

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Survivors of the Holocaust experienced a traumatic time where their individuality was threatened. The fact that they emerged from the concentration camps alive is miraculous and can be analyzed in many different ways. This study analyzes different categories of identity and how they manifest themselves in two autobiographies by Charlotte Delbo and Primo Levi. The survivors' pre-war identities were altered and, after liberation, they reentered the world with different outlooks on life. Identity can be studied through many different lenses, four of which are personal, social, persecuted, and survival. Noticeably, these four types are not all inclusive, nor specific to Holocaust victims, but are vividly revealed in Delbo's and Levi's texts. The way memory affects a traumatic retelling of a story also influences how the texts are written. Identity can take shape in many different forms and the study of them not only establishes consciousness of self-identity but also shows how trauma affects an individual's perspective after overcoming a violent experience.

Echoed Identities: Charlotte Delbo and Primo Levi's Perception of Self in their
Concentration Camp Autobiographies

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
<u>CHAPTER</u>	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 WHAT IS IDENTITY?	8
3 SELF IDENTITY	13
4 SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED IDENTITY	26
5 PERSECUTED IDENTITY	42
6 SURVIVAL IDENTITY	55
7 MEMORY'S EFFECTS.....	75
8 CONCLUSION.....	85
WORKS CITED	89

Introduction

“I’ve come back from another world
to this world
I had not left
and I know not
which one is real
tell me did I really come back
from the other world?” (Delbo 224)

The Holocaust was a time in which the concept of identity was dangerous. The persecution of specific identities was prominent and those who survived the brutality of the times struggled with putting their experience into words. The survivors who lived in one of the many camps were proficient in starvation and constant thirst, taking away visions from their situations that would stay imbedded in their memories for the rest of their lives. The identities the survivors possessed before the war were completely altered when they emerged after their imprisonment in concentration camps. Besides aiming to eliminate the persecuted minorities from Europe, the camps were created and run with the intent to strip away the identities of the prisoners, in order to obtain ample domination over the victims. The concentration camps created new identities in which past necessities, such as food, water, and warmth were suddenly considered extravagances. Prisoners had to reshape who they were, as well as their priorities, in order to survive.

As countless autobiographies show, survivors wanted to put words to their experience and well as explore more of who they were in the camps through poetry and

memoirs. The identity obtained during the persecution shaped the survivors' attitudes as well as influenced how they chose to dictate their stories. Many of the autobiographies that emerged from this time had similar themes, such as food, water, and warmth, but they also had features unique to each person's venture.

While Heinz Heger, an Austrian, directed his focus to a more mature audience, detailing the ways a homosexual survived in *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, Livia Bitton-Jackson, a Czechoslovakian, created a young adult autobiography, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, to reach younger demographics. Ruth Kluger, a survivor hailing from Austria, wanted to show how important family was to her survival in *Still Alive*, all the while presenting her text in a more hostile manner, whereas Jorge Semprun, a Spaniard living in France, wrote forgiveness into his book, *Literature or Life*, perhaps insinuating he has healed enough from his persecution to forgive. Two survivors, who played a key role in autobiographical accounts of their time in a concentration camp, were Charlotte Delbo, a French political prisoner and Primo Levi, an Italian Jew. Each wrote a narrative that I will explore and analyze in this study in regards to their depiction of identity during their imprisonment. Both Charlotte Delbo and Primo Levi wrote their life stories from their time while held in a concentration camp; within these books, I investigate countless perceptions of identity with the intent of deciphering complex memories, detailing horrific situations and yet leaving room for a close examination of the self.

I chose to focus specifically on these two authors not only because their accounts are written with special attention given to vivid details but also because their stories stood out to me more personally than any other Holocaust memoirs. The beauty in which Delbo writes her account cannot be mimicked and I briefly forgot it was about living in a

concentration camp. Her prose impressively connects with her poetry intermittently throughout her book. This combination keeps the reader's attention as well as shows a more in-depth look inside the author's mind. Delbo writes with such intense passion about the Holocaust's effects on her and her friends that it is easy to get lost in her story. Levi, on the other hand, wrote his account in a more explanatory way with little passion, but more emphasis on the situation, analyzing why he ended up in Auschwitz as well as focusing on detailing his time there through a philosophical viewpoint. This approach is intriguing as it is a beneficial counterexample to Delbo's method. The reader is fascinated by Levi's aim to explain his experience without inserting as much emotion as Delbo does in her text. Having a male and a female look at a concentration camp experience will help provide a rounded and balanced analysis.

I will also be including various poems by other survivors as poetry deals greatly with identity and self-exploration. The poetry I have discovered examines the question of "who am I" as well as "why am I being persecuted?" Poetry helps shed light on other survivors' view of their identity during the Holocaust and because much of it is written post-war, they write looking through the viewpoint of their identity at the time. I shall bring light to a subject by detailing how Holocaust survivors saw themselves during their time in camps for the duration of their persecution. I critique and analyze Delbo and Levi's depiction of themselves as well as how identity is defined and related in a time when the purpose was to demoralize and strip individuality.

When beginning this project, I was faced with many questions. First, how did Delbo and Levi see themselves in a time of ultimate persecution? Second, why did they choose to write about that time in their lives? Third, how has that writing helped or

hindered their healing process? Lastly, how has memory affected their written accounts? While I shall focus mainly on their self-perception in relation to constructed identity, I will also touch on the reasoning behind the choice to write autobiographical narratives or poetry in order to express and explore. Since there is little evidence as to how both authors' writing may have helped or hindered their grief, I chose not to address this subject. I will, however, explore briefly how memory affected their narratives as both authors discuss that not only in their texts, but also in other works they have published.

Charlotte Delbo is not well known by the general public in the United States and little more so in her own country. Her masterpiece, *Auschwitz and After*, is written with such beauty that it is a pity she is not more popular. Delbo was born in Vigneux-sur-Seine, near Paris, August 10, 1913. While little is known of her childhood, we do know that she became interested in politics at a young age. In 1932, Delbo joined the French Young Women's Communist League, which was an organization dedicated to educating people on the philosophies of communism and promoting the spread of communism throughout Paris. She developed a prominent role within the group becoming a natural leader helping advance their resistance to the impending World War II. In 1934, she married George Dudach, another active communist (Barrows).

After she married Dudach, she became the assistant for French writer Louis Jovet and traveled all over South America with him. She was in Buenos Aires, Argentina, when she heard of Germany's invasion of France in 1940 and instead of staying safe miles away from the war, felt it her duty to return to France to fight in the resistance against Germany. In one instance, she explained to Jovet that she "can't stand being safe while others are put to death" (Barrows). Joining forces with her husband, she

helped deliver anti-Nazi pamphlets to counteract Nazi propaganda. Delbo was disgusted with not only Germany's takeover of France but also with the Nazi aim to eliminate entire races. She and her husband were arrested March 2, 1942, and charged with delivering anti-German leaflets in Paris. Her husband was shot in May of that year and in 1943 Delbo and 230 other Frenchwomen were sent to Auschwitz and imprisoned as political enemies. Living in Auschwitz until the liberation, she was overworked to the point of exhaustion, malnourished to the point of starvation, and witnessed an overwhelming amount of brutal events involving her friends and other women in the camp. After the liberation, she attempted to resume a normal life, but struggled with learning how to comprehend the atrocity she lived through. She died in 1985 from lung cancer, leaving behind one son (Barrows).

Her autobiography details the period at the concentration camps as well as her time after the imprisonment. Published in 1985 originally, *Auschwitz and After* is a trilogy: *None of Us will Return*, which explains the beginning of her stay as well as much of the trepidation she experienced as an inmate; *Useless Knowledge*, which explores more of the Frenchwomen's journey to freedom as they were moved from Auschwitz to Ravensbrück; and *The Measure of Our Days*, which is about Delbo's re-emergence into the world post-Holocaust. This trilogy encompasses parts that are linear, explaining events chronologically as well as parts that are more similar to a stream of consciousness. She combines poetry and prose majestically in *Auschwitz and After*, covering themes of death, brutality, beauty, camaraderie, strength, friendship, family, loyalty, pain, and character.

On the other side lie Primo Levi and his text, *Survival in Auschwitz*. Levi is better known to the general public than Delbo because he lectured about his experience many years after his liberation, hoping to spread the awareness of the Holocaust. He was born in Turin, Italy, July 31, 1919. His parents were Jewish and Levi grew up a dedicated student whose passions in school were chemistry and biology. In 1937, he majored in chemistry at the University of Turin's School of Sciences, where he graduated cum laude in 1941. Levi was anti-Fascist and joined the Party of Action in an effort to stop the rising, restrictive Fascist laws, under Mussolini. He was arrested in 1943 while protesting and sent to a concentration camp in the Modena Province. The camp was taken over by the Germans in 1944 from where Levi was sent to Auschwitz. Although he survived the camp, he lived an emotionally troubled life until he committed suicide April 11, 1987 ("Chronology"). Some of his works include: *The Periodic Table*, *The Reawakening*, *If Not Now, When*, and *The Drowned and the Saved*. His autobiography of his time spent during the war, *Survival in Auschwitz*, was published in 1947 and is one of his most famous works.

Survival in Auschwitz, originally published in Italian under the title, *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This is A Man*), is a compelling autobiography and it is one of the first books published after the war (1947) with the intent of describing life in a concentration camp. The title was changed in English to convey the idea that the book was specifically about living in a concentration camp as the name "Auschwitz" was becoming wide spread with news articles and publications reporting on the newly liberated camps in Europe. The narrative covers Levi's incarceration at Auschwitz until the liberation of the camp in 1945. He was detained for eleven months and worked in various areas during his

imprisonment. His book covers those fields as well as friendships made, illnesses endured, and persecution seen.

Both authors provide many details in terms of how they perceived their identity as well as why they include specific stories or events. These perceptions can be examined through a sociological viewpoint as well as a psychological approach. Both explain the human condition and its capabilities when suffering a traumatic event and both approaches will broaden the understanding of how survivors chose to depict their individuality.

Chapter Two: What is Identity?

Both Delbo and Levi's autobiographies deal with the common subjects of death and persecution during the Holocaust but each has uniqueness to it in its depiction of how their identity was explored. Identity is not an abstract concept. As humans are social creatures, they interact with others and prefer to not be isolated. The individual and the group are interconnected and as humans recognize themselves as unique, they also see themselves as part of a community. C. Margaret Hall, an expert in the studies of identity, particularly female, concludes then, that individual identity is influenced by collective identity making it a direct result of people bonding with humankind (Hall 13). Identity is important; without it, people feel lost and unsure of themselves. People continually compare and contrast themselves with others, whether it is their family, friends, colleagues, religious cohorts, or role models. They size themselves up in order to build upon their own character hoping to have society see them as special and worthy of recognition.

C. Margaret Hall asserts that identity is important in developing awareness of capabilities and desires. Interdependency is central to human nature and helps create many facets of individuality. These facets are multilayered and are critical for analyzing how humans see themselves. Hall states that as identity is formed through the connection of others, these "others" are needed throughout its development to help bring it to its full fruition. There are numerous influential aspects that shape an individual's perception of self, both positive and negative. Comments, critiques, reassurances, praise, and rejections are merely a few of these aspects. There is also the concept of crisis, such as the Holocaust, which critically affects identity (Hall 13-14).

The Holocaust was a time in which the Nazis felt threatened by various identities, including, but not limited to, sexuality, race, and appearances. As a result of the persecution they endured and the camps they were sent to, some minority groups, such as Jews, homosexuals, and the Roma/Sinti, questioned their identities, and while it was challenging, ended up creating new ones. The new identities stuck with survivors and helped influence how they would relate their story to others. It also influenced how they saw themselves during a time in which persecution was rampant. Some used that influence to construct narratives. The challenge of having to rediscover oneself again post-crisis is extensive but Charlotte Delbo and Primo Levi intended to accomplish this and analyzing how they perceived themselves during that time period in their lives is significant in understanding the concept of post-traumatic identity.

Both Delbo and Levi created new perceptions of who they were as individuals while they were in concentration camps. They saw themselves in a new fashion; they saw their strengths tried, they saw relationships with others develop and they saw their beliefs tested. Thus, I shall explore four ideas: self-awareness, community with friends, persecution and survival.¹ This list pertains not only to prose writing but also to poetry. Identity is vast and unique as it differs from person to person, but the four fields mentioned above will aid in exploring a small section of it and how important it was to inmates in concentration camps as well as those who survived the cruelty.

Each theme holds importance and value in the lives of survivors. Self-awareness lies mainly in the perception of self and how that acuity affects actions, decisions, and

¹ Although religion is important in terms of identity construction, it was not a strong aspect in either Delbo or Levi's lives, therefore it was not included in the scope of this research.

beliefs. Judith Gerson, author of “In between States: National Identity Practices among German Jewish Immigrants,” states that survivors perceived their body image and inner self differently and since it is human nature to criticize the self, this identity was influential in the survival of the person’s sanity during and after the war. The individuals’ self-images determined how they felt they could handle the trauma. Some, like Delbo and Levi, saw themselves as exceptionally strong and able to survive anything handed to them. This is not to say that survival was only linked to a positive self-image, it also depended on many other circumstances, such as: age, gender, gassing, year, camp, etc. Gerson asserts that others saw themselves as initially strong but slowly let go as they gave up hope, thus, many times, leading to their imminent death as they would be considered weak and therefore useless to the work that needed to be performed by the inmates. Another group was indifferent to the situation, numb from the horrors of what they had endured and not caring anymore whether or not they survived (Gerson 184). This view that many maintained of their own capabilities is prominent in many Holocaust memoirs as people not only judge themselves but know others judge based purely on outward appearances and actions.

Identity within a community setting is another type of perception that is important to all human beings. People continually find themselves as members of society, no matter the neighborhood, school, town, or country in which they belong. Humans are social creatures and need a social community to help validate ideas, challenge beliefs, and assert positions. Without community, many people feel alone and depressed. How people perceive themselves also stems from how they are perceived in a community. This surrounding community is usually in friends and family. It can be made up of religious

groups and political affiliations as well but friends and family are vital in assisting in the construction of a person's character (Hall 13). Both Delbo and Levi discuss how their cohorts influenced their decisions and aided them in maintaining their sanity in order to focus on surviving the camps. Socially constructed identity is possessed by all people as it is not only influenced by others but also inevitable.

Two ideas need to be evaluated when discussing identity perceived in times of persecution: trauma and elimination. Jean-Claude Deschamps, author of "Social Identity and Relations of Power between Groups," states that trauma influences newly constructed identities that arise from difficult situations. These new identities strengthen beliefs and force people to remember life when it was more beautiful and peaceful (Deschamps 88). The Nazis tried to strip the original identity of their victims because they felt defenseless against specific convictions, outward appearances, actions, traditions, and ideals. As a direct result of this though, inmates held on to their convictions more forcefully, sustaining them to get through the hardship. The persecutors attempted to eliminate all originality and impose conformity. While this may have worked on some, others fought it as much as possible, such as Delbo and Levi. Persecuted identity is found in each autobiography and is distinct in the inmates' perception of how they would survive.

Survival identity played another important role in concentration camp prisoners' characters as the need for survival was vital. When people are thinking about surviving a traumatic situation they take upon themselves new values and priorities, which can alter identity. This new identity is focused clearly on how to survive and what it would take to overcome the brutalities. They focus on what their life might be like after they survive, who they might become, and how they will set up a completely new life, starting from

scratch (Hall 43). This survival identity may correspond with their original self but often it does not as is the case for both Delbo and Levi. The Holocaust dramatically changed them and their lives after the war. All these types of identity differ and depend on the individual, yet they can be seen clearly in *Auschwitz and After* by Charlotte Delbo and *Survival in Auschwitz* by Primo Levi.

Chapter Three: Self-Identity

Psychiatrist Vamýk Volkan defines identity using a metaphor: people wear “two layers of clothing, where the first layer fits snugly (the personal identity) while the second layer (the social identity) is a loose covering that protects the individual in the way a parent, close family members, or other caregivers protect the subject” (Kinnvall 752). This metaphor shows how people possess two types of identity: one they construct for themselves on a personal level, how they see themselves and how they view their own behavior; and another identity that society constructs and judges. In this chapter, I will focus on the personal identity that both Charlotte Delbo and Primo Levi construct for themselves. The way in which both authors detail their individual plights and why they choose to depict themselves that way is noteworthy. This construction says much about how they viewed their personal capabilities as well as why they include stories, ideas, judgments, and uncertainties the way they do. Poetry from the Holocaust also contains a great deal of introspection into personal identity. Each poet wants to illustrate what the human condition is capable of when submerged in the most brutal and trying type of situation. This concept of personal identity will enlighten and answer many questions that start with why, such as “Why me,” “Why am I doing what I am doing?” and “Why am I in this situation?”

Another psychologist, Donald M. Taylor, introduces the “Four Components of the Self.” He argues that self-concept is important and must not be overlooked. The question of “Who am I” is in people’s minds as they encounter day-to-day decisions. He argues that there is a difference between “identity” and “esteem.” Identity is the component that describes who someone is while esteem is the component that forms the evaluation of

that self (Taylor 35). Without one or the other, a full self-concept cannot be completed. While Delbo and Levi continually describe their struggles during their imprisonment, they also evaluate their capabilities and inner selves. This personal perception is what they choose to focus on as it comes up time and time again in both autobiographies. Some of the poetry from Holocaust survivors also has self-evaluation within as it analyzes the social situation as well as what it means for the individual to live in that situation. The first part of self-analysis is the acknowledgment of the individual's body and capabilities (Taylor 34).

The acknowledgement of the self, however, is not uncommon and is not specific to Holocaust survivors. Humans notice the way they look and act throughout their lives. Both Delbo and Levi bring this idea up many times. Sometimes the language is blunt, giving a vivid description of what they notice about themselves; other times the language is coded with euphemisms so as to not completely shock the reader. The notably blunt language leaves a dominant impression in the readers' minds and Delbo uses it more frequently than Levi. For example, in the first part of her trilogy, *None of Us Will Return*, Delbo compares herself to a dummy, like the ones on display in clothing stores (Delbo 17-19). In another chapter, Delbo uses this same idea to describe a woman's death as the SS and their dogs kill her. Delbo says, "Do not look. Do not look at this dummy being dragged on the ground. Do not look at yourself" (Delbo 89). As Delbo compares the way this person is murdered, readers understand how Delbo sees herself: she views the situation as if she were the woman, the dummy, in the sense that she is completely helpless and there is little she can do for herself. The prisoners are at the mercy of the guards and are aware of that fact. This awareness of vulnerability and the fact that Delbo

writes about it shows how prominent it is on the prisoners' minds. The fact that she writes about it in her trilogy also shows how she is self-aware of her helplessness.

In the second part of her trilogy, *Useless Knowledge*, Delbo gives a colorful account of a time she is allowed a quick bath in a stream. She describes the process of removing her stockings and the odor she expects. She acknowledges the fact that the area around her smells like the outdoors but she cannot smell it, nor can she smell her own filth. "No, no memory of any odor. It's true that I can't recall my own smell when I lifted my dress. Which proves that our nostrils were besmirched with our own stink and could no longer smell anything" (Delbo 150). Why she chooses to include this incident is important because her awareness as a woman, that is, noticing her body and appearance, is heightened. Later, when she removes her stockings and her toenails separate from the skin and are glued to the stockings, she notes that she has no time to consider this peculiarity. She mentions how "To see one's toenails encrusted in one's stockings is, I promise you, an astonishing sight" (Delbo 151). The fact that Delbo brings up both the smell and sight of this event shows how aware she is of her own image and also how she feels it is important enough to include in her trilogy.

Elaine Scarry acknowledges that the body is a complex structure able to withstand torture and pain. Her book, *The Body in Pain*, details how the body can go through physical pain and, although changed, emerge whole, but with new scars and memories (Scarry 31). The difficulty of putting words to physical pain is discussed in length yet Delbo seems to do so with a sense of ease. She strives to make readers understand just exactly how she feels upon seeing and smelling herself for the first time after a long while. The graphic details she includes emphasize her tortured self but she also knows

there are no words fully to describe the surprise a person would feel as they watch their toenails separate from the skin. She provides readers with shocking images and blunt language. In terms of her smell, she notes that she cannot actually smell anything although she acknowledges that the aroma would have been horrific with the diarrhea-encrusted panties and filthy body. How she views her appearance in this scene is explicit yet she writes it using descriptive language to place the exact images in readers' minds and also show that the body is able to withstand awful conditions.

Delbo not only acknowledges her physical appearance but also her mental capabilities:

You may say that one can take away everything from a human being except the faculty of thinking and imagining. You have no idea. One can turn a human being into a skeleton gurgling with diarrhea, without time or energy to think. Imagination is the first luxury of a body receiving sufficient nourishment, enjoying a margin of free time, possessing the rudiments from which dreams are fashioned. People did not dream in Auschwitz, they were in a state of delirium. (Delbo 168)

This comment shows how conscious Delbo is of her own mind during a time when focusing would have been difficult. She makes note of how important imagination is and how dreams arise from it. The problem is, it is impossible to dream in a time when the worst nightmares are reality all around a person. Nightmares were real and people saw them in the torture, beatings, killings, and mutilations they encountered while imprisoned in a concentration camps. This consciousness shows how Delbo is aware of her mental capabilities as well as those of her comrades, creating universality among prisoners.

While Levi acknowledges his body in his autobiography, he does not go into the same detail that Delbo does. His mention of his body is not only to point out to readers the emaciated look he possesses but also what that look means for survival. For instance, when the selections arise, the male prisoners evaluate each other's bodies to point out the likelihood of being selected for the gas chamber. Levi writes, "In the latrines, in the washroom, we show each other our chests, our buttocks, our thighs, and our comrades reassure us: 'You are all right, it will certainly not be your turn this time, ... du bist kein Muselmann ... more probably mine ...' and they undo their braces in turn and pull up their shirt" (Levi 146)². Using each other as mirrors, they not only see their own gaunt bodies but also their hope for survival. They reassure each other to keep their spirits up and hope that their time to die is not upon them. This perception of self is reinforced by the comrades' opinions and comforting words.

Levi also discusses his awareness of his body when he works as a chemist around the female workers. He mentions the shame and embarrassment he feels when the women look at him. He describes himself as "ridiculous and repugnant" (Levi 167). The prisoners' heads are shaved, their faces swollen, yellow and full of bruises and sores, their clothes dirty, stained with mud, grease, and blood, they are full of fleas and they smell from lack of bathing. Levi's acknowledgment of his physical appearance shows he feels ashamed of being forced to work with women, who are not as self-conscious of their smell, and make it clear they hate being in close proximity with the dirty men. This passage shows how prominent shame is when in a situation such as this. Levi's self-

² A muselmann is someone who is weak and in a state of decay (Levi 103). These are the prisoners who have little hope of surviving as they are usually too sick and lack the strength to carry onward.

awareness evaluates not only his body but also the position in which he is thrown, which is humiliating and corrupt.

Both authors bring up their evaluation of the situation of living in the camp. They look at how their strength is tried and how they think they might overcome the adversity that is their day-to-day life. Levi argues that “To destroy a man is difficult, almost as difficult as to create one ... here we are, docile under your gaze; from our side you have nothing more to fear; no more acts of violence, no words of defiance, not even a look of judgment” (Levi 177). He notes that many of the men have given up and remain helpless. They know there is no point left in fighting as they are completely dominated by the guards. Delbo also notes how many want to remain strong and defy the institution but to do so would be deadly so they, too, go along with the rules in order to survive (Delbo 69). The two authors evaluate their abilities of surviving the camps based on their strength to move forward and take each day as it comes.

Although Levi is aware of the situation, he remains hopeful, another feature that some Holocaust autobiographers mention and others ignore. Levi says, “Strange, how in some way one always has the impression of being fortunate, how some chance happening, perhaps infinitesimal, stops us crossing the threshold of despair and allows us to live” (153). Likewise, Delbo mentions a time when they are hopeful. In *Useless Knowledge* she writes, “To speak was our only escape, our mad raving. What did we speak of? Material, usable things. We had to omit anything that might awaken pain or regret. We never spoke of love. And suddenly, in the small camp, we were coming back to life, and everything was coming back to us. We wished we could read, listen to music, go to the theater. We were going to put on a play” (Delbo 168). Both these passages

demonstrate how important it is for the preservation of identity when hope is involved. Giving up hope is disastrous for some as it admits complete defeat and means letting go of ever getting out of the camp alive. Both Delbo and Levi hold tight onto hope, planning for their lives after Auschwitz and thinking how they plan to reintegrate themselves into a society which would be almost foreign to them. As hope is a factor in both autobiographies, it can easily be seen as important to Holocaust victims.

While the situation itself causes a time for individuals to reflect on their personal identity, the derogatory names that many of the victims endure during their imprisonment also affects them. Levi notes that it is common to be called a “Häftling” and compared to animals as they eat and live (Levi 22). The word “Häftling” means prisoner, captive, or detainee, therefore when a victim is called it he is deprived of the original name given to him by his parents and called the same name as the person next to him. By calling all of them Häftlings, they are seen as the same by the guards. Similarly, it has been noticed that many Holocaust autobiographies reference the animal names the perpetrators called the victims and minority groups in Europe during the Holocaust. Levi indicates a time when the Kapos would yell “Wer hat noch zu fressen?” referencing the way the prisoners eat their food: more like animals (*fressen*) than like humans (*essen*). Levi even agrees with this remark and admits “‘Fressen’ is exactly the word, and is used currently among us” (Levi 85). This reference to animals (rats, pigs, etc.) can be seen in both Holocaust autobiographies and this is merely one instance where Levi mentions it. Likewise, when Delbo refers to the dummy scene, she is comparing the dummy to herself and what she sees in her comrades. Although she attributes this name to her own identity, she is belittling herself, something she is used to from the Nazi guards around the camp. Name

calling affects people's perceptions of themselves and influences the shaping of their self-esteem, overall contributing to their identity.

The dehumanization tactics that the Nazis enforced included many forms of torture, neglect, and verbal abuse. One way to hurt people and subject them to humiliation is to call them names meant to degrade rather than their given name. The definition of name calling is "the use of offensive names, especially to win an argument or to induce rejection or condemnation without objective consideration of the facts" ("Name-Calling"). This verbal bullying not only offends people, but also takes away their uniqueness. This form of abuse may seem less extreme than starvation or physical attacks, but when exposed to it many times, the individual starts to actually feel worthless, the actual intention of the bully. Calling the victims in the camps animals or something less than a person wounds the prisoners and harms their self-esteem. Levi admits that the men look like animals when they eat, as it is with such voracity that there is no other way to describe the sight. Delbo's mention of herself as a dummy only reinforces the idea that she is starting to feel worse about herself and likens her body to that of a mannequin, something non-human with no agency. The verbal abuse is intended to damage the victims' self-image.

The jobs that the prisoners are assigned also play a role in the individual's perception of self. While Levi is a chemist by profession, this is only one of the jobs he performs while in Auschwitz. He labors in the lab, in the field unloading cast-iron cylinders from wagons, hauling pots of stew and performing other manual, physically stressful jobs. Although, as a chemist, he is formally trained to use his brain, he is forced to utilize his body while in Auschwitz. Delbo also talks of performing hard, manual labor

during her imprisonment. She and the other female prisoners haul dirt or snow from one side of the road to the other, for no other purpose but to keep the prisoners from sitting idle (Delbo 90-94). This type of back-breaking labor was developed with the intention of demoralizing the prisoners, all the while testing their strength and physical capabilities. The concept of “Tod durch Arbeit” (killing people through work) was applied here as it made no difference to the Nazis who was worked to death and who was strong enough to live another day.

The acknowledgement of what is missing from their lives also plays a part in how concentration camp prisoners view their identity. Both Delbo and Levi talk of what they miss from their lives before imprisonment. Both have lost freedom, family, food, dignity, and the ability to maintain proper hygiene. Since proper hygiene and food are necessary for survival, the absence of such would be obviously detrimental to their well-being. The losses of dignity and freedom are hard for anyone to handle, yet prisoners struggle to deal with it and ignore what they are no longer capable of possessing. As both authors mention what they miss from their lives, they do not dwell long on those negative thoughts. They mention what saddens them and acknowledge their losses but then move on with their stories. This could be because both Delbo and Levi know that simply to remember and mention them is enough because thinking about them too much while in the camp is futile. On the opposite side however, the concentration camp prisoners might continue to dream about what they have lost as remembering it might have given them hope for their life after the camp. Either way, the authors know they lose much upon entering their prisons and make it a point to mention it. This affects their perception of themselves and helps in the construction of their concentration camp identities.

Poetry is another important part of many Holocaust survivors' interpretation of the event. Poetry, very often, is a reflection of personal observations, ideas, and feelings. It is more concentrated and denser than prose, making interpretations of it more difficult, yet more enticing. The poetry from those imprisoned in camps shows all of this and more. It is a mirror of how they saw their situation and perceived their identity as prisoners or persecuted figures in society. In the following poem, Delbo analyzes her situation and asserts that the concentration camps cannot be compared to hell as they are worse:

Hell had vomited all its damned
who were greeting us now
Right away
we realized
why they failed to welcome us warmly
They missed the torments of hell
and saw us arriving
we who came from the world
as people who know
and can tell the difference
and right away
we would also know
and wish to forget life.

.....

In hell

you do not see your comrades dying
in hell
death is no threat
you no longer feel hunger or thirst in hell
you no longer await anything
in hell
there is no more hope
and hope is anguish
in the heart empty of blood.
Why then do you say that it is hell,
here? (Delbo 134)

This poem recapitulates Delbo's feelings upon arriving in Auschwitz as well as how she feels during her stay there. She compares herself and her comrades to those who are gaunt with despair and know that soon she will become one who feels like giving up on life. She admits that Auschwitz is worse than hell because in hell one does not see friends die or fear death. Hell should be the end of everything and Auschwitz still contains suffering and torment; thus, it must not be hell. It is worse in Delbo's mind.

One of Primo Levi's poems, "Shemá," is pointed at those who did not suffer in the camps and criticizes people who think they can compare situations. This poem, which is not found in *Survival in Auschwitz*, but published in *Holocaust Poetry*, has similar themes to those Levi wrote about in his autobiography. An excerpt follows:

Consider whether this is a man,
Who labors in the mud

Who knows no peace
Who fights for a crust of bread
Who dies at a yes or a no.
Consider whether this a woman,
Without hair or name
With no more strength to remember
Eyes empty and womb cold
As a frog in winter (Levi, "Shemá" 205)

Levi draws attention to small features that people take for granted such as hair or pieces of bread. He talks about his time in Auschwitz yet makes the poem more universal to apply to all those who suffered in concentration camps. While he brings up ideas that are covered more in depth in his book, he touches on some that are not, such as what the women went through. His imagery is vivid, placing emphasis on the fact that readers need to have a more graphic visual painted for them to truly understand how the concept of what a man is changed in the Holocaust. This poem captures how he sees his identity, one that is threatened and altered, during his time in Auschwitz and its message is powerful and disturbing.

The two poems are connected through the experience the authors had as well as the way in which they relay that experience. Each author may have endured a situation that varied from the other but the overall feelings they interpret are similar: anger, distrust, hesitation, and fear. These emotions, although typical of human nature, are amplified during their imprisonment and the persecution they suffered beforehand. The idea that each feels compelled to write about that experience in a poem shows the desire

to heal from the trauma using a personal interpretation of the event. The narrators know it is important to share their experiences, yet concentrate on different aspects of those experiences. They choose to include what stands out to them the most and desire to get their points across using dominant images and bold lines. The poetry written not only addresses their self-identity, but also that of their peers.

The question of how exactly these survivors see themselves cannot be answered as most Holocaust survivors are deceased. We have only what they wrote about themselves in their autobiographies and poetry. This allows the chance to examine the work based on their words alone. The reason they choose to write could have been a form of self-therapy for them as it helped put words to the horrific situation, shedding light on how they wanted to heal. Delbo and Levi choose to evaluate and explain their own history, looking deeper into how they see themselves based on what was occurring around them. This perception is important as traumatic conditions, such as life in a concentration camp, cause a time for reflection and evaluation whether the individual going through it realizes it or not. The concept of the self is important for people to realize and value as it helps shape perceptions of the world and notice how others affect them, either positively or negative.

Chapter Four: Socially Constructed Identity

“Part of our existence lies in the feelings of those near to us.” (Levi 205)

No words express more how socially connected humans are to the communities around them than this quotation by Primo Levi. Human beings are, by nature, social creatures and need friendships, family, and like-minded groups with which to bond. C. Margaret Hall argues that we need these groups in order to discover more about ourselves: “Self-discovery results from observing, reflecting, and acting rather than solely from thinking” (Hall 118). Hall contends that we take on a social identity in which we alter ourselves to fit in more with the group. She also asserts that human actions within group settings are drastically different from people’s actions when they are by themselves. This change in behavior is a direct result of the opinions or actions of the majority of the group (Hall 126). Socially constructed identity is not unique to certain types of people but to everyone with social connections.

John C. Turner, a social psychologist, defines social identity as “the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group membership” (Turner 18). Both Charlotte Delbo and Primo Levi are aware that they belong to certain communities and act in ways that is most appropriate to that social situation. While each group is unique to each person, such as Delbo a part of a female political prisoner group and Levi a part of a male Jewish group, each acts out characteristics that identify them within that group. One part of belonging to a community is the preservation of identity as it is important not only to the individual but also to the other group members.

David Unruh, a sociologist, considers that through death people's identities are preserved by their loved ones. He states that "what is being preserved after death is a self-concept which existed during life, was acknowledged by others, and had become a significant aspect of the dead person's self" (Unruh 340). Charlotte Delbo talks of how portions of her die, metaphorically, many times in Auschwitz. In one instance she details, "This [lack of interest in imagination or explanation] is the part of me that died in Auschwitz. This is what turned me into a ghost" (239). Since she feels that a fragment of her dies, she knows that writing about her life in the camp is a way of preserving that piece through the power of words. In addition, she talks of the literal death all around her, specifically the death of her comrades in which she helps to preserve their identities mostly through descriptions of their bodies and personalities. Her own metaphorical death connects to her friends' literal deaths as, in both cases, something significant is gone and will not be seen again:

Yvonne Picard

who had such lovely breasts

died.

Yvonne Blech

who had almond-shaped eyes

and eloquent hands

died.

Mounette died

who had such a lovely complexion

a full mouth

a silvery laugh.

Aurore

who had mauve,

mallow-colored eyes

died.

So much beauty and youth

ardor and promise...

All as brave as heroes of ancient Rome. (Delbo 146)

In this poem from *Useless Knowledge*, Delbo honors her friends by remembering and describing features that stand out most to her. Each woman is exceptional to Delbo and as she looks back at who they were to describe them before their deaths, she chooses characteristics that mean a great deal to her, in order to show just how special each woman is.

While Delbo focuses heavily on specific feminine body features, Levi focuses on behavior. He does not go into the depth that Delbo does regarding his mourning for his friends' deaths but does mention those closest to him, such as Resnyk and Lorenzo. Levi points out the strength of the men around him, in terms of both physical and mental strength, while describing very little about their appearances. He notes that Resnyk was a kind man who had immense strength when carrying the dead prisoners, helping to ease Levi's load (Levi 73). Lorenzo is described as the man who keeps Levi alive by helping get him supplies from outside the camp (Levi 142). These two friends, along with others he mentions, are special to Levi as they aid in his survival. By mentioning them in his autobiography and giving them credit for his survival he honors their identity. Identity

preservation is important to people as it helps to remember loved ones and how big an impact they make on the lives around them.

Thomas Trezise, a specialist in Holocaust studies, writes not only about the community experienced and described in Delbo's book, but also about community in general. He writes that "Nazism exploited differences both between and within communities in order precisely to destroy them" (Trezise 862). Despite this goal, many communities feel a strong need to stay together in order to survive. This bond is seen in both Delbo's and Levi's autobiographies. Because of it, there is a natural "us versus them" distinction. Those within the group's protection may look and pass judgment on others. They observe others through the lens of comparison. Delbo brings this idea up in *Useless Knowledge* when she and her friends arrive in Berlin on their way to Ravensbrück. She writes, "We came from Auschwitz. Everyone should have realized it. We discovered an abyss between the world and us, and it made us very sad" (Delbo 181). The acknowledgment of the separation shows just how aware they are of surrounding communities. This is precisely because they are discriminated against so intensely, starved so severely, and dressed so shabbily, looking half-dead, that it is not difficult to notice the nearby sneers and judgment. Delbo's community has to stick together in order to stay strong.

Morton Weinfeld, one of the authors of "Long-Term Effects of the Holocaust on Selected Social Attitudes and Behaviors of Survivors: A Cautionary Note," maintains that overall, when a group is prejudiced against, the bond between them creates such an immense solidarity that the in-group cannot be broken up. This bond helps the individual in the group handle the situation around them as it prevents them from succumbing to

discouragement (Weinfeld 7). While Delbo talks in great length about the solidarity of the community around her, describing emotions, thoughts, actions, and fears, she insists that she is not outside of that group, but rather holds the same fears and emotions that her friends possess. She also uses the group's company to help her get through the days. One day she is left alone in the street. Disheartened to be away from her group she says,

Why did I find myself on that particular day all alone in one of the camp streets? We never made a move without being together, eye and ear on the lookout. Why then was I alone on that day, when the whistle blows burst from every side of the camp, and the Polizei cordoned off each street? . . . How did I get caught so stupidly? Fool that I am. Oh, how dumb, stupid!

(Delbo 193)

She chastises herself for getting caught without her group as she knows that she is safer in the company of her comrades. Later on, she even makes sure to detail the times Viva, her closest friend, slaps her in the face to wake her up from her faint. Delbo faints during every roll call, unlike Viva, and yet she does not regret it and actually enjoys the slap. Without Viva, Delbo would be caught in her faint and possibly punished, or sent to her death as she would be seen as sickly. Delbo credits her survival to her friends and this is just one instance that she mentions (Delbo 65). This community of women is the reason Delbo and a couple others survived.

Similarly, Levi notes how his community helps him to survive as well. A fellow prisoner warns Levi not to drink the water, thus saving him from the diseases that are within (Levi 26). Another prisoner, Walter, explains how the *Ka-Be* [Krankenbunker] (sick ward) is run and how one can survive the gas chambers from it (Levi 56). In fact,

the entire last part of *Survival in Auschwitz* is about the last few days in Auschwitz and his time spent in the *Ka-Be*. He talks of how the men around him all help each other out with cleaning up those who cannot control their bladders, getting and sharing food, and helping to keep the peace so others do not go insane from the sickness and despair. It is precisely because of the community he forms around him in the sick ward that he is able to survive until the camp is liberated. The inmates use each other for survival and even when one passes away they work together to take care of the body. This close relationship proves beneficial to each individual.

There is a difference between female and male communities as theorized by Myrna Goldenberg. Goldenberg states that the women experience the camps differently than men. There are three perspectives the women maintain that influence their experiences, and thus affect their writing. These perspectives are: “biological differences from men, gender-specific socialization patterns, and the ethic of caring that both reflected and was generated from their experiences as women” (Goldenberg 80). The ways in which the women view the camp varied from woman to woman yet Goldenberg postulates that almost all memoirs by female writers indirectly or directly credit survival to some manner of their friendships and/or collaboration (Goldenberg 86). This is demonstrated through the entirety of Delbo’s trilogy. She tells numerous stories of how the companions help each other keep their sanity and push forward in hopes that they will someday be free. A sentence to sum up this feeling is: “[W]e do not want to be separated from each other. We protect one another” (Delbo 92). Delbo acknowledges, time and again, that the other Frenchwomen are what keep her secure.

Another difference between the male and female communities is that while the men dream of the meals from their past, the women actually exchange recipes (Goldenberg 88). The endeavor to preserve traditional values shows up frequently as the women's social structure is different from what they are experiencing around them in the camps. The women's friendship, bonding, and nurturing support the formation of surrogate families while the men do not see the necessity of forming these same types of kinships. Delbo and her friends even create a play to help distract them from the camp around them. While Delbo is doing her best to prepare for the future by planning, staying positive, and creating a family because she wants one, Levi is forming his family in the sick ward out of necessity. It is almost as if Levi, by happenstance, creates his family because the men happen to be together in the sick ward and hope to survive until liberation. Delbo enters the camp with her friends, remains by their sides until the very end, and then writes about her memories of them throughout her entire trilogy. Levi acknowledges that there are other men with whom he bonded during the time he is in the camp but few that he really connects and is still friends with after liberation.

These differences in experiences show not only how men and women differ in their time in concentration camps but how varied female and male social identities are. Delbo clearly holds on to her social identity and trusts her friends to do the same while Levi does not detail the bond he holds with the other male prisoners. This is merely because, as Goldenberg speculates, men do not form the same type of bond and dependence that women do when they are in compromising situations (91). She writes that it is not because they have no comradeship; but rather they do not contain the same amount of caring for others that women do. In fact, Goldenberg maintains that "Bonding

between men was more a factor of political proclivities than of the ethic of caring” (91). The men do not see a reason to become too attached to their comrades as they feel they will lose them eventually whereas the women feel it essential to build bonds with other females. As Levi says, “[I]n the Lager things are different: here the struggle to survive is without respite, because everyone is desperately and ferociously alone” (101). His view differs from that of Delbo who, even though she may feel alone at times in her mind, knows that it is essential to have a community of friends around in order to survive.

Although women create surrogate families during their imprisonment, they do not let go of the memories of their lost, blood family members. Delbo does not touch much on her family in the first two parts of her trilogy and briefly mentions blood relatives of her friends. She talks of how families are ripped apart in the chapter “Arrivals, Departures” but rarely discusses losing loved ones during imprisonment or the selection process. This does not give the impression that she does not care enough to talk about family, only that the new one she has created for herself is more important at the time because they are the ones assisting her in her survival. Neither does Levi discuss his family members much. He mentions a young girl in the beginning whose last name is the same as his, thus implying she may have been his niece, but does not talk of siblings or parents in depth throughout his novel. This implies his need to forget them while in Auschwitz in order to hide his grief over their loss. The need to talk about family in each autobiography does not come up much as the new families they devised for themselves are more important to their survival.

Both Delbo and Levi talk of the communities they create within the camps and by doing so, they aim to create a community with the reader. Thomas Trezise discusses how

Delbo uses “I” and “we” many times interchangeably as she aims to connect herself with her comrades (Treize 872). This is then altered as she begins to also write “you” in various parts. One example would be in her “Payer to the Living to Forgive Them for Being Alive” at the end of *Useless Knowledge*:

You who are passing by
well dressed in all your muscles
clothing which suits you well
.....
how can we forgive you
that all are dead
.....
I beg you
do something
learn a dance step
something to justify your existence
something that gives you the right
to be dressed in your skin in your body hair
learn to walk and to laugh
because it would be too senseless
after all
for so many to have died
while you live
doing nothing with your life. (Delbo 229-30)

The entire poem draws the readers in and expresses the hope that they will feel the suffering and the guilt for not helping Holocaust victims. Delbo is not only accusatory but vividly descriptive and in the depiction of details. Levi also does this, just not to the extent Delbo does. In the beginning of his text he asks, “Would you not do the same? If you and your child were going to be killed tomorrow, would you not give him to eat today?” (Levi 6). Thus, he directs the question at the reader hoping to spark emotion, empathy and reflection. The authors’ directness forces readers to pay attention and create a figurative community with them as they feel the anguish the authors describe.

The authors feel it is important to assign social identity markers during the time of their imprisonment. When asked what religion Levi is, he answers Jewish (Levi 4) and when asked profession, he answers chemist (Levi 17). These two labels alone are linked to the social constructs during his childhood and youth. While in the camp he does manual labor, which makes him a laborer (Levi 41). This label is the product of the social system in the camp. While he is not properly trained with the skills to perform manual labor, the camp society forces upon him a job that he comes to identify with. Similarly, Delbo identifies herself as a resistance fighter as the result of being involved in a group that fights against the Nazi oppression and helps those who were persecuted. The author carries this label proudly, and because of this, she returns to Paris from South America, is captured, and deported to Auschwitz.

The social identity formed in groups defines a person’s uniqueness as it is essential in the construction of the full self. It makes individuals unique just as their personal identity does. Stephen Reicher, a social psychologist, writes that when people adopt social identification markers, they do so proudly and boldly. When people “behave

in terms of any given social identity, they are guided by the norms, values, and beliefs that define the relevant identity” (Reicher 929). This behavior is used by the group members to decide whether or not to accept another person into their group but is merely one part of the decision: what matters are the practices, beliefs, and ideologies of that specific group. By belonging to a group where beliefs are sustained and valued, people feel as if they matter. They, like Delbo, may feel the need to be with people who respect the same principles, as she does, as it is important to know that their opinions matter and they are more appreciated as a person in a time when their individuality is taken away from them. Levi also creates and preserves a working community while he is in the sick ward, forming a group where the men were sick, knew it, accepted it, and dealt with it accordingly. He belongs with a group of men who are sick and isolated in the *Ka-Be*. Because of this formation, he is able to survive until the liberators come. Levi and Delbo’s attempt to maintain a sense of normalcy is not surprising as, given the situation, the establishment of normalcy is crucial to survive a crisis.

Tadeusz Różewicz, a Polish poet and writer, acknowledges the community of people around him and questions why he survived while so many perished. In his poem “The Survivor” he reflects on how he managed to come out of a time when his group was meant to be eliminated. The poem is as follows:

I am twenty-four
led to slaughter
I survived.

The following are empty synonyms:

man and beast

love and hate

friend and foe

darkness and light.

The way of killing men and beasts is the same

I've seen it:

truckfuls of chopped-up men

who will not be saved.

Ideas are mere words:

virtue and crime

truth and lies

beauty and ugliness

courage and cowardice.

Virtue and crime weigh the same

I've seen it:

in a man who was both

criminal and virtuous.

I seek a teacher and a master

may he restore my sight hearing and speech

may he again name objects and ideas

may he separate darkness from light.

I am twenty-four

led to slaughter

I survived. (Różewicz 157)

Although Różewicz does not mention specifically what community he is involved in he does show sorrow for the community around him which is gone. He concedes that opposite concepts such as “man and beast” become blurred and muddled as the world around him is confusing and brutal. When one can no longer see the difference between a man and a beast, something that is abnormal and corrupt is happening. His graphic images of “chopped-up men” will remain rooted in his memories for the rest of his life, and the fact that he no longer sees important ideas such as “virtue,” “beauty,” and “love” as valid but merely words shows his disbelief in the world around him as well as his more pessimistic outlook on life because of the time he endured in a camp. He ends the poem with the hope that he can overcome the atrocity with help from a “teacher” and a “master,” allowing his audience to trust that perhaps he has faith in himself that he will heal from the brutality, both mentally and physically.

Różewicz’s poem, with all its opposites and comparisons, reflects the dividing line between the personal and social identity. It shows how they are connected, yet separate concepts, influencing each other and forming the identity of a person. Although they are two different ends of the spectrum, they end up helping and influencing each other, just as Różewicz’s personal, horrific memories of his time in a concentration camp

influence how he chooses to remember the community he lost. With his broad references, he commemorates their time and preserves their plight through his words.

Just the same, Delbo and Levi compare themselves to their friends and surrounding inmates throughout both their autobiographies. Delbo compares her strength to Viva's multiple times as Viva seems to be able to withstand more exhaustion than Delbo can (Delbo 65). Another comparable event would be when Delbo is bathing quickly in the stream. She remembers when they first arrived and she poured perfume on herself and that was the last time she smelled decent. She talks of how Viva and Yvonne and the others mentioned how good she smelled and compares that to how she and her companions smell at the present moment. This contrast stands out as it is a comparison that brings up a positive, lighthearted memory, and one that she hopes to hold on to in order to remain hopeful for the future (Delbo 152). She also compares herself to the people outside of the camps in Berlin when they are passing through on their way to Ravensbrück. She notes their clothing and the way they are hurrying to their jobs. She knows that her and her comrades look vastly different and stand out among those who were not currently Holocaust prisoners (Delbo 181-82).

So too, Levi also compares himself to his surroundings. He talks of the *Muselmänner* multiple times, usually observing that there is no need to befriend them as they are not going to last long. He continually compares his body and strength to theirs and feels that he is more likely to survive the camp:

Their life is short, but their number is endless; they, the *Muselmänner*, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, on non-men who march and

labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer. One hesitates to call them living; one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand. (Levi 103)

This is not the first mentioning of the *Muselmänner* but one that shows Levi's true feelings. Levi knows that if he becomes a *Muselmann* he will not survive Auschwitz and so does all he can to avoid becoming one. In this passage, Levi also mentions how those that are destined to die are the ones who keep the camp running and the men who no longer can be considered human beings are too numb to accept the suffering they are enduring. This acknowledgement only heightens the fact that Levi has little hope for himself and his comrades. His own look into the future is depressing for his outlook has been transformed because of his current surroundings. The contrast between death and suffering no longer has much distinction as they are synonyms in Auschwitz.

Comparing oneself to the community one is surrounded by has been happening as long as there has been social groups. Henri Tajfel, social psychologist, describes how social groups compare themselves to surrounding communities and how individuals compare themselves to the group in which they belong. The main reason people feel the need to compare themselves is insecurity. They feel insecure about the way they look or act and need to "engage in certain forms of social comparisons" with other people in order to validate their identity (Tajfel 494). This insecurity only lessens when they feel accepted and no one is judging them. Tajfel argues that everyone is either already insecure or on the verge of developing insecure tendencies. According to Tajfel, belonging to a group with like-minded ideas or practices alleviates some of the fears that

come with insecurity. Both Delbo and Levi's texts show the insecurities they feel throughout their time in concentration camps.

Levi and Delbo both feel insecure while imprisoned in Auschwitz. They are insecure in their position in the new surroundings, their body image, their strength, failing at times, and their own identities, which are compromised. The need to be attached to a community makes them feel valued as individuals. As people feel less insecure when they are surrounded by like minds and like situations, it also increases their morale towards the stressful situation.

Social identity is a field of study that sheds some light on how both Delbo and Levi see themselves relative to social groups in both *Auschwitz and After* and *Survival in Auschwitz*. Both narrators use their sense of self as a starting point as to how they act around people and whom they interact with during their imprisonment, showing that self-identity and social identity are connected. They associate themselves with groups that have similar beliefs and experiences and are able to identify with the individuals on a personal level. This identification is beneficial to survival since to be alone means likely they will perish at the hands of the Nazis. Social identity is important in the construction of the rounded self-identity.

Chapter Five: Persecuted Identity

The old man
leaves his house, carries books.
A German soldier snatches his books
flings them in the mud.

The old man picks them up,
the soldier hits him in the face.
The old man falls,
the soldier kicks him and walks away.

The old man
lies in mud and blood.
Under him he feels
the books. (Świrszczyńska 21)

The poem, “He was Lucky,” written by Anna Świrszczyńska, shows the exact type of persecution many victims of the Holocaust experienced during the 1930s and 40s. This persecution was not felt only in Poland, Świrszczyńska’s homeland, but all over Europe and areas where Jews and other targeted groups lived. Hatred and blame reached their climax during the late 1930s. Many minority groups were persecuted in their home towns by Nazi officials and soldiers and deported to the camps. If they managed to get past being sent directly to the gas chambers, they had little chance of surviving until the end of the war as torture, abuse, and malnourishment were ways in which the Nazis

controlled and tormented the prisoners (Bergen 1-2). Those that survived did so out of sheer luck or by using their brains to stay sharp and aware of the surroundings, like Levi and Delbo.

Doris Bergen, a Holocaust historiographer, argues that “prejudices always reveal more about the people who hold them than they do about those at whom they are directed . . . they are habits of thought; they are not reasoned responses to objective realities”(3). She notes that the racism, hatred, and other preconditions that led up to the final decision to imprison these groups stemmed from stereotypes that had been surfacing more and more over the past few years because of the shame Germany felt after World War One. The reason these stereotypes emerged is because of the perceived and constructed danger of the groups’ identity, whether personal beliefs or social actions. The individual’s identity may have been seen as wrong, threatening, obtuse, or morally unsettling. Those who were persecuted were told that their identities were incorrect as they did not conform to the Nazi ideals. Delbo was a resistance fighter advocating communism, therefore a threat to the National Socialism the Nazis were trying to impose all over Europe. Levi was not only another resistance fighter but also an ethnic Jew, thus a threat in more ways than one. When both were captured and taken to the concentration camps, they were under a regime that expected to eliminate them. It is important to look at how the two narrators are treated as the dehumanization tactics the Nazis implemented had reasons behind them.

Herbert C. Kelman, professor of Social Ethics at Harvard University, proposes that dehumanization happens when someone stops perceiving another as fully human. He suggests that in order to perceive another as human, one must

accord him identity and community To accord a person identity is to perceive him as an individual, independent and distinguishable from others, capable of making choices, and entitled to live his own life on the basis of his own goals and values. To accord a person community is to perceive him—along with one’s self—as part of an interconnected network of individuals who care for each other, who recognize each other’s individuality, and who respect each other’s rights. (Kelman 301)

The combinations of identity and community create an individual’s worth which is necessary in the building of self-respect and self-esteem. Eliminating these ideas degrades humans and harms their perception of self as well as the perception of society. Many Nazis employed tactics of dehumanization to eliminate the victims as well as assert power over the defenseless. They viewed the targeted groups as separate from themselves and dangerous should they continue to reproduce.

The dehumanization tactics that the Nazis instituted were vast. Many inmates in each camp were not only beaten with clubs or guns, but also flogged, trussed, burned, and whipped. Some were subjected to bright lights, exhaustion exercises (such as knee bends, forced crawling, or carrying heavy weights), kicked, and electrocuted. These various techniques do not include the experimentation many victims underwent by the doctors in the camps, as detailed by Darius Rejali in his book *Torture and Democracy* (95-96). The multiple ways in which a prisoner was tortured show the lengths the Nazis would go to eliminate and subjugate anyone whom they considered inferior.

A need to dominate and change a person’s identity can come from the need to be right and the belief in the norm. Jean-Claude Deschamps emphasizes that people who feel

the need to assert their power over those unable to resist are many times those who consider themselves internally consistent with the concept of what is normal and accepted. If people fall out of that category, they are at risk of being dominated and their identity transformed or erased. If transformed, the collective and individual identity of the persecuted group is then altered dramatically and a new identity arises. Whether the people want to or not, after they have experienced prejudice, they reshape their beliefs and attitudes, forcing a change in how they view their own identity (Deschamps 89).

Altering perception of the self as well as the community can be seen in both Delbo's and Levi's works. There are countless examples of the prejudice layered upon them throughout their time in concentration camps and proof that they begin to see the world differently by questioning the morals of the Nazis and fascism. The only reason they begin dramatically to question the new world is a direct result of the new hatred directed at them. This change in identity would not have occurred if they had been left alone as fate would have taken them down a different route. There are some similarities between both authors' experiences and abuse but there are also differences, based partly on the person's social background and partly on the political actions.

One similarity both endured while in Auschwitz is the demand of the manual labor required. This labor is futile and tested not only physical strength but also mental capacity. One passage from Delbo shows how she feels about what the guards are requiring her and her comrades to do. The women are supposed to carry dirt in their aprons to the other side of the yard as the guards have decided to make a garden at the camp entrance. The male prisoners dig up the dirt from the ditch and put it in the female prisoners' aprons. These women then run across the yard and dump it on the other side,

all the while being beaten with clubs to make them run faster. They have to make sure to circumvent the electric fence as to avoid electrocution. In this section, Delbo writes, “Two shovelfuls of earth do not weigh very much. Gradually, they grow heavier. The weight is greater, the arms grow numb. We take the risk of not holding the apron’s corners tight, letting a bit of soil run out. If a fury were to take notice, she would beat us to death. Still we do it, it’s just too heavy” (91-92). Later she compares her experience to the Jewish women in the group. They do not have aprons and have to turn their jackets backwards in order to carry the dirt. Delbo notices the “terrifying comedy” they present and pities them (92). The Jewish women have it worse than the political prisoners as they are seen inferior to the other inmates.

The dirt hauling scene is a memorable one and can be compared to a scene in Levi’s text. While the women have to run with the heavy weight for hours, growing weaker with each passing moment, the men are also made to bear overwhelmingly heavy weight for long periods of time. They are supposed to carry cast-iron supports off the train to a designated area. Levi is assigned to work with the person they call Null Achtzehn [Zero Eighteen, as these are the last three numbers of his identification tattoo] because no one else wants to work with them: Null Achtzehn because he tries too hard and Levi because is weak and clumsy (Levi 44). After Levi’s strength weakens, a support falls and Levi lands under it. The Kapo arrives and “distributes kicks, punches, and abuse” (Levi 45). Levi ends up in the infirmary with a severely hurt foot. The physical labor the guards impose on the prisoners ends up hurting and sometimes killing them, which is part of the original intention of the system.

Levi notes that the only reason he ends up in the unbearable position of carrying the supports is because he knows “it is the normal order of things that the privileged oppress the unprivileged: the social structure of the camp is based on this human law” (Levi 44). The acknowledgement of his position is a result of the persecution he has felt the entire time in Auschwitz. At the beginning of the story, the author writes a paragraph which stands out among the rest:

Around us, everything is hostile. Above us the malevolent clouds chase each other to separate us from the sun; on all sides the squalor of the toiling steel closes in on us. We have never seen its boundaries, but we feel all around us the evil presence of the barbed wire that separates us from the world. And on the scaffolding, on the trains being switched about, on the roads, in the pits, in the offices, men and more men, slaves and master, the master slaves themselves. Fear motivates the former, hatred the latter, all other forces are silent. All are enemies or rivals (Levi 41).

What Levi notices is how the world inside the camp is different than the one he remembers outside of it before he became a prisoner. He notes how even nature seems antagonistic. There is only fear and hatred that surround him in Auschwitz which depresses him and the fact that he notes its presence shows how mentally aware he still is, even after the abuse he has endured. It can be safely assumed that his outlook on life is dramatically altered due to the persecution he has lived through and the choice of words he uses in his autobiography.

Charlotte Delbo begins to see the world differently due to her time in concentration camps as well. When the guards are bringing the women back in from their outside work and she sees female bodies strewn about in the snow and puddles. She remarks “Sometimes we had to step over them. They were just ordinary obstacles so far as we were concerned. It was no longer possible for us to feel anything at all. We were walking. Walking automatons, walking ice statues” (Delbo 35). She has become immune to sorrow for dead prisoners as they no longer strike her as shocking. This desensitization can only arise out of seeing the same horror over and over again. It is no longer horrifying, but part of the natural world around them.

There are other manual labor jobs to be endured. Delbo has to dig up roots (76) and create ditches while pounding the sand (105). Levi mentions other instances where his strength is exhausted such as unloading cylinders which weigh 175 pounds (Levi 73) and wheeling the heavy wheelbarrow of potatoes back to the infirmary towards the end of his time at Auschwitz (189). Each time both authors write of the labor they have to perform, they write that they think they cannot finish and will fall onto the ground, showing weakness. They are afraid they will be caught falling behind the rest, singled out, and sent off to the gas chambers. At the end, however, they are considered the lucky ones as they have been granted the opportunity to leave the concentration camps alive. Although they survive, they are changed people because of the oppression and atrocities they had to withstand.

Another difference between the two texts is that while one is written from a female perspective, focusing on comradeship and capabilities, the other focuses on how mankind can endure so much hardship and still stay sane. There are specific examples

which detail both of these ideas. Delbo writes “The voice grows hard: ‘Keep your chin up! On your feet!’ And I feel that I cling to Viva as a child to its mother. I am hanging onto her who kept me from falling into the mud, into the snow from which one never rises” (65). Delbo knows that it is because of her friends she stays alive and is able to stay strong. Levi mentions the effects of the hardship at multiple points of his text such as the following: “Today the only thing left of the life of those days is what one needs to suffer hunger and cold; I am not even alive enough to know how to kill myself” (Levi 169). The authors write their perceptions from different standpoints, one expressive and literal, one ambiguous and philosophical.

Another difference between the two authors is that Delbo writes more of a novel intermixed with poetry while Levi writes a novel in which he points out the inadequacies and immorality around him, mentioning concepts ranging from the Nazi beliefs to the fate of humanity after the war. Delbo’s poetry has many different subjects, most sad but stark, while her prose is graphic and detailed. She does not connect her poetry to her prose but both function together in a way that is not only direct, but captivating as well. Levi does give some evocative facts about his day-to-day activities, like Delbo, but does not go into the amount of detail that she does. While she mentions how she feels about situations, Levi writes how wrong they are while commenting and evaluating whether others question them as he does.

The idea of thirst is an example of how the two authors write differently about how they perceive the vital necessity. Delbo writes intermittingly about her constant thirst. Because the water in the camps is either forbidden or diseased, many prisoners suffer from thirst as they not only want it every minute of every day but also dream about

it every night. Her chapter, "Thirst," is a prime example of this need. The narrator gives instance after instance of her need for water. She mentions the stream that the guard dogs bathe in and the how the thought of water is persistently on her mind. She misses fresh, never-ending water, the way she bathed in it, swam in it, and ingested it. She is so desperate for liquid that she chooses to trade her bread and butter, thus losing her evening meal, in order to acquire someone's water ration. Her friend, Viva, helps her survive by saving some of her tea for her, but Delbo writes there will never be enough fully to quench her thirst (Delbo 70-75). The control of water was another way the Nazi's tortured the prisoners.

Levi also mentions an instance with water, only not as detailed. A Polish Jew named Schlome warns him and his companions not to drink the water of the camp as it is "Geschwollen," ("swollen") or diseased enough that it will make a person sick (Levi 26). The men in his area help each other out just as the women on Delbo's side. This mention of water is not nearly as detailed as Delbo's but Levi does make a note to reference it as it is significant in showing how they do care for each other.

This difference in mentioning water shows how each author perceived it. While Delbo writes a full chapter on it, Levi merely gives a brief mention. Levi does give a few details about what goes on around him, but he focuses more on his inner analyses and contemplations of camp life. He explains how camp life is run, how the men might survive it, how important it is to learn German, and how staying fit and hiding weaknesses guarantee the best chance for survival. He does not write as much as Delbo on who does what or how important his comrades are to him. Levi is more concerned with answering the questions of why he is there, what this means for his future, and the

future of humanity. He takes a philosophical approach in deciphering the world at large while Delbo looks more at the personal. This is one difference between male and female perspectives and shows the difference in what individuals view as most important.

There is indeed a distinct difference between male and female writers. Elizabeth A. Flynn notes that while narratives from females are stories of interaction or connection, narratives from men are stories of achievement or separation (586). She writes that women are able to detach themselves from relationships or institutions in which they have been subordinated and begin to trust the institutions they form for themselves (587). Delbo writes in this way as she talks of her relationship with her female comrades. For example, in the chapter “The Teddy Bear” Delbo explains how the women are creating a Christmas feast and exchanging gifts. She says, “The women kissed one another. They never stopped kissing and exchanging host and good wishes...” (165). This scene shows how even though the women are interned in a camp, they are still making the effort to recognize the friends they have around them and strive to keep that connection.

Men’s narratives, on the other hand, emphasize individuation rather than association (588). Men tend to focus, according to Flynn, on how they persevere through difficult situations and end up stronger and more knowledgeable. Levi integrates these ideas into his text as he makes distinctions between how one is more likely to survive and what serves as a death sentence for others. The connection that the women feel the need to establish corresponds to their desire for a strong social identity while the men show how they feel it is more of a personal battle in which the self is the only one responsible for the outcome.

Delbo talks many times about the brutality of roll call and how the women had to stand for hours at attention, no matter the weather, no matter the conditions in which they are dressed. She mentions how the women are freezing and how after the camp, she will see standing in line in a different light because it will always bring back the roll call memories. This minor detail sets Delbo apart from Levi because she feels it important in getting the harshness across in her novel. Levi does not mention roll call. This difference between the two writers is intriguing because both were surely made to stand in roll call, but only one felt the need to write in depth about it. Perhaps Delbo saw it more as a stab at her individuality than Levi who saw it as yet another element of living in Auschwitz, not significant enough to go into detail.

Lastly, a point worth noting is Delbo's substantial amount of description regarding the dog attacks she witnesses. She goes into great detail about one of the guard dogs attacking a man from behind as well as one instance in which a dog attacks a woman, crushing her throat with his fangs. These harrowing episodes are used by Delbo to elicit sympathy from the reader. By using expressive language and intense images she is able to shock the reader into feeling sympathy for the situation because she knows it appeals to their pathos. She knows that the reader will be unable to experience empathy and leaves that part of identification out of her text. Many times she reaches out to the reader to evoke emotion and these dog attacks are one example.

Levi, conversely, does not want to spark much emotion from the reader but mostly forces the reader to ask himself what he would have done if given the same situation. By directing his language to the readers, he is confronting their uncertainties and pushing them to consider how differently they might react to the happenings in

Auschwitz. Levi also likes to describe the men's thoughts on specific concepts around them. When he describes the idea of time, he describes how the prisoners view time differently than the rest of the world as, to them, it all blends together: the past, present, and future. It does not have the same meaning it once had but has taken on an alternate reality to the prisoners. Levi's idea of telling his story and the way he was persecuted is vastly different than how Delbo wants to convey her story, and much of it can be analyzed because of their gendered individuality.

Franca Molino Signorini, a Levi scholar, reminds us that Levi never wearies of telling readers that if prisoners were "not killed at once they were killed gradually, systematically destroying their individuality until they were nothing but mass, reduced to mere matter, and eventually to inert flesh" (181). Signorini uses a passage in *Survival in Auschwitz* to back up her assertion. In it, Levi says

Imagine now a man who is deprived of everyone he loves, and at the same time of his house, his habits, his clothes, in short, of everything he possesses: he will be a hollow man, reduced to suffering and needs, forgetful of dignity and restraint, for he who loses all often easily loses himself. He will be a man whose life or death can be lightly decided with no sense of human affinity, in the most fortunate of cases, on the basis of a pure judgment of utility. (Levi 21-22)

Signorini notes that the Nazis attempted to strip all sense of individuality from the prisoners, exposing shame, pain, and fear. They did this to control the oppressed as they would have no strength or courage to resist. Falling into line was easier than standing out, which threatened acknowledgement, leading to the subjection of more abuse than those

who remained silent and compliant. Signorini observes the men lost their original identity due to the humiliation they had to endure, which was exactly the Nazi's goal (Signorini 181).

Loss of original identity is not the only side effect of direct persecution. The study, *The Posttraumatic Self: Restoring Meaning and Wholeness to Personality*, is a collection of essays regarding Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and its effects on the individual and the community surrounding the individual. Until recently, PTSD has been a subject attributed mainly to veterans returning from war and undergoing mental anguish and problems. New research suggests it can be ascribed to anyone who has experienced a traumatic situation (rape, torture, abuse, coercion at gunpoint, or any other extraordinary stressors). The victims of the Holocaust are, therefore prime candidates for research on PTSD regarding the effects the concentration camps had on individuals. While many returned feeling lost or overwhelmed by the sudden freedom, others felt ashamed and alienated in their communities. The camp victims did not emerge unscathed from the camps: they were changed people with newly formed identities as a direct result of the abuse that made them targets.

Both Delbo and Levi undergo a dramatic shift in their lives, being exposed to torture, abuse, and pain. Because of this period in their lives, their pre-camp identities are reshaped into new ones, causing a changed outlook on life, humanity, and the capabilities of people. Had the two authors not been taken into the Nazi's oppressive situation, they would have lived entirely dissimilar lives, continuing on with their original opinions, passions, and ideals. The persecution they absorbed changed them profoundly and challenged them in unimaginable ways.

Chapter Six: Survival Identity

“To talk meant that we could make plans about going home, because to trust we would return was a way of forcing luck’s hand. The women who had stopped believing they would return were as good as dead. One had to believe, against all odds, incredible as it might seem. One had to lend to this possible return home certainty, reality and color by preparing for it, conjuring up each and every detail.” (Delbo 102)

Charlotte Delbo and her comrades never give up the hope that they will live through the Holocaust. In fact, one of the main themes in her trilogy is hope. The women plan on returning to their previous lives after liberation, all the while accepting that they are going back changed women with entirely altered outlooks on life. This acknowledgment that survivors of the Holocaust are returning home changed is seen mainly in Delbo’s autobiography and to a lesser extent in Levi’s. Both authors know that the Holocaust dramatically transformed their identities so that the original person who entered the gates of the concentration camps did not survive and a new person emerged after the liberation. While many did not possess *physical* strength, few could emerge from a situation like the Holocaust and stay strong enough *mentally* to overcome it. The new identities of the survivors meant not completely disregarding who they were before their imprisonment but using that as a foundation and building upon it with the new knowledge they had obtained about themselves.

Survivors of the Holocaust emerged from the camps with new perspectives on the world around them. They had seen horrors that no one should ever have to witness. They observed beatings, brutality, torture, murders, and rapes. They saw their friends shot in

front of them. They saw their family members sent away to the gas chambers. They saw the ashes of their loved ones rising from the chimneys into the sky. They witnessed comrades and companions slowly waste away until there was not enough strength to take another breath. Being a part of this type of world would dramatically change how a person responds to situations as well as the personal beliefs they may have. The survivors emerged from the camp with these visions in their minds and so, through many years of research, sociologists and psychologists have logically concluded that each individual would have signs of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), more specifically Concentration Camp Syndrome, as detailed by Paul Chodoff in 1997.

Paul Chodoff, a political psychologist specializing in trauma and the Holocaust, postulates a syndrome that applies explicitly to concentration camp survivors. This Concentration Camp Syndrome has similarities to PTSD: “Its distinguishing features include a severe anxiety state marked particularly by apprehensiveness and hyper-vigilance, along with various sleep disturbances, particularly night terrors and nightmares Obsessive preoccupation with recollections of the persecutory experience” was also prevalent. Chodoff notes that when these symptoms are present, they often interfere with interpersonal involvements, leaving the survivor either isolated or unreasonably needy (153). Two of the key differences between the Concentration Camp Syndrome and PTSD are depression and survivor guilt, which, at the time of Chodoff’s publication, were not considered symptoms of PTSD (154). The Concentration Camp Syndrome does have other indicators which are relative to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and since it is a broader disorder, I will use it in analyzing the new survivor identities with which Delbo and Levi emerged.

PTSD is most commonly defined as “a disorder in which the disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning” (Wilson 2). In his introduction to *The Posttraumatic Self: Restoring Meaning and Wholeness to Personality*, John Wilson notes that while PTSD is a disorder, it comes with both positive and negative effects. Many people embrace each side, growing from them, reinventing a new sense of personal identity and focusing more on the brevity of life. Some, however, focus on the negative, and because of this, they may slip into a deep depression, with the full force of the trauma controlling their lives. There are, of course, many negative symptoms of PTSD: flashbacks, night terrors, insomnia, unwarranted fits of aggression, feeling tense, verbal or physical abuse. These symptoms are not only specific to certain situations but based more on the individuals and their handling of the event.

Even though PTSD, and more specifically, Concentration Camp Syndrome, encompasses an array of symptoms, I will only discuss a few during this chapter in relation to Delbo and Levi’s autobiographies. These symptoms and the side effects of the trauma endured are: self-discontinuity, helplessness and humiliation, and survivor guilt. Although these are negative, I will also discuss the positive features because both authors wanted to restore order by reconfiguring their lives, transforming their pain, maintaining hope, and appreciating the shortness of life by conceding to the possibility of death. A survivor can go through both positive and negative transformations as both Delbo and Levi show in their texts.

John Wilson asserts that self-discontinuity is a time in which a person “experiences a disruption, rupture, or severing of connection to self-objects and sources

of psychic meaning and importance” (“Posttraumatic” 34). He writes that survivors feel as if they are no longer emotionally connected to the outside world after they return from a traumatic experience. They cannot find meaning in situations they may have once enjoyed and also realize that no one understands what they have experienced. This, then, makes them hesitant to talk to others because they feel it will be to no avail. Many are told that counseling will help them as talking about the traumatic event is one way to begin healing. They are told to try new hobbies and find a way to connect to those new securities. This way, the self-discontinuity they are experiencing will be directed into new interests, thus creating a new form of self-continuity (“Posttraumatic” 54).

Self-discontinuity can be seen in both Delbo’s and Levi’s works. The third part of Delbo’s trilogy, *The Measure of Our Days*, details her time after returning from Auschwitz. She writes a poem in which her self-discontinuity can be clearly observed:

Returning
means getting it all back.
Returning is not all
it means return to live anew
experience the everyday
work run into debt
save to pay off the debt
sell soap
that’s all one knows
.....
Stop grumbling

that's life
what did you dream of over there?
Of eating your fill
sleeping your fill
loving your fill
You dreamt of eating sleeping loving
you've got it
since you returned.
History
is over
be happy like everyone
History
is one moment in time
living
is now
So why on earth did you want to return? (Delbo 277-78)

Although they all wanted to survive and return to the lives they had before the war, they found out that life is entirely different from what they expected. This is because of their new outlook on life because of the hardships they had just overcome. Delbo articulates her disbelief that this is the life she wanted to return to and the disconnectedness is seen throughout the poem. She no longer finds joy in what she did and she must now struggle to find a reason to go on. Survivors knew they wanted to survive and return home, but once they did, they realized that a part of them was left in

the concentration camp. The only thought on Holocaust victims' minds during their imprisonment was survival but once that goal was achieved, they were unsure of what to do with themselves.

Levi also writes of this detachment in *Survival in Auschwitz*. In the chapter "A Good Day" he writes that

. . . this [acknowledgement of grief and pain] is the reason why so often in free life one hears it said that man is never content. In fact it is not a question of a human incapacity for a state of absolute happiness, but of an ever-insufficient knowledge of the complex nature of the state of unhappiness; so that the single name of the major cause is given to all its causes, which are composite and set out in an order of urgency. And if the most immediate cause of stress comes to an end, you are grievously amazed to see that another one lies behind; and in reality a whole series of others. (Levi 82)

Levi knows that even though there is a small chance of surviving the camp, it is human nature never to be satisfied, even when happiness is present. He knows that upon returning to the life he had pre-war, he will still never be content as it is common for humans to continually wish they have more, not seeing or valuing what they may already possess. Even though Levi is not distinctly addressing the life he might have after he leaves the camps, he does know that whatever it may present itself as, he will never be truly happy. This idea shows itself as he acknowledges the idea that it is human nature to look for the next negative event even if one has just overcome a negative situation. He does know that life will be substantially different and he will not be able to bond to the

same self he was before he was confined because of the altered outlook on the life he just obtained. Self-discontinuity is difficult for survivors to overcome but it is only one feature of PTSD and Concentration Camp Syndrome.

Helplessness and humiliation are other symptoms many survivors experienced after they left the concentration camps. The feeling of helplessness is present in many survivors of trauma. If their trauma involved a dominating force, such as the Nazis, then they lived in a helpless position for a period of time, as that was the goal of those that controlled the situation. Kathleen Nader, an expert on the effects of traumatic events, defines traumatization as “an experience of disempowerment that includes lack of control and reduced [sic] or inability to depend on self or others for protection” (120). As Holocaust survivors had just lived through an event in which they were vulnerable, this symptom of PTSD applies to them. The helplessness is humiliating to many and may result in lashing out and hurting others or lashing inward and hurting oneself. Nader also notes that lack of trust and low self-esteem contribute to the sense of helplessness and humiliation (120). The Nazis gave the victims no reason to trust them, their actions showing their intentions every time. The Nazis also shattered their victims’ self-esteem, broke their dignity, and held power over them. This, then, caused the victims to feel helpless and humiliated, both during the war and after they resumed their original lives.

Delbo writes of this humiliation and her view of helplessness in the chapter “Night”: “The octopi strangled us with their viscous muscles, and if we succeeded in freeing an arm it was only to be strangled by a tentacle coiling itself around our necks, tightening round our vertebrae, squeezing them until they cracked . . . squeezing them to the breaking point” (54). She uses the extended metaphor of octopi strangling victims to

show how terrifying it is to be unable to control the situation. The fear of succumbing to the death grip is devastating but Delbo mentions that the victims must give in and stop struggling in order to survive. They find that there is no purpose in fighting for the octopi will only get stronger and eventually win the battle (Delbo 54). This metaphor demonstrates the helplessness Delbo experiences in the camps. The humiliation and utter loss of control is overwhelming and Delbo notes, although she feels defenseless and mortified, she knows it is better than being dead. She has to give in to what the Nazis want, such as doing tedious jobs or finding a way to control starvation, in order to leave the camps alive.

Primo Levi also writes of feeling powerless during his time in Auschwitz. He acknowledges that “According to our character, some of us are immediately convinced that all is lost, that one cannot live here, that the end is near and sure . . .” (33). He believes that some give up hope immediately upon arrival and those that do so perish. The feeling of helplessness is prominent in Auschwitz, according to Levi. He notes that all the men are “on the bottom” (33) and there is no chance to rise above the degradation delved upon them. They feel vulnerable and ashamed of whom they are. The prisoners slowly lose themselves in the chaos that surrounds them and defeat seems inevitable. Although Levi wrote his autobiography after the liberation and he is looking back on his life there, he knows that because of man’s human nature there are those who take the shame and helplessness and transform those feelings into pessimism. This new feature of their survivor identity is a direct result of the time spent in the camps.

The last negative symptom that many victims experience directly after the traumatic event is survivor guilt. Many survivors question “Why me?” or “Why did I live

when others died?” These questions then transform into guilt as the victim feels they are not worthy enough to survive when others, whom they perceive as better people, died. Yet, this is not to be confused with shame. Boris Droždek, Silvana Turkovic, and John Wilson claim that while shame is more complex, involving ego-processes and personality, guilt involves more of self-recrimination about responsibility for personal actions (344). Many survivors felt both shame and guilt but since Delbo and Levi focus on guilt in their books, I will focus my discussion on guilt. Survivor guilt is felt especially when someone lost loved ones in the process. The survivors feel as though they should have done more for those they lost, a moment in which their guilt controls their feelings towards the event, thus halting their progress on healing.

Survivor guilt can be seen all throughout *A Measure of Our Days* by Delbo. In her chapter “Mado” she writes: “How could those stronger and more determined than I be dead, and I remain alive? Can one come out of there alive? No. It wasn’t possible” (257). Delbo is writing from her friend Mado’s perspective and yet Delbo’s words construct the emotion. She knows that a part of herself died in Auschwitz and yet, she is more confused as why so many others died unmercifully. She feels guilty for surviving the torture, starvation and weather extremes. Delbo battles with herself throughout *The Measure of our Days* as she struggles to reestablish a life for herself after Auschwitz. She feels overwhelmed with the sudden options and decisions she has available. In addition to this, she feels conflicted at having lost so many of her good friends. She wonders why she is able to make a new life for herself but so many cannot. The survivor guilt she feels only intensifies when she reflects on her past.

While Delbo discusses numerous examples of her survival guilt post-Auschwitz, Levi does not include as many examples. He mentions friends he lost, but notes that he does so out of necessity. Levi credits his survival to them, yet only mentions them briefly with no real emotional attachment. He notes that Henri provides interesting conversations (115) and Lorenzo helps him remember he is a man (142), but he does not mention how he feels about losing so many comrades after he is liberated. He notes that a few of his friends are still living and have reunited with family. He hopes to see some of his friends again one day, but his true emotions are excluded from his text. This is another difference between Delbo and Levi as Delbo never passes over her emotions while Levi does not feel the need to include his. Perhaps he feels survivor guilt after the Holocaust, but he does not want to write examples of it as it would be instilling more emotion in his text than he normally feels comfortable including.

Positive reactions are symptomatic of those aiming to heal from PTSD. A common desire of those having survived traumatic experiences is the need for restoration of order by reconfiguring their lives. The survivors, after returning to the outside world, suddenly, find themselves at a chaotic junction in their lives. They are confused and uncertain of what to do next. The first step in the healing process from PTSD is establishing order in their lives while they try to figure out what to do next. Jacob D. Lindy, a trauma psychiatrist, argues that survivors feel out of control, overwhelmed, and ashamed of their actions. They feel that they are to blame for the situation and do not know how to function (314). This dyscontrol adds another reason as to why many who survive traumatic experiences feel disconnected from their pre-trauma view of themselves. By beginning to establish order, priorities are made and goals are set. They

not only reconfigure how they are going to create new lives but also how to stay positive and look towards a new day, rather than dread it.

Delbo shows this restoration in *The Measure of Our Days* in the chapter “Gilberte.” As Gilberte, one of her comrades, is trying to create normalcy and find her place in the post-war world, she admits that she is unsure of how she will manage. She knows that she must start over and even acknowledges that she wants to get married and have children but never feels it is the right time. She admires those who are able to pick up their lives from where they left them and continue on living. Gilberte wants to make a new life for herself but struggles with how to make that happen. The need to establish order, as Lindy describes, is challenging, and some never succeed in doing so (Lindy 314). While some may not succeed in finding new meaning for life, others do and slowly heal from their trauma.

Levi does make a brief reference to his life after the Holocaust as well as the lives of a few of his friends. He mentions in the last paragraph of his text that Arthur returned home to his family and “Charles has taken up his teacher’s profession again” (Levi 206). Levi, himself, notes that he hopes to see his friends again one day but does not note whether or not that happened. Readers are also unsure of how Levi reestablished his own life as *Survival in Auschwitz* does not go into detail about Levi’s life after the liberation. Readers would need to look at one of his other texts, such as *The Reawakening*, which discusses Levi’s life after liberation, as well as some of his speeches online in order to see how Levi has learned to heal from the process. Since many of those suffering from traumatic situations want to find a way to heal, it can be safely assumed that Levi aimed to do just that. In 1987, though, Levi committed suicide, perhaps never fully healing from

the trauma. It is as though he was unable to transform his pain into something more positive, which, according to the healing process for those suffering from PTSD, a desire to transform the pain is the next step.

Converting the pain into a sort of distraction is what many psychologists tell those afflicted with PTSD. They are told that it is okay to remember the event but to take that pain and turn it into something positive. John Wilson claims that there is a way to take all the negative feelings of a situation and transform them into four different areas. These four areas include: “unity, transcendence and integration of consciousness, serenity, and love” (419). As these four fields are opposite to how most survivors feel, therapists help them learn how to find connections between the brutal past and more hopeful present. While it may be difficult to tell survivors that they need to find a way to heal from their past, it is a statement intended to show that by staying positive and looking towards the future and not staying focused merely on the past, they can begin to heal from the trauma.

One way to focus on the future is to maintain hope. Hope is shown throughout both Delbo’s and Levi’s texts in many different forms. They not only preserve hope while they are imprisoned but mention how hope will be taken into account after the Holocaust. John Wilson’s article, “Trauma and the Epigenesis of Identity,” asserts that hope is a “mental outlook of what constitutes goodness, trustworthiness, comfort, regularity, predictability, and consistency in object relations.” In relation to survival, Wilson continues that “. . . faithful survivors never lose hope. Hopeless survivors lose faith and surrender to fate without purposeful striving and will” (94). Wilson believes that hope is what motivates survivors to overcome the adversity they are faced with. It is what

some rely on expecting that it will distract them during the traumatic situation. This same idea applies to post-traumatic victims.

Delbo shows the hope to which she and her comrades hold on multiple times throughout *Auschwitz and After*. In the chapter “The Tulip,” Delbo remarks how the girls encounter a tulip outside the walls of Auschwitz when they are working. The next day, they are looking forward to seeing the tulip again and they share that excitement with other women in the camp. “Here, in a desert of ice and snow, a tulip We look at it. We forget the stinging hail All day we dream of the tulip In the morning, at the intersection where the road to the lake began, we experienced a moment of hope” (60-61). This moment of happiness the women feel is something they try to focus on until they find out that the house near the tulip belongs to the SS in charge. The brief instant inspires the women to feel hopeful that there is a future awaiting them outside of Auschwitz. She uses this memory to show that the women try to focus on a form of happiness in order to get through the horrible situation and that the hope they possess is continually reciprocated.

Another instance of their hope and how they are planning for the future is when the girls gather around each other and talk about what they are going to eat after they are free. One says she would like a whole chicken; another says something crunchy, while another most desires hot chocolate. Soon, they transition into the hope of taking hot baths and sleeping for a great deal of time (Delbo 200). As the women are planning their future pleasures, readers sense that they are sustaining hope that they will indeed have a future. The women are also talking about these ideas to help distract them from the reality of their situation. Using hope as a distraction is another way hope helps survivors begin to

heal. Incorporating it while the trauma is still happening shows the need for the establishment of normalcy and focus on future dreams.

Levi also shows hope in his text. He talks of reaching spring and getting through winter. As the winters in Auschwitz kill many people because of the cold, the hope that spring is coming keeps the men striving to witness it. He describes this hope as man's basic purpose because to lose hope means to lose strength. Levi writes that "The conviction that life has a purpose is rooted in every fibre of man, it is a property of the human substance. Free men give many names to this purpose and many think and talk about its nature. But for us the question is simpler" (79). Grasping this hope and not letting it loose helps keep the men's sanity throughout *Survival in Auschwitz*.

As many survivors feel they must hold onto hope both during their event and after, they come to realize that life is short. This realization motivates many to make the most of their present lives as they could lose them at any moment. John Wilson asserts that many obtain a "freshness of appreciation for the beauty of life . . . similar to a swimmer who holds his or her breath as long as possible under water and then rapidly emerges through the smooth, silvery surface of the water to inhale clean, fresh air into aching lungs filled with carbon dioxide" (414). This metaphor can effortlessly be applied to those who live in the camps. Once they obtain their freedom, they breathe a sigh of relief and realize that they had just lived through something so traumatic, intended to kill them, that they need to be grateful they made it out alive. The survivor guilt some feel at this point is told to be turned into gratitude that they lived. Wilson notes that trauma survivors begin to realize there is a solid future that holds chances for self-actualization that they might not have seen preceding the traumatic experience (414). Many survivors

suddenly hold more empathy and compassion than they did before. These qualities can then be turned into something positive, like helping others recover from traumatic events. The appreciation for the shortness of life is not universal to all Holocaust survivors but present in many of those who survive traumatic environments.

Identity has a great deal to do with PTSD and those who survived the Holocaust. Identity is not a constant. Even for non-traumatized persons, it is ever changing throughout life and is based not only on personal beliefs but also external factors. Wilson argues that for those who have “looked death in the eye” and realized the possibility of their own demise, this change occurs almost indefinitely (418). Many begin to transform their identity in relation to the near death encounter and shape their priorities and beliefs differently. The recognition that they survived a traumatic experience creates more awareness of the self and influences actions.

Since the Holocaust victims witness an immense amount of death, the reaction they later would experience when watching someone die would differ from someone with no experience with death. They are not fully desensitized but death seems less shocking and they handle it in a different manner than someone who may not have seen death firsthand. In the chapter about Germaine’s death, Delbo emphasizes that upon witnessing how Germaine looks in death, someone remarks how beautiful she is. Delbo writes then that, “Even as we knew this beauty to be a lie, realizing it was doomed to disintegrate in a few hours, we found solace in the contemplation of eternal beauty” (310). The fact that the girls find beauty instead of fear or revulsion at Germaine’s death shows not only that they care for her deeply but also that this is not the first time they have seen a dead person. Her “eternal beauty” will be the image the women remember, instead of how she

physically looked in Auschwitz, or how she will look a few hours after her death. The desensitization to death influences identity as it alters the perception of an inevitable event. Those surviving the Holocaust no longer fear the inevitable as they know they have essentially already lived through it once.

Lastly, in relation to identity, it is important to note that the transformation that comes with survival identity is an intricate process that occurs at all levels of the consciousness. Since it is the unconscious that protects the susceptible areas of identity, psychologists note that “there is no meaningful sense of being alive without an inner core of identity, no matter how it has been shaped, molded, or injured by trauma” (Wilson 109). The endeavor to protect our inner selves is innate, therefore, basic human nature. Survivors feel the need to preserve as much of their inner selves as they can in order to hold on to their original life. This is then altered, under no control of their own, after the Holocaust and the survival identity changes how they live their lives, how they raise families, and how they remember the event. Although the change may occur in a different way, each survivor faces it.

How survivors decide to put the experience into words connects to their autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memory is a term most commonly defined as memories that encompass events personally experienced (Neisser 71). These memories are unique to individuals and interpretations of outcomes play a large role in how the individual remembers the event. If the event was traumatic, the memories that cover it are going to vary dramatically from an event which was positive because it will maintain its focus on certain parts of the event while forgetting others. The autobiographical memory keeps memories that replay a story, situation, or moment. These memories are not all

inclusive. The mind remembers happenings it feels are most important. It may leave out portions that it deems unworthy or exclude certain dialogue which may have little to do with the situation. It remembers usually the most extreme or graphic parts as those were the parts that influenced the individual the most. Memories that involve traumatic events may be complex but are the ones to focus on in when analyzing Holocaust autobiographies.

A pertinent text written over how memory is connected to the Holocaust is Robert N. Kraft's book, *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust*. His book includes all aspects of how testimonies are remembered by Holocaust survivors, from oral to written. Kraft asserts that individuals are unique in their recollection of traumatic memories. He believes that it has to do with the four stages people go through when they encounter violence. These four stages are: numbness/distortion felt during the event, the deniability of the event that each person holds, the focus on how to survive, and the coexistence with the atrocity. Survivors may be exceptional in how they perceive the trauma but Kraft says that all go through these four stages (Kraft 96). He interviewed hundreds of Holocaust survivors and each expressed having gone through each stage even though they may not have realized it at the time.

In the numbness/distortion stage, survivors described how they felt they were "in a trance," "frosted over," "like robots," and "hibernating." They knew that the new situation was going to be extreme and so Kraft relates that they had to shut down their normal emotional response in order to survive (96-97). This shutdown came in the form of being numb to the happenings around them. Many felt as though time is distorted and because of this connection with numbness, numerous survivors felt their selves splitting.

Suddenly there were two perceptions of the self: one as subject and the other as object (Kraft 100). This new being was a way for the mind to protect its inner self so as to not lose control and succumb to the situation.

The second stage of adapting to atrocity is the “denying perception” each person held (Kraft 102). Kraft writes that “knowledge may actually override perception of worldly events—to the extent that the senses themselves are not believed” (103). In the case of the concentration camps, people did not believe what they were seeing to be factual. They did not understand that the horrors could actually come to life. It is not that the perception was repudiated or set aside as something too unbearable to think about, only that what they were witnessing was too horrific to be perceived as wholly realistic and could result from human actions (Kraft 104).

The third stage is the focus on how to survive. Before they can fully adapt, survivors had to figure out how to stay alive and concentrated purely on that. Putting aside basic humanity was one way as was looking out only for oneself. Two of the main thoughts were finding food and water. Without these elements, death was imminent. Survivors began to detach from their original selves and ruminated only on surviving the death camps (Kraft 105-109). Once they figured out how to acquire the materials they needed to survive as well as what was expected of them, they began to coexist with the atrocity: the fourth stage.

Learning how to live in coexistence with the revulsions around them not only constitutes the fourth stage but also shows how adaptive humans are when the time calls for it. Holocaust survivors learned how to form new strategies and live with limited supplies. They figured out how to live through each day, never entirely giving up on

hope. While some chanced disobedience, others found a way to blend in with the inmates, hoping to not be noticed and targeted. After learning how to cope with the situation, survivors began to discern more of their surroundings as well as the camp's cruelty (Kraft 110-114). Levi mentions an instance where this adaptation takes place. He writes:

Man's capacity to dig himself in, to secrete a shell, to build around himself a tenuous barrier of defense, even in apparently desperate circumstances, is astonishing and merits a serious study. It is based on an invaluable activity of adaptation partly passive and unconscious, partly active...one manages to gain a certain equilibrium after a few weeks, a certain degree of security in face of the unforeseen; one has made oneself a nest, the trauma of the transplantation is over. (60)

As Levi details the fourth stage, readers see how he and his comrades acclimatize to the surroundings and fall into a rhythm. The acknowledgement of this process and the preceding three stages then leads into how they would remember the Holocaust after the liberation.

To sum up, survivor identity is complex but has many connections to not only Concentration Camp Syndrome but Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in general for those who survived the Holocaust. Many survivors faced an uncertain world and their reactions as well as perceptions were altered from how they may have originally acted because of the traumatic experience they had just endured. While both Delbo and Levi live through extreme trauma, they both learn how to deal with it in a way in which they can focus on their new lives and new goals. While Delbo writes about her life after the Holocaust, Levi

omits many details in *Survival in Auschwitz*, but addresses them in his other works, such as *The Reawakening*. As they lived through similar situations, the concept of PTSD can apply to them, given the stories within their autobiographies. They not only experienced similar symptoms such as self-discontinuity, helplessness and humiliation, and survivor guilt, but also each had the desire to restore their lives by instituting order, convert their pain, uphold hope, and value the brevity of life. The ability to put words to trauma is something to be commended for as the role of memory plays a large part in recreating not only the horror they witnessed but also constructing stimulating stories dealing mainly with negative events.

Chapter Seven: Memory's Effects

“Memory is a curious instrument . . .” (Levi 156)

Writers of autobiographies take different approaches to the sharing of information they feel may benefit, enlighten, or inspire readers. Writers have their own ways of processing memory. Autobiographical memory is a part of memory that is not entirely unique to writers but a feature they must learn to utilize throughout the constructions of their texts. The concept of autobiographical memory is important when it comes to the analysis of autobiographical texts, especially ones that deal with trauma and the understanding of trauma. While memory has been studied for many years and psychologists have come to label certain features of it accordingly, the true effects that it has on autobiographical texts are still being studied. It is imperative that it be looked at in relation to trauma texts as the role memory plays in writing those texts is significant.

Robert Kraft theorizes in chapter five of *Memory Perceived* that survivors understood their concentration camp memories to be the guide of how they lived their lives after the Holocaust. These core memories influenced their actions and thoughts, induced fears, assaulted their sleep, and shaped how they interacted with friends and family. Therefore, these traumatic memories fashioned the concept of the self for each survivor (Kraft 121). Many survivors used these memories to write down their thoughts into poetry or autobiographies, explaining how memory played a part in their accounts. In fact, in one of Primo Levi's publications, *Moments of Reprieve*, he writes, “Without any deliberate effort, memory continues to restore to me events, faces, words, sensations, as if at that time my mind had gone through a period of exalted receptivity, during not a detail was lost” (Kraft 41). Others felt guilt each time they remembered the horrors of the

Holocaust and so had a harder time assimilating into the new society. Lastly, some felt unable to voice their memories and so stayed silent about their experience. Since each person heals from a situation differently, silence can be most comforting to some.

Numerous survivors felt uneasy about returning home and still were fully unable to comprehend what they just survived. These individuals could not find the strength to express their feelings and several did not want to. Many wanted to focus on finding their families and rebuilding their lives so they do not feel it necessary to burden listeners with the terrors they observed (Kraft 143-44). Although, as Roberta Culbertson, expert on memory and its relation to trauma asserts, the silence that many held was difficult but it was still fundamental to their existence and to the conception they had of themselves (169). Culbertson believes that although many survivors did not want to talk about their experience the struggle of putting the experience to words was even harder. Eventually, most survivors, according to Culbertson, wanted to talk about the traumatic event and so they relied on the message of words to try to evoke empathy and understanding (170). The problem arises: words will never fully explain the ultimate horror Holocaust survivors went through. Nonetheless, writers strained to find the closest possible way to convey their experience.

Robert Kraft notes that witnesses of the Holocaust have a difficult time articulating the emotional and physical suffering that they endured while imprisoned. They remarked that there were no real words in any language to truly convey misery, mortification, betrayal, and starvation. Many survivors tried to find the words to describe these emotions and spoke of the desire to conjure a new language (Kraft 7). In fact, Lea Fridman Hamaoui, expert on various Holocaust writers, including Charlotte Delbo, writes

that transcribing the “extreme experience” into written language “disrupts conventions of belief and disbelief upon which speakers and listeners, readers and writers are agreed” (243). She argues that the tale shifts from the story itself to the breakdown of the forms and conventions that sustain telling, therefore the use of language proposes a solution to the problem (Hamaoui 244). Delbo finds a way to do just this in her text. She shows readers rather than tells and does so by writing in a stream of consciousness using the first person plural. She writes by paying special attention to the minute details of extremity: thirst, cold, torture, the tulip, roll call, death, dreams, and sleep. By using “we” she includes the reader within the “plural consciousness of the narration” (Hamaoui 247).

Finding the words to express the exact feeling was not the only problem Holocaust writers faced. Victoria Stewart, expert on women’s autobiographies, notes that the role memory played was also problematic when the writers were constructing their autobiographies. The concept of time was disjointed and writers had to find a way to connect the present with the past and create continuity between the two. Stewart writes that memory and the perception of time made it challenging to create a direct narrative because both ideas were not only distorted but confusing as well for the victims during their time in concentration camps. Stewart acknowledges that although Delbo tries, she knows that readers will never be able to identify fully with the writers of these autobiographies, as language is deficient in expressing true emotions (112). This did not stop them from at least trying to make readers aware of the horrors they witnessed, as Delbo and Levi have shown in their texts.

The connection between memory and language is detailed more by Roberta Culbertson in her article. Although the two are intertwined in the production of

narratives, the relationship is awkward and uncomfortable because “each needs the other for the hope of any sense, any universalization of experience, any sense of the continuity of self, even of community, of hearers” (183). Culbertson claims that in trauma, the brutality must be fictionalized to a degree in order to become a realistic account of one’s self. Writers struggled to put their past in the order that made it most coherent. They had to confront the confusion and figure out the best way to present the information. The “reality” became fictitious because the “self to be reestablished, filled out, reinflated, is a self now, in need of interpretation of what is in the body, being the experience of the body then” (Culbertson 184). This new self must reevaluate the old self and find unity between the two.

When utilizing traumatic memory and making it into a written account, many survivors found that the visual imagery had a place. The images that they observed during their imprisonment were difficult to forget and had an important influence on the narration. These images, according to Francesca Cappelletto, who studies war and memory, were not mere fantasies or a copy of reality, but an emotional experience in a visual form (251). These memories used more of the auditory sense and were usually more perceptive because they created a depiction in the survivors’ minds. This picture was then what the writers aimed to present in the development of their narratives.

It is important to note that the mind is not the only part of the body that remembers the graphic experience. The body also has its own way to recollect the abuse weighed upon it. Roberta Culbertson says that wounding the body leaves lasting effects because the body tries, during the persecution, to protect itself just as much as the mind does. The body focuses on how to avoid injury as well as how to find a way to heal from

it (174). The body and the mind use defense techniques to shield themselves from as much trauma as they can, whether it is the mind numbing itself to the horrors it is witnessing or the body utilizing its reflexes more consistently. Thus, both the body and the mind emerge from the situation with scathing memories that are hard to process.

Elaine Scarry argues that “what is remembered in the body is well remembered” (109). The body never forgets the abject torture and abuse it endures, thus affecting the memories of the situation. When survivors thought back to when they were physically hurt, their body felt uneasy, they started sweating, and they felt as though they were back in the traumatic event again. This adverse reaction is not universal, but Scarry emphasizes that many survivors of torture experience these symptoms (110). The body is a vulnerable site and although malleable, still has the ability to be hurt with the memory of that pain everlasting.

The memory of the mind and body connect to identity as the memories from traumatic times influence how a person reacts to certain situations. Robert Kraft found that “specific, personal memories can remain vivid for more than fifty years, causing people to cry suddenly, to break down uncontrollably, and to become enraged (1). This intrusion of dreadful past thoughts is unwanted and can be devastating. People put their lives on hold for a brief instant, allow their mind to take them back to a time they would rather forget, and once again emerge from the situation feeling miserable and confused. These disruptions can control how people live their lives. If they cannot put aside those thoughts and concentrate on the present, they focus on the past, halting the new identity formation that is needed in order to heal from the trauma. Kraft affirms that survivors

needed to keep their attention on who they were after the emergence and continue to plan their future, always looking ahead rather than behind (2).

In relation to the four stages that Kraft names about how a survivor confronts atrocity, Charlotte Delbo also has four different stages that show her interpretation of the complexity of memory. Years after writing *Auschwitz and After*, she comments on her interpretation of memory and how complicated, yet important it is, especially in regards to the formation of her texts and the formation of her identity. Delbo believes there are four types of memory and relates each to Holocaust texts as she feels the connections between the two are something that cannot be ignored. These four types are common, deep, external, and sense.

Delbo defines common memory as that which tells readers Auschwitz and other concentration camps are part of a sequence of occasions, a miserable event in the past which survival helps to redeem. Deep memory, according to Delbo, reminds readers that the Auschwitz past is not really past and never will be (Langer xi-xii). Deep memory depends on common memory, though, as it knows what common memory cannot, but tries nonetheless to express. The deep memory has two functions in regards to Holocaust accounts: “[I]t restores the self to its normal pre- and post-camp routines but also offers detached portraits, from the vantage point of today, of what it must have been like then” (Stewart 117). The paradox between common and deep memory is complicated as the past feeds into the present influencing it and helping to construct how events are remembered.

The other two types of memory are not as multifaceted and are more parallel in nature. Delbo notes that when she tells people about Auschwitz she is using ideas from

her external memory or the memory connected with the thinking process. This memory allows survivors to remember the worst parts of their imprisonment and it is the “sense memory that preserves and tries to transmit the *physical* imprint of the ordeal, [enabling] us to approach the unthinkable” (Langer xiii-xiv). The sense memory is used in the writing of the autobiographies because it allows the survivor to remember the small details that make up the bulk of the experience. The duality between each set of memories makes the narration conflicted and sometimes disjointed as the authors struggle to articulate their meaning, all the while trying to sort out their memories.

Delbo addresses these concepts of memory throughout all three parts of *Auschwitz and After*. She not only distances herself from the story to discuss memory, but also brings up how it is threatened, at odds with her nature, imprisoned, and valued. The first time she mentions it is in her “Springtime” chapter. Delbo questions how it is possible that she keeps her positive memories when she is surrounded by death and destruction. She notes that her memories are capable of conjuring up intense emotion and sadness and wonders why she is left with the memories that do nothing but sadden and harm. Delbo says, “Why did I keep my memory? My memory is more bloodless than an autumn leaf. My memory has forgotten the dew. My memory is drained of its sap. My memory has bled to death” (112-13). After this questioning she ends her chapter and the first part of her trilogy with the phrase “None of us will return. None of us was meant to return” (114). This questioning puts the pressure on the readers, asking them why having a memory of such traumatic times is even worth it if all it does is haunt the survivor. She equates her memory to death and despair. By discussing memory in this manner, readers

see that it is something important to Delbo as she dissects the value it has to trauma survivors.

The awareness of memory is a feature Delbo finds important and she fears losing it throughout her experience. Even if she questions its value, she does not want to lose it. In the chapter “The Misanthrope,” Delbo says, “Since Auschwitz, I always feared losing my memory. To lose one’s memory is to lose oneself, to no longer be oneself” (188). She talks of memorizing not only various poems, but also telephone numbers, metro stations, and boutiques. The most discussed item she remembers is the play, *Le Misanthrope*, by Molière, which is looked at in detail throughout her text. She finds this play more valuable than other items as it provides an escape as well as a distraction to the brutal reality happening around her in Auschwitz. She is able to memorize the entire text which she sees as an accomplishment. Memory is important to Delbo and as she remarks on the positives of it, she also mentions the disadvantages.

When Delbo returns to the outside world, she describes how she is “imprisoned in memories and repetitions” (261). This new “prison” contains the graphic images and memories of the time in the concentration camps. She notes how it is hard to repress the corrupt memories but that it is important to not let go of those thoughts as they help remind the survivor the horror they lived through. As it would be difficult to forget the disturbing images they saw, survivors would know that it is those exact memories that keep them thankful they survived.

Lastly, according to Delbo, memory is all the victims possessed when they entered the gates of the camps. She discusses this in *The Measure of Our Days* in detail:

Each one had taken along his or her memories, the whole load of remembrance, the weight of the past. On arrival, we had to unload it. We went in naked. You might say one can take everything away from a human being except this one faculty: memory. Not so. First, human beings are stripped of what makes them human, then their memory leaves them. Memory peels off like tatters, tatters of burned skin. That a human being is able to survive having been stripped in this manner is what you'll never comprehend The survivor must undertake to regain his memory, regain what he possessed before: his knowledge, his experience, his childhood memories, his manual dexterity and his intellectual faculties, sensitivities, the capacity to dream, imagine, laugh. If you're unable to gauge the effort this necessitates, in no way can I attempt to convey it.

(255)

Delbo mentions the importance of pre-and post-camp memories but admits that people will never fully grasp their importance until they are stripped of them. Memories, no matter how happy or sad, are valuable and are part of every human. Delbo explains how even in the camps, some lost their pre-camp memories and had to try to recreate them after the Holocaust. They were so preoccupied with survival, during their imprisonment, that they had no energy left to focus on their pre-war memories. Delbo does counteract this thought in her text as she and her comrades talk of old times and exchange stories of their lives before the war. It is clear that although Delbo does value the importance of memories, she is unsure of how to explain that to readers who have not lived through an event as traumatizing as hers. Her thoughts on memory are ones to note as she not only

mentions them more than a few times, but also tries to dissect their significant and complicated nature.

The effect that memory had on the survivors of the Holocaust was vast and all-inclusive. Although memory is a complex concept, the description survivors gave of their time in concentration camps showed how central it was to their lives. Although all were traumatized by the sights they saw, they remembered the situation in a different fashion. Those who wanted to put their memories into autobiographies struggled with finding the exact words to express the emotion felt at the time. As words are not descriptive enough to show true human emotion, writers faced many challenges in the conveyance of their stories. Authors like Delbo and Levi manage to sort through their jumbled memories and construct a story that not only captivates readers but evokes emotion and further thoughts on the issue. Since Holocaust autobiographical memories are influenced by trauma they can be analyzed when studying Holocaust narratives.

Conclusion

Survivors of the Holocaust lived through a traumatic time in which their individuality was threatened. The mere fact that they made it out of the concentration camps alive is nothing short of a miracle and can be studied and analyzed in many different ways. The connection these survivors had to identity is one feature that is not only vast but also fascinating. The survivors' pre-war identities were altered and they emerged from the camps different people with different outlooks on life. Identity can be studied through many different lenses, four of which are personal, social, persecuted, and survival. These four types are not all inclusive, nor specific to Holocaust victims, but are vividly demonstrated in Charlotte Delbo's and Primo Levi's autobiographical texts. They are four ways in which identity can take shape and the study of them not only creates awareness of self-identity but also how trauma affects an individual's perspective after overcoming a brutal time.

As the survivors entered the camps, their personal identity was at stake. Because the Nazis felt that certain beliefs or practices would disrupt the overall National Socialist ideology they believed that eliminating the threat was the only option for creating a successful country. Deporting many innocent victims to concentration camps was only one way in which the Nazis asserted their power. Relatively speaking, it was the identities of those persecuted that threatened the Nazi ideal. As the survivors learned to adapt to the camps, many held on to their personal identity as they felt it important in preserving who they originally were. Others changed their minds about what was vital and focused more on survival than staying attached to their pre-war selves. The personal

identities of the individuals are broad and cannot be explained in full detail in any one work as with any type of identity.

Social identity is another idea that is not only important but also broad. My analysis of the social identities pertain more to the individual groups that were formed in the camps than to the pre-war formations and up holdings. Delbo's group of women perceives the war in a diverse manner and their social identity differs from that of Levi's group of men. Both groups show how social identity is constructed based on the expectations of the surrounding groups. While Delbo's group shows how important it may be to connect with others in traumatic times, Levi shows the other side's equally significant need to battle trauma by one's self. The social identity formed within the camps did help to shape hope and perseverance all the while focusing on survival and learning how to handle the oppression.

The persecution that Delbo and Levi both underwent shows how identity takes shape when a person is experiencing a traumatic situation. The portrayal that both narrators focus on when touching on their persecuted identity shows readers that identity still plays a part when faced with atrocity. What the camp prisoners endured altered their perception of humanity and therefore changed how they would react, after liberation, to situations which may have reminded them of their imprisonment. Persecuted identity is imperative to analyze as it leads into survival identity.

The survival identity that the victims emerged with after the war can largely be viewed in its relation to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and more specifically, Concentration Camp Syndrome. The negative and positive side effects from a traumatic encounter are seen in many trauma victims. How the individuals handle the event and

what they do to start to heal from it is left in their control even though there are guides and resources intended to aid their process. The survival identity is the proof of the lasting effect trauma has on individuals.

As I explored how the Holocaust survivors changed, I also looked at how memory takes effect. The mind's ability not only to comprehend but then to articulate the horror people live through shows the body's capability to learn and begin to heal from the trauma. When the survivors wanted to put their experience into words, they had the challenge of sorting through their memories and constructing a narrative in which the chronology of events is understood as well as the power of the emotions conveyed. While there are no words fully to explain raw human emotions, writers attempted to get the main points across, as Delbo and Levi have proven.

In regards to the questions posed in the introduction, Delbo and Levi see themselves very differently in a time of ultimate persecution, especially in terms of their personal, social, persecuted and survival identities. They both chose to write about that time in their lives as a means to heal from the trauma. While the process may have helped Delbo heal, it can be said that Levi never fully did, as evidenced by his suicide in 1987. Lastly, I had to take memory into account as it clearly has an effect on writing coherent and emotional autobiographies. Each question was analyzed and discussed in relation to the texts and the identity within.

Identity and how persecution affects it are ideas that cannot be ignored. I noted how the change in the survivors is noticeable and the texts they wrote not only show that change but also how important they felt it was to show how malleable human beings really are. To live through the trauma that they did and still majestically construct

narratives to convey their thoughts is a feat that deserves recognition. The best passage to sum up the ideas presented comes from Levi's text:

This [intermediary gradation] division is much less evident in ordinary life; for there it rarely happens that a man loses himself. A man is normally not alone, and in his rise or fall is tied to the destinies of his neighbours; so that it is exceptional for anyone to acquire unlimited power, or to fall by a succession of defeats into utter ruin. Moreover, everyone is normally in possession of such spiritual, physical, and even financial resources that the probabilities of a shipwreck, of total inadequacy in the face of life, are relatively small. And one must take into account a definite cushioning effect exercised both by the law, and by the moral sense which constitutes a self-imposed law; for a country is considered the more civilized the more wisdom and efficiency of its laws hinder a weak man from becoming too weak or a powerful one too powerful. (100)

As Levi explicitly details the connections between the camps and how they affect identity, he also notes how survivors of trauma have the capability to overcome the hardship and heal from the atrocity. Levi's quotation leaves the chance for hope that all who survive trauma can eventually find a way to heal and possess the strength to retell their stories, hoping not only to inspire future generations, but also to spread the awareness of the event and show how intensely it may have affected their sense of self.

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