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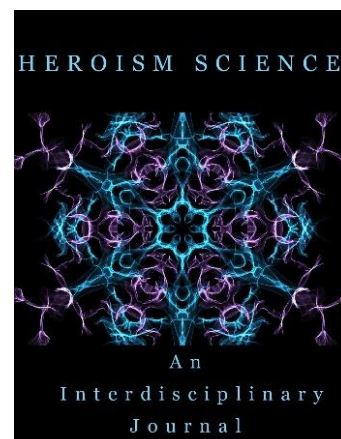
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Prosocialization: Lessons Learned from the Upbringing of Holocaust Heroes



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ABSTRACT: Research on factors associated with heroic rescue during the Holocaust suggest that the parenting and upbringing of the rescuer was significant (Ganz, 1993; Oliner & Oliner, 1988). The research suggests that heroic altruism during the Holocaust was but a natural extension of the rescuers' integrated moral identities reflecting deep-seated instincts, predispositions, and habitual patterns established in early upbringing according to moral parenting practices, that when acted upon conferred the deepest feelings of meaning, life satisfaction, and sustained well-being across the life-span. This paper explores the implications of these and other findings from the research on heroism during the Holocaust, specifically, how can we apply the lessons learned from the parenting of Holocaust heroes to parenting today? Prosocialization, a novel approach to parenting derived from the research on moral exemplarity, defined as parenting with the conscious intention of raising caring, morally courageous kids, is introduced.

KEYWORDS: *Rescue, Holocaust Rescue, Heroic Altruism, Heroism, Holocaust Heroism, Prosocialization, Socialization, Moral Exemplarity*

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE UPBRINGING OF HOLOCAUST HEROES

On October 5th, 1942, on the outskirts of the city of Dubno, Ukraine, five thousand Jews were mass murdered by the Nazi mobile killing unit SS Einsatzgruppe. German civilian contractor Hermann “Fritz” Graebe whose workplace was nearby was alerted by his foreman and drove to the site. Three years later, at the Nuremberg Trials, Graebe would be the only German citizen to voluntarily testify against the Nazis incurring the wrath of his fellow German neighbors, forcing him and his family to emigrate to the US in 1948.

Included in his testimony, Graebe would describe what he witnessed during the 15 minutes he stood by the pit (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann_Friedrich_Graebe):

My foreman and I went directly to the pits. Nobody bothered us. Now I heard rifle shots in quick succession from behind one of the earth mounds. The people who had got off the trucks - men, women and children of all ages - had to undress upon the order of an SS man who carried a riding or dog whip. They had to put down their clothes in fixed places, sorted according to shoes, top clothing and undergarments. I saw heaps of shoes of about 800 to 1000 pairs, great piles of under-linen and clothing. Without screaming or weeping these people undressed, stood around in family groups, kissed each other, said farewells, and waited for a sign from another SS man, who stood near the pit, also with a whip in his hand. During the fifteen minutes I stood near, I heard no complaint or plea for mercy. I watched a family of about eight persons, a man and a woman both of about fifty, with their children of about twenty to twenty-four, and two grown-up daughters about twenty-eight or twenty-nine. An old woman with snow white hair was holding a one-year-old child in her arms and singing to it and tickling it. The child was cooing with delight. The parents were looking on with tears in their eyes. The father was holding the hand of a boy about ten years old and speaking to him softly; the boy was fighting his tears. The father pointed to the sky, stroked his head and seemed to explain something to him. At that moment the SS man at the pit started shouting something to his comrade. The latter counted off about twenty persons and instructed them to go behind the earth mound. Among them was the family I have just mentioned.

In that moment, Graebe thought of his own 12-year-old-son, and he heard his mother’s voice asking, “And Fritz, what would *you* do?” This question was one that Fritz Graebe’s mother Louise had posed numerous times throughout his childhood, one that would shape the

development of his moral identity, and one that, ultimately, would compel him to risk his own and his family's lives multiple times to take heroic action to save the lives of hundreds of Jews.

Like industrialist Oscar Schindler, Graebe used his role as contractor to invent bogus projects and needs for inflated numbers of workers – taking Jews off of trains and out of concentration camps and put them to work on his projects, sometimes putting them on trains to nowhere – ghost factories that he had set up in the far reaches of Ukraine – just to get Jews out of harm's way. The day the war ended, there were 5000 Jews on his payroll.

After WWII the focus of social psychological research centered on understanding the vicissitudes of authoritarianism and evil. It wasn't until 1963, nearly 20 years after the war ended, that Rabbi Harold Schulweis, hoping to identify stable personality traits or characteristics associated with altruism, founded the *Institute for Righteous Acts* to search out and conduct interviews with the rescuers, many of whom would go on to be honored as *The Righteous Among The Nations* by Yad Vashem, *The Holocaust Remembrance Center*. One of the first naturalistic studies of Holocaust rescue was conducted by Perry London who found three factors characterizing rescuers: a spirit of adventurousness; social marginality; and the influence of a moral parental model (London, 1970).

Indeed, Louise Kinkle Graebe was a working class, very religious Lutheran woman who articulated and modelled strong egalitarian values, social responsibility, empathy, and moral courage. Graebe biographer Presbyterian pastor Douglas Huneke describes Frau Graebe as weaving biblical teachings and parables of compassion and kindness such as *The Golden Rule* and *The Good Samaritan* into her parenting in a very homey way (Huneke, 1981/82).

Of his mother, Graebe has said that she knew right and wrong; she accepted people for their own worth, not because someone else had told her about or spoke against them. For instance, despite intense family pressure, Louise insisted on visiting a cousin who had been imprisoned, and when young Fritz asked her why, she explained what it meant to have empathy and compassion, characteristically turning the discussion back to him asking, “And Fritz, what would *you* do?” (Huneke, 1985).

As an answer to her question, Graebe’s choice to risk his own and his family’s life to rescue Jews during World War II speaks volumes. While it is impossible to know definitively the extent to which his mother’s moral modeling impacted Graebe’s decision to act heroically, research on factors associated with rescue during the Holocaust suggest that the parenting and upbringing of the rescuer was significant (Ganz, 1993; Oliner & Oliner, 1988). This paper explores the implications of the findings from the research, specifically, how can we apply the lessons learned from the parenting of Holocaust heroes to parenting today? Regrettably, as we confront the global escalation of authoritarianism and the decline of human decency, especially in Western Democracy, opportunities to take morally courageous action to help the “other” are steadily increasing. Hence, when we ourselves are faced with the more daunting question “What will I do” or “What will my children do?” we can have a better path to arrive at the “right” answer.

RESEARCH ON WWII RESCUERS

Subsequent to London’s early study, more robust, systematic research on WWII rescuers and bystanders was conducted focusing on demographic, situational, socialization, and personality factors. For a more in-depth review see Fagin-Jones (2017) in Allison, Goethals, and

Kramer's (2017) *Handbook of Heroism and Heroic Leadership*. In brief, the findings suggest that on average, the rescuers – who represented approximately one half of one percent of the entire Nazi occupied population – were a demographically heterogeneous population who possessed a strong dispositional trend characterized by care-based moral courage manifesting in heroic altruism.

Although certain situational factors such as wartime living arrangements, previous experience with Jews, and the opportunity to help were significant, prosocial personality characteristics distinguished a group of verified rescuers from bystanders over and above these situational factors correctly classifying over 96% of subjects (Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007). Notably, in another study that included a comparison group of non-Jewish pre-war immigrants, the bystanders scored significantly lower than both the rescuers and the comparison group on measures of social responsibility and risk-taking suggesting that bystanders were likely less predisposed to take risks to help others dependent on them because “it’s the right thing to do” (Midlarsky, Fagin-Jones, & Corley, 2005).

What determined both the exceptional *other*-oriented dispositions of the rescuers and the more *self*-oriented dispositions of many bystanders? The research strongly suggest that *both* the caring, morally courageous character of the rescuers *as well as* the bystanders’ self-orientation was rooted in their upbringing, leading Holocaust rescue researchers Samuel and Pearl Oliner to conclude, “Rescuers participation was not determined by circumstances but their own personal qualities...chance sometimes provided rescuers with an opportunity to help, but it was the values learned from their parents which prompted and sustained their involvement.” (Oliner & Oliner, 1988, p. 142).

Indeed, in many cases, rescuers in the Oliners' sample came from more cohesive families and had more affectionate parents who valued inclusion, used victim-centered and inductive discipline techniques, and who were prosocial role models who did not endorse stereotypes of Jews. In contrast, the bystanders' families were generally less cohesive. Their parents tended to be less affectionate, were more likely to use authoritarian power-based discipline and occasional non-behavior related aggression; to model conventional norms and stereotypical attitudes toward Jews and other out-groups (Oliner & Oliner, 1988).

The Oliners' findings were consistent with London's earlier work in which almost all rescuers were found to have very strong identifications with at least one parent. The parent with whom the rescuers held very strong identifications tended to be very strong moralists, not necessarily religious, but "holding very strong opinions on moral issues and serving as a model of moral conduct.... Some kind of active moralism seemed characteristic of all the rescuers and usually was related to parental morality rather than a to a specific kind of ideology. The Dutch minister saw himself motivated by a transcendental religious doctrine, the German and Belgian rescuers by clearly social kinds of morality, all were acting out roles which their moral parental models would have lauded on the same grounds," (London, 1970, p. 247-248).

Subsequent to this early naturalistic study, Ganz (1993), using a data set that built on the extensiveness, specificity and format of the Oliners' questionnaire, empirically examined the combined effect of a set of family upbringing variables to distinguish rescuers from bystanders correctly classified almost 80% of subjects – finding the two strongest predictors to be family cohesiveness, defined as the degree of commitment, help and support family members provide for one another, and victim-centered discipline, defined as the parents encouraging the child's concern for and reparation of the harm or hurt feelings of the victim.

In addition, the perception of parents' altruistic values; an inductive as opposed to a power-assertive or love-withdrawal approach to parental discipline; parental affection, and the extent to which the father was recalled as being an altruistic role model significantly differentiated the rescuers from the bystanders. Ganz's findings reflecting the meaning of differences in parental upbringing between Holocaust rescuers and bystanders were markedly consistent with the Oliners' (1988) thus increasing both the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

With respect to family cohesion, strong family attachments were the cornerstone marking one of four types of *extensive* orientations (other-oriented qualities of commitment and care) in the Oliners' rescue sample. These early cohesive family bonds fostered other-oriented relationships based on inclusion, caring, openness and dependability. The family unit as a relational model, once internalized, became a source of psychological ego strength which, in turn, engendered the development of independence, risk-taking, decisiveness, and tolerance (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). More bystanders, on the other hand, identified by the Oliners as *constricted* (or more self-oriented) recalled a lack of both early and later familial closeness that fostered a sense of impotence, indecisiveness, and passivity.

An exemplar of psychological ego strength was Dutch social worker Marion Pritchard. Pritchard saved 150 Dutch Jews, mostly children. At age 19, along with other students, mostly members of the Dutch Resistance, she was arrested by the Nazis. She recalled, "I always thought I had my mother's ability to ignore fear, until I spent seven months in jail." Still, upon her release Pritchard persisted in her rescue activity. In the Spring of 1942, Pritchard saw Nazis loading children, ages 2 to 8, onto trucks. "I was shocked and in tears," Pritchard said, "and after that I knew my rescue work was more important than anything else I might be doing," (Burns,

<http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/saviors/others/marion-pritchard-dutch-savior/>). In order to protect the Jews she was hiding, she was forced to shoot and kill a Dutch Nazi policeman, which haunted her. Pritchard credited her liberal parents with instilling in her a sense of justice and moral resolve. Encouraged to express her feelings and to expect honest answers from her parents, Pritchard recalled being raised with respect and consideration from the time she was born, and in turn, grew up treating other people the same way.

A second subgroup of the Oliners' rescuers were socialized toward an extensive orientation from having had close relationships with Jews and may have been influenced by role models' tolerant attitudes toward Jews. Another subgroup of constricted bystanders was defined by seeing Jews as distant irrelevant objects. One Polish rescuer reported, "Four Jews stayed with me from 1942. Two were friends from secondary school. They had been in touch with my mother. She had arranged to get them out of the Czestochowa Ghetto and later handed them over to me" (Oliner & Oliner, 1988, p. 135).

A third group of rescuers characterized by broad social commitments were socialized to stand up for their beliefs and to engage in socially responsible behaviors- these rescuers more likely to feel abstractly connected to Jews as an extension of a sustained commitment to ensuring the welfare of society. By contrast, bystanders were socialized to avoid social commitments and responsibility. Dutch rescuer Corrie ten Boom was raised by her father, Casper and her mother Cor, who were devout Protestants in the Dutch Reformed Church which "protested Nazi persecution of Jews as an injustice to fellow human beings and an affront to divine authority. The Ten Boom family strongly believed that people were equal before God," and they fostered many poor and disabled children prior to the war

(<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10006914>). During the war, Corrie and

her family participated in resistance efforts hiding Jews in their home in Haarlem. Among thirty family members who were arrested by the Gestapo, Corrie and her sister Betsie were sent to the Ravensbruck concentration camp, where Betsie died. After the war, Corrie established rehabilitation centers for survivors, the poor, and individuals with disabilities and thereafter spent the remainder of her life travelling the world advocating for social justice.

Lastly a fourth group of rescuers were egalitarians who derived their sense of responsibility to others from their strong feelings of psychological similarity to humankind generally and empathy for people in pain. A fourth subgroup of bystanders were true ethnocentrics and socialized to experience others as alien to them. The parents of these bystanders were more likely to demonize Jews and to believe that Jews were responsible for their own fate. One German rescuer recalled that his mother taught him never to regard others as inferiors. “She would never look down on people. She would always appreciate what people were worth, and it didn’t matter whether they were poor or whatever.” His father “taught me never to look down on people. Be honest and straightforward. See other people as your friends. All people are people” (Oliner & Oliner, p. 143). Whereas one bystander recalled, “My father didn’t ‘discuss’ Jews...he would make some remarks, but they weren’t always flattering. I think they were always based on fact...I don’t believe there was much Anti-Semitism in Holland. There were some remarks, and I still believe Jews do a lot of those things to deserve those remarks...to some extent they have brought the wrath of the world upon themselves, and still do (Oliner & Oliner, 1988, p. 154).

Hence, the rescuers’ and the bystanders’ attitudes and actions were shaped by their pre-WWII childhood upbringing and, the research suggests, persisted thereafter. The rescuers’ upbringing likely catalyzed the development of an integrated moral identity – where an

individual's identity is meaningfully predicated upon internalized moral attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that over time become integrated into the core self. Assor (2012) asserts that highly moral behavior crucially depends upon integrated moral motivation, or the propensity to act morally because the very act is experienced as reflecting one's core self. Indeed, Holocaust rescue researcher Eva Fogelman has labeled the rescuers' moral identities as "The Rescuer Self." Fogelman states, "Through the rescuing relationship the values and inner most core of the rescuer were expressed. That core was nurtured in childhood, came to full expression during the Holocaust, and then continued in the post-war years as an integral part of the rescuer's identity, in essence a rescuer self."

Research examining WWII rescuers and bystanders in later life reveals that rescuers were in fact still volunteering as older adults. Despite reporting overall poorer health and fewer resources than bystanders in later life, older rescuers reported experiencing higher levels of life satisfaction than bystanders (Midlarsky, 1985). Hence the rescuers' integrated moral identities shaped in childhood and enacted during World War II persisted over the life span and may be associated with increased life satisfaction, suggesting that people who are raised by parents who prioritize familial closeness, role model extensivity and tolerance, promote social responsibility, and teach empathy for all people – especially "others" in pain, engage in a more deeply meaningful and transcendent existence that manifests in sustained well-being across the life span (Fagin-Jones, 2018).

Reflecting the "rescuer self" one rescuer interviewed by the Oliners in later life stated, "I did everything from my heart. I didn't think about getting something for it. My father taught me to be this way. I still feel the same way now. I cannot refuse if somebody needs something. That's why I still help people. I'll do it until I don't have the strength to do it anymore" (Oliner

& Oliner, 1988, p.227). That these behaviors came so naturally to the rescuers is evidenced by rescuers' common reply when asked the question *why* they did what they did - that they "had no choice but to help." In most cases rescuers eschewed the title of "hero" feeling that they "didn't do enough." Such a feeling prompted Ukrainian Baptist rescuer Ivan Jaciuk to state:

I am told that a tree will be planted in my honor in that majestic city of Jerusalem...but I am not worthy of it or of any honor...There is a blot on my conscience. Perhaps I could have done more for your people during those terrible days when I saw your starved brethren carrying heavy stones and begging for a crumb of bread from passersby (Palidel, 1993, p. 277).

What can be learned then from the exceptional moral exemplarity of Ivan Jaciuk and these extraordinary ordinary individuals? The research suggests that heroic altruism during the Holocaust was but a natural extension of rescuers' integrated moral identities reflecting deep-seated instincts, predispositions, and habitual patterns established in early upbringing according to moral parenting practices, that when acted upon conferred the deepest feelings of meaning, life satisfaction, and sustained well-being across the life-span.

Prosocialization

Parenting is considered the most impactful factor on child social development (Padilla-Walker, 2014). Prosocialization, an approach to parenting derived largely from the research on moral exemplarity, is defined as *parenting with the conscious intention of raising caring, morally courageous kids*. The theory of prosocialization is based partly on the research on prosocial development but primarily on the empirical findings from studies on moral exemplars, in this case, the non-Jewish rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust.

Consistent with the Oliners' (1988) and Ganz's (1993) findings on the importance of family closeness and cohesiveness, prosocialization should focus primarily on the early childhood development of secure base attachments and empathic concern. The establishment of secure base attachments have been associated with prosocial development and behavior (Shaver & Mikuliner, 2012). Theoretically, a person who internalizes a secure base attachment more likely to experience attain the vitally important psychosocial developmental foundation of basic safety and basic trust (Erikson, 1950). Internalizing a base of safety and trust protects against anxiety and avoidance and promotes the foundation for courageous action and risk-taking. In addition, strong moral parental role modeling, via parental engagement in moral action on behalf of the welfare of the other, vicarious learning, reinforcement, and victim-centered discipline will provide the optimal environment for a child to internalize a sense of empathy for the other as well as a sense of self-efficacy and social responsibility (Allison & Goethals, 2011).

Discipline techniques that focus on induction, or reasoning and explanation, have been associated with prosocial development (Hoffman, 2000). More rescuers than bystanders' parents used clear, emotionally charged explanations, less punishment, and more reasoning in response to their mistakes. Furthermore, more rescuers' parents encouraged them to make reparations for the harm they caused, whereas more bystanders' parents were more likely to use gratuitous aggression and were less likely to communicated implicitly both the presumption of error than the evil intent of the child. Perhaps most importantly, in choosing inductive discipline rather than power-assertive approaches, the rescuers' parents modelled benign behavior by the powerful over the vulnerable, which may have been internalized by the rescuers and applied in their courageous altruism toward vulnerable Jews during the Holocaust.

In addition to parenting styles and values steeped in moral, other-oriented values, other parenting techniques, such as autonomy support practices may be implemented. Autonomy support practices (Assor, 2012; Roth & Assor 2012) have been associated with prosocial behavior in children and teens who report feeling a stronger sense of volition, happier, and more alive; demonstrate improved affect regulation, and provide empathic support to others in need. Examples of autonomy support practices include fostering inner-directed valuing processes, taking the child's perspective, support of reflective values and goal examination, providing rationales for expected behaviors, demonstrating positive valuing of modelled expected behaviors (Assor, 2012; Roth & Assor, 2000).

Parental modeling of and teaching emotional and self-regulation, thought by Greene and Van Tongeren (2012) to be the “master virtue” appears to have been vitally important in the choice to undertake and sustain heroic action. For no rescuer reported feeling an absence of fear. On the contrary, rescuers reported having an ongoing awareness of the constant danger and ever-increasing existential threat posed by the Nazis, but they possessed the emotion-regulation capacity to manage feelings of chronic terror and to remain efficacious in their heroic action often over a period of two to five years.

As genocide persists into the 21st century and authoritarianism infects Western Democracies as evidenced by the detaining and inhumane practices of forced separation of child immigrants from their parents by the United States government, the heroism science community is called to reflect on the question Fritz Graebe's mother posed to him time and time again during his upbringing: “What will *we* do?” Prosocialization offers a path providing today's parents with the insights and parenting tools learned from moral exemplars, notably, those righteous few who risked, and in some cases like Betsie ten Boom sacrificed, her and their

family's lives during the Holocaust to help the "other." In so doing, parents can morally equip their children with the courage and care necessary to take heroic action in the future and thereby honor the memorable commandment of Yehuda Bauer of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum "*Thou shalt not be a perpetrator; thou shall not be a victim; and thou shall never, but never, be a bystander.*"

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.