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THE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN HOLOCAUST MORAL ATTITUDES AND MORAL LESSONS

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Abstract

This study presents correlations found between moral attitudes expressed by Israeli high-school students in response to Holocaust and post-Holocaust moral dilemmas and the lessons they learnt from Holocaust learning. 102 Israeli high-school students responded to a Moral Attitudes questionnaire and a Lessons Learned questionnaire. The research aimed to examine whether particular moral attitudes correlated with specific lessons perceived to have been acquired from the Holocaust Learning Program. This was an innovative attempt to look for these kinds of correlations. The findings are divided into two parts: the first part presents the correlations found between seven Holocaust era dilemmas categories and the lessons categories. The second part presents the correlations found between seven Post-Holocaust era dilemmas categories and lessons categories. A significant linear connection (correlation) was found between participants' moral attitudes regarding the seven Holocaust and seven post-Holocaust dilemma categories and at least one of the two lessons categories. The conclusion is that Holocaust learning including exposure to Holocaust moral dilemmas reinforced moral thinking and participants' understanding of human difficulties and needs. When we look at the correlations between Post-Holocaust era moral attitudes and the perceived moral lessons the conclusion is that: insofar as the moral attitude is more critical, the lessons learned will be more influential. Insofar as the moral attitude is more compassionate the lessons learned will be less radical. Insofar as the moral attitude is more open-minded and flexible, the lessons learned give more consideration to other people's needs and universal values.

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Keywords: Moral dilemmas, moral lessons, correlations



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1. Introduction

"In the Holocaust, worlds collapsed, the world of the individual, family and the community, and all the conventional rules were broken: the rules for daily living and society, rules of morality and thought" (Faberstein, 2002, p. 133). The Second World War (1939-1945) was the time when Nazi Germany murdered approximately 6,000,000 Jews under the leadership and vision of its leader, the Fuhrer, Adolph Hitler (Greif et al., 1983) solely for ideological reasons. The Second World War gave Hitler the opportunity to fulfill his ideological ambition to liquidate the Jews in Europe (Heilbruner & Zimmerman, 1995). Additionally, approximately 300,000 Romani people were murdered by the Nazis (Barley, 2007). Nazi plans for extermination were also aimed towards specific groups of German citizens – those people, who were found to be physically or mentally disabled according to medical standards. They were murdered in a special secret government operation, termed "Euthanasia" or under the code name "T-4", which took place in 1939-1941. Approximately 100,000 Germans including children were executed, using toxin shots (Snyder, 2012). These actions provide an accurate reflection of the Nazi regime's thorough and persistent implementation of their ideology in practice, sometimes even happily performed by ordinary Germans (Goldhagen, 1998). With the end of the war, survivors had to invest immense efforts to overcome the trauma they had experienced and most of them indeed succeeded. Most Jewish survivors of the Holocaust migrated to Israel, established new families and became active and creative citizens who became engaged in social activity and achievements no less than the other residents of the state; however, others suffered from severe Post-Traumatic Syndrome and did not manage to overcome this malady. Even those who functioned well remained with mental scars that imposed subjective suffering for the rest of their lives and of course influenced their families and their close surroundings (Neuman, 2010). The influences of the Holocaust are also visible among the second generation, children of Holocaust survivors. Since the survivors and their families constitute a large proportion of the population in Israel, this is very significant for Israeli society. The strong mental needs of parents who are Holocaust survivors have significantly influenced their children and created difficulties for those children such as: anxieties, difficulty forming individuation and over-responsibility for their parents and others so that they become "parental children" (Neuman, 2016). The following is a good description of this reality: "Among the generations of Holocaust survivors, the children of the survivors, their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, there is an inter-generational transmission of trauma and memory. This trauma has most central significance for each generation and it influences a variety of areas and levels" (Fuchs, 2009, p. 12). Holocaust studies in Israel are considered a most significant stage for the transmission of the legacy of the Holocaust to Israeli youth and the shaping of Holocaust memory. There are several main educational-social-cultural stages, which children in Israel undergo with regard to the Holocaust: (a) From childhood until high school: during this period the main learning occurs on memorial days when general information is given in school. (b) In high school: Holocaust studies are part of the curriculum for matriculation exams and there is an organized guided journey to Holocaust extermination sights in Poland for those choosing to visit. (c) During compulsory military service in the army, soldiers are given lectures about the Holocaust. For army officers there is also an organized guided journey to the Holocaust extermination sights in Poland (d), Holocaust studies are offered in universities and colleges for those who wish to study this subject. It is noted that there is also a

very popular phenomenon of journeys for organized groups of adults to the sites of the Holocaust and its commemoration in Poland (Lev, 2007). This paper discusses possible correlations between moral attitudes derived from Israeli high-school students' responses to Holocaust and post-Holocaust moral dilemmas and the lessons they elicited from their Holocaust learning.

2. Problem Statement

Previous research on Holocaust moral dilemmas and lessons has not tested possible correlations between moral attitudes towards Holocaust moral dilemmas faced by Jews during and after the Jewish Holocaust and lessons learned from Holocaust learning program in high school.

3. Research Questions

The research question was: Can we find correlations between students' moral attitudes and the lessons they acquire from the Holocaust Learning Program?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to test whether specific moral attitudes correlated with specific lessons perceived to have been acquired from the Holocaust Learning Program.

5. Research Methods

Participants. 102 Israeli high school students male and female participated in the study. They were studying in three different high schools in Israel and their ages ranged from 17-18. They all took part in the study voluntarily. All of them belonged to the third and fourth generation after the Jewish Holocaust. Some of them had relatives, who were Holocaust victims or survivors. Please replace this text with context of your paper

Procedure. The data were collected from two questionnaires: The Moral Attitudes Questionnaires and the Lessons Learned Questionnaire completed by the 102 research participants at the end of two years comprehensive research.

The data analysis tool used in this study was a correlation matrix using "Pearson" coefficients. Data analysis examined possible linear connections (correlations) between the mean results for Holocaust and Post-Holocaust dilemmas categories and lessons categories. Correlations were examined between the two different moral solutions for each moral attitude category and two moral lessons categories: The Humanist-liberal moral lessons category and the Nationalist-utilitarian moral lessons category.

6. Findings

Table 1. Correlations between Holocaust moral attitudes and moral lessons

| Dilemmas and Lessons | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Category 1a- "The collaboration dilemmas", survival moral solution | | | | | | | | |
| 2 Category 1b- " The collaboration dilemmas", deontological moral solution | | | | | | | | |
| 3 Category 2a- "The acute dilemmas", survival moral solution | | | | | | | | |
| 4 Category 2b- "The acute dilemmas", deontological moral solution | | | | | | | | |
| 5 Category 3a- "The parental dilemmas", survival moral solution | | | | | | | | |
| 6 Category 3b- "The parental dilemmas", deontological moral solution | | | | | | | | |
| 7 Nationalist- Utilitarian Lessons | | | | | | | | |
| 8 Humanist-Liberal Lessons | | | | | | | | |

**p<0.01 *p<0.05

As shown in Table 01, the results indicate that:

In category 1a: "The collaboration dilemmas": a medium positive significant linear correlation was found between the results for the survival moral solution and the results for the Humanist-Liberal moral lessons ($r=0.33$, $p<0.01$). This means that if the extent of agreement with the survival moral solution is higher, then the extent of agreement with Humanist-Liberal moral lessons will also be higher.

In Category 2a: "The acute dilemmas": a medium positive significant linear correlation was found between the results for the survival moral solution and results for the Humanist-Liberal moral lessons ($R=0.35$, $p<0.01$). This means that if the extent of agreement with the survival moral solution is higher, then the extent of agreement with Humanist-Liberal moral lessons will also be higher.

In Category 3a: "The parental dilemmas": a medium positive significant linear correlation was found between the results for the survival moral solution and the results for the Humanist-Liberal moral lessons ($R=0.28$, $p<0.01$). This means that if the extent of agreement with the survival moral solution is higher, the extent of agreement with Humanist-Liberal moral lessons will also be higher.

No significant linear correlations were found between Holocaust moral dilemmas categories and Nationalist-utilitarian lessons, for either one of the moral solutions.

Table 2. Correlations between Post- Holocaust moral attitudes and moral lessons

| Dilemmas and Lessons | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Category 4a: The perception of Jewish behavior towards the Nazis, judgmental moral solution | | | | | | | |
| 2 Category 4b: The perception of Jewish behavior towards the Nazis, acceptance moral solution | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 3 | Category 5a: Consideration of revenge and compromise, affective-intuitive moral solution | .14 | -0.13 | | | | |
| 4 | Category 5b: Consideration of revenge and compromise, rational-utilitarian moral solution | .01 | .33** | -.31* | | | |
| 5 | Category 6a: The perception of the Holocaust as a historical event, universal moral solution | .03 | .05 | -.03 | .34** | | |
| 6 | Category 6b: The perception of the Holocaust as a historical event, Jewish-particular moral solution | .162 | 1.00 | .37** | -.06 | -.80** | |
| 7 | Humanist-Liberal Lessons | -.16 | .35** | -.16 | .21* | .26* | -.02 |
| 8 | Nationalist- Utilitarian Lessons | .22* | -.16 | .32** | -.06 | -.07 | -.34** |

**p<0.01 *p<0.05

As shown in Table 02, the results indicate that:

In Category 4a: "The perception of Jewish behavior towards the Nazis": a medium positive significant linear connection (correlation) was found between the results for the judgmental moral solution and the results for the nationalist-utilitarian moral lessons ($r=0.22$, $p<0.05$). This means that if the extent of agreement with the judgmental moral solution is higher, then the extent of agreement with nationalist-utilitarian moral lessons will also be higher.

In Category 4b: "The perception of Jewish behavior towards the Nazis": a medium positive significant linear correlation was found between the results for the acceptance moral solution, and the results for the humanist-liberal moral lessons ($R=0.35$, $p<0.01$). This means that if the extent of agreement with the acceptance moral solution is higher, then the extent of agreement with humanist-liberal moral lessons will also be higher.

In category 5a: "Consideration of revenge and compromise": a medium positive significant linear correlation was found between the results for the affective-intuitive moral solution and the results for the nationalist-utilitarian moral lessons ($R=0.32$, $p<0.01$). This means that if the extent of agreement with the affective-intuitive moral solution is higher, then the extent of agreement with nationalist-utilitarian moral lessons will also be higher.

In category 5b: "Consideration of revenge and compromise": a positive medium significant linear correlation was found between the results for the rational-utilitarian moral solution and the results for the humanist-liberal moral lessons ($R=0.21$, $p<0.05$). This means that if the extent of agreement with the rational-utilitarian moral solution is higher, then the extent of agreement with humanist-liberal moral lessons will also be higher.

In category 6a: "The Perception of the Holocaust as a historical event": a positive medium significant linear correlation was found between the results for the universal moral solution and the results for the humanist-liberal moral lessons ($R=0.26$, $p<0.05$). This means that if the extent of agreement with the universal moral attitude is higher, then the extent of agreement with humanist-liberal moral lessons will also be higher.

7. Conclusion

The results revealed that a significant linear connection (correlation) was found between participants' moral attitudes regarding all seven Holocaust and post-Holocaust dilemma categories and at least one of the two lessons categories as discussed below.

Previous research has already recognized possible connections between Holocaust learning and different messages, which may have an impact on learners' deduction of conclusions and the lessons that they learn. Gurani (2015) noted that Holocaust learning and especially the journeys to Poland deliver different messages, which are new for the participants, mainly from two different angles: 1. the universal message of the Holocaust, which sees the Holocaust as parallel to other cases of genocide. 2. The Jewish-national message of the Holocaust that sees the Holocaust as a unique event for the Jewish people and refuses to assign the term "Holocaust" to other cases of genocide. If we replace the term "message" with the term "conclusion" or "lesson" we can surmise two possible different outcomes of Holocaust learning: one negative and the other positive. An example of a negative outcome can be found in the findings presented by Davidovich and Hazan (2011), which indicated that the journey to Poland increased negative consideration of the Poles among most of the students, who saw Poles as anti-Semites and collaborators with the Nazis during the persecution of the Jews in the Holocaust. Another example of negative outcome is from the research conducted by Kimchi (2011), who found that the journey to Poland led participants to strengthen their Israeli identity and have greater identification with Zionist values but also radicalized their conceptualization of Arabs as a group endangering the security of Israel. On the other hand, a more positive outcome was found by Ganor (2006) who investigated the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) journeys to Poland and found that they influenced the soldier's code of ethics by reinforcing humanist values. Thus too, Davidovich et al. (2011), who also investigated the IDF journeys to Poland found that universal values were strengthened among the soldiers who participated in the journeys.

It appears that drawing conclusions or lessons from Holocaust learning depends to a large extent on the different emphases of the learning program. In this research, participants were exposed to different messages and emphases according to the goals of the Holocaust learning program and according to specific emphases given by teachers and the professional tour guides during the journey. In addition, they were exposed to Holocaust moral dilemmas and acquired different moral lessons from the Holocaust as a result of their participation in this course. When we look at the research results regarding the correlations between Holocaust era moral attitudes and the perceived moral lessons, we find that agreement with the survival moral solution led in all the three categories to agreement with Humanist-Liberal moral lessons.

The conclusion is that Holocaust learning including exposure to Holocaust moral dilemmas reinforced moral thinking and understanding of human difficulties and needs. When we look at the correlations between Post-Holocaust era moral attitudes and the perceived moral lessons the conclusion is that: insofar as the moral attitude is more critical, then the lessons learned will be stronger. Insofar as the moral attitude is more compassionate, then the lessons learned will be less radical. Insofar as the moral attitude is more open-minded and flexible, then the lessons learned give more consideration to other people's needs and universal values.

Following these conclusions, we can surmise that learning, understanding and evaluation of Holocaust moral dilemmas increases the probability that students will learn universal lessons, such as the need for understanding, closeness and friendship with other peoples. This insight can strengthen support for the approach that universal lessons can be learned from the Holocaust.

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