HOLOCAUST TRAUMA: A WORKING CONFERENCE



Sponsored by the

Whitney Humanities Center at Yale University
Holocaust Survivors Film Project at New Haven
Yale Child Study Center

September 26-27, 1981 New Haven, Connecticut

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I. SATURDAY, September 26, 1981

9:00 - 9:30 A.M. 1. Opening Remarks (Peter Brooks and Geoffrey H. Hartman)

9:30 - 10:45 A.M. 2. Holocaust Trauma: Themes, Concerns, Phenomena

Presenter: Sigal Moderator: Krystal

In this session the question will be asked: What are the specific psychic phenomena and salient themes that arise in the wake of severe trauma? These may include unique forms of grief, mourning, remembering, and other lifelong modes of living and coping that bear the imprint of the holocaust experience. Both the phenomenologic and psychodynamic aspects will be discussed, as well as the epidemiology and cognitive characteristics

11:00 - 12:15 P.M. 3. Elements of the Trauma Experience

Presenter: Klein Moderator: DesPres

The ways in which extreme trauma is experienced and remembered will be elaborated. It has been postulated that under severe trauma altered states of consciousness may be attained, or that major experiential changes take place once the stimulus barrier is broken. Are psychological states such as numbing, derealization, unspeakable dread, profound desolation, and utter helplessness the ones that comprise the trauma experience and most accurately describe it? In addition, the memory traces of the trauma, both conscious and unconscious, may have unique characteristics, such as "flashbacks", nightmares, vivid memories, etc. Are new descriptive categories necessary for these experiences?

We are well aware of the fact that the interweaving of remembered and ongoing experiences may lead to distortions of current perceptions and revisions of past recollections. Can we identify and describe these complex processes and arrive at the underlying common denominators of the traumatic state?

Presenter: Furst
Moderator: Kestenber

In this session the problem of the role of the life cycle will be discussed. What is the effect of trauma experienced at different developmental states? How will subsequent stages of the life cycle be modified by the impact of the trauma? Examples from both the Holocaust and Vietnam War will be discussed.

There is a crucial controversy going on as to whether people overuse the Holocaust experience as an explanation or excuse for life events. How can we establish and maintain a balanced perspective on this issu

3:15 - 5:00 P.M. 5. Small Group Discussions

II. SUNDAY, September 27, 1981

9:00 - 10:30 A.M. 6. Toward a Theory of Traumatization and Survival

Presenter: Lifton Moderator: Bergmann

How can the psychic sequelae of a trauma be conceptualized in a theoretical framework? Various approaches may be employed, using and adapting existing theoretical models. For instance, one may try to interpret the phenomena in psychodynamic and psychogenetic terms. Another approach would be to look at the effects of trauma on systems interactions, family and transgenerational processes and sociological and psychohistorical aspects. A third approach might be one derived from existential psychological models, and a fourth from a cognitive developmental viewpoint. The strengths and weaknesses of each of the approaches will be discussed.

10:45 - 12:00 P.M. 7. Studying the Holocaust Trauma

Presenter: Weissman Moderator: Cohen, D.

Research Methodologies

How are we to apply or modify existing research methods to study the psychology of trauma? A panoply of methods is available: epidemiolo cal and sociological techniques, psychiatric interviews, projective testing analysis of literature and art, and the use of videotaping. Which of these approaches is the most suitable? How should these met be applied? This session will attempt to answer some of these questi

1:45 - 3:00 P.M. 8. Plenary Session (Solnit)

In this session, the participants will have an opportunity to discuss and distill the issues raised in the conference. In addition, they will examine the need and method for achieving continuity between pas present, and future Holocaust trauma research.