Soviet Holocaust Survivors: An Ethnographic Study

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Western Michigan University

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SOVIET HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

by

Marina Shafran

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology
Advisor: Eric M. Sauer, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
June 2011
SOVIET HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

Marina Shafran, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2011

The purpose of the current study was to help understand the lives, worldview, and meaning making of Soviet Holocaust survivors currently residing in the United States. Ethnographic interviews were conducted to explore survivor’s childhood, family life, religion, political views, work, and social life. These areas were examined during the following time periods: pre-WWII, during WWII, and post-WWII.

From the collected and analyzed data I was able to offer an insight into the experiences of five Soviet Holocaust survivors under the Soviet regime. I described the struggles that the survivors experienced during the Holocaust, the losses they had suffered, and the Nazi atrocities they had experienced during the war. Moreover, I attempted to offer a unique account of their lives under the Soviet regime and the anti-Semitic discrimination it imposed. I shared survivor’s detailed accounts of anti-Semitism in higher education, work, and daily life. I offered an understanding of what it means to be a survivor in a country that failed to acknowledge the mass murder of its own citizens. I also offered an understanding of what it means to be a Soviet Jewish survivor and to have an identity shaped by compounded trauma and anti-Semitism.
anti-Semitism. Implications are discussed within the context of Holocaust research, and future research is suggested.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have helped me in the writing of this dissertation. I can mention but a few. The participants of this study, who were kind to share their past with me, I would not be here without you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

My dissertation chair, Dr. Eric Sauer, who gave me a chance and supported, encouraged, and helped me, when I needed it the most. The members of my committee, Dr. Mary Anderson, who has been an incredible source of support in this process, and Dr. Mary Lagerwey, who encouraged me to connect my interest to the larger research field.

My family who supported me in something they did not fully understand. My grandparents who have been cautious to speak about their past, yet valued the importance of my study. The pseudonyms of the participants in this study are given after you. My parents, who wished to protect me from the anti-Semitism they had encountered, and therefore were cautious about this topic, and my husband, who supported me in learning about my history.

I would also like to thank my psychologist, Colleen Thebert-Wright PhD, who helped me cope with the difficulties of the process and offered me understanding, when everything else seemed to fall apart.
Acknowledgements-Continued

Last but not least, Rene Lichtman, who has been a great source of support and encouragement and Mr. Sam Offen and other survivors I encountered in my journey. Thank you all.

Marina Shafran
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CHAPTER I
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the Soviet Union, until 1987, no one knew anything about the Holocaust. I only learned in the United States. Here I learned a lot. In the Soviet Union - nothing.

Soviet survivor

Introduction

Many questions drive a person to study the Holocaust. These questions are numerous and mostly unanswerable. Among them are questions about God and where he was during the Holocaust, why he abandoned the Jews, and whether what happened during the Holocaust could take place again. Did modern warfare technology show people a glimpse into the human potential of evil doing (Bauer, 1980)? How could the appearance of Adolf Hitler lead to the murder of most of European Jewry? How thousands of peaceful Germans, who otherwise would not intentionally harm another human being, could have contributed heavily to the execution of the Holocaust (Langer, 1995)?

More than a hundred years ago about five million Jews resided in the territory of the Russian Empire. The Russian and later Soviet Jews lived through some of the most dramatic and traumatic events known to modern history. They had experienced two world wars, revolutions, never ending anti-Semitic pogroms, political liberation, and governmental repression. Culturally, Russian Jews have contributed monumentally to the Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, Byelorussian, and Ukrainian literature. When permitted by Soviet authorities, they contributed to the field of science and technology, industry, art, scholarship, and fought in the wars. For their multiple achievements they encountered a mix of praise and anti-Semitic persecution
(Gitelman, 1988). After the end of WWII Jews, Jewish identity and Jewish history were silenced. They became a taboo (Rohdewald, 2008).

Their own identities were frequently challenged in the process. Some put aide anti-Semitic discrimination and dedicated their lives to the communist regime even though the Soviet regime rarely allowed them to forget they were Jews. Others ultimately rejected their country of birth and sought to move to other lands. Some sought to shed their Jewishness and assimilate into the dominant Russian culture while others have attempted to hold on to it and explore pro-Zionist ideas (Gitelman, 1988). Regardless of their position, the Soviet authorities had consistently discriminated against the Jews-not permitting them to forget that they were Jews in a non-Jewish country.

Until recently, demographic and sociological data pertaining to Soviet Jews in the era between WWI and WWII have been dependent on the materials published in USSR (Altshuler, 1998). Censorship was extensive in the Soviet Union up until the 1990s. The numerous documents relevant to the Jewish life and the Holocaust, such as the numbers of Jews dead, as well as witness accounts were not available to the public. Survivors were discouraged from sharing their experiences, the Holocaust was downplayed, and survivors’ testimonies were non-existent (Gitelman, 1997). Sixty-three years after the end of WWII there continues to be a lack of knowledge about the fate of Soviet Holocaust survivors.

It is known that about one third of the Jews massacred in the Holocaust were Soviet citizens, yet they remain the most unknown population (Gitelman, 1993). The number of the Soviet Jews massacred in the Holocaust are estimated between 2.5
million and 3.3 million (Altshuler, 1998). The exploration of Jewish history and culture by Jews was not permitted in USSR until the 1990’s, which was particularly destructive since no other country lost as many Jews as the Soviet Union (Gitelman, 1990).

In recent years, specific scholarship about the Holocaust in the USSR began to emerge in the fields of history, political science and economics. For example, “The Holocaust and Colonialism in the Ukraine” (Lower, 2005), “Ghettos in the Occupied Soviet Union: The Nazi ‘System’” (Dean, 2005), “Soviet Jewish War Photojournalists Confront the Holocaust” (Shneer, 2005), “Jewish-Belorussian Solidarity in World War II Minsk” (Epstein, 2005), “Yizker Bikher as Primary Sources for the Study of Ghettos in the German-Occupied Soviet Union” (Koss, 2005), and “The Fate of Soviet Soldiers in German Captivity” (Otto, 2005). Though these studies are of extreme importance, since they bridge the gap in the Soviet Holocaust scholarship, one crucial factor is missing. The voices of the survivors, the people who experienced these events, are not there. This is mainly because survivors from that area are exceptionally rare. Not many survived the Holocaust, some still reside in the former-Soviet Union, and those who live in the West rarely have had the opportunity to share their accounts.

The Holocaust ended over sixty years ago and many believe that the main waves of Holocaust scholarship have passed (Wieviorka, 1994). Materials currently appearing about the Holocaust are meant to educate future generations. For example, a recent film, “Spell Your Name” (2006), by Serhiy Bukovsky illustrates this point. The film is meant to tell the world about the experiences of survivors. Yet the film
does not focus on the survivors. Instead, it follows the journey of local Ukrainian students as they discover the Holocaust for the first time. The film focuses on the experiences of the non-Jewish students; rather than telling the stories of the Ukrainian Jews they are learning about, failing to offer the much-needed information about the experiences of Soviet Jews in Holocaust.

Language is another important factor standing in the way of learning about Soviet Jewish Holocaust survivors. In the US it is difficult, but possible, to locate Soviet Holocaust survivors. It is not easy to collect their testimonies, however, because many of them do not speak English. This may in part explain why there are only eight testimonies of Soviet Holocaust survivors at the Washington DC United Holocaust Memorial Museum which are in English.

Soviet Jewish Holocaust survivors are difficult to find and are often unwilling to share their stories. Many learned not to speak about their experiences because they feared the repercussions from the Soviet government and this appears to continue to be the case even after they have left the Soviet Union.

To summarize, Soviet authorities treated the Holocaust in the Soviet Union very differently than governments in the rest of the world (Gitelman, 1990). The events of the Holocaust were downplayed by the Soviet authorities and survivors were silenced (Gitelman, 1997). The Soviet government systematically suppressed any evidence of the Holocaust from the public (Altshuler, 1987). The materials about the Soviet Holocaust appearing today are aimed at educating future generations. Some survivors are cautious to speak about their experiences to this day. Some survivors who moved to the US are willing to share their experience, but cannot do so
because they do not speak English. With the opening of Soviet archives, more information becomes available about the fate of the Soviet Jews in the Holocaust. Testimonies of Soviet Holocaust survivors, however, continue to be scarce.

In this investigation, I sought to study the experiences of a small group of Soviet Jewish Holocaust survivors who emigrated from the former Soviet Union and currently reside in the US. My goal was to learn about Soviet survivors and the Holocaust in the USSR directly from the survivors. To achieve this goal I conducted ethnographic interviews with five Soviet Holocaust survivors residing in the Detroit area. Interviews were conducted in Russian to allow participants to tell their stories in their native language.

**Broad Areas of Exploration**

This study intended to explore the lives of Soviet Holocaust survivors currently residing in the United States. The following specific areas guided the interview process: childhood, family life, religion, political views, work, marriage, and social life. These areas were examined during the following time periods: pre-WWII, during WWII, and post-WWII.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

If you want to understand anti-Semitism, don’t study Jews. Study non-Jews.
Leon Wieseltier

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to review existing literature about Jews in the Soviet Union, Soviet attitudes towards the Jews, and Holocaust research in the West and in the field of psychology. Another goal is to identify a gap in existing literature and briefly discuss how the present study will contribute to the literature.

The history of the Soviet Jews is unique. They had undergone multiple hardships in the 20th century. In a period of one hundred years they endured two world wars, the Holocaust, a communist revolution, and severe persecution by the Nazi and Soviet regimes (Ro’i, 2007). Over sixty years have passed since the Holocaust and WWII ended. Numerous volumes in various disciplines have been written in the West about the Holocaust. When it comes to Soviet Jews, however, it is only recently that geographically specific case studies began to emerge. Historical documentation about the lives of Jews under the Soviet regime was written primarily in the West (Gitelman, 1997). Inside the Soviet Union, any Jewish cultural activity was persecuted and forbidden by the Soviet authorities (Altshuler, 1987; Ro’I, 2007). Although historical accounts published in the West about Soviet Jews attempted to provide a detailed account of the Jewish life under the Soviet regime, they were limited because the historians were rarely allowed to visit the locations they were
describing (Cang, 1969). Finally, the demographic data about Soviet Jews in the USSR are limited and, at times, confusing (Gitelman, 1993).

Since USSR’s collapse in the early 1990s, the “iron curtain” has been lifted and more archival information is becoming available to the public. We may never know the exact numbers of Jews that were murdered and perhaps it will be difficult to learn about the events that took place over sixty years ago that were systematically suppressed by the Soviets (Gitelman, 2005). However, one thing is clear: the life of Soviet Jews in the former USSR was dramatically different from the life of the Jews living in the West today. The Soviet regime exposed Jews to continuous traumatization. Therefore, in order to attempt to understand Soviet Holocaust survivors, it is important to examine Soviet history.

**Jews in the USSR**

**Early Jewish Life in Russia**

Historically, the Eastern Orthodox Church has always played an important role in the lives of the Russian rulers and Russian people. Even prior to the seventh century, the Christian dignitaries loathed the Jews because they converted the pagan Khazar monarchs, who ruled Russia to Judaism. Later, when Prince Vladimir of Kiev established Christianity as the official religion for his people, the church heads became determined never to allow Jews to thrive again. In Russia, the word “Zhيد/ Yeid” (Jew) came to mean hate, and anti-Semitism slowly began to grow (Lawrence, 1970).

The anti-Semitism that the Jews saw during and after WWII may have been different than the anti-Semitism of the past, but it was most certainly not the first time they had encountered it (Lawrence, 1970). Long before WWII began, Russian Jews
had experienced numerous pogroms. “Pogrom” is derived from “pogromit” which means “to break or smash” and “to conquer” (Klier & Lambroza, 1992). Jews experienced extensive anti-Semitic violence in three main waves of 1881-82, 1903-06, and 1919-21, and the term “pogrom” became directly associated with the Jews. The Russian government initiated, supported, and/or allowed the pogroms (Lawrence, 1970).

Although these were the three main waves, pogroms took place earlier in history as well. One of the famous cases involved the 1563 pogrom, when the armies of Tsar Ivan IV captured Polotsk, a Polish city, and ordered all the Jews who declined to convert to Orthodox Christianity drowned. The most dramatic pogrom took place in Ukraine in 1648 when Bogdan Chmelnicki and the Cossacks rebelled against Polish feudalists, victimizing many Jews who served in limited positions under the Polish rule (Klier & Lambroza, 1992).

Pogroms were frequent throughout the Jewish Russian history. They occurred from the 7th century all the way to the last of the tsars in the early 1900s. Anti-Semitism thus existed in Russia for centuries (Klier & Lambroza, 1992). Despite the frequent anti-Semitic acts, however, it is difficult to find a well-documented history of the Soviet Russia’s Jews since very little of that history was recorded. The information that is available has been published outside of USSR (Cang, 1969). While more and more Soviet archives are becoming available to the public, it is not clear how many remain sealed.

Albert Einstein once noted:
A people, a nation, is like a tree which is born with its own shadow. The higher the tree the longer its shadow. If you like you may call it not a shadow but a fate. The shadow of the Jewish people is prophecy – vision of the end of the days. The shadow of the Romans was fame, domination of foreign lands. The shadow of the Russians is anti-Semitism (Cang, 1969, p. 14).

**Jews before WWII**

Approximately 5.2 million Jews resided in the Russian Empire on the eve of WWI (Altshuler, 1998). They comprised roughly 40 percent of the world’s Jews. WWI and the Communist revolution of 1917 changed the borders of Russia and caused fragmentation in the Russian Jewry. During the years leading up to WWI emigration was still allowed and approximately 1.7 million Jews emigrated from Russia between the years of 1880 and 1914 (Altshuler, 1987). After 1914 the Soviet authorities rarely permitted emigration.

The 1917 communist revolution led to the transition of monarchy to the first governmental regime. The revolution emancipated the Jews, and allowed them to participate in all aspects of revolutionary life. At the same time, the Bolsheviks, who lead the revolution, systematically eliminated all aspects of Jewish traditional life. First came the massive repression of all forms of religious life such as synagogues, yeshivot, religious publications, and schools. This policy was applied to all religions, and not limited to Judaism. For the Jews specifically, however, it created a deep wound in the collective existence and national consciousness. Russian Jewry became deprived of its intelligentsia, which had flourished prior to the revolution. As a result, it lost its autonomous intellectual leadership (Decter, 1971).
Following Lenin’s death, Stalin came to power in 1924 (Lawrence, 1970). One of the main contributions of Stalin to socialism was his implementation of socialism in the USSR. Before Stalin, many revolutionaries believed that the socialist revolution had to occur in several countries simultaneously to become successful. With the notion of socialism in one country, Stalin introduced Five Year Plans, whose goal was to bring the Soviet Union into the era of industrialization and collectivization. Soviet citizens, including the Jews, had to adjust to this new system. For the first time in Russian history, thousands of Jews began working as proletarians in factories and mines for state wages (Eckman, 1974).

The idea of socialism in one country was nationalistic in its roots. Therefore, it was only a matter of time before anti-Semitism resurfaced during times of hardship, fed by the hatred and nationalist emotions of the people. Stalin took advantage of these anti-Semitic propensities when fighting his opposition (Gitelman, 1997). Anti-Semitic prejudice reached its peak during the 1937-39 purges. Anti-Semitism was used to get rid of Stalin’s opposition inside the Communist Party, where the Jews played a crucial role. Some of the more influential Jews in Stalin’s opposition were labeled “rootless cosmopolitans.” The term “cosmopolitans” was used to label individuals who did not wish to see socialism in their own country. Although the word Jew was not specifically stated, it was still clear to whom “rootless cosmopolitans” referred (Eckman, 1974). The massive attack on Jewish culture began in 1938. Jews were systematically “discouraged” from attempting careers in the foreign ministry, gradually extending to all governmental branches that dealt with foreign affairs (Decter, 1971).
Soviet authorities first restricted, and later eliminated, some of the Jewish traditions (Altshuler, 1987). Later, anti-Semitism was used against rural Jews, many of whom were Stalinist supporters of collectivization. In the country, Jews were labeled as speculators and petty traders. Though Jews were being labeled as the opponents of collectivism in one country they were still contributing to the development of the Soviet Russia as physicians, teachers, and professors. The contradictions experienced by the Jews were more malicious than those experienced by any other ethnic group in USSR. Jews found themselves trapped between anti-Semitic hate and the demand to contribute to the collectivization of the country (Eckman, 1974).

WWII in the Soviet Union

Of the numerous countries that participated in WWII, the Soviet Union suffered the greatest losses. According to Soviet sources, 20 million civilian and military people were lost (Gilboa, 1971). Almost 1,800 towns, and over 70,000 villages, were destroyed, and approximately 25 million residents became homeless. The total material damage is estimated at about 679,000 million rubles.

In the Soviet Union, WWII has always been commemorated as a monumental event of supreme importance. Each year celebrations of another anniversary marking the victory over Nazi Germany take place. Old songs are sung, and it is still possible to see the audiences cry. For example, during a May 9 celebration in 2005, Tamara Gvirdzeteli, a famous Georgian singer, and Vitaliy Lanovoy, a well-known Russian actor, sang a song from the film “Belorusskiy Vokzal” (1970), that tells the story of a small group of WWII veterans who reunite in the 1960s. It was quite amazing to see
so many people simultaneously break into tears. The power of the war message in 
Soviet Union has always been strong. The Holy War and the Great War are just some 
of the names WWII was given.

Despite the great losses, many Soviet veterans remember the war as a time of 
purity, achievement, and camaraderie (Gitelman, 2005). This in part is due to the 
glorification of the war that occurred. “The war, rather than the revolution, became 
the legitimizing myth of the system itself” (Gitelman, 2005, p. 1). For many years 
following the end of WWII, the Soviet propaganda maintained that the war was won 
against all odds, due to supreme sacrifices, and because of the genius leadership of 
Stalin, the Soviet people, and the Soviet system. Any deficiencies experienced in 
agriculture, technology, political repression, and the many social problems, were 
justified by the Communist government by the war (Gitelman, 1997).

**Holocaust in the Soviet Union**

Although WWII continues to be celebrated by the Russians to this day, the 
Holocaust continues to be handled quite differently. It is known that about one third 
of the Jews massacred in the Holocaust were Soviet citizens, yet they remain the most 
unknown population (Gitelman, 1988). According to the 1995 Yad Vashem Museum 
on Holocaust research study, 1.5 million Soviet Jews were murdered by the Nazis, 
and another 200,000 died in combat (Gitelman, 1993). Another careful estimate 
suggests that approximately 5.25 million Soviet Jews were murdered, and another 2 
million killed in fighting in combat (Gilboa, 1971).

The estimates of Jews killed in the Holocaust continue to vary to this day. The 
number of Jews residing on the territory of the USSR prior to WWII is confusing as
Two censuses were conducted prior to WWII on January 6, 1937 and January 4, 1939. The 1939 census data remained sealed in the Russian Archive of the Economy in Moscow until 1980. In both the 1937 and the 1939 censuses, respondents were required to state their nationality (ethnicity). The discrepancy between the two censuses results is quite large. The 1937 results indicate a much smaller number of people in USSR. Some noted that the low numbers in 1937 were due to the heavy losses experienced in USSR as a result of the Stalinist collectivization efforts. Others hypothesized that the discrepancy was a result of undercounting. The results of the 1939 census are unclear as well. Several months after it was conducted, the government declared the results erroneous, the findings were sequestered, and those in charge of the census were proclaimed as “enemies of the people”. According to the 1939 census, there were a total of 3,028,538 Jews in the Soviet Union, an 11.5% (313,430) increase from 1937 (Maskudov, 1993). Some scholars indicate that the 1937 census was undercounted by 1.2%. Assuming that the undercount affected the Jewish population count, it can be concluded that on the eve of WWII the Jewish population totaled approximately 2,747,689 (Altshuler, 1998).

The War Begins

Although the Jews were singled out for annihilation by the Germans, it was on Soviet ground where the Nazis were able to demonstrate their fight against their sworn enemies and the Judeo Bolshevik ideology (Lawrence, 1970). Based on the Nazi Marshal Erich von Mannstein’s interpretation of the Nazi ideology, the Nazis came to believe that Jews were in charge of the Soviet regime. As a result, Jews residing in the occupied Soviet territories were perceived as a serious threat to the
German nation (Gilboa, 1971). These interpretations ultimately lead to Himmler’s orders to take action and exterminate the Jews:

More than elsewhere in Europe they (the Jews) here occupy all key positions in the political and administrative leadership and in commerce and industry. They constitute the major element in (stirring up) possible disturbances and revolt. The Jewish Bolshevist regime must be liquidated once and for all…

The (German) soldier must understand that Jewry is to be severely punished, since it is the spiritual message-bearer of Bolshevism…. All likelihood of revolts being initiated by the Jews must be quelled (Gilboa, 1971, p. 5).

German attack on the Soviet Union began at 4 o’clock on June 22, 1941 (Altshuler, 1998). Previous German campaigns against France, Great Britain, Denmark and Norway did not have a pre-planned goal of Jewish extermination, but a goal of to conquer the occupied territories (Lustiger, 2003). Planned systematic annihilation of the Jews was not carried out until 1941. The May 1941 issue of the “Guideline for the Behavior of the Troops in Russia” stated the following: “The battle against Bolshevism, the deadly enemy, demands vigorous and ruthless action against bolshevist agitators, insurgents, saboteurs, Jews, and the total uprooting of any active or passive resistance” (Lustiger, 2003, p. 102).

Three million Germans invaded the Soviet Union from the west. Although the Nazis had expressed their intentions quite clearly, the Soviet government kept secret the Nazi atrocities that were taking place against the Jews (Gitelman, 1993). Even though the Germans were explicitly stating that their goal was to eliminate the Jews, Soviet media remained silent about Nazi atrocities as was agreed in the 1939 Nazi-
Soviet pact (Gitelman, 1990). Many reflected back to the Germans they remembered from WWI as “decent people.” What happened next, no one could expect.

On February 21, 1941 Germans began an anti-Jewish advertisement campaign for the German troops and the Soviet population. Pamphlets, posters, movies, radio shows and news reports were distributed in the 18 Soviet languages. The newspapers proclaimed the Germans as liberators who destroyed the “Yiddish communism.” Anti-Jewish German propaganda was especially accepted in the Ukraine and the Baltic countries. When Germans entered Ukraine, they were greeted enthusiastically.

In 1941, the Ukrainian Volunteer Police was created. The volunteers were allowed to participate in all the anti-Jewish actions including pogroms, guarding of the ghettos and the extermination camps (Lustiger, 2003). Ukrainians were even mobilized to aid the atrocities against the Jews in Poland.

Researchers studying about the Soviet collaborators with the Nazis after the war were unable to locate a single document produced by the Soviet authorities warning Ukrainians and Byelorussians of a potential punishment for aiding the Germans in the oppression of the Jews (Cang, 1969). Later, reports of the crimes committed by the Ukrainian Volunteer Police were suppressed (Lustiger, 2003).

Many of the murderous events were clearly described in the Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry (Black Book) (Ehrenburg & Grossman, 2002). It is the only existing record, which details the mass annihilation of the Jews. Here is a description given by eye witnesses in Berdichev, Ukraine:

Another such German "joke" was the story of the death of Aron Mizor, an elderly butcher who lived in Byelopolsky Street. A German officer robbed
Mizor's apartment and ordered his soldiers to carry off the stolen articles. He himself remained with two soldiers for some amusement. He had found the knife the butcher used on domestic fowl and thus learned of Mizor's profession. ‘I want to see how you work,’ he said and ordered the soldiers to bring in the small children of the neighbor women. ‘Butcher them!’ the officer ordered. Mizor thought the officer was joking until the officer punched the old man in the face and repeated: ‘Butcher!’ His wife and daughter-in-law began to cry and to entreat the officer. At that point the officer said: ‘You'll have to butcher not only the children, but these two women as well!’ Mizor fainted and fell to the floor. The officer took the knife and struck him with it in the face. Mizor's daughter-in-law, Lia Brazikhes, ran out into the street, begging passers-by to save the old people. When the people entered Mizor's apartment, they saw the dead bodies of the butcher and his wife in a pool of blood. The officer himself had demonstrated the use of the knife (Ehrenburg & Grossman, 2002, p. 13-14).

Other similar “jokes” took place in Berdichev and numerous Soviet cities and villages. First the Germans “toyed” with the Jews, collecting everything valuable, such as, money, boots, and provisions, and soon after executed them in a systematic way. In Berdichev, in a matter of few days, 30,000 Jews were murdered, leaving less than ten Jewish survivors by the time the Soviets liberated the city (Garrard & Garrard, 1996).

The monstrous slaughter of the innocent and the helpless, this spilling of blood continued the entire day. The pits were filled with blood since the
clayey soil could no longer absorb any more, and the blood spilled over the edges, forming enormous puddles and flowing in rivulets into low-lying areas. When the wounded fell into the pits, they did not die from the SS bullets, but by drowning in the blood that filled the pits. The boots of the executioners were soaked in blood. The victims walked through blood to get to their graves. The terrified screams of those being murdered hung in the air the entire day… Peasants driving at dawn from Romanovka to town saw that the entire field was covered with the bodies of the dead. In the morning the Germans and the police removed the bodies, killed all of those still breathing, and buried them again. Three times in a short period the soil above the graves cracked open from pressure inside, and a bloody fluid spilled over the edges of the pits and flowed across the field. Three times the Germans forced the peasants to heap up new hills above the enormous graves (Ehrenburg & Grossman, 2002, p. 15-16).

Nazi atrocities took place in many Soviet cities. Just a few hours away from Berdichev, in Babi Yar, Germans executed 33,000 Jews in two days (Garrard & Garrard, 1996). City after city, the Einsatzgruppen mobile murder squads killed Soviet Jews with machine guns. Some Jews were placed in ghettos that were liquidated of their inhabitants by 1941-42. It took the Einsatzgruppen about five months to murder approximately half a million Soviet Jews (Gitelman, 1993). In some regions, like Ukraine and Belorussia, at times, Germans were welcomed as liberators who came to rescue the residents from the Bolshevik elements. In these areas, the participation of local residents in the extermination of the Jews was
particularly atrocious and recurrent. The local police often outdid the Germans when it came to slaughtering the Jews. As a result, of the local police collaborating with the Nazis, only a few Jews were saved by the local non-Jewish residents. This was in contrast with Poland, where anti-Semitism was no less ingrained in the public consciousness, but nevertheless rescues by non-Jewish residents still took place (Cang, 1969).

**Jews in the Red Army**

Jews who served in the Red Army faced anti-Semitism as well. When the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union began, approximately half a million Jews served in the Red Army, and in the Soviet Navy and Air Force (Cang, 1969). During WWII, a great number of Jews displayed courage in fighting the Germans. After Stalinist cleansing of the top army ranks in 1937, many open spots became available in the military leadership. Jews who distinguished themselves as leaders in battle were eligible for these positions as well. By 1943, there were forty-nine Jewish Generals in the Red Army, some of whom were decorated with highest medals of bravery. This information was highly publicized abroad in the “Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union” report, which noted that out of 50,000 recipients of the “Heroes of Soviet Union” award, 1,500 recipients were Jews. At the same time, these details were suspended from the Soviet press (Gitelman, 2005).

Inside the Red Army, Jews were often blamed for the war. This was not done openly, yet still created an atmosphere of hostility. Records of Polish Jews who fought in the Soviet Army noted cases of both soldiers and higher rank officers who tended to put down their fellow Jewish soldiers. Records of anti-Semitism written by
Soviet Jews who fought in the Red Army do not exist. For the Soviet Jewish soldiers who fought against the Nazis executors of the Holocaust, the reason for fighting was no different than for other non-Jewish Soviet soldiers. In fact, many were not aware of the Holocaust until they liberated the camps in late 1943 and 1944 (Gitelman, 1997 & 2005).

In a recent interview series conducted with 221 Soviet Jewish WWII veterans residing in the US, Israel, and Russia, several common themes were noted (Gitelman, 2005). Although these veterans were born in traditional Jewish homes, they fought the war as Soviet citizens. For most, the ongoing Holocaust was not the motivation for fighting. They fought as Soviet citizens, and perhaps they believed that the Soviet system was their system as well. Some noted that they fought to prove that they were able to fight in combat. The majority noted that, prior to the war, there was everyday anti-Semitism but it was not taken seriously. In late 1943 to early 1944, however, it began to change when medals and promotions were not given to the Jews but were given to non-Jews who fought in the same battles. Some reported being directly told that they were not decorated or promoted due to their nationality (Gitelman, 2005).

**The Response of Soviet Authorities**

WWII gave a free rein to anti-Semitism that was not seen even during the darkest times for the Soviet Jews under tsarist Russia (Gudkov, 2007). Anti-Semitism spread from the areas conquered by the Germans throughout the Soviet Union, reaching even the partisans and the Red Army. Official Soviet policy almost completely ignored the rising wave of anti-Semitism and remained silent about the Nazi extermination of the Jews (Gitelman, 1990). The Nazi anti-Jewish policy was addressed by Stalin only
once, at the beginning of the war. Stalin, Sikorski, Anders and Kot unanimously agreed at the December 1941 meeting, that Jews were cowardly fighters (Pinkus, 1988).

For many Soviet Jews, the response of Soviet authorities came as a shock. Soviet authorities made no effort to disprove the German anti-Jewish propaganda, or to prevent the public from cooperating with the Germans (Cang, 1969). In 1966, a leader of the Vilna Jewish community shared the following with Lawrence (1970): “We heard about none of the German atrocities, and most of us thought it would be like under the Kaiser’s occupation, that we would receive better treatment by the Germans than by the Russians” (p. 64). In this particular Lithuanian city, the Red border guards did not allow thousands of Jews to escape into the Russian territory, which lead to the destruction of almost all of the local Jewish population.

Soviet leadership responded with silence. The following quote from Stalin illustrates the Soviet approach:

Some comrades still fail to understand that the important strength in our country is the Great Russian nation (...) some comrades of Jewish descent believe that this war is being fought to save the Jewish nation. These Jews are mistaken. We fight the Great Patriotic War for the salvation, the freedom and the independence of our homeland led by the Great Russian people (Lustiger, 2003, p. 107).

Moreover, in an effort to minimize the Holocaust in the USSR, Soviet leadership took active steps to hide the true nature of Nazi mayhem against the Jews. Even after the Nazi invasion, reports released to the Soviet population did not
mention Jews as the primarily targeted group. The Soviet newspapers Pravda (Truth) and Izvestia (News) described the events as “crime against the Soviet people,” blending the Jewish deaths with those of the entire Soviet population. The instances in which Jews were mentioned specifically were limited (Cang, 1969).

The Holocaust in the Soviet Union was continuously underreported and minimized (Hirszowicz, 1993). From 1949, until Stalin’s death in 1953, the Jewish extermination was ignored. According to Korey (1973), the Soviet government attempted to expunge the Holocaust from the collective memory to avoid stirring a national Jewish consciousness and identity. Various methods of distortion were utilized when it came to reporting the victims. Usually, when information about the Holocaust was made available, the nationalities of the people who resided in the region were provided. Hence, Belarusians would be mentioned first if the victims belonged there geographically, Ukrainians in Ukraine, Russians in Russian, etc. Jews were placed in the last place or above the “and others” category.

Another method Soviet authorities used to downplay the Holocaust involved describing specific crimes perpetrated by the Nazis and their collaborators in a particular area, adding few sentences about specific crimes against the Jews that took place. For instance, in a June 20, 1966 article, Iakovlev writes in detail about Fritz Hildebrand, a Nazi war criminal who led the extermination operation of old people, women and children in the villages of Przemysl and Drogobycz in 1942-44. Iakovlev reports that Hildebrand led extermination “action” in 1943 against many peaceful civilians. He continues to say that in October 1942 an “action” of Jewish extermination was conducted in Przemysl and in March 1944 in Drogobycz. It is
apparent that the old people, women and children were Jews, but it is not clearly stated in the report (Hirszowicz, 1993).

In other cases, such as Trebinka, Sobibor, and Belzec, the fact that the camp was designed specifically for Jews was mentioned. The uprising that took place in Sobibor however, was attributed to the Soviet POW’s, and their Jewish ethnicity belonging was either extensively distorted, or completely ignored (Hirszowicz, 1993).

Several reasons for the suppression of the Holocaust events in USSR are proposed (Gitelman, 1997). For the Soviets, publicly admitting the events may have meant admitting the collaboration of some Soviet citizens with the Nazis, especially the Ukrainians and the Baltic nationalities, which could harm the manufactured notion that all Soviet people are united in a communist friendship: “druzhba narodov.” Also, admitting the Holocaust may have raised Jewish consciousness, just like it did in other countries. In addition, this may have opened the discussion of existing anti-Semitism in the Red Army and the occupied territories. Finally, WWII was crucial in the Soviet “political formula” and “giving the war to Jews” would damage the intended systemic rationale (Gitelman, 2005).

The Years after the War

By the time the war was over, the memory of Jews that took part in the Nazi resistance movement was erased and the crimes of perpetrators suppressed. At the end of the war, the Soviet authorities had no interest in making the Holocaust realities in the Soviet Union public (Lower, 2005). A commission to investigate the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis and their collaborators was formed on November 2, 1942, but was dissolved by 1945. Materials presented in Nuremberg to the military court
did not state specifically that the main victims were Jews. After the war, this information was still kept secret. Stalin announced that the two main victims of WWII were the Soviet and German people, ignoring the victimization of the Jews (Lustiger, 2003).

The years between August 23, 1939 and March 5, 1953 were the worst for the Soviet Jews and are considered “the black years.” These were the years of physical and spiritual Holocaust, as well as anxiety and despair (Pinkus, 1988) when Soviet Jews experienced a profound hatred as individuals and as national minority under both the Nazi and the Stalinist regimes. The end of WWII brought an escalation of anti-Semitic sentiments, particularly in the areas that were occupied by the Nazis. The old factors contributing to anti-Semitism before the war were enhanced by new reasons. In the areas where local residents cooperated with the Nazis, a fear arose that the returning Jews would demand back their apartments and property and in some instances their positions held prior to the war in sectors of higher education, arts and sciences (Pinkus, 1988).

During WWII the Nazis exterminated over one million Soviet Jews (Altshuler, 1998). When the war ended, those Jews who returned from the early evacuations found their homes occupied in the Ukraine and Belorussia by their former neighbors, who refused to leave. The returning Jews found themselves facing an increasing number of obstacles. They were not allowed to rebuild their cultural institutions, or collective farms in the Crimea area, or to reopen Yiddish newspapers, publications, or Yiddish theater. The justification given by the authorities was that
Russia was creating a new society. The old Jewish ways were deemed to be obstacles that had to be removed (Cang, 1969).

In the meantime, anti-Semitism continued to grow. Every day, new charges against the Jews were published in the press. On some days they would be marked as “ruthless wanderers” and the next day accused of being “cosmopolitans” with no attachment to their own land (Cang, 1969). Soviet authorities were aware of the rising anti-Semitism but their political interests influenced their reactions. On one hand, the Soviet authorities feared that acknowledging the suffering of the Jews would lead to loss of the population’s support for the anti-Soviet nationalist movement. On the other hand, it would be dangerous for the Soviet authorities to tolerate open displays of anti-Semitism since it would be hard to go against the mass nationalistic movement and avoid using anti-Semitism to promote government aims (Pinkus, 1988).

In order for the Soviet authorities to maintain their anti-Semitic policies, yet at the same time avoid publicly denouncing the Jews, an official Jewish minority policy was implemented in 1946. According the policy the government took some limited actions against extreme manifestations of anti-Semitism. They also allowed Jews to return to their prior residences but at the same time conducted massive propaganda to convince them to remain in the areas where they resided during the war. Jews were admitted to economic, art, and educational institutions but were restricted from political, security, and governmental positions. Finally, limited opportunities were allowed for reconstruction of Jewish cultural life (Cang, 1969).

At the same time, there was a Stalinist effort to systematically remove Jews from the governmental branches, particularly from areas related to Soviet foreign
policy, such as, the army, security services, Foreign Ministry and Foreign Trade. The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which was the only established Jewish representative body during the war, was severely restricted. Mass media began hinting that Jews possessed dual loyalties and were capable of betraying the socialist motherland in time of crisis (Cang, 1969). A profound campaign against “Jewish nationalism” was exercised and was much stronger than any other nationalistic campaign. The murder of the head of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and director of Moscow State Yiddish Theater, Mikhoels, on 13 January 1948, was meant to indicate that “Jewish statehood” in the Soviet Union would not become a reality (Pinkus, 1988).

Soviet anti-Jewish campaign escalated on August 12, 1952, when twenty-six of the best known Jewish poets and novelists were shot by the Soviet authorities (Lawrence, 1970). From 1948 to 1952, “238 writers, 87 artists, 99 actors and 19 musicians, totaling 443 leaders of Jewish culture, died by execution, torture or from hardships” (p. 67).

Stalin’s fear of Jewish domination continued to escalate. Soon he was suspicious of anyone who had Jewish ties in his immediate political surroundings. This included Marshall Voroshilov, the People’s Commissar for Defense, who was married to a Jewish woman; Kaganovich, the First Secretary of the Moscow Obkom of the Communist Party, who was a Jew; Molotov, who was married to a Jewish woman; Beria, the First Deputy Prime Minister, whose mother was half Jewish, and Khrushchev, whose daughter was married to a Jew (Gitelman, 1991).

Stalin’s paranoia led to major Jewish cleansing. The anti-Jewish Stalinist purges reached their peak during the last months of Stalin’s life in the provocation
known as the “case of Kremlin doctors” (Kostyrchenko, 2007). On January 13, 1953, nine Kremlin doctors, six of whom were Jewish, were announced to have confessed to plotting the elimination of Soviet political and military leaders. They were labeled for the first time specifically as Jews and Zionists (Lawrence, 1970).

After Stalin’s death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev came to power (Korey, 1973). Khrushchev was born near Ukraine and his attitude towards Jews was shaped by the anti-Semitism he saw in the area. While serving as the chairman of the Ukrainian Council of People’s Commissars, he had to appease the extreme Ukrainian nationalists and the extreme anti-Jewish propaganda (Eckman, 1974). Khrushchev secretly disposed of Jews who held any official positions to guarantee that Ukraine would not be “run by the Jews.” Jews under Khrushchev were restricted to the insignificant jobs in the municipality. He also systematically suppressed any evidence mentioning the Jews as victims of Nazi atrocities in Ukraine.

The largest Jewish massacre in Babi Yar was not permitted to be publicized (Korey, 1973). No monuments were erected in places where Jews were murdered. There was no indication that something extraordinary took place in those locations.

Though Khrushchev’s era meant some freedoms for the Soviet people, his attitude towards the Jews had not changed from Stalin’s times. He did not lift the sanctions imposed on Jewish life. In fact, Khrushchev went further than Stalin in hampering Jewish institutions. In March 1962 and 1963, laws were passed prohibiting the baking of matzoth bread on Passover. Jewish publications were restricted and anti-Semitic literature was common in print (Eckman, 1974).
The Jews continued to be treated with the same degree of suspicion and
distrust as they were in Stalin’s time. The mentality of ‘us versus them’ continued.
Despite the massive assimilation of Jews into the Soviet culture they were still
perceived as aliens and strangers (Decter, 1971). In 1956, Khrushchev delivered the
following interview to a French delegation:

Should the Jews want to occupy the foremost positions in our republic now, it
would naturally be taken amiss by the indigenous inhabitants. The latter
would not accept these pretensions at all well, especially since they do not
consider themselves less intelligent or less capable than the Jews. Or, for
instance, when a Jew in the Ukraine is appointed to an important post and he
surrounds himself with Jewish collaborators it is understandable that this
should create jealousy and hostility toward the Jews (Decter, 1971, p. 14).

The reign of Khrushchev continued until 1969, when Leonid Brezhnev
became president of the USSR (Ro’i, 2007). Brezhnev loosened many of
Khrushchev’s restrictions and concentrated on domestic policy, small economic
reforms, and even permitted the reopening of 500 churches. His treatment of the
Jews, however, did not improve from Khrushchev’s times. He continued denying any
accusations of anti-Semitism in USSR. Organized Judaism was prohibited and
members of the various Jewish communities had no way to keep in contact. No Bible
in Hebrew had been published since 1917. The production of Jewish religious
artifacts was prohibited. At the same time, the Russian Orthodox Church, Georgian
Orthodox Church, Islam and Buddhism all had organized permits, which legally
allowed them to assemble and exercise their ideas, as well as publish and distribute their religious works.

Finally, in 1969, the Soviet government, for the first time in many years, removed the restrictions from observing Jewish Passover. Also, in 1971, the first national conference of Jewish religious leaders was held in Moscow. In other realms, a few changes were made (Eckman, 1974). Finally, in the 1970s, previously forbidden emigration became an option. Between 1970 and 1980, approximately 10 percent of the Soviet Jewish population emigrated abroad, primarily to Israel and to some Western countries (Ro’i, 2007). Those who emigrated were labeled “enemies of the country” and were believed to emigrate due to Zionistic ideas.

During the 1980’s, the generational assimilation of cultural, linguistic, and systemic differences was apparent (Ro’i, 2007). The Soviet government had systematically and forcefully diminished the previously existing differences between the Russians and Jews in culture, religion, and tradition. They now shared common lifestyles and values. The collective Russian consciousness indicated a mix of tolerance and indifference towards the Jews, as the political attention began shifting towards emerging issues in the Caucasus, Chechnya, and the Gypsies (Gudkov, 2007). Emigration to Israel and the West continued but Soviet authorities heavily controlled the number of emigrants allowed to leave. People leaving were still blamed for betraying the “motherland.”

The 1990’s marked a massive emigration of Soviet Jews. Approximately a million and half Jews emigrated from the USSR, primarily to Israel (Leshem, 2007). From 1990-91, about 400,000 Jews, which is 50 percent more than in the entire
1970s, emigrated (Ro’i, 2007). By 2005, only a quarter of the Soviet Jews that resided in Soviet Union in 1989 remained in Russia (Leshem, 2007). “These immigrants who arrived in Israel in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet regime, from the beginning of the 1990s on, did not bring with them a tradition of civic culture and organized community activity beyond the rudimentary and informational stage, and that chiefly on the local level” (Leshem, 2007, p. 333).

**Jewish Culture in the Soviet Union**

When analyzing culture and identity of the Jews, it is useful to distinguish between two types of culture and two types of identity. There is active and passive culture, and active and passive identity (Gitelman, 1991). Active culture includes the creation and use of artifacts of a cultural nature, such as literary publications, fine arts, scholarship, cinema, foods, unique clothing, celebration of specific holidays, and culture-specific symbols. Passive culture, on the other hand, involves patterns of thinking and behaving that are not consciously ethnic, and usually are not perceived by the larger group as such. This thinking and behaving, however, are being derived from an ethnic group.

Likewise, active ethnic identity is a positive and conscious assertion of a desirable identity, something one is proud of and wishes to show others. Examples of active ethnic identity include openly practicing one’s religion, speaking ethnic languages in public, wearing ethnic clothes, and attending cultural events. In contrast to active ethnic identity, passive ethnic identity is accepted as part of life, and is usually expressed through neutrality and ambivalence. In the Soviet Union, passive identity was recorded on one’s identification card. This imposed identification created
a situation where complete acculturation was demanded of the Jews. Almost all Soviet citizens had to assimilate to a culture that was not originally theirs. For the Jews however, a paradox was created. On the one hand, they were actively forbidden from exercising their ethnic culture, yet their passports, unless they were born into a mixed marriage, indicated they were Jewish, and thus were considered by the state to be Jews. Thus, it was the Soviet state that insisted on keeping the Jewish identity of Jews, passive, insisting on marking Jewish ethnicity formally (Gitelman, 1991).

The rights of Soviet citizens were detailed by the Constitution in 1918 (Korey, 1973). There has been a question from the beginning, however, whether Jews qualified for the same rights as other Soviet citizens. The Leninist-Stalinist regimes classified Jews as second-class citizens, and the Soviet internal passport system made this classification obvious. The 1932, “metrika” law mandated all Soviet citizens to carry a national identity card from the age of sixteen. This forced the Jews to be identified by governmental agencies when searching for new housing, applying for jobs, or attempting admission to educational institutions (Lawrence, 1970). “The Soviet Jew thus gets the worst of both worlds. He is not allowed to forget that he is not quite Russian, and he is not allowed to develop as a member of a separate national community with its own culture, its own religion and its own tradition” (p. 106).

There has not been a sufficient explanation given to why the Soviets insisted on keeping the Jews Jewish. It would be logical to believe that in a country that was interested in amalgamation of its multiple nationalities, an increased number of people who could call themselves Russian would be desired. Gitelman (1991), hypothesized that this notion had to do with control. Abolition of ethnic identification
in one’s passport would have meant free and uncontrolled ethnicity change in the Soviet population. Thus, some state controlled aspects of ethnic identification would be abandoned.

Throughout Soviet history, there was a quota of non-mainstream candidates allowed in the high branches of government, institutions of higher education, and other positions of power. It was very clear that through the years, including Gorbachev’s, and later Putin’s, times, that Russians, specifically the White (Caucasian) Russians, dominated these posts. During Gorbachev’s time, this became more prominent than in previous years. Many individuals in high positions were replaced leaving only the foreign minister Shevarnadze as a person of Georgian descent in the governmental branch.

**Soviet Union and Anti-Zionism**

In addition to continuously separating the Jews from the rest of the population via their documented ethnicity, the Soviet government blamed the Jews for allegedly maintaining pro-Israel sentiment (Gitelman, 1990). For the Soviet leaders Jews were frequently associated with Zionism, which the Soviet authorities perceived as non-patriotic. To proclaim one’s Jewishness meant to denounce Soviet ideology (Gitelman, 1997). The relationship between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in the Soviet Union has always been close. “It is one of history’s ironic twists of fate that the origins of two conflicting manifestations of nationalistic yearning - Russian Communism and Israel-oriented Zionism - occurred almost simultaneously” (Eckman, 1974, p. 73).
There are four broad phenomena that comprise anti-Zionism (Gitelman, 1990). First, Zionism has been suggested by Russian Marxists as an effort to redirect efforts in Russia from a socialist foundation into utopian bourgeois routes. In this case, it is interpreted as an internal political issue. Second, it has been criticized as an imperialistic tool in the fight against the national liberation movement. Third, anti-Zionism became the main euphemism for Soviet governmental Judeophobia. Finally, anti-Zionism played heavily in the USSR, Israel and Arab world relationships. Although at first the USSR was pro-Israel, this was only due to a desire to maintain an alliance with the west that was necessary to ensure Soviet involvement in the post-WWII settlement of the Middle East. Once this objective was achieved, however, the USSR shifted to a pro-Arab standpoint, in part by utilizing opposition to Zionism (Frankel, 1991).

Historically, the Bolsheviks and Communist Russia have been against Zionist ideology (Frankel, 1991). From 1947-53, the Soviets supported the establishment of Israel. When the Egyptian Suez crisis occurred in 1956, Russia’s association with Egypt, and hostility towards Israel, became clear. Although the tsars always showed interest in the Middle East, due to territorial expansions and the desire to populate Muslim countries with Christian minorities, Stalin did not indicate a special interest in the Middle East. After WWII, however, the Soviets realized they had an opportunity to expand Russian influences in the region and began actively opposing the creation of a Jewish state (Cang, 1969).

Stalin, as well as Lenin before him, was an opponent of Zionism. Lenin argued that the notion of traditional Zionism and Jewish nationality was that of
“reactionary philistines” and assimilation was the only solution to the Jewish question (Cang, 1969). “The best Jews, those who are celebrated in world history, and have given the world foremost leaders of democracy and socialism have never clamored against assimilation” (p. 206). Stalin continued Lenin’s ideology.

During the Six-Day War of 1967, it was the aim of the Soviets and the Arab countries to annihilate Israel and its Jewish citizens (Eckman, 1974). In 1970, the Soviets released a pamphlet detailing their opinion about Zionism and Middle East events in the “Zionism: Instrument of Imperialist Reaction”:

The Zionist conception of Israel is based, first and foremost, on aggression and territorial expansion ... in theory and practice Israeli Zionism is akin to imperialism. It is not surprising that Western imperialist powers support Tel Aviv, since they have similar ideological views and consider Israel an imperialist outpost in the Middle East ... Zionism, like any other reactionary ideology, is an ideology of exploiters; it resorts to slander campaigns and hypocritical propaganda stunts. Thus, the real tragedy of the Jews in countries which were under the Nazi yoke is being used to camouflage the neo-fascist practice of today’s Israel (Eckman, 1974, p. 78).

With the gradual decline of anti-Semitism in the 1990’s came the gradual decline of anti-Zionism. Political parties using nationalism and anti-Jewish and anti-western ideology continue to exist, but they are a minority. The decline is related to the broad information available to Russian people about Israel, its economic, industrial, and military accomplishments. The majority of Russians distance
themselves from the Israeli-Palestinian events. Yet many believe the fight of Israel for its existence is justified (Gudkov, 2007).

Who is a Survivor?

Soviet authorities frequently singled the Jews out and accused them of Zionism and anti-patriotism; what is more, they refused to admit that Jews were targeted for annihilation by the Nazis. The Conference of Material Claims against Germany, a conference that represents Jews in an attempt to negotiate reparations for Jews who had suffered in the Holocaust, concluded over the years that Jews who fled the Nazis beginning in June 1941 are considered Holocaust survivors (Kagedan, 1995). So are the Polish Jews who were forcefully relocated as a result of the rise of the Nazi regime. Yet Soviet Jews did not qualify as survivors, because the Soviet government failed to recognize Jews as a unique group that suffered under the Nazis. Soviet survivors were not eligible to receive reparations from Germany while they resided in the USSR.

One of the difficulties in determining who is a survivor is determining who is a Soviet citizen. Soviet borders changed frequently. The geographic area of the Soviet Union changed in 1939, when WWII began. It was not the same in 1941, when Germany invaded USSR. It changed once more in 1945, when the war was over. At the beginning of the war, the Soviets divided Poland with the Nazis. Soon afterward, they annexed the Baltic countries of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to the Soviet republics. When the Soviet army entered Berlin at the end of the war they were able to reoccupy part of Poland again and add it to the Soviet Union. With their new territories they added the many Jews who resided in Poland.
Another issue to consider when determining who is a survivor is migration. When WWII broke out, many Jews escaped the Nazis by entering the Soviet Union, moving away as far as Siberia. Others fled when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. There is an additional group of Jews in the Caucasus who did not live under the Nazi rule, yet suffered the many derivations and hardships under the Nazi and the Soviet regimes (Glicksman & Van Haitsma, 2002).

Glicksman and Van Haitsma (2002), included a very general definition of who is a survivor in their study of Soviet Jews and the Holocaust. They believe that the majority of elderly Soviet Jews could be considered survivors. Jews residing in the Asian Soviet republics are not included because the Nazis did not enter these territories. They found that many of the participants in their study indicated psychological issues such as long-term trauma are found among individuals who are labeled “survivors” in the US. The many psychological issues, such as guilt of survival over other family members, trauma, and anguish were never formally addressed among Soviet survivors. Many never shared their experiences with others, because of fear of repercussions from the government (Glicksman & Van Haitsma, 2002).

Today, the Holocaust is still not given proper representation in the former Soviet Union and Holocaust survivors are not acknowledged. On July 23, 2008, the Associated Press published a story about Jews from Odessa who appealed to the Ukrainian government to stop the construction of a shopping mall at a gravesite containing the remains of 26,000 Jews murdered there during WWII. A similar event took place earlier in the year, when the Jews of Vinnytsia fought the Ukrainian
government to terminate the construction of an apartment building in the location of a pre-WWII Jewish cemetery (Bondaruk, 2008).

**Holocaust in the West**

It is important to note that most of the Holocaust scholarship available today, including the literature on Holocaust in the Soviet Union, was written in the West by Western historians (Kushner, 2006). Various disciplines have contributed extensively to the collection of survivor testimonies and historical facts. In the West, many books were written, films made, commemorating museums and monuments were established. In the US, Holocaust scholarship has flourished in particular. Multiple books have been written, which has allowed researchers not merely to document the events of the Holocaust, but also to examine the appropriate methods of Holocaust studies.

**Holocaust Testimony**

The development of Holocaust testimony took place in the US in three main periods. The first accounts began to appear immediately after the liberation of concentration camps, when survivors were encouraged to document their experiences in writing. The second wave of testimonies appeared in 1961, after the televised trial of Eichman, and the third and perhaps final wave, took place following the screening of Schindler’s List film in 1993 (Wieviorka, 1994).

Boder published one of the most significant early testimonial records in 1949. The collection included eight interviews Boder gathered from survivors immediately after the end of the war. These interviews were unique since very few interviews were collected up to that point in time. Most were collected years after the war had ended.
Boder traveled to Europe soon after the war ended with the purpose of collecting information. It is very apparent that he was interested in facts only and not personal impressions and information. He was in control of the interview throughout the process and steered the interviewees into the directions he believed to be valuable. Each interview Boder conducted began with the following statement:

We know very little in America about the things that happened to you in concentration camps. If you want to help us out by contributing information about the fate of the displaced persons, tell your own story. Begin with your name, give your age, and tell where you were when the war started and what happened to you since (Boder, 1949, p. xiii).

Boder (1949), shaped the interviewees’ responses extensively by suggesting the topics discussed. The interviews are difficult to read because it is clear that the interviewees were uncomfortable. Some attempted to share more than just facts. Boder did not, however, allow them to do so. Below is a quote to illustrate this point, from an interview with Anna Kovitzka, a thirty-four year-old Polish survivor:

Mrs. Kovitzka: My father had to leave his home and hide somewhere in the suburb. The Gestapo was looking for him. I remained alone with my mother in the five rooms, and all through the night I was clinging to the window, running around in search. Where are the people who used to come every night – every evening – to see my father? Where are the grandchildren who are afraid [now] to cross the street and come upstairs? Nobody was there.

Question: Will you please tell the facts? (Boder, 1949, p. 2).
Boder (1949), offered the reader a unique account of eight survivors who were willing to share their experience soon after their liberation. Yet, he was unable to hear the other “non-factual” parts of the testimony these survivors offered such as their personal and subjective trauma.

The tendency to focus on facts dominated the legal discourse as well. In the legal sphere, survivors’ testimonies were often reshaped and adjusted to reflect factual details (Kushner, 2006). Overall, individual testimonies were dismissed and bureaucratically documented evidence was used instead. Reporting documented facts only reflected the legal tradition at the time, particularly in the US, as well as the lack of respect Nazi victims received.

Early Holocaust historians were not immune to modifying history. Some historians created their accounts from the evidence presented at post-war trials, and shared some of the Nazi prejudices, instead of incorporating survivors’ testimonies. Thus, the very few historians who were recording the events of the Holocaust told the survivors to forget what had happened and move on, just as the rest of the world did (Kushner, 2006).

The method of testimony has evolved significantly since the end of WWII. It changed from print and paper to audio and video recordings, and with it the function of the testimonies changed as well (Wieviorka, 1994). In the years immediately following the end of WWII, the primary intent of testimony was to gather information of the events that took place. In the search for knowledge, testimony served as archival documentation (Hartman, 1993 & 1996). In the 1950’s, researchers at the Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyr’s and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority in
Jerusalem, began collecting written and oral survivor testimonies as “scientific research” for the first time. They developed a questionnaire, which included almost five hundred questions (Kushner, 2006). The testimonies collected in the 1960s were designed primarily to reach the oppressed and marginalized populations, such as working class women. Early stages of survivor interviewing emphasized quantity over quality, and did not value understanding the individual experiences. As noted by one of the researchers, “If I find only one piece of evidence, it does not mean anything to me; if I have ten records that is good; but if I have a hundred, then the evidence is conclusive” (Kushner, 2006, p. 281-82). Individual survivor accounts were not particularly valued. In 1959, Ball-Kaduri, wrote “whoever experienced the suffering there [Germany] and escaped in time, can hardly add anything of importance, after the passing of so many years” (p. 282). Ball-Kaduri contributed to the accepted notion at the time that an individual was not important on his or her own unless his or her experiences corresponded to the experiences of a majority group. This approach was frequently challenged in the Holocaust testimonial literature (Kushner, 2006).

The notion of sticking to the facts and strength in numbers left a mark on modern history. Today, some contemporary historians no longer trust survivors’ memory (Kushner, 2006). They believe that it has become blurred and affected by events that have happened to the survivors since the end of the Holocaust. Indeed, survivors’ memories are believed to be even less reliable than letters and diaries (Hartman, 1996). Critics of this approach claim that Holocaust testimony has been transformed into an easy communication venue for future generations. Therefore, the
function of testimony is not to gather knowledge but to briefly and shallowly remind people about the past (Hartman, 1996). This approach is very different from an ethnographic perspective where people’s stories are valued and believed to offer an insight into how they make meaning of their lives.

**Holocaust Research in Psychology**

In the field of psychology, Holocaust research has been approached from several angles. In the quantitative realm, correlational studies were primarily designed to locate a relationship between the traumatic experiences of survivors and some characteristics of their post war life. In the past twenty years, psychological research on Holocaust survivors has generated several studies (Lomranz, 2000). In the new millennium, Holocaust scholarship in the field of psychology declined rapidly. Many questions were raised concerning the manifestation of trauma in behavior such as PTSD and adjustment disorders, personality disorders, aging, life-span development, and extreme trauma. A meta-analysis of the Holocaust survivor literature indicated that relatively little research has been conducted on the topic of the Holocaust, and what has been conducted has many methodological flaws. Most of the studies conducted so far researched in one-sided, one-dimensional, and flawed images of the Holocaust survivors; at times, failing to differentiate between survivors and non-survivors. The flaws are apparent in theoretical construction, definition of concepts of importance, trauma, and coping. In terms of methodology, faulty designs were often used, with an emphasis on primarily patients and clinical case studies. Inappropriate measures were often chosen, and tools and questionnaires that were often inappropriate for posttraumatic populations were used (Lomranz, 2000).
In the qualitative realm, phenomenological Holocaust studies posed a dilemma in psychology, due to an attempt of a third party to learn about the experience of an individual without experiencing the event on their own (Kraft, 2006). Although these studies were better designed, they were very few, and did not challenge the many quantitative studies.

The various Holocaust studies and the data generated from these studies allowed the creation of a topography of trauma. These studies were helpful in gathering some broad surface information about individuals who experienced severe trauma, and allowed researchers to understand the overall nature of trauma, yet failed to collect more of the personal, individual, and deep information about the survivors. The studies focused on what the survivors shared in common in terms of coping with trauma and resilience, but did not address their unique experiences in the Holocaust and the struggles that had dealt with after the Holocaust was over (Kraft, 2006). The results of these studies outlined broad findings of countertransference of mental health professionals toward Nazi Holocaust survivors and their children, issues of avoidance, survivor's guilt, anger directed at the Nazi perpetrators, horror, anguish, and shame (Lomranz, 2000).

The research conducted so far raise questions about the nature of theories and methodologies that should be used when studying survivors (Lomranz, 2000). In what way should the Holocaust be studied? Should it be done in a lab, via questionnaires, or via case studies? How does the culture affect Holocaust coping? How does mass trauma impact the broad culture? And, finally, from which psychological perspective should the Holocaust be explored: psychodynamic, behavioral, or psychoanalytic?
Critics of some of the psychological studies of the Holocaust argue that the efforts made in psychology so far were not significant primarily because researchers failed to dive into the sheer horror of survivor’s experiences (Danieli, 1980). The argument made by Lomranz (2000), is that since the Holocaust is identified as perhaps the most severe catastrophe in modern history, studying such a complex phenomenon, however, is a difficult task. Therefore, it may be challenging to find ways to approach it. This may lead researchers to focus on the pathology of the survivors, rather than their experiences.

Today, Holocaust testimony is at a critical point. In recent years, many Holocaust testimonies have been collected, bringing the number to approximately 100,000 individual survivor accounts. Kushner (2006), believes that in order to use survivor testimony fully, the Holocaust has to be explored beyond Nazi destruction, focusing on what survivors may chose to share. This will allow “the strand of history and memory to be woven together to show the full complexity of survivor identity” (Kushner, 2006, p. 291).

Despite the information available about Holocaust survivors in the West, there continues to be almost no information about Soviet Holocaust survivors. Studies in the field of political science, history and economics have begun emerging in recent years. The voices of the survivors, however, are still absent. For years, Soviet Jews who witnessed the Holocaust were afraid to talk. Today, survivors who are willing to talk do not speak English and cannot share their experiences in current communities in the US. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to seek information directly from
survivors who are willing to share their experiences, in their own words, focusing on topics they chose to address.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

There is properly no history; only biography.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Introduction

In this study, I used an ethnographic interview approach to gain insight into the inner world of several Soviet Jewish Holocaust Survivors. Ethnographic interviews allow the researcher to understand how people make meaning of their own life and the social world they live in (Spradley, 1979). My goal in this study was to identify a description of the conceptual meaning that a small group of Soviet Jewish Holocaust survivors use to make framework of their lives. I attempted to reach this goal by conducting ethnographic interviews and drawing conclusions from these data.

Several authors influenced me in choosing ethnography as the primary research method. While reading Bolkosky's (2002), “Searching for the Meaning in the Holocaust,” I solidified my idea that the Holocaust should not be used as a means to learn “lessons” from the victims. It should not be used to generalize the knowledge gained from this study to the larger non-survivor population. Survivor testimonies are not meant to make the listeners and the readers feel better. Unlike Frankl’s (1963) book, “Man’s Search for Meaning,” that continues to be widely read by non-survivors who attempt to use Frankl’s experiences to find life meaning, message of hope, peace and tranquility in their lives. Bolkosky, on the other hand, argues that Holocaust survivors do not speak about finding peace when they share their past. Rather, “they speak reticently, in a language that they know remains inadequate to communicate the
reality of the Holocaust” (p. xi). Instead, we should listen to survivor’s testimonies, as they are; unedited, horrific, and full of meaningless acts of violence and murder. We should take them in as they are, no matter how difficult it is to hear them.

From Greenspan’s (1998), “On Listening to Holocaust Survivors,” I learned about the importance of hearing the survivors recount their stories the way they chose to share them. Focusing on the details of each story rather than collecting many short testimonies and the importance of hearing what the survivors wish to share. Greenspan describes interviewing survivors multiple times as the process of interviewing the same person 50,000 times rather than interviewing 50,000 people, once. I solidified the importance of attempting to understand the accounts related as closely as possible in order to understand survivors rather than collecting a brief story and drawing my own conclusions from it.

Finally, from Krystal’s (1997), “Massive Psychic Trauma,” and “Integration & Self-Healing,” I learned about the constant activation of mourning and grieving among the survivors. Their inability to ever reach a harmonious completion of any grieving process due to the horrific losses they had suffered and the gruesome circumstances in which these losses took place. I learned that I would likely trigger various unresolved grieving issues in the participants and it would be very important to protect my participant’s feelings as they participate in the study.

In this study, I attempted to focus on the experiences of the participants’ as a whole, and offer the reader an insight into the lives of these survivors. The primary function of the Holocaust oral testimonies is to allow survivors to speak in their own voices (Hartman, 1996). Although this study was not designed to collect only oral
testimonies, I attempted to tell the stories of the survivors using their own language and words. The interviews were conducted in Russian and later translated to English. I believe the ethnographic interview approach was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to picture the world from the perspective of the survivors whom I was attempting to understand. In this chapter, I explain the methodologies, the sample and the process for conducting the open-ended audio-taped interviews that I used to collect the data. I also discuss the process for transcribing the interviews, coding, and data analysis.

Rationale for the Use of an Ethnographic Approach

I believe an ethnographic approach was most appropriate for this study because it allowed the participants of this study to be actively involved in content of the data that was collected (Graham, 1984). Other methodological designs seemed insufficient, given that ethnography provided a way of giving the Soviet Holocaust survivors greater visibility, not only within the Holocaust survivors’ community, but also in society as a whole by sharing their stories as completely and personally as they wished to. I outlined the general broad categories I wished to explore, but the participants decided the topics they wished to share and the amount of detail they wished to discuss. They also commented on my understanding of the data. They had an opportunity to review the full transcripts, the emergent themes, and the quotes that I wished to use in the final document. Participants received copies of the transcripts as soon as they were available. They had a chance to look over them and decide whether they wished to add more information to their accounts. In this study, I used
ethnographic interview as the main data collection tool because it allowed me the best access to the meaning of the world of Soviet Jewish Holocaust survivors.

According to Spradley (1979) at the heart of ethnography is the “disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think, and act in ways that are different (p. 2).” Instead of studying people, ethnography connotes learning from people (p. 3). As a researcher, I attempted to experience the lives of the participants as closely through their eyes as possible. I attempted to understand what life was like for them, and what meaning they made of their world.

**Ethnographic Interview**

The focus of ethnographic interview is to understand the experiences of other individuals and the meaning they make of their experiences (Ely, 1997). The ethnographic interview can be described as a series of friendly conversations where the ethnographer aids participants in telling their story by restating the purpose of the interview during each meeting, explaining the nature of the project, and asking questions that will allow the ethnographer to gather information about the participants and how they organize their worlds (Spradley, 1979).

Ethnography is a process and a product grounded in culture (Goetz & Lecompte, 1984; Wolcott, 1988). In the ethnographic method it is the goal of the researcher to provide a “cultural reconstruction” of the lives of the participants studied and link theory and practice (Goetz & LeCompte, p. 3). Ethnography is a multimodal research strategy that uses a variety of techniques to describe informants’ interpretations of their world and the discovery of the meaning of what the researcher observed. The research strategies used in ethnographic research are empirical and
naturalistic. This approach allows the researcher to observe their participants as well as observe self as they observe the participant. The two methods of observation allow the researcher to gain information about the way the informants view their lived experiences (Spradley, 1979). The ethnographic method permits eliciting information from informants that involves an interpretation of their phenomenological world. It is the informants who determine the categories that the researcher will study and later interpret.

The main goal of the researcher who uses an ethnographic interview technique is to build rapport, which facilitates the development of a strong relationship between the ethnographer and the participant. The researcher in ethnographic research attempts to become part of the culture that they describe, and work together with the participants to produce the data (Charmaz, 1995). A strong relationship indicates that trust has been developed and encourages the participant to speak freely about their experiences. In ethnographic interview, special emphasis is also placed on how individuals use the narrative form to fuse the events they experienced into a life-long narrative. Individuals appear as storytellers, and the researcher provides the individuals with a place to “continue in their own way until they indicate they have finished their answer”; “if we cut them off with our next questions, if we do not appear to be listening to their stories, or if we record a check mark or a few words on our schedule after they talked at length, then we are unlikely to find stories” (Mishler, 1986, p. 235).

During data analysis, the researcher emphasizes the content of the texts, the collection of words, phrases, and images that comprise the stories. The narrative is
analyzed in its entirety, valuing its integrity. The analysis, therefore, is purposefully open-ended, aims to explore and enrich the overall understanding of the subject, rather than reach a specific conclusion (Avdi & Georgaca, 2007).

Ethical Considerations

This study followed the ethical standards approved by Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) and emphasized the welfare of the participants. Participants were referred to by pseudonyms that I assigned to them before the interviews began. Names of relatives and acquaintances mentioned during the interviews were recorded, but were later changed to protect their identities. All personal information, such as first and last names, phone numbers, and addresses were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office. I was the only person who had access to this filing cabinet. Audio files, transcribed and translated data files were stored on my computer in a password-protected file. When I made paper copies of the transcripts and translations I made sure to keep them in my office in a locked desk. I made sure to shred the documents as soon as I completed reviewing them. The participants were informed that three members of my dissertation committee would have access to the data collected. They were also informed that I intended to hire a translator to verify the accuracy of my translation who would also have access to the collected data. The translator hired had undergone HSIRB training and was aware of the importance of confidentiality. The participants were also informed that audio recorded and transcribed interview information may be kept for historical record, unless the participants expressed explicit desire for the information to be destroyed. They were also notified that the data might be used in future publications. In such
cases, their names and other identifying information, as well as the names of their relatives and acquaintances, would be replaced by pseudonyms to protect their identities. Finally, the participants were informed about Michigan law and my obligation to break confidentially in the case of potential harm to self or others, or child and/or elder abuse.

**Preliminary Attempts**

Several years before I began data collection I made attempts to speak with several Holocaust survivors. My first attempt to speak with a survivor was not very successful because I asked him very specific questions during our first meeting. Mr. Offen, a Polish survivor, who agreed to speak with me, began shutting down emotionally soon after we began speaking. I made a mistake of asking him specific questions about his book “When Hope Prevails” (2005), instead of listening to what he may have chosen to share with me. With the second survivor I met, Mr. Lichtman, I made sure to hold back on my questions and allow him to decide on the topic of conversation. Mr. Lichtman, however, took a more academic approach and shared multiple resources with me, rather than share his personal story. I was able to form a friendship with Mr. Lichtman, and he eventually shared his story with me. But it took many months and multiple interactions before our relationship was strong enough for him to trust me.

I learned from these experiences about the importance of listening to the survivors, getting to know them, sharing my own past, and permitting them to choose what they wish to share. Most importantly, however, is the need to form strong relationships with the survivors before beginning to ask them questions. It was with
these experiences and the conclusions I had drawn from them, that I understood that
the survivors are a unique culture. Therefore, in order to attempt to understand them
and learn about them, I need to approach them as a unique culture. The ethnographic
method permitted me to do so.

Sampling

Sampling “refers to the method used to select a given number of people (or
things) from a population” (Mertens, 1998. p. 25). The participants for the study were
selected via purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is the core of naturalistic
research. In purposive sampling participants are selected based on some criteria they
share in common. Purposive sampling increases the range of data exposed and
maximizes the researcher’s ability to identify emerging themes that take adequate
account of contextual conditions and cultural norms (Erlandson et al., 1993). Random
or representative sampling was not desirable in this case because my major concern
was not to generalize the findings of the study to a broad population, but to maximize
discovery of the heterogeneous patterns and problems that occurred in the particular
context of this study.

The participants for this study were recruited from the Detroit area Jewish
Community Center (JCC). The gatekeeper for this study was M. R., a well-respected
Soviet Immigrant Coordinator at the JCC. I contacted the JCC and arranged to meet
with the Soviet Immigrant Coordinator. When we met, I explained the purpose of my
study and provided her with an introduction letter along with a consent form. During
this meeting, I expressed my interest in finding participants for the study. She
informed me that a group of Soviet WWII veterans meets once a month at the center,
among whom there are a few members who “went through the Holocaust” (M.R., 2008). She offered to speak with the veterans at their upcoming meeting and ask them if they would be willing to speak with me.

Around the same time I had the opportunity to attend a banquet of WWII veterans and Holocaust survivors. I attended it as a translator. I learned about the banquet from Mr. Lichtman, a French survivor, who is a member of the JCC where the banquet was taking place. He had offered my email to one of the organizers who was looking for someone to help them translate the Russian program to English. During the banquet I met many Soviet survivors who self-identified as Soviet ghetto survivors and evacuees. At the event I assisted with translation only, but was able to meet the members of the Soviet survivor community. As the youngest person at the banquet, I stood out, and many of the survivors stopped to speak with me after the event was over. They inquired about my interest in the topic and encouraged me to pursue it. I kept in touch with some of them. We exchanged emails and phone calls. Mostly we spoke about their health, their children, and my progress in school. I occasionally visited them in their homes. We exchanged ideas, books, and family photographs. Our relationships slowly grew.

When the time for data collection came I contacted the gatekeeper who asked the veterans and survivors to volunteer for the study. One of the veterans, from the veteran group, agreed to participate. Four additional participants, whom I met in the banquet agreed to participate as well. At this point they either knew me very well or had heard about me from other survivors. It is important to note that all participants had a choice of participating. Not all the survivor and veterans I had met agreed to
talk to me about their past. I only spoke with those who expressed their interest to the gatekeeper.

Research Participants

When the sample size is small, it is particularly critical to ensure that the participants are good informants. According to Spradley (1979), good informants are thoroughly enculturated, involved, and capable of describing events and actions as they experienced them. They also need to be able to offer analyses and interpretations of the events they have undergone from the “insider’s” perspective (Spradley). To make sure that the participants in this study met these requirements, only Soviet Jewish Holocaust survivors from the non-Asian Soviet republics were considered as possible participants (Glicksman & Van Haitsma, 2002). Participants from non-Asian Soviet republics were not included in the study because they are not considered survivors since the Nazis did not occupy these areas during WWII. In addition, they had to have survived a ghetto, or lost family members to the Nazis, between the years of 1941 and 1945. In this study “ghetto” is defined as a means of concentration and control imposed by the Nazis. All potential participants had to be willing and able to commit to at least two interviews.

Five Soviet Holocaust survivors between 73 and 87 years old chose to participate in this study. Three participants were women and two were men. Two participants were married with children and grandchildren, three participants widowed with children and grandchildren. Four participants were originally from Ukraine, although from widely different areas within Ukraine, and one participant was from Belorussia. All participants had a degree from some type of a higher
education institution. Two of the participants had graduated with a master’s degree, two participants had graduated with a bachelor’s degree, and one participant graduated from a military academy. All of the participants had lived in the United States for a minimum of ten years. Two participants immigrated to United States with their families, three participants followed their children and moved a few years later. During the study, all the participants resided in the Detroit area. Several additional participants were screened for the study, but were determined to be cognitively impaired and were not included in the sample (see Appendix D).

All participants spoke some English; some were more comfortable using it than others. During the interviews, all the participants spoke only Russian. Four of the participants had never previously spoken about their experiences during WWII and the Holocaust to an interviewer or a family member. Only one participant (Faina), had offered her testimony to a local Holocaust archive. Faina, a 74-year-old Belorussian, also had been interviewed by a local newspaper about her experiences in the Holocaust and spoke about her experiences at a Soviet survivors benefit in her area of residence. She described her interview experiences as very difficult and stressful.

**Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

**Data Collection**

Each participant was asked to commit to at least two interview sessions and potentially more if needed. I interviewed each participant individually. In the current study, one participant was interviewed two times, and four participants were interviewed three times. Each individual interview lasted approximately sixty
minutes. At the end of each interview, I recorded my impressions about the progress of the interview and the areas we covered. I audio taped all the interviews and transferred them to my computer. I next transcribed the interviews for each participant in Russian and translated them in full length to English. No omissions were made in the Russian version of the transcripts; all of the editing was done in the translated English version of the transcripts.

All interviews were conducted at the participants’ homes, for their convenience. I stated the purpose of the interview to the participants at the beginning of each session. I ensured that participants understood the concept of confidentiality and that no identifying information would be included in the final version of the project. I informed the participants that their participation in the study was voluntary, and that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any point without negative repercussions. I informed the participants that, at some point in the study I might ask them to review parts of the report and comment on it. I attempted to create a safe interview environment for the participants, and to share their experiences openly, by continuously explaining the research study and its purpose.

**Interviews**

For the purposes of this study, I used ethnographic unstructured interviews. The research design included two to three rounds of audio taped interviews with each participant. Each interview lasted approximately sixty minutes. Once the participants for the study were identified, I set up a time with each of them to meet for a face-to-face interview. I explained to each of the participants that “the goal of the study was to learn about the experiences of Soviet Holocaust survivors who emigrated from
USSR and currently reside in the U.S. The purpose is to explore the unique experiences of this population, their memories, stories, and life experiences before the Holocaust, during the Holocaust and afterwards under the Soviet regime” (Appendix E). I assured each participant that his or her identity would not be revealed at any point during or after the research study.

The interviews were held at participants homes. I drove in the morning to meet the participants in their homes. Each time I met with the participants I offered them a small box of chocolate in accordance with Soviet custom. Participants invited me to sit on the couch at their living room or at their kitchen table. There was open space between the participants and me to allow for the recorder to be placed conveniently during the interviews. Most participants offered me light refreshments. I made sure not to eat and drink during the interviews to prevent noise. Some participants insisted on offering me lunch after the interview was completed. In accordance with Soviet custom, I agreed.

I began the second and third rounds of interviews by checking in with the survivors about the way they were feeling, whether they felt that they could continue, and going over member checks. I reminded the participants about what they shared and the various stories they described. I proceeded to ask how they wished to proceed. For example, “the last time we met you spoke about evacuation and traveling to Udmurt. You also spoke about your family and your nanny. It sounded like these were important memories for you. Where would you like to begin today?” Sometimes the members chose to describe the same stories again. Other times they proceeded to describe other events. Occasionally participants repeated some details of
their stories as I was getting ready to leave and had already turned off the tape recorder. Usually they made process comments, such as “no one knows what we had seen in the USSR.” I made sure to record these comments in my fieldlog to ensure that all the data was recorded.

Fieldlog

Documentation is very important in qualitative researcher. Researchers frequently use a fieldlog to record a thick description of their impressions as the study progresses. “Thick description,” which refers to the description of researcher’s intellectual work is a very important concept in qualitative research. The goal of ethnographic research is to establish rapport, chose informants, transcribe the data, and keep a detailed log. What defines ethnography, however, is the elaborative intellectual process that goes into creating a “thick description” of the topic being researched (Ponterotto, 2006).

In qualitative investigation, fieldnotes are used to record the experiences and thoughts of the researcher during the course of the data collection process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Fieldnotes are descriptions expressing observations and encounters the researcher has made while participating in a data collection process (Emerson, 1995). High quality field notes are very important because they remind the researcher of the circumstances and the character of the situation in which the interview took place (Bogdan & Biklen).

I used a fieldlog throughout the data collection to record ideas, impressions, and hunches. I wrote out fieldnotes after each interview to record more completely the meaning and context of the interviews and the observations. In the fieldlog, I
included both descriptive fieldnotes and reflective field notes. In the descriptive fieldnotes, I attempted to record as objectively as possible the details of what occurred in the interview. In the reflective fieldnotes, I addressed personal thoughts about the progress of the investigation and the participants’ stories. I made sure to record speculations, feelings, ideas, and hunches, among other things, that I experienced.

For example, in my interviews with Faina I focused on recording the general areas she spoke about immediately after completion of the interview such as pre-war life, life in the ghetto, family members, and life in the forest. I also described in detail her body language as she spoke. In one of the entries I described in detail how she hugged herself when she spoke about the war. I recorded that she rubbed her right arm above the elbow and touched her temple when she was trying to remember a detail or a name. I also recoded that she seemed to have had mixed feelings about her daughter’s religiosity because at some point she asked me to keep a portion of an interview a secret, even though she was aware it was being recorded. I noted that I should probably probe about her religiosity and her feelings about religion in our following interviews. I also noted that she touched me a lot as we interacted, something uncommon for the Russian people. I made a note to monitor her story for areas of touch. She eventually described a story of her mother, after she had lost all of her relatives. Faina noted that her mother became emotionally absent and that she had to constantly pull on her mother’s skirt to remind her of her presence.

I also recorded my own struggle with occasionally dissociating as the interviewees spoke. I wondered what it meant and why I did so. I recorded my own
feelings about the interview process. For example, after completing my first interview I recorded that I felt “as if I was hit with a frying pan in my face.” I attempted to document the deep shock I was feeling and the sense of numbness I experienced for several days. Finally, I monitored my emotions as the interview process was drawing to an end. In my last interview, with Luba, I found myself quietly choking on my tears as she described her grandfather being buried alive. At that time, I wrote that for me, the interview process was very much about my own feelings, and less so about Luba. I recorded that I was feeling torn between my own emotions and the fear of drawing attention to myself crying and discouraging her from speaking. I noted that I should review Luba’s transcripts and fieldlog notes more closely because I may have been less attentive to her that the people I interviewed earlier in the data collection process.

**Transcribing and Editing**

The data gathered during the open ended interviews provided me with valuable information that gave me a deeper understanding of what life was like in the Soviet Union for Jewish Holocaust survivors. My first task was to transcribe the audiotapes. My challenge at that point was to transcribe the interviews verbatim. The challenge of transcribing the interviews verbatim was greater than I had anticipated. A sixty-minute interview took up to twelve hours to transcribe. I learned to use a computer while in the United States but never mastered Russian typing. I used an Internet transliteration program that allowed replacing English letters with Russian letters as I typed. Although the process was taxing, I was confident that each transcription accurately represented...
what the participants had said. I also felt confident in my understanding of the points that each participant was trying to make.

Translating the transcripts also proved to be challenging. After each transcription was finished, I spent 6 to 7 hours, on average, translating the interviews verbatim from Russian to English. By the time data had been collected, transcribed and translated, I had read and reviewed each interview at least three times to ensure accuracy.

To further ensure that my interpretations were correct, I hired the services of a native Russian speaker, who checked all of the transcripts and corresponding translations. The translator read twice through the Russian transcripts and compared the corresponding English translations for accuracy. If she disagreed with my translation she made specific comments to explain her rationale. Once she completed the process, we conversed and discussed the differences in our interpretation. Most of the inconsistencies were around specific Jewish words, often spoken in Yiddish, which the translator was not familiar with. In other instances we attempted to negotiate the best fitting translation to the word in question.

Coding

The goal of this study was to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of what it means to be a Soviet Jewish Holocaust survivor. Therefore, my main goal during the data analysis was to reveal key themes in the data for each individual survivor, and for the group as a whole. I worked systematically with the data, read and re-read the original transcripts and the corresponding translations, organized them, broke them into manageable units, and searched for patterns for what was meaningful (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).
Categories

I familiarized myself with the content of each interview by repeatedly listening to the audiotapes, and by reading and re-reading the transcripts. After transcription and translation, my first steps included placing my observations and comments on color-coded index cards, assigning a specific color to each participant. As I read through the transcripts in the translated form, I kept track of themes, hunches, interpretations and ideas by making notes in the margins using comment boxes. When I came across anything significant that I wanted to include that described one of the participants, I wrote it on his or her specific color-coded card. I detected meaningful words and phrases, and used these as category headings. The ideas for categories thus came from the content of the interviews. I divided the transcripts into a number of category files under which all applicable interview materials were clustered. I then color-coded each category. I then focused on reading the entire text of all the interview transcripts, observations, and documents to identify specific patterns from the reading. During the reading, I made notes on the text, to record potential themes that appeared in the data.

The categorizing process was complete when I exhausted the sources and when patterns emerged. I determined that the process of coding and re-coding was complete when the analysis appeared to run its course, all incidents were classified, categories were clearly defined, and a sufficient number of regularities had emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, I ensured that accounts about trains were classified under categories of transportation, escaping, fear, fear of losing relatives, bombing, confusion, and long-term trauma.
Themes

After I finished categorizing the data, I looked for themes. “Theme” in the analysis refers to a statement of meaning that occurs throughout all or most parts of the interview, or is a minor part of the interview but has a heavy emotional or factual impact (Ely, 1997). Themes are units derived from patterns such as "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1989, p.131). The researcher identifies themes by "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (Leininger, 1985, p. 60). The ultimate goal was to piece together the emerging themes into coherent and comprehensive picture.

I analyzed each category separately. I recorded themes that emerged within and between the categories. I studied the transcripts of each person repeatedly and then moved to the next person. I noted new impressions and added additional categories as they emerged. As themes developed, I added participants’ verbatim statements from the transcripts, in their English translation, and listed them under the appropriate categories in an attempt to link the headings with the data from which they emerged.

I placed the themes for each participant side by side on a chart drawn on an oversized board, in order to see the range of themes more clearly. I then examined the commonalities and differences in the profiles for each participant. Additionally, I attempted to identify unique themes for each individual participant and themes that represented the group as a whole.
I believe it was important for me to share the unique stories of the survivors as background to the themes. When I started studying the transcripts, I did not expect to find such similarity across participants. From the interview data that I collected, I found strong commonalities in the following major themes: Holocaust experiences, wartime trauma/deprivation, anti-Semitism and governmental oppression, long-term trauma, Jewish identity, and speaking about the Holocaust.

Within each theme, I identified specific categories that the survivors found to be important in their lives. For instance, within anti-Semitism, participants discussed their views on the causes of anti-Semitism in USSR, the role of authorities, their experiences with anti-Semitism early in life, in education, at work, and in the larger society.

Rigor

“In qualitative research, rigor is associated with openness, scrupulous adherence to a philosophical perspective, thoroughness in collecting data, and consideration of all data in the subjective theory development phase” (Burns & Grove, 2005, p. 55). To be rigorous, the researcher has to remain open and be willing to let go of preconceived views. I attempted to remain open by sharing my personal background story with the participants and the reader and examining my family and cultural backgrounds. I also attempted to be rigorous by examining the trustworthiness, credibility, and validity of the present study.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the researcher attempts to investigate the realm of meaning and strives for results that can be trusted (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).
Trustworthiness implies that the processes of the research are carried out fairly, and that the conclusions are represented in a matter most closely reflective of the experiences of the participants studied (Ely, 1997). Three activities - prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation - increase the probability of producing credible findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). “Reliability is fostered by using low-inference descriptors; comparing multiple observers viewing the same events, which is inter-rater reliability; using research assistants; asking peers to examine findings; or mechanically recording data (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, pp. 338-340).

In the current study, I attempted to achieve trustworthiness by using several procedures outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). For example, I worked on building rapport with the participants. I kept detailed notes of my interactions with the survivors. I audiotaped the interviews. I also read and re-read the data and compared my interpretation and translation of the data with a translator. As I made sense of the data and validated my findings, I repeatedly consulted with the participants about the accuracy of my understanding of the information they shared to enhance credibility (Lincoln & Guba). The participants provided feedback as to the accuracy of the data and made clarifications, whenever necessary.

Credibility

Credibility refers to whether the findings of the study fairly represent the perspectives of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility can be enhanced if the researcher is careful at each stage of the study. In this investigation, I took a number of steps to strengthen the credibility of my findings. For example, the participants were interviewed in at least two sittings. I discussed my initial
understandings of each participant’s story with them to ensure that I captured the story they were attempting to share during the interview. I also ensured that the data were transcribed and translated correctly by employing a native Russian speaker who compared the transcribed documents to the translated version.

Monitoring the details of data collection, data processing and data analysis can also enhance credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I made every attempt to ensure that the emerging categories and themes actually came from the data. As themes developed, I took participant’s verbatim statements from the transcripts and listed them under the corresponding categories to connect the headings with the data from which they emerged. I continuously listened to the audiotaped interviews to monitor that the categories emerged from the data.

**Validity**

Validity in qualitative research refers to how good an answer a study yields (Field & Morse, 2003). The answers received from informants in a qualitative study must reflect their reality. Therefore, it is crucial that the choice of the internal methods utilized avoids any distortion of reality in the research context. In quantitative research, the emphasis is on reliability. In qualitative research, however, the emphasis is placed on validity (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Validation is considered a crucial process “in the structure of ethnographic construction” (Newfield, Joanning, Kuehl, & Quinn, 1991, p. 285). “It is not possible to achieve perfect reliability if we are to produce valid studies of the real world” (Taylor & Bogdan, p. 7).

“In qualitative research, it is important to address the bias of the researcher since the researcher who functions as an observer does the data gathering. Hence, it is
important to address the reliability of the coding system used in the analysis portion of the study” (Field & Morse, 2003, p. 116). In this study, I achieved reliability by asking the survivors to evaluate my interpretation of their stories and descriptions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). When informants approved my interpretation of their experience, I knew that I grasped the content they were attempting to communicate.

**Personal Perspective**

In qualitative research, the area studied by the researcher usually interlocks closely with their deepest professional and social commitments (Ely, 1997). In this case, it is the story of my own attempt to obtain information about my family and culture that determines largely the theoretical and philosophical approach that I adopted in this study. I was born in Ukraine into a Jewish family. I moved to Israel when I was ten years old. Some of my family members perished in the Holocaust in the Ukraine; I am not sure how many. In my family, we do not speak about those events. I never heard my grandparents speak about their past when I was growing up. They also never spoke about WWII. Old photographs never decorated our house; there were no books about the war, and the word Holocaust was never mentioned. There were occasional peculiar behaviors, for example, grandma’s sudden outburst when my cousin, who was about twelve-years old at the time, referred to our grandparents as “them.” I remember that grandma rushed into the room yelling, “do not call us ‘them!’ ‘Them’ are the Nazis!” She rushed away and we never discussed the incident.

During my senior year at Southern Illinois University, I enrolled in an honor Holocaust history class and had to write a research paper. I began researching Babi
Yar, because it was the closest location to where I was born where mass murder of
the Jews took place. One day I stumbled upon an Internet link about the Berdichev
ghetto, the city where I was born. I was surprised at this discovery since I had never
heard about a ghetto in Berdichev. My family on my father’s side had lived in
Berdichev for several generations. My mother’s side resided in an area very close by.

I attempted to share the information I discovered with my mother over the
phone but she did not show interest in the subject and discouraged me from doing
research. At some point, I asked my mother to ask my grandparents some questions
about the ghetto and a week later she replied that they did not know the answers.
Once again, she discouraged me from doing research in the area. After a while, I
stopped talking about the Holocaust with her. A few months later, during a visit to
Israel, I learned from my grandmother that my mother never asked her any of my
questions. So I asked her myself. My grandmother was upset as she spoke. She
appeared guarded and was making an effort to control her emotions and avoided eye
contact. She had heard about the ghetto and what had happened in Berdichev from
people she knew. She cried; and I felt bad that I had upset her since it was the first
and only time I ever saw her cry.

It was after this undergraduate course that I began studying the Holocaust in a
systematic way. I read many books, watched films and read testimonies. One year
after my initial research into the Holocaust began, I went to Israel and visited the Yad
Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem with my father. I had not been there since
middle school. I remember being surprised at how poor the museum looked compared
to the American museums I had visited. It had no elaborate exhibitions like the ones
that are very common in the US. There were very few artifacts, but there was an
abundance of full size photographs of naked men and women right before they were
shot and later laying in mass graves. I was somewhat desensitized to these scenes of
horror but was still quite disturbed. My father became visibly upset so I offered to
leave. We went to the archive section of the museum and I entered “Shafran” and
“Berdichev” into the computer database. No names came up. “Try Nemirovsky,” my
father said. I did, and a list of about eleven names appeared. This is how I learned that
Nemirovsky was the name of my grandmother’s family, on my father’s side, and
these were our family members who were killed in the Holocaust. I suppose my
father, like my mother, did not wish to talk about the Holocaust.

From these interactions, I learned that if I wish to pursue my interest in the
Holocaust, I would have to do it on my own. I accepted that I would frequently have
to listen to the discouraging speeches of my family. It appeared that for my parents,
my focus on the Holocaust was confusing and alarming. They always wished for me
to assimilate into the larger American culture, encouraging me to downplay any
traces of Jewish culture I had left, and asked me not to mention I was from Israel. My
mother frequently stressed that I should straighten my hair (most Jews have curly
hair), and at some point even offered me plastic surgery to correct my “Jewish” nose
as a birthday gift. What frightened them even more was a potential career as a
Holocaust researcher, which for them meant never finding employment. My family’s
discouragement confused me for a very long time. It was only after I began reading
Holocaust literature specific to the USSR and interviewing the participants for this
study that I started understanding their worldview.
I have not gained any more knowledge about my family since my undergraduate years at Southern Illinois University. My maternal grandmother and paternal grandfather are alive. They know about my interest in the Holocaust, but they do not speak about it. When they do offer information, it is about other people who went through the Holocaust. They actively avoid speaking about their own lives. Their general attitude is one of avoidance. My mother continuously asks me whether my committee members actually allow me to study the Holocaust. She questions the sincerity of the people who support my research and wonders whether I will be able to find a job with such a specialization.

I believe that my desire to learn about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union stems from a need to understand my generation and myself. I often wonder how, in less than fifty years, Soviet Jews went from a rich religious life to Atheism. Why did we lose our culture? And what happened in the Soviet Union that made my parents and grandparents afraid to speak about Jewish history and the Holocaust?

Although I initiated this study to find some answers to these questions, it is important to note that my findings address only the lived experiences of the participants in this study. I did not intend to use the participant’s experiences as answers to all of these questions. Their testimonies are their own and should not be used to give our lives a sense of meaning, learn “lessons,” or generalize what was learned to non-survivors. These testimonies, however, offer an insight into what their experiences were like. I believe that from this study I gained a better understanding of the survivors, their lives, and their culture. I also gained insight and understand my cultural background in a historical context.
All research is conducted from a specific standpoint and this study is no exception. I believe that strength of this study, however, is that my position is articulated from the beginning, which will allow me to scrutinize my work and the circumstances under which it will be produced. I am a third generation descendant of Soviet survivors and WWII veterans. I am a partial product of the communist ideology, since I spent the first ten years of my life in the USSR. I was raised in Israel, and I currently reside in the US.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

We who have come back, by the aid of many lucky chances or miracles – whatever one may chose to call them – we know: the best of us did not return.

Viktor Frankl

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the results of the study. I used ethnographic interviews to learn about the experiences of five Soviet Holocaust survivors. The broad areas of inquiry included the lives of Soviet Holocaust survivors before WWII, during the Holocaust, and after WWII, under the Soviet regime. Findings presented in this chapter reflect my interpretation of their experiences as shared in individual interviews. This chapter begins with the profiles of five Soviet Holocaust men and women who were kind to share with me their thoughts and experiences.

In this chapter, I also discuss the recounted experiences of the participants as they found themselves trapped in the Soviet Union, prohibited from leaving, and continuously battling anti-Semitism. What the participants shared was extremely enriching, yet quite difficult to hear. Despite the frequent difficulties listening to their stories, I benefited from the interviews very much. I was able to collect valuable data and, in the process, I became close with the participants, learned about their lives, and better understood their culture.

Participant Narratives

Participant narratives were created to provide an overview of each member’s story. To protect each participant’s confidentiality, I selected a pseudonym before the interview began. Moreover, I changed names of family members and friends. I also
omitted personally identifying information. I constructed individual profiles to
provide more detailed information about each participant. In this next section, I
introduce each of the five participants individually and share a brief outline of their
personal experiences.

**Faina**

Faina, a 74-year-old Jewish female, was born, and grew up in Belorussia. Faina
was four-years-old when the war began. She was placed in the Minsk ghetto, the third
largest ghetto in Eastern Europe, with her family. Faina was nearly killed by the Nazis in
the ghetto on three separate occasions. While residing in the ghetto, she experienced
continuous hunger and deprivation. Faina’s brother and uncle were killed while assisting
the underground resistance movement in the ghetto. Faina’s grandparents were also
killed during one of the roundups. Faina’s mother, shocked by the loss of her relatives,
no longer paid much attention to her daughter. She remained disengaged until the day
the Germans decided to liquidate the ghetto. While standing in line to the gas vans she
suddenly made a decision to save her daughter. She walked out with Faina through a
hidden kitchen door at the train station where she worked. They traveled away from the
ghetto and hid in one of the Belorussian forests. From July 1943 until Belorussia’s
liberation in July 1944, Faina and her mother lived in the forest. Even while hiding in
the forest, they experienced instances of anti-Semitism from non-Jewish Belorussian
partisans.

In 1945, Faina and her mother traveled to Varkuta to be with Faina’s father who
was sentenced by Soviet authorities to thirty-six years of hard labor for Trotskyism
before the war began. Anti-Semitism began escalating after the war, and the local
population became increasingly anti-Semitic and antagonistic as more people returned from the war.

Faina’s Jewish appearance and name were frequent sources of discrimination when she was growing up. She was called “Yeed” many times in her childhood, which caused her anguish.

Faina experienced frequent anti-Semitism in her studies and professional life. She was denied educational opportunities and job placements. When an aunt visited from the US, Faina was not allowed to house her in her apartment and spend time alone with her. They had to meet in public places and were followed by agents from the KGB secret service. In the 1970’s, Faina was denied several requests to leave the country and immigrate to the US. Faina’s children suffered anti-Semitism as well. Her daughter was expelled from a university when the administration learned that Faina applied to immigrate to the United States. She finally arrived in the US in 1988.

Faina did not speak about her experiences in the Holocaust with her children for many years. She waited for them to initiate the conversation. When Faina retired she began volunteering at her local Holocaust museum. At first she volunteered at the library, but was soon approached to become a speaker. Faina stated that telling her story in English was very difficult for her, and at times, felt like punishment. Today, Faina feels more comfortable speaking at the museum and sometimes offers her services as a speaker. After she began to participate in this study, Faina’s daughter started asking her some questions about the past.
Lev

Lev, a 73-year-old Jewish male, was born and grew up in Ukraine. During the war Lev and his family were evacuated to Jambyl, Kazakhstan, where they stayed with a local family. Lev recalls in detail the cold weather and lack of food and clothing. Lev lost many family members on his mother's side during the war. Lev’s mother and grandmother were the only family members who survived the Holocaust. Lev does not know how many family members he lost on his father’s side because his father was an orphan. Lev and his family returned to Dnepropetrovsk in 1944 when the city was liberated.

After the war, Lev experienced multiple anti-Semitic incidents. Lev did not realize he was Jewish growing up because many of his friends were Jewish as well. When he grew up, however, he began to understand that being Jewish meant being different. Lev's father changed his name to a more Russian sounding name to spare his children the pain of anti-Semitism.

Lev was unable to secure a well paying position because of his ethnicity. On several occasions he was denied job offers because he was Jewish. In some instances he was told directly not to apply because of his ethnicity and, at other times, it was hinted at indirectly. At his permanent position at a factory he was not promoted because the authorities did not wish to create a high concentration of Jews in one department.

Lev's children encountered anti-Semitism as well. They too had difficulties attending higher education institutions of their choice. Lev actively attempted to help his children make educational choices that would minimize some of the anti-Semitic backlash they would experience. He believed that they did not possess the strength to
fight anti-Semitism that he had. Lev’s two children were raised in a non-religious home. Lev and his wife did not speak about Judaism with their children because it was not a common practice in the USSR.

Lev began attending a support group for childhood Holocaust survivors when he retired. He does not speak up in the meetings, however, because he feels that the non-Russian group members do not understand his experiences as a Soviet Jew. Lev realized that his grandchildren do not know anything about the events of the Holocaust because he did not talk to his children about the war. Lev had had opportunities to speak about the events of the war and his life in the USSR before, but chose not to. He noted that he wishes to speak to people who understand him and his experience. If people do not understand his experiences he chooses to keep silent.

**Dora**

Dora, a 76-year-old Jewish female, was born and grew up in Ukraine. When the war began she and some of her family members were evacuated first to Stalingrad region and later to Ulyanovsk region in Russia. Most of Dora’s family refused to evacuate and were killed soon after the Germans entered the village. Dora’s father and several uncles were also killed fighting the Germans. Dora recalled the continuous hunger and poverty that she had experienced during the war. She also recalled traveling on trains during German bombing raids; something she believed caused her long-term trauma.

After the war, Dora graduated high school and got married. She was denied admission to a university because of her ethnicity and attended a night college instead. Dora experienced anti-Semitism extensively at her place of employment. She frequently
heard open anti-Semitic remarks, was promoted only when it was absolutely necessary, and was poorly paid.

Dora’s children experienced anti-Semitism in school but their complaints were dismissed by the school administration. Dora described feeling helpless not knowing how to fight the anti-Semitic system. When Dora’s children began working they were not promoted, were not allowed to travel on work-related assignments, and were denied many privileges that their non-Jewish coworkers enjoyed.

Dora wished to leave USSR to Israel on several occasions, but was unable to because Soviet authorities did not permit it. Her immigration applications were denied. She could only move to a different city in USSR but she believed anti-Semitism was similar everywhere in the country. Once communism collapsed, she left with her husband to the United States. Her two children had moved to the US few years earlier.

Dora did not speak about her experience in the war. She believed that there were many people with similar stories and no one was speaking about their experiences openly. For Jews, it was the norm not to talk about their experiences and Dora did what everyone else did. She kept quiet.

**Gregory**

Gregory, an 87-year-old man, was born and grew up in Ukraine. Gregory served in the air force during the war as a radio operator on a fighter plane. The Nazis killed many members of Gregory’s extended family. His parents and three sisters were separated during the war. Gregory’s mother and three sisters survived the war in evacuation, while his father died of hunger in 1944.
Gregory encountered anti-Semitism in the army. He was reduced in rank because of his ethnicity, and considers himself lucky, as he was not jailed. He indicated that for Jews, being discriminated against in the Red Army was a common practice.

After the war ended, Gregory was unable to find a job in the radio transmission field. He was rejected from jobs because of his ethnicity and was frequently told so to his face. He took a job as a roofer with his father-in-law, and spent his life working physically demanding jobs. He contemplated getting higher education, but had a family he had to feed, and never pursued his education.

Gregory's children encountered anti-Semitism as well, but he did not wish them to leave the USSR. Gregory does not believe that he had had a bad life in USSR because he was born into a poor family to begin with. He dislikes when his sisters pretend that their childhood was anything but the poor condition that he actually remembers. He did not wish to leave the USSR, but eventually followed one of his children to the US after all of his other relatives had moved.

Gregory did not know that the Nazis were targeting Jews during the war, even though he served in the air force. After the war, he began reading, and still continues reading, newspaper articles and books about the Holocaust. In our conversations, he frequently referenced appropriate parts from the “Black Book,” the only existing Soviet Jewish testimony book in Russian.

Luba

Luba, a 75-year-old woman, was born and raised in Ukraine. During the war she was evacuated with her family to Udmurt. She believes that she had a much easier time during the war because she had both of her parents with her. Her father was a
member of the Communist Party and was the director of one of the factories in their city. She attributes her relatively easy time during the war to her father who was able to secure a position in all of the locations they traveled to. Because of her non-Jewish appearance and non-typical Jewish last name, many people did not know she was Jewish and she was able to blend in easily into her environment.

When the Germans invaded, Luba and her family escaped on a horse and carriage. While they were traveling, they were frequently bombed, and she learned to roll off the cart and into the forest. They were able to buy small amounts of food during their travels because her father was able to bring money with him.

Luba lost several relatives during the war. Some of Luba’s relatives received some help from their Ukrainian neighbors, who hid them and fed them when the Nazis entered the city. Luba believes that her relatives were able to get the help from others because they did not look Jewish. Luba’s grandfather surrendered to the Germans, to protect the family that was hiding him, and was buried alive by the Nazis. Luba noted that she was traumatized by the event, and avoided the location where her grandfather was buried for many years.

Luba did not encounter a lot of anti-Semitism after the war. She spent most of her life in a primarily Jewish city, did not seek a competitive career, and was able to avoid much of the anti-Semitism. She stated, however, that many of her friends and family encountered anti-Semitism. Luba’s children were also able to avoid anti-Semitism because, she believes, of their non-Jewish appearance.

Luba decided to come to the US with her daughter once it became legal to leave. She did not contemplate immigration before 1990’s because she knew it was
impossible. Luba noted that the war left her with a life-long trauma. For example, she continues to be frightened of crowds, planes, and cellars.

**Emergent Themes**

The interviews I conducted with the five participants allowed me to identify specific patterns and themes that appeared frequently in their accounts. I attempted to draw meaning from the data I collected by focusing on exploring themes that participants shared in common. From the data I collected, I was able to identify commonalities with issues concerning the following major themes: Holocaust experiences, anti-Semitism and governmental oppression, long-term trauma, Jewish identity, and speaking about experiences in the Holocaust. It appeared to me that participants’ conceptual frameworks; their sense of identity, as Soviet Holocaust survivors, and how they made meaning of their lives heavily relied on these five elements.

Within each theme, I identified specific categories that the participants found to be significant in their lives. For instance, within Holocaust experiences, participants discussed the loss of their family members, near death experiences, deprivation, and minimization of their own experiences. Again, it seemed to me that these experiences and memories were at the depth of their identities as survivors, and maintaining these memories and experiences was crucial to their identities.

After the discussion of major themes, the participants expressed interest in sharing their experiences and memories with their own family members. Even though all participants indicated that sharing their stories was extremely difficult for them,
they reported feeling some satisfaction sharing their life-long hidden stories with another person.

**Holocaust Experiences**

The five participants were born in Belorussia and Ukraine. They reported relatively happy childhoods and family lives before the war. All participants were close with their families. Three participants grew up in larger cities and were surrounded by their parents and siblings. Two participants grew up in small Jewish communities, where the majority of residents were Jewish. All participants had positive memories of their pre-war childhood even though they reported poor life quality and frequent food deprivation.

**War Experiences**

All participants reported multiple traumatic events they experienced during the war. For example, one female participant described her life in the Minsk ghetto, loss of family members, several near death experiences, and continuous hunger. Three of the participants were evacuated to the Caucasus and experienced prolonged hunger, frequent air raids, and long and excruciating journeys to safety. All participants described in great detail their commutes to safety. They spoke in detail about traveling on trains, carts, and horses. When speaking about trains they noted a constant fear of being separated from family members because trains frequently left the station ahead of schedule to avoid bombings. Many people who left the train to seek food were frequently left behind. As one survivor explained:

Well, you know… on the stations the echelons were going and on stations ee… someone was walking ee... for the boiled water, to take water, to buy
something… And so echelon left and people stayed (behind) and so they separated. So. Really many families separated.

Participants described detailed accounts of air raids, having to hide, fear of being lost in a crowd, and the constant hunger they had to endure. These events appeared to have profound effects on their lives. One participant continuously spoke about food. As she described moving from place to place during the war she made note of the different foods that were available in each place she moved to. For example, in one instance she described not having enough food while being evacuated in Russia:

They the… there was nothing there eeee… boiled…aw… there were growing only potatoes and cabbage and ry… eeee….rye. Black bread ryy… rye! There was nothing else. No one had found the rest vegetables about what…. Just the cabbage. And we were boiling that cabbage, so, first eeu..ca…in e..that… there was such a, all year round they had the same menu: shchi (cabbage soup) and potatoes. So there, of course there was no meat, milk about that no one was even talking. Shchi from ca… cabbage. In the summer with… with cabbage sweet shchi, in the winter sour and all year round they were boiling shchi. And first they were boiling from those… from cloverleaves of cabbage and shchi were black, and then until already till… went to real other shchi those cabbage, so already there was also growing black. So all year round we were eating that black shchi and well that… and potatoes. Were eating there was a glass of milk – were pouring in those potatoes and it was actually already such a luxury.
During the war participants reported not knowing about the persecution of the Jews. Only one participant was aware of what was happening to the Jews during the war because she was in a ghetto. The remaining participants learned about the Holocaust when the war had ended. All participants emphasized multiple times that no one knew about what was happening to the Jews and that their lives became much worse after people began returning from the war. For these participants, the end of war meant dramatic escalation in anti-Semitism.

Minimization of Experiences

During the interviews all participants made constant statements that were aimed to minimize the suffering they endured in the war. They all noted that other people, like their perished relatives, or other survivors, experienced far more anguish than they did. Even the participant, who survived a ghetto, and hid in the forest for over a year, indicated that her experiences paled in comparison to the experiences of others. All participants expressed some degree of survivor’ guilt and referenced family members and friends who did not survive the war as the real victims of the Holocaust. They frequently referred to their perished relatives, stating that the relatives “had seen more” during the Holocaust. One male participant indicated that when he was growing up everyone had a family member that was killed in the war; therefore a sense of loss was all too common. He noted:

I can’t say I had it worse than others, even the people in JCC, like (name) that you talked to, I know what she experienced, consequently, ee…it is much worse, much worse. I sometimes, ee... think about it..ee… remember, the war, and the apartment, and the cold…but to say, to say that it is on my brain all
the time... no! Some things stay, like my mother ee... not asking her about
what she remembers, names, yes... When I lived there, growing up this was a
common situation, everyone lost someone. My classmates and later people I
worked with. I think there was not one family that didn’t lose someone.

Overall, however, it appeared that all participants shared in common a notion
that other survivors experienced far more suffering than they did. The survivors did
not appear to differentiate between their sufferings as Jews and the suffering of
overall Soviet population. This perhaps has to do with Soviet authorities
systematically minimizing the Holocaust and forcing the message that Soviet people
suffered in the war (Gitelman, 1990).

It is interesting to note, when comparing their experiences to survivors of
Western Europe, participants indicated that they frequently felt misunderstood and
even agitated that Western survivors did not know much about the experiences of
Soviet Jews. They frequently felt that their experiences were minimized and even
dismissed by Western survivors. One participant in particular indicated that he does
not wish to converse with individuals who do not understand him or do not know
about Soviet history. He agreed to speak only with people who knew about the events
of post WWII Soviet Union. In the following example he relates an incident that took
place in his child survivor support group:

And well, eee... on that, on that week we... two days ago, we participated in
that group, when, where there were representatives of catholic... Catholics,
Christians, someone else... different, there were about six people. They are,
like the conductors of the information about Judaism, about... about Jews.
And when a participant was telling them about that very eee… her being in German ghetto, after all sounded, (they asked) for example, for me such a ridiculous question –And well, when you were released, the ghetto – what? So they imagined, that ghetto – it means, could be right after (immediately after liberation) construct (come out of the ghetto and build a palace to live in) come, well kind of Kremlin Palace something like that, some threshold or… it was hard for them pro… and now it is hard to imagine…. That is why here all that, there is an opportunity to talk about it and you feel that your interlocutor understands you… So, you know I can talk with anyone on my way, but when the interlocutor understands me, I am talking about it with pleasure.

Loss of Family Members

All participants lost numerous family members in the war. All participants described in detail what they knew about their murdered relatives, and attempted to describe what happened to family members whose fate they knew little about. For example, one participant described in a heroic light, and in lengthy detail, the loss of her brother and uncle who fought with the partisans. Participants included the smallest details in their description of their relatives as it appeared important to communicate as much as they remembered about their relatives. One survivor offered several accounts of her older brother who was killed by the Nazis, whom she appeared to idealize. She noted:

My brother, he was… he was very brave boy, he had no expressed Jewish appearance and he used it, when he climbed over the barbed wire and.. he did
not attract attention of locals. He was very brave and smart, witted boy. He merged with line of workers who were walking to the workshops to work in the workshops of weapon crafting, which broken weapon, which came from front in huge number here my brother he had many responsible tasks, because he was quick, brave boy. And such kids as (my brother) were many were too many... they were brave.

Some participants outlined the clothes their relatives wore, the reputation they had, the languages they spoke, what others thought of them, as well as personality characteristics they remembered. For example, one survivor described her grandfather:

...and grandfather was not looking like Jew, he contrary was such an, (intellectual) with an elegant beard such, he was. So his look was non-typical such to him...the long nose well, something more...and he was well spoken in Ukrainian language.

Participants made sure to spell out the full names of their relatives as they described them. These descriptions were always positive and, at times, appeared idealized. They frequently illustrated their memories with photographs of family members that they were able to salvage from the war. Some participants offered book references where authors mentioned their family members, areas of residence, or general geographical references. It was the only time when participants offered other printed references to support their stories. One participant expressed deep regret not
asking his mother for details about the family members massacred in the Holocaust. He was not able to sustain a sense of family history or transmit it to his own children.

For the family members that were killed, participants frequently shared long and detailed accounts of how they died. For all participants, knowledge of the death of some of their relatives came after the war when they relatives failed to return from the war. Some participants had to learn about what had happened from their former neighbors upon returning to their hometowns. From all the information shared, the loss of family members appeared to be the most difficult subject to describe. Participants became still, looked far into distance, and spoke in a monotone voice. One participant wrapped her arms around her body and held tight the entire time she spoke. Another participant rubbed her temple, which made me think she was trying to fish out memories from her mind. It was particularly apparent that this section of the accounts was rather recited than told. For four of the participants, it was the first time describing the details of these events. All participants requested to stop the interview and sobbed in the process. As a listener, it was clearly the most disturbing part to hear, as I was unable to verbally respond to what I was hearing as long as the participants were speaking and had to silently listen to horrific details of murder.

**Anti-Semitism and Governmental Oppression**

All participants spent ample time describing the various sources of oppression they encountered after the war. They appeared to share a common belief that anti-Semitism was an overall governmental policy. As one participant described it:

And on the other hand, it is... it is clear, at least my experience tells that it was clearly the state policy – anti-Semitism... and it is not because some Ivan
sat right there and that is it, well, closed the oxygen and there, some intelligent man was living, and was it possible to breath freely – no.

All participants described numerous instances of discrimination they experienced and systematic oppression of Jews as people. Most of their children experienced anti-Semitic oppression as well. Moreover, participants noted that Soviet authorities purposefully hid and downplayed the Holocaust.

One participant described how authorities ignored that one woman gave away a Jewish girl to the Nazis. She noted:

No no, it was not like this. I said, authorities were hiding it, they were not talking, and everything was hidden. So why punish her? Maybe if she..aaa..if sh..she gave away Russians but not for a Jew. No, not for Jew. They wanted to kill Jews themselves the Germans did the job for them.

Later people returned from war, anti-Semitism began, they (authorities) aa..m.th... they tried to hide what happened, they were doing it on purpose now.

We even could not complain much. (We) were absolutely deprived. There was no point, no reason to complain. Who do you complain to if people on top are the one who decide to do this?

This was a big secret, nobody talked, it was dangerous, everyone was afraid of authorities, nobody knew who could be listening, especially after the war.
The one participant that was somewhat able to avoid discrimination felt that it happened because she did not look Jewish and did not have a Jewish last name. Otherwise, she believes, that she would have had experienced it as well. All participants shared a sense of helplessness and hopelessness about their life in the Soviet Union, frequently stating that they wished for a better life, wished they could leave the country, but could not see a way out. An overwhelming sense of helplessness was apparent throughout their entire accounts. As one survivor noted:

Where to leave? When they started to let out so we immediately rose up everyone to leave, all the Jews.” … “And in the beginning they were not letting out, there was not even talk to leave anywhere. So, what – where to leave?! To leave in different town – all the same. Here while you are sitting already, you are sitting. Is it bad, or good, but you are sitting, and in… other town no…no.. nowhere to, there was no sense in leaving. That is it. At least I knew all people at work, even the bad nasty people; at least I knew how to manage with them.

Another participant who described his helplessness noted:

...ee, consequently, after the war, we ee ...we have seen anti-Semitism, ee...all the things we talked about, eee...at work, and with my children, ee..and my work, and ee...consequently no promotion, and parents, and eee...and not letting us immigrate... many things, and no one knows, no one knows about what we have seen, what we experienced. Chernobyl...
**Post-War Anti-Semitic Escalation**

All participants indicated that anti-Semitism escalated rapidly after the end of the war. The escalation of anti-Semitism marked a new era of suffering for the participants. Veterans, who returned from the war, the non-Jewish population, and the Soviet government, openly shared anti-Semitic messages and developed anti-Semitic laws. Previously moderately peaceful Soviet citizens became increasingly nationalistic, frequently blamed Jews for the war, and did not wish to share their land with the Jews. As one survivor noted:

> It was hard to live after, after the war it was e.. hard to live somehow anti-Semitism, in spite of disappearing it started showing more clearly, started to be shown." … “The population started filling incr... increase and here we clearly saw Komi antagonism, all that e.. well native, born there, who e.. who, who, did not know at all, nothing at all about Jews. But they suddenly got installations: so ee.. – not take to works, avoid and actually – why have you all come here? We have our own republic here! We have here... here we ourselves like... like on so say family meetings they said – we had brought you the culture! – And we don’t need your culture! Why the hell we need your culture here?! Here we have our dears and ou.. our world and coil.

The three participants who were evacuated to the Caucasus indicated that anti-Semitism was not as frequent during the war. All participants clearly stated that anti-Semitic messages trickled down from the authorities, who wished to implicate the Jews for the war. While evacuated, local populations frequently took the Jews in and did not seem to distinguish Jews from other Russian or Polish people who were also
evacuated to the Caucasus. Only after the war ended and people began to return, locals became more nationalistic, blamed the Jews for the war, and demanded that they leave. As one participant noted the change in anti-Semitic sentiment after the end of the war:

(during evacuation) there was no prejudice as such, that actually not. there was no such, well – to them (people in Udmurt) there were Jews, Russian, and Poles. There were different, also Udmurts… Well different, but different (than locals) there were. But when (people) started coming back from front already ee… people, well then it was already well such already (anti-Semitic) talks then, well. Then I already heard the word “Yiddo,” I learned. I had no idea, what was that and who it was. Well then I already began hearing this word.

Education

Participants reported that being Jewish had affected their primary, secondary, and university education. Four participants indicated that being Jewish caused them to experience discrimination in the classroom, amongst their peers, and affected their options when seeking university education. Participants indicated that they were denied admission to their universities of choice, at times blatantly, when the admission committee indicated that they did not accept Jews. At other times indirectly, indicating there were no more openings in the university. Later on, their children faced the same issues. Participants had to alter their educational plans depending on which universities accepted them. One participant elected to attend night school; another began working in a physically demanding job, while two others moved across the country to attend the only university that would admit them. One
participant reported that she was able to enroll in a university of her choice without problems, but indicated that she decided to pursue a less competitive field of education. All participants indicated that they endured anti-Semitic remarks from their fellow students and teachers at some point in their lives. One participant indicated that she and other Jewish students at her university had to attend meetings where Jews were accused of being Zionists and against the Soviet government. She indicated that she had no choice to attend those meetings and remain quiet while the discussion went on. She noted:

But I always suffered from anti-Semitism it... especially when there was the doctor’s plot. Eee. we... we students were gathered for the meetings. And we, Jews were sitting with such compressed... in such a strained condition and our heart were beating because every time they were saying – “Zionists,” “Zionist Jews,” “aggressors.” It was so painful, and we, all friends, we all tried to be with each other. And a.. studied in anti-Semitism atmosphere ee... in Leningrad. This, this was also unforgettable... I would not say that ee... institute management was fighting against it – no, no one was fighting and no one ee.. no one was trying to facilitate students’ fate.

**Employment**

Participants indicated that they had difficulties finding employment because of their ethnicity. They noted that once graduated, they were turned away from positions, having been told directly and indirectly not to bother to apply. One participant described difficulties finding a job for several years after graduating from a university:
And all years... so I could not get a job at all, there could not be even a thought about going at some decent factory to work as chemist or ... or eee.. in academy, in chemical institute. There they had told me from the start – don’t waste your time here, don’t go here, in clear words.

When they were finally able to find employment they remained in the same position for years, rarely receiving promotions. One participant described an incident at work where he was told that the higher up management denied his promotion because they did not wish to create a high concentration of Jews in one department:

Then he came to the chief engineer (department head), as that is the service of the chief engineer, and as they are friends, so he was in the close terms with him... he tells – well I would like to take that guy as my assistant. He... all right I’ll talk... in the Party Committee... after that he comes to him and tells – you know... They are meeting and he tells – in the Party Committee they told that two Jews in one section is too much.

Another participant shared that she learned from her superior’s wife that there was a direct governmental order not to promote Jews. One female participant reported that she frequently heard openly discriminatory comments at work. She indicated that it was a common practice and there was no way to oppose such comments and she could not do much about it. She noted:

“... well very often you could hear “Yiddo” (at work) and so – it already surely could be heard, but a, what was I to do. I had to take it.”

Another participant shared that she experienced anguish after attempting to immigrate to the United States. She indicated that when her superiors learned that she
applied for immigration they put her on civil trial at work where she had to answer multiple humiliating questions her coworkers and superiors asked. She explained:

I was exposed to persecution, awful persecution, for that. And I already had a family, already the daughter was in tenth grade and the son was in fifth grade. And husband then, he was .. moved from job, ee.. I had lost job. I was the head of group, and there was a gathering where they judged me. All institute of domestic service, all institute me, like judged, everyone acted. Then I ee.. I was called at the meeting, where were sitting really many ee.. people then. Like a Russian “p” letter they were sitting and I was called c…put in the middle of that letter “p”. And I was condemned by everyone: so – why do you want to go to Israel? I had to answer all… all the questions. Besides, there were so many of them, I am standing, like – on execution – Joan of Arc, am standing at execution, everyone was asking me questions.

She described the experience as highly traumatic and shameful. Participants indicated that they frequently heard anti-Semitic comments from their coworkers and were unable to speak up because it was so common and accepted.

**Long-Term Trauma**

All female participants identified some type of a long-term psychological trauma they continued to experience. For example, they identified continuous discomfort with riding trains because it reminded them of escaping into safety during the war. They also identified feeling uneasy on planes because the engine noises reminded some of them of the air raids they experienced. One survivor noted:
This was very difficult. Until today I feel uneasy when I hear the sound of planes and large crowds, and when there is not enough air I become very uncomfortable, very uneasy. I do not like crowds and to this day I avoid crowded places, I try not to be in crowds. Something like this doesn't go away; it stayed with me forever, until the grave I will have this.

Other survivors related their discomfort in crowds and cellars because they were reminded of their war experiences when they felt suffocated. One participant indicated that she struggles with closed spaces and fears of not having enough air. She related an account of hiding in her house basement when it was bombed and parts of the building had collapsed trapping her inside. One survivor described several near death experiences she lived through in the ghetto. She noted that these frightening memories are still in her mind today. In one example she was almost shot by a Nazi officer. She recounted:

He grabbed my hand angrily and carried me... carried me to the building. E..I can't forget his angry gaze and...and force in his hands, with which he squeezed my hand. E..he carried me to mother, ee..grabbed my hair and put me on the high metallic chair. Put the gun out of holster and put it to my forehead. This feeling still remains in my memory.

During a separate incident in the ghetto she came close to being shot again. She stated:

(Once) when we were with little girl Olya, we had not succeeded in hiding in the cellar and stayed sitting on the bed, when two policemen flew in. So, above (the ground) stayed just me and Olya and old man at the opposite.
Policemen glanced at... at us, two kids. Olya was three years old and I was five. They glanced at us and at the old man, whispered something quietly, then, so it is, leaned on the table and started aiming at the old man. They were aiming for quite a long, as it seemed to me, and they shot him, this helpless old man.

For several survivors, there were a number of long-term impacts. For example, they made arrangements to always have ample amounts of food in their house to avoid feeling hungry again. Other types of long-term trauma described were not being able to visit places of massacre for years, discomfort with attending crowded places and events.

The two male participants were somewhat reluctant to admit to having long-term psychological side affects. One participant, Gregory, specifically stated that he is a “strong man;” a man who fought in the army, and denied long-lasting trauma. As can be seen in some of the stories, however, the two men told, they experience long-lasting effects as well. For example, one survivor described a deep sense of regret and sorrow for not preserving the family legacy and as a result having no family history to transmit to the future generations. He noted that this is something he continues to contemplate on a daily basis.

An overwhelming message that all of the participants communicated was that other people had it much worst than they did. The statement usually concluded an interview, or came after a particularly painful memory. It appeared as if the participants made use of this statement to give some perspective to their experiences and put their minds at rest. It seemed like a curious balance between seeking
validation for their experiences, yet fearing to dive in into their own personal pain. As if other people’s painful experiences in the war, almost normalized their own.

**Jewish Identity**

Surprisingly, all five participants identified their passive ethnicity as the source of their Jewish identity. All participants had no choice but to constantly be identified by their identity because Soviet authorities recorded it in their legal documents. Four of the participants reported their Jewish appearance and name as further “give away” of their ethnicity. They reported that they had embraced their Jewish identities even though they were a frequent source of discrimination. All participants discussed Jewish appearance in a lot of detail in their interviews. One participant noted:

I was my father’s daughter and was strongly pronounced Jew. I never wanted to change my nationality and even did not want to meet with… with non-Jewish people. I never hid my name, though it was always hard aa.. to speak that my name is (obviously Jewish name) and aaa… it was painful for me during all years, until I moved to America, where I relaxed and could feel myself free.

*Another participant described learning about his ethnicity in adolescence and understanding what it meant. He noted:*

But in general well, I even can’t… can’t remember when started I… I started being called by my Russian name. Now, perhaps, well to say someone, that Isya… we had Isya, we had Aba… were the guys of clearly Jewish… Lusik was… So then it was perceived without any, without shyness, without
everything. Then, we were already walking with our head down, when we realized what was hanging over us.

Another factor that shaped participant’s Jewish identity was religiosity. Participants reported levels of religiosity ranging from atheism to moderate religious beliefs. All participants reported growing up in moderately religious to non-religious Jewish homes, and not transmitting their beliefs to their own children. For some, not speaking about their religion was because they themselves, did not know much about it. For others, the people who kept the religion going in their families, were killed. Finally, for some survivors religion was never present in their family because their parents were members of the Communist Party, and it was just not permitted by the government. One participant described her mother practicing some Jewish traditions in secret. She hid it even from her husband who was in the Communist Party and could be fired if authorities found out. She noted:

...we had no (religion). We had not that because, that then it was very strict. Father was the head...and he was in the regime. In those years about... not about any religion...even ee... matzoth when we had to, so father did not know, when we had matzoth at home. I liked (matzoth) very much, mother liked very much so ee... quietly, in synagogue she agreed and they brought it for us. Well then in the night time in such... in pillow cases brought that matzo, mother was hiding it somewhere, so that it would not get on even father’s eyes so that...quietly.

For all of the participants, their Jewish identity was created for them by the majority culture. They were Jews because the regime singled them out as Jews. They
were Jews, because the people around them were oppressing them for their Judaism. One participant described a traumatic incident that occurred to her soon after liberation. She was called a Jew by the local boys and cried to her mother to “remake” her so she could stop being Jewish. She noted:

But then I, in the first days, when we settled in that house, I was going to the garden there and eee... I was enjoying the ripe beans. And suddenly I heard the voice of a boy: “Hey, Yiddo! What are you doing in this garden? This is not your garden! This is the policemen garden. Go away from here!” I was shocked. I was totally numb from terror. He called me “Yiddo”. I was stunned. I ran to mother crying and flew in the room shaking in tears and said: “Mama! I don’t want to be Jew anymore! I don’t want to be Yiddo! I want to be Belarus! Remake me!” And I was hysterical and I realized very quickly that it was impossible to remake me.

She indicated that she never again questioned her identity, but at that moment she wanted to stop her suffering. She reported feeling “free” for the first time only when she moved to United States. Another participant indicated that he felt free for the first time in the US. He described his first encounter with open Jewish religiosity that occurred in the United States:

I remember when I arrived here, (US) we arrived in October. In the middle, yes, while here and there as I... looked around, saw things, we lived near here. And close there was big Plaza, it was the Jewish district, many orthodox are living there... Khe-khe...Hanukkah is going on, I am walking in the evening, the snow... hangs – Hanukkah...ee...the cars are passing with Hanukkah
eee…. Menorah… The shiver went through my body. As I even could not imagine to myself. I even had my thoughts numb regarding, that, there are Jewish feasts that you have to celebrate… (openly).

Practicing religion was not permitted in USSR, and some participants began learning about Judaism when they arrived in the US. Some confronted their religious Jewish identity when their children began keeping Jewish traditions. Some survivors attempted to incorporate their children’s religious views into their own lives. Some survivors found themselves reciting prayers the way they remembered some of their relatives doing before the war began. Others felt that they were too set in their atheist ways, and could not consider Judaism no matter how hard they tried. As one survivor noted:

I.. I really feel myself Jew, but I can’t make myself read these books reli… religious. You have to be born with them, with them to absorb it all from the childhood. Now this I… I.. ca.. I…I.. don’t… don’t.

She continued to explain that for years she attempted to be more religious, develop some spiritual beliefs, but was unsuccessful because she found it impossible to deviate from the Soviet anti-religious mindset she was exposed to. She noted:

I…I would like it in my soul, (to be religious) but I just can’t now. In my age to put the efforts, to overcome all that here, overcomes that learning, I just physically can’t.

No matter what their religious preferences were, participants noted that it was only in the US that they began thinking about their Jewish identities in terms other than what they were used to in USSR. Their identities began transforming from
passive to active only after living in the US for several years. Some participants expressed quite strong pro-Israeli sentiment and shared that they wish to see the state of Israel continuing to grow. Some noted that they wished for their grandchildren to continue Jewish traditions, but did not feel it was their place to dictate their children’s beliefs.

**Speaking About the Holocaust**

All five participants described a longing to share their memories and experiences with their family members, but choosing not to do so. They indicated a range of reasons for keeping silent. For Lev and Dora, it made sense not to speak about their past during the years following the end of the war because so many Soviet people lost their relatives. They indicated that although they gradually became interested in speaking, it was difficult because of the highly anti-Semitic environment they functioned in. As stated by Dora, people around her did not wish to hear about her experiences, and she added that some of the people around her assisted the Nazis with some of the atrocities they carried out. Therefore, she did not feel safe speaking up.

All participants indicated that they expected their children to ask them about their experience. For them, it would have opened a window of opportunity to share. Their children, however, failed to ask and the participants remained silent. Gregory described a sense of agitation and frustration that his children did not ask him about his past. He seemed to have felt a sense of disappointment in his children because they did not wish to know more. He even stated that he made sure to enlist his son in
the Soviet Army, even though his son had an option not to enlist, so he could experience something similar to what Gregory went through.

It seemed that once the participants had a chance to talk, they were not sure how to begin speaking about their past. When I met with Luba for the first interview, her daughter was present, and it appeared that she wished to navigate her mother’s story in a direction she felt was beneficial. I explained to Luba’s daughter that my preference was to speak with her mother alone, and it was interesting that Luba occasionally checked in with me to see if what she was sharing was in fact what I wanted to hear.

It appeared that the participants were somewhat intrigued that I showed interest in their experiences and may have felt the need to offer me the “right” story. They continuously asked me whether they were sharing what I “wanted” to hear. Focusing on self was foreign for them and they were simultaneously delighted and confused that someone wanted to learn about their past. This dynamic reached its peak after my second interview with Faina, who asked me, as I was leaving, why someone as “healthy and athletic” as myself had an interest in something as “morbid” as the Holocaust. A similar incident occurred with Gregory when we met for the first time. He looked up at me for a few seconds and said “I will talk to you, but the Holocaust to you is like Napoleon to me.” I interpreted his comment to mean that I am as far removed from the Holocaust as he is from Napoleon.

And yet all the participants described almost an internal need to speak about their experiences; a need to share, to record, to transmit. Faina described it as an obligation to transmit the knowledge to the future generations. She noted:
That it is my responsibility to share it with the future generations. You remember (my daughter) from last time, and she asked me some questions since, and my grandson. I have to tell them so they know about our family history.

It appeared that despite the need to be heard, survivors experienced a fear of not being understood. This fear may have made them more cautious when deciding to share their experiences in the Holocaust. For example, Lev shared in his interview that he only wishes to speak with people who understand him, and does not wish to educate people about his experience. It seems, however, that not many people who understand him are there to listen.

Overall, it appears that all five participants benefited from sharing their experiences. It was a very difficult process for them. All five survivors, even Gregory, who described himself as a “strong man” sighed and wept quite frequently. Often, we had to stop our interviews rapidly, because participants were overwhelmed by their memories, began crying, or simply could not make themselves revisit that part of their memories.

For me, as a researcher, it was also a painful process. Laub (1992) notes that there are three levels of witnessing in relation to the Holocaust. First, being a witness to oneself within the experience. Second, being a witness to other people’s testimonies. Third, being a witness to the process of witnessing. For myself, I do not have the experience of being a witness to oneself, the first level, because I was born long after the war had ended. At the second level, I experienced being a witness to the testimonies of the survivors, who shared their testimonies with me. I witnessed the
stories of my participants, their trauma, and the anguish they have felt recounting their past. At the third level, the process of witnessing being witnessed, I observed how my participants, and myself as the listener, shifted within and between the stories they were recounting. Their traumatic past, the horror, the anguish, all told sixty-five years later. I also observed myself as I attempted to relate, to comfort, and to understand my participants.

In this study, my task was to allow the participants to speak with minimal interruption on my part. Once participants began speaking, however, they no longer looked at me, spoke in a monotone voice, and continued speaking, until they had to stop. It was extremely difficult to be a passive listener, especially when the stories became particularly horrific. I attempted to suppress some of my immediate reactions, like crying, because I did not wish to discourage the survivors from speaking.

Even though I have dedicated most of my life to studying the Holocaust, I was not prepared to hear some of the stories the participants shared. I believe that there was a big difference between watching testimonies on tape and listening to them face to face, especially from people I came to know and care about. Probably the most difficult part was to hear one of the participants describe her grandfather being buried alive. I found myself disassociating momentarily on several occasions. I often wondered why I did that, especially since I looked forward to learning this information for many years. It appears, however, that I needed brief moments to escape from what I was hearing because it was too overwhelming at times.

After we completed the interviews, some participants reported attempts to communicate with their children. Most of the children were aware of our
conversations, and some came forward requesting their parents to tell them what they have told me. The participants reported that it was a satisfying experience.

**Conclusion**

In this study I conducted ethnographic interviews with five Soviet Holocaust survivors. I was able to identify several themes that the participants shared in common. These themes appeared to shape their identity as Jewish Soviet survivors. They influenced the way they made meaning of their lives. The commonalities related to their experiences during the Holocaust, incidents of anti-Semitism they had undergone, governmental oppression, long-term trauma, Jewish identity, and speaking about their experiences in the Holocaust. All participants found it difficult to share past memories, especially since, for many of them, it was the first time to do so. Despite the difficulties, participants reported their interview experience beneficial and planned to initiate conversations about their past with family.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

- How do Jews even know they are Jews? They are not so different from the rest…
- Oh, they won’t mind forgetting all about it, but they are constantly reminded…

Fazil Iskander

Summary of the Study

Various researchers and clinicians have attempted to study the Holocaust and Holocaust survivors in the past sixty-six years. Although numerous studies have been published so far, most of them focused primarily on pathology and the psychological implications that the trauma inflicted on the survivors (Hass, 1990; Glicksman et al., 2003; Lomranz, 2000; Robinson et al., 1994). Early Holocaust scholarship focused primarily on negative psychological consequences of the Holocaust for several reasons. First, psychological trauma was explored to document the reasons for reparations many Jews were seeking from the Germans. Second, researchers and clinicians assumed that the Holocaust had to have had traumatic and pathological effects. Finally, many of the researchers and clinicians arguing for the pathological effects of the Holocaust were themselves survivors (Glicksman et al.).

In this study, I attempted to go beyond pathology and explored how the Holocaust and the life in the Soviet Union impacted the lives and identities of five Soviet Holocaust survivors. Despite the existing literature on Holocaust survivors, information about Soviet Holocaust survivors continues to be scarce (Glicksman et al., 2003; Glicksman & Van Haisma, 2002). In the section that follows, I will review several important findings. First, I will compare the findings of this study to other
studies in this area. Next, I will offer limitations and implications of this study. Finally, I will discuss my experiences conducting this research.

As the number of Holocaust survivors grows smaller every day, it is important to explore more personal accounts, focus on unique stories, memories, and recollections of survivors. Specifically, it is important to focus on the less known and studied groups, like Soviet Holocaust survivors. In the present study, I focused on exploring the experiences of five Soviet Holocaust survivors who were born in non-Asian parts of the Soviet Union, survived the Holocaust, lived in the Soviet Union after the end of WWII, and immigrated to the US. I examined the experiences of the survivors in the pre and post Holocaust life behind the Soviet iron curtain. The purpose of the study was to explore the overall themes that the five survivors shared in common. Another goal was to attempt to understand what formed their identities as Jewish Soviet survivors and influenced the way they make meaning of their lives.

When I began to initially collect information for this study, what became immediately apparent was that the Soviet Holocaust survivors were unlike any other Holocaust survivor population. For the Soviet Jews, 1945 did not mark the end of anti-Semitism and discrimination. Anti-Semitism played a prominent role in the lives of Soviet Jews before, during, and especially after the end of WWII (Gitelman, 1991; Gitelman, 1993; Gitelman, 1997; Gitelman, 2005). For most European Jews, Holocaust marked the end of systemic annihilation, discrimination and oppression. After the war, they were able to immigrate to the US and other Western countries and made attempts to piece their lives together (Altshuler, 1993). For the Soviet Jews, however, the end of the war marked a new era of anti-Semitism. Soviet authorities
systematically downplayed the Holocaust. One of the common Soviet slogans in the post WWII era was that the Jews did not suffer more than other Soviet citizens (Shafir, 2001). As noted by the participants in this study, anti-Semitism was a state policy rather than a person-to-person attitude. Even though publicly the Soviet government denounced anti-Semitism, privately, they encouraged the oppression of Jews in all public areas. Criminal cases of anti-Semitic discrimination were never prosecuted under the Soviet regime (Smith, 1990).

The term Holocaust began to appear in Soviet literature only in the 1980’s (Shafir, 2001). For the Soviet government, the Holocaust was only one subcategory of a larger racist fascist phenomenon. Jews were a part of a subgroup like the Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Gypsies, or other nationalities who were persecuted for their race. Therefore, for the Soviet government, the roots of the Holocaust lay in capitalism, which they were viciously combating (Gitelman, 2005).

The results of this study support the literature findings on the Soviet systemic and consistent governmental anti-Semitic policy (Altshuler, 1987; Altshuler, 1993; Altshuler, 1998; Cang, 1969; Dean, 2005; Decter, 1971; Eckman, 1974; Frankel, 1991; Gitelman, 1988; Gitelman, 1990; Gitelman, 1991; Gitelman, 1993; & Gitelman, 1997; Glicksman & Van Haitsma, 2002). Participants reported life-long discrimination in all aspects of their lives. Participants identified continuous anti-Semitic incidents in early life, school, university, work place, and daily life. Openly anti-Semitic comments were voiced throughout their lives and non-discriminatory policies were nonexistent. Participants reported that Soviet authorities made no efforts to fight anti-Semitism, and in fact secretly enforced it. Several participants
indicated that they knew of governmental policies that prohibited Jews from receiving promotions, applying for higher management positions, and receiving fair treatment. On multiple occasions, participants were discouraged from applying to higher institutions and various jobs. At times, they were directly told that Jews were not being hired.

All participants reported that speaking about their experiences was very difficult. The process of sharing traumatic memories is extremely complicated to say the least. For Soviet survivors, sharing memories is a complex process with many obstacles (Shklarov, 2006). Soviet survivors were not permitted to openly share and recognize their experiences by the Soviet authorities (Gitelman, 1995). Systematic silencing by the Soviet authorities may have gradually become ingrained in the survivors, preventing them from speaking (Shklarov, 2006). Greenspan (1998), noted that in order for a survivor to tell their story, the story needs to be heard by a listener who is open, non judgmental, and willing to comprehend what the teller is willing to share. In the Soviet systems, open and non-judgmental listeners did not exist. Four of the five participants shared their memories for the first time in this study.

An additional factor that may make the sharing process for survivors more difficult is language. “The language in which Soviet survivors may describe their experiences was never part of the common social lexicon” (Shklarov, 2006, p. 8). The term “Holocaust” did not exist in the Russian language until the 1980’s. Today, many people continue not to know what it means. When I began preparing for data collection, I was somewhat puzzled because I was not able to think of the corresponding Russian translation for the term “Holocaust survivor.” A native
speaker, I could not think of the word. I thought about the word “zhertva” which translates as “victim.” In Russian, however, victim implies someone who had been killed. Another term I thought about was “proshedshiy Holokost” or in English, “went through the Holocaust.” But this term as well, was not the same as a “survivor.” The Yad Vashem research institute used the term “svidetel” a witness, when referring to survivors. I felt that the term witness referred to someone who observed the events rather than someone who actively participated in them. In the end, I decided to use the term “went through the Holocaust” because it was the closest term I could identify. When the interviews began, it became apparent that the survivors also did not know which terminology to use. They each thought about it for a moment and remarked that it did not matter. The overall impression, however, was that we were about to enter an unexplored territory that even the survivors did not know how to address.

An additional issue that the survivors had to address when speaking about the past was their collectivistic background. Soviet survivors spent years in a society that did not value the individual, but instead, focused on the group and the collective. In a study conducted by Matsumoto et al. (1998), researchers looked at cross-national differences in display rules of emotions. They attempted to understand how these differences could be understood in terms of Individualism and Collectivism measured on a personal level. Matsumoto and colleagues have found that Russian individuals, even when compared to Korean and Japanese individuals, who are usually considered to be very collectivistically oriented, exercise more control of their emotional display. They hypothesized that it is more important in the Russian culture to maintain
harmony in self-in-group relationships than in self-other relationships. Hence, not standing out in any way from one’s group is very important in Russian culture. Results of the current study correspond to the findings of Matsumonto and colleagues.

In this study, the five Holocaust survivors attempted to relate their stories in a very controlled fashion. Throughout interviews survivors spoke in a flat voice, avoided eye contact, and did their best to hold back their tears. Some survivors described in a neutral voice the horrific murder of their relatives. They minimized their experiences and frequently compared their experiences to the hardship of other survivors and family members who did not survive the Holocaust. For example, one participant continuously referred to the family members lost, the suffering they had undergone, and how her life, even though she survived a ghetto, was much easier. Another participant overlooked the suffering he had experienced and expressed some guilt about having food while his father died of starvation.

Survivors stated that everyone suffered in the war, and their experiences, no matter how traumatic, were not unique. It appeared that drawing attention to the self was not acceptable for the participants. Several indicated that they grew up surrounded by people who lost relatives. Their own losses, therefore, were not unique. For example, one survivor emphasized that everyone in his school class had a difficult time and lost someone. He referenced his classmates after I briefly reflected that he experienced a lot during the war. I could tell, however, that hearing sympathetic remarks was difficult for the survivor and he proceeded to launch into a long recollection of all the relatives his classmates had lost.
Even though there is a great need to learn about Soviet Holocaust survivors, it is important to keep in mind the survivor’s well being and possible consequences of retelling their past. Considering the difficulties survivors experience telling their stories, it is important to take into consideration their emotional state after the interviews are completed and the researcher leaves. What are the effects of speaking about the past trauma for the first time sixty-five years later and at such elderly age.

For Soviet survivors, speaking about the past while residing in the Soviet Union was not an option (Gitelman, 1990). In addition to the continuous anti-Semitic oppression there was also no way to seek psychological help for those who suffered trauma in the war. Today, psychology is only beginning to develop in Russia (Gitelman, 2005). Freud’s works were published in the Soviet Union in the 1920’s, but like many literary sources that did not coincide with the Soviet teachings, were banned a few years later (Bondarenko, 2004). Following the ban of Freud’s writings, all psychoanalytically oriented writings were banned as well. The overall Soviet approach to psychology was medical. Professional counseling was non-existent. People referred to friends or “healers” to deal with problems they encountered. Western psychology began to slowly penetrate Soviet Union in the 1970’s. It slowly began to be openly discussed and practiced in 1986. Many prominent psychotherapists, including Carl Rogers, visited Russia after Perestroika in 1986 and the following years. By that time, however, most Soviet Holocaust survivors, and Jews in general, were slowly leaving the USSR. As a result, many of them were never exposed to the idea of psychology, especially seeking counseling.
Few helpful options were available for survivors residing in the USSR. Since the field of psychology was underdeveloped, there were no discussions of trauma, counseling, or any type of psychological help. Posttraumatic stress disorder was unheard of and people were expected to continue functioning as if nothing had happened. Survivors did not know that psychological help was possible; and since the Soviet system did not provide it, there was no point seeking it (Shklarov, 2006).

It is reasonable to theorize that when combining a collectivistic mindset, non-existent psychological help, lack of sufficient Holocaust lexicon, and systemic governmental suppression of the Holocaust, that survivors would hesitate to tell their stories. Therefore, when the survivors finally decided to share, they became overwhelmed by their trauma and had to become detached from their emotions while speaking. In a study of Soviet veterans, Gitelman (2005) noted that some of the Soviet veterans he interviewed spoke in a dispassionate way about the murder of their relatives. He attributed their lack of emotion to not witnessing the murder of their relatives, living with the knowledge of their relative’s death for so many years, and efforts to minimize the pain and military or Soviet stoicism. The findings of current study correspond with the finding of Gitelman (2005), on veteran stoicism. All participants in this study spoke in a dispassionate way when recalling the Holocaust. Four of the participants, however, exhibited some emotion by occasionally sobbing, sighing, or taking deep breaths. One survivor, Gregory, who was the only participant who served in the military, remained more stoic than the other participants. In his interviews, he refrained from addressing emotions, spoke in a very detached way, and on one occasion, denied having long-term trauma on the account of being a “strong
man” who served in the military. During instances when he was about to become emotional, he paused, changed the subject, invited me to eat, or asked to take a break. It appeared that showing emotions was not easy for all the survivors. For Gregory, however, it was unacceptable.

Conceptualizing Gregory’s identity as a Soviet Jewish veteran is somewhat difficult. On the one hand his identity has been heavily shaped by his Soviet citizenship and status of WWII veteran. On the other hand, his Jewish ethnicity was a frequent source of discrimination under the Soviet regime. In a study of Soviet WWII veterans, Gitelman (2000), notes that veterans reported that during the war they genuinely believed in, and fought for, the Soviet socialist system. They were not driven to fight by the Holocaust. Many were not aware of the Holocaust that was taking place and fought like any other Soviet citizens. They believed in the Soviet ideology, primarily because they were too young to know about any other governmental system. Most were born between 1915 and 1925. During their service and after the war had ended, however, they were frequently discriminated, denied military decorations, and soon joined a post-WWII anti-Semitic reality. Therefore, their identities continued to shift between patriots of the Soviet motherland Jewishness. Like the veterans in Gitelman’s study, Gregory expressed similar ideas as well.

The complex duality of Soviet citizenship and Judaism has had a profound influence on the identities of Jewish WWII veterans. It becomes apparent that under the Soviet regime there was no room to incorporate the two radically different identities together. The Soviet authorities deprived the Jewish veterans of high army
decorations, which did not permit them to be celebrated in the post-war era. The same authorities had also stripped them from their religious and cultural heritage, not permitting them to practice their ethnic traditions (Gitelman, 2000). It is understandable, therefore, why Gregory could not describe his cultural identity as easily as the other non-veteran participants. Identifying his identity completely in terms of Judaism may have meant downplaying or even rejecting his veteran identity. Therefore, he tended to shift between the two, levitating closer to his veteran identity.

I like to think that the relationship the survivors and I formed influenced their ability to let down their guard to some extent. I anticipated that the survivors would not be very comfortable speaking about their past with an unknown person. Therefore I made efforts to get to know them for several months before the actual interviews began. I believe that the relationships we developed made a big difference in terms of survivors’ ability to share. Several of the women spoke about feeling close to me. They referred to me as Marinochka (an affectionate form for Marina) and stated that they felt that I was like their “daughter” or a “friend close in age.” They developed mother-like behavior such as worrying about my eating habits and future and even offered to introduce me to “a nice Jewish boy.” When I informed one of them that I was in a relationship with a Japanese man she asked many questions, exhibited concern, and wanted to know why I was not dating a fellow Jew. I believe that the close relationship I formed with the survivors allowed them to go into more detail and share more about their past. They were able to open up more, trust me, and take more risks.
Although our relationship may have contributed to these survivors’ readiness to speak, other factors need to be considered as well. A possible explanation to these survivors’ ability to speak openly could potentially be attributed to the many years of residence in the US, and the freedoms the country offers. Survivors may have felt safe to talk about their experiences because the heavy anti-Semitism they experienced throughout their lives had finally disappeared in the US. The sense of safety may have gradually contributed to survivors’ readiness to share.

The survivors’ elderly age may have also nudged them in the direction of speaking up. As Gregory briefly noted in one of the interviews, “today everyone is writing a memoir but there is no one to read it.” Perhaps someone showing interest in their stories prompted some survivors, who did not initially plan to speak, to participate in this study. Glicksman (2003), identified a somewhat similar need to speak among the participants in her study. When surveying the elderly survivor population for current mental health needs, participants frequently, without prompting, spoke about the Holocaust. Glicksman (2002), stressed that the Holocaust had played a far more significant role in the lives of the survivors who had recently moved to the US than those who immigrated soon after the war. The survivors who recently immigrated to the US expressed motivation to speak about the Holocaust with their families. They reported a need “to pass something along to younger generations” (Glicksman et al., 2003, p. 151). What they had to pass on, however, was very different from what Western survivors had. Recent Soviet immigrant survivors had no Jewish education, they were no longer part of the Russian culture, and the Soviet system had betrayed them. What they had to offer was their own
stories of survival. The authors stressed that the fact that the Holocaust played such a
different role in the lives of Soviet Holocaust survivors further implies how important
it is to recognize differences within the survivor population group (Glicksman et al.,
2003).

The results of the current study support the findings of Glicksman et al.
(2003). All participants, without exception, reported that the Holocaust was just the
beginning of their suffering. They referenced multiple instances of anti-Semitism in
school, university, work, and day-to-day life. For them the Holocaust was a painful
event that transitioned into half a century of further discrimination. Participants
reported frequent feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. They reported feeling
like second-class citizens in their own country. They also expressed not knowing how
to battle anti-Semitism in their lives or to help their children who were experiencing
anti-Semitism as well. Moreover, they were not permitted to leave the country that
casted them so much anguish. Reports of continuous discrimination led me to believe
that survivors suffered compounded trauma followed by many years of silence.
Possibly, the traumatic events they had experienced led them to shut down even
more, not trust people with their stories, even their children, and be more guarded. I
believe that although it is somewhat easy to attribute the behaviors of the survivors to
Russian stoicism, their behavior, however, may in fact resemble something more
complex and fragile such as compounded trauma.

Years of Holocaust denial, anti-Semitism, and compounded trauma has left a
significant mark on the lives of the survivors. The trauma experienced during the
Holocaust, and the continuous persecution in the Soviet Union, significantly shaped
the identities of the survivors in this study. Specifically, these experiences shaped their Jewish identities.

Gitelman (2005), noted that most veterans he interviewed indicated that their ethnicity did not matter much in their life before the war. The participants in Gitelman’s study were aware of their ethnicity, but did not experience frequent anti-Semitic incidents before the war. They reported knowing that they were Jewish, but not paying particular attention to the fact. There was some “bytovoi,” or day-to-day anti-Semitism, but they did not consider it serious. As noted by Shklarov (2006), prior to the war all Soviet people had some label, whether it was Belorussian, Azerbaijani, or any other ethnicity. During 1943 to 1944, emphasis on nationality began to increase. Many veterans reported not getting equal treatment in the army.

After the war Jewish veterans were frequently denied war decoration. When they received decorations they were often two degrees lower. When veterans returned home from the war they frequently encountered hostility from their neighbors, especially in Ukraine, who had taken over their housing and frequently refused to leave. For many Jewish veterans the new anti-Semitic attitude and policy aroused feelings of humiliation. Many felt that due to the Holocaust and their own personal contribution to the war effort they should have received some preferred treatment rather than the discrimination they encountered (Gitelman, 2000).

Participants in this study reported similar incidents. Although only one survivor identified as a war veteran, other participants also noted that they, or people they knew, had many difficulties returning to their hometowns. Frequently people who occupied their houses refused to leave and they had to fight to find a place to
live. They were frequently discriminated by other citizens who accused them of taking property that did not belong to them.

Similar to the findings of Gitelman (2005), on minimizing anti-Semitic instances before the war, the participants in this study noted that anti-Semitism before WWII was less frequent. Gitelman hypothesized that the participants in his study potentially minimized anti-Semitic occurrences before the war because they viewed it retrospectively, since even the Soviet authorities admitted to existence of anti-Semitism before WWII and fought against it.

Participants in this study reported poor but happy childhoods. Perhaps the reason for not experiencing as much anti-Semitism at the time is the young age of the participants before the war began. They may have not remembered anti-Semitism because they were too young to understand it. The older participant in the study, Gregory, reported some anti-Semitic incidents, which he felt were not as frequent because he lived in a Jewish part of the town. He did indicate, however, that he experienced instances of anti-Semitism as soon as he joined the Red Army.

Long-term trauma appeared to be a very important factor that shaped the identities of the Soviet Holocaust survivors in this study. Glicksman and Van Haitsma (2002) noted that most of the research conducted on trauma has focused on the effects of a single traumatic incident on an individual. When previous researchers focusing on the elderly have explored trauma, they focused on a single traumatic event in a distant past, or seldom, a recent event. With some individuals, however, the trauma is reoccurring, and its impact is compounded. The Soviet Holocaust survivors in the study reported trauma at an early age and continued traumatic experiences after the
end of the war under the Soviet regime. Participants in this study reported frequent persecution such as incidents of anti-Semitism, confusion about their Jewish identity, extreme stressors like the Chernobyl nuclear explosion, and difficulties adjusting to the US lifestyle as examples of various traumas they experienced. Survivors initially focused on the events of the Holocaust and spent lengthy time describing their past. When describing life under the Soviet regime, however, they spent far more time describing specific anti-Semitic incidents, explaining the systemic governmental oppression, and for the first time, focused on their feelings. I believe that their focus on the post-war life indicates that these events were as impactful and traumatic as the Holocaust.

In this study, I observed an important dynamic of survivors sharing feelings in some instances and holding back on feelings in other cases. When I began collecting data, I expected that the participants might avoid sharing and showing feelings. Primarily because of Soviet culture and some previous studies that showed that overall, survivors avoid feelings in their accounts (Gitelman, 2005). I found that survivors did in fact avoid their feelings, but primarily when speaking about the Holocaust. When they spoke about life after the war, however, they consistently incorporated feelings into their stories. During these sections of the interview, they became more animated and some made eye contact. Survivors consistently reported feeling helpless and hopeless about their life in the Soviet Union. For example, one survivor described her helplessness in not knowing how to help her daughter after she was expelled from the university. She was expelled because the authorities found out that her mother applied for immigration. Some survivors expressed anger and
frustration with the Soviet system. One participant expressed multiple angry comments about her coworkers who mistreated her for years. In a different incident, the same survivor shared feelings of deep sadness when she was not able to openly congratulate a fellow Jewish friend on a Jewish holiday.

I theorize that the survivor’s ability to relate feelings, at least in some situations, may be due to the solidification of their Jewish identity. For Soviet people, Soviet identity has been shifting since the 1990’s. Soviet Jews transitioned from being patriots of USSR, to citizens of Russian, to Jews (Walke, 2009). Jewish life in the Soviet Union meant assimilation to the larger non-Jewish culture. Exercising Jewish culture and traditions was prohibited. Jews lived a paradoxical existence. They were strangers in a country that prohibited them from expressing their own culture, but would not accept them into their own. They were not affiliated politically, religiously, or socially (Shklarov, 2006). They were battling for survival in their own country.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s marked a new era in the lives of Soviet people (Walke, 2007). For Soviet Holocaust survivors it opened the gates of the country that oppressed them for centuries. Immigration to the US meant a new life for the survivors. As the survivors in the study transitioned from the collective Soviet experience to being immigrants in the US, their sense Jewish identity began to shift. Walke, conducted a longitudinal sociological study with Byelorussian Jewish partisans currently residing in St. Petersburg, Russian. Walke, noted that participant’s broken and sometimes contradictory sense of Jewish identity began to shift as the internal political mechanism of the Soviet Union began to change. In the interviews,
participants in Walke’s study focused on four main themes. They described their childhood in the 1920s and 1930s, German occupation in 1941, postwar life, and post Soviet life.

It is interesting to note, that even though Walke (2007), conducted a longitudinal study, the participants, when describing postwar lives, only hinted at “experiences of anti-Semitism” (p. 48). The participants of the current study focused on three of the four themes Walke’s participants noted. They too spoke about their childhood in the 1920s and 1930, German occupation and postwar life. The only difference is that the participants of this study had already immigrated to the US at that point. The main difference between the findings of the two studies was that the participants in this study focused primarily on anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union whereas the participants in Walke’s study cautiously implied it. In fact, at least half of the collected data in this study focused on participant’s experiences of anti-Semitism in the postwar Soviet Union.

It is very important to emphasize once again that for four of the five survivors it was the first time to ever speak about their experiences in the Holocaust. This was an extremely difficult task. They had to overcome some Soviet cultural barriers and focus on the self. They expressed openly negative sentiment for the Soviet authorities. They even shared feelings. This openness, I believe, can be primarily attributed to the comfort they feel in the US. Some noted that since immigration they began observing religious holidays and Jewish traditions. Some became involved in the Jewish community. Overall, they began searching for their active Jewish identity and what it means to be Jewish for them. In the former USSR, it is still not an easy thing to do.
Although Walke (2007), observed a shift in the Jewish identity of some of her participants, Russia continues to be quite a nationalistic country. This leads me to believe that although Jewish culture, tradition, and religion virtually died in the Soviet Union, it can potentially be reinvented in countries and communities that are not shaped primarily by anti-Semitism.

Although many survivors in this study either lost their religious beliefs or never had them to begin with, they were able to connect to some Jewish traditions and rituals in the US. For example, Dora began observing the Sabbath, even though she does not eat kosher food. For her, the Sabbath brings her closer to her grandmother who perished in the Holocaust. Gregory openly shared his belief in a God-like being and Faina now follows some traditions because her daughter practices as a Hassidic Jew.

To summarize, it appears that the Holocaust and anti-Semitism had a profound impact on the lives of the survivors in this study. Constant discrimination, oppression and persecution have had an overpowering affect on the lives of these survivors. They could not exercise their culture and tradition. They had no control about sharing their Jewish ethnicity. Soviet authorities shaped Jewish identities for them. The Soviets virtually erased the Jewish culture in USSR. They downplayed the Jewish losses. They also denied the Jews a Holocaust survivor status. They executed Jewish cultural leaders and prohibited the practice of Jewish religion. Soviet Jews could not, therefore, transmit the Jewish traditions to their own children, because many did not learn what these traditions were.
Despite the constant anti-Semitic oppression, the Soviets insisted on keeping the Jews Jewish by recording their ethnicity in governmental documents. In the absence of all cultural attributes, participants had no other choice but to accept the discriminatory identities the Soviet government created for them. They had to assimilate to the main Soviet culture. Their Jewish appearance, names, and passport-recorded ethnicity, however, still singled them out for discrimination. There was no one to complain to, there was no one in a position of authority that could help them. They were not represented in the government and other positions of power. Worst of all, there was no way to leave.

Today, after more than ten years of living in the US, survivors are slowly beginning to define a Jewish identity of their own. They are trying to remember the cultural traditions of their perished relatives. To mimic some traditions their children have developed and found some connections in their local Jewish communities. After years of residing in the US, where the Holocaust is publically acknowledged, participants reported feeling safe. They are now able to begin speaking about the past. They are also able to develop relationships with researchers, like myself, and for the first time, open up.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study used a small sample of participants in the Detroit area who consented to discuss their experiences and memories. Although participants in this study came from different parts of Ukraine and Belorussian their experiences and memories may be very different than those of survivors who lived in other parts of the Soviet Union.
Another limitation of the study is the amount of data collected. The participants in this study had not previously discussed their experiences with other people. One participant was interviewed in English for an American testimonial archive, but her interview was extremely brief due to her limited English ability. When comparing her archival testimony to this study, however, it can be clearly seen that her account in the current study is much more detailed and covers more aspects of her experience.

The participants in this study spoke about their life for the first time. All participants found it to be an incredibly difficult task. Participants cried frequently during interviews and often asked to stop the interviews and continue later, even though they initially planned to meet with me longer. Hence, preserving participant’s well being became an even more important goal than I initially anticipated. Although I continuously encouraged the participants to consider seeking counseling, for which I committed to pay, it was evident that this was not a consideration they paid much attention to. Mainly because of Soviet attitudes to psychology and the overall cultural norm to remain stoic and undergo all life’s misfortune on ones own. I was positioned in a very difficult situation where I was very interested in the stories the participants had to tell, but had to balance my curiosity and the present research with my participant’s long-term well being. I chose participant’s well being. I made sure to continuously check in with them whether they wished to continue. I stopped the interviews when they wished to stop. Finally, I decided to limit the interviews based on my impression of the psychological state of the survivors. If I felt that the interviews were beginning to take a toll on the participants, I made sure to stop.
Some aspects of the relationship I formed with the survivors could be perceived as a limitation of the study. The relationship between interviewer and interviewee contains some elements of mutual influence. Because four of the participants resided in different parts of the Soviet Union, I probed in various areas of their story equally. When I encountered the last participant, however, Luba, I learned that we were from the same city. Even though I initially planned to probe questions with the same range of experiences like those of previous participants, I now realize that I may have asked more specific questions of Luba at the beginning of the interview, as a way to find out more information about my own family’s background.

The impact on the interviewer by the stories of the interviewees needs to be discussed as well (Greenspan, 1998). In an article about the impact of the Holocaust survivor narratives on the interviewer, Goldenber (2002), addresses the positive and negative impacts of the interviews on the interviewer. The negative impacts include vicarious traumatization or compassion fatigue, difficulty listening to the traumatic narratives, increased fear and vulnerability as a Jew, and a general sadness about the dark side of humanity. I first realized what a difficult project I initiated after the first full interview I conducted. I felt overwhelmed and had to make sure I transcribed the data in small segments. The task became surprisingly more difficult when I had to translate the transcripts. It meant replaying horrific scenes over and over again. I began experiencing frequent nightmares, often resembling the stories shared by the participants. Avid enthusiast of Holocaust literature and film, I had to put aside my interests, as I could not separate the feelings I experienced listening to the survivors from the books and films I was attempting to explore. I had to monitor my mood...
continuously to ensure I was not missing specific themes in the transcripts due to my own difficulties. Therefore, I made an effort to extend the time of my research to ensure I was not focusing on myself rather than the stories.

Finally, there was information that did not make it into the study because it was accumulated from emails and phone conversations after data collection concluded. All participants wished to keep in touch after data collection process was terminated. I learned from the participants and their children that the health of some of the participants had declined significantly, another reminder that Soviet survivors are slowly disappearing.

**Conclusion**

The results of the present study provide findings that are consistent with the limited research available on the topic. Despite the small sample of participants in this study, the results offer a window into the lives of five Soviet Holocaust survivors. Results focus on experiences before and after the Holocaust in the Soviet Union and their Jewish identity. Although the population of Soviet Holocaust survivors is rapidly declining, efforts are presently made to preserve their memories. For example, a number of archives collecting testimonies of Jewish war veterans and survivors has recently appeared online. Online archives such as www.iremember.ru and www.holokost.net have been making an effort to collect testimonies of the Russian citizens, some of whom are Jewish. Most testimonies, however, continue to be collected in English, primarily by the Shoah foundation. Interviews conducted in Russian are still needed. Specific studies in the field of psychology could offer a
better understanding of this population and the multiple traumas they encountered.

The present study offers a modest contribution to the field.

In the present study, I offered insight into the experiences of five Soviet Holocaust survivors under the Soviet regime. I described the struggles that the survivors in this study experienced during the Holocaust, the losses they suffered, and the Nazi atrocities they experienced during the war. Moreover, I attempted to offer a unique account of their lives under the Soviet regime and the anti-Semitic discrimination it imposed. I shared detailed accounts of anti-Semitism at school, work, and daily life are shared. In this study, I offered an understanding of what it means to be a survivor in a country that failed to acknowledge the mass murder of its own citizens. Instead of helping its own people, the Soviet regime isolated the Jews, discriminated against them, prohibited them from leaving, and denied them reparations. Finally, I offered some understanding of what it means to be a Soviet Jewish survivor and to have an identity shaped by trauma and anti-Semitism.
Appendix A

Recruitment Guidelines for Participants

(Written from the perspective of the student-researcher.)

(These guidelines will be provided to Maria, the informant from the Detroit Jewish Community Center who may refer potential participants for participation in the study. Potential participants must meet the following criteria: experienced the Holocaust in USSR, they must have lived in the Soviet Union during the years on 1941-1945 and remained in the Soviet Union until at least 1970’s. My contact with the potential participants may occur in person or by telephone after a referral from Maria.)

Key information to include during contact with potential participants:

- General information including the investigator and primary supervisor and dissertation committee names, affiliations, degrees, and credentials
- Brief introduction to the study including the focus and purpose of the study and general information about the process of the study
- Information regarding the inclusion criteria for the study (e.g., an individual who experienced the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, the republic of residence during the Holocaust, residence after the Holocaust, and age.)
- Request for the informant to contact potential participants to provide information about the study and refer them to contact me directly by telephone.
- In this contact I will ask the informant to provide this information to potential participants on one occasion without any further encouragement to participate, as I would not want their actions to be perceived as coercive

I will then respond to any questions regarding the study and thank the potential participants for their time and assistance.
Appendix B
Initial Contact Script

(Written from the perspective of the student-researcher. Original script will be spoken in Russian.)

(This script is intended to provide guidance for the initial contact with a potential participant. While it may not be followed word for word, all information will be included in the actual contact. I will use this script to communicate with each partner of each potential couple.)

(If the individual provided a phone number, I will call them. If they called me, I will not answer initially, and I will return their call at my soonest convenience. I will not answer the call because it is unlikely that I will be in a position to speak with the participants [e.g., being in a quiet private location where I have access to the script and time to talk to the participants].)

(To protect the confidentiality of the potential participant, if I do not reach the person when I call them, I will leave my name and number for the person to call me back. I will not leave any other information with the person who answers the phone or on an answering machine/voice mail. If I have not heard from the individual after approximately one week, I will again attempt to reach them via the same process. If they do not respond to two messages, I will assume that they are not interested in participating.)

Hello, __________. My name is Marina Shafran, and I received your message regarding possible participation in my research study about the experiences of Soviet Holocaust Survivors during WWII and the Holocaust. Is this a good time for you to talk? (If they indicate that it is, I will continue with the script. If they state that it is not a good time, I will inquire as to a more convenient time for me to call, and I will continue the script during that conversation.) If it is okay with you, I would like to start by describing the study, I will then say more about what will be required of participants, and I will then answer any questions you have about the study.

First of all, I am a doctoral student in counseling psychology at Western Michigan University, and I am being supervised by Dr. Phillip Johnson. This research is for my dissertation. I am studying the experiences of Soviet Holocaust Survivors before, during and after WWII in the Soviet Union. This area has been understudied, and the existing information is extremely limited. This area is both a personal and professional interest for me, as I was born into a family that lost several of its members in the Holocaust in USSR. I believe this research may be important for mental health professionals, historical record, and other professionals.
I am currently seeking potential participants who meet the following criteria:

- Lived in the Soviet Union during WWII and the Holocaust.
- Lost family members in the Holocaust.
- Was in a ghetto or a concentration camp during the war.
- Lived in USSR after the war at least up till 1970’s.
- Immigrated to the United States at some point after 1970’s.
- Individuals who do not have serious mental or emotional concerns (e.g., experiencing thoughts of suicide, currently addicted to drugs or alcohol).
- Individual feels that they can spend time speak of their experiences in the Holocaust without harm to their well-being.

Do you believe that you meet these criteria? *(If the individual answers in the affirmative, I will continue with the script. If not, I will thank them for their time and conclude the conversation.)*

Participation in my study would consist of two or more meetings. I will interview the potential participant, and I will be audio recording these interviews. I will be interested in seeing pictures or other war memorabilia you might be willing to show me. I may also request to observe certain events, although this will be at the sole discretion of the participants.

Now that you know some basic information about the study, what questions do you have for me? *(Answer any questions.)*

Since participation in this study would require a substantial time commitment on your part, I do not want you to commit to participation without a chance to think about it. However, I am interested to know if you believe that you may be interested in learning more about participating. *(If they say no, thank them for their time and conclude the interview. If they say yes, continue with the script.)*

*(At the conclusion of each conversation that makes it to this point, I will close with the following.)* Thank you for speaking with me today. I will contact you in approximately one week in order to follow up regarding your participation in this study. How would you prefer that I contact you? *(I will note their preference.)* If you decide before this time that you are or are not interested in participating please feel free to call me at 269-267-5980. I look forward to speaking with you again soon.
Appendix C

Follow-Up Conversation Script

(Written from the perspective of the student-researcher.)

(This script will guide the conversation that follows the initial contact. Again, this script may not be followed word for word, but I will include all of the information in the conversation. This follow-up will take place one week after the initial contact.)

(I will contact the individual in the manner that they indicated that they prefer. To protect the confidentiality of the potential participant, if I do not reach the person when I call them, I will leave my name and number for the person to call me back. I will not leave any other information with the person who answers the phone or on an answering machine/voice mail. If I have not heard from the individual after approximately one week, I will again attempt to reach them via the same process. If they do not respond to two messages, I will assume that they are not interested in participating.)

Hello, _____________. This is Marina Shafran calling to follow-up about the research study about the experiences of the Soviet Holocaust Survivors in USSR. Is this a good time for you to talk? (If they indicate that it is, I will continue with the script. If they state that it is not a good time, I will inquire as to a more convenient time for me to call, and I will continue the script during that conversation.) Now that you have had a chance to consider participating in the study, I am calling to see if you may be interested in participating. (If they say no, thank them for their time and conclude the interview. If they say yes, continue with the script.) I would like to schedule a meeting with you to review information about the study and. This interview will take approximately one and a half hours. This initial meeting should allow you to get to know me and ask me any questions you might have. (I will then schedule the meeting at a time and place that are mutually convenient for the individual and me.) Great! I am looking forward to meeting you on ____________ at _____________.

(If more than one week will pass between the scheduling of the interview and the actual interview, I will call the individual 24-48 hours before the scheduled interview in order to remind them of our plans.)
Appendix D
Informed Consent Process and Initial Meeting

(Written from the perspective of the student-researcher.)

(This meeting will take place at a private location convenient to the participant. The following script is designed to serve as a template rather than a script to which I will strictly adhere. This meeting will begin with the signing of the consent form, followed by answering any questions participants might have and a brief mental health assessment.)

(If the individual fails to present for the interview, I will call them fifteen minutes after the scheduled appointment. If they are running late and indicate they are on their way, I will wait for them and conduct the meeting when they arrive. If they have forgotten or are unable to make it to the appointment, I will allow one reschedule of the meeting per individual. If they indicate at this time that they are no longer interested in participating, I will thank them for their time.)

(Since this will likely be my first time meeting the participant, I will begin by introducing myself and beginning to build rapport upon entering the environment. I will also set up the recording equipment, although I will not begin recording at this time. I will also indicate at this time that I am not currently recording.)

Hello! It is very nice to meet you. Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today. I would like to begin by giving you an idea what to expect from our meeting today. I am going to start by discussing these consent forms with you. If you sign these forms, we will proceed from there. I will be asking you a number of personal questions about your background and your overall wellbeing. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions. At the end of our interview, I will tell you what you can expect to occur next and allow plenty of time for questions you might have. Do you have any questions before we get started? (I will respond to any questions.)

Okay, I would like to begin by discussing the consent form. Although I am going to give you an opportunity to read over these in their entirety, I would like to stress a few points. First of all, if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from participation at any point throughout the process, without any negative consequences. Should you choose to withdraw, you will be able to choose whether information I have collected from you will be included in the final study. Second, should you decide to participate, all information about you will be anonymous, as is described in more detail in the consent form.

At this time I would like you to read over the form. It is in Russian. (I will allow the participant to read over the consent form. I will be as non-intrusive as possible while they review the consent forms. Once they appear to have finished, I will continue with}
Do you have any questions about the consent form or anything contained within it? (I will answer any questions. I will also observe their body language in order to assess if they seem to be experiencing any reluctance. If they seem to have reservations, I will address these reservations with the participants. If necessary, I will ask them if they need time to consider their participation, and I will reschedule the remainder of the interview. I will also end the interview at this point if they do not wish to continue. As long as they agree to continue their participation, I will continue with the script.) Would you like to participate in this study? (If they agree, I continue with the script. If they do not wish to participate, I will thank them for their time and leave.) Okay, I would like you to sign two copies of the form, and I will do the same. This copy (give the participant one copy signed by themselves and me) is for your records, and I will keep this copy.

My first question for you is kind of a fun one. I would like you to select a pseudonym that I will use on all written and electronic materials in place of your real name. If you have a name in mind now, I will go ahead and note that. If not, I would like for you to select one by the end of this interview.

At this point I would like to begin by asking questions. (I will then proceed through this list of questions. I will use minimal encouragers and prompts throughout the process as necessary.)

- How old are you?
- Do you consider yourself to have any disabilities? If so, please describe the nature of the disability/disabilities.
- Do you have any history of emotional or mental concerns or problems? (As I am asking the questions about mental health, I will use my clinical skills to assess the level of seriousness of any concerns. This portion of the interview may be somewhat similar to a diagnostic interview that I would undertake when conducting an intake at the counseling center. However, I will also be cognizant of my role as a researcher, not a counselor. However, should the need for crisis counseling arise, I will be prepared to provide it, along with a referral to counselor/therapist.)
  - (If yes) Please describe these concerns or problems.
  - How did you deal with or handle these concerns?
  - How would you describe the impact of these concerns on your current functioning?
  (If the potential participant has any history of severe mental health concerns, such as psychosis or diagnosed personality disorders, she will be excluded from participation. Additionally, any potential participant who indicates that psychological problems are having a moderate to severe impact on her daily functioning will not be included as a participant.)
- Do you believe you may have some cognitive impairment problems that may make the interview process difficult for you?
  - (If yes) Please describe these concerns or problems.
• (If the potential participant is experiencing moderate to severe cognitive impairment [e.g., moderate memory loss, difficulties concentrating, difficulties remaining awake for long periods of time, or more serious concerns], they will not be included in this study. Moderate problems could be worsened through the repeated interviews involved in this study. Additionally, any potential participant who indicates that cognitive impairment and memory problems are having a moderate to severe impact on her daily functioning will not be included as a participant.)

• Do you have any current emotional or mental concerns or problems?
  o (If yes) Please describe these concerns or problems.
  o How are you dealing with or handing these concerns?
  o How would you describe the impact of these concerns on your current functioning?

(If the potential participant is experiencing moderate to severe psychological problems [e.g., moderate depression, moderate anxiety, or more serious concerns], they will not be included in this study. Moderate problems could be worsened through the repeated interviews involved in this study. Additionally, any potential participant who indicates that psychological problems are having a moderate to severe impact on her daily functioning will not be included as a participant.)

• Are you currently functioning independently or do you require the help of a guardian?
  (If the potential participant is requiring the need of a guardian to function in a daily life or may require a guardian to sign the consent for them they will not be included in the study. The intent is to keep the best interest of the participants in mind and also allow for the interviews to be confidential and I wish to avoid the need for another person to make the decisions for the participant and/or be involved in the study).

• Have you ever felt suicidal? (If yes, I will conduct a risk assessment, determining when they had these feelings, the seriousness of these feelings, if they ever acted on these feelings, their current feelings, etc. The focus of this assessment will be dual purpose: to insure the safety of the potential participant regardless of their inclusion in this study and to determine whether they are well-adjusted and stable enough to participate in the study. While I am conducting the suicide risk assessment, I will use the skills I gained through working on the Gryphon Place suicide prevention training and through my graduate training. If the potential participant has any history of attempting suicide, they will be excluded from participation in this study since that is the greatest risk factor for completing suicide. Additionally, any potential participant who is currently experiencing any suicidal ideation beyond fleeting thoughts will not be included in the study.)

• Do you have any concerns about your use of alcohol or other drugs?
  o (If yes) Please describe your concerns. (If the potential participant is concerned that they are addicted to or abusing alcohol or other drugs,
I will not include them in this study for their protection and to maintain the integrity of the study.)

- Have you ever been in trouble with the law?
  - (If yes) Please describe the nature of this trouble.
  - What is your legal situation currently?
(If the participant has ever had serious legal problems [e.g., being tried for any violent crimes] or if they have legal issues still pending that could lead to time in jail or prison, they will be excluded from participating in this study.)

Thank you for answering those questions. How was this experience for you? (Respond to their statements. I will be sensitive to the fact that they just shared a great deal of personal information with me, and I will attempt to convey this to the potential participants.)

Okay, now I would be happy to answer any questions you might have of me. These can be any questions at all. My origin, education, etc. (Answer their questions.)

While I am packing up my stuff here, I would like you to fill out this contact form. If you have any questions as you go through it, please feel free to ask me. (I will give them a copy of the contact form.) Are you finished? Great! Thank you. Now what we need to do is schedule our first interviewing time with you. If you know what would be the best time right now please let me know. If you need more time I could call you within the next few days to schedule the best time and location for you to meet. Do you have any questions about it? (Answer questions.) Thank you for answering all of my questions today and meeting me. I will look forward to talking to you again soon.

(At this point I will say goodbye to the participant.)
Appendix E

Consent Form

Western Michigan University
Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology

Principal Investigator: Eric Sauer, Ph.D.
Student Investigator: Marina Shafran, M.A.
Title of Study: Soviet Holocaust Survivors: An Ethnographic Study

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "Soviet Holocaust Survivors: An Ethnographic Study." This project will serve as Marina Shafran’s dissertation study for the requirements of the doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology from Western Michigan University. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

If you decide to participate, you are agreeing to allow Marina Shafran, a doctoral student at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, to collect information from you about your experience as a Holocaust survivor. The information you share with Marina Shafran will be used as part of her dissertation research. You were informed by Marina Shafran that she is the primary researcher and is assisted by her dissertation committee, which is composed of two professors in the Counseling Psychology and Counselor Education program as well as a professor in the Nursing program. Marina will also hire a native Russian speaker who is proficient in English and Russian at a University level to verify that she translated the interviews to English properly. The translator hired will not have access to your information and will not be someone that you know or have a chance to meet in the future.

The goal of the study is to learn about the experiences of Soviet Holocaust survivors who emigrated from USSR and currently reside in the U.S. The purpose is to explore the unique experiences of this population, their memories, stories, and life experiences before the Holocaust, during the Holocaust and afterwards under the Soviet regime.

Participants in this study will include individuals who resided in the Soviet Union during WWII years 1939-1945, and remained in the Soviet Union upon the end of the war for at least twenty years. Participants from Asian republics of USSR
(Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan, and Turkmenistan) will not be included in the study.

Your participation will involve a series of interviews, conversations that will be audio taped and showing of personal artifacts such as letters and photographs. The artifacts will be shared during the interview and will not be taken from you permanently. These will be strictly for display and story illustration purposes. The time involved will vary and may take from three hours to ten hours total and will involve up to five meetings. Your confidentiality will be protected and the recording of your interviews will be stored in a safe and isolated location at Marina Shafran’s house. Only Marina Shafran and the person hired to verify the translations will have access to the material. You should also know that the recorded interviews will be stored at WMU along with the other data I collect from you for at least three years after the study closes. The audio recording I will be making will be used to ensure that I could recall in greater detail what you share with me. I will transcribe your story onto a typed document. The translator I hire will have access to your interview both on tape and on paper to ensure that I translated the interview onto English properly.

Your participation may have potential risks. While harm is not anticipated, it is possible that discussing such personal and emotional information with the researcher could cause you to become emotional or upset. Remembering the past may bring painful memories and I would like to encourage you to take care of yourself during the interviews and not push yourself to tell the story if you feel you are becoming overwhelmed and upset. My first and foremost concern is for your wellbeing and I do not want to see you hurt.

The study has some potential benefits. You will allow me to contribute your stories to a field that does not know much about Soviet survivors. You may benefit from discussing your experiences, if you have not shared your story before. You will also receive a copy of this study and be able to share with your family if you would like. You may also learn more about yourself and your relationships with Soviet life and authorities. Also, you will be contributing to an increased understanding of the phenomenon of Soviet Holocaust survivors.

The data collection will take place in your home for your convenience. However, you are free to change the meeting location to any other location such as the Jewish Community Center conference room for your convenience.

In order to maintain confidentiality your real name will not be used during the interview and data publication. You have the option to choose a pseudo name or be referred to as participants number 1, 2, etc.

In order to protect family members or friends whose names you do not wish to be mentioned in this project you may refer to them by pseudo name as well unless they are deceased.
You may terminate your participation in the study at any time. You may also refuse to answer any question(s). In addition, you have the right to withdraw from the study prior to its completion.

Due to the moderate psychological risk involved in your participation in this study you can feel free not to answer any questions that you chose to as well as questions that you interpret as invasion of your privacy. If during or after your participation, you experience any feelings of discomfort that might arise as a result of the interview you can contact Marina Shafran and she will arrange up to five counseling appointments with a licensed psychologist in the area of your convenience paid by Marina Shafran.

All your demographic information as well as this consent form will be kept in a safe place and will remain separate from verbatim transcripts of your interviews. Marina Shafran will not destroy audiotapes of the interview upon the completion of her Doctoral degree for the purpose of historical record unless you specifically request her to do so.

You chose to participate in this study freely. You are under no obligation to participate. You are legally and ethically capable and competent to participate in this study.

The procedures of the research listed above have been explained to me by Marina Shafran. She can be reached at (269) 267-5980 to answer any questions. Marina Shafran’s dissertation chair, Doctor Phillip Johnson can be reached at (269) 387-5123. I may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study. I have received a copy of this statement for me to keep.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

----------------------------------------------

Participant’s signature  Date
Appendix F
Consent Form Translation in Russian

Западно-Мичиганский Университет
Факультет Психологии и Педагогики

Руководитель исследования: Доктор Ерик Сауер
Исследователь: Марина Шафран

Тема исследования: Советские Евреи, прошедшие Холокост: этнографическое исследование

Вы приглашаетесь для участия в исследовательском проекте на тему "Советские Евреи, прошедшие Холокост: этнографическое исследование". Данный проект является частью докторской диссертации Марини Шафран в области психологии (Западно-Мичиганский Университет). Настоящий документ излагает цель проводимого исследования, требования и процедуры, а также возможные риски и выгоды, вытекающие из участия в исследовании. Пожалуйста, внимательно ознакомьтесь с данным документом. В случае необходимости, задавайте вопросы для получения более подробной информации.

Я, нижеподписавшийся, даю своё согласие на то, чтобы Марина Шафран, кандидат на докторскую степень Западно-Мичиганского Университета г. Каламазу, могла запрашивать у меня информацию касательно меня и моего опыта, как прошедшего Холокост. Полученная от меня информация будет использоваться в диссертации Марини Шафран. Я осведомлен о том, что Марина Шафран является основным исследователем при поддержке диссертационной комиссии, которая состоит из двух профессоров из факультета по психологии и педагогики, а также профессора из департамента по медицинскому уходу. Английский перевод проводимых интервью будет заверен русскоговорящим лицом, владеющим английским языком на продвинутом уровне.

Целью исследования является изучение опыта эмигрантов из СССР, прошедших советский Холокост, в настоящее время проживающих в США. Исследование проводится с тем, чтобы изучить различные историю, воспоминания и жизненный опыт людей перед началом Холокоста, во время и после Холокоста при Советском режиме.
Участниками данного исследования будут являться люди, которые находились в Советском Союзе во время Второй Мировой Войны (1939-1945) и продолжали проживать в Советском Союзе в течение 20 лет после ее окончания. Участники из Азиатских Республик СССР (Казахстан, Кыргызстан, Узбекистан и Туркменистан) не будут включены в исследование.

Моё участие в исследовании будет состоять из серии интервью, которые будут записываться на аудио плёнку, а также предоставления личных материалов, включая письма и фотографии. Время, потраченное на интервью будет различным и, в общей сложности, может варьироваться от 3 до 10 часов и включать до 5 встреч. Конфиденциальность встреч, проводимых в рамках исследования будет обеспечена, а аудио записи интервью будут храниться в безопасном и недоступном месте дома у Марина Шафран. Доступ к материалам будут иметь только Марина Шафран и лицо, нанятое для заверения перевода.

Ваше участие имеет некоторые риски. Вовремя Вашего участия потенциальный стресс может произойти в связи с болезненными воспоминаниями о которых Вы раньше не рассказывали. Я прошу Вас не продолжать интервью если Вы почувствуете что Вы не в силах. Пожалуйста берегите себя.

Плюсы исследования. Благодаря Вам я смогу внести вклад в сферу психологии. Тема Советского Холокоста не исследована в психологии, поэтому Ваш вклад поможет людям узнать о Советском Холокосте.

Для моего удобства сбор информации и встречи будут проходить у меня дома. Однако, в случае необходимости, у меня есть право изменить место проведения интервью на любое другое удобное для меня место расположения, например Центр Еврейской Общины.

В целях обеспечения конфиденциальности, во время интервью и публикации материалов моё настоящее имя будет изменено. У меня есть возможность выбора между вымышленным именем и порядковым номером (участник 1,2 и т.д.).

В целях защиты я буду также использовать вымышленные имена в отношении членов моей семьи и друзей за исключением умерших.

Я могу прекратить участие в исследовании в любое время. Я также могу отказаться отвечать на любой вопрос(ы). Кроме этого, у меня есть право выйти из участия в исследовании до его завершения.

Принимая во внимание умеренный психологический риск, связанный с участием в данном исследовании, я могу отказаться отвечать на любой поставленный вопрос(ы), который(е) я считаю вторжением в мою личную жизнь. Если во время или по окончанию моего участия в исследовании я почувствую какой-либо дискомфорт, возникший как результат проводимых интервью, я могу обратиться к Марине Шафран с тем, чтобы она за свой счет
организовала для меня до 5 консультаций с сертифицированным психологом в удобном для меня месте.

Мои демографические данные и настоящий документ будут храниться в недоступном месте отдельно от транскриптов интервью. Если мною не оговорено иначе, по завершении докторской диссертации Марина Шафран не будет уничтожать аудио записи интервью в целях сохранения исторического материала.

Моё участие в данном исследовании добровольное. У меня нет никаких обязательств для участия. У меня есть законное и этическое право и компетенция для участия в настоящем исследовании.

Марина Шафран осведомила меня о вышеписанном порядке проведения исследования. Я могу задавать ей любые интересующие меня вопросы по тел. (269) 267-5980. Я также могу адресовать вопросы руководителю диссертации Марии Шафран, доктору Филлипу Джонсону по тел. (269) 387-5123. В случае возникновения вопросов во время исследования я также могу обращаться к главе Комитета по институциональному надзору за человеческими субъектами по тел. 269-387-8293 или к вице-президенту по Исследованиям по тел. 269-387-8298. Я получил копию данного документа.

Данный документ был одобрен Комитетом по институциональному надзору за человеческими субъектами (КИНЧС) и может использоваться в течение года с даты со штампом и подписью главы Комитета в верхнем правом углу. Не принимайте участие в исследовании, если прошло больше года с указанной даты со штампом.

С настоящим документом ознакомлен(а). Я осведомлен(а) о возможных рисках и выгодах. Я согласен(а) участвовать в исследовании.

Имя участника

Роспись участника  Дата
Appendix G
Participant Contact Form

Name: ____________________________

Address:

Home phone number: ______________

Cell Phone Number: ______________

Would you prefer that I primarily contact you by phone? ______________

Which number should I call first if I need to call?

What time of day/day of week is best to reach you?

In the event that you are unable to answer your phone, I will leave a message with my name and phone number. In order to protect your confidentiality, I will not include any more details. No one else has access to my voicemail, so you may leave any message you like on my voicemail.

Is it okay if I leave a more detailed message on your voicemail/answering machine that reveals that you are participating in this study?

If I have to leave a message with someone else (not either of you), is it okay if I leave a more detailed message regarding your participation in this study?

You have the right to receive a written summary of the result of the dissertation and you have the right to request the transcripts of your interviews once they are
transcribed. If you would like to receive a written copy of the summary of findings from this dissertation by mail, you will fill in the following information (Optional):

Name: ______________________

Address: ____________________________

City, State, Zip code: ____________________________
Appendix H
Mental Health Provider Referral List

(Written from the perspective of the student-researcher.)

(Prior to interviewing the individual in any given area, I will provide a list of mental health providers in that area to the HSIRB. This is a list that I will potentially use for Detroit. These lists will attempt to include providers known to provide affirmative counseling, as well as low-cost or sliding scale providers. I will also try to provide more individualized lists that fit the participant’s circumstances, such as including a Russian speaking or Yiddish speaking counselor.)

Mental Health Providers: Detroit Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles Silow, Ph.D.</td>
<td>6710 West Maple Road</td>
<td>(248) 661-2999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>West Bloomfield,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michigan 48322</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Family Services of</td>
<td>2245 S. State St., Ann</td>
<td>(734) 769-0209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washtenaw County</td>
<td>Arbor, MI 48104</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Lost cost/sliding scale

Note: It is recommended that you contact providers in order to determine who might be good fit for you. They can also provide information regarding which insurance companies they work with, if any.
Appendix I
Disseminating Results to Participants

(Written from the perspective of the student-researcher.)

(After I have developed the final version of the ethnographic description and analysis [Chapter 4 of my dissertation], I will contact the individuals who wished to see the final results, however they have indicated that they prefer I do so. I will not undergo additional attempts to reach the participants at this time, as I do not need to schedule a meeting with them. The purpose of the call is simply to inform them that I am mailing the reports and to confirm their address, which is probably not likely to have changed since the previous mailing.)

(The following is the script that will guide the phone conversation.) Hello, ____________. This is Marina Shafran. How are you? (Respond appropriately.) Is this a good time for you to talk? (If they indicate that it is, I will continue with the script. If they state that it is not a good time, I will inquire as to a more convenient time for me to call, and I will continue the script during that conversation.) I am really excited to be calling to tell you that I finished my study. I am planning on mailing you the final results via certified mail, and I would like to first confirm your address. (Confirm that the mailing address I have is correct.) Great! I also want to thank you again for all of your participation in this study. It was great getting to know you.

(I will then mail a copy of the results to the participant via certified mail in order to protect their confidentiality. The following will guide the letter that will accompany the case reports.)

Dear ____________ and ____________,

I hope this finds you doing well. I am extremely pleased to be sending you a copy of the final results of my study. I hope you find the results to be interesting, informative, and true to your experiences. I am extremely appreciative of all of the time and energy you spent with me. This study truly would not have been the same without you.

I wish you the best!

Marina Shafran, PhD
Appendix J
Participant Protection Guidelines

The researcher will include the following considerations if she begins to question whether the process of undergoing the research may be harming a participant.

1. If a general concern arises during the process of data collection and analysis, I will consult with the dissertation supervisor and committee before engaging with the participant again.

2. If a concern arises during a data collection activity, such as an interview, I will use my best clinical judgment. I will either stop the data collection activity immediately, or I will finish as soon as is reasonable without causing a disruption.

3. If a concern occurs during an interview, I may provide crisis counseling and/or provide a mental health provider referral list (see Appendix H) to the participant.

4. I will use my clinical judgment in consultation with the dissertation supervisor about appropriate next steps, which could involve:
   a. Terminating involvement with the individual.
   b. Lessening the involvement of the individual in the current research, which could include changing the frequency of interviews.
   c. Making no changes to the involvement of the individual.

5. If the individual’s involvement is lessened or terminated, the reason for this change will be explained to the individual by the researcher. It would be preferable to process this change in person, if possible.

6. If the researcher decides to discontinue data collection with an individual, the individual will be permitted to determine whether the data collected from them previously can be included in the data analysis.

If there are any negative consequences for the participant, I will file an adverse effects report with the HSIRB.
APPENDIX K

HSIRB Letter of Approval

Date: September 2, 2009

To: Phillip Johnson, Principal Investigator
    Marina Shafran, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number:

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Soviet Holocaust Survivors: An Ethnographic Study” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: September 2, 2010


Press.


*Poetics Today 27* (2), 275-95.


