "effectiveness" of their behavior; both efforts are unnecessary in my perspective); and second, to analyze some of the differences between women and men in their methods of defying the oppressors. When analyzing resistance and its gender differences, I discuss the limitations and ambiguities of a traditional definition of resistance and refine this term for the purposes of the project. Next, I describe the sample population and

methodological considerations. Then, drawing from the experiences related through Holocaust survivor oral histories, I analyze the mechanisms used to resist the Nazi oppression and some of the patterns that emerged among survivors. Finally, I evaluate the applicability of an expanded definition of resistance and suggest further research.

***Resistance:
A Question of Definition***

Studies of resistance to oppression in general, and resistance during the Holocaust specifically, use a somewhat narrow definition of the term "resistance" (Fogelman 1994; Hilberg 1992; Goldberg 1991). Actions that intentionally defy an oppressor's goals are considered resistant; however, imaginary lines seem to be drawn about how bold or overt the actions must be before they are construed as *true* resistance. If the action is not resistant "enough" to fit the somewhat fuzzy definition, victims are considered acquiescent, passive or non-resistant.

In non-Holocaust studies, resistance is described as that "which in some measure ends up directly challenging the social relations of power" (Kraus 1993, 248); a "capacity to organize collectively and challenge openly the interests of [the power holders]" (Hart 1991, 94); and more often is not defined but simply implied (Scott 1990; Goldberg 1991). In *Women and the Politics of Empowerment*, methods of resistance described include: escape, revolt, daily acts of subversion, strikes, and uprisings (Bookman and Morgen 1988, 5). Note in this example the omission of more subtle or covert acts of defiance. A narrowly defined use of "resistance" may simply

reflect the foci of various scrutinized projects; yet, a strictly overt interpretation is so pervasive that little or no terminology remains to discuss covert or subtle mechanisms of intentional defiance *as resistance*. Furthermore, some people argue that these mechanisms are not resistance at all but are instead "something else."²

The limitation of "resistance" to overt action is, likewise, a theme in Holocaust research. Raul Hilberg uses this term when describing armed and unarmed revolts, sabotage, attempts at escape (Hilberg 1992, 174-185), and formal underground movements (205-211). Eva Fogelman's *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* (1994) focuses on resistance but, again, only overt manifestations. One possible reason for a narrow interpretation of resistance in Holocaust research is the widespread use of "The Resistance" to describe organized, underground partisan groups who fought against Nazi policies and efforts.

A few researchers have worked toward a broader definition of resistance, either directly (Scott 1990) or indirectly (Milton [1984]1992). Anna Pawełczyńska ([1973] 1979) discusses subtle mechanisms used by victims in Auschwitz *as* resistance, although alternately refers to these behaviors as "mechanisms of adaptation," "defense mechanisms," or "inner resistance." Sybil Milton describes two "basic" types of resistance in the Holocaust era: "(1) organized networks linked by a common ideology; and (2) autonomous personal acts of noncompliance" ([1984] 1992, 232),

² Responses of this sort have been conveyed to the author at various times including at the SSSP National Conference, August 1995; and in a conversation with Joan Ringelheim, a respected Holocaust scholar, in 1994. See footnote 3.

but limits her discussion to actions by "The Resistance" outside the camps (232-237). Her descriptions of defiant (or non-conforming) activities within the camps are referred to as "mutual help" and "survival skills" rather than resistance (227-232).

In non-Holocaust research, James C. Scott (1990) approaches variation in the degree of outwardness of resistant behavior by referring to "hidden transcripts" and "public transcripts." Scott argues that "short of actual rebellion, powerless groups have...a self-interest in conspiring to reinforce hegemonic appearances" (1990, xii), and yet, the oppressed people still resist in covert ways--his concept, "the hidden transcript." This "discourse that takes place 'off-stage,' beyond direct observation by power holders" (Scott 1990, 4) has three primary characteristics. First, a hidden transcript is specific to a given social setting and set of actors; second, it goes beyond speech to a "whole range of practices"; and third, the

frontier between the public and the hidden transcripts is a zone of constant struggle between dominant and subordinate--not a solid wall...Tactical prudence ensures that subordinate groups rarely blurt out their hidden transcript directly. But, taking advantage of the anonymity of a crowd or of an ambiguous accident, they manage in a thousand artful ways to imply that they are grudgingly conscripts to the performance (Scott 1990, 14-15).³

³ For an interesting example of this, see the quote from Michael Berger's testimony later in this paper.

Scott's work, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, seeks to "move beyond apparent consent and to grasp potential [resistant] acts, intentions as yet blocked, and possible futures that a shift in the balance of power or a crisis might bring to view" (1990, 16). In doing so, Scott begins to redefine resistance to include activities other than revolts and rebellions, and outside of the direct observation of the oppressor.

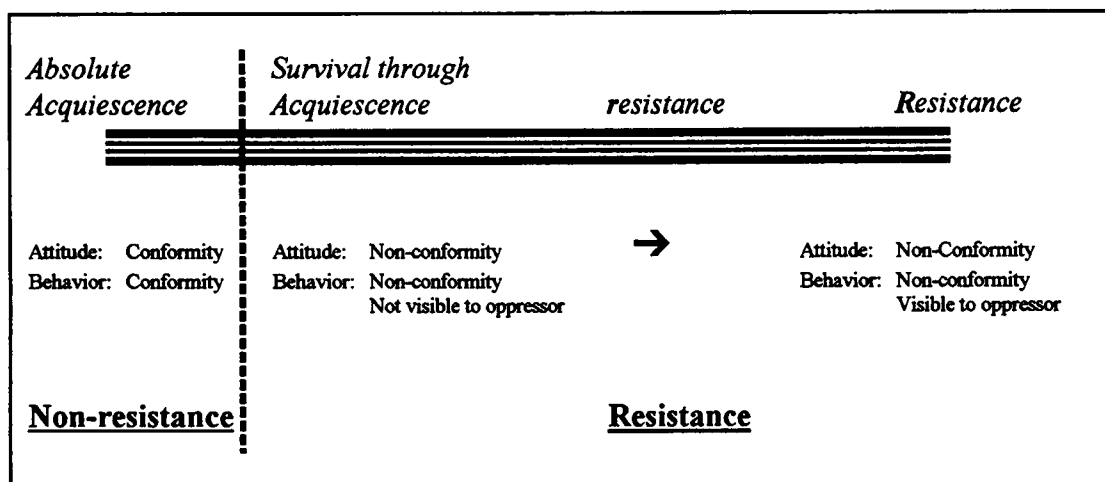


Figure 1: Resistance on a Continuum

Similarly, I argue that resistance is best described as a continuum from complete conformity to blatant defiance (See Figure 1). On the "*absolute acquiescence*" end of the continuum, the oppressed person or group follow all orders of the oppressor without any intention of behavioral or attitudinal defiance. At this end, the victim fully conforms to the oppressor, a state of **non-resistance**. Absolute acquiescence results from hopelessness, confusion or internalization of the oppressor's beliefs (Bettelheim 1960; Gaventa 1982), but is nonetheless non-resistance.

If, instead, the person or group's conformity is only surface-deep, they cross the line to **resistance**. Although their visible behavior conforms to the oppressor, attitudinal conformity is absent; the oppressed individual or group refuses to be hopeless despite dire conditions and fights dehumanization by the oppressor. These efforts often encourage increasingly visible resistance later. Behavioral acquiescence, thus, is a temporary decision to mitigate confusion and wait for opportune moments when other forms of resistance are more likely to succeed. I refer to the segment of the continuum closest to absolute acquiescence but across the resistance line as "*survival through acquiescence*."

Moving to the right on the continuum from survival through acquiescence, non-conforming behavior becomes increasingly more visible to the oppressor or bystanders. The polar opposite of absolute acquiescence includes highly visible defiance like revolts and rebellions, referred to as "**Resistance**" with emphasis on the capital "R." The middle ground between **Resistance** and survival through acquiescence encompasses a wide range of intentionally defiant efforts that are at times subtle and are not always visible to the oppressor. This area is called "*resistance*" with emphasis on the lower case "r."⁴ Although there are not rigid lines between resistance and either **Resistance** or Survival through Acquiescence, these labels address behavior variability paired with attitudinal non-conformity. The key

⁴This notion is the product of a discussion with Joan Ringelheim in April 1994 in an effort to by-pass the theoretical question of "What is resistance anyway?"

criterion for determining the presence or absence of resistance *per se* is the intentionality of defiance or conformity--the attitudinal component. A continuum approach allows discussion of responses to oppression without flattening diverse cases into two crude behavioral categories--resistance and non-resistance.

An analysis of resistance--especially when using a definition that includes intent--is subjective in nature and requires inquiry into the direct experiences of the participants. This approach allows a more thorough understanding of the dynamics of power and resistance that is inaccessible through official documents and observable behavior. Its purpose is *not* to glorify non-resistance or neutralize the definition of resistance (Ringelheim [1985]1992, 390), but to broaden understanding and encourage analysis of responses to extremely oppressive conditions. In James Scott's terminology, inquiry into the thoughts, behavior, and hidden responses to oppression "is attentive to what may lie beneath the surface" (1990, 70).

Sample and Methods

The Sample of Survivors

The risks (death, starvation, abuse, disease) associated with concentration camps and death camps varied from one camp to the next in Nazi Europe; therefore in an effort to maintain some semblance of consistency, my work focus is on the means of resistance employed by Auschwitz prisoners. This complex of camps, often called Auschwitz-Birkenau, grew out of a single concentration camp established in 1940. By the time of its liquidation in January 1945, the complex included three "main" camps--Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Monowitz--plus approximately 39 sub-camps primarily established for labor (Smolen 1982, 39). Herein, I refer to the entire complex as "Auschwitz" rather than distinguishing among the divisions because of the ambiguity resulting from multiple name changes and rapid expansion in a relatively narrow time frame.

Perhaps more than any other camp in the Nazi system, the prisoners of Auschwitz were culturally diverse. They were female and male; they represented nearly every European country, language, religion, and social background over the course of the four and one-half years of the camp's existence (1940-1945). The rigid sex segregation of Auschwitz severely limited opportunities for collaboration and/or communication between women and men. Although the overt acts of resistance were

not always limited to "either women or men,"⁵ the segregation of the Auschwitz camps provides a unique opportunity to examine differences and similarities in resistance by sex.

Methodology

The data for this project were gathered through analyses of Holocaust survivors' oral histories. Organizations worldwide have recorded interviews with the people who survived this ordeal in an effort to preserve their memories. Despite the wealth of information they contain, to date the oral histories have not been systematically studied by scholars.⁶ Although several thousand interviews are available in various collections throughout the United States, only a relative handful are being analyzed each year.

Oral histories provide a unique view of past events. In contrast to carefully phrased written or published accounts, interviews with eyewitnesses capture the thoughts, fears, decisions, and covert actions of the participants intertwined serendipitously with their interpretation of historic actuality (Yow 1994; Langer 1991; Skelton 1994). Undoubtedly, the passage of time transforms the memories of

⁵ An example of a female prisoner, Mala Zimetbaum, escaping with a male counterpart posing as her guard can be found in a book edited by Yuri Suhl, *They Fought Back* (Crown Publishers, 1967).

⁶ Lawrence Langer is a notable exception; he has extensively analyzed the oral histories from the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. See *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (1991, Yale University Press).

survivors. However, Yow describes results of Brewer's psychological research on memories that indicates a greater recall of events that are (1) unique, (2) consequential, (3) unexpected, (4) emotion provoking, and a criteria added by Yow (5) important to survival (Yow 1994, 20). The conditions faced by survivors during this historical event definitely meet *all* of these criteria, indicating a higher recall reliability than could be expected of a lesser oppression. Lawrence Langer addresses the accuracy of survivors' interviews: "*nothing is clearer in these narratives than that Holocaust memory is an insomniac faculty, whose mental eyes have never slept...*Factual errors do occur from time to time, as do simple lapses; but they seem trivial in comparison to the complex layers of memory" (Langer 1991, xv; emphasis mine).

Most of the approximately 50 interviews consulted for this project were recorded with an interviewer and a solitary interviewee, rather than several co-participants. Two exceptions are: a pair of sisters were interviewed together on one tape, and one testimony is a self-recorded account by a survivor given to the Gratz College collection after her death. All are in-depth interviews with open-ended questions, and were conducted by a variety of interviewers at the different agencies or organizations. Although interviewees are speaking alone of their own experiences, they refer on a regular basis to their conversations and interaction with other people in their vicinity at particular time frames. Thus, the perspective captured in the oral

history is of a person's perceived condition in a community context, not in isolation (Yow 1994).

Survivors of the Holocaust have socialized with each other in subsequent years; presumably their recollections risk being "shaded" by this interaction. The interviews collected for this project were conducted from Washington to Florida over the course of the past 15 years; thus, excessive contamination of recollected experiences between interviewees is less likely than interviews conducted at the same time and/or place.⁷ Furthermore, survivors' experiences are unique and intertwined with their own personal histories; similarities between interviews are strictly theme-based interpretations by this author.

All interviews used for this project are unstructured, unedited accounts, and reflect a cross-section of people who survived imprisonment in Auschwitz between 1941 and January 1945. The oral history collections that conducted these interviews attempted to record accurately the experiences of survivors, but not one of the sponsors was specifically concerned with subtle mechanisms of resistance. Recording the perceptions and covert behavior of a group of people may be easily contaminated as a result of interviewer bias. For example, by asking the "right" questions (e.g., "What were other ways that you defied the Nazis?"), answers may reflect current interpretations and ideas rather than recollections from the period (Yow 1994, 55-83). The victims may or may not recall their behaviors at specific times yet, at other points

⁷ See *Oral Histories Cited* section for some of the collection locations.

in time their memories are especially vivid. The use of already collected oral histories reduces the potential for interviewer bias, although the ever-present risk of bias in analyzing the interviews remains.

Whenever possible, I use primary source documentation and compiled original records to verify inferences made in the oral histories. Danuta Czech's day-by-day compilation of existing (and generally Nazi) documents, *The Auschwitz Chronicle, 1939-1945* (Czech 1990), is invaluable for corroborating the episodes and chronology of the oral histories. Gail Skelton argues that

oral history data is (sic) most useful when it is (sic) combined with a written record. When we compare peoples' memories to the recorded occurrence of events, we can uncover motives, beliefs, and ideologies that lead people to see the world in particular ways. Thus we are able to speculate on the social meanings behind peoples' accurate (or inaccurate) perception...In the absence of a written record, oral history can provide a rich source of information unobtainable in any other way. Particularly if oral accounts are consistent, we uncover data otherwise forever lost (Skelton 1994, 111).

Coding

I use transcriptions of the collected survivor oral histories for my actual analyses. In the initial coding, I review the transcripts and mark key time points in the survivors' experiences. Examples of the coding process at this level include:

1) initial introductions to Nazi policies,

We didn't have problems until July 1940. Actually it started in April, when the Germans came in...Still, it wasn't bad; you could live with it. Still we had our food. They left us alone. They wouldn't allow the bakers to make Matzah...they didn't want the children to go to school (DeLeon interview).

2) forced removal from home setting,

About a week after [Passover] they started to clear out the city, into the ghettos. We were crammed into three streets. That's how they formed the ghettos. It was a horrifying situation...They just came into the house and they said, "Leave everything"...We couldn't take nothing. We could only take what we could carry with us on our shoulders to the ghetto (Etkin interview).

3) arrival at Auschwitz,

As we came down [from the trains] my mother didn't feel good, so we were holding her under the arms. I was on the right side; she [her sister] was on the left. When we came down from the train, we saw Mengele. We didn't know it was Mengele. He had a cane. And he throw the cane between me and my mother and he pushed me away. And then my mother drew me back and she gave me a kiss (Goldstein/Mandel interview).

4) and liberation.

When we woke up, everyone started to yell that there were no more Germans—we are free. They had snuck out during the night...I remember crawling out of the barracks—and I mean crawl, on my hands and knees—and then try to get

up and walk a little bit...just knowing that we are free again, that was a beautiful thing (Greeson interview).

The interviews are coded by sex to look for potential gender-specific patterns, and are coded by place and time to differentiate the experiences of the various nationalities. Every survivor interview in my collection (over 50 interviews to date) is coded to this extent during my initial reading.

Not all of the oral histories in my collection are appropriate for use in this particular project. For example, a small number (4-6) of the transcripts was typed in a narrative format rather than interview format, and edited by the source collection for grammar. I have used these interviews only as points of reference for comparison to other survivor interviews; however, I do not rely heavily on their details because I have no way of knowing the extent of the changes or the questions asked by the interviewer. Likewise, one of the interviews in my collection was conducted by an interviewer who was very intrusive, effectively destroying its value as an oral history of the survivor; the more assertive opinions and dialogue were the interviewer's, not the interviewee's.

After sorting the interviews for overall quality, coherence, and applicability, approximately 25 survivors' testimonies were fully coded for this project. I reread each interview and recorded its general themes about attitudes, behavior, and overall conditions on the file using one or two word descriptors. These notations were used

to pinpoint differences and recurrent themes later. Examples of themes coded at this level include:

1) disbelief,

Little things used to trickle down here and there. People used to tell stories about what the Germans were doing--nobody believed this...Somebody knocked on the door [of the family house] and a guy came in...He told us stories about what is going on in Germany. We were sitting around the table in the kitchen and my parents made us go out because children don't listen to stories like this. Everybody looked at him and said that he is crazy. I mean he told the real stuff about what is going on. He said that they just took people out and hung them in the middle of the street...Everybody looked at him and said, "He is crazy. He is absolutely crazy. Why would people do things like this?"...He stayed for a couple of days and then he moved on. He was all by himself...we did not believe him (D. Freilich interview).

2) perceptions attributed to gender differences,

Little by little my parents were told, "We don't need you anymore. We don't want you as a member anymore"...and "Thanks for the business, but please don't come anymore"...My mother smelled something--of course women are a little bit more afraid anyhow than men--but my father said, "It can't go on like this. Hitler is an idiot; he's a madman. How can people go for that? I've got good friends, Jews and non-Jews" (K. Stern interview).

3) risks and reactions,

You see you get confused [on arrival at Auschwitz]. Everything goes so fast. They don't let you think. You don't know even who is with you and who is not because you cannot look around. Because the Germans were going around

with pistols. They killed you right on the spot if they see something
(Greengrass interview).

4) feelings of hopelessness,

We were all without energy, without anymore...we were like dead people, walking. Without hope anymore, any energy. Any, what do you call [it?]... without any ambition. We knew that it was the end (Varon interview).

5) and Nazi dehumanization efforts and the resultant feelings.

[They had] taken off the hair and put on this uniform. We didn't look like women. We looked like witches. Worse than a witch even. Not like human beings (Klapholz interview).

The next step of the coding process addressed project-specific goals.

Recurrent resistance and non-resistance themes were recorded, along with broader descriptions of the circumstances surrounding intentionally defiant or conforming behavior or attitudes. The specific-codes described:

- 1) Behavioral responses to confusion, especially when relevant to resistance/nonresistance.
- 2) Discussions recalled within communities about actions to take or avoid.
- 3) Covert or unpunished defiance by self or others; perceived results of these acts; subsequent behavioral changes.
- 4) References to learning new information about risks and reality; behavioral and attitudinal responses to this information.

- 5) Pivotal points in the survivor's experience (awareness, decisions, chance encounters).⁸
- 6) Thoughts and attitudes about risks of overt resistance; choices made for or against particular actions.
- 7) Attitudes of hope, despair, disbelief, confusion, and fear; decisions attributed to these attitudes.

The project-specific codes relate to lengthy narrations about specific events, attitudes, and decisions. Rather than including examples at this point in the discussion, examples of this type appear throughout the paper intertwined with the resistance analyses.

The final step in the coding process was the analysis of recurrent themes with particular attention paid to variations by sex. After reaching some preliminary conclusions, I reread the oral histories that were *not* fully coded to search for glaring contradictions in my results or assumptions. Published memoirs, like Gerda Weissmann Klein's *All But My Life* (1995), provided additional materials for verifying or refuting themes found in my oral history collection. This paper includes selected quotes from the oral history collection to demonstrate major recurrent themes and examples of resistance *per se*; it is not all-inclusive of common themes, and not all of the interviews that were coded and analyzed are cited in the text. A cross-section of quotes from women and men highlight some of the similarities and differences by sex,

⁸ Ronald Berger uses "Holocaust epiphanies" to describe these experiences. See *Constructing a Collective Memory of the Holocaust: A Life History of Two Brothers' Survival* (1995, University Press of Colorado).

but like all social experiences, widespread variation occurs in the thoughts, behavior and reactions to adversity by specific individuals.

Resistance with an *R*

In a now infamous statement, psychologist Bruno Bettelheim argued that the victims of the Holocaust "committed suicide by submitting to death without resistance" (Bettelheim 1960, 251). This statement--although interpreted a variety of ways by scholars for the past thirty years (Ringelheim [1985]1992; Robinson 1970)--implies, among other things, that resistance is limited to overt action. Rather than criticizing or even excusing a lack of resistance, perhaps it is better to demarcate the defiance that did occur and the typical results of those acts. Resistance with an *R*, as defined earlier on a continuum from passivity to revolt, includes actions which were overt, obvious and had the intended effect of stopping the established Nazi goals (revolt, rebellion, escape). Resistance attempts of this sort within Auschwitz typically were punished by the immediate murder of both the resister and uninvolved bystanders (Greengrass interview; Herzberger interview; Kulka 1985).

It is rare to find references to personal attempts at Resistance in survivor oral histories. An example is found in the oral history of a woman who was a nurse in Auschwitz. She was asked by Mengele (the infamous Nazi doctor who experimented on prisoners) to inject pregnant women with a substance she believed was kerosene:

And I said, "No, I will not. I took a vow to save people, not to kill them." He said, "No?" and took out his revolver. He put it back--the revolver--and said to two Germans... "Take her out and beat her up in front of the whole camp." In the beginning I cried. I hollered. I yelled. Finally, I lost consciousness.

When I woke up it was night and I thought to myself, "I'm still alive. How could I be alive?" And I moved and I felt that there were bodies around me...they were people. Cold people (Gorko interview).

Two of her friends pulled her out later and revived her.

Although relatively few oral histories describe personal Resistance, most survivors at some point in the interview process describe retaliatory abuses and murders that occurred when other prisoners overtly resisted. For example, Isidore Greengrass recalls that people who attempted to escape were tortured in front of the other inmates (including him) prior to being hung:

It's not the hanging what they did to people, but they are afflicting the suffering before they are hanging.... We were thinking but we have to see the environment. The conditions was impossible to go out... Therefore you don't have the will or the power to organize to run. They were talking, later on when we were a longer time in camp, between some people to do something. The danger was that as soon as something is not exactly [right], they will kill the whole group (Greengrass interview).

Other survivors describe the Nazis' reaction to finding escapees:

They gave her a whole loaf of bread and a salami. People were so jealous! Why she gets so much when she was the one gone? They told her to eat as much as she wanted. Then they hanged her in front of all of us (T. Stern interview).

There were instances when someone tried to escape. They were searching and we had to stand in line for hours. Then they would catch them and beat them and torture them in public. When you have seen that you didn't want to do it. We were not strong physically; we were strong mentally but not physically. I don't see how you could make a revolution in Auschwitz (Herzberger interview).

Public display of retaliatory punishment for Resistance had the dual effect of punishing the resister with death and squashing future attempts by other prisoners with fear.

Overt Resistance is *relatively* (but not comprehensively) quantifiable by sex for comparison purposes--unlike either the more subtle resistance with a lower case "r" or survival through acquiescence--by utilizing existing Nazi documents. The *Auschwitz Chronicle: 1939-1945* (1990) is a compilation of original camp documents, record books, and occupancy reports on a day-by-day basis. By counting the number of recorded acts of Resistance⁹ in this book between July 1942 and December 1943,

⁹ For the calculation of Figure 1, the success of resistance was determined by assuming that any act of resistance not prevented or punished within a week had succeeded. In other words, if a prisoner escaped and was free for this period of time, she would be considered successful *even if she was then caught and punished*. The logic behind this interpretation is that a week is ample time to relay information to the outside world. For the time periods indicated, there were only seven acts of overt resistance for which the prisoner's sex was indistinguishable from the available information. These seven were omitted from this figure.

One ambiguous aspect of this count is whether a prisoner's "attempted escape" (as recorded in Nazi documents) reflects an actual effort at Resistance or a decision by the prisoner to commit suicide. For this count, these attempted escapes were considered Resistance for both women and men.

separating by sex, I developed Figure 1. An example of the type of account included in this quantification is the record for June 20, 1942:

Between 3:00 and 4:00 P.M., four prisoners working in the garage of the troops' supply depot (Truppenwirtschaftslager--TWL) escape from Auschwitz. They are Kazimierz Piechowski (No. 918), Jozef Lempart (No. 3419), Stanislaw Gustaw Jaster (No. 6438) and Eugeniusz Bendera (No. 8502). Three of them wear SS uniforms, one the uniform and visored cap of an SS Staff Sergeant, and the other two steel helmets and rifles. The fourth is chained like a prisoner. They leave the camp from the garage in a Steyer Model 220 automobile...(Czech 1990, 184).

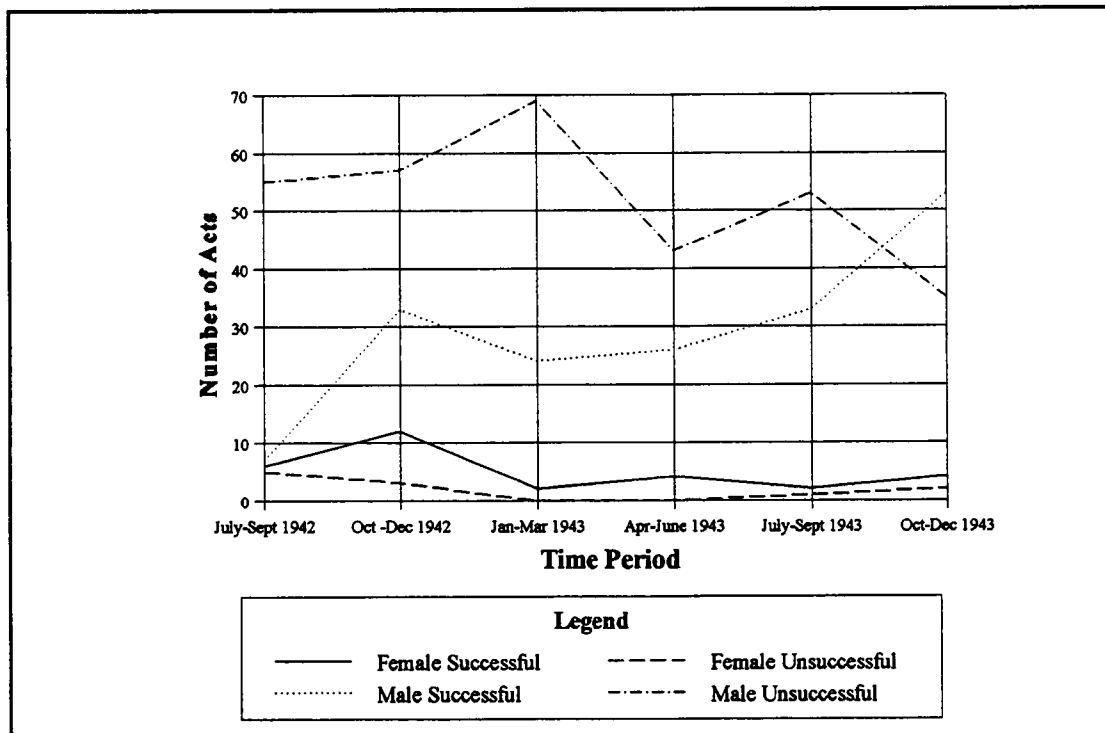


Figure 1: Overt Acts of Resistance

The tabulation of Resistance in Figure 1 shows a difference in the number of acts by sex across all time periods included. An adequate analysis requires comparison of the population differences between the male and female camps; however, occupancy levels are uncertain for much of the time. Checking the time periods which have recorded occupancy levels for both men and women, population does *not* account for this large of a difference. For example, the November 1, 1943 occupancy level for the women's camp was 32,943; the men's camp occupancy level on the same day was 54,630 (Czech 1990, 518). Comparisons between the two camps are figured using a rate of resistance formula:

$$\frac{\text{Events}}{\text{Population}} \times K = \text{Rate of Resistance}$$

In the period from October to December of 1943 there were six acts of overt resistance by women (a Resistance rate of .18) compared to eighty-eight acts for men (a Resistance rate of 1.61). The low number of attempts may indicate a difference in the precautions taken by women, but is equally likely a product of the extremely low number of female attempts. Nevertheless, men were more likely to resist overtly than women regardless of differences in occupancy, but exact differences are unknowable. Although the number of overt acts was lower for women than men, women's

successes outnumbered their failures for every time period. Men, in contrast, experienced more failures than successes until after October 1943.¹⁰

Many factors contributed to the lower rate of overt Resistance by women in Auschwitz. The most obvious inhibiting influence on their overt defiance was pre-camp socialization differences by sex. Early twentieth century norms in Western European culture limited women's public roles more than men's. Work opportunities were sex-defined with men having more occupational choices (Kaplan 1990, 588). Jewish women, the majority of all women in Auschwitz, were additionally limited in their participation in public worship (Umansky and Ashton 1992, 1-20). According to Kaplan, women held a subordinate status in the public world with their primary focus being the household and immediate community (Kaplan 1990, 594).

Decisions about overt defiance of or retreat from Nazi policies were entrusted to male household members rather than to women or made equilaterally. Often the women's perceptions and warnings were more astute (Kaplan 1990, 593-4). One survivor describes her father's response to her mother's fears of the Nazi policies: "Ahk! The women with their gloomy outlooks" (Klapholz interview). Although their attitudes or opinions were not necessarily heeded if they differed from the men's, women were not passive bystanders. They were adept at covert expressions of their

¹⁰ The Nazi strength, tenacity, and control were beginning to erode in 1943 as evidenced in their defeat in Stalingrad (February), the Warsaw uprising (April and May), and the revolts at Treblinka and Sobibor (October). Covert communication and new arrivals kept prison populations informed and hopeful.

will. An excellent example from pre-war years can be found in Marion Kaplan's work when a survivor tells of her mother applying for American immigration quota numbers without her father's knowledge (1990, 605).

Resource availability further hindered Resistance efforts by women; to revolt or escape required access to external help and material goods (disguises and makeshift weaponry). Relative restriction to the private sphere (home and family) rather than the public sphere (work outside the home or family business, political involvement, military service) in pre-war years reduced the potential for women having widespread, external (out of the community) contacts. The paid labor force of Europe in the 1930s was dominated by men, providing them with more external contacts than women. Bold resistance efforts from within concentration camps were less likely to be successful without assistance from outsiders (Pawelczyńska [1973]1979, 115; Kulka 1985, 295-6), a resource that was rare for female camp prisoners. A lack of help from outside the camp population undoubtedly had an inhibiting effect on the number of Resistance attempts by women, despite their relative success when they did try (as shown in Figure 1).

The camp authority structure additionally limited the possibilities for females to Resist. One of the more effective means of escape was through deception. By stealing a uniform, a man could pass as a low ranking Nazi guard escorting prisoners to another area as indicated in the example above. This technique was rarely an option for women; although many of the women's bunkers were governed by female block

elders, the women with authority within Auschwitz were most often either prisoners or well-recognized Nazis. Women's Resistance would have necessarily been more blatant and, therefore, a higher risk for punishment or death. Other factors potentially influenced women's lower rate of Resistance compared to men's, ranging from worse living conditions (Milton [1984] 1992, 228) to less autonomy within the camps, but rather than focusing on why revolts and rebellions did not occur, it is more productive to concentrate on apparent acquiescence and subtle resistance mechanisms.

Survival through Acquiescence

The Line between Resistance and Non-resistance

Research on resistance seeks to understand the dilemma of who resists authority or oppression and who does not (Milgram 1974; Gaventa 1982). A strict definition of acquiescence--unenthusiastic consent to oppression which lacks observable protest or rebellion--seems applicable to some prisoners' reactions in Auschwitz; I refer to this extreme as "survival through acquiescence." At this end of the resistance continuum, the line between resistance and non-resistance ebbs and is barely discernible. On the non-resistance side of the line, technically off the continuum altogether, the oppressed person is in a state of utter acquiescence, exemplified by both behavioral and attitudinal conformity. On the resistance side, behavioral compliance is evident, but hope and the seeds of defiance are still present--in other words, attitudinal acquiescence is lacking.

It is useful to examine an acquiescent response to extreme oppression using John Gaventa's (1982) discussion of Steven Lukes's three dimensions of power (1974). The first and second dimensions of power focus on the control mechanisms of the oppressor; the third dimension analyzes mental obstacles of the oppressed, a theoretical aspect more relevant to the discussion at hand. Rather than describing non-resistance as a lack of behavior on the part of the oppressed, the third dimension of power suggests structural constraints exist that promote passivity.

According to the third dimension framework, conflict or resistance is averted by means which shape or influence the "conceptions of the necessities, possibilities, and strategies of challenge in situations of latent conflict" (Gaventa 1982, 15). Gaventa includes actions such as the creation of social myths, manipulation of language, and control of communication as direct means of shaping perceptions of the oppressed. He also includes indirect means: "the conceptions of the powerless may alter as an adaptive response to continual defeat" (Gaventa 1982, 16). The potential consequences of extreme oppression in this perspective include excessive fatalism, internalization of the oppressor's beliefs (also suggested in Bruno Bettelheim's 1960 work), and a reduction of demands or expectations by the oppressed (Gaventa 1982, 17).

The third dimension of power begins to unravel the bases for behavioral responses of non-resistance by Holocaust victims. A discussion of Nazi policies that prevented resistance from occurring is impossible without considering influences outside the gates of Auschwitz. The nearly complete control of communication by the Third Reich enabled the Nazis to shape the beliefs of the people prior to their arrival. This extreme restriction of verifiable or official information fused with disbelief to reduce all types of resistance and facilitate oppression. Charlotte Delbo, an Auschwitz survivor, captures the mentality of new arrivals: "*They expect the worst—not the unthinkable*" (Delbo 1995, 4).

An overriding disbelief of early accurate information about Nazi pogroms and camps precluded pre-camp Resistance by most people. Elements of disbelief are captured in the oral histories of *most* survivors:

We heard something about...that they were bringing Jews there and killed them but nobody, nobody wanted to believe that human beings could do that to other human beings. Nobody wanted to believe that until the last moment (B. Freilich interview).

Now that I think, that if we would have believed, maybe, that those things--the rumors that we heard about the Polish Jews--are true, I think that probably that we would have known that that's going to come true. We probably would have done something. But we were doubting that that happened....When I was so young, I thought that maybe this is an exaggeration (Herzberger interview).

This theme is present in most survivor oral histories; despite "rumors" about killings and concentration camps most people did not believe the accounts were true. The abstract legitimacy of government influenced people to dismiss unofficial sources of information despite the obviously radical and destructive nature of the government's programs.

Furthermore, the strict control of communication--another tool of the third dimension of power--was so great that information was not coming out of the camps with any regularity or verifiability. To quote a male survivor who arrived in Auschwitz from the Krakow ghetto in 1942:

Every few days there would be a train going to the "labor camps."
Their propaganda was quite good because nobody came back to complain. So everybody toyed with the idea that maybe it is a good idea because they allow you to take clothing...take your sewing machine because you are going to go to a labor camp and they are going to feed you and everything else....A lot of people volunteered, it was so cold (Helmer interview).

Even after the trip to Auschwitz in locked cattle cars (typically with no room to sit, no food and merely two buckets: one with water for the entire car and the other for use as a toilet) disbelief still helped suppress resistance and encourage passivity. One woman stated that as they pulled into Auschwitz, she saw the skeleton-like prisoners in their striped uniforms and was convinced that they were mistakenly sent to an insane asylum. She was sure at any time someone would come to apologize to say that a mistake was made and send them home (Cahana interview). The pervasiveness of disbelief apparently has no gender bias; the oral histories of both men and women reflect equally on this mental state shaping their initial inaction or acquiescence.

As trains arrived at the gates of Auschwitz, incoming prisoners were greeted by huge gates proclaiming *Arbeit Macht Frei* (meaning "work will make you free" in German). This declaration, a created social myth in the terminology of the third dimension of power, nurtured the hope of the arriving passengers--for freedom--and provided a road map for success--through work. Combined with the relief of ending a

torturous journey in a cattle car, the passengers were ready to believe what they read.

Several survivors express an initial sense of relief on arriving at Auschwitz:

We were happy that we arrived somewhere again. That was their philosophy. They made the suffering, the terrible things so terrible that when you got to a certain point, you didn't really care where you are, just that it had stopped. Then we didn't know what they had in store for us. But we were happy that we were somewhere, out of this cattle car (Ban interview).

We came to Auschwitz, we were so happy...[then] they opened the [train] cars. They start to hit us, "Go there! Go there! Go there! Go there!" Everybody wanted to be with their families (T. Stern interview).

The oral histories describe the reduced expectations of the oppressed people, an adaptive response as discussed in Gaventa's work (1982, 17). As is evident from their testimonies, the oppression was so extreme that any respite was welcomed, even arrival in Auschwitz.

This sense of hope was quickly shattered by confusion and fear as Nazi guards ordered the people to separate by sex and age. Those who failed to follow orders were shot immediately. One woman describes the sense of confusion and anguish after seeing a Nazi guard shoot her 6 year old brother for gathering snow to give his mother to eat:

We were all crying, all screaming...they were confusing us. First, they said to stand here, then they told us to stand there and we were

running from one place to the other. I wanted to go with my mother then a German came and said, "No, you are going someplace else"
(B. Freilich interview).

Zygmunt Bauman contends that prisoners always confronted a choice between "greater and lesser evil"; the outwardly correct choice to each dilemma served the Nazi agenda by promoting passivity. Furthermore, he states:

To make their victims' behavior predictable, and hence manipulable and controllable, the Nazis had to induce them to act in the 'rational mode'...the victims had to think...that their conduct did matter; that their plight could be at least in part influenced by what they were about to do (Bauman 1989, 132).

Perhaps the most revealing example of the use of the third dimension of power to control perceptions, to induce a "rational" response to irrational conditions, and to reduce the likelihood of resistance is demonstrated by the speech given by the SS (*schutzstaffel* or Nazi elite) guards at the door to the gas chamber:

On behalf of the camp administration I bid you welcome. This is not a holiday resort but a labor camp...The chance is there for every one of you. We shall look after your health, and we shall also offer you well-paid work. After the war we shall assess everyone according to his merits and treat him accordingly. Now, would you please all get undressed. Hang your clothes on the hooks we have provided and please remember your number. When you've had your bath there will be a bowl of soup and coffee and tea for all (Klarsfeld, Hellman, and Meier 1981, 166).

At that point, the group was herded into the "shower rooms" and gassed to death. As one group of people was told that their "health would be looked after" and that they would be given a cup of tea, the other group--those selected for work--were told that their parents and children were taken to a place to rest. Later, they were informed that the ashes and smoke from the chimneys was all that was left of their families.

Behavioral Acquiescence

Although prisoner beliefs and perceptions were somewhat controlled by the camp authorities, widespread skepticism of all "official" information prevailed especially after the registration process. Demoralization, deprivation, and physical inability resulting from starvation and disease led many prisoners to respond with apparent acquiescence, supporting the argument that there are indirect mechanisms in the third dimension of power. However, I question whether the majority of prisoners was truly hopeless. The oral histories of survivors are grim but reflect a pervasive spirit of hope. Hope is often heralded as the difference between certain death and a slim chance for living (Greengrass, Fritzhall, Freeman, Herzberger interviews).¹¹

Brutal force and ongoing deception by the Nazis reduced Resistance, but increased the

¹¹ People who had lost all hope in Auschwitz were distinguishable by their hollow or glazed-over stares and their even more pronounced skeletal appearance. These people were referred to as *muselmänner* by their fellow prisoners. Most people who fell to that level of hopelessness died shortly thereafter. Survivors describe the mental, more than physical, characteristics of this state of despair. Charlotte Delbo vividly renders this appearance and the inevitability of death in *Auschwitz and After* (1995), p. 66.

likelihood of widespread behavioral acquiescence and resistance rather than hopeless conformity.

Most survivors describe an initial period of shock and adjustment to Auschwitz; during this time (usually from 3 days to 3 weeks), their reaction was trance-like conformity:

The first 3 weeks, I was depressed. I was suicidal maybe. I had a strong feeling of futility. For 3 weeks I went through hell because I had to make a decision to strive for my survival. One day, I decided I was going to eat that soup [that tasted] like grass. I decided I had to eat and swallow that horrible food (Herzberger interview).

The decision to try to survive described by Mrs. Herzberger is a critical component in crossing over the line from non-resistance to resistance. A decision to defy the oppressor or at least frustrate the oppressors' goals, even at the risk of death, indicates a willingness to resist extreme oppression. Solidarity with other prisoners, continuation or restoration of hope, and covert resistance efforts (including food sharing and mutual assistance) intentionally impeded Nazi success in achieving their goals: dehumanization, fracturing communities, and exploitation of labor as a tool for extermination of *lebensunwertes Leben*.

A Holocaust survivor describes the mentality of attempting to comply with the camp regulations (attitudinal *and* behavioral acquiescence) followed by a conscious decision to defy the Nazi efforts (abandoning attitudinal acquiescence). He describes his early reaction to Auschwitz as utter hopelessness. He consciously decided:

I don't gonna test fate. I don't gonna do anything against fate. If they tell me to stand there, I gonna stand there. If they say go, I go. Since I don't know what to do, I don't want to blame myself for not going the right direction. I dropped my responsibility (Helmer interview).

Passivity in this context describes initial inaction resulting from confusion in an ambiguous and deadly situation. He, like Mrs. Herzberger, soon made a decision to live by “testing fate.” When selected to work in a mine, Mr. Helmer risked detection and removed a Nazi marking from his chest, believing that he would not survive this type of work. As he did, he met another man doing the same and they became partners, cooperatively weighing their daily predicaments, and making decisions together to either resist or comply with Nazi orders. After this point, his apparent acquiescence was strictly behavioral conformity when the risk of retribution outweighed the chance of success; for this survivor--and many others--acquiescence was only skin-deep.

James Scott addresses inherent problems with a “third dimension of power” approach to studying quiescence by oppressed communities. In his argument, the beliefs and values of the subordinate group are not transformed by the oppression--as argued in *Power and Powerlessness* (Gaventa 1982). Instead, subordinate groups readily “imagine a counter factual social order” (Scott 1990, 81), but they

have a vested interest in avoiding an *explicit* display of insubordination. They also, of course, always have a practical interest in resistance--in minimizing the extractions, labor, and humiliations to which they are subject. The

reconciliation of these two objectives that seem at cross-purposes is typically achieved by pursuing precisely those forms of resistance that avoid any open confrontation with the structures of authority being resisted (Scott 1990, 86).

Scott's statement reflects a significant argument of this paper: behavioral non-conformity unseen by the oppressor is nevertheless a form of resistance.

resistance

If resistance can be spelled with a lower case "r," the definition of resistant acts expands. No longer limited to overt rebellion, acts of resistance can be defined as any actions which hindered or were prohibited by the Nazi regime. Thus, activities like sabotage, passing information regarding specific risks of the camps, "organizing" (prisoners' slang for stealing food and other supplies from Nazi warehouses), food-sharing, the use of artifice to increase survival chances, and even purposeful "foot-dragging" are resistance techniques.

Although less explosive and perhaps less effective at changing the overall structure of the oppression than bold Resistance, covert mechanisms erode the strength of the oppressor. Resistance with a lower case "r" potentially reduces the risk of punishment while encouraging future breaches if the original acts are successful or unnoticed. According to Robert Goldberg, "acts of resistance encourage further defiance, both by individuals and groups, and heighten the confidence of men and women in their ability to shape the world" (Goldberg 1991, 14). In this sense, restoration of hope and confidence are critical factors for resistance to any oppression. Acts that strengthen seemingly powerless victims reduce the oppressor's ability to dominate them.

James Scott (1990) developed a terminology to contrast the outward behavior of groups to their backstage thoughts or actions. His concept of contrasting "transcripts" is applicable for understanding the subtle mechanisms of resistance used by Auschwitz prisoners to defy or diminish the power of the Nazis. On the one hand, Scott uses "the term *public transcript* as a shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" (Scott 1990, 2). On the other hand, he defines the *hidden transcript* as characterizing off-stage discourse which is beyond the direct observation of the oppressor (4). Scott contends that in situations of oppression, the survival of the powerless is often contingent on the suppression of rage and avoidance of reaction in front of the powerholder. A hidden transcript grows out of what Scott calls the *frustration of reciprocal action* (Scott 1990, 37). In contrast to the passivity they outwardly display, the victims think and act out aggression unobserved and thus, unpunished by their oppressors. Isidore Greengrass, a survivor, describes the mental process of building a "hidden transcript":

We used to say...if Haman was hanged, Hitler and his bunch should not be hanged. Rather to put them in a cage and move them around from one place to another. From one concentration camp to another...the main thing we were talking [about was] what kind of punishment we can provide for [our] suffering (Greengrass interview).

These images encouraged the prisoners to survive; other subtle resistance techniques reduced the potential for punishment, but undermined their oppressors' goals.

Another example of resistance is sabotage. The prisoners who survived were overwhelmingly those who were selected to go to labor sub-camps (or who arrived in Auschwitz very late relative to the end of the war). Especially in the early 1940s, the Nazi goal was to work the inmates until they died of starvation and exhaustion rather than kill them immediately. As survivors recall, the ability to work meant a chance to live (Ban, Fritzhall, Greengrass, and Herzberger interviews). A substantial number of inmates were forced to work in ammunition factories, allowing covert yet intentional attempts to damage the Nazi war effort through sabotage. Noemi Ban describes her experiences at sabotaging:

Whenever it was possible, if he [the foreman of the group] said put in two of that certain kind of thing, we put in three, or none, or mixed it up the order of it....It was obvious that these bombs, what we are going to build, would be used against those who will liberate us. So it was a small, very, very small way of saying to them that "We hate you and we would like you to die. We are not willing to build for you a better bomb" (Ban interview).

Although this form of resistance is not as destructive to the oppressor as outright revolt or rebellion, it can erode the differential of power between the two groups. Likewise, it tends to sustain the hopes (and lives?) of the victims until the oppressor weakens or falls.

Oral histories of survivors frequently describe productive uses of dual transcripts (Scott's terminology). On a daily basis, longer-term Auschwitz prisoners

informed the newcomers of the informal rules and risks of the camp; the process of conveying and receiving covert hints for survival began almost immediately upon arrival. A group of prisoners called the *Kanadakommando* was in charge of sorting people and their belongings as they got off the trains at Auschwitz. These men--always men--were closely guarded. Like all other prisoners, if they were caught hindering Nazi policies they paid for the act with their lives. Members of the *Kanadakommando* were often chosen for their ability to speak several languages including German; it was necessary for the Nazis to give orders in the native language of the arrivals to expedite the "selections." According to Fritzie Fritzhall, who arrived in Auschwitz at the age of twelve, a member of the *Kanadakommando* whispered to her in Yiddish as she was getting off of the train, "You are fifteen, remember you are fifteen." As the women and children were sorted by age, she changed her age to fifteen. The 15 year olds were not sent to the gas chambers that day with the other children--they were considered to be capable of labor (Fritzhall interview). Fritzie was not alone; the whispers of the *Kanadakommando* were heard by many survivors as an introduction to the hazards of the camp:

Since we were talking in Spanish [the men of the Kanadakommando] told us right away they were Jewish from Greece...they said, "Give the children to the old people. And don't act like you are sick"... "And try to go to the right side, try to go to the right side" (Varon interview).

By resisting, rather than Resisting, the relatively high status *Kanadakommando* prisoners could undermine some of the Nazi efforts--and save a number of lives; Resistance, in contrast, meant certain and immediate death.

In addition to the clues given by the *Kanadakommando*, some prisoners were perceptive during the sorting process on arrival to Auschwitz and during later *appells*.¹² Even when chosen for the "wrong" side, these people risked switching to the other side exploiting the confusion to their own benefit; in James Scott's terms, they were "taking advantage of the anonymity of a crowd...[to] manage in a thousand artful ways to imply that they are grudgingly conscripts" (Scott 1990, 15). Examples of "switching sides" are found in both men's and women's interviews. One woman was chosen for the "death" side due to a limp. The next day when the others lined up for work, she lined up with them rather than going with the group chosen for death. She was amazed to find that "nobody remembered me even" (Klapholz interview). Two other survivors describe defiant reactions to bad selections:

I was standing next to a middle-aged man who had an obviously crippled leg. When he was ordered to the left, I knew that this was not the group I wanted to be in. So when I was ordered left, I went right...the guards did not notice that I had disobeyed the order and

¹² A selection process to divide the prisoners considered valuable as workers from those who were to be gassed immediately.

switched groups. I assume that others did the same thing, but I didn't see it myself (M. Berger interview).¹³

I limped because of the injury to my feet--so I was assigned one Friday morning to go to the crematory...He pointed at me and said, "you go there" and "you go there." And I was pushed to a side, so I was between the people. You know I was small and I just ran away. Later on I heard from other inmates that they said, "Oh, we will catch him next time! Let's forget about him" (Weisman interview).

Defiant behavior at key moments of confusion allowed many people to survive specific high-risk moments. Although these types of resistance are not carefully planned or orchestrated, the behavior saves the person's life for the moment and encourages future breeches against the oppressors.

By convincing the powerful oppressors of their acquiescence through charades, the powerless gain an iota of control and possibly survive the oppression. Although this method of resistance is evident in the oral histories of both men and women, the actual characteristics of the deception varied by sex. Initial analysis indicates that men used artifice for gaining jobs, smuggling, and reduction of hard or high-risk labor. When asked how he got out of Auschwitz, one man indicated that he volunteered for a job: "They needed master electricians in Germany...I didn't know what it was but

¹³ Quote from a published source: *Constructing a Collective Memory of the Holocaust: A Life History of Two Brothers' Survival* by Ronald Berger (1995, University of Colorado Press).

[decided] it can't be worse" (Rosenfelder interview). In contrast women more often used artifice to change their apparent age or physical condition, and to protect camp "sisters." Repeated references occur in women's testimonies of attempting to look healthier during selections. To quote one survivor, "When we saw they picked pale and skinny people, we developed a sense of intuition. We would slap our faces and punch our cheeks to have color" (Freeman interview). Another survivor states, "[some women] were beginning to get grey hair and they would go and take a little piece of coal...to color their hair with so they would look a little younger" (Fritzhall interview).

One key element of Scott's hidden transcript is the need for social spaces which are relatively "free" in which the powerless are able to build a community of resistance. According to Scott, mutuality is important for the growth of both overt and covert resistance (Scott 1990, 118). In writing about slavery in the United States, he argues that owners:

Took great pains to prevent the creation of sites where a hidden transcript could be created and shared. They were, of course, greatly aided by the fact that their subjects were a newly and traumatically assembled population (Scott 1990, 127).

The Nazis, like slave owners, sought to reduce resistance through limiting free space and by mixing culturally diverse prisoners to create what Anna Pawełczyńska refers to as conflict-ridden communities ([1973] 1979, 33). In the words of a survivor:

The Hungarian girls were resented and they made no secret about it. They told us that while they were already clearing the forest to build the barracks we were in, we were still in Budapest in the coffee houses and...[at] our concerts and lectures and movies (Ban interview).

By putting prisoners of different nationalities in barracks together, the Nazis were able to temporarily reduce communication and collaboration due to language barriers, and to provoke historic hostilities.

The constant shifting of prisoners from one barracks to another--or one camp to another--fragmented groups as communities were being built. These efforts hampered resistance in some ways, but in others aided prisoner communication throughout the camp system. Women and men alike discovered the fates of family members and friends while imprisoned by communicating with prisoners who had greater autonomy in their camp occupations and by questioning new arrivals. Likewise, information about camp Resistance and the progress of the war was clandestinely transmitted from prisoner to prisoner by word of mouth. War reports were discussed by the Nazis as they guarded prisoners; the prisoners covertly listened and reacted to the news as one survivor describes:

We deliberately [tried] to overhear what they were talking about. So we picked up [news about] some major events, such as we knew when the war broke out between the Germans and the Russians. We also knew from their reactions to us. If they had victories, successful military accomplishments, they were good to us; on the other hand, if they suffered a defeat, they were brutally mad and they took it out on

us...After Stalingrad we knew [the war] was turning and we started hoping. And this is why we were full of hopes (Weisman interview).

James Scott, discussing the importance placed on rumors and ambiguous news by oppressed groups, argues that victims' misperceptions of reality are often more hopeful than warranted by the actual conditions of their oppression (1990, 82). Hope --whether grounded in reality or not--altered the behavior of the prisoners of Auschwitz. Covert communication was a key element of resistance. Men and women alike made decisions about when to be defiant, and when to appear compliant based on information received from behind the backs of Nazis. Furthermore, hope waxed and waned with the tone of the news from outside the fences.

***Social Relationships:
Differences in resistance by Sex***

A notable difference between the resistance of men when compared to that of women is the role social relations played in shaping behavior. The oral histories of survivors contrast in an interesting way: women tend to refer to groups or *communities* of women who shared resources to increase the chance of survival, but men refer to *partners*. Although this difference is not perfectly clear cut, the implication is that men's circles of trust were much more limited than women's; the boundaries of women's circle were more flexible than the rigidly defined men's

associations. Subsequently, the behavior of the two groups varied in response to their patterns of social relations.

Community allegiance acted both as an asset and a liability for women. In one sense, the inclusion in a broader community increased the number of associates who helped each other in the effort to physically and mentally survive. One woman describes how her friends held her up after she fainted during an *appell* (roll-call) so she would not be sent to the gas chambers:

The two of them, two friends on the sides although we were not supposed to stand too close to each other, they somehow managed to hold me on. They picked me up and they were holding me with their hands. So I escaped of the collection and they took me into the barrack (Ban interview).

Other women describe how friends helped each other through periods of despair:

Maybe there we came back to the basics, and we have seen what is more important. A friend was of utmost importance. If I wouldn't have been encouraged by my friends during these three weeks of utter depression, I don't know what would have become of me. When I came out of the depression, I tried to encourage others because we could see in each other the signs. Now some could be encouraged and still could not pull it through because you have to do it yourself (Herzberger interview).

In the midst of all of the troubles, we were trying to cheer each other up. If one was feeling a very low, we tried to tell them about things we were going to do when we were liberated (Bernath interview).

The establishment of communities in effect increased the development of resistance activities and decreased the likelihood of succumbing to despair. Formation of community ties reinforced a goal of generalized survival and helped to strengthen prisoners' mental tenacity.

The community based strategies at times had a inhibiting effect on women. Instead of making decisions individually or with one other person, communities of women discussed the options and implications of resistance.

We were going for a transport to Czechoslovakia. We didn't believe them. So maybe 20 girls were talking. We're supposed to go to a hospital where everybody is supposed to get together. From there the train will come and take us away. We ran away back to the barracks and there was a bathroom... [which] was very long. We were hiding there. After 5 [or] 10 minutes, we decide it's not going to be good. If they find us, they will kill us. So we might as well go with everybody (Goldstein/Mandel interview).

Feelings of responsibility for group survival, rather than individual survival, changed the means available for women to resist. Ideas that would work for one or two women were futile for larger groups; yet larger group alliances helped to reduce hopelessness:

I began to fight this feeling of hopelessness and helplessness and haze by the thinking process...Some of my bunkmates were girls who came from the villages that didn't even have electricity...so I described as vividly as I could what movie I had seen, scene by scene; and what books I had read...Pretty soon I had people come from the lower bunks and stand up as I was in the middle of the barrack giving book or movie reviews (Freeman interview).

Contrasted to women's social relations, the *partnership* analogy for men does not necessarily imply only two people, but an association of about five or fewer people:

Whenever I was down, I always found someone, particularly a Jewish fellow, to pick me back up...[we had] almost a family structure of 2 or 4 or 5 people depending on the situation...they kept the same people in the same barracks to work in the same location. So we did stick together (Weisman interview).

In many cases, the men in “partnerships” knew each other before internment in Auschwitz. The members of the group were most often specific individuals (referred to by name) rather than the more fluid boundaries found in women's communities (sometimes referred to as “the girl from Italy” or similar references). Furthermore, there was less replacement of men's partners if one died. One man reflected,

You couldn't survive Auschwitz by yourself. You had to have a partner...You on this row and your friend on the next row back. As your friend was searched, you held what you were smuggling. Then when he stepped clear, you passed it off to him. Sometimes you got caught and you got beaten (Vogel interview).

He later mentions more than one partner, but they are very specific individuals compared to the women's accounts which mention a wide range of people included in their “community.” Another man describes the empowering effect of having a partner:

Maybe the reason was I feel so good is because I had my cousin. He was much younger than I. I took care of him. So taking care of somebody else gives you more courage to do right things (Greengrass interview).

Another man's testimony initially appears to bridge "community" social relations, but as he elaborates, the "partnership" pattern re-emerges:

Within the camp you formed a group as you would with a family. We tried to assist each other and provide support for each other, to protect each other from the dangers of hard work or if we had an extra bit of food [we shared] so usually you did it with a fellow you bunked with, that is, he was next to you in his bunk. I was with another fellow, a Polish fellow, we bunked together and we really lived like brothers. We shared whatever we could, we helped each other (Weisman interview).

If men's social relations were narrower and more rigidly defined, they were more likely to be victims of hopelessness in cases where a partner is killed. The despair of losing a "partner" to death was similar to the loss of a biological family member. The sense of loss and defeat often reduced the attitudinal resilience of the remaining partner.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

Mechanisms of resistance, ranging from sabotage to building support communities, help oppressed groups alleviate their immediate suffering under oppression. Repeated success in resistant behavior leads to the possibility of either outliving the oppression, or enables prisoners to collect resources for a more perilous form of Resistance. Given the conditions of the Holocaust where the goal of the Nazis was to eradicate the people in the camps, the results of varying levels of resistance can be inferred as follows:

- 1) If no Resistance occurs, the oppressors' program is efficient but slow.
- 2) If Resistance occurs, the oppressors' program is efficient and quick.
- 3) If resistance occurs, the oppressors' program is both inefficient and slow.

Thus, I argue that the *value* of resistance *per se* rests ultimately with its potential ability to achieve an end: of renewing or sustaining hope, of survival, of ending or escaping oppression, of changing the dynamics of the oppression to the benefit of the oppressed, or of overthrowing the oppressor. The degree of overtiness is irrelevant, especially if overt resistance promotes the oppressor's goals. By utilizing a continuum from passivity to revolt, resistance encompasses all endeavors that intentionally challenge an oppressor's goals, including behavioral acquiescence combined with mental defiance.

Oral histories of survivors provide a unique data source for sociological research on the Holocaust, as shown herein. Use of oral histories permits analysis of social interaction between the oppressed and oppressor (from the oppressed person's point of view), as well as relationships within the community of oppressed people, both of which are largely inaccessible in historical documents. Qualitative analysis of survivor oral histories reveals patterns of disbelief, hope, the power of propaganda, communication techniques, and survival strategies, in addition to the resistance theme as discussed; an incredible wealth of research information is accessible to researchers through these audio- and videotapes. Studying topics that recur across interviews allows social researchers to define common strategies and social behavior. Uncovering variations between interviews permits contrasting between aggregates of people, as found in this paper comparing women's and men's resistance; similarly, discovering commonalities within groups allows delineation of mechanisms typical to that particular aggregate, as seen in Josey Fisher's work, *The Persistence of Youth: Oral Testimonies of the Holocaust* (1991).

Recent social research has illustrated that the history of women is not identical to that of men (Rittner and Roth 1992). Variation between the experiences of women and men within the Auschwitz complex of camps is evident from their oral histories. Despite similarities on general themes like disbelief and retaliatory punishment for overt resistance, social interaction patterns and their relationship to resistance differed

by sex. Situations like Auschwitz, with strict sex segregation, provide unique opportunities for research on gender related differences.

Although Holocaust studies are necessarily historical, the sociological knowledge revealed in this research is applicable to other conditions of oppression, past and present. Empowerment and resistance studies in sociology profit from analysis of the past rather than waiting for history to repeat itself. In this paper, the conceptualization of resistance on a continuum rather than questioning its presence or absence provided a different perspective to behavioral responses to extreme oppression. Future research in other pernicious situations would verify whether the discussed strategies for resistance are replicated, expanded, or absent. For example, recent “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia has similarities to the conditions of Nazi Europe, although on a different scale and with different historical roots: the religious beliefs of the oppressed are exploited as a tool by the oppressor, men and women are segregated (at times) in abusive and controlled areas, and fear is utilized to prevent or reduce resistance by the victims. As the conditions in Bosnia are alleviated, research on the mechanisms used by its victims for sustaining hope and resisting dehumanization or death may be available to researchers.

Beyond the extreme of concentration camps and genocides, the resistance continuum approach may clarify the mechanisms used by people in total institutions in their efforts at maintaining a sense of self. A broader interpretation of resistance with various levels of defiance allows research on the innovative mechanisms of relatively

powerless people to withstand oppression. Furthermore, greater understanding of the social forces that buttress an oppressed community's hope on the one hand, or lead to widespread disbelief on the other hand, contributes to the discipline of sociology in general and resistance literature in particular.

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Vita

A long, circuitous path led Lisa White Smith to research the Holocaust. Born in 1960 and raised wherever her father's eccentricities led their family, she encountered diverse social and cultural norms as a child among her father's conservative medical friends and her mother's radical artist friends. But when a fourth grade teacher suggested she read a small book, *Twenty and Ten* (Claire Huchet Bishop: The Viking Press, 1952), she was confused about why Nazi soldiers wanted to find and potentially harm children and their families. Her questions and curiosity about the Holocaust lodged in a remote corner of her mind, eventually covered by the dust of time.

She later graduated from John Overton High School in Nashville, Tennessee. Driven by family expectations and no better ideas, she went to college and pursued a degree in Architecture. After a few years, she interrupted her schooling for what was intended to be a brief period of time. Ten years later, after a series of unsatisfying jobs in architecture, Lisa White Smith returned to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In 1993, she finally (proudly) graduated with a degree in Sociology. But the old questions about the Holocaust resurfaced as she completed Western Civilization 152 and various sociology courses that discussed racism, prejudice and discrimination. She was still confused about how the Holocaust could and did happen.

The area of Lisa White Smith's mind that once held the questions about the Holocaust has been transformed. Instead of the small, remote, dust-covered corner,

the area for Holocaust questions is brightly lit and in the center, filled with books, papers, information and ideas all stacked precariously high. This Master's thesis is but one of her projects on this subject. One of her papers, "A Thread of Hope: Spirituality in the Shoah," can be found in the interdisciplinary journal *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas* (October 1995: Shippensburg University). Another paper, "Resistance under Extreme Oppression: Responses in Auschwitz" was accepted for publication in *Perspectives on Social Problems*, Volume 8 (pending 1996: JAI Press Inc.). She finally understands that answers about the Holocaust are elusive, yet questions proliferate. She hopes to never run out of the patience to listen and learn more about this event.

*You'd like to know
ask questions
but you don't know what questions
and don't know how to ask them
so you inquire
about simple things
hunger
fear
death
and we don't know how to answer
not with the words you use
our own words
you can't understand
so you ask simpler things
tell us for example
how was a day spent
a day goes by so slowly
you'd run out of patience listening
but if we gave you an answer
you still don't know how a day was spent
and assume we don't know how to answer.*

--Charlotte Delbo (1995, 275)