

Abstract

Levels of interpersonal guilt (Survivor Guilt, Omnipotent Responsibility Guilt, Separation/loyalty Guilt and Self-hate) and levels of coping traits typically found in families who survived the Holocaust, (Numb, Victim, Fighter, and Those Who Made It) were studied in 66 adult children of Holocaust survivors. Adult children of survivors were significantly higher in Survivor Guilt compared to a non-Jewish American sample of equivalent age. Adult children of survivors were equal in Survivor Guilt to patients hospitalized for depression, however they were significantly lower in Self-hate. The Numb and Victim family coping traits were significantly correlated with Survivor Guilt. Experienced clinicians rated participants' narrative responses for guilt and other factors. A significant association between how much mothers talked about the Holocaust and levels of survivor guilt in adult children was found, suggesting a direct mechanism of transmission.

Introduction

"Survivor guilt" as a construct is discussed by Darwin in the *Expression of Emotion of Man and Animals* (1872 edition, reprinted by University of Chicago Press, 1965) and Freud, in his *Letters to Wilhelm Fliess : Drafts and Notes 1887-1902* (Basic Books, 1954) both describe the anguish that people experience when they lose a loved one and are over taken by that irrational but overwhelming sense of guilt when someone beloved has died, and feel they should have done something more to help or prevent the death from happening. However it was only in the wake of the Holocaust that Neiderland (1961) first coined the term, after working with survivors of the Holocaust who were living in the United States, suffering from severe depression, and acting as "the walking dead" so great was their identification with their families who had died in the Holocaust. In the years that have passed since Neiderland's early work with survivors, Modell (1972) and Weiss (1984; 1986) expanded on the use of

the term to extend to the guilt that people feel when they worry about surpassing members of their families, or others they love, and hold themselves back from pursuing normal developmental goals. O'Connor, Berry and colleagues (1997; O'Connor, 2000) continued on in this tradition, operationalizing the concept of survivor guilt as broadly defined in daily life and is a measure used in this study, the *Interpersonal Guilt Questionnaire-67*.

Since the time of World War II, many have studied Holocaust survivors and later their families. It has been noted repeatedly that survivor guilt at merely surviving the concentration camps left an indelible imprint of guilt on not only the survivors of the camps, but their children and grandchildren. However, there have been few empirical studies of survivor guilt of Holocaust survivors or adult children of Holocaust survivors. Nor have their been many empirical studies attempting to discover the ways in which survivor guilt might be transmitted. In the present study

Methods

rien, who tend to be numb, angry, and compliant.

Fighter: Families are characterized by a drive to build and achieve, to maintain a facade representing a sense of mastery, and a "never again" attitude towards the Holocaust. Children reared by often seeking dangerous situations and acts of "heroism".

Those Who Made It: Families are characterized by assimilation, attempts to become "normal" by denial of the past, and an interest in status and material success. Children were often neglected and unappreciated unless they were successful.

The *Holocaust Parental Experience Rating Scale* (HPEERS; Hirsch, O'Connor, & Kosoff, 2005), is a 5-item questionnaire with a likert type rating scale (1 to 5) and an additional number designating that the rater is unable to answer because there is not enough material, which senior clinicians use after reading short narratives or sections of narratives, written by adult children of Holocaust survivors talking about their parents' experiences in the Holocaust. The raters are asked to indicate how much they think the narrative's author's mother and father talked about the Holocaust, how much they think the author was affected by the Holocaust, or their parents' experience of the Holocaust, how much guilt they think the author experiences, how much worry, and how much the author indicates each parent discussed the Holocaust. Cronbach Alphas were established for inter-rater reliability between the two raters in this study; reliabilities ranged from .60 to .70, with a mean of .68 for the ratings of narratives responding to questions about the mother. Inter-rater reliabilities for the ratings about responses to the questions about the father ranged from .54 for one item (How much does it seem that this person's father talked about the Holocaust and his experiences in it?) to .74 with a mean of .66.

Procedures

- Contacted children of Holocaust survivors
- Sent notices through email lists through Holocaust Museum, Washington, DC

- Attended international conference of survivor families and invited people to participate
- Sent out packets of materials including instruments

- Everything was answered anonymously and returned by mail
- Narrative responses to questions about parents' experiences were extracted from the data, typed up, randomized, and prepared in a Mother's Experiences Narratives book, and a Father's Experiences Narratives book.

- The Holocaust Parental Experience Rating Scale and the Mother's and Father's Experiences books were given to two senior clinicians with at least ten years experience using the constructs studied in this research
- The clinicians rated each narrative according to the Rating Scale
- All data analyzed

Survivor Guilt Transmitted Across Generations: From Holocaust Survivors to Their Offspring

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Results

Interpersonal Guilt and Adult Children of Survivors

The results of this study demonstrated that adult children of Holocaust survivors were significantly higher in interpersonal guilt and self-hate when compared to 98 non-Jewish European Americans similar in age, gender, and geographic local, as shown in Table 1.

Variable	Adult Children of Holocaust Survivors	Non-Jewish European American Sample	t
Survivor Guilt	73.5	64.3	4.920***
Separation Guilt	41.5	37.14	2.797**
Omnipotent Responsibility Guilt	50.9	45.48	4.226**
Self Hate	33.9**	28.54	3.213**

p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001
The non-Jewish European American sample was taken from Eri Asano's Dissertation, The Wight Institute, 1998

Table 1. Comparison of adult children of survivors with non-Jewish European sample on Interpersonal Guilt and Self-hate

In another study conducted by O'Connor, Berry, Weiss, & Gilbert (2002), it was found that 50 patients hospitalized for depression also scored high in Survivor Guilt with mean score at 74.3. In a comparison of scores between the adult children of Holocaust survivors and the inpatient depressed population, the only significant difference was found in Self-hate (inpatient population mean = 52.86), with the adult children lower in Self-hate than the depressed population, despite being as high in Survivor Guilt (see Figure 1).

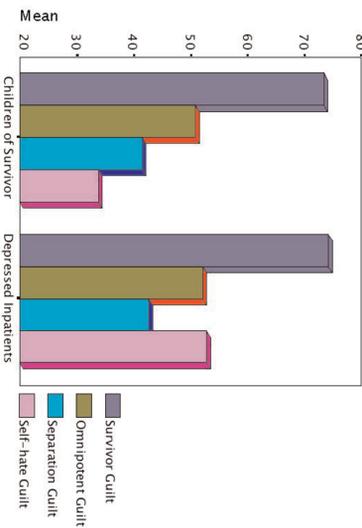


Figure 1. Comparison of men and women's scores on subscales of the Interpersonal Guilt Questionnaire-67

An independent samples t-test found women significantly higher than men in this sample of adult children of Holocaust survivors. In Survivor Guilt with p<.001, and women significantly higher in Self-hate with p = .003. (See Figure 2).

Results Related To Family Coping Traits

Discussion

The results of this study support prior research and clinical experience suggesting that adult children of Holocaust survivors carry with them a great deal of survivor guilt, passed on to them, often implicitly, by family members who were directly effected by the Holocaust. The correlational nature of this study prevents us from making any causal conclusions in terms of how survivor guilt is transmitted, however as our results demonstrate the significant association between survivor guilt and the trait of coping style categorized as "victim," suggests that families in which one finds frequent depression and anxiety are also likely to have highly guilty children who work to protect their parents by hiding their negative feelings such as sadness and worry.

This suggests that survivor guilt is transmitted in these families with greater intensity, as the deep concern for parents, expressed by the children, represents survivor guilt and a fear that should they be happy they might make their parents feel inadequate simply by comparison.

Likewise, the coping style or trait categorized as "numb" is significantly associated with survivor guilt, and these families are known to be unable to handle emotions, and to have parental over involvement with one another. Parents who are so self-absorbed, or absorbed with one another, may be signaling their children that their unhappiness is of a depth and severity that it leaves no room for the children, and as a consequence the chil-

The data were then analyzed for results concerning the family traits, as first described by Danieli and operationalized by the subscales on Rich's Children of Survivors' Questionnaire of family coping styles or traits. The subscales of the CSQ were correlated with the subscales of the IQG (See Table 3). Next, differences between men and women on the CSQ were analyzed using the independent samples t-test. It was found that men were significantly higher, with p< .05, on Numb and Victim subscales but there were no differences on Fighter and Those Who Made It subscales (see Figure 3).

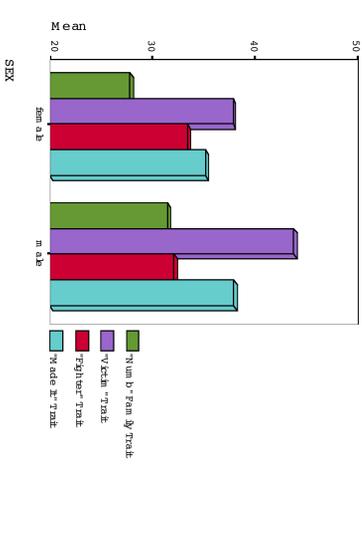


Figure 2. Comparison of Men and Women's Scores on Subscales of the Interpersonal Guilt Questionnaire-67

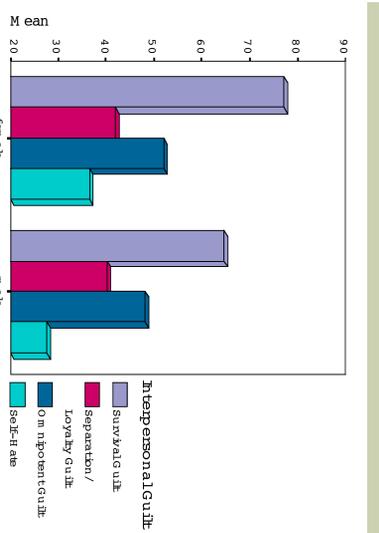


Figure 3. Comparison of men and women's scores on subscales of the Interpersonal Guilt Questionnaire-67

Results related to particular family history and survivor guilt
In an analysis of rate of parental family survival ranging from none to all, statistical significance was found as shown in Table 3.

Discussion

Children develop high survivor guilt, towards the parents, accompanied by a numbness and compliance in an effort to avoid surpassing their parents. In this way, the family coping style, or that of the parents, may provide a mechanism whereby survivor guilt is transmitted.

The narrative data suggests several other clues to the mechanisms of transmission that are striking, and so direct, they were unexpected. It appears the more the mother spoke about the Holocaust, the higher the levels of guilt and self-hate the adult child seems to feel. Additionally the adult children expressed a significant degree of omnipotent responsibility guilt when describing their mothers' experiences in the Holocaust, but not when describing their fathers' experiences. It seems worthwhile to consider from this data that survivor guilt may be transmitted through the mother directly speaking of painful experiences she has endured, or witnessed, whereas the father's speaking is not associated with the transmission of survivor guilt. In fact, the narratives related to fathers' experiences seemed to be associated with only a few positive variables, namely the more successful "fighter" and "made it" type of families, who were better able to overcome the damage done by the Holocaust. The results of this study call for more research, and suggest directions to take in studying what happens to children whose families have endured unspeakable political trauma.

Survivor Guilt	.577***	.325**	.052	.020
Omnipotent Responsibility Guilt	.324**	.399**	.263*	.413**
Separation Guilt	.057	.127	.199	.523**
Self-hate	.567***	.407**	.090	.099

p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 2. Correlations between subscales on the CSQ and subscales on the IQG-67

Numbers of Family Members Who Survived in Father's Family	Number of Subjects	Survivor Guilt Mean
None	20	71.200*
Few	33	71.709*
Most	6	84.000*
All	1	67.000

Table 3. Rate of parental survival and survivor guilt.

Significant differences were found with p<.05 between fathers who had no family surviving and those who had most of their families surviving, and fathers who had few of their family members surviving and those who had most of their family members surviving. However given the small number of fathers who endorsed the "most" item, interpretation of this data is difficult.

Results of Qualitative Data Analysis

The narrative data, derived from responses to questions about the participants' mothers' and father' experiences of the Holocaust, rated independently and reliably by two experienced clinicians who served as judges and answered five Likert-type scale items about the narratives. The judge's responses to the following questions were meant:

1. After reading this narrative, how much survivor guilt to you think the writer feels?
2. How much omnipotent responsibility do you think he or she feels?
3. How much do you think that he/she worries about his/her mother/father?
4. How much did his/her mother/father talks or talked about the Holocaust?
5. How much do you think the writer was him/herself affected by his/her parents' experiences in the Holocaust?

Table 4 presents the correlations of the judges ratings on the narratives with the major variables.

Mother's Reported Experiences	Survivor Guilt	Omnipotent Guilt	Separation Guilt	Self-hate	"Numb" Trait	"Victim" Trait	"Fighter" Trait	"Made It" Trait
Correlation	.029	-.190	-.119	.068	-.116	.238*	-.105	.063
Mother's Experiences	Survivor Guilt	-.232*	.090	.506**	-.189	.339*	-.009	.065
Mother's Experiences	Omnipotent Guilt							
Correlation	.145	.131	.036	.262	-.184	.175	-.073	-.148
Mother's Experiences	Separation Guilt							
Correlation	-.267*	-.284**	-.331**	.365**	-.011	.201	.234	.247
Mother's Experiences	Self-hate							
Correlation	.133	.095	.074	.094	.081	.317*	.002	-.094
Mother's Experiences	Father's Experiences							
Correlation	.067	.141	.112	.117	-.044	-.173	-.109	-.048
Mother's Experiences	Father's Guilt							
Correlation	.026	.028	-.072	.073	.133	-.038	-.238	-.140
Mother's Experiences	Father's Guilt							
Correlation	.176	.061	.099	.143	-.174	-.099	-.084	-.276
Mother's Experiences	Father's Guilt							
Correlation	.030	.176	-.048	-.121	-.163	.023	.302*	-.041
Mother's Experiences	Father's Guilt							
Correlation	.206	.206	-.086	.013	.096	-.001	.148	-.038

Table 4. Correlations between Ratings of Narratives and Major Variables

The Biographical Instrument included regular demographic information, in addition to asking questions specifically about parents' experiences in the Holocaust or World War II. Participants were asked to respond to these questions about their mother and their father separately, and to write as much as they wished.

Interpersonal Guilt Questionnaire-67 (IQG-67; O'Connor, Berry, Weiss, Bush, & Sampson, 1997) is a 67-item, Likert-type self-report questionnaire designed to assess guilt related to the fear of harming others. Internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha coefficients) for the three subscales directly related to interpersonal guilt have ranged from .82 to .85 for Survivor Guilt, from .82 to .83 for Separation Guilt, and from

74 to .83 for Omnipotent Responsibility Guilt.

Survivor Guilt is characterized by the pathogenic belief that by pursuing normal goals and achieving happiness, one may cause loved ones to suffer, simply by comparison.

Separation/loyalty Guilt is characterized by the pathogenic belief that if a person separates from, or is different from loved ones, loved ones will suffer as a consequence.

Omnipotent Responsibility Guilt involves an exaggerated sense of responsibility and concern for the well being of others.

Self-hate includes common negative self-statements made by highly guilty people and has been significantly associated with depression in prior research.

Children of Survivors Questionnaire (CSQ; Rich, 1982) is a 59 item Likert scale developed to operationalize Danieli's typology of four distinct coping styles of families surviving the Holocaust. While each family demonstrates some of each coping style, individuals from a family tend to exhibit more of one trait than others. For the purpose of this study, individuals were each given a score on each subscale of the CSQ. Cronbach's alphas were established for this study, with "Those Who Made It" at .76, "Numb" at .74, "Victim" at .78, and "Fighter" at .67.

Victim: Families are characterized by depression, worry, panic, and a tendency to catastrophic over-reaction to events. Children were particularly guilty and tried to protect their parents by hiding feelings of anger, sadness, and worry.

Numb: Families are characterized by difficulty handling emotions, parental over-involvement with one another at the expense of the chil-