8-2021

Exploring Trauma, Loss, and Posttraumatic Growth in Poles Who Survived the Second World War and Their Descendants

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Exploring Trauma, Loss, and Posttraumatic Growth in Poles Who Survived the Second World War and Their Descendants

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University in partial fulfilment

of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Montclair, NJ

August 2021

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Jennifer Brown Urban

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

Exploring Trauma, Loss, and Posttraumatic Growth in Poles Who Survived the Second World War and Their Descendants

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Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program:
Family Science and Human Development

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July 19, 2021
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Abstract

EXPLORING TRAUMA, LOSS, AND POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN POLES WHO SURVIVED THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THEIR DESCENDANTS

by Alexandra Rush

Life Course Theory's (Elder, 1998) paradigmatic themes of historical time and place, linked lives, timing of events, and human agency were applied to explore the experiences of Poles who survived the Second World War in Poland and the impact of intergenerational transmission of traumatic effects and/or features of posttraumatic growth, and meanings constructed. A phenomenological analysis was based on 13 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with one 1st generation survivor, seven 2nd generation and five 3rd generation descendants; four females and nine males, ranging in age from 23 to 90. The conceptual framework of Posttraumatic Growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006); positive changes associated with KZ Syndrome (Kepiński, 1970/2008; Lesniak, 1965); Family Resiliency Framework (Walsh, 2016); and theory of Ambiguous Loss (Boss, 2016) informed this study. Findings revealed a main theme of Loss as the core essence of trauma, across all three generations; other main themes included Betrayal, Lack of Recognition of Poland's Suffering, and Positive Growth and Legacies Shared. Family milieu, communication patterns, and shared worldviews contributed to transmission of traumatic effects, and/or features of posttraumatic growth and family resilience. Sharing of positive legacies sowed the seeds for positive growth, and in some instances, a sense of purpose in descendants.

Keywords: Poles, intergenerational trauma, posttraumatic growth, life course theory, family resilience, purpose, ambiguous loss, phenomenology, Second World War in Poland

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge my son, Andrew and brother, Marek who were among the very first to generously extend themselves to support me in this amazing endeavor. Your willingness to openly share your insights and memories with me were instrumental to the launch of this study. Next, I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Jennifer Brown Urban, my dissertation chair and trusted advisor for her steadfast and unwavering support of my voice and my work, and whose guidance and expertise helped me navigate the challenging waters inherent in pursuing a topic that is very complex and close to one's heart- I could not have done this without you! I also wish to whole-heartedly thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Soyoung Lee, Dr. Johanna Quinn, and Dr. Steven Lee for their guidance, expertise, and earnest appreciation of the value of this topic and the meaning it held for me. I wish to also thank Dr. Ellen Hulme whose insights, compassion, and support were invaluable to me; Charlotte, who welcomed my perspectives and supported me; Brian who tirelessly listened to all my ideas and drafts; Brittanie who reminded me that graduation was indeed on the horizon; and my faithful companion, Gizmo (the best dog ever) who sat next to me each and every day, chapter after chapter. Last, I wish to sincerely thank my friends for their heartfelt support and belief in my ability to see this work to its fruition.

Much love and gratitude to all of you!

Alexandra (Oleńka)

Dedication

"I can do all things through Him that strengthens me." Philippians 4:13.

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, especially my mother, Iwonka; my father, Andrzej (*Zyndram,* Second Lieutenant, Baszta, kompanii 02, Armia Krajowa-Warsaw Uprising*)*; my grandmothers, Janka and Stanislawa; my grandfathers, Teofil (Kapitan, Polish Paratroopers) and Stanislaw (Naval Kapitan- *Obrancu Helu* [Defender of Hel]); and my aunt, Alicja. This work is also dedicated to my son, Andrew (my heart and joy); my brother, Marek and his wife, Maritta; my nieces Andrea and Sarah; my grandnephew Connor Andrew; Henia and Ewa; Tadeusz, his parents and his family; Armja Krajowa and the Warsaw resistance fighters; a free Poland; and most of all, *my participants* whose generosity, courage, and heart ultimately made this possible. I wish to honor the bravery, faith, and fortitude of our ancestors and unequivocally recognize all people who suffered at the hands of the Nazi regime and Soviet repression.

Contents

First Lesson

Lie back, daughter, let your head be tipped back in the cup of my hand. Gently, and I will hold you. Spread your arms wide, lie out on the stream and look high at the gulls. A dead-man's-float is face down. You will dive and swim soon enough where this tidewater ebbs to the sea. Daughter, believe me, when you tire on the long thrash to your island, lie up, and survive. As you float now, where I held you and let go, remember when fear cramps your heart what I told you: lie gently and wide to the light-year stars, lie back, and the sea will hold you.

By poet, Phillip Booth - *the last poem my mother, Iwonka shared with me in 2008*

Chapter 1: Introduction

I walked in Kraków, in Warsaw and the houses and streets whispered to me… what happened. (Iwonka's journal, 1994)

Words cannot fully describe or capture the devastating suffering and catastrophic losses that emanate from war and mass trauma. These cataclysmic events etch lasting impressions and imprints for generations to come. Both survivors and descendants are impacted in ways that reflect their own developmental history, unique and collective traumatic experiences, socio-cultural changes and losses, and dynamic family processes (Aldous & Klein, 1988; Elder & Shanahan, 2006; Walsh, 2007). From a relational perspective, individual, family and society mutually influence one another in reciprocal ways, and during times of war or mass trauma individual ↔ context relations are punctuated and traumatic alterations of life trajectories exert powerful individual and intergenerational effects (Kahn, 2004; Overton, 2013).

Survivors of war and mass trauma may transmit powerful themes of trauma and loss to future generations, leaving indelible imprints on their descendants that potentially influence future outcomes. It is also proposed that alongside such imprints, one will find patterns of resilience and posttraumatic growth characterized by themes of hope, determination, and strength, as well as creative transformations that construct meaning out of suffering (Atwell et al., 2009; Frankl, 1963). Such transformations can positively influence and impact future outcomes, inspire growth and purpose, and often co-exist with themes of trauma and loss (Frankl, 1963; Kepinski, 1970; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

The purpose of this study is twofold: the first is to explore the experiences of Poles who survived the Second World War and their descendants and provide a space where their voices may be heard. The second is to illustrate the potential for growth and transformation that can emerge from profound suffering and extreme circumstances. Poles who survived this tragic period in history and their descendants are in a unique position to tell this powerful story and to share their lived experiences and legacies of courage, strength, and hope. By exploring trauma, loss, and posttraumatic growth in Polish survivors and their descendants, we can expand the current knowledge base and become sensitized to the challenges experienced by today's survivor families (e.g., mass trauma, genocide, terrorism) as they attempt to reconstruct their lives. By looking backward, we are better equipped to move forward in helping these individuals and families identify potential strategies for growth, transformation, and empowerment. Lastly, by creating a space in western research literature to explore the traumatic effects of Hitler's genocidal policy toward the Poles and the Soviet repression that followed, we can broaden the scope of Holocaust research and provide social acknowledgement for Polish survivors and fighters of the Second World War and their descendants (Kepinski, 1970; Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018; Lukas, 2012; Maercker et al., 2009).

This study explores the lived experiences of Polish survivors and fighters of the Second World War in Poland and their descendants, and examines the transmission of trauma, loss, and posttraumatic growth across generations. For the purposes of this study, the term Poles refers to people of ethnic Polish descent and ancestry who are Polish citizens, native Polish speakers, and who are Roman Catholic or Christian. Second and third-generation descendants in this study are also of ethnic Polish descent and ancestry, but may or may not be Polish citizens, Polish-speaking, and/or practicing Catholics or Christians.

Positioned under a meta-theory of relationism, this study assumes that individual ↔ context relations are dynamic and mutually-influencing and occur in a larger social and historical context (Overton, 2013). Life Course Theory informs this study, which includes paradigmatic themes of human lives in historical time and place, linked (interdependent) lives, and human agency (Elder, 1998; Elder & Shanahan, 2006). Life Course Theory can meaningfully illuminate a study exploring the experiences of Poles who survived the Second World War and their descendants, since it is sensitive to socio-historic context, continuity and change, human agency, and incorporates the concept of linked lives (Elder & Shanahan, 2006). The conceptual framework of posttraumatic growth also informs this study and is defined as "the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1).

The following research questions guided the study: RQ1: *What features of trauma, loss, and posttraumatic growth are transmitted from Poles who survived the Second World War to their children and grandchildren?* RQ2: *What legacies are passed down to 2nd and 3rd generation descendants?* RQ3: *How is present day outlook influenced by having been a descendant of a fighter and/or survivor of mass trauma?* RQ4: *How is trauma, loss, and/or posttraumatic growth being transmitted to the 2nd and 3rd generation?* RQ5: *How do descendants of Poles who survived the Second World War experience western society's awareness and recognition of Poland's suffering during this time*?

My Positionality

I approach my work as an informed researcher and as the descendant of two Polish-Catholic parents who survived and escaped the German and Soviet occupation of Poland during the Second World War. My father was a freedom fighter, who fought in Warsaw Underground's

Compania 02 ("Baszta") of Armja Krajowa (AK) in the Mokotów district during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. My paternal grandfather commanded and fought in the Polish Navy's batteries on the Hel peninsula and my maternal grandfather was the recipient of the Order of Virtuti Militari, Poland's highest military decoration for courage in the face of the enemy. My maternal grandmother and my mother lived in hiding in Poland after their home was seized by Nazi storm troopers. For two years, they honorably risked their lives by opening up their home to a young Jewish girl, Anka, who pretended to be my mother's sister. Both my mother and Anka were able to successfully escape from Poland and corresponded many years later. My family has suffered tragic losses as a result of the Nazi atrocities and the German and subsequent Soviet occupation of Poland. My positionality inspires me to encourage readers to acknowledge the suffering, as well as the courage, strength, and hope of Poles who survived and fought to maintain Poland's honor and independence, and to provide a space for their voices to be heard and the legacies of their descendants to be shared.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Trauma has been defined as exposure to a stressful event that overwhelms a person's ability to effectively cope with the stressor (van der Kolk et al., 1996) and a *catastrophe* has been defined as an event that is "sudden, overwhelming, and often dangerous, either to one's self or significant others" (Figley, 1985, p. xviii). The impact of catastrophic, mass trauma (e.g., war, genocide, slavery, terrorist attacks) carries far-reaching and profound effects for individuals, families, and societies over time. These events challenge one's beliefs and expectations about humanity, the self, and the world, and can disrupt basic assumptions that the world is benign and meaningful, the self is worthy, and people are trustworthy (Epstein, 1989). In attempting to describe the profound effects of such experiences, researchers have noted that a primary empathic bond between the survivor and the human community is ruptured, which creates a chasm where one is no longer at home in the world (Laub & Podell, 1995).

Mass Trauma in the Context of Poland and the Second World War

Poland belongs to a region of Europe which has been described as the *bloodlands*, in which two occupying totalitarian regimes inflicted mass trauma upon the Polish nation and sought to impose their respective systems of Nazism and Communism (Snyder, 2010). Between 1939 and 1945, estimates place human war losses in Poland at 5,620,000 to 5,820,000, which include 2,770,000 ethnic Poles lost due to the German Occupation; 2,700,000 to 2,900,000 Jewish Holocaust deaths; and 150,000 victims of Soviet repression (Materski & Szarota, 2009, p. 9). Other historians estimate that Poland lost approximately six million of its citizens, including 50% Polish Christians and 50% Polish Jews (Lukas, 2012). Historians have also estimated that between 1940-1941, about 500,000 Polish citizens were deported and exiled into the frontiers of

the Soviet Union, of which 52% were ethnic Poles, 30% were Jews, and 18% were Ukrainians and Belorussians (Kochanski, 2012, p. 138).

In western research and reporting, the story of the Polish people is not often shared or fully portrayed when presenting or discussing the events of the Holocaust. For this reason, the term *forgotten Holocaust* has been invoked to call attention to Hitler's cleansing policy against ethnic Poles and the catastrophic losses suffered by the Polish nation, both during the German occupation and Soviet occupation that immediately followed (Lukas, 2012). Drawing upon the notion of forgotten Holocaust, a psychological study conducted by Montague (2012) specifically explored the effects of the Holocaust for six Polish Catholic survivors and their descendants, and found that "all participants in this study thought that the general public in the United States was unaware of the persecution, enslavement, and suffering of Polish Catholics during the Holocaust" (Montague, 2012, p. 171). During the time that the research was conducted, the author noted that no other studies in western psychology had addressed the impact of the Holocaust for Poles or Polish-Catholics and their descendants, further illustrating a lack of social awareness and social acknowledgement of Poland's suffering and devastation during this mass trauma.

More recently, a 2018 study investigated posttraumatic stress symptoms in Polish survivors of WWII and the role of social acknowledgement (Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018). This study found a high rate of posttraumatic stress disorder among WWII survivors in Poland, including WWII veterans and deportees to Siberia and noted that in Poland, "social recognition of war-related trauma has been limited to certain groups only (e.g. Nazi concentration camp survivors), largely due to the political conditions from 1945 to 1989" (Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018, p. 3). The results of the study found lack of social recognition or social acknowledgement of

war-related trauma to be a risk factor for posttraumatic stress disorder, and concluded that the study participants could have experienced a lack of social acknowledgement of their war-related trauma due to the presence of a totalitarian political system (e.g., Soviet repression) after the war (Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018, p. 3). Additionally, previous research conducted by Polish psychiatrist and philosopher, Antoni Kępiński, found that former WWII Polish concentration camp prisoners felt their suffering and heroism went unrecognized (Kępiński, 1970). Of note, studies continue to show that perceived social acknowledgement and social support serve as protective factors after trauma and contribute to posttraumatic growth (Forstmeier et al., 2009).

KZ Syndrome

Trauma research can benefit from the work of Antoni Kępiński, a Polish psychiatrist and philosopher, and former concentration camp prisoner himself, who has been referred to as the pioneer of post-traumatic stress disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Schochow & Steger, 2016). In collaboration with his colleague Dr. Stanislaw Kłodziński, a former Auschwitz prisoner, Kępiński conducted hundreds of interviews over many years with Poles who were former concentration camp prisoners. These interviews led to Kępiński's observation of a complex phenomenon, known as concentration camp syndrome or *KZ Syndrome* (Kępiński, 1970/2008; Schochow & Steger, 2016). Kępiński observed that many former camp prisoners exhibited both somatic and psychological difficulties, which included post-camp asthenia (e.g., feelings of weakness and fatigue), depressed mood, difficulties with self-restraint (e.g., greater excitability, irritability), and interpersonal distrust (Kępiński, 1970/2008). Kępiński concluded that *KZ Syndrome* could not be easily defined or meaningfully portrayed in a lengthy list of symptoms, "What is felt very rarely appears easy to define. That is why, in spite of many studies,

the essence of *concentration camp syndrome* is still difficult to describe" (Kępiński, 1970/2008, p. 79).

In seeking to capture the essence of this complex phenomenon, Kępiński explained that camp experiences had become the primary point of reference for former prisoners, and had evermore changed their worldview, relationships with people, sense of purpose, and values (Kępiński, 1970/2008). In Kępiński's words, "They could not get out from the camp circle, there were the horrible things in that circle, but beautiful too, the bottom of human humiliation, and human goodness and gentleness. They possessed the knowledge of human beings, and in spite of this, or maybe because of it they are tormented with the mystery of the human being" (Kępiński, 1980, p. 77). Former camp prisoners harbored unfulfilled expectations and hopes; to perceive everyday life problems as trivial compared to camp experiences; and felt their suffering and heroism went unrecognized (Kępiński, 1970/2008). Often, they had more difficulty adjusting to post-camp life than to camp conditions (Kępiński, 1970/2008). In some cases, however, positive changes were noted alongside negative effects, and these changes included increased independence, activity, and courage (Lesniak, 1965; Krysinska, 2010). According to Kępiński, these positive changes reflected increased life dynamics or vitality, trust of others, and stoicism (Kępiński, 1970/2008; Krysinska, 2010). Interestingly, positive changes observed in *KZ Syndrome* are closely aligned with contemporary definitions of *posttraumatic growth* described as "positive change experienced as a result of the struggle with a major life crisis or a traumatic event" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; UNC Posttraumatic Research Group, 2019).

Transmission of Trauma Across Generations

Intergenerational or transgenerational trauma has been observed across a wide range of cultural groups, including native American populations (Brave Heart, 1998), African-American

descendants of slaves (Williams-Washington, 2010), children of war veterans (Dekel & Goldblatt, 2008), descendants of Holocaust survivors, (Baranowsky et al., 1998; Danieli, 1998; Kellerman, 2001c, 2013) as well as descendants of Polish-Catholic survivors of the Holocaust (Montague, 2012). This transmission is also seen in descendants of Armenian refugees (Karenian et al., 2010), descendants of Cambodian refugees (Simcox & Strasser, 2010), Palestinian children living under military occupation (Barron & Abdallah, 2015), and second-generation Latino immigrant youth (Phipps & Degges-White, 2014). In a study of war-related trauma among families who experienced the Kosovo war, researchers found the presence of substantial post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression, even 11 years after the war, for both post-war civilians and their children (Schick et al., 2013).

French psychoanalysts have observed the relationship between the experience of large historical traumas associated with war and the recurrence of trauma-related themes experienced by descendants, often generations later (Davoine & Gaudillière, 2004). These descendants carry an experience that they cannot understand or easily articulate. The following description shared by a Lakota/Dakota native American woman poignantly embodies the transmission of trauma and grief across generations, stemming from a history of genocide: “I feel like I have been carrying a weight around that I’ve inherited. I have this theory that grief is passed on genetically because it’s there and I never knew where it came from. I feel a sense of responsibility to undo the pain of the past. I can’t separate myself from the past, the history of the trauma. It has been paralyzing to us as a group” (Brave Heart, 2003, p. 7). As reflected in this powerful quote, descendants may internalize their ancestors’ trauma-related suffering and grief (Brave Heart, 1999b; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Kellermann, 2001c) and may live-out replicas of their parents’ traumatic experiences (Kahn, 2006). This phenomenon has been termed

intergenerational trauma or transgenerational trauma and "refers to the process in which a trauma that happened to the first generation was passed on to the second generation" (Kellermann, 2013, p. 33).

Intergenerational or transgenerational trauma can impact descendants of survivors of war trauma, the Holocaust, terrorist attacks, as well as descendants of war veterans and refugees, and may continue beyond the 2nd and 3rd generation (Kellermann, 2013; Yehuda et al., 2005). Research evidence suggests that children of trauma survivors are biologically at greater risk for PTSD (Yehuda et al., 2005; Yehuda, 2006; Yehuda & Bierer, 2000), and that parental PTSD is associated with lasting hormonal changes (e.g., low cortisol levels) in offspring, even in the absence of lifetime PTSD in the offspring (Yehuda et al., 2000). For example, epigenetic modifications can arise in response to trauma, resulting from environmental exposure that can alter gene expression and such changes are viewed to be enduring and carry the potential for intergenerational transmission (Yehuda & Bierer, 2009).

Mourning and Loss Across Generations

Traumatic memories and trauma-related effects can weave through generations and assume an amorphous and organizing presence, as if time stands still, while the narrative of the trauma is transmitted and re-lived (Auerhahn & Laub, 1998). Traumatic memories create powerful and lasting impressions, and even in cases where traumatic memories were not shared, unresolved grief and trauma-related symptoms can be transmitted (Brave Heart, 1998; Danieli, 1998; Laub & Lee, 2003). Studies with Holocaust survivors and their descendants suggest that trauma is often transmitted to future generations as themes of loss of family, feelings of sadness and grief, unexpressed anger, trauma-related flashbacks, nightmares, and dreams (Chaitin, 2003). For example, descendants of Holocaust survivors often report having nightmares where they are

"chased, persecuted, tortured or annihilated, as if they were re-living the Second World War over and over again" (Kellermann, 2013, p. 1). Heritable changes in gene expression can occur from major emotional trauma and are proposed to leave marks on the chemical coating of the chromosomes, which then becomes a sort of memory of the cell (Kellermann, 2013; Meaney & Szyf, 2005). "The body keeps score" (van der Kolk, 1994, p. 253) and it is proposed that physical reminders of past events persist not only in first generation survivors, but in descendants as well (Kellermann, 2013; Meaney & Szyf, 2005; van der Kolk, 1994). Holocaust-related flashbacks and nightmares, themes of loss of family, feelings of sadness, and intergenerational effects have also been observed in Polish-Catholic survivors of the Holocaust (Montague, 2012).

Survivors notably experience unresolved mourning and loss (Shosnan, 1985), and the children of survivors may absorb their parents' grief and complete their parents' mourning process (Shosnan, 1985). "These offspring, the 'second generation' from the trauma, may thus bear *'the scar without the wound*,' since they are significantly, if only indirectly, affected" (Albeck, 1994, p. 106). Scholars have interpreted this phenomenon as *empathic traumatization* or the 2nd generation's attempt to empathically understand the pain of their parent's war-related experiences as a way of connecting with them (Albeck, 1994; Walsh, 2007). Children of Holocaust survivors may also be more likely to develop PTSD after traumatic experiences of interpersonal loss, but interestingly enough may be more resilient after traumatic experiences involving disasters or accidents (Kellerman, 2001b). Researchers have also observed a cohesive pattern among adult children of Holocaust survivors, which involved feeling traumatized by witnessing the effects of their parents' suffering and the expectations placed on them to give meaning to their parents' suffering (Tippett, 2017). These felt expectations may reflect the second generation's attempt to make up for the traumatic losses their parents experienced (Rush,

2017). Although in their late 30's, 40's, and 50's, the 2nd generation often described themselves according to who their parents were and had great difficulty with circumstances involving separation, which they felt essentially reflected difficulty separating from their parents (Tippett, 2017). Of particular interest to the current study's focus on posttraumatic growth, was the observation that children of Holocaust survivors also demonstrated many resilience-related qualities, alongside transgenerational effects of trauma (Tippett, 2017).

Processes of Transmission

There is evidence to suggest that survivor parents tend to transmit psychological burden to their children and that *perceived transmission of parental burden* by descendants can be a process by which trauma can "linger across generations" (Letzter-Pouw et al., 2014, p. 420). To illustrate this point, researchers specifically examined *perceived transmission of parental burden* or "perceived ToPB" and its relationship to secondary transmission across three generations (Letzter-Pouw et al., 2014, p. 427). Their findings suggested that *transmission of perceived burden* from Holocaust survivors to their offspring and from their offspring to their grandchildren was related to more posttraumatic symptoms and Holocaust salience or the "extent to which the Holocaust is present in everyday thoughts, feelings, and behaviors" in the descendants (Letzter-Pouw et al., 2014, p. 427). *Perceived transmission of parental burden* predicted posttraumatic symptoms in the children of survivors when there was either one or two survivor parents and children of survivors reported suffering from posttraumatic symptoms the more they experienced their parents' emotional preoccupation with the Holocaust (Letzter-Pouw et al., 2014). These findings led the authors to suggest that "an emotionally-charged relationship with traumatized parents" was an important transmission process and that carry-over effects from

grandparents to parents could lead to a preoccupation with trauma in grandchildren (Letzter-Pouw et al., 2014, p. 426).

Family members can develop secondary traumatization upon learning of, relating to and empathizing with the traumatic experiences of other family members (Walsh, 2007). Secondary traumatization may contribute to challenges faced by children and grandchildren of survivors of war trauma, including that of *ambiguous loss*, which has been defined as "a situation of unclear loss that remains unverified and thus without resolution" (Boss, 2016, p. 270). According to Boss (2016), *ambiguous loss* is externally-caused and consists of two types: physical absence with psychological presence due to a lack of resolution or proof of death (e.g., loved one is missing) and psychological absence with physical presence (e.g., loved one is suffering from PTSD). In the context of survivor families, *ambiguous loss* can surface as a physically present parent, but one who is psychologically absent due to the effects of war-related trauma and/or homesickness due to loss of country and forced re-location (Boss, 2016). Boss proposes that family members must construct their own meanings within the paradoxes of presence and absence, and that the goal is to learn to live well with *ambiguous loss*, rather than to ascribe to the myth of closure (Boss, 2010, 2016).

Transmission of trauma also occurred in 2nd generation descendants of Holocaust survivors when parents kept their Holocaust trauma a secret or when communication about the Holocaust was indirect, fragmented, and catastrophic (Braga et al.; Danieli, 1982; Danieli, 1988). Moreover, parent-child communication about the Holocaust characterized as an obsessive-retelling or all-consuming silence led to distress in children (Baranowsky et al., 1998; Davidson, 1980). On the other hand, survivor parents who discussed war-related experiences with their children in an open and balanced manner had healthier relationships with them (Trachtenberg &

Davis, 1978). Resilience was also observed when offspring of Holocaust survivors reported more open and affectionate parent-child communication styles that engaged symbolic resources, such as story-telling, humor, and artistic expressions in relating Holocaust experiences (Braga et al., 2012).

Transmission of Resilience Across Generations

Resilience has been defined as "a phenomenon or process reflecting relatively positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma" (Luthar, 2015, p. 742) and is considered a superordinate construct, encompassing two dimensions: positive adaptation and adversity (Luthar, 2015). Positive legacies involving resilience can be passed on to descendants as themes of strength and resourcefulness (Rush, 2020), as well as hope, ambition, and determination (Atwell et al., 2009; Braga et al., 2012; Kellermann, 2008), all of which can positively impact future outcomes. For example, 2nd generation descendants of Holocaust survivors display a mix of resilience and vulnerability in coping with stress, having intervals in their life where one is more prevalent than the other (Kellermann, 2008). They also display mixed profiles in midlife, involving both physical vulnerability and psychological resilience (Shrira et al., 2011), and those who have witnessed the effects of their parents' trauma have also been found to absorb both their parents' strength and suffering (Lev-Wiesel & Amir, 2003).

2nd generation descendants also serve as hopeful extensions of their parents' lives, internalizing both the value of life and of optimism (Sigal, 1998; Solomon, 1998), while 3rd generation descendants re-construct the history of their grandparents and have focused on their grandparents' courage and heroism, thus carrying positive legacies of pride, gratitude, and strength (Kahane-Nissenbaum, 2011). In the context of refugee families, strong ambition and

determination to build a better future for their children are major strengths in resettled refugee families who escaped persecution and war (Antonovsky, 1987; Atwell et al., 2009).

Resilience from a Relational Perspective

From a relational developmental systems perspective, resilience is viewed as involving mutually adaptive individual ↔ context relations, which take into account individual attributes, such as self-regulatory behaviors, as well as features of the environment that promote healthy development in challenging contexts (Lerner et al., 2012). Within this perspective, resilience is viewed as a concept that represents a dynamic relationship between a person and their ecology, both adaptive and supportive of healthy and positive human development across the life span (Lerner et al., 2012). In essence, "adaptive individual ↔ context relations constitute across life the fundamental reflection of resilience" (Lerner et al. 2012, p. 289).

The concept of family resilience has also been described as "the capacity of the family, as a functional system, to withstand and rebound from stressful life challenges – emerging strengthened and more resourceful" (Walsh, 2016a, p. 3). Similar to Lerner et al. (2012), the Family Resiliency Framework advocates a resilience-oriented approach that is multisystemic, sensitive to context and the impact on the family, and aimed at strengthening relationships and institutional resources to promote recovery and positive adaptation in adversity (Walsh, 2007; Walsh, 2016a). Within this framework, trauma recovery is best served by shifting one's focus from individual pathology to resilience-building in families and communities (Walsh, 2007; 2016a). Key processes identified as vital in building family resilience include communication processes (e.g., clarity, open emotional expression, collaborative problem-solving), organizational patterns (e.g., flexibility, connectedness, mobilizing social and economic resources), and belief systems, which include making meaning out of adversity, positive outlook,

and transcendence and spirituality (Walsh, 2007; 2016a). Such key processes are viewed as mutually-influencing and embedded within a dynamic ecosystem that the family can mobilize for support (Walsh, 2016). Relational in its perspective, this framework seeks to not only inform research, but to also design the training and delivery of mental health and psychological services and community-based programs to strengthen families and help them identify pathways of resilience in coping with adversity, trauma, and multiple and/or chronic conditions of stress (Walsh, 2016). Through strengthening family functioning and facilitating community connectedness in adverse conditions, positive adaptation and resourcefulness can be increased which can also inform future challenges the family may face (Walsh, 2016).

Posttraumatic Growth

Posttraumatic growth is "the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with a highly challenging event or traumatic experience" (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1). The concept of posttraumatic growth is not a new idea, since from ancient times much has been written about great good coming out of great suffering (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; UNC Posttraumatic Growth Research Group, 2019). Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996, 2004) first coined the concept of posttraumatic growth, a complex phenomenon that cannot be distilled into a single coping mechanism. Initially, Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) identified five constructs as indicators of posttraumatic growth, which included personal strength, relating to others, new possibilities, appreciation for life, and transcendence. They introduced a 21-item scale to measure the positive legacy of trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). As their research and theoretical developments evolved, Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) introduced the Posttraumatic Growth Conceptual Framework, and proposed that posttraumatic growth cannot be observed directly. In this more evolved conceptual framework, posttraumatic growth or PTG is reflected in the following five

areas: increased personal strength; increased appreciation for life; relationships that are more meaningful; new possibilities; and richer existential and spiritual life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; 2004).

Theoretical Roots of Posttraumatic Growth

During the 20th century, philosophers and psychologists within existential and humanistic traditions began addressing how crisis could lead to positive personal change (Caplan, 1964; Frankl, 1963; Maslow, 1970; Yalom, 1980). Since then, an empirical focus on growth through trauma or adversity has substantially increased (Joseph & Linley, 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Although a good deal of resilience literature cuts across the disciplines of psychology, psychiatry, family science and human development, most of the theoretical and empirical roots of posttraumatic growth are found within the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry. As such, various terminology has been used to describe the concept of growth emerging from trauma or adversity (Joseph & Linley, 2005). In addition to the term posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004), other terms include, perceived benefits (McMillen & Fisher, 1998), transformational coping (Aldwin, 1994), thriving (Abraido-Lanza et al., 1998), flourishing (Riff & Singer, 1998), and organismic valuing and growth (Joseph & Linley, 2005).

Joseph & Linley (2005) have identified three main features of growth following adversity, including changes in relationships reflecting a greater value placed on relationships with family and friends and compassion toward others; changes in self-perception, including seeing oneself as stronger and wiser, while also accepting one's limitations; and changes in life philosophy as evidenced in a greater appreciation for life and clarity of what is personally meaningful (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Such features align closely with core ingredients of

positive human health, which include quality connections to others, positive self-regard and mastery, and leading a life of purpose (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Along these lines, one of the first empirical studies of purpose emerged from Viktor Frankl's observations of people who survived Nazi concentration camps and those who did not (Frankl, 1963; Ryff & Singer, 1998). Creating meaning out of suffering and viewing one's life as purposeful are essential ingredients for survival and wellness in the most depraved of conditions (Frankl, 1963; Ryff & Singer, 1998). More recent studies of purpose have proposed three dimensions of purpose which include personal meaning, goal-directedness, and a beyond-the-self orientation characterized by concern for the well-being of others and making a difference in the world (Damon et al., 2003; Damon, 2008). Frankl's observations are aligned with the conceptual framework of posttraumatic growth, including a richer existential life, as well as with positive changes identified in KZ Syndrome, including sense of purpose (Frankl, 1963; Kępiński, 1970/2008; Lesniak, 1965; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Resilience or Posttraumatic Growth?

While resilience has been defined as a process of positive adaptation in the context of adversity or trauma, posttraumatic growth refers to positive changes that are experienced as a result of trauma or a life-altering crisis (Davis, 2021; Luthar, 2015; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Although resilience facilitates a return to pre-trauma levels of adaptation, it is not synonymous with growth or reflective of a profound change in one's philosophy of life, self-perceptions, and relationships with others (Ogińska-Bulik & Kobylarczyk, 2016; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Posttraumatic growth emerges from a person's struggle with a traumatic experience and its aftermath and results in positive growth through surviving and coping with such a tragedy or life-altering event (Davis, 2021; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Different from resilience, the

person does not bounce back to baseline, but rather experiences growth beyond pre-trauma levels of adaptation (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Another distinguishing feature of posttraumatic growth is that positive changes coexist with psychological distress that are a consequence of the trauma. In other words, traumatic events lead to negative reactions and psychological distress, however, profound growth and positive changes coexist with distress (UNC Posttraumatic Research Group, 2019).

The coexistence of positive changes and negative changes are present in KZ Syndrome (i.e., concentration camp syndrome) with positive changes including increased activity, increased independence, and trust (Kępiński, 1970/2008; Krysinska, 2010; Lesniak, 1965). Kępiński (1970/2008) further qualified such positive changes to be reflective of courage, stoicism, sense of purpose, increased vitality for life, trust of others, and a shift in values hierarchy. Table 1 identifies conceptual similarities between positive changes associated with KZ Syndrome (Kępiński, 1970/2008), positive growth in the Posttraumatic Growth Conceptual Framework (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), and family strengths cultivated through the Family Resiliency Framework (Walsh, 2016).

Table 1

Conceptual Similarities Between Positive Changes in KZ Syndrome, the Posttraumatic Growth Conceptual Framework, and the Family Resiliency Framework

Positive Changes in KZ Syndrome (Kępiński, 1970; Lesniak, 1965)	**Posttraumatic Growth Conceptual Framework (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004)**	**Family Resiliency Framework (Walsh, 2016)**
Courage; Stoicism	Increased Personal Strength	Stronger
Increased Independence		More Resourceful
Sense of Purpose	New Possibilities	Purposeful
Increased Life Dynamics	Increased Appreciation for Life	Positive Outlook
Trust of Others	More Meaningful Relationships	Connectedness
Shift in Values Hierarchy	Richer Existential/Spiritual Life	Transcendence & Spirituality

Although many conceptual similarities exist between the three, it would appear that posttraumatic growth and positive changes associated with KZ Syndrome may be more applicable in the context of war and genocide and when evidenced by the following:

- Shattering of fundamental cognitive schemas, resulting in a profound change in one's belief system and worldview
- Psychological distress simultaneously coexisting with positive growth
- Positive growth beyond pre-trauma adaptation levels (e.g., one does not simply bounce back to baseline)
- The struggle with the traumatic experience or life-altering crisis is necessary for growth to occur

Furthermore, posttraumatic growth is stable over time and estimated to occur in about one-half to two-thirds of people who experience a life-altering crisis or highly traumatic experience (Collier, 2016).

Application of Life Course Theory Under the Metatheory of Relationism

Catastrophic historical events leave indelible imprints upon individuals, families, and societies across generations and can promote powerful legacies that inspire hope, strength, and determination. A relational perspective can attune to the complexity of such individual and family ↔ context relations that occur in a larger social and historical time period, including one that has undergone dramatic and seismic changes, such as Poland during the Second World War and its aftermath. By positioning the current study under a relational meta-theoretical lens, we can more fully attune to the individual ↔ context relations and dynamic family processes that occur over the life span and across generations in survivors of mass trauma and their descendants. Cataclysmic historical events and their related social changes fundamentally impact

and alter life trajectories in unexpected ways, and such changes can reverberate across generations. These reverberations may emerge as trauma-related themes and emotions, as well as positive legacies that promote adaptation and growth amongst survivors and their descendants across time.

Life Course Theory is particularly attuned to changing lives in changing contexts, and is capable of encompassing large-scale historical phenomena and its intergenerational effects, thus allowing for both continuity and change over time (Elder 1998; Elder & Shanahan, 2006). Situated under a meta-theory of relationism, Life Course Theory offers the following advantages for exploring the lived experiences of Poles who survived the Second World War and their descendants: (1) Sensitivity to socio-historic context and changing lives, (2) Importance of human agency within opportunities and constraints of socio-historic contexts, (3) Timing of life events in influencing and shaping developmental trajectories, and (4) Concept of linked lives as reflected in the interdependence of family lives over time, including generational time (Elder 1998; Elder & Shanahan, 2006). Life Course Theory is also well-matched to the researcher's expectation that posttraumatic growth coexists with trauma and loss, and is intergenerationally transmitted in ways that represent both continuity and change over time. Continuity surfaces as intergenerational effects of trauma and loss and also as a passing down of positive legacies. Change occurs through the adoption of new perceptions of self and world-relatedness that promote growth in a new socio-cultural milieu.

Current Study

When exploring intergenerational trauma, loss, and posttraumatic growth in Poles who survived the Second World War and their descendants, the use of phenomenological research can tap into the "what" and "how" of participants' lived experiences and provide a voice for those

who have not been adequately studied in western research (Lukas, 2012; Montague, 2012; Rush, 2020). Even recent studies in Poland have found that, "Most WWII survivors have not ever been recognized as war victims. Large groups of people (e.g. former resistance members who were identified as anti-communists) were prosecuted. Some (approximately one million who were deported from 1940 to 1944 to Siberia from Soviet-occupied areas) were at risk of being prosecuted if they told anyone about their severe traumatization at that time" (Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018, p. 3).

Research that supports the role of social acknowledgement as a protective factor in the aftermath of trauma and as a resource for promoting posttraumatic growth may be particularly helpful for groups, whose suffering and grief have not been recognized (Doka, 1989; Forstmeier et al., 2009; Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018; Maercker et al., 2009). Phenomenological studies in particular can promote a deeper understanding of the intricacies and complexities a person's lived experience and constructed meanings by gathering rich, descriptive data, which can shed light on the complex processes of transgenerational trauma. This type of approach can enrich the existing knowledge base of posttraumatic growth, since it is open and receptive to emergent themes and new perspectives. Additionally, such an approach can provide valuable insights for identifying adaptive strategies and resources for aging survivors to compensate for age-related and traumatic losses (Baltes, 1997; Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018).

To explore the transmission of trauma, loss, and posttraumatic growth in Poles who survived the Second World War and their descendants, the following research questions guided this study: RQ1) *What features of trauma, loss, and posttraumatic growth are transmitted from Poles who survived the Second World War to their children and grandchildren?* RQ2) *What legacies are passed down to 2nd and 3rd generation descendants?* RQ3) *How is present day*

outlook influenced by having been a descendant of a fighter and/or survivor of mass trauma? RQ4) *How is trauma and/or posttraumatic growth being transmitted to the 2nd and 3rd generation?* RQ5) *How do descendants of Poles who survived the Second World War experience western society's awareness and recognition of Poland's suffering during this time*?

Chapter 3: Method

Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology was first developed in the 20th century by Edmund Husserl as a research method to study philosophy and human behavior (Husserl, 1913/1962). Husserl proposed that people come to know what they experience by attending to processes, perceptions, and meanings that arise in conscious awareness. He practiced two fundamental procedures or epoché to study conscious experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Wertz et al., 2011). Epoché is derived from the Greek word ἐποχή which is often translated as a suspension of judgment (Merriam-Webster, 2018). The first procedure or epoché involves putting aside prior knowledge (i.e., bracketing) to openly reflect upon the phenomenon under investigation with fresh, new eyes (Husserl 1970; Wertz et al., 2011). In other words, the researcher explores what is experienced and how it is experienced with "nothing added and nothing subtracted" (Giorgi, 2009; Wertz, 2011, p. 125).

The second epoché is referred to as phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1936/1954) and encourages the researcher to focus on the meanings subjectively given to objects and to closely reflect on the experience in all its complexity (Wertz et al., 2011). As a research method, phenomenology attempts to systematically reflect upon people's experience, including their mental and affective responses and the meanings they construct (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). The researcher temporarily puts aside their pre-existing knowledge, biases, and contextual assumptions to fully capture the essence of a phenomenon, conveyed as lived meaning or "how the person experiences and understands their world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 183).

Phenomenology was selected as the methodological approach and was situated under an interpretive/constructivist paradigm, which seeks to describe, understand, and interpret a phenomenon and acknowledges multiple realities (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Phenomenology is

well-suited for exploring the transmission of traumatic effects and positive growth or change after trauma in Poles who survived the Second World War and their descendants, since it is sensitive to socio-historic context and can deeply attune to the participant's lived experience and meanings they construct (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Phenomenology also has the advantage of being able to encompass multiple perspectives in all their complexity and can provide a voice for people whose suffering may not be socially acknowledged or recognized (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018; Rush 2020). This approach is also receptive to emergent themes, which can provide new perspectives regarding our current understanding of intergenerational transmission processes of trauma and posttraumatic growth, as well as family resilience and adaptation following war and mass trauma (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Phenomenology applied in this study. The present study utilized a phenomenological approach, and was receptive to emergent findings and features of posttraumatic growth, positive changes in KZ Syndrome, family resiliency, and ambiguous loss (Boss, 2016; Husserl, 1970; Giorgi, 2009; Kępiński, 1970/2008; Lesniak, 1965; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Walsh, 2016; Wertz et al., 2011). The researcher put aside prior knowledge and biases and maintained fidelity to the participant's lived experiences and meanings constructed (Wertz, 2011). A systematic set of methods and procedures was followed to prepare, organize, analyze, synthesize and interpret the data. The following steps were taken as outlined by Moustakas (1994) to prepare to collect the data: formulating research questions and defining terms; conducting a literature review; developing criteria for selecting participants (e.g., screening for eligibility, obtaining informed consent, agreeing on place to meet and time frame, protecting confidentiality, obtaining permission to record and use data in present and future studies); and

developing three interview schedules: 1st generation survivors, 2nd generation descendants of survivors, and 3rd generation descendants of survivors.

Phenomenology informed three separate interview schedules (e.g., first, second, and third generation, See Appendices G, H, and I) by using open-ended questions and a receptive presence to tap into participants' perceptions of how they have been directly affected by the events that took place in Poland during the Second World War, or how they have been affected by their parent's (s) or grandparent's (s) experiences during this time (Moustakas, 1994). Questions asked about their lived experiences, as well as intergenerational effects and the meanings they ascribed to such (Smith et al., 2012). Questions also tapped into the participant's mental and affective responses in relation to trauma, loss, and posttraumatic growth, including legacies of strength and outlook on life. For example, questions included*:* "What kinds of losses did you experience in Poland during the Second World War?"; "How were you affected by these losses?"; "What does it mean to you to be a descendant of a parent (parents) who survived/fought against the German and/or Soviet occupation in Poland?"; "How do you think your grandparents were affected by these experiences?"; "How do you think these losses impacted you or your family?"; "In what ways do you think you might have gained strengths from your parent's experiences?"; "What does it mean to you to be the grandchild of a resistance fighter?"; "What is your outlook on life today?" Probes were used to further elicit the *what* and *how* of their lived experiences, affective responses, and perceptions and meanings ascribed.

In conducting interviews, the principal investigator engaged in the *epoché* process to create a supportive atmosphere and facilitate rapport and also put aside prior knowledge to enter the lifeworld of the participant and gain rich descriptions of the participant's experience(Moustakas, 1994). This included identifying and setting aside prior assumptions and

personal biases and engaging in self-reflection and collegial dialogue. The aim was to gain data that would generate insight into the deeper meaning of the participant's experience or its essence (Burch, 2002), and point toward new avenues of inquiry to contribute to the knowledge base of family processes that transmit traumatic effects and/or positive growth and adaptation following traumatic experiences.

Participants

A purposeful sampling strategy was utilized to select Poles who survived the Second World War and their descendants through emails to personal contacts and Polish organizations, including the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences located in Manhattan, New York; Polish American Congress, Northern New Jersey Division located in Wallington, NJ; and the Kosciuszko Foundation located in Manhattan, NY. Inclusion criteria for the selection of Poles who survived the Second World War and their descendants, included being a Polish survivor and/or fighter of the Second World War in Poland or a descendant of a Polish survivor and/or resistance fighter(s) of the Second World War in Poland, and being raised Polish Christian or Polish-Catholic, the predominant religion of ethnic Poles which is closely interwoven into Polish cultural heritage. The rationale for using this strategy was that purposeful sampling allows for a more in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon and falls under the umbrella of non-probability sampling, which is a choice method for qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The principal investigator utilized a screening tool (See Appendix A) and communicated with the participants to confirm they met the inclusion criteria, after which an appointment was arranged at a mutually-agreed upon time.

Data was obtained from 13 participants, one 1st generation descendant, age 90, seven 2nd generation descendants, ranging in age from 55 to 70+[1], and five 3rd generation descendants, ranging in age from 23 to 44. Four of the participants were female and nine were male; all participants were raised Catholic. At the time of the study, 7 identified themselves as Roman Catholic; 2 identified as Catholic; 2 as "spiritual"; 1 as practicing Buddhist; and 1 as agnostic. Participants also identified whether they or their ancestors had fought in the resistance for the Polish Home Army, had been imprisoned or sent to a concentration or forced labor camp, or deported to the Soviet Union. They also identified whether they experienced loss of family members or their home in Poland during WWII- (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Generation	Survivor/Fighter Parents Survivor/Fighter Grandparents	Place of Birth	Residence	Polish Language Fluency
Halina	90	F	1st	Survivor (Germanization Camp)	Poland	Florida	Fluent
Elena	55	F	2nd	1 Survivor Parent (Germanization Camp)	US	Florida	Fluent
James	62	M	2nd	1 Fighter Parent 1 Survivor Parent (Ravensbrück)	US	NY	Fluent
Sylvia	70+	F	2nd	1 Fighter Parent/POW 1 Survivor Parent	Poland	Conn.	Fluent
Teofil	56	M	2nd	2 Survivor Parents	Poland	NJ	Fluent
Theresa	69	F	2nd	1 Fighter Parent/POW 1 Fighter Parent/POW-Siberia	London	NJ	Fluent
Matt	66	M	2nd	1 Fighter Parent 1 Survivor Parent	US	Texas	Some
Arthur	23	M	3rd	1 Fighter Grandparent 1 Survivor Grandparent	US	NJ	Exposure
Tomek	61	M	2nd	1 Fighter Parent/POW 1 Partisan/POW	US	NJ	Fluent
Maciej	34	M	3rd	1 Fighter/POW Grandparent	US	NJ	Exposure

[1] One 2nd generation descendant did not wish to disclose her exact age, so 70+ is an approximation.

				1 Partisan/POW Grandparent			
Michal	33	M	3rd	1Fighter/POW Grandparent 1 Partisan/POW Grandparent/POW	US	NY	Exposure
Kristopher	44	M	3rd	1 Fighter Grandparent 1 Survivor Grandparent (Auschwitz)	Poland	NJ	Fluent
Dominik	41	M	3rd	1 Fighter Grandparent (Auschwitz) 3 Survivor Grandparents	US	Chicago	Fluent

Note: All names are pseudonyms. Partisans are participants who assisted Polish underground efforts.

Interviews took place at locations that were accessible and convenient for the participants and included a private home, private office, and empty classroom which afforded privacy. One interview took place via Skype, since the participant resided in Texas. All participants were provided with consent forms (See Appendix E) and were asked to carefully read them and bring up any questions or concerns they had. The interviewer (e.g., principal investigator) promptly and clearly answered all questions during the consent process and throughout the interview. All participants signed the consent form and agreed to participate in the study, having been informed of the potential risks and benefits. Participants were also made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty by informing the interviewer.

Participants were apprised that the interview would take approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and that they could skip any question and continue to participate in the rest of the interview. They were also told that they could take a break at any time, and if necessary, another session would be scheduled to complete the interview. All participants were able to complete the interview in one sitting. All interviews were audio-recorded, and field notes were taken during the interview. Audio-recordings were transcribed utilizing a professional automated transcription

service (Trint.com) and the participants were informed that their name or identifying information would not be used in any publications or presentations.

Analysis

In organizing and analyzing the data, the researcher read each individual transcript to get a sense of the whole (Giorgi, 2009) and engaged in bracketing by writing in the margins of each transcript to examine how personal experiences and biases could influence the topic and analysis of the data (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher then incorporated horizontalization of the data by re-reading each transcript slowly and considering "every horizon or statement as relevant to the topic and question as having equal value" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). Through the process of horizonalizing the data, meaning units were identified and listed, and overlapping and redundant statements were eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). Next, meaning units were clustered into common themes used to develop individual and composite textural and structural descriptions of the experience, and were then integrated into a textural and structural synthesis of their meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness Strategies

To establish confirmability, the researcher (e.g., principal investigator) engaged in self-reflexive practices to address subjectivity and to establish trustworthiness throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These practices included: self-journaling, taking process and field notes, writing memos which included the bracketing of potential areas of bias, and discussing the researcher's own positionality with colleagues and dissertation advisor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish transferability, the use of thick, rich description was utilized, so that the experiences of the participants could be described in enough detail to be able to apply the findings to other contexts and settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was established through member-

checking to clarify information given by participants and provide an opportunity for participants to volunteer additional information, if they desired (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility was also enhanced by the researcher's persistent observation and prolonged engagement with the topic through discussions with members of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences, as well as with personal contacts, and by attending professional development workshops on the Holocaust and genocide education (New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education, 2017 July; 2017, October). The researcher presented her research interests and positionality at the 2018 Annual Conference of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences (Rush, 2018 June) and the 6th Annual Consortium for Critical Reading, Writing, and Thinking Conference (Rush, 2018 October) to both Polish and American scholars and received feedback. Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and personal experience with the topic, allowed the researcher to establish trust and rapport with the participants, and appreciate the scope, depth, and sensitivity of the context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Chapter 4: Findings

The findings were based on a phenomenological analysis of the participants' narratives and focused on their lived experiences and the meanings they constructed and ascribed. Under a meta-theory of Relationism and informed by *Life Course Theory*, reflections considered historical time and place, linked lives across generations, human agency within opportunities and constraints, and the timing of events in one's life trajectory (Elder, 1994, 1998; Elder & Shanahan, 2006; Overton, 2013). A main theme of *Loss* emerged in each of the participants' narratives and cut across all three generations. References to having lost everything as a result of the war readily surfaced in each interview, and were accompanied by feelings of sadness, and at times, a sense of unresolved or ambiguous loss (Boss, 2006). These findings supported previous observations of themes of loss of family, feelings of sadness, and intergenerational effects in Polish-Catholic survivors of the Second World War in Poland (Montague, 2012). For 2nd and 3rd generation descendants who reported traumatic effects, *Betrayal* emerged as a main theme and was embodied in a worldview of mistrust, which often referenced the relinquishment of Poland to Stalin by its allies.

In each interview, features of posttraumatic growth and/or positive changes identified in KZ Syndrome surfaced in positive legacies that were shared across generations, constituting a third main theme of *Positive Growth and Legacies Shared.* This theme included six subthemes: *Redefining and Rebuilding in a New Country*, *Beyond-the-Self Orientation*, *Ability to Survive*, *Never Giving Up*, *Agency*, and *Valuing the Self*. In many instances, features of posttraumatic growth co-existed with traumatic effects, as observed in previous studies (Shrira, 2011; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Last, all participants with the exception of one 3rd generation descendant, felt that the suffering of Poles was not fully recognized or acknowledged by the general public, thus

constituting a final theme of *Suffering of Poles Unrecognized.* These four main themes and six subthemes are further elaborated upon in the following categories: *The Experience of the Second World War in Poland: An Intergenerational Lens*; *Transmission Processes Across Generations;* and *Transforming the Old World and Entering the New.*

The Experience of the Second World War in Poland: An Intergenerational Lens

> *They lost family members, they lost property, they lost relationships...They left feelings, blood, sweat, tears on the street...they lost everything. (Matt, 2nd)*

Loss

Loss emerged as a central theme across all three generations and presented as the core essence of trauma. Participants were deeply attuned to the monumental losses suffered by their family and Poland as a whole; for example, Arthur (3rd) shared, "… not only my grandparents, but anybody who was affected by the war at that time, whether they were occupied or they were part of the battlefield, or they were getting bombed; they lost everything". References to losing everything cut across all interviews, along with difficulty comprehending the magnitude of the suffering experienced; "I don't think I'll ever endure any sort of hardship that was anything close to that in my entire life" (Arthur, 3rd). In addition to expressing feelings of sadness for what was lost, descendants were in awe of the first generation's ability to survive; "It's amazing to me how she lived through all that, and made it out" (Elena, 2nd).

Halina (1st) lost her father, who was killed by the Nazis for refusing to "sign a list to become German" (Halina, 1st) and her oldest brother who was "picked up on the third day of the occupation and sent to a labor camp" (Halina, 1st). Loss for Halina (1st) also involved moving from one city to another to escape capture and germanization; "The Germans wanted to make a pure race. Did you hear about the *Lebens*[born]?" (Halina, 1st). *Lebensborn* ("fountain of life" in

German) was an SS-initiated program founded by Heinrich Himmler to screen Polish children for inclusion on the *Volksliste* (Racial Registry) of German traits. Polish children were kidnapped from their homes or orphanages, and if they met Nazi racial criteria, they would be raised and educated in *Lebensborn* homes and then fostered out to German families. As put forth by Himmler, "I would consider it right if small children of Polish families who show especially good racial characteristics were apprehended and educated by us in special institutions and children's homes which must not be too large" (Kochanski, 2012, pp. 270-271). Halina (1st) explained, "they were taking all the blonde, blue eyes girls, they wanted to develop the perfect race for Germany". Children who did not meet the Nazi racial criteria were sent to labor camps or to Auschwitz and killed by lethal injection (Kochanski, 2012). At the end of the war, only 15-20% of the 200,000 Polish children kidnapped were returned to Poland (Kochanski, 2012; Lukas, 2012).

Halina (1st) was sent to a camp in the vicinity of the Hel Peninsula to become "part of the German race" (Halina, 1st) because she was "blonde, blue-eyed with Nordic features" (Halina 1st). At the camp, Halina (1st) was instructed to "learn the Gothic language" or "the pure German" (Halina, 1st). To maintain a familial connection, she held onto a little picture of the Black Madonna ("Czarna Madonna" in Polish); "the only thing I had from my parents' house". Seen as a motherly protector, the Black Madonna is a venerated icon of Blessed Virgin Mary, declared "Queen and Protector of Poland"; an honorary title used by Polish-Catholics (Kosloski, 2019). Fortuitously, Halina's (1st) mother, who assisted the Polish underground officers, arranged an escape for Halina (1st) and herself on a cargo train to a small city, outside of Łódź, where Halina's (1st) maternal grandmother and aunt resided.

Family ties were also severed as young males sought to avoid capture by the Germans. Although his parents "didn't want to talk about it [the war] that much", Teofil (2nd) learned that his paternal uncle "was sent to a German family to become a full-time servant, mostly because his parents were afraid he was going to be taken to Wehrmacht". The German Wehrmacht ("defense power" in German) was the unified armed forces of Nazi Germany, known for its brutality, countless war crimes, and extreme contempt for its foe, including Polish soldiers and civilians (Ray, 2019; Sudol, 2019).

Losing close connection with one's family also occurred in the context of not being able to return to Poland as a former member of the Home Army; "Many of the people that ran the Polish scouting organization [in US] were the generation like my grandfather who left… [they] could not return to Poland after World War II. If they did, it would have been a death sentence" (Dominik, 3rd). Sylvia (2nd) explained that being a part of the "remnants of the Home Army, the people who didn't want to register with the communists" put a person at great risk, including her father; "Let's put it this way. The Russians were threatened by them and were persecuting them" (Sylvia, 2nd). Tomek (2nd) shared, "There were guys that were murdered when they came back after the war… They were arrested on the spot and thrown into prisons or shot. That's the reason my grandfather never went back". Teofil (2nd) further recounted, "… historically, we had a few people who were handed the one-way passport and [told], 'We don't want you in the country because it's too much heritage, too much trouble with you, and you are creating too much trouble.'" As expressed in the words of Polish novelist and playwright, Witold Gombrowicz, the end of the war did not bring freedom or liberation for Poles, instead, "… it simply meant swapping one form of evil for another, Hitler's henchmen for Stalin's" (Courtois et al., 1999, p. 22). For 2nd generation Poles who decided to leave Soviet-imposed communism, family ties also

suffered; “I did experience loss… because my family was pretty much spread apart by the Atlantic Ocean. My parents were there [Poland], so I suffered some sort of disconnection”.

Ambiguous Loss. *I gave my life to my family, but I gave my heart to Poland.*

(Zyndram, Warsaw Uprising- AK, Baszta, Kompanii 02, Mokotów)

Ambiguous loss or loss which “defies resolution” (Boss, 2016, p. 270) wove through many of the participants’ narratives and across all three generations. References to living in Warsaw rubble, the remnants of Poland’s capital after its massive destruction, often elicited strong feelings of sadness and bewilderment for 2nd generation descendants; “I can only look at the pictures and then imagine the dust, the dirt, the soot… I think about what I would feel like" (Matt, 2nd); "Warsaw was destroyed during the war. My father and my mother ended up in some building, that was all pockmarked" (Sylvia, 2nd). Searching through photographs was not uncommon amongst 2nd generation descendants and represented an attempt to reconstruct history and empathically connect with the pain of their parents’ past:

> It makes me emotional. It gives me a drive to keep working to search out things... I keep looking through these picturesque photos and I see pictures of people in Baszta Kompania. That was my father's military company and I’m looking... and I'm zooming in on the pictures to see if I am going to find my father...I haven't found him yet... I think I will. (Matt, 2nd)

Searching through photographs was also a means of verifying family history; “I bought a book at great expense, a photo album from Poland and I'm going through it, looking for my father's picture. I'm not sure if [it’s] him, but I'm verifying history, all these family stories” (Sylvia, 2nd).

At times, the status of family members was unclear or unknown, which motivated descendants to seek out their extended family in Poland and re-establish family ties:

> …trying to find my genealogy, my heritage, and try[ing] to find some stories, just what was it all about, who these people were. I sure owe it to myself and my parents to... As a kid, I didn't know I had relatives because they all thought my dad died, so my sister took a trip to Poland and visited my great uncle in Gdańsk. She knocked on the door and they refused to let her in because they said, "We have no family in the US, Renard [Tomek's father] is dead." My sister proceeded to explain to them the facts and info only my father would know. She was finally able to meet him. That opened up the door to other family members, til Facebook came along and helped me reunite with more family. (Tomek, 2nd)

Feelings of sadness over the loss of the family that could have been also emerged; "I just have always been sad that we never had a big family because everyone died... That would be the loss that I have… the loss of family" (Elena, 2nd). Even in the context of Polish youth organizations, ambiguous loss left its impression on descendants; young Poles who fought and died for Poland were psychologically-present, if not physically-present (Boss, 2016). Dominik's (3rd) Chicago-based Polish Cub Scout troop, the "Boys in the Woods" was named in honor of young Polish partisans who fought in the woods during the war. Dominik (3rd) recalled his former Cubmaster bringing out "this small little box from the woods where his friends had died. For us, seeing how he would get physically moved, he'd tear up… it was jarring, and it certainly left an impression".

Curtailment of Developmental Trajectories. Loss also presented as a harsh and abrupt curtailment of survivors' developmental trajectories, resulting in long-term consequences over the life course (Elder, 1998; Wertz, 2011). The timing of the war decidedly impacted young

Poles who fought as adolescents in the Warsaw Uprising; sometimes referred to as "the lost generation" (Jadacki, 2004, p. 195). In passing on the family history with his two sons, Tomek (2nd) illustrated the plight of his father, a young Warsaw resistance fighter; "Dziadzo ["grandfather" in Polish] was running around with stones; he was 16, 17 years old and shooting guns... Could you do that? Could you stand in front of a tank?". The timing of the war negatively impacted Polish civilian youth as well, often traumatically altering their life trajectory and putting an unforeseen end to their dreams and ambitions; "A lot of people, they lost their innocence, they lost their livelihood. My dad was studying to go to medical school. Mother was studying to be a tradesperson. And they never got that" (Teofil, 2nd).

Suffering of Poles Unrecognized

> *To be raised Polish is to hear stories like this which are so difficult to listen to but also to have them completely missing from the larger conversation. (Dominik, 3rd)*

All participants with the exception of one 3rd generation descendant, felt that the catastrophic losses and suffering experienced by Poles during the Second World War were not recognized or acknowledged by the general public. Avenues for participants to express their feelings or mourn their losses were limited, outside of their Polish circles; often they felt they were not part of the larger social conversation (Doka, 1989; Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018). For instance, James' (2nd) mother who survived four years of imprisonment in Ravensbrück, the Nazi concentration camp for women, would become upset upon hearing stories which only acknowledged the suffering of Jews; "When my mom would hear the stories… She would say, "Well, what about the Poles? What about all us Christians? … So, there was a sense of injustice" (James, 2nd).

Inaccurate historical accounts of events that took place in Poland during the war were particularly troubling to descendants, as well as broad brush representations of Poles as Nazi collaborators or “dumb Polaks”:

> There was that layer of anti-Polish sentiment. It's complicated because on the one hand, you have a holiday called Pulaski Day. On the other hand, when I was growing up, my initials are DP, that ended up after World War II, when we had a wave of displaced persons, standing for "Dumb Polak". (Dominik, 3rd)

Lack of recognition of Poles’ suffering also extended into US educational systems, which failed to acknowledge or address Hitler’s genocidal policy toward ethnic Poles. Kristopher (3rd), whose grandfather was an Auschwitz survivor, described his experiences in the US educational system in the eighties as a Polish immigrant; "It was only Jewish people that died in Auschwitz and all concentration camps. Nobody else". Similarly, Arthur, age 22 (3rd) felt that “… anybody who doesn't have a general knowledge of European history or World War II history, doesn’t have any idea that a lot of Poles were massacred”. Elena (2nd) shared similar feelings as well; “Even in movies, that's how it's portrayed mostly”.

Sylvia (2nd) faced harsh critiques and was “accused of being antisemitic” (Sylvia, 2nd) for deciding to publish a scholarly article on the origins of Auschwitz; “Auschwitz was originally built for Polish prisoners. It was built to break the Home Army” (Sylvia, 2nd). Historically, the first prisoners of Auschwitz were Poles who were viewed as a political threat to German forces, which included the Polish intelligentsia and those that had ties to the Home Army. Many of those who could provide guidance and leadership to Poland were gassed upon arrival to Auschwitz (Kochanski, 2012). Until the launch of the Final Solution and Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union, Polish Christians made up the majority of Auschwitz prisoners, numbering 18,000 in

1941 (Kochanski, 2012). This was a consequence of the Nazi policy aimed at eradicating Poles of any political or cultural influence and began with Hans Franks' (General Governor of occupied Poland) ordering of the extermination of the Polish intelligentsia or Aktion AB ("Außerordentliche Befriedungsaktion" in German; "Extraordinary Pacification Action" in English), resulting in the murder of approximately 3,000 members of the Polish Intelligentsia and the arrest and imprisonment of 30,000 (Kochanski, 2012; Lukas, 2012; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2021).

Transmission Processes Across Generations

It was part of the milieu. (Sylvia, 2nd)

Central family processes that carried the potential to transmit traumatic effects and/or posttraumatic growth or resilience in descendants included the degree to which war related suffering permeated the family milieu, family communication patterns about the war and its related suffering, and how the war influenced the family members' worldviews.

Communication Patterns

Communication patterns took into account the quality of emotional expression and the extent to which information, details, and memories about the war and war-related suffering were shared, including an obsessive re-telling of traumatic events, distinct absence of communication about the trauma, or balanced disclosures (Baranowsky et al., 1998; Boss, 2006; Danieli, 1998; Shmotkin et al., 2011; Walsh, 2007). The quality of communication patterns and the meanings constructed in the telling of traumatic experiences were essential processes that influenced intergenerational transmission of traumatic effects and/or positive adaptation or family resilience.

Excessive, detailed, and emotionally-laden communications about war-related suffering affected descendants more negatively and often aroused feelings of anxiety, anger, sadness, guilt, and/or insecurity. In sharp contrast, less frequent communications, which provided fewer details and incorporated humor and acceptance were less likely to transmit traumatic effects. Sharing humorous stories or conveying war experiences in a measured and stoic manner appeared to have a benign or protective influence on descendants:

> My mom told funny stories about how my father was courting her because that's where their courtship started; they met each other in the army. My mom really didn't say anything about the war and what was going on at the time... She just basically told me about the shenanigans my father would pull. (Theresa, 2nd)

Theresa's (2nd) parents both fought under General Władysław Anders in the Polish Army, including in the Battle of Monte Cassino. On rare occasions, Theresa's (2nd) mother would share her experiences as a prisoner in a Siberian labor camp, specifically to illustrate the point that being cold is worse than being hungry, "She couldn't stand the cold. I remember her always saying that" (Theresa, 2nd). Theresa's (2nd) mother explained that Siberian labor camp prisoners would all huddle together because, "Even if the person next to you died, they were still warmer than the cold outside" (Theresa, 2nd). Although, the content of this message is harrowing, Theresa's (2nd) mother's stoic communication style served as a buffer against emotional upset in her daughter and minimized the potential for transmission of traumatic effects; clearly indicative of a resilient family milieu.

Another example of family communication that boosted family resilience through the use of humor, emerged in Halina's (1st) description of a "very cold winter" and not having enough coal. Only 9 years old when the war broke out, Halina (1st) would gather pieces of coal that fell

from a passing cargo train, and one day, she came home crying because no coal was to be found; Halina (1st) chuckled when recalling her mother's response, "Oh, don't worry. No problem, we have more coal than they do" (Halina, 1st). In this example, Halina's (1st) mother's use of humor is buffering the experience of trauma for her daughter, thus minimizing the impact of direct effects. Throughout the interview, Halina (1st) exhibited much stoicism and acceptance, even when describing how she suffered from nightmares for 20 years; "I have nightmares for over 20 years that the building was burning, the bombs flying, every night for 20 years. That's it" (Halina 1st). Halina (1st) presented as remarkably adaptive and did not report any other traumatic effects. Her coping strategies were indicative of a high degree of self-agency, even as a young girl. Halina's (1st) resilience was further confirmed by her daughter Elena (2nd) who described her mother as "a survivor and a thriver".

Characteristic of her stoicism and desire to push forward, Halina (1st) did not share her war-related suffering with Elena (2nd); "… she never took me down that black hole" (Elena, 2nd). Not surprisingly, Elena (2nd) reported no traumatic effects, and instead, described a family milieu embedded in her Polish heritage; "I really grew up in my heritage, but in the good stuff of the heritage, not the World War II stuff of the heritage" (Elena, 2nd). When Halina (1st) did disclose to Elena (2nd) her escape from germanization and the war-related poverty she experienced, she did so without a lot of grim details or heightened emotions; "… she carried everything quietly, she didn't share with me a lot. She didn't want me to know what she probably went through or what she saw as a child" (Elena, 2nd). Elena's (2nd) only observation of her mother's experience of traumatic effects was her reluctance to watch war movies; "… my mom can never watch anything that has to do with the occupation of Poland during Nazi Germany" (Elena, 2nd). For

some survivors, the conscious choice to not re-visit traumatic memories can be protective and adaptive (Barron, 2015).

For Tomek (2nd), family communication involved the passing down of his Polish cultural heritage, especially when he was younger. Although his parents would speak about the war from time to time, little detail or explanation was given; "How do you explain that to kids?" (Tomek, 2nd). Tomek (2nd) gathered information about the war from the "internet mostly" (Tomek, 2nd) and was very attuned to how difficult it was for his parents to "explain" (Tomek, 2nd) their war-related experiences:

> How do you explain that to your 13-year-old or 15, 16-year-old, your country's being ripped apart in front of your face? Everything you know is gone. You see people being killed on the street for no reason, except for being at the wrong place at wrong time. (Tomek, 2nd)

Descendants who were regularly exposed to parents' or grandparents' war-related suffering through communication patterns characterized by a preoccupation with the war and recurrent expressions of anxiety and/or anger were more likely to suffer traumatic effects as opposed to communication styles that were characterized by more balanced disclosures. For James' (2nd) parents, the war served as a central point of reference, hence they would frequently share details about their traumatic experiences:

> Well, I heard lots of stories...We could sit here for a month, and I wouldn't be able to tell you all the stories I heard... That was their lives. So I heard everything about the concentration camps. I heard everything about my father's battles and all the people that he saw murdered and killed. They [parents] gave me a full, up close picture of war. I heard plenty. (James, 2nd)

Family Milieu

The family milieu was defined as the family environment, particularly the atmosphere of the home (American Psychological Association, 2020) which took into account the degree to which the war and its related suffering permeated the family setting and underscored the dynamics of parent-child and grandparent-grandchild relationships (Danieli, 1998; Kepinski, 1970/1980; Shmotkin, 2011; Wiseman & Barber, 2008). The family milieu also considered the family's connection to their Polish cultural heritage and social milieu of other Poles that provided social identification (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018).

James' (2nd) father was a resistance fighter in the Polish Home Army and his mother was imprisoned in Ravensbrück concentration camp for four years; "My mom certainly suffered from PTSD and was very anxious, and would often get hysterical and cry…" (James, 2nd). James (2nd) met many of his mother's friends who were also imprisoned in Ravensbrück, and as a youngster recalled meeting one woman who had a deformed leg; "there was a lot of gruesomeness... and I remember going, 'God, that's horrible'... Króliki. You know what that means?" Kroliki or *rabbits* refers to the Nazi program of scientific experiments conducted on young Polish women in Ravensbrück, which housed the largest Polish population of any other country. Since Poles were deemed to be racially inferior and young females were considered to be the healthiest prisoners, many young Polish women were subjected to up to six operations each, and were referred to as *rabbits*. These brutal Nazi experiments consisted of breaking and removing leg bones and muscles and infecting them with bacteria. 74 women were subjected to such experiments of which 63 survived, mostly due to help received from other inmates (Peterson Havill, 2020).

In James' (2nd) family milieu, the parent-child dynamics were underscored with fear and anxiety, "protect, protect, protect"; "My parents encouraged me to be scared, but they only made

me insecure" (James, 2nd). He also felt his parents placed a "terrible burden" on him by continually emphasizing, "Don't stick your neck out"; "don't be proud, don't stand out, don't think you're smarter or better than anyone" (James, 2nd). Although, encouraged by his father to develop a "can do" spirit and a sense of independence, James (2nd) felt hampered by lingering feelings of insecurity and self-doubt, which he perceived as probably "the biggest part of what I suffered as a consequence of their war experience" (James, 2nd):

> What my father probably gave me was a sense of independence, a sense of seeking adventure, a sense of curiosity, and a sense of I can do… But he didn't make me feel better than other guys. I can do, but other people are better than me. (James, 2nd)

Drawing upon his "can do" spirit, James (2nd) eventually moved past a fear-based worldview and identified positive avenues for "feeling valuable" and "believing in yourself" (James, 2nd), thus redefining his sense of self and world-relatedness. In many ways, the message of "I can do", facilitated self-valuing following adversity (Joseph & Linley, 2005), as well as positive changes, such as resourcefulness, and increased independence (Kepiński, 1970/2008; Lesniak, 1965).

Matt (2nd) also described a family milieu characterized by a preoccupation with the war, where both parents were dealing with traumatic effects; "I think it affected them horribly. My father was affected tremendously. My mother was affected tremendously. My father couldn't shake it. He could never move on from it. He carried it every day. He talked about it every day". Matt (2nd) struggled with anxiety throughout his life; "I don't know somehow if that was passed on to me, but I've been diagnosed with hypertension since I can remember. Since high school. . . I can never relax . . . I don't know how to relax". Matt's (2nd) suggestion of inheriting anxiety or the biological transmission of effects aligns with previous research findings of descendants of

parents with PTSD and Holocaust survivors as being at risk for neuroendocrine or hormonal abnormalities, specifically if one's biological mother has PTSD (Tippett, 2017; Yehuda & Bierer, 2009), as was the case with Matt's (2nd) mother. Arthur (3rd), who is Matt's (2nd) nephew also described his grandparents as suffering from war-related trauma and its impact on his mother (i.e., Matt's (2nd) younger sister), both in terms of transmission of traumatic effects and posttraumatic growth:

> I think my parent caught a lot of the flak from what my grandparents' experienced. I think a lot of that trauma came back to the United States when they moved here, and it was very evident in the household... I think that there is definitely a certain amount of trauma that was passed on, because of my grandfather dealing with PTSD, and my grandmother always being anxious, because of having to get out of a deathly situation. But it's not all bad. I think that my parent also got hard drive and determination, and work ethic and intelligence from those experiences that my grandparents' had. You have to take the good with the bad of it. When you come from more trauma, there's going to be bad and there's going to be something good. You know, you're going to develop skills. (Arthur, 3rd)

For Dominik (3rd), regular communications about the war and its related suffering elicited strong feelings of empathy, but not traumatic effects; "The war was a reality. It wasn't an abstraction of someone talking about an ancient event that happened. It was talking about what seemed to be a trauma… in some ways still recent…" (Dominik, 3rd). Although Dominik (3rd) perceived communications about the war to be "raw and fresh" and "definitely unhealed", the family milieu was centered on preserving the family's Polish cultural heritage, which created

resilience and minimized the transmission of traumatic effects; “My father placed us in every single Polish group, whether it was Polish Boy Scouts, Polish karate, Polish folk dancing, Polish Saturday school. We very much grew up in that milieu” (Dominik, 3rd).

Descendants also heard stories about the war within the family’s social milieu of other Poles who had been through similar experiences. In addition to providing social identification and a natural social support system for families, these social gatherings had the effect of normalizing war stories for descendants. For instance, Matt (2nd) was exposed to a “tremendous amount of discussion about World War II” (Matt, 2nd) since his parents “socialized all the time with other Polish people that went through the very same circumstances as they did” (Matt, 2nd), and Sylvia (2nd) took for granted hearing stories about her father being arrested by the Nazis, “because virtually everybody else in my family had stories like this. They were all in Home Army. They were all in battles... It was part of the milieu, so to speak” (Sylvia, 2nd).

Family and social milieus which normalized discussions about the war also opened the door for descendants to start asking questions, particularly 2nd generation descendants who were more directly impacted by their parents’ suffering. Matt (2nd) explained, “as you get older, you begin asking questions and then you get answers. My father would give me a book and start explaining things to me. My mother… preferred not to go back there mentally". Again, for some survivors, to “go back there mentally” can often be re-traumatizing and trigger painful emotions that are difficult to bear (Barron, 2015). Under these circumstances, open discussion with the parent is not usually an option, and that is often clearly understood by the descendant. As such, the trauma remains unspoken, yet fully alive in the family milieu. Descendants, empathically-attuned to their parent’s grief and suffering, may silently carry the burden; perhaps, even imagining the worst scenarios (Brave Heart, 2003; Kellermann, 2031; Shosnan, 1985). Dominik

(3rd) did not have the opportunity to meet his maternal grandfather, yet he was "at the forefront of my imaginings about World War II" (Dominik, 3rd), having been one of the earliest political prisoners of Auschwitz, along with his two brothers.

Families were also highly invested in passing on accurate historical accounts of what occurred in Poland during the Second World War and the Soviet repression that followed. These accounts were often rich in contextual and sociohistoric details, including the family's geographic location during the war, involvement with the Home Army, position in society, family heritage, and practical means of survival; and although eliciting feelings of sadness in descendants, communications which passed on historical facts and information did not appear to transmit traumatic or negative effects in descendants.

Family Milieu Under Stalinism. Living under Stalinism posed its own unique problems, including the need to maintain secrecy to avoid potential harm or danger to family members with ties to the Home Army. Family members who lived outside the Eastern Bloc were considered a "potential enemy" (Teofil, 2nd) and this greatly impacted the family milieu whereby "communist-free zones" (Sylvia, 2nd) were identified to safely communicate:

> In Poland, there is a general distrust. You have your childhood friends who are like family and you live in a circle and this is sort of a communist-free zone. You never talk about politics. These are people who are trusted and who will help you. (Sylvia, 2nd)

For Kristopher (3rd), growing up within the socio-historic context of Soviet-imposed communism compelled him to be hypervigilant; "… you really didn't know who your friends were, who was talking behind your back, who was reporting you to the KGB" (Kristopher, 3rd). Such a context shaped a deep sense of mistrust in him; "just don't talk because you never knew who was

reporting on you. So I have a strong suspicion of everyone" (Kristopher, 3rd). Being exposed to communist propaganda and indoctrination negatively impacted both 2nd and 3rd generation descendants living in Poland and contributed to strong feelings of mistrust, including "distrust of authority" (Sylvia, 2nd) and news sources, necessitating the need to "read between the lines" (Sylvia, 2nd) and "check multiple sources" (Teofil, 2nd) of information to discern the truth.

Worldviews

Betrayal Embodied in Mistrust. Still very much alive in the minds of descendants was Poland's betrayal by its allies and loss of freedom to the Soviet-imposed communist regime, while its western allies were celebrating:

> … in 1945, we are familiar with that iconic image of the American seamen passionately kissing a woman, celebrating the end of World War II. That moment didn't work like that in Poland because you had the beginning of a communist occupation. (Teofil, 2nd)

In a 1965 interview, Major-General Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski, Commander in Chief of Armia Krajowa during the Warsaw Uprising, explained that he did not know the allies had agreed to hand over eastern Poland to the Soviet Union; "I heard about this only after the Uprising, when I was a prisoner of war" (Zawodny, 1978, p. 215). Betrayal by Poland's allies most likely impacted the quality and effectiveness of aid provided to the Polish resistance and fighting Warsaw (Zawodny, 1978), and after 63 days of fervent fighting, Poles formally surrendered to the Germans, and Hitler ordered Warsaw to be annihilated and all its civilians expelled (Korkuć, 2019; Zawodny, 1978).

For 2nd and 3rd generation descendants who experienced traumatic effects, Poland's betrayal by its allies influenced worldviews and emerged through references that illustrated the

traumatic consequences of such betrayal, as well as the human capacity to breech trust. Matt (2nd) was quick to refer to the meeting of Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Josef Stalin at the Yalta Conference (February 4-11, 1945) which left Poland's fate in the hands of Stalin:

> I don't understand why Winston Churchill is as revered and as acclaimed as he is; to this day, I'm not a fan of his. And I'm not a friend of Franklin Delano Roosevelt because those three [Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin] got together at the summit in Yalta and they gave Poland to Josef Stalin… the world is always double-dealing, double-crossing, stealing, cheating, lying, killing, and I have anxiety over that. (Matt, 2nd)

As illustrated in a March 1945 letter from Winston Churchill to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Poland's betrayal by its allies is readily apparent and its fate sealed; "it will soon be seen by the world that you and I [Roosevelt and Churchill] by putting our signatures to the Crimea settlement have underwritten a fraudulent prospectus" (Ash, 1991, p. 7). Soon after, on April 25, 1945, the United Nations Conference on International Organization (UNCIO), also known as the San Francisco Conference, held its proceedings without Poland's participation; Jan Ciechanowski, Polish Ambassador to the US at the time, ruefully observed:

> The empty chair of Poland at the San Francisco Conference weighed heavily on that assembly. There was something uncanny in the fact that, at the end of a victorious world war... Poland, an allied nation... was prevented from taking her part in a gathering of nations allegedly held to apply the terms of justice and democracy to a future system of world security (Kochanski, 2012, p. 514).

In the collective memory of Poles, the Yalta Conference symbolizes the ultimate betrayal; “the Polish army had been the first to defy Hitler in defense of their independence, with Britain’s official assistance. In return, Polish soldiers bravely fought on behalf of Britain within factions of the British army” (Kubow, 2013, p. 4). Despite heroic sacrifices and cataclysmic losses, Poland’s freedom and independence were relinquished by British and American allies to the “tender care of Uncle Joe Stalin” (Kubow, 2013, p. 4). Collective memory of Poland’s betrayal was also present in the mind of Kristopher (3rd), as he described his experiences in the US educational system during the late eighties:

> … nowhere in the history books did I read that Poland was attacked from the east, from Russia, our supposed allies. That was never written in any history. I argued that tremendously, when I was a teenager here, fourth, fifth, sixth grade... and they're like well, that's not what happened. I said yeah, it is, that is exactly what happened. So none of that was never written or spoken about; it was very concealed. (Kristopher, 3rd)

From Sylvia’s (2nd) perspective, historical accounts of what occurred in Poland during the Second World War were “completely falsified” by the Soviet regime, which sought to discredit the Polish Home Army and their accomplishments in order to legitimize communist control of Poland; “So essentially, you're fighting the struggle in Poland and here. You have to start with Poland” (Sylvia, 2nd).

Soviet aggression also emerged in Tomek’s (2nd) recollection of his grandfather’s command of the Lwów garrison in September 1939, defending the second largest city in Poland, referred to as the "Vienna of Poland" (Kochanski, 2012). Tomek's grandfather surrendered Lwów to the Soviets to prevent its destruction and was taken to Moscow, where he met Josef

Stalin, "known and notorious for having a meeting with you and putting a bullet in your head" (Tomek 2nd). Tomek's (2nd) grandfather never knew why Stalin decided to allow him to return to Lwów, but nevertheless he "bolted in the middle of the night" (Tomek, 2nd) and escaped. Tomek (2nd) holds the original manuscript of a book written by his grandfather, along with the actual letter he wrote to his troops, urging them to "get out, surrender, get out as fast as you can" (Tomek, 2nd). This warning served to alert his troops to avoid capture by the Soviets, who executed "all the Polish military personnel and anyone else who was around" (Tomek, 2nd). Tomek (2nd) further explained, "All the guys he [his grandfather] knew as friends were the guys who were killed in the Katyń Forest, the Katyń massacre committed by the Soviets and the secret police".

The Katyń Massacre is prominent in the collective memory of Poles and symbolizes the countless victims of Stalinism. Originally, the Katyń Massacre referred to the mass graves of the bodies of Polish officers imprisoned and murdered by the NKVD (i.e., Soviet secret police; *Naródnyy Komissariát Vnútrennikh Del* in Russian) that were discovered in the Katyń forest near Smolensk in Russia. Today, the concept of the Katyń Massacre means the extermination of all Polish citizens carried out on the basis of a March 5, 1940 resolution by the Soviet Politburo of the Bolshevik Party. This resolution included the extermination of both Polish prisoners of war and civilian prisoners, nearing 22,000; 14,700 prisoners of war and 7,300 civilian prisoners (Kalbarczyk, 2020, p. 7). Later in the interview, Tomek (2nd) expressed difficulty comprehending why Russian soldiers are celebrated heroes, given the brutality of their actions; "They went to their grave being a hero, and they were the worst butchers" (Tomek, 2nd). Ironically, a survey conducted in March 2019 by the respected Levada Center, polled a representative all-Russian sample (N = 1,638) of urban and rural populations, ages 18 and above; they found that 51% of

those surveyed had respect, admiration, or sympathy for Stalin, the highest positive rating in the past 20 years (BBC News, 2019; Levada Center, 2019).

Such a collective history left descendants acutely aware that “horrible things can happen” (Matt, 2nd), and having an “up close, full picture of war” (James, 2nd) let descendants in on knowledge about humanity that most people do not encounter; “What normally was hidden in a human being became revealed, his/her criminality and his/her holiness" (Kepinski, 2008, p.80). For Sylvia (2nd), “because of the distrust of authority and distrust of communists. You closed yourself off in a group of closest family and friends". For example, “In Poland it's a given… you don't make friends after you are in college at the latest... If you don't have friends from your childhood or your college, then you don't trust people anymore” (Sylvia, 2nd). The worldview of betrayal embodied in mistrust may not shift upon leaving Poland and immigrating to the US; “I never accept the government in Poland or even here; even though of course, I'm more likely to accept the government authority in United States. I don't trust newspapers. I don't trust the police” (Sylvia 2nd). Sylvia (2nd) who immigrated to the US with her family in the late sixties, perceived a collective sense of mistrust in Polish immigrants, “This is a problem for a lot of [Polish] immigrants to the United States, that they lose their natural network in Poland and when they come here, even among the Poles here, they don't make friends”. In sum, Kristopher (3rd) captures the elusiveness of attempting to define the essence of betrayal in the Polish experience:

> I think most people who survive this, whether they're from a second or third generation, they see the world differently. It's not just mistrust and anger and things like this. And it's not noticing cameras and where the exits are and keeping your right shoulder to the wall; we just see the world differently. (Kristopher, 3rd)

Hope and Optimism. For some participants, hope and optimism emerged as a predominant worldview. 1st generation survivors perceived a hopeful or optimistic outlook as an integral part of persevering through grave uncertainty. When asked what qualities helped her survive the war, Halina (1st) was quick to say, "I tell you something, you have to go through life thinking positive and be happy". Halina's (1st) optimism also influenced the worldview of her only child, Elena (2nd), "I choose always to be on the bright side of things because it's easy to go south. I just keep a positive attitude all the time, even if I have to pretend. Similarly, Theresa (2nd) described the impact of her parents' optimism, "I don't think I've experienced anything related to their army experiences, other than being happy, I guess. I always look on the bright side of things". Both Theresa (2nd) and Elena (2nd) reported no traumatic effects stemming from their parents' war-related experiences. An optimistic worldview also emerged in Michal's (3rd) description of his grandmother, "That was one thing I always remember about my grandmother- she always had optimism. It was always like, 'Don't get down. Something else will come'". Most compelling was the emergence of optimism in the context of risking one's life to save the lives of others. Michal's (3rd) grandmother was involved in supporting the Polish underground's resistance efforts, including hiding guns under the floorboards of the family home. She and her family also risked their lives assisting Poles, Jews, and gypsies facing imminent Nazi persecution to escape from Poland; the family home was considered a "passing house" (Michal, 3rd). Michal's (3rd) grandmother was fluent in both Polish and German, which often served as a valuable asset for Poles who could pass themselves off as German in potentially dangerous situations. Michal's (3rd) optimism was sparked by this extraordinary family story:

> It was Christmas Eve and her mother [Michal's maternal grandmother] was trying to get Jews out of Poland before everybody was coming in. A German came in

> and they were searching the house and that was the craziest thing. They had gotten a report that something had happened and before they even came into the house, the [German] general said, "How are you doing?" She [maternal grandmother] responded in fluent German saying, "I'm doing very well. Merry Christmas." Just like that, being like that. The guy was like, "Okay. We don't need to search this house. Everything's fine." Just a pass over in judgement of some sort, which happens a lot. You hear a lot of those stories, but you also hear the bad stuff... That's where I think the optimism comes. It's like you're trying to do something good. Hopefully, something good comes back to you...

Not only did survivors' optimism influence 2nd and 3rd generation descendants' outlook on life, but in some instances, was perceived by them as a strength gained; "… the optimism I think is another fabric, maybe a strength. I feel optimistic about the future. Maybe that is influenced by my heritage as well" (Maciej, 3rd).

Transforming the Old World and Entering the New

Redefining and Rebuilding in a New Country

That was the focus- to rebuild the Polish community,

not so much a focus on what we lost. (Maciej, 3rd)

Redefining and rebuilding a new life in America, the land of possibilities, in many ways represented a manifestation of posttraumatic growth for 1st generation survivors. America represented an opportunity for a fresh start and self-determination, a far cry from Soviet repression. Increased strength and an openness to new possibilities (i.e., features of posttraumatic growth), as well as courage, increased independence, and sense of purpose (i.e., features of KZ Syndrome) emerged in the context of redefining and rebuilding a new life in a new country. 1st

generation survivors found a home in America, a free country receptive to their agency; “I think that's one of those things that helped them assimilate to American culture is, ‘We're going to rebuild and this is the place to do it’" (Michal, 3rd). Redefining one’s life course in a new country also meant affirming one’s Polish identity:

> I think my grandparents were strong, resilient, kind, open people who went through a lot of adversity to get to a certain point to create a positive generational thing going forward. I think that is pretty much an identity signifier… as these war heroes, if you will. (Maciej, 3rd).

Preserving Polish Cultural Heritage. Affirming Polish identity not only took the shape of rebuilding a community of Poles, but also of passing on Polish culture and heritage to descendants. Passing on Polish cultural heritage not only provided a sense of purpose for 1st generation survivors, but also linked lives across generations, and to the Poland that was lost. Preserving one’s Polish cultural heritage rippled across all three generations and was clearly evidenced in Maciej’s (3rd) statement; “the ability to be adaptable, to move through adversity, to be in service, to really value the cultural aspects of that heritage” (Maciej, 3rd). Preserving one’s Polish cultural heritage also emerged as the fashioning of a familial and collective Polish identity, which highlighted character virtues of courage, strength, the ability to survive, and determination or an unwillingness to give up or surrender, much like the character virtues that undergirded the 1st generation’s ability to survive and desire to fight for Poland’s freedom. At times, these characterizations emerged in positive legacies that emboldened descendants to face their own personal challenges with courage and determination:

> I'm hearing the stories on how they got away and how they acted in certain situations within the war from my relatives. I think hearing all of that gives me something to think about when I personally go through some sort of struggle or obstacle in my life. And I think, it gives me also a sense of determination. And it gives me a feeling of…of almost, I don't want to say pride because pride can be taken in a bad sense. But it's definitely a feeling of, if my grandfather could get out of a war and can escape and fight Nazis, then, I can sit down and study for a test for 12 hours. And if I can't do that, I wouldn't consider myself their descendant. (Arthur, 3rd)

Taking pride in one's Polish cultural heritage also linked lives within Polish social milieus; "… we had a choice of being a Boy Scout, or Polish Scout, I wanted to be a Polish Scout, why not? Why be a Boy Scout if I could be a Polish Scout?" (Michal, 3rd). Legacies of pride also countered negative stereotypes of Poles as "dumb Polaks" and served as internal resources for 1st generation survivors to affirm their sense of dignity and worth as political refugees in a foreign country. Affirming pride in one's cultural and family heritage was viewed as a resilient response to the possibility of feeling marginalized or treated as a second class citizen, and also emerged for 2nd and 3rd generation descendants who immigrated from Poland to the US. Along with honoring and preserving Polish cultural heritage, the importance of family rippled across generations, especially in the context of having lost family members as a result of the war:

> I think there was also a strong sense of family matters within the home because of trauma. I think that at the end of the day, all you really have is your loved ones

> and your family, and I think that was definitely communicated to my parent from my grandparents. (Arthur, 3rd)

Beyond-the-Self Orientation

For some, surviving the war inspired a sense of purpose, particularly a beyond-the-self orientation, previously identified as one of three dimensions of purpose (Damon et al., 2003; Damon, 2008). Beyond-the-self orientation was reflected in positive legacies that stressed the importance of helping others; "I feel like… one person can do so much, many people don't realize it, but I did, because of the war" (Sylvia, 2nd). Such legacies inspired core values, such as kindness and compassion; "… do everything that you can to be fair to other people. To respect people. To be kind to people. To help people" (Matt, 2nd); "We had core values, and just the ability to see the bigger picture past yourself; the idea of community resilience. I think those core values permeated and maybe by accident or subversively [they] made into my consciousness" (Maciej, 3rd). For Maciej (3rd), such legacies also provided a blueprint for his own purposeful pursuits; "My mission is to build community" (Maciej, 3rd). A beyond-the-self orientation also emerged in the context of striving for "peace and love" (Michal, 3rd) and of telling the truth of what happened in the war; "He [grandfather] wanted me to know the truth and he didn't want me to forget what really happened… He said, 'Someday, somebody is going to ask you about this and I want you to tell them the truth'"(Kristopher, 3rd). Honoring one's family and making a commitment to keep the family lineage alive further reflected a beyond-the-self orientation:

> There is a Hebrew phrase that I really like that's called, Tikkun Olam, which means to heal the world or fix the world, but I also feel, especially more after [learning of my] genealogy where many people have fought to keep the family alive up to this point, that it's my responsibility to keep that going. (Dominik, 3rd)

Legacies of "family first" (Michal, 3rd) and "family matters" (Arthur, 3rd) captured the essence of honoring family relationships, which included caring for sick or elderly family members; "I wish he'd [father] lived a little bit longer, but we also took good care of him while he was sick. If I had to do it again, I would. I would not change a single thing that I did" (Theresa, 2nd). Years later, Theresa (2nd) and her younger sister cared for their elderly mother; **"**We took care of my mom the way she wanted. She wanted to be taken care of at home, and we did" (Theresa, 2nd).

Ability to Survive

Admiration for the 1st generation's ability to survive in dire circumstances emerged in practically all of the descendants' narratives and was often perceived as a strength gained; "I think I gained attributes to learn how to survive...learn how to think on my feet" (Matt, 2nd); "I could survive in any kind of crisis. I don't fall apart. I don't get crazy. I just say, 'This is what you got to do and you do it'. It taught me survival" (Theresa, 2nd); "I'm a survivor... There's no other word to do it. And just everyone who made it through and survived, whether it was will, through attrition, through a friend, through something, we survived" (Kristopher, 3rd). For Matt (2nd), the ability to survive and think on his feet were also seen as biologically-inherited; "I think I have some DNA that... gives me a boost instinctually...", while for Tomek (2nd) it was perceived as an inherent ability to successfully deal with a crisis, "All my friends say, and they're actually my neighbors… if there was a crisis, they would always like to have me in the neighborhood". At times, the ability to survive was presented as a collective characterization of Poles as courageous, tenacious, and committed to honor and country:

> They [parents] never wavered from protecting God and country. They were resilient. They believed in what they did. Like I said, they always stressed that they survived, and other people didn't. If they survived, there was a reason for

> them to survive that tragedy. They felt that they were on this earth to spread that history, and just being Polish, being tough, being stubborn, and just being loyal to your faith and your heritage. (Tomek, 2nd)

Never Giving Up

"Our family motto was "never give up" and "never surrender" (Michal, 3rd)

Determination of which the essence was "to never give up" (Sylvia, 2nd) presented as a powerful legacy for almost all participants; "I don't give up" (Halina, 1st). This prevailing legacy sprang from having survived the war and exerted a powerful ripple effect across generations; "Well, we had a family mantra. It's called, 'Never give up'. I think that was a way to just really show that, 'Okay, we survived this horror. If you see adversity or challenges in your life that's minimized, you should be able to see through that'" (Maciej, 3rd). Although fully appreciating the profound meaning underlying this family legacy, Maciej's father, Tomek (2nd) invoked humor for its everyday application, which further illustrated family resilience; "Get up. Never give up. What the hell are you doing? Put on your hat. Get out there" (Tomek, 2nd). For Kristopher (3rd), thinking about the suffering his grandparents endured provided him with strength and motivation to persevere through his own difficulties; … "keeping in my head things that happened to them [grandparents] always gave me that extra level- they went through that and survived, than I can survive this" (Kristopher, 3rd). Not giving up also applied to post-war challenges, which were framed by Theresa (2nd) as yet another war to win or survive:

> You see when they [parents] came to the United States, they were determined to buy a house, to get a car… to save money, and so on... I think their determination [was] that they were probably going to either win or survive the war. (Theresa, 2nd)

Agency

Agency or self-determination was a prominent legacy for many participants and was often characterized by resourcefulness and being able to come up with solutions; “I definitely think my grandfather had a military mind. I think he was able to strategize and size up situations and be able to come up with an intelligent solution very quickly” (Arthur, 3rd); “I think Dziadzia [grandfather in Polish] was the general... We always called him the confidant, the commander. That's how he ran his life” (Michal, 3rd). For Sylvia (2nd), “exhausting every opportunity” was a powerful means of promoting not only survival, but of increasing individual freedom toward shaping one’s destiny and making a difference in the world; "I believe in the power of an individual to make a difference- that one person can do so much” (Sylvia, 2nd). Agency also emerged as future-oriented whereby saving money and advancing one’s education were seen as necessary for survival by the 1st generation. Saving money and valuing education were life lessons passed down to descendants as key to advancement and insuring future security, even in the face of political or economic uncertainty.

Choosing one’s attitude in the most depraved of conditions and creating meaning out of suffering (Frankl, 1963) also surfaced as an expression of agency in Kristopher’s (3rd) powerful description of transforming cataclysmic suffering endured under the Nazi occupation into a means for achieving posttraumatic growth to withstand the “bigger toll” (Kristopher, 3rd) of the Soviet repression:

> I think the Nazi regime helped Polish people survive communism because the ones who made it through the war... through the concentration camps… through whatever… they were the ones who said you're not going to break us; you're not going to destroy us physically, mentally. (Kristopher, 3rd)

Valuing the Self

You have to love yourself. (Halina, 1st)

Reclaiming and rebuilding a "valued self" in the aftermath of trauma and in the context of being impacted by parental trauma bolstered forward movement and positive growth for some participants (Wertz, 2011, p. 185). Similar to affirming one's Polish identity and cultural heritage, "feeling valuable" (James, 2nd) and "loving yourself" (Halina, 1st) contributed to positive growth following trauma and adversity (Joseph & Linley, 2005; Luthar, 2015). Halina's (1st) valuing of self emerged both during the war and in her post-war adaptation, and most likely protected her from feeling diminished or devalued, a feature often found in survivors of trauma, including genocide (Brave Heart, 1999b; Wertz, 2011). *Valuing the Self* was also viewed as an act of agency that supported individual development and fostered a concern for the welfare of others (Rogers, 1964). For James (2nd) "feeling valuable" reflected both a valuing of self and extended into a desire to make a difference in other people's lives, thus providing him with a sense of purpose and feelings of gratitude and deep satisfaction:

> I think that happiness is overrated. I believe the key to fulfillment is feeling valuable… and I have an immense amount of value that I create here with my clients. I help them, see, understand change, shift in their work.... So, I have an enormous amount of satisfaction, gratitude, and appreciation that keeps me fulfilled. (James, 2nd)

The conscious decision to value one's self created an avenue to transform direct and intergenerational traumatic effects emanating from the violence and inhumanity of war and genocide. In this way, the possibility of feeling diminished or devalued, inherent in such highly traumatic and dehumanizing experiences is transmuted by affirming one's dignity, worth, and

value (Brave Heart, 1999b; Wertz, 2011). *Valuing the Self* became a means for honoring the self, appreciating life and relationships with others, and transforming life philosophy to reflect greater self-actualization and a beyond-the-self orientation, all of which were indicative of posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), as well as a sense of purpose (Damon et al., 2003; Damon, 2008).

Chapter 5: Discussion

Informed by Life Course Theory's (Elder, 1998) paradigmatic themes of historical time and place, timing of events, linked lives, and human agency within opportunities and constraints, this study explored the experiences of Poles who survived the Second World War in Poland and their descendants, specifically intergenerational transmission of traumatic effects and/or features of posttraumatic growth or positive change across three generations. Life Course Theory fostered attunement to dynamic and reciprocal family and macro-level processes, sensitivity to socio-historic context, and continuity and change over time and across generations. The current study further illustrates how experiences of mass trauma carry far-reaching intergenerational effects and how traumatic effects and loss often coexist with resilience and positive growth or change.

Catastrophic losses and stories of war-related suffering weaved through the lifeworld of descendants, assuming an amorphous presence, as if time stood still (Auerhahn & Laub, 1998). Such losses defy resolution and alter life movement, necessitating the reconstruction of self perceptions, relationships with others, and view of one's place in the world (Boss, 2016; Ogińska-Bulik & Kobylarczyk, 2016; Wertz, 2011). Within this reconstructive process lies the potential for growth to emerge evidenced as increased strength, openness to new possibilities, more meaningful relationships with others, increased appreciation for life, and a richer existential and spiritual life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004). Such positive change has been described as posttraumatic growth and frequently coexists with traumatic effects (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Family processes and shared meanings that contribute to traumatic effects and/or features of posttraumatic growth in descendants were of particular interest in this study, as were family processes that contributed to resilience. This study also provided a voice for participants and a space to acknowledge the suffering of Poles during the Second World War and Soviet repression

that immediately followed, since lack of social acknowledgement has been observed in previous research (Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018; Lukas, 2012; Montague, 2012). This is particularly salient since social acknowledgement is a protective factor in the aftermath of trauma and is viewed as a resource for promoting posttraumatic growth (Forstmeier et al., 2009; Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018; Maercker et al., 2009). Additionally, there is a paucity of research in western psychological literature regarding the effects of the Nazi regime and subsequent Soviet repression on Poles and their descendants.

Life Course Theory

The findings lent strong support to the applicability of Life Course Theory in the study of catastrophic historical events and their intergenerational effects (Elder, 1974, 1998). Human agency and life choices are contingent upon constraints and opportunities existing within a particular socio-historic context and structure as observed in previous studies on children of the Great Depression and men returning home to America from World War II (Elder, 1974, 1998). In both contexts, longitudinal research demonstrated how overwhelming historical effects can influence development and the life course (Elder, 1974, 1998). Similarly, the current study found that overwhelming historical effects of the Second World War in Poland and Soviet repression had the potential to traumatically alter the life course of individuals and families across the lifespan.

Life Course Theory's emphasis on historical time and place promoted a deeper appreciation of the socio-historic context of the war in Poland and Soviet repression, and the complexities and intricacies of the meanings constructed by participants. Close attunement to socio-historic context also created a space for historical quotes and interviews to be interwoven into the findings which brought to life collective meanings ascribed by Poles in relation to

Poland's betrayal by its western allies to Soviet-imposed communism and the countless victims of Stalinism as symbolized by the Katyń Massacre. The paradigmatic theme of linked lives applied to intergenerational transmission of traumatic effects and the passing down of positive legacies across generations, which linked lives and the old world (Poland) with the new world (America; Elder & Shanahan, 2006). The paradigmatic theme of human agency within constraints and opportunities illuminated the resourcefulness required to survive and escape persecution in Poland and adapt to America, a free country, receptive of self-determination.

Last, the paradigmatic theme of timing of events cultivated a deeper appreciation of the traumatic impact of war on developmental trajectories, especially for Poles who were children or adolescents during the war, including adolescent Poles who fought in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, the "lost generation" (Jadacki, 2004, p. 195). Although such powerful experiences crystalized identities around honor, courage, and patriotism, the timing of events traumatically altered life trajectories, similar to Elder's observations of children of the Great Depression (Elder, 1974, 1998). For instance, the timing of the Second World War in Poland could dramatically change the life course of a young Pole and put an end to their educational aspirations or occupational ambitions. Providing for one's family becomes the number one priority, which in some instances, necessitated working in an occupation distant and unrelated to one's career goals or aspirations. In this context, the negative stereotype of "dumb Polak" could be particularly disconcerting.

Trauma, Loss, and Posttraumatic Growth

RQ1: ***What features of trauma, loss, and posttraumatic growth are transmitted from Poles who survived the Second World War to their children and grandchildren?***

Loss emerged as the core essence of trauma and cut across all three generations, with frequent references to losing everything. Leaving the old world and entering the new did not mean that mourning and grief were put to rest; to a greater or lesser extent, the war and its related suffering were still alive in the family milieu and communications. Similar to studies with Holocaust survivors and their descendants, "echoes of parental traumatic memory" underscored the dynamics of parent-child relationships for some 2nd and 3rd generation descendants (Wiseman, 2008, p. 49). In other instances, preoccupation with war-related trauma contributed to "transmission of perceived burden" for 2nd generation descendants as observed in previous research with descendants of Holocaust survivors (Letzter-Pouw et al., 2014, p. 427). Findings also supported previous studies with 2nd generation descendants of Holocaust survivors who attempted to empathically understand the pain of their parent's past as a way of connecting with them (Albeck, 1994). Descendants in the current study made similar attempts by reconstructing their family history and creating meaning within the paradoxes of the presence and absence of loved ones (Boss, 2016). Poland as it was before the war, and deceased family members and Polish partisans were psychologically present in memory, but physically absent, thus lending support to the theory of Ambiguous Loss (Boss, 2016).

Mourning and loss were also closely aligned with features of ambiguous loss, defined as traumatic, unclear, confusing, externally-caused, and relational (Boss, 2006; 2010; 2016). In some instances, survivor and/or fighter parents were physically present, but psychologically absent due to the effects of war-related trauma (Boss, 2016). Family processes of creating shared meanings within the paradoxes of presence and absence of family and Poland and through the passing down of positive legacies built resilience in families (Boss, 2016; Walsh, 2016). Resilience-building was also promoted through affirming Polish cultural heritage and identity

and through family communications that engaged humor, optimism, and acceptance, as well as the shared legacies of hope, strength, courage, and altruism.

Within the context of extreme suffering and catastrophic losses, a reconstructive process can occur which forges posttraumatic growth and positive change, features of which can carry over to future generations. In the current study, features of posttraumatic growth that were adopted by 2nd and 3rd generation descendants included belief in one's ability to survive and determination, both viewed as personal strengths; valuing of relationships with family and one's Polish cultural heritage; openness to new possibilities in life; increased independence; and sense of purpose as observed in KZ Syndrome (Kępiński, 1970/2008; Lesniak, 1965). Furthermore, affirming Polish cultural heritage inspired the adoption of core values of courage, strength, agency, and an unwillingness to give up, which mirrored the 1st generation's ability to survive and desire to fight for Poland's freedom.

Legacies Shared

RQ2: ***What legacies are passed down to 2nd and 3rd generation descendants*****?**

In many instances, positive legacies were passed down to descendants which embodied features of posttraumatic growth and/or positive changes associated with KZ Syndrome. Features of posttraumatic growth included increased personal strength, openness to new possibilities, and more meaningful relationships (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), and positive changes associated with KZ Syndrome included courage, increased independence, and sense of purpose (Kępiński, 1970/2008; Lesniak, 1965). At times, positive legacies reflected purpose dimensions which echoed through various subthemes, including *Beyond-the-Self Orientation*, *Valuing the Self* (i.e., reflective of personal meaning), *Redefining and Rebuilding in a New Country* and *Never Giving Up* (i.e., indicative of goal-directedness). Positive legacies distinguished by altruistic values

inspired purposeful pursuits in some descendants, including a desire to build community in one instance. The emergence of purpose was perhaps, not so unusual, since sense of purpose was previously observed as a positive change in KZ Syndrome (Kępiński, 1970/2008; Lesniak, 1965), as well as an avenue to create meaning out of suffering by Frankl (1963), considered the father of purpose by some (Ryff & Singer, 1998).

Outlook on Life and Family Resilience

RQ3: ***How is present day outlook influenced by having been a descendant of a fighter and/or survivor of mass trauma?***

Shared worldviews characterized by hope, optimism, and acceptance, rather than mistrust, betrayal, and fear contributed to a positive outlook in descendants. Families that encouraged optimism, preserved Polish cultural heritage, and established a social community of Poles were more resilient. Focusing on Polish cultural heritage constructively connected the old world with the new and fostered a positive outlook in descendants. These findings supported previous research with Cambodian survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) which found integration of culture to serve as a protective factor, and studies with Lakota native Americans which observed that incorporation of traditional culture in treatment interventions reduced intergenerational transfer of historical trauma effects and historical grief (Brave Heart 1999b, 2003; deVries, 1996). Furthermore, building a community of Poles who had been through similar circumstances provided social acknowledgement of war-related suffering which further contributed to positive adaptation in survivors and family resilience. These findings supported previous studies which identified lack of social acknowledgement of war-related trauma as a risk factor for posttraumatic stress disorder (Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018, p. 3), and perceived social

acknowledgement and social support as protective factors after trauma and contributors to posttraumatic growth (Forstmeier et al., 2009).

Transmission Processes

RQ4: ***How is trauma, loss, and/or posttraumatic growth being transmitted to the 2nd and 3rd generation?***

Family processes were a medium through which traumatic effects could be transmitted to descendants and included family communication patterns, family milieu, and shared worldviews. The quality of such processes could contribute to the transmission of traumatic effects or build family resilience (Walsh, 2016). Boundary ambiguity defined by the Theory of Ambiguous Loss (Boss, 2016) as not knowing who is in or out of the family took on a different quality for this study. Boundary ambiguity surfaced as a blurring of boundaries in parent-child and grandparent-grandchild communications characterized by preoccupation with the war, and in family milieus where the war served as a central point of reference. These observations supported previous research which found that Holocaust-related parent-child communications that took on the quality of an obsessive re-telling of events led to more distress in children (Baranowsky et al., 1998; Davidson, 1980), and Kępiński's (1970/2008) observations of some former Polish concentration camp prisoners having more difficulty adjusting to post-camp life than to camp life. In these instances, the war became their central point of reference, as if they never left the camp. Such a blurring of boundaries in parent-child and grandparent-grandchild communications and in the family milieu contributed to feelings of anxiety, anger, and/or insecurity in descendants in the current study, hence the survivor's trauma became the descendant's trauma. Additionally, communication patterns characterized by recurrent expressions of anger or anxiety

were more likely to transmit traumatic effects in descendants as compared to communication styles that were less reactive and emotionally-laden.

Last, shared worldviews characterized by themes of betrayal or mistrust transmitted traumatic effects, which included anxiety and mistrust of others. These effects were further compounded if a descendant grew up under Stalinism, rather than America. Living under Soviet repression fostered distrust of authority and news sources, and mistrust of people outside of one's family and closest friends, previously referred to as one's "communist-free zone" (Sylvia, 2nd). It is again important to note that former resistance members who were identified as anti-communists by the Soviet-imposed communist regime in Poland were prosecuted (Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018). Such circumstances made it nearly impossible for Poles who fought during the Second World War to openly discuss their traumatization for fear of risking their life or being prosecuted (Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018).

Communications that were more stoic, balanced, and emotionally-contained, which illustrated a life lesson, positive legacy, or historical aspect of the war did not appear to transmit traumatic effects. Moreover, communications or stories about the war that incorporated humor, hope, optimism, and/or altruism did not contribute to traumatic effects in descendants, thus supporting previous research, which found resilience in parent-child communication styles that engaged humor in sharing Holocaust experiences (Braga et al., 2012). Likewise, shared worldviews characterized by hope and optimism fostered family resilience, which mirrored positive outlook as identified by Walsh (2016) as resilience-building. In some instances, positive legacies inspired purposeful pursuits in descendants and character virtues, such as altruism, compassion, independence, and persistence or "never giving up", reflecting features of

posttraumatic growth and/or positive changes observed in KZ Syndrome (Kępiński, 1970/2008; Lesniak, 1965; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Lack of Recognition of Poles' Suffering

RQ5: ***How do descendants of Poles who survived the Second World War experience western society's awareness and recognition of Poland's suffering during this time*****?**

War trauma, genocide, forced relocation, and destruction of culture leave behind devastating losses and traumatic effects that shape the life course and reach across generations (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Elder, 1998). Social acknowledgement serves as a protective factor in these contexts and contributes to posttraumatic growth (Forstmeier et al., 2009; Lis-Turlejska et al., 2018; Maercker et al., 2009); however, almost all participants in the current study felt that the suffering experienced by Poles during the Second World War was not fully recognized or acknowledged by the general public. Lack of social acknowledgement in this context strongly resonates with what has been termed disenfranchised grief or "the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported" (Doka, 1989, p. 4).

The findings of the current study revealed that all participants, with the exception of one 3rd generation descendant, felt that social acknowledgement of Poland's suffering, outside of one's family and Polish community, was not present. Although publications, such as *The Eagle Unbowed*: *Poland and the Poles in the Second World War (*2012), *Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles Under German Occupation 1939-1944* (Lukas, 2012), and *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (Snyder, 2010) provide comprehensive and contextually-sensitive accounts of the Second World War in Poland with all its complexity, mainstream media narratives largely draw on publications, such as *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne*

(Gross, 2001), a landmark publication that revealed Poles had collaborated with Germans in murdering Jews in the town of Jedwabne. Although this work has sparked serious discussion on this highly sensitive and dreadful topic, it has been criticized for failing to use German material, which allegedly minimizes the role of German encouragement, and also overlooks questions of Jewish collaboration with the Soviets and the Germans (Kochanski, 2012). Such incomplete accounts largely influence media narratives which can lead to sweeping generalizations of Poles as Nazi collaborators (Peczkis, 2018). Consequently, it is important to provide further context by noting that hundreds of thousands of Poles aided hundreds of thousands of their Polish-Jewish neighbors (Furth, 1999; Lukas, 2012) and that many Poles feared risking automatic death or execution for helping Jews (Friedman, 1980; Peczkis, 2018). It is also noteworthy to mention that Jan Karski, Polish resistance fighter and underground courier, was among the first to apprise the western allies of the atrocities being committed under the German occupation (United States Holocaust Museum, 2021).

The myth of Poland's complicity in the Holocaust has been challenged by many scholars contending that Poles who collaborated with the Nazis represent a minority (Browning, 2017; Kochanski, 2012; Lukas, 2012; Peczkis, 2018) and that individual Poles collaborating with the Nazi regime, is very different from representations of the Polish nation as complicit in the Holocaust (Peczkis, 2018). Such false media narratives foster negative stereotypes of Poles as anti-Semitic and compound existing stereotypes of "dumb Polak", both of which contribute to disenfranchised grief. Unfortunately, disenfranchised and historical grief can be present for many cultural groups who have experienced historical trauma and whose voices have been unheard or largely ignored (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Doka, 1989). Highly complex and sensitive topics, such as war and genocide necessitate the inclusion of critical contextual details which

Life Course Theory (Elder, 1998) and a relational perspective (Overton, 2013) invite. Such topics also call for an appreciation of contextual complexity and an openness to a multiplicity of lived experiences, which a phenomenological approach embodies. Applying such perspectives, encourage presence and attunement to the voices of all people who suffered persecution under the Nazi and Soviet regimes and historical trauma.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included challenges recruiting 1st generation descendants due to age and availability, and recruiting additional participants who were part of the same family, but representing different generations. Although, the current study was able to capture intergenerational processes within families, including Halina (1st) and her only daughter, Elena (2nd), Tomek (2nd) and his two sons, (Maciej, 3rd) and Michal (3rd), and Matt (2nd) and his nephew, Arthur (3rd), recruiting family members from all 13 participants was difficult. All participants in the study, however, provided thick, rich descriptions of what they experienced, how they experienced it, and the meanings they constructed, thus fulfilling the purpose of a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994).

Future Implications

Conceptualizations of posttraumatic growth and resilience can be overlapping, even when carefully defining and distinguishing the two constructs. In the context of studying intergenerational processes, features of both can emerge which requires cognitive flexibility in approaching pre-defined conceptualizations. Future research could explore the relationship between posttraumatic growth and resilience and their impact on intergenerational processes in the context of trauma. Along these lines, recent studies have found a weak relationship between resilience and positive change after a traumatic experience, and between resiliency and

posttraumatic growth (Ogińska-Bulik & Kobylarczyk, 2016). Specifically, resilience was found to have a weak correlation with posttraumatic growth in the domain of changes in self-perceptions; however, a strong correlation was found between resilience and posttraumatic growth in regard to appraisal of stress. When stress was appraised as challenging, rather than threatening, resilience and posttraumatic growth were positively correlated, suggesting that appraisal of stress mediated the relationship between resilience and posttraumatic growth (Ogińska-Bulik & Kobylarczyk, 2016). Future studies could consider the role of stress appraisal in relation to family resilience and posttraumatic growth within the context of war trauma or highly traumatic events.

In the current study, positive changes associated with KZ Syndrome surfaced for some descendants, inviting further integration of the work of Kępiński (1970/2008), considered a pioneer of posttraumatic stress disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Schochow & Steger, 2016) when studying posttraumatic growth. Moreover, future studies could explore how family processes, such as the quality of family communication patterns, family milieu, and shared worldviews impact adaptation and resilience in families who have experienced traumatic losses, and also in immigrant families navigating the challenges of adapting to a new country and way of life. Incorporating a family process perspective can contribute to healing and inform social policy and treatment programs aimed at addressing families impacted by trauma (Arditti, 2011; Walsh, 2016). In this way, we can reduce the transmission of traumatic effects and promote ecologies that support positive adaptation and family resilience. Last, understanding how purpose development is influenced across generations of families who have experienced traumatic losses can help contemporary families transform the effects of loss and suffering in the context of adversity or extreme circumstances.

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Appendix A

Screening Questions

1. Are you of Polish-Catholic or Polish-Christian ancestry? Yes_____ No _____

    a. (If yes, proceed to question 2; if no then participant has met exclusion criteria)

2. Did you, your parent or grandparent fight against the Nazi regime in the Polish Home Army or Polish Resistance? Yes_____ No_____

    a. (If yes, participant will be included in the study; if no then proceed to question 3)

3. Are you, your parent or grandparent a survivor of the Second World War in Poland?
    a. Yes _____ No_____

    b. (If yes, participant will be included in study; if no then participant has met exclusion criteria)

Appendix B

***Voices Unheard*: Poles Who Survived the Second World War and Their Descendants**

I am a doctoral candidate at Montclair State University who is seeking interested participants to take part in a research study exploring the experiences of Poles who survived the Second World War in Poland and their descendants.

In the west, the story of the Polish people is not often shared or fully portrayed when presenting or discussing the events of the Second World War or the Holocaust. For this reason, the experiences of millions of Polish Catholics and Polish Christians who suffered this mass trauma have been referred to as *The Forgotten Holocaust* (Lukas, 2012). Poles who survived this tragic period in history and their descendants are in unique position to tell this powerful story and to share their lived experiences, strength and hope.

Since I am also the daughter of a Warsaw resistance fighter and a descendant of a Polish survivor of the Second World War, it would be my honor and privilege to speak with you. If you are a Polish Catholic or Polish Christian survivor or a descendant of a Polish Catholic or Polish Christian parent or grandparent who survived the Second World War in Poland, and are interested in possibly participating in my study, please contact me at rusha2@montclair.edu.

If selected, your participation in this study will remain confidential and voluntary.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Rush

Alexandra Rush, PhD Candidate
Montclair State University
(732) 570-1460

Appendix C

Recruitment Email for Personal Contacts

Subject Heading: *Interested in Telling Your Family's Story?*
Interview Participants Needed for a Study Exploring the Experiences of Poles Who Survived the Second World War in Poland and Their Descendants

Hello _____;

I hope all is well with you and that you are enjoying the [season]! I am reaching out to you to let you know a little bit about my work and research interests. I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Family Science and Human Development at Montclair State University and want to learn more about the experiences of Poles who survived the Second World War in Poland and their descendants. I am specifically interested in the perspectives of ex-partisans, resistance fighters, military officers in Armia Krajowa, and Polish Catholics and Polish Christians who survived the war, and the experiences, stories, and legacies they have passed down to their families.

My study will involve face to face or skype interviews, lasting approximately 90 minutes, and will be asking questions about these experiences and legacies. The purpose of my study is to learn more about how Poles experienced this tragic period in history and how these experiences have influenced their descendants. My hope is to make more visible the stories and strengths of Poles who survived the Second World War and to further inform western research literature on this topic.

I really look forward to hearing your unique perspective and hope that you would be interested in participating in my study!

Best,

Alexandra Rush, PhD Candidate
Department of Family Science and Human Development
Montclair State University
1 Normal Avenue
Montclair, NJ 07043
Rusha2@montclair.edu
Cell Phone: (732) 570-1460

Appendix D

Recruitment Email for Polish Organizations

Subject Heading: *Recruiting Interview Participants for a Study Exploring the Experiences of Poles Who Survived the Second World War in Poland and their Descendants*

Hello _____;

I hope all is well with you and that you are enjoying the (season)! I am reaching out to you to let you know a little bit about my work and research interests. I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Family Science and Human Development at Montclair State University, and I am preparing a study to learn more about the experiences of Poles who survived the Second World War in Poland and their descendants. I am specifically interested in the perspectives of ex-partisans, resistance fighters, military officers in Armia Krajowa, and Polish Catholics and Polish Christians who survived the war, and the experiences, stories, and legacies they have passed down to their families.

My study will involve face to face or skype interviews, lasting approximately 90 minutes, and I will be asking questions about these experiences and legacies. The purpose of my study is to learn more about how Poles experienced this tragic period in history and how these experiences have influenced their descendants. My hope is to make more visible the stories and strengths of Poles who survived the Second World War and to further inform western research literature on this topic.

I really look forward to hearing your unique perspective and hope that you would be interested in participating in my study!

Best,

Alexandra Rush, PhD Candidate
Department of Family Science and Human Development
Montclair State University
1 Normal Avenue
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Rusha2@montclair.edu
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Appendix E

ADULT CONSENT FORM

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

Title: Voices Unheard: Poles Who Survived the Second World War and Their Descendants

Study Number:

Why is this study being done? This study is being done so that we can find out more about the experiences of Poles who survived the Second World War in Poland and their descendants.

What will happen while you are in the study? If you decide to volunteer for this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview. You will be asked several questions about your feelings, experiences and perspective on this topic. I will tape record the interview, so I don't have to make so many notes. You will not be asked to state your name on the recording.

Time: The interview will last about 90 minutes.

Risks: You may experience uncomfortable feelings, such as anxiety, sadness or anger, or my questions may bring up some painful memories. If you wish to stop or take a break, please let the interviewer know. I can also provide you with a referral to speak with a professional if these feelings linger.

Benefits: You may benefit from this study by having an opportunity to share your experiences concerning Poles who survived the Second World War in Poland and their descendants. Some people find talking about these experiences to be helpful and benefit from sharing about their family's heritage.

Who will know that you are in this study? You will not be linked to any presentations. We will keep who you are confidential.

You should know that New Jersey requires that any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or acts of child abuse shall report the same immediately to the Division of Youth and Family Services.

Do you have to be in the study?
You do not have to be in this study. You are a volunteer! It is okay if you want to stop at any time and not be included in the study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Do you have any questions about this study? Phone or email Alexandra Rush, PhD Candidate, Montclair State University, (732)570-1460, rusha2@montclair.edu or Principal Investigator, Dr. Jennifer Urban, Department of Family Science and Human Development,

Institute for Research on Youth Thriving and Evaluation, Montclair State University, 1 Normal Avenue, Montclair, NJ 07043, 973-655-6884, urbanj@montclair.edu.

Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant? Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Katrina Bulkley, at 973-655-5189 or reviewboard@montclair.edu.

Future Studies It is okay to use my data in other studies:
Please initial: _____ Yes _____ No

As part of this study, it is okay to audiotape me:
Please initial: _____ Yes _____ No

One copy of this consent form is for you to keep.

Statement of Consent
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I am 18 years of age or older and have received a copy of this consent form.

_____	_____	_____
Print your name here	Sign your name here	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Principal Investigator	Signature	Date

Appendix F

Potential Risk & Referral Resources for Study

Justification for Potential Risk: Since the participants will be discussing their experiences related to the Second World War in Poland, either directly or intergenerationally, they may experience feelings of sadness, anxiety, or distress. The justification for exploring this phenomenon is to provide a voice for ethnic Poles to express their feelings and perspectives related to these experiences, and to contribute to the existing research literature on the impact of mass trauma and the potential for resilience and posttraumatic growth across generations.

Precautions: During informed consent, participants will be made aware of the potential for uncomfortable feelings to arise, such as anxiety, grief, anger, or painful memories, and will be informed that they can stop at any point during the interview to take a break, discontinue, or resume at a future interview date. They will also be made aware that a referral to speak with a professional can be provided if these feelings linger.

The following resources will be made available to any participant in distress or who requests follow-up with a mental health services:

1. NJMentalHealthCares is a free, confidential mental health information and referral. Live service is provided from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday thru Friday; other times callers may leave a message for a return call the following business day. 1-866-202-HELP (4357) (TTY 1-877-294-4356)

2. Caring Contact: (908) 232-2880

Caring Contact is an award-winning, volunteer-staffed caring and crisis hotline and listening community, who provides active listening support and to the central and northern New Jersey community. Website: https://caringcontact.org/about-us/

3. NYC WELL: 1-888-NYC-WELL

At any hour of any day, in almost any language, from phone, tablet or computer, NYC Well is your connection to get the help you need. They can provide:

- Suicide prevention and crisis counseling
- Peer support and short-term counseling via telephone, text and web
- Assistance scheduling appointments or accessing other mental health services
- Follow-up to check that you have connected to care and it is working for you

4. Texas 211 – 2-1-1 is a free referral and information helpline that connects people to a wide range of health and human services, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

5. Psychology Today Therapist Finder (National Website): https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists

Appendix G

Interview Schedule for 1st Generation Survivor

The purpose of this interview is to explore the experiences of Polish survivors and fighters of the Second World War, specifically the German and Soviet occupation of Poland. I'm going to be asking you some questions about your feelings and experiences on this topic, so feel free to say whatever you want or feel is important. I'm interested in your unique experience and perspective. If at any time, you wish to stop or take a break, please let me know.

1. **How old were you when Hitler invaded Poland?**

2. **Were you living with your parent (parents) during this time?**
   Prompt: Tell me more.

3. **Did you have siblings living with you at this time?**
   Prompt: Tell me more.

4. **How did you react to the invasion?**

5. **How did your family react to the invasion?**

6. **Can you tell me about some of your experiences during the German Occupation?**
   Prompt: Did you fight against the Nazi regime in the Polish Home Army or Polish Resistance?

   Prompt: Did you actively participated in the Polish Resistance efforts?

7. **Were you or your family members sent to a labor, concentration camp or prison?**
   Prompt: Tell me more.

8. **Did you or your family live in hiding?**
   Prompt: Tell me more.

9. **How did your family communicate with each other about what was happening?**

10. **How did you cope with these experiences?**

11. **How did your family cope with these experiences?**

12. **How do you think you were affected by these experiences?**

13. **What kinds of losses did you experience?**

Prompt: **Loss of family? Country? Belongings? Culture? Language?**

14. How did these losses impact you?

15. How did these losses affect your family??

16. Have you had nightmares related to your experiences during the Second World War in Poland?
Prompt: Tell me more.

17. Have you experienced feelings of anxiety or dread related to these experiences?
Prompt: Tell me more.

18. Have you experienced feelings of anger?
Prompt: Tell me more.

19. Have you experienced feelings of guilt?
Prompt: Tell me more.

20. What was it like for you to adjust to a new country and culture?

21. Did you see yourself as a refugee?
Prompt: Tell me more.

22. Some Polish people feel that their suffering during the Second World War is not known or recognized by the general public. How do you feel about that?

23. What does it mean to you to have survived (fought) against the German and Soviet occupation in Poland?
Prompt: What does it mean to you to be a _____(repeat how the participant describes themselves: resistance fighter, survivor, victim)?

24. What qualities do you think helped you to survive?

25. What kinds of lessons did these experiences instill in you?

26. Have those lessons or experiences changed your life?

27. In what ways do you think you might have gained strength from these experiences?

28. How have those strengths influenced your life?

29. **Do you think you may have gained positive values from your experiences during the Second World War?**

30. **What is your outlook about your life today?**

31. **How would you describe your relationship with your children?**
    Prompt: How close are you?

32. **Is there anything else you wish to say or add that we have not covered or that you think is important for me to know?**

This concludes our interview, and I really want to thank you for sharing your thoughts, feelings, and time with me. I highly value and appreciate your unique perspective. One of the goals of my study is to let more people know what happened to the Polish people during the Second World War, and to help survivor families understand that many strengths and positive values can come from experiencing extreme suffering and loss. I hope that my research will provide you with a sense of satisfaction and an acknowledgement of your family's courage and strength.
On a final note, I would like to ask that if I need to reach out to you one more time to clarify any of your responses to me, would that be okay?
Thank you so much for your time with me!

Appendix H

Interview Schedule for 2nd Generation Descendant

The purpose of this interview is to explore the experiences of children of Polish survivors and fighters of the Second World War, specifically the German and Soviet occupation of Poland. I'm going to be asking you some questions about your feelings and experiences on this topic, so feel free to say whatever you want or feel is important. I'm interested in your unique experience and perspective.

1. **How do you view your parents?**
   Prompt: What comes to mind when you think of them?
   Prompt: Tell me more.

2. **What stories have you been told about the Second World War in Poland?**
   Prompt: When Hitler invaded Poland?
   Prompt: Who shared these stories with you?

3. **Some Polish people feel that their suffering during the Second World War is not known or recognized by the general public. How do you feel about that?**

4. **Did your parent or parents fight against the Nazi regime in the Polish Home Army or Polish Resistance?**
   Prompt: Did they actively participate in the Polish Resistance efforts?

5. **Was your parent (parents) sent to a labor, concentration camp or prison?**
   Prompt: Tell me more.

6. **Did your parents (parents) live in hiding?**
   Prompt: Tell me more.

7. **Tell me about your parent's (parents') experiences during the German and Soviet occupation of Poland?**

8. **How was this information communicated to you?**

9. **How do you think your parent (parents) were affected by these experiences?**

10. **What kinds of losses do you think your parent (parents) experienced?**
    Prompt: Loss of family? Country? Belongings? Culture? Language?

11. **Do you think these losses impacted you or your family in any way?**
    Prompt: In what ways?

12. How do you cope with loss?

13. Are there other ways that you were affected by what your parent (parents) experienced?

14. Have you had nightmares related to your parent's (parents') experiences during the Second World War in Poland?
Prompt: Tell me more.

15. Have you experienced feelings of anxiety or dread related to your parent's (parents') experiences?
Prompt: Tell me more.

16. Have you experienced feelings of anger?
Prompt: Tell me more.

17. Have you experienced feelings of guilt?
Prompt: Tell me more.

18. How would you describe your relationship with your parent (parents)?
Prompt: How close were you?

19. What was it like for your parent(s) to adjust to a new country and culture?

20. Did you they see themselves as a refugee(s)?
Prompt: Tell me more.

21. What does it mean to you to be a descendant of a parent (parents) who survived or fought against the German and/or Soviet Occupation in Poland?
Prompt: What does it mean to you to be the child of (repeat how the participant describes their parent (parents): resistance fighter, fighter, survivor, victim, etc.)
Prompt: What does it mean to you to be the child of a resistance fighter?
Prompt: What does it mean to you to be the child of a survivor (victim)?

22. What qualities do you think helped your parent (parents) survive?

23. What kind of lessons or values did your parent (parents) impart in you?

24. Have those lessons influenced your life?

25. In what ways do you think you might have gained strengths from your parent's (parents') experiences?

26. How have those strengths influenced your life?

27. Do you think you may have gained positive values from your parent's (parents') experiences during the Second World War?
Prompt: Tell me more.

28. What is your outlook about your life today?

29. Is there anything else that you wish to say or add that we have not covered or that you think is important for me to know?

This concludes our interview, and I really want to thank you for sharing your thoughts, feelings, and time with me. I highly value and appreciate your unique perspective. One of the goals of my study is to let more people know what happened to the Polish people during the Second World War, and to help survivor families understand that many strengths and positive values can come from experiencing extreme suffering and loss. I hope that my research will provide you with a sense of satisfaction and an acknowledgement of your family's courage and strength.
On a final note, I would like to ask that if I need to reach out to you one more time to clarify any of your responses to me, would that be okay?
Thank you so much for your time with me!

Appendix I

Interview Schedule for 3rd Generation Descendant

The purpose of this interview is to explore the experiences of grandchildren of Polish survivors and fighters of the Second World War, specifically the German and Soviet occupation of Poland. I'm going to be asking you some questions about your feelings and experiences on this topic, so feel free to say whatever you want or feel is important. I'm interested in your unique experience and perspective. If at any time, you wish to stop or take a break, please let me know.

1. **How do you view your grandparents?**
   Prompt: What comes to mind when you think of them?
   Prompt: Tell me more.

2. **What stories have you been told about the Second World War in Poland?**
   Prompt: When Hitler invaded Poland?
   Prompt: Who shared these stories with you?

3. **Some Polish people feel that their suffering during the Second World War is not known or recognized by the general public. How do you feel about that?**

4. **Did your grandparent or grandparents fight against the Nazi regime in the Polish Home Army or Polish Resistance?**
   Prompt: Did they actively participate in the Polish Resistance efforts?

5. **Was your grandparent (grandparents) sent to a labor, concentration camp or prison?**
   Prompt: Tell me more.

6. **Did your parents (parents) live in hiding?**
   Prompt: Tell me more.

7. **Tell me about your Polish grandparent's (grandparents') experiences during the German and Soviet occupation of Poland?**

8. **How was this information communicated to you?**

9. **How do you think your grandparent (grandparents) were affected by these experiences?**

10. **What kinds of losses do you think your grandparent (grandparents) experienced because of the Second World War in Poland?**
    Prompt: Loss of family? Country? Belongings? Culture? Language?

11. Do you think these losses impacted you or your family in any way?
Prompt: In what ways?

12. How do you cope with loss?

13. Are there other ways that you were affected by what your grandparent (grandparents) experienced?

14. What was it like for your grandparent(s) to adjust to a new country and culture?

15. Did they see themselves as a refugee(s)?
Prompt: Tell me more.

16. What does it mean to you to be a descendant of a grandparent (grandparents) who survived or fought against the German and/or Soviet occupation in Poland?
Prompt: What does it mean to you to be the grandchild of (repeat how the participant describes their grandparent/grandparents: resistance fighter, fighter, survivor, victim, etc.)
Prompt: What does it mean to you to be the grandchild of a resistance fighter?
Prompt: What does it mean to you to be the grandchild of a survivor (victim)?

17. What qualities do you think helped your grandparent (grandparents) to survive?

18. What kind of lessons or values did they impart in you?

19. In what ways do you think you might have gained strengths from your grandparent's (grandparents') experiences?

20. Your parent is the child of a survivor parent/parents (use the language the participant uses). How do you think your parent has been affected by your grandparent's (grandparents') experiences during the Second World War in Poland?

21. Do you think the losses that your grandparent (grandparents) experienced impacted your parent in any way?
Prompt: In what ways?

22. Are there other ways that your parent was affected by what your grandparent (grandparents) experienced?

23. Do you think your parent gained strength from those experiences?
Prompt: In what ways?

24. Do you think your parent gained positive values from those experiences?

Prompt: Tell me more.

25. **Have those strengths or positive values influenced you?**

26. **What is your outlook about your life today?**

27. **Is there anything else you wish to say or add that we have not covered or that you think is important for me to know?**

This concludes our interview, and I really want to thank you for sharing your thoughts, feelings, and time with me. I highly value and appreciate your unique perspective. One of the goals of my study is to let more people know what happened to the Polish people during the Second World War, and to help survivor families understand that many strengths and positive values can come from experiencing extreme suffering and loss. I hope that my research will provide you with a sense of satisfaction and an acknowledgement of your family's courage and strength.
On a final note, I would like to ask that if I need to reach out to you one more time to clarify any of your responses to me, would that be okay?
Thank you so much for your time with me!