"Family Dynamics, the Nazi Holocaust, and Mental Health Treatment: A Shift in Paradigm"
Introduction

- Qualitative study, based on a 35 person sub-sample of a larger research project (131 participants) conducted in 9 locations across the U.S. funded by the **John Templeton Foundation**.
- Three theoretical frameworks explore family resilience among Holocaust survivors before, during, and after WW II: Danieli’s Family Typology (1982; 1985), Greene’s Systems-Based Resilience-Enhancing Model (2002; 2007), and Walsh’s Keys to Family Resilience (1998).
The study examined how family resilience allowed families to not succumb to stressful situations, but instead to overcome the negative consequences associated with high risk (Leitz, 1999).
The idea represents a shift in paradigm.

A paradigm is the configurations of beliefs, values, and techniques that are shared by members of a professional community.

A shift is propelled when questions frequently arise about old “truths” or “facts” as Kuhn (1970) stated in his work on how knowledge is constructed.
Paradigm shifts cause intellectual tension

- The **vulnerability perspective**, normative losses associated with aging are expected to reactivate prior trauma and exacerbate psychological distress (Kahana et al., 1997; Kahana, Kahana, Harel, & Rosner, 1988; Shmotkin & Lomranz, 1998);

- The **resilience perspective**, coping skills that facilitated earlier adjustment will continue to provide future strengths (Kahana et al., 1997).
Danieli’s Family Typology of Survivors

- **The Victim** - passive, depressive, or anxious. Possibly disengaged and suspicious, may exhibit somatic symptoms.

- **The Numb** (a subset of the Victim) - described as more isolated and silent and exhibiting feelings of guilt or shame.
Danieli’s Family Typology of Survivors

- **The Fighter** - characterized by active resistance, exhibiting pride and strength. Likes to be in control and is confident and assertive.

- **Those Who Made It** (a subset of the Fighter) - younger families who have negated or moved beyond the impact of the Holocaust, often by transformation/growth.

- This typology was later empirically validated by Rich (1982) in the U. S. and Hantman & Solomon (2003) in Israel.
The Templeton Family Dynamics Study

Resilience Definitions

1. Adaptation to extraordinary circumstances (i.e., risks) and achievement of positive and unexpected outcomes in the face of adversity (Fraser, 1997) and

2. The ability to maintain competence across the life span (Masten, 1994).
“Resilience can be defined as the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful”.  
“Resilience depends on the family belief system, organizational patterns, and communication process (Walsh, 1998).
The *Family Resilience Template* was based on:

- **Systems theory**, addressing family structure and organization;

- **Ecological theory**, encompassing the family’s relationship to other social systems and its response to stress; and

The *Family Resilience Template* questions may be ordered by Maslow’s (1968) hierarchy of needs, that suggests survivors must first secure basic resources that provide the bedrock of disaster relief (Greene, 2002b). Once safety is secured, individuals, families, and communities can rebuild. People can regain their self-esteem, then meet their goals and begin to self-actualize. Some may experience a spiritual transcendence, finding meaning and purpose through spiritual faith and cultural meaning.

Question: Did as Frankl suggest, some survivors experience spiritual transcendence?
Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1968)

- Self-Actualization/Transcendence
- Family reconfiguration
- Food, shelter
Questions on the Family Resilience Template

1. What was the economic well-being of the survivor’s family of origin?

2. What was the emotional climate in the family of origin?

3. What was the structure of the family of origin? The family of creation? (Addresses level of connectedness, hierarchies, roles, subsystems, and lineage).

4. What are the characteristics of their communication processes? (Includes an understanding of family rules [e.g. do we talk about the Holocaust?]).

5. How does the family—both of origin and of creation—fit into and act upon its environment? (Explores how families respond to stress and obtain resources).
Questions on the Family Resilience Template

6. What are the educational achievements and careers of members of the family of creation?
7. How resilient do the family of origin and the family of creation appear? (Examines how families face risk and build on protective factors and assets).
8. What is the family’s shared belief system? (Includes its values, convictions, attitudes, and norms).
9. How did the family self-repair, rebuild, or reconfigure itself after the Holocaust?
10. Do family members seek justice, want to leave a legacy, or want to create a sense of transcendence? Are they idealistic? Do they strive for a better day?

Themes of Strength

This study supported an earlier study (Greene, 2002) that suggested survivors:

- Resolved to live
- Made friends
- Turned to others and banded together
- Found ways to get food
- Tried to save the family
- Set up school programs
- Wrote songs, poems, stories
- Cared for others
- Tricked and sabotaged the guards and
- Fought for their lives
The empirical verification of Danieli’s typology of survivor adaptation concluded that there are three types of survivors: (1) Victims, (2) Fighters, and (3) Those Who Made It.

Based on participants’ self-perceptions in this Templeton study of 131 participants, (1) 44% were categorized as Victims, (2) 28.8% as Fighters, and (3) 26.5% as Those Who Made It.
This study revealed that participants were generally aware of and wanted to describe the structure of their families of origin and their adaptation today. For example, a participant recalled a loving family of origin as follows:

“Oh gosh, they did not know what to do with us! My sister did not want to eat. She was like a little social butterfly. They were giving her money to eat! And I said to give it to me! Nothing could prepare for the Holocaust. Maybe my childhood and being surrounded by love by whole family has helped me to try to help someone else”.
Keeping family dyads together was another major factor related to survival and hope. One survivor remembered:

“I was ready to die, but then I saw my sister arrive at the camp. I stole and bartered at night to support her smoking habit.”

Survivors who were able to stick together with family members often developed survival strategies to obtain food. As one stated:

“Just keep going day by day. Having my sister at that time—just trying to survive. We gathered leftover food to bring to others.” Another said, “I had brothers and sisters so I did not need friends. We lived in an orphanage and stole food for each other.

Other participants recalled: “I had my sister and me.”
Transcripts indicated that survivors felt their children were an important aspect of their legacy. In the words of a survivor:

When I see my grandchildren and my great grandchildren, it inspires me. I lived through my children and I lived for them. Every time I would buy something nice for the house, I would think of mommy and daddy and how much joy they brought me. Even until this day, I think they would be so proud of me with having such smart and wonderful children.
Survivors placed their hope on their children and grandchildren. This was expressed by a survivor, who said, “My son would call me every Friday and tell me that I was his life and inspiration.”

To the question “What is your legacy?” one person answered:

Grandchildren to be good citizens. Take care of each other—not just family—others go outside—Stay Jewish—Friday night Shabbat dinner when they were around. My husband used to bribe grandchildren to go to synagogue on Saturdays. When he died, grandchildren did Shabbat service in many languages as legacy to grandfather.