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Leadership Within the Camps: A Study of Holocaust Resistance

By

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University of Richmond

Richmond, VA

April, 1997
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Introduction

The main goal of my research project will be to gain an understanding of leadership within the Jewish community in Nazi concentration camps. My research will focus on the situational factors that affected these Jews, and will strive to explain why certain prisoners were able to emerge as leaders despite the forces working against them.

The primary question underlying my research is, "What environmental factors, individual characteristics, behaviors, beliefs, and socialization factors enabled or ignited certain Jews to emerge as leaders within the concentration camps during World War II?". The Jews that were held as prisoner in these camps were inflicted with physical, emotional, and spiritual pain, and it is this type of situation where perhaps leadership is most needed, and at the same time perhaps the hardest to come by. This study is significant in that it could reveal valuable information concerning why, how, and what types of leaders emerge in highly adverse and life threatening situations, and how some of these leaders were able to achieve success.

Literature Review

During the period of World War II, the Nazi's used concentration camps as a means for bringing about the extermination of the Jewish population. In these death camps, Jews were over-worked, starved, abused, poisoned, and executed. In this time of hardship and fear, men, women, and children struggled to save their own lives, and the lives of their loved ones.

In such camps, there were several thousand people from different countries and social strata all herded together in a small space, and living under the burden of great
hardships. In this “class-less” society, certain Jews exhibited leadership qualities, and these individuals were looked to for guidance, for hope, and for survival. Most scholars agree that the emergence of such leaders was based not on positional power nor wealth, but rather on character, behavior, and true leadership ability. Due to the life and death choices that confronted the prisoners, it was necessary that group status be based upon subjective (personality) and not objective (family status) variables. As one scholar explains, “If a group member’s personality best suited her to become a leader, she did so for the benefit of the entire group.”

The extreme environmental conditions of the camps reduced men to what they really were—morally worthy or worthless, good or evil, a leader or a follower. In such life and death situations, individuals showed the true patterns of behavior that formed the basis of his/her personality. In the absence of formal power, the leaders that emerged were those individuals who were willing and able to assume leadership responsibility. An examination of leadership within the Jewish community in Nazi concentration camps should reveal specific characteristics, roles, and functions attributed to these leaders. Such an examination is significant in that it will serve to highlight the factors that are most fundamental to leadership under such extreme circumstances.

There are a number of issues that emerge from the review of existing literature on Jewish leadership within the camps. The first of these involves identifying the types of

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behaviors, actions, and attitudes that made an individual stand out as a leader. Although there is no set list of ‘leader’ behaviors, most scholars indicate that leadership in the camps was in some way directly related to acts of resistance against the Nazis.

Leadership within the camps was initiated by those Jews who led and inspired acts of resistance; however, many scholars have different opinions concerning the actions that constitute resistance. For example, Raul Hilberg, author of The Destruction of the European Jews, defines resistance as “opposition to the perpetrator.” According to Hilberg, “alleviation” techniques such as smuggling food were not acts of resistance since they did not stem Nazi advance. In contrast to this view is the work of scholar M. Dworzecki. Dworzecki states that “Resistance of the anonymous masses must be affirmed in terms of how they held on to their humanity, of their manifestations of solidarity, mutual help, self-sacrifice, and that whole constellation of manifestations subsumed under the simple heading of ‘good deeds’.”

Many scholars agree with Dworzecki’s view of resistance. Roger S. Gottlieb argues that in an environment that was so dedicated to getting the Jews to accept death, “a choice of life was itself an act of resistance.” Gottlieb argues that resistance is an act “motivated by the intention to thwart, limit, or end the exercise of power of the oppressive group”, and insists that this resistance includes everything from armed warfare to simply

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6 Ibid (p40).
staying alert and maintaining an active mentality\textsuperscript{7}. Similarly, Swiss historian Werner Rings claims that what counts “is not the level of violence, but the motivations and objectives of the resisters”\textsuperscript{8}. Rings classified Jewish resistance into five different levels, ranging from mere gestures to armed combat\textsuperscript{9}.

Based upon these more inclusive views of resistance, experts have come to view leaders within the camps as those prisoners who not only fought to save the lives of their fellow Jews, but also those whose actions, however small, strengthened another prisoner’s will to live. While some prisoners led organized resistance movements against the German’s, there were others whose “resistance” was perhaps less noticeable, but no less significant. Much of the existing research on Jewish resistance seems to focus on the organized revolts and armed combat, and many researchers have overlooked the more hidden acts of resistance. In doing so, much of the current literature has ignored those individuals who became leaders simply by sharing their bread, comforting a stranger, or holding a prayer service.

German authorities had forbidden any form of cultural, social, or religious activity among the prisoners in an attempt to further the feelings of isolation and dehumanization that the Jews had experienced upon arrival into the camps. Despite such restrictions, leaders risked punishment and death to make such activities come alive. Considering that the Jews were for the most part powerless against the Germans, group solidarity became their most effective form of resistance, in that such actions strengthened their will to live,

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid (p34).
\textsuperscript{8} Marrus, Michael R. “Jewish Resistance to the Holocaust”. Journal of Contemporary History. 1995. (p92).
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid (p92).
enhanced their group unity, and planted the seeds of rebellion\textsuperscript{10}. In fact, many scholars believe that these more hidden acts of leadership were in fact more vital to prisoner survival than those more overt acts of resistance.

Cultural activity among the prisoners served as one of the main forms of resistance. The songs and poems that the prisoners wrote, and the plays and poetry readings that they organized "served to counteract the Nazi's intentions and express opposition"\textsuperscript{11}.

Felicja Karay conducted a case study of cultural life among prisoners in the Jewish forced labor camp at Skarzysko-Kamienna. Karay found that cultural activity seemed to "evolve by itself out of the need to preserve one's sanity and strengthen the will to live"\textsuperscript{12}. For example, a yearning for a feeling of safety and togetherness led many prisoners to partake in spontaneous community singing while lying in the barracks at night. Similarly, the need for entertainment and consolation also produced a number of "artists" who composed their own songs, and went from barrack to barrack singing their tunes. Karay's survey of the surviving material found that many of these songs were about prison life, and were songs of social protest.

Other uniting forms of cultural activity that Karay found were the use of the couplet, and stage performances. Karay discovered that almost every barrack had its own unnamed poet whose couplets served as another "weapon in the war of survival"\textsuperscript{13}.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid (p1).
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid (p7).
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid (13).
Passed around the camp through word of mouth, these couplets served to improve morale and relieve monotony, while at the same time served as a form of “daily press”\textsuperscript{14}. Stage performances and “concerts” were another cultural activity that united the prisoners at Skarzysko-Kamienna. As one prisoner recalls, “Those were the best moments of my life in the camp. They encouraged us to continue to fight for our survival, and allowed us to find an escape from the humiliation, pain, and despondency”\textsuperscript{15}.

Karay concluded that cultural activities at the Skarzysko-Kamienna camp fulfilled several functions in the lives of the prisoners. For the performers and artists, cultural activity was often a source of income, and therefore a weapon in the war of physical survival. Psychologically, cultural activity was “a means of escaping from reality, an outlet for the constant frustration and fear, and a source of hope strengthening the will to keep fighting to stay alive”\textsuperscript{16}. Many prisoners who took part in these cultural activities discovered unknown talents, thereby rekindling their faith in themselves and in their humanity.

Social activity was another primary form of resistance. Most scholars have found that group bonds were “the most important element helping new prisoners to avoid plummeting into the depths of isolation and disorientation”\textsuperscript{17}. Mutual assistance groups formed in virtually all camps and among all types of inmates, and it is held that without such groups an individual could not have survived life under such harsh conditions\textsuperscript{18}.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid (13).
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid (p22).
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid (p23).
\textsuperscript{17} Pingel (p176).
\textsuperscript{18} Baumel (p67).
Even less formally than in mutual assistance groups, prisoners often gathered socially in their barracks to discuss current problems, or to simply spend time together in an attempt to forget about the surrounding reality\(^{19}\).

Judith Baumel studied a group of ten young women which formed in the Plaszow labor camp in Poland in 1943. Known as the Zehnnerschaft, these women were connected (like most mutual assistance groups) by three main factors, including similar schooling, family ties, and a common geographical origin. Baumel found that these girls became like an extended family, forming ‘mother’/’daughter’ relationships, and caring collectively for all group members. In addition to caring for the members of their own ‘family’, these girls were also willing to extend assistance to non-group member prisoners.

The protection of such a group was necessary for acts of assistance, such as treating an injured inmate, sharing food with other prisoners, or arranging for a transfer to an easier work gang\(^ {20}\). This collective struggle for survival became an important manifestation of resistance. Prisoners who worked together were able to offer words of encouragement, point out the most dangerous SS men, share an additional slice of bread, and strengthen others’ resolve to survive\(^ {21}\). Those prisoners who did not receive this or similar help had to compensate for that deficiency by increasing his/her own output, both physically and mentally.

Religious activity served as the third form of hidden resistance within the camps. Although all forms of religious observance were banned, Jews did manage to maintain

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\(^{20}\) Pingel (p169).  
\(^{21}\) Strezelecka (p408).
some elements of tradition. Oftentimes, prisoners gathered together in the barracks to pray and sing religious songs. Periodically, there were minyans (quorum for prayer services) for public prayers, and seders (holiday feasts) were organized for events such as Passover\textsuperscript{22}. Such religious activity kept the faith of the prisoners alive, and gave them hope for survival. Praying together was not only a source of worship, but also a means of gathering as a community to share with and support one another.

Based on these forms of resistance, the emergence of leadership in these camps can be examined in the context of culture, social responsibility, and religion. Cultural leadership was exerted by those individuals who worked to keep song, theater, and other aspects of cultural life alive and thriving in the camps. For example, Karay found that the singers Chaim Albert and his girlfriend Hannah were admired and looked up to by many of the prisoners in Skarzysko-Kamienna\textsuperscript{23}. Prisoners loved to hear the songs that these two artists had composed, and the two often traveled in secret from barrack to barrack spreading their songs of protest.

The anonymous composers of various camps songs and anthems are other examples of prisoners who took on a ‘leadership’ role. For example, the camp anthem “In Camp Skarzysko” was extremely popular among the prisoners.

\begin{verbatim}
There in the forest
Not far from the town
Behind bars and fences
Barbed wire all round
Oh, that is my prison
Alone, no family near,
And no one, when I die,
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{22} Karay (p8).
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid (p9).
Prisoners would oftentimes sing this and other camp anthems when they were working, and when they were in their barracks at night. The individuals who composed such lyrics made it possible for these prisoners to unite together and sing for salvation.

Faith Amid the Flames, a video compilation of survivor interviews, examines how Jewish faith remained strong in the camps. Many of these survivors claimed that one of the secrets to their survival was cultural activity. Joseph Friedenson, a survivor from Poland, explained that within the camps there was "a real belief that we were an eternal people". He claimed that it was this belief that kept him strong, and that watching other Jews risk everything to cling to their heritage gave him hope of salvation.

There were numerous Jews who became social leaders within the concentration camps. In Baumel’s examination of the group Zehnerschaft, she found that there were three primary leadership figures, each of whom took charge of a different facet of the group’s existence. Rivka Horowitz cared for the girl’s physical requirements, Rivka England was the group’s spiritual leader, and Rachel Shantzer was the resident ‘peacemaker’. Describing Horowitz, one member recalled that “Whenever someone needed something—extra food, a sweater, lining for her shoes—Rivka knew someone to turn to, someone to ask. She had an incredible network.”

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24 Ibid (p10).
26 Baumel (p69).
27 Ibid (p69).
walks she used to take with Englard, stating that "Rivka would go out with one or two of us to walk and talk...We would walk and talk and somehow gain courage".  

The women of Zehnnerschaft also took a leadership role within the camp among non-group member prisoners. Shantzer remembered one such incident where they "smuggled a number of jam jars into the barracks and divided the contents among the prisoners". Although the punishment was either lashes or death, she stated that they "were willing to risk it in order to share what we had with the other girls, giving them a taste of 'heaven' in our little hell".

Even prisoners who did not have a leadership role in any type of mutual assistance group were able to execute social acts of leadership. Halina Birenbaum, a young prisoner of Majdanek, recalled that:

We had to fight for everything in Majdanek...But I was not capable of fighting. Had it not been for Hela (her sister-in-law), her boundless devotion and constant care, I would have perished after a few days. Hela fought with redoubled strength--for herself and for me. She shared every bite she acquired with me...Later I was ready to make my sacrifice for her. Out of regard for her, and thanks to her help, I too finally joined the fight for life in the camp of death...I roused myself from the state of apathy and despair.

This quote makes it clear that the chances of survival could depend a great deal on the help given by another person. Those individuals who were willing to reach out to their fellow prisoners not only took a great risk, but also became a leader in the war of survival and resistance.

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28 Ibid (p69).
29 Ibid (p72).
30 Ibid (p72).
31 Pingel (p171-2).
Similarly, there were a great number of individuals who became religious leaders within the camps. For example, in Karay’s study of Skarzysko-Kamienna, she discusses the arrival of Rabbi Yitzhak Finkler into the camp. Finkler was brought to the camp with his family in March 1943 on transport from Piotrkow Trybunalski. Shortly after his arrival, Finkler turned his barracks, known as “Rabiner Barak”, into a center for religious study and prayer. Finkler was able to lead prayers and abbreviated holiday services in his barracks, and Karay found that “not only did hasidic followers gravitate toward him, but also ordinary people seeking advice, answers, and comfort”.

Another religious leader described by Karay was a prisoner by the name of Jeszajahu Rechter. Rechter organized a seder for the occupants of his barracks on Passover eve, 1944.

We baked matzos on the stove in the barracks...and used coffee for wine, pouring it into tins. Potatoes and beets served in place of the haroset (a symbolic Passover dish) and all the holiday dishes...We “got hold of” a table and covered it with paper...Thirty prisoners were seated around it...We didn’t have a haggadah (the liturgy of prayers and recitations read at the seder). There was utter silence and then my son got up and began to sing “How is this night different from all other nights?”...We never heard the rest. After these words, everyone burst out crying. That was our haggadah, the haggadah we Jews recited at that Passover seder in Skarzysko-Kamienna.

A similar story is that of Yossel Rosensaft, head of the Bergen-Belsen Survivor’s Association. Rosensaft testified that in December 1944, he and a group of inmates figured

32 Karay (p7).
33 Ibid (p7).
34 Ibid (p7).
35 Ibid (p8).
36 Ibid (p8).
out when Hanukkah would occur37. In an attempt to celebrate this holiday, the prisoners went outside and found a piece of wood from the snow38. Using their spoons, they carved out eight holes and then filled these holes with pieces of carton39. The prisoners lit the carton, and then sang the Hanukkah song “Ma Oz Tsur Yeshuati” in unison40.

Rabbi Mendel Halberstam, a survivor from Poland interviewed in the video Faith Amid the Flames, points to similar examples of religious activity within the camps. Halberstam explains in his interview that many of the Jewish prisoners risked their lives in order to continue learning and worshipping. He recounts one particular prayer song that the Jews in his barracks used to recite together,

No one is greater than God  
Nothing is greater than Israel41.

Halberstam remembers one instance when the guards overheard the prisoners singing this prayer. The guards questioned the prisoners if they truly believed the words of the prayer, despite the situation that they were in. Halberstam recalls, “I remember the prisoners all replying ‘We believe!’ , and the guards then said to us that if our God was real, that he would have heard our prayers and saved us from the camps. The words of the guards did not stop us from believing”42

Another survivor interviewed in the video is Moshe Braunfeld, a survivor from Poland. Braunfeld recalls several instances of religious observances within the camps. He

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38 Ibid (p39).
39 Ibid (p39).
40 Ibid (p39).
41 Brandriss and Lonner
42 Ibid
explains that the prisoners in his barracks fasted for Yom Kippur, and did not take the soup that was given to them by the guards. Braunfeld also remembers times when the prisoners blew the rams horn for Rosh Hashanah, and baked matzo for Passover. He explains how activities such as these were in themselves acts of resistance. "It was impossible to resist because we were not strong enough. But the courage was there. The courage in itself was resistance"\(^{43}\).

Braunfeld states in his interview that there was a real belief among the prisoners that God would take care of them, and that God would save them. He remembers one song that was often sung in the camp,

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Look from the Heavens and see
We've been scorned
Made an object of contempt
Considered like sheep for slaughter
To be slain and destroyed
Through all this we have not forgotten you
Look from the heavens and see
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Braunfeld explains that songs such as this were sung by the prisoners as a reminder that God was with them, and so they should not be afraid.

There were several leaders--rabbis and teachers--who became the centers of circles of followers. There were numerous prisoners like Rechter and Rosensaft who took it upon themselves to organize religious celebrations. In addition, there were prisoners like Braunfeld who remember how important religious observances were to the struggle and survival of the Jewish people in the camps. Without such leaders willing to risk the wrath of the SS, such religious activities would surely have never taken place.

\(^{43}\) Ibid
\(^{44}\) Ibid
Individuals who emerged as leaders in the camps were characterized by their beliefs, behaviors, and socialization. Baumel’s study of the Zehnnerschaft revealed certain information regarding the women who emerged as leaders within the Plaszow labor camp. Rivka Englard seemed to believe that she and the other women were in some way ‘called’ to leadership. She explained that

You can’t begin to imagine how often we had been taught the meaning of the phrase ‘all Israel is responsible for one another’ in our youth... We had been brought up with the ideal of Jewish martyrs who did not betray their faith, Jewish women who protected their virtue until death and Jewish children who would rather die than commit idolatry.... Life in Plaszow and Auschwitz was a test of our willingness to ‘sanctify God’ by adhering to our faith, by assisting as many Jews as possible and by remaining decent human beings.

Englard’s testimony seems to indicate that her ‘call’ to leadership was very closely tied to her religious beliefs and upbringing. She had been taught that ‘all Israel is responsible for one another’, and she never hesitated to live up to the meaning of this teaching.

Baumel also makes the point that the close ties of these women in Zehnnerschaft could in some way be related to gender roles. Baumel points to the work of Carol Gilligan, who explains that “Women not only define themselves in a context of human relationship, but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care.”

Women’s traditional social conditioning towards motherhood and family might account for why so many ‘mother’/’daughter’ bonds were formed so quickly, and why so many women felt that it was their “duty” to look out for and care for their fellow inmates.

Pingel’s studies of prisoner life in the concentration camps have also provided some useful information concerning camp leaders. Pingel found that the existence of

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45 Baumel (p79).  
46 Ibid (p78).
group/social network played a large part in prisoner survival. Therefore, he determined that sociability (the ability to reach out to strangers, good communication skills, etc.) was a key factor in leadership\textsuperscript{47}. Prisoners were in desperate need of human contact, a feeling of ‘togetherness’, and a feeling of ‘safety’. Those individuals who could provide these things became viewed as ‘leaders’, and as an inspiration.

In a study done on rescuers and leaders of the holocaust, Rittner and Myers determined several factors that they believed to be related to leadership. They found that acts of “leadership” within the camps depended a great deal on an individual’s upbringing, on their character, on their general love of people, and most of all, on their love of God\textsuperscript{48}. Rittner and Myers found that many ‘leaders’ viewed their own actions as “natural”. One particular individual they spoke with seemed to sum up this attitude when he referred to an old Jewish proverb, which states that “If you are in a place where there is no human being, be a human being”\textsuperscript{49}.

Methodology

The research design for this project is a combination of historical research method and qualitative interviews. Considering the nature of the selected topic, these methods are compatible and meet the specific needs of the project. Whereas the historical method of research will provide me with a factual account of the holocaust, the interviews that I will conduct will allow me to gain an insider’s view of life in the concentration camps.

\textsuperscript{47} Pingel, (p169).
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid (p23).
A large portion of the data for this study will be obtained by reading and analyzing primary and secondary texts. These texts will include first-hand accounts of Jews who survived the "death" camps, previous studies done on Jewish responses to Nazi persecution within the camps and historical accounts. In order to gain a wide array of information, I will be utilizing a number of different libraries in both Virginia and Washington D.C., in particular the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. In addition, I will utilize the 'Survivor's Network' that has been established on the Internet to expand my search and gain information relevant to my topic.

The historical research aspect of my project consists of three essential steps. These include "the gathering of the data, the criticism of the data, and the presentation of the facts, interpretations, and conclusions in readable form"50. When gathering data, the historian must learn to cultivate an attitude of skepticism. The historian's main goal is collect factual information, and so it becomes his/her duty to "doubt every statement until it has been critically tested"51. Only once the information has been critically examined can the historian begin interpreting the data and drawing conclusions.

In addition to this historical research, I will also be obtaining data for this project by interviewing several concentration camp "survivors". I will question these individuals about their experiences, and ask them to recall and describe who, in their opinion, were the Jews that seemed to exhibit leadership within the camps, and why these individuals were considered leaders. The descriptions of these 'leaders' and the stories obtained by

51 Ibid, (pp.13).
these survivors will provide me with information that will help to confirm, refute, or add new insights to the current scholarship. Sample interview questions have been included in Appendix A at the end of this paper.

The amount of survivors that I will interview will be based on the numbers that I am able to locate, and on their willingness to discuss their experiences in the camps. In order to be considered as a subject for this study, the candidate must have been a prisoner in at least one concentration camp during World War II. Interview subjects will be obtained through library and computer research, and through personal contacts. Each interview will be conducted in person whenever possible; however, telephone interviews will be conducted in cases where a personal meeting cannot be arranged. Interviews that are conducted both in person and over the telephone will be tape-recorded at the subject’s approval.

These interviews will provide me with qualitative data relevant to my project. Qualitative research interviews “attempt to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, and to unfold the meaning of the people’s experiences”\(^\text{52}\). Oftentimes referred to as “unstructured interviews”, there are few standardized procedures, and much of the analysis has to be made on the spot\(^\text{53}\). How the social actors retell their life experiences as stories can provide insight into the characters, events, and happenings central to those experiences\(^\text{54}\).


\(^{53}\) Ibid, (pp13).

The interviews will provide a better understanding of the survivors’ experiences through a carefully planned exchange of both questioning and listening. This exchange requires skill and a vast knowledge about the topic being discussed. In order for such an exchange to provide the researcher with the optimum amount of information, there are several stages of interview investigation that need to be followed.

Steinar Kvale identifies seven stages of an interview investigation. The first of these stages is thematizing, which involves “formulating the purpose of the investigation and describing the concept of the topic to be investigated before the interview starts”\(^{55}\). After the ‘why’ and ‘what’ of the investigation have been established, the researcher begins the second stage—designing the study so that it addresses the research questions\(^{56}\). The third stage is the interviewing itself, which includes a briefing/debriefing session with the subjects, and an interview question guide\(^{57}\). The fourth stage of an interview investigation is the transcribing of the oral interview into a reliable and valid written text\(^{58}\). Following this transcribing, the researcher begins analyzing the data that has been obtained. He/she looks for emerging patterns and themes within the text, and begins making comparisons and noting relationships between variables\(^{59}\). The sixth stage in the process is that of verifying and double-checking to make sure that the recorded information is both reliable and valid\(^{60}\). Upon verifying the information, the researcher

\(^{56}\) Ibid, (pp88).
\(^{57}\) Ibid, (pp127).
\(^{58}\) Ibid, (pp163).
\(^{59}\) Ibid, (pp204).
\(^{60}\) Ibid, (pp88).
arrives at the last stage of the process and compiles a comprehensive report of his/her findings.

Following these seven steps should help ensure that my interview investigation is successful. However, it is important to note that both the interviews and the library research that I will be conducting for this project could have certain limitations as a means of collecting data. As far as the interviews are concerned, there are several things that I will need to take into consideration. I will need to keep in mind that the individuals I interview might suffer from mild memory loss, might distort certain portions of their story, might have repressed certain aspects of their experiences in the camps, or might have very strong emotions and biases against the Germans. Other problems with interviews could be that I might not establish adequate rapport with the respondent, or that he/she might not have any information that is relevant to my particular topic.

There are two types of validity tests that I will apply to these oral sources of historical information. First, I will conduct internal tests which "evaluate the material in terms of its own self-consistency". Such internal validity tests include identifying underlying themes, collating divergent accounts, allowing for embellishment, looking for conformity with established historical facts, and evaluating the oral sources. I will also apply external validity tests that "compare and contrast oral information with written accounts and physical evidence". For example, I will match the oral histories with printed records and other written historical accounts in order to test for accuracy.

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61 Ibid, (pp71).
62 Ibid, (pp71-81).
63 Ibid, (pp71).
Similarly, there are limitations with historical research. Relying on primary sources could produce some of the same problems associated with oral history. Those individuals who wrote first-hand accounts of their experiences in the camps may have distorted some information, or may have suffered from some mild memory loss. Validity tests as described above will be conducted on these sources in order to check for validity and reliability. Other written historical accounts also have limitations, such as the reputation of the source and conformity with other historical documents. In addition, historical accounts may not provide eyewitness encounters, nor the emotional discussions that are vital to a project of this nature.

It is clear that orally communicated history and formal history can serve as a complement to one another. Alone, each method is somewhat incomplete, but "together they form a harmonious union, with the one offering objective interpretation based upon sound evidence, and the other giving a personalized immediacy, a sense of being there and of participation"64. Oral history complements written records by providing intimate views of events, by filling in the gaps, and by providing an insider’s prospective65. Used in conjunction with one another, these two methods provide the researcher with a broad data base and with keen perspectives of the events at hand.

**Interview Subjects**


65 Ibid, (pp15).
Three survivors of the holocaust were interviewed extensively for this project. Each of these interview subjects were willing to answer any and all questions that I had concerning their experiences in the concentration camps. In addition, each subject allowed me to tape record the interview in order to ensure accurate documentation.

A personal interview was conducted with Simone Schwartz on April 7, 1997. Schwartz was born in Poland in 1929, and spent the first two years of the war living in the Russian controlled portion of Poland. In 1941, the Germans invaded her small town, and she and her family were taken to their first concentration camp. Schwartz was in five different camps in total, but spent the longest amount of time in Auschwitz. She was liberated in 1945 at the age of sixteen, and was the only surviving member of her family.

Joseph Friendenson was interviewed over the telephone on April 2, 1997. At the start of the war, Friendenson lived in the Warsaw Ghetto. Following the time he was in the ghetto, he was sent to three different concentration camps. Friendenson spent only a short amount of time in each of his first two camps, and then spent almost two years at Auschwitz. By the time he was liberated from Auschwitz, he had witnessed the death of four family members, and many of his close friends.

A personal interview was conducted with Ester Smith on March 19, 1997. Smith was born in early 1927. She was a prisoner at Auschwitz from 1943 until she was liberated in 1945 at the age of eighteen. Smith was the only surviving member of her family.

The interviews that were conducted with Schwartz, Friendenson, and Smith provided an in depth account of life in the concentration camps. This insider’s view has
served as a complement to the historical research, in some cases supporting the existing literature, and in some cases presenting a somewhat different perspective on prison life. Interview texts are attached at the end of this paper in Appendix B, C, and D.

Presentation of the Data

The emergence of leadership within the concentration camps can be examined through the context of culture, social responsibility, and religion. All forms of cultural, social, and religious activity were forbidden by the German authorities, and those individuals who initiated and participated in such activities led the most effective forms of Jewish rebellion—group solidarity and strengthening the will to survive.

Cultural Activity

As far as the description of cultural activity within the camps is concerned, the qualitative interviews and the historical research that I conducted present somewhat contradictory accounts. Historical research points to cultural activity among the prisoners as one of the main forms of resistance in the camps. However, each of the interview subjects deny almost all forms of cultural activity.

Schwartz does not believe that there was any opportunity for cultural observances within the camps. Although she recognizes that perhaps prisoners in other camps may have had different experiences, she explains that she personally never participated nor witnessed any form of cultural activity. She states that “In the camps we could not observe our
culture. I did not think about culture. I thought only about saving myself and staying alive.  

Friendenson has similar views on culture within the concentration camps. He recalls that while he did experience some forms of cultural activity in the Warsaw ghetto, that he did not experience any such activities in the camps. He explains that “there was no real culture in the camps. We did sing one or two different prayer songs, but those songs were for worship, not for culture. Conditions were so bad in the camp that it was not really possible to think about culture.”  

Finally, Smith’s comments concerning cultural activity in the camps are similar to those of Schwartz and Friendenson. She recalls that “There was no culture. At least I did not experience any culture. Nobody cared about music, nobody cared about culture. We just cared about survival. We were not allowed to have culture. How can you have culture when you are crammed up like a sardine?” Smith explains that the guards would not hesitate to kill prisoners who were disruptive or who were making a lot of noise, and that therefore, there was too great a risk to even think about singing or other similar activities.  

Leadership and Culture  

The survivors that were interviewed for this project seem to disagree with the existing literature concerning the connection between leadership and culture among the prisoners. Historical research presents the existence of numerous cultural leaders—

prisoners whose songs and poetry uplifted the spirits of the prisoners, and united them in their struggle for survival. However, all three of the interview subjects seem to believe that there is no correlation between leadership and cultural activity within the concentration camps. None of the survivors that I spoke with experienced any form of cultural activity, nor did they encounter any aspects of leadership as related to culture.

Social Activity

The qualitative interviews and the historical research seem to present similar accounts of social activity within the camps. Existing literature stresses the importance of social activity to prisoner survival. Although the story told by Schwartz contradicts the historical research, both Friendenson and Smith speak not only of significant exposure to social activities, but also of the impact that these activities had on their struggle to survive.

Schwartz did not experience any form of social activity in the concentration camps. She explains that her days in the camp were spent alone, stating that "We were degraded. We were afraid to look anyone in the face. We were alone." Schwartz denies that there were many prisoners who took any sort of risks to help other prisoners in need. She was "alone and frightened" during her time in the camps, and she kept to herself in order to avoid being beaten by the guards.70

Friendenson paints a somewhat different picture from Schwartz concerning social activity. He claims that "there were many groups of prisoners who helped one another", and explains that he could not have made it through without his group of friends71. It was

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69 Schwartz
70 Ibid
71 Friendenson
this support group that gave him the strength to live. He says that it “made it much easier to think of survival if you knew that you had your friends going through the same hard times as you were. We were all suffering. We had all lost our families. The only thing that we still had left was each other, and so we tried to hold onto that.”

Friendenson recalls several ways that social groups were able to help and support one another. Talking to one another, communal praying, or even just “sitting in silence together” were all forms of social activity that he feels made him stronger against the Germans. He also remembers witnessing certain heroic acts of friendship during his time at Auschwitz. He saw Jews share their only piece of bread with other prisoners who were sick or weak, and he saw prisoners risk their lives to get messages about lost family members and loved ones to other Jews. Friendenson also recalls one particular group of prisoners who were always helping the sick and the weak. This group of individuals helped everyone, not just the prisoners that they knew.

Smith also had a great deal of exposure to social activity within the camps. She explains that there were many Jews who met people from their home town or counties with whom they shared personal acquaintances. Oftentimes, these Jews became very close friends with one another. Smith claims that friendships among the Jews were very common within the barracks; however, she does recall that there were several Jews who kept mainly to themselves. Like Friendenson, Smith explains that her friends were crucial to her survival, “The friends that I made in Auschwitz are people that I am still very good

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72 Ibid
73 Ibid
friends with today. I do not think that I could have survived Auschwitz without the
friends that I made.\textsuperscript{74}

Smith believes that there were many different ways in which her friends kept her
strong. She recalls that “We stayed near one another, we prayed together, we took care
of one another when we were sick.”\textsuperscript{75} The social group that Smith formed provided her
with the support and concern similar to that given by close family members. She explains
that “The friends that I was with in the camp became like a family to me. I cared about
them like they were my family.”\textsuperscript{76}

Leadership and Social Responsibility

Friendenson and Smith both discussed the correlation between leadership and
social responsibility. The connections they make between acts of social resistance and
leadership qualities such as strength, bravery, and faith strongly supports the historical
research on this topic.

Friendenson believes that the acts of resistance exhibited by some of the members
of his and other social groups were in fact signs of prisoner leadership. He explains that
“All of these things took courage, bravery. They are signs of a strong person, a true
friend, a real leader.”\textsuperscript{77} According to Friendenson, the individuals who risked their lives to
help others by sharing food or by providing support had several things in common. He

\textsuperscript{74} Smith
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid
\textsuperscript{77} Friendenson
remembers that these prisoners were "strong and brave" and that they all had a real belief in the power of God. \(^{78}\)

Aside from this emotional strength and belief in God, Friedenson does not think that there were any other distinguishing characteristics to these individuals. He states that "anyone could be brave, anyone could believe." \(^{79}\) Resisting the German authorities required an inner strength, and this strength came from a belief in God and from a belief that you were going to survive. Friedenson believes that any Jew had the ability to resist, they just needed to have faith.

Smith also believes that there is a connection between leadership and social activity among the prisoners. She feels that the "leaders" in the barracks were "those individuals who were human to one another when the guards were treating us like animals." \(^{80}\) She recalls an instance when she was sick, and a woman she was close to offered her a piece of bread. She describes this woman and other leaders as being those prisoners who "were less afraid." \(^{81}\) Smith remembers that these women were "strong, and had a strong belief that God was with us, and looking after us at all times." \(^{82}\)

**Religious Activity**

The qualitative interviews and historical research give fairly similar accounts of religious activity among the Jewish prisoners within the camps. Historical research points to a high level of religious activity among prisoners, including communal prayers and

\(^{78}\) Ibid
\(^{79}\) Ibid
\(^{80}\) Smith
\(^{81}\) Ibid
\(^{82}\) Ibid
holiday observances. The interviews conducted with both Friendendson and Smith support this data, whereas the interview conducted with Schwartz does not.

Schwartz does not remember either witnessing or participating in any type of religious activity while in the concentration camps. She explains that there could never be any type of religious activity in the camps primarily because the guards would not allow it. Even during the time she lived in the ghetto, there was never any religious activity permitted by the guards. She remembers that when her father was killed, she and her mother tried to properly bury his body; however, the guards would not allow for a proper burial.

While she was a prisoner in the camps, Schwartz claims that she never really thought much about religion. In fact, she recalls that during her time in the camps she really did not want to be Jewish anymore. “We were persecuted because we were Jewish, and I believed that we were no good. When I was liberated was when I slowly started to realize again that Jews are just as good as anybody else”.

Unlike the opinion expressed by Schwartz, Friendenson’s story illustrates that there was in fact a great deal of religious activity in the camps. He explains that although there were no Churches or Synagogues, that many of the prisoners were able to continue praying and observing their religion due in part to the efforts of the rabbis. He recalls that “Rabbis organized secret prayer services for the Jews, and led many Jews in communal praying and singing”. Friendenson states that a major function of these rabbis was keeping up the spirits of the prisoners. He feels that the “rabbis were very important to

83 Schwartz
84 Friendenson
our survival. They helped us become a more united people, they helped us to cope with the hard times we were facing."\(^{85}\)

When we discussed the observance of religious holidays, Friendenson did have some relevant experiences to share. He recalls that the prisoners did try their best to observe some of the religious commandments, such as no working on the Sabbath. However, he explains that such observances were very difficult due to the strict nature of the guards. Friendenson also remembers that the prisoners in his barracks once organized a seder, despite the fact that they did not have any matzo. He recalls the significance of this seder, claiming that "The seder united us because we were able to come together and celebrate our religion even though we were not supposed to. We were all sharing the same nightmare experiences, and that made this particular seder more special than any other."\(^{86}\)

Smith has similar memories of religious activity. She remembers that although the prisoners in her barracks tried their best to keep some aspects of their religion, that it was very difficult. She explains that since the barracks were separated, all of the rabbis were in the men’s camps. Therefore, she believes that perhaps it would have been easier to maintain some aspects of religion in the men’s camps as opposed to the women’s camps.

Despite the lack of rabbi’s, Smith claims that the women in her barracks were able to observe their religion to some extent. Although they were never able to openly celebrate any religious holidays, they always knew when the holidays were occurring, and did their best to pray in silence. She explains that “Just because we couldn’t have

\(^{85}\) Ibid
\(^{86}\) Ibid
holidays didn't mean we had lost our faith in God. We believed strongly in God, and we believed strongly that we would survive Auschwitz. If it were not for my belief in God, I would not have been saved.\textsuperscript{87}

\textbf{Leadership and Religion}

Although Schwartz made no correlation between leadership and religious activities in the camps, both Friendenson and Smith seemed to feel that there was a strong connection. This connection is supported by the historical literature on religious activities of concentration camp prisoners.

Friendenson recalls that during his time in Auschwitz, he looked to many of the rabbis for spiritual leadership. He views the leadership of these rabbis, and the guidance that they gave to the prisoners as being extremely vital to prisoner survival. Friendenson believes that it was more than their position as 'rabbi' that made these men stand out as leaders within the camp. He feels that each of these men had certain things in common, including a strong faith in God, and a strong belief in survival.

In addition, each of these men had the ability to keep the spirits of the prisoners high. He explains that the rabbis he encountered were easy to talk to, and had very positive attitudes. Despite all of the hardships that the prisoners were facing, the rabbis did their best to unite the prisoners and make them believe in the power of salvation. Friendenson also recalls that each of the rabbis had open hearts, and were constantly extending their hand out to the prisoners in need.

\textsuperscript{87} Smith
Smith also makes a similar correlation between leadership and those individuals who were involved with religious activities in the camps. Smith does not point to any specific “religious leaders” within the camps. However, she does believe that every women that gathered together to pray in the barracks was in fact a religious leader. She explains that “Each of these women was a leader. There was no single woman who led the barracks. We all played a part. We all prayed together for our survival”88.

Smith gives several explanations as to how these women were able to become religious leaders. She believes that many of the women in the camp felt that religion was the only thing that could save them. “God was our only hope of survival, and so we did all that we could to maintain religion”89. She continues to explain that “these women were not all used to taking risks, to doing what they were told not to do. Secret prayers and worship were so dangerous, and many women were risking their lives for God”90. Smith feels that the fear of death and the horrible feelings of despair and isolation enabled these women to reach out for God’s help.

Analysis

The historical research and interviews can be analyzed in terms of leader emergence in the context of culture, social responsibility, and religion.

Leadership and Culture

88 Smith
89 Ibid
90 Ibid
The data obtained through historical research is not supported by the personal accounts told by the survivors. Existing literature on the holocaust points to cultural activity as one of the main forms of resistance among the prisoners in the concentration camps. However, the interview subjects deny the existence of such activities.

Interview subjects did not participate in, nor witness any cultural activity during the time they spent in the concentration camps. However, this does not mean that cultural activity did not exist. It is possible that survivors who were interviewed for this project were prisoners in camps that did not have cultural activity. It is also a possibility that cultural activity existed at the camp, but just not in the barracks in which these subjects lived.

The study done by Karay concerning prisoner life in Skarzysko-Kamienna determined that cultural activity in the camp evolved “by itself out of the need to preserve one’s sanity and strengthen the will to live”\textsuperscript{91}. She found that songs, poems, and stage performances served to unite the prisoners of the camp, and that the individuals who initiated and participated in such activities demonstrated acts of resistance and leadership. Similar evidence of cultural activity is presented in the video Faith Amid the Flames, and is alluded to in numerous other studies.

This literature provides no real insight into the specific individual characteristics, beliefs, behaviors, and socialization factors that enabled or ignited certain Jews to emerge as cultural leaders within the camps. Rather, Karay’s study focuses primarily on leadership as a result of environmental factors. She assumes that environmental factors played a large role in cultural leader emergence. Karay claims that the harsh conditions of

\textsuperscript{91} Karay (p7).
the camps, combined with the extreme isolation and despair that prisoners faced, resulted in the inevitable emergence of cultural activity.

Karay's reliance on cultural leader emergence as the result of environmental factors offers a unique, yet perhaps limiting view of prisoner leadership. Karay observed that prisoners within the camp needed to in some way combat their feelings of dehumanization and isolation. She assumes that the need for human contact, the need for interaction, and the need for hope fostered the inevitable development of culture.

Although environmental factors contributed a great deal to the emergence of cultural leaders within the camps, it is unlikely that they were solely responsible. Based on the lack of participation in cultural activities among the interview subjects, it is clear that environmental conditions are not the only necessary factor for leader emergence. Although each individual prisoner within the concentration camps had a different personal history and a somewhat different set of experiences, almost all Jewish prisoners were exposed to the same basic hardships. Jews in every camp were forced to face the fear of death, were forced to live in horrible conditions, and were made to feel that they were in some way sub human. Despite these same basic environmental conditions, not all Jewish prisoners participated in cultural activities.

The fact that culture did not evolve naturally in every camp is evidence that environmental conditions were not the only contributing factor to cultural leader emergence. Literature that pertains to culture within the camps has ignored the influence of individual characteristics, beliefs, behavior, and socialization factors on prisoner behavior. Further research is needed in order to explore cultural leader emergence as it is
related to each of these factors. Since the interview subjects did not witness any cultural activity, this study does not provide any further insights into the relationship between leadership and cultural activity.

**Leadership and Social Responsibility**

The data obtained from historical research concerning leadership and social responsibility is supported by the interviews of both Friendenson and Smith. The work of most scholars in the area of social activity within the camps has shown that such activities served as a primary act of resistance among the prisoners. Those individuals who participated in social activities and fulfilled a social responsibility within the camps are described by these scholars as social leaders.

The interview with Simone Schwartz serves as the only contradiction to this documentation on social activity among the prisoners. Schwartz did not witness any form of social activity within the camps; however, this does not mean that such activities did not exist. Schwartz claimed that she kept mainly to herself while in the barracks, and it is likely that her isolation prevented her from taking notice of the social activity that prevailed. Another possible explanation is that social activity existed only in select camps and barracks.

Despite the information provided by Schwartz, there is a large magnitude of research that indicates that there was a high level of social activity. Baumel's study of the Zehnnerschaft mutual assistance group and Pingel's studies of prisoner life have revealed numerous insights regarding leader emergence. Combined with the interviews of Friendenson and Smith, this literature provides valuable information regarding the specific
individual characteristics, behaviors, beliefs, and socialization factors that enabled or ignited certain Jews to emerge as social leaders within the camps.

The research that I have done indicates that individual characteristics played a large role in leader emergence within the concentration camps. Historical research points to good communication skills, the ability to reach out to strangers, and a general love of people as several examples of leader characteristics. This idea of being human and having a place in your heart for strangers was also discussed by the interview subjects. In addition, the interview data showed that strength, courage, and bravery were other individual characteristics related to social leadership.

Historical research and qualitative interviews also point to several behaviors that are related to social leader emergence. Behaviors such as participating in simple conversations with other prisoners, lending a helping hand to prisoners in need, and sharing food with a prisoner who was sick or weak have all been connected to leadership. Both the historical research and the interviews support the idea that individuals who exhibited these behaviors were considered to be leaders among the prisoners, and leaders of the resistance movement.

Just as there are certain behaviors that are connected to leader emergence, research indicates that there are also certain beliefs that enable or ignite certain individuals to become social leaders. Baumel found that many of the female leaders she studied believed that they were in fact 'called' to leadership. These women grew up adhering to the phrase “all Israel is responsible for one another”, and they claim that this belief has
driven them to acts of resistance\textsuperscript{92}. Equally important among social leaders seems to be a strong belief in God, and a strong belief in survival. The individuals who had true faith in survival and salvation are said to have been able to raise the spirits of the prisoners and keep them hopeful.

The research that I have conducted indicates that socialization factors were also significantly connected to social leader emergence within the camps. Throughout both the historical research and the interviews, an individual’s upbringing is constantly connected to leadership abilities. The way a child was raised to treat other people, in particular the way they learned how to act toward strangers, is said to effect their likelihood to emerge as a social leader within the camps. Children who learned how to extend kindness to others, how to approach strangers, and how to take risks were viewed as being more likely to become social leaders.

Gender roles are another aspect of socialization that have been connected to leader emergence. In Baumel’s study of the Zehnnerschaft, she explains that women’s traditional social conditioning towards motherhood, caring, and nurturing may account for many of the mother/daughter bonds that formed in the camps. Baumel feels that these aspects of socialization may also explain why many women felt obligated to care for the sick prisoners in the camp.

The combination of historical research and qualitative interviews have provided a multitude of explanations for social leader emergence within the concentration camps. It has been shown through this research that certain individuals were either enabled or

\textsuperscript{92} Baumel (p79)
ignited to become social leaders based on a combination of individual characteristics, behaviors, beliefs, and socialization factors that they shared in common.

Each of these factors contributing to the emergence of social leaders are in some way related to, and dependent upon, one another. An examination of each of these factors seems to indicate that oftentimes the influence of one results in the influence of others. For example, individuals with characteristics such as the ability to reach out to strangers and a general love of people will be likely to exhibit behaviors such as engaging in conversations with strangers and lending a helping hand to people in need. A person’s socialization and the way that he or she was raised to treat other people is likewise related to these individual characteristics and behaviors. An individual who was taught to extend kindness to others will generally have a love for all people, and will be willing to lend a helping hand.

This dependency suggests that many of the factors that are connected to social leadership within the concentration camps could not exist alone. The environment we are exposed to, the individual characteristics we posses, the beliefs we adhere to, the behaviors we exhibit, and the way in which we are socialized all affect one another. No individual is solely a product of his or her environment, nor is any individual’s actions based only on their personal beliefs or individual characteristics. Therefore, the emergence of social leaders within the concentration camps depends upon a series of intertwined factors.

Leadership and Religion
The historical research on leadership and religious activity is supported by the qualitative interviews of Friendenson and Smith. The data obtained from this research points to religious activity as one of the primary forms of prisoner resistance within the camps. Both the historical research and the interviews present information concerning the environmental factors, individual characteristics, behaviors, and beliefs that enabled or ignited certain individuals to emerge as religious leaders and resisters within the camps.

Within the existing literature, environmental factors are shown to be connected to the emergence of religious leaders. In Karay's examination of religious leadership in Skarzysko-Kamienna, she found that the conditions of the camp resulted in high levels of participation in religious activity. Similar views were expressed by Ester Smith. In her interview, Smith spent a good amount of time discussing how feelings of despair and isolation led the prisoners to resist the Germans through communal prayers and religious observances. She believes that many prisoners felt so alone, and were so in need of comfort, that participation in religious activity was both inevitable and natural.

Since not all prisoners experienced such religious activities in the camps, environmental factors alone cannot explain the emergence of religious leaders. The interview with Schwartz contradicts the idea that religious activity existed within the camps. Since Schwartz was exposed to the same basic environmental factors as Friendenson and Smith, environmental factors alone do not sufficiently explain why certain individuals became religious leaders within the concentration camps. Although environmental conditions certainly played a significant role in the development of leaders,
leader emergence was also affected by a delicate combination of individual characteristics, beliefs and behaviors.

Throughout the research on religious activity, individual characteristics are discussed in connection with leader emergence. Historical research presents characteristics such as courage, emotional strength, and physical strength as several contributors to leadership ability. In addition, Friendenson and Smith add numerous characteristics to this list. They believe that high spirits, a friendly nature, a positive attitude, and an open heart were common traits among the religious leaders in the camps.

The research that I have conducted indicates that there are several common beliefs and behaviors related to leader emergence. The historical research and qualitative interviews show that there was a strong belief among the prisoners that God was with them and that He would take care of them. Common behaviors among religious leaders seem to include such things as organizing and participating in holiday observances and communal prayers, and sharing religious books and artifacts.

The combination of survivor interviews with the current literature on religious activity within the camps presents several explanations of leader emergence. Environmental factors, individual characteristics, behaviors, and beliefs are all depicted as having a real connection to religious leadership. Despite this connection, each religious leader arrived at his or her position in somewhat of a different way—through a different set of circumstances, and with a different set of background experiences.
Recommendations for Further Research

At the conclusion of this project, it is clear that additional research is needed in order to further the understanding of leader emergence within the concentration camps. Perhaps the main problem with much of the existing literature is that it fails to offer a comprehensive view of leadership. Researchers have overlooked the relationship between environmental factors, individual characteristics, behaviors, beliefs and the socialization process. Each of these issues plays a significant role in leader emergence, and further examination into their relationship will provide valuable insights concerning prisoner leadership during the holocaust.

There are also several recommendations that can be made for the improvement of this study. In order to compensate for the lack of research on the complexity of leader emergence within the camps, more survivor interviews should have been conducted. Although the three interviews that I conducted did provide me with valuable insights, I feel that I would have been able to draw more conclusions and make more substantial observations had there been a larger sample size. Several problems were encountered over the course of this study while trying to locate survivors to interview. Based on my experiences with this project, I have learned that the process of finding interview subjects oftentimes takes much longer than expected.

Conclusion

The primary question underlying the research for this project was "What environmental factors, individual characteristics, behaviors, beliefs, and socialization
factors enabled or ignited certain Jews to emerge as leaders within the concentration camps during World War II?”. The historical research and qualitative interviews that were conducted have led me to conclude that perhaps there is no ‘correct’ answer to this question.

This project examined leaders in the context of culture, social responsibility, and religion. In each of these contexts, there were numerous leaders who emerged—each with his or her own set of individual characteristics, behaviors, and beliefs, and each influenced by an array of different environmental and social factors. Although there are discernible trends and commonalties that have emerged through this examination, there is no magic formula for leader emergence that can be presented.

Each of these factors related to the emergence of leaders within the concentration camps were found to be related to, and dependent upon, one another. The ‘formula’ for leader emergence among the Jews was situational, and this emergence relied upon a combination of environmental factors, individual characteristics, behaviors, beliefs, and socialization factors. The harsh environmental conditions of the camps, coupled with the socialization process of the prisoners, makes the events of the holocaust incomparable to any other event in history. Considering the hardships that prisoners were forced to bear and the isolation that they experienced, leader emergence within the camps was truly a unique process. Individual characteristics, beliefs, and behaviors combined with these factors to produce a collection of cultural, social, and religious leaders. Together, these leaders created a resistance movement that increased prisoner unity, and kept people focused on survival.
References


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Schwartz, Simone. Personal Interview. April 7, 1997


Appendix A

Sample Interview Questions/Conversation Guidelines:

1. Could you take a few minutes to recount your personal involvement in the holocaust—i.e. the length of time spent in the concentration camps, which camps you were exposed to, etc.

2. During the time you spent in the concentration camps, did you either witness or hear about any Jewish resistance movements within the camps? What type of influence did the members of such a movement have on the other prisoners? How did the majority of prisoners view the members of these resistance movements?

3. Do you recall any particular Jews who became ‘leaders’ within the camps? Were there any individuals who seemed to be looked upon by a majority of people as being a group ‘leader’, spokesperson, or savior?

4. How would you describe these individuals? What type of personalities did they have? What was their leadership style? Why were they viewed as leaders—how did they ‘earn’ their recognition? What were their leadership duties?
Appendix B

Interview: Simone Schwartz
April 7, 1997

MF: Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today; I really appreciate it. Let me first give you a brief description of my project. My study is centered on leadership amongst the prisoners in the concentration camps. Primarily, I’m looking to see what environmental factors, individual characteristics, beliefs, and socialization factors enabled or ignited certain Jews to emerge as leaders within the camps during World War II. Perhaps the best way for us to get started would be for you to tell me a little bit about your personal history—which camps you were exposed to, the length of time you spent in concentration camps, etc.

SS: You must remember that I was very young. In 1939 I was ten years old. I was born in 1929. The first two years I was under the Russians. I was born in Poland, and Poland was divided into two zones—it was between Hitler and Stalin, Germany and Russia. Poland was divided from East to West. I was under the Eastern zone. I lived under the Russians and it was not good. My parents had a shoe store, and it was taken away from us. We were free to play outside. We were free to go to school. What I remember about school, the only thing I really remember is how great Russia is, how they are going to conquer the world, how great Stalin is, and how what he is doing is so great for Russia and for all of humanity. And that is pretty much all I remember about the two years—until 1941. In 1941, Hitler breaks the Non-Aggression Pact and comes to our little town. I lived in a very small town, with maybe 500 inhabitants—only a few hundred Jews. The minute Hitler invaded our town, it was chaos. They came to us in the middle of the night to our house to take us to the camps. I was in many camps—five in total. Now, you want to talk about leadership?

MF: Yes. Ultimately what I’m trying to see is how, despite such hardships and fear, certain individuals were able to emerge as leaders.

SS: But there were no leaders among the prisoners because in every hut there was a designated prisoner put in charge of taking care of all the other prisoners—he was promised by the guards that he would not be killed. These prisoners who were our leaders did the same thing as the Nazis did—they hit us every day, beat us up, and were mean to us. What the Nazis told them to do to us, they did to us. There was no leader.

MF: What about other types of leadership? Were there individuals with no formal authority who were looked upon as being ‘leaders’ among the prisoners?

SS: In the barracks, we were beaten on a daily basis. We were not allowed to have baths, and we were filthy. We were given stripes to wear—white and blue stripes. We had big, baggy pants, a big shirt, and a hat. Our heads were shaven routinely. We were not able to go to school. They called us the Underclass because we were not humans. We were
subhuman. Even when we walked to work, we could not walk on the sidewalk. They made us walk in the middle of the road with the dogs because we were not human. So, what kind of leadership was there? There was no leader. You are looking for a leader. We were hungry. We were so hungry that the piece of bread that we got had to be eaten right away otherwise the inmate next to you stole from you. When you are hungry, you will do anything to eat. You are mad. There was no such thing as a leader. We were degraded. We were afraid to look anyone in the face. We were alone. That is what I have encountered in my years in the camps, but if you talk to someone else, they might have a different story to tell you.

MF: Perhaps do you recall any instances where a group of prisoners struggled to keep their culture or their religion alive?

SS: As far as religion is concerned the answer is definitely ‘No’. We did not have anything to observe. I did not even know what day it was. I did not know what season it was. The only thing I knew was that I was cold and hungry. I also remember that I did not want to be Jewish anymore. We were persecuted because we were Jewish, and I believed that we were no good. When I was liberated was when I slowly started to realize again that Jews are just as good as anybody else. Why should anyone believe that they are not as good as anybody else? You need to believe in yourself, no matter what religion, or what race of person you are. That is what I have learned. It is a beautiful world, and we can all live together and love one another. I guess I still haven’t answered your question. There is no answer to what you are asking. I don’t have an answer. Perhaps in the ghetto there may have been more of a chance for religious observances. But I was in the ghetto before we went to the concentration camps, and we lived under the rules of the guards. I remember when my father died and we were still living in the ghetto. My mother and I had to bury my father with no ceremony because the guards would not allow us to have a ceremony. I do not know where my father is buried because we could not put up a marker. Even though my mother was ‘in charge’ of us children while we were in the ghetto, she was not really in charge—the guards were in charge. We could not observe our religion or our culture. In the camps I did not think about culture or religion. I thought only about saving myself and staying alive. I thought I could save myself if I went to work, because when you went to work you walked past a garbage can that you could sometimes sneak food from. If the guards saw you take this food, they would beat you up. Many of the prisoners who were beaten by the guards died because they were so weak, and they had no strength. But as far as religious observances, I never had any. As far as cultural observances, I never had any.

MF: Do you recall any time when a particular prisoner risked getting caught by the guards in order to help another prisoner?

SS: Not really, no. We were all so alone, and so frightened. You cannot understand how scared we were. We did what we were told in order to survive. We did what we were told so that we would not get beaten up by the prison guards.
MF: Were there any prisoners who escaped?

SS: Many tried to escape—many tried to escape to the woods. When I lived in the ghetto, we were ordered to walk. They didn’t tell us where we were going. We walked for days, and my sister (the next to the oldest) was running away to the forest because we always thought that if you run away to the forest that somebody might save you, that somebody might hide you. She ran to the forest with her boyfriend, but they did not make it. She was shot right in front of me. I saw it. My mother saw it. My other sister saw it. My father was dead already—he had been beaten to death by German soldiers. So many of the people who were walking with us that day died. Some were shot because they tried to escape. Some were shot for no reason at all. At the end of the walking, whoever survived (mostly the young ones) were taken to their first concentration camps.

MF: Were any of the prisoners who tried to escape successful?

SS: I do not know. Everyone I saw who tried to run always got shot by the guards, but I am sure that there were people who made it to the woods and were able to hide out until they could get away. There are many stories and books about prisoners who hid in the houses of people who were sympathetic to the Jewish outcasts. My escape came only when I was liberated at age 16. I met a man who was eleven years older than I was, and he courted me and then I married him. I wish I could have continued my own education, but I was very unsure of myself and I looked up to this older man. The family I have raised with my husband is everything to me. It is so important that all my family is educated so that we can learn from the past, and learn from our history. Life is very short, and we need to take advantage of all that our beautiful world has to offer. You need to understand that if you were in a concentration camps, you could not do whatever you wanted to do. We were ordered from three or four o’clock in the morning to stand out in the cold weather and work. How could you think about religion or culture? How could you think about anything other than your own survival? The only thought I would have was “How do I keep myself alive? How can I survive?”. The soup that they gave us was water—potato or bread soup. I was so hungry for this soup that I remember thinking that if I could only survive, that is all I would ever eat again. They did not peel the potatoes, they just threw them in—it was just water. They were thinking that the soup is just to alleviate the prisoners. They never gave us enough to eat. Even though I always wanted more soup, I have never been able to eat potato soup again like I thought I would.

MF: Do you consider your own personal struggle to survive as an act of leadership?

SS: I suppose so. I remember when my father died, I was so sad. He used to tell me that I should try my best to survive this torture. He told me that somebody from my family needed to survive to tell the story of what happened to our family, and to all of the Jewish people. There were six million Jews killed, but even that number is too small. There were so many deaths that have never been accounted for, so many people lost forever. Always in my mind was the thought of survival. When we were liberated, I could not believe that I had really survived. When they told us to come out of our barracks, we were so weak
that we could not even open the door. We were dirty and covered with lice. We were sprayed with some type of disinfectant, and were given clothes and some food. They gave us SPAM and peanut butter, but so many people died that day because their stomachs could not handle real food. I remember thinking that day that SPAM and peanut butter were the most delicious foods, and that I would eat them every day of my life. After my liberation, I never talked about my experiences in the camps like my father wanted me to do—not even to my own children. They asked me why I was alone—why they had no grandparents, no aunts or uncles. But I could not talk about it. I did not want to expose them to such harm. They read about it, they knew. But I couldn’t tell them. But a few years ago, the university had an exhibit about Anne Frank, and for the first time I decided to talk about my experiences. I felt much better being able to tell people about the camps. People need to know what happened. I need to tell them what happened.

MF: You mentioned how your father wanted you to survive so you could tell your story. What gave you the strength to survive despite the hardships you faced? What gives you the strength to tell your story of survival?

SS: My will to survive, the strength, it comes from my father. It also comes from inside me. So many times I thought that I was not going to survive—I thought that my destiny was to die in the camps like so many others had died. But I did not die. I struggled to live—I struggled to survive. I wanted to live and tell the story of my family. For many years it was hard for me to talk. There are still many things that I cannot talk about, will never talk about. The strength to keep talking comes from knowing that there are some scholars saying now that the Holocaust did not exist. Have you heard about these books? They say it didn’t exist! It did exist. I am here to tell you that it did exist.
Appendix C

Interview: Joseph Friendenson
April 2, 1997

MF: Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me this afternoon. Before we get started, let me tell you a little bit more about my project. My study is about leadership amongst the prisoners in the concentration camps. I'm looking to see what individual characteristics, environmental factors, and socialization factors enabled or ignited certain Jews to emerge as leaders within the camps during the war. Now that I've given you a little background on my project, maybe you could start by telling me about your personal history—which camps you were exposed to, etc.

JF: First I was in the Warsaw ghetto. After that, I went to three different camps, but I spent most of my time at Auschwitz. There is so much I could tell you about what it was like to be in the concentration camps, but it would take me years to tell you everything. Life for the prisoners was really horrible, it was horrible. We were worked so hard, and given so little to eat. Many people died from hunger. Many people died. The guards were so strict, they had many rules. People who broke the rules were always punished—they were often killed. I saw so many awful things at Auschwitz, things that I could not tell you about. I saw many members of my family and many of friends killed by the guards. I will never be able to forget the things that I saw, and I will never forget my family that died. There are many important things to remember about the Holocaust, lessons to be learned from the evil. Please tell me, what can I help you with. You said you wanted to talk about leadership. Is that right?

MF: Yes, leadership amongst the Jewish prisoners. Do you recall any particular individuals who seemed to emerge as 'leaders' or role models within the camp?

JF: Well, many people seemed to look to the rabbis as leaders, spiritual leaders.

MF: Could you tell me a little about the role that the rabbis played?

JF: Sure, there were no Churches or Synagogues, but many of the prisoners were able to keep some of their religion because of the rabbis. Rabbis organized secret prayer services for the Jews, and led many Jews in communal praying and singing. In general, the rabbis kept up our spirits. They made us believe that God was with us, that God would save us. The rabbis were very important to our survival. They helped us become a more united people, they helped us to cope with the hard times we were facing. The rabbis also answered many questions for us: questions about god, ethical questions, etc.

MF: What made these individuals stand out as leaders?

JF: It was much more than just their position as a rabbi that made them stand out as a leader. These men had many things in common. For instance, they all had a strong belief
in God. They all believed that we were going to survive. Many of the rabbis had very positive attitudes, and were able to keep all of the prisoners hopeful. They were kind men, their kindness set them apart. They were always reaching out to the prisoners in need.

MF: Did you ever observe any holidays?

JF: Yes, on several occasions. We tried to observe religious commandments, such as no working on the Sabbath. However, that was very hard to do because the guards made us work, and if we did not do what we were told, the consequences could be great. We organized a seder once, although we did not have any matzo (unleavened bread). This seder united us, because we were able to come together and celebrate our religion even though we were not supposed to. We were all sharing the same nightmare experiences, and that made this particular seder more special than any other.

MF: Were there any cultural leaders in the camp? Individuals who tried to unite prisoners through songs or other cultural activities?

JF: Not really in the camps. The Warsaw ghetto did have culture. We were allowed to have movies; In fact, there was even a movie theater. We were also allowed to have concerts—we had several concerts. But not in the camps. There was no real culture in the camps. We did sing one or two different prayer songs, but those songs were for worship, not for culture. Conditions were so bad in the camp that it was not really possible to think about culture.

MF: Were there any groups of prisoners who became friends and helped one another struggle through life in the concentration camp?

JF: Oh yes, definitely there were many groups of prisoners who helped one another. In fact, I could not have made it through without my group of friends. Having a group of people to stay with, and talk with, and that can help you when you need help was so important to me. It made it much easier to be strong, and it made it much easier to think of survival if you knew that you had your friends going through the same hard times as you were. We were all suffering. We had all lost our families. The only thing that we still had left was each other, and so we tried to hold onto that.

MF: How were you able to help one another?

JF: There were so many ways—talking, praying, even just sitting in silence together. I saw many heroic acts of friendship while I was in Auschwitz. I saw people share the only food that they had with someone who was weak or sick. I saw people extend a kind word to other prisoners that they did not know. I saw people risk their own lives to get messages about lost family members and loved ones to other prisoners. All of these things took courage, bravery. They are signs of a strong person, a true good friend, a real leader. I remember one particular group of prisoners who were very religious—they were
always helping the sick and the weak. They helped everyone, not just the prisoners they knew. These types of activities could get you killed if you were seem by a guard.

MF: What type of person does it take to display such acts of courage?

JF: These people were strong and brave. They believed in God. They believed that they were going to survive. The prisoners who did not believe, many of them were weaker. But anyone could be brave, anyone could believe.

MF: Were there any resistance movements?

JF: Yes, there were resistance movements; however, I did not really have any contact with such groups. I have heard a great deal about resistance movements, and about prisoners escaping. Many people talked about trying to escape to the forest, because they said that was where the resistance movement was hiding. If you made it to the forest, you could hide and perhaps would be safe. It was so hard to think about escaping. Everyone wanted to escape, but since the chances of being successful seemed so slim, it was no worth it to many. We wanted to survive, and we believed that if we kept our faith in God, we would survive.

MF: Well, thank you so much. Your insights really have been a tremendous help to my project.
Appendix D

Interview: Ester Smith
March 19, 1997

MF: Thank you so much for taking time out of your schedule to do this interview—I really appreciate it. Perhaps I should begin by telling you a little bit more about my project. I’m trying to find out what type of individual characteristics, environmental factors, and socialization factors enabled or ignited certain Jews to emerge as leaders within the camps during the war. Primarily, I want to study those individuals who took part in ‘hidden’ acts of leadership. For example, prisoners who organized prayer groups or those who united their barracks with songs of protest. Well, now that I’ve explained a little about my project, maybe you could start out by telling me a little bit about your personal history with the holocaust: which camps you were in, which years, etc.

ES: Well, I was in Auschwitz. I was there from 1943 until 1945—when I first came to Auschwitz I had just turned sixteen. It was a very horrible time—so horrible you could never imagine. Maybe you would like me to tell you about life in the concentration camps before I really get to your questions?

MF: Yeah, that would be great

ES: Well, we got up every morning at five o’clock, and many times the weather was very bad. We stood outside until nine o’clock, and at that time the SS counted us. Then we went back to our barracks for the rest of the day and just laid there like sardines. There were so many of us cramped into the barracks that it was so hard to move, so hard to breathe. At five o’clock in the afternoon we were brought back outside. Again we were lined up and counted. At this time we got a very small piece of bread to eat. In the morning we had been given black water to drink. The water looked black like coffee, but it was not coffee. Once a week we were all stripped naked outside. We were sprayed with some sort of disinfectant, but I can not remember what it was called. After we were sprayed, they gave us back our clothes. The clothes they gave us were not our own clothes. They had taken our clothes and gave all the women long gray dresses and hard wooden shoes to wear.

MF: Did you work at all while you were in the camp?

ES: Yes, I worked in the crematory. To this day I can still remember the smell. I can not pass by the chimneys at the train stations in New York without remembering the smell of the crematory. I will never forget how awful it was.

MF: Perhaps we could talk a bit about leadership in the camps. Were there any prisoners who had leadership positions?
ES: Yes, there were certain prisoners who were “in charge” of the other prisoners in the barracks. These prisoners were oftentimes just as mean as the guards because they did what they were told. They wanted to stay alive, and so they beat us just like the guards did.

MF: What about any ‘informal’ leaders among the prisoners? Individuals who were looked up to by, or united the group?

ES: It is hard for me to say. No one in particular stands out in my mind as a ‘leader’. We were all so scared, we just did what we were told.

MF: Were there groups of prisoners who became friends and helped one another to overcome the hardships of camp life?

ES: Oh yes. Many people met other Jews who were from their home town or county. Many prisoners became very good friends with the people they met in the barracks. Some prisoners kept mainly to themselves, but others were more willing to reach out and talk to other Jews. The friends that I made in Auschwitz are people that I am still very good friends with today. I do not think that I could have survived Auschwitz without the friends that I made. We took many risks for one another.

MF: Would you consider the risks that you took for one another to be acts of resistance? Acts of leadership?

ES: My friends kept me going, they kept me thinking that God was going to take care of us. We helped each other survive—we were leaders. I believe that the leaders in the barracks were those individuals who were human to one another when the guards were treating us like animals.

MF: How did you manage to keep one another strong?

ES: We stayed near one another, we prayed together, we took care of one another when we were sick or weak. The friends that I was with in the camp became like a family to me, I cared about them like they were my family. I remember one instance when I was not feeling well, I was very sick. A woman I was very close with, she knew my mother well, she offered me her piece of bread. She told me to eat her piece of bread because it would give me the strength to get better. I will never forget the kindness of many of my friends.

MF: The woman who shared her bread with you seems very brave and selfless. Would you consider her actions to be characteristic of a leader?

ES: Yes. We were all afraid, but there were some of us who were less afraid. These were the individuals who were able to take care of others. They were strong, and had a strong belief that God was with us, and looking after us at all times. This woman was
very courageous. Her actions made her a leader who took risks, a leader who fought against the Germans.

MF: You said that you were confident that God would take care of you. How much did religion come into play during the time you spent in Auschwitz?

ES: We tried to keep some aspects of our religion. We were separated in the camps—men and women. I imagine that the men’s camps may or had more religion than we did in the women’s camps. The men’s camps had rabbis and were more open. But in the women’s camps we did have some religion. Each barrack had about 1000 girls, and we always managed to know when it was a holiday. There was not much opportunity to celebrate any of these holidays. The guards would not allow us to have religion, and we always did what we were told. Just because we couldn’t have holidays though, didn’t mean we had lost our faith in God. We believed strongly in God, and we believed strongly that we would survive Auschwitz. If it were not for my belief in God, I would not have been saved.

MF: Were there any particular individuals who organized group prayers?

ES: Not really. I prayed alone, or sometimes I prayed with my friends. We would pray together for our survival. We prayed quietly in the corner so that we would not get caught by the guards. There was no single leader of our prayers, but every woman that prayed was a leader. Each of these women was a leader. There was no single woman who led that barrack. We all played a part. We all prayed together for our survival.

MF: What did these women who prayed together have in common?

ES: We all felt religion was the one thing that could save us. God was our only hope of survival, and so we did all that we could to maintain religion. These women were not all used to taking risks, to doing what they were told not to do. Secret prayers and worship were so dangerous, and many women were risking their lives for God.

MF: Do you remember any cultural activity in the camp? Were there any songs that were sung, or plays that were performed?

ES: In the camps? No. There was no culture; At least I did not experience any culture. Nobody cared about music, nobody cared about culture. We just cared about survival. We were not allowed to have culture. How can you have culture when you are crammed up like a sardine?

MF: Were there any resistance movements, or prisoners who tried to escape?

ES: There must have been resistance movements. I have read books about the resistance movements, but I did not witness any. Perhaps in the men’s camps such movements were more common. Sometimes there were prisoners who tried to escape, but I do not know
any who were successful. When they lined us up to count us every day, if there was ever
someone missing, we had to wait while the guards looked for that prisoner. We waited
and waited, and eventually they found the prisoner, either dead or alive. If the prisoner
came back alive, she was usually shot.

MF: Well, I think that about wraps up the interview. Thanks so much for your time.