

Narrative Subversion of Acknowledgment and Denial within ex-Nazi Memoirs

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“The disbelief of the victim, suffering from lack of information and isolation, is different from the disbelief of the perpetrators and bystanders, whose callous disregard about the fate of the Jews is striking.” Marion Kaplan

Abstract

My research is a critical examination of 2 former Nazi memoirs and their reflections and perceptions of that time. My aim is to attempt to understand how these individuals perceive their role and the role of their group within this history. I will argue that these memoirs showcase their reflections on the often contradictory and transformative process of both acknowledgment and denial of their complicity within the Nazi regime in WWII and their struggle to reconstruct their role within a group that they acknowledge committed undeniable atrocities, but one that they also have formed positive associations with. I would like to examine how this process shapes the construction of their post-war identity and how that is directly related to the acceptance or redemption of their group. I will attempt to demonstrate how these individuals have divided their reality into completely separate segments: one, the story of their wartime experience where they fought (what they perceived as) bravely and honorably alongside their comrades, two, the story of their experiences on the Homefront, and three, the story of Nazi victims whom both men have completely distanced themselves from. This dissociation and compartmentalization of simultaneously occurring events within their own experience allows them to both accept and deny their complicity, to admit awareness of what was happening, while at the same time insisting on their ignorance of what was happening, and to both recall and erase the experiences of victims who were living beside them. This research will try to understand how these two individuals could both acknowledge and condemn the atrocities committed by the Nazis during WWII while also engaging in various forms of denial about the level of complicity of both themselves and their group. This research does not provide direct evidence about Nazism itself. Rather, these books provide indirect evidence; that is, the "evidence" is filtered through a specific postwar consciousness. In this sense, they provide direct evidence for how these perpetrators have reconstructed their experiences. I hope to use the insights of Göçek 2014, Charny 2001, 2006, 1994, Zerubavel 1996, 2006, Lipstadt 2020, Bandura 1996, 1999, Billig 1995, Mosse 1995, Adorno 1969, and Arendt 1963, 1994, to explore transformative denial, confession, and what these memoirs tell us about complicity. Using these

insights, I hope to expand upon social scientific investigations of perpetrator testimonies and rationalization.

It is important to note that these memoirs were written in English indicating that they were likely intended for non-German audiences placing these two individuals in a very small subset of perpetrators who 1) chose to write about their experiences, 2) attempted to acknowledge and work through their complicity, and 3) specifically chose to share this with people outside of their group. It is important to consider perpetrator memoirs as a part of the data to understand how these atrocities occur and explore what they have to say and how they can contribute to this field of inquiry. Perpetrator memoirs are a complex composition of confession and denial and as such, they illuminate the process by which people become Nazis in the first place. Because these are being written and published after several decades of reflections, these insights are especially important to understand how even these people who are committed to acknowledging are exhibiting patterns of denial, such as self-justification and confession.

Part I: Introduction and Background

When I first began this paper, I wanted to better understand what factors contributed to collective public indifference to government-sanctioned dehumanization, abuse, and genocide of victims during the Holocaust? How could ordinary Germans remain indifferent towards atrocities being committed by their government, police, and soldiers, and how do they deal with navigating that complicity? First, I looked at the history leading up to the Holocaust and considered that each period would offer a vastly different perception of how Nazism was understood at that point. I began to see a pattern emerging of factors that contributed to the rise of Nationalism, violence, and ultimately mass genocide. Factors I saw emerging that I wanted to delve deeper into were as follows:

Nationalism

Intergroup Relations

Dehumanization

Perception and Distorted Realities

Propaganda and Publicly Manufactured Emotions (Göçek)

Justifications and Reverse Victimization

In my previous research (Pattipati 2019) I focused mainly on these factors and used interviews as my source information, however, I was not satisfied with the depth of the interviews, especially in light of social performance and social pressure, and wanted something that I could examine in greater detail that would shed some light into the way that perpetrators viewed themselves and their groups' role during this time. I specifically chose Alfons Heck and Bernhard Teicher as I hoped they represented “ordinary”, everyday Germans of that time. I realize now that they were rather atypical Germans, as they not only were willing to critically

examine and acknowledge their role but were willing to share their reflections publicly. I will argue that despite their willingness to engage in this way, they continue to subvert their acknowledgment perhaps subconsciously by utilizing common forms of “innocent denial” (Charny 2001).

Introduction

Durkheim suggests that as society moves towards modernity and individualism, individuals struggle to maintain social ties inherent in a group structure that help an individual to understand their self-identity, purpose, and place within society. While Durkheim suggested that the death of the g-ds has left an unfilled void, I would argue that increasingly various forms of nationalism have stepped in to fill this void. Like religion, nationalism offers identity, purpose, and, through group membership a sense of belonging and unity. In this way individuals within these groups may attach the very essence of who they are to the structure and success of this group, therefore equating their entire understanding of themselves with their understanding of their nation. Nationalism especially when combined with Racism (Mosse 1995), by its nature, sets one group against another. In WWII Germany, this took on the form of the “volk”.

The “volk” was the name for the German in-group which was largely defined by those it excluded and were called Aryan. In order to create a new national identity or volk, Nazis needed to establish and define which individuals were citizens and patriots, and who were foreigners and “enemies. To accomplish this, Nazis created the position of the Propaganda Minister, held by Joseph Goebbels. His primary job was to convince the German population that the Germans were under threat from external and internal enemies and needed to defend themselves against both without mercy. He built upon historic tropes and conspiracies about Jews and their infidelity to any Nation. He insisted that Germans must show no mercy because the enemies of the state aimed to destroy not just Nazism, but Germany as a nation, and all Germans as individuals. As Heck mentions, he created an image of Germany as “*a nation that was both infinitely dear and threatened by unrelenting enemies*”. (Heck 1985, page 8). This may appear to be overzealous, but as can be seen with the high number of suicides at the end of the war, it seems to have resonated with many Germans. This also was something that both Heck and Teicher referred to, both often hearing from comrades that they should “enjoy the war now because the peace will be terrible”, and both indicating a common fear that, at best, all Germans would be enslaved for life if defeated.

To be Aryan one must not have more than one Jewish Grandparent. There were other groups that were excluded and victimized in the Holocaust, however, as the two authors largely define their Germanness against Jewishness, that is what we will focus on. Germans outside of the SS (who had more exclusive requirements) were largely defined against the legal determination of “Jewish blood”. This legal definition of who was Aryan and who was not, especially as one is defined against the other, created clear and structured in-group and out-group identifiers. This method of inclusion juxtaposed with exclusion helps to strengthen the emotional cohesion of the group. As individuals in the out-group are legally and violently

excised from the main body, it indirectly increases coherence within the dominant majority. (Göçek, 2014)

“In-group” is the group that an individual identifies with, and the “out-group” is anyone that that individual perceives as not being in their group. Identifiers can include factors like religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, sexual orientation, or political affiliation. The in-group need not be the dominant group. For the purposes of this paper, the in-group will refer to the Aryan group perspective, and the out-group will refer to non-Aryans. In-group members in this paper, in addition to being non-Jewish, are ethnically German, Christian or Catholic, and were not identified as Communist or LGBT+.

It is worth noting that neither Teicher nor Heck used the term “Aryan” when describing either themselves or their compatriots. Rather they just referred to them as “Germans”. This is important because by referring only to “Aryan” Germans as German, Jews and others in the out-group are cast as foreign, or non-German, which is something that the Nazis tried very hard to incept into the minds of all Germans. They also always referred to Jewishness alongside Bolshevism.

Those who were accepted into the volk were privileged with a huge economic turnaround, social benefits, and engagements, national military success, and honors. The Nazis, in addition to military honors and employment, focused a lot on welfare programs for Aryan Germans. Projects like the Winter Program raised money for lower-class citizens struggling to get by, and most, if not all, Germans were expected to donate. There was also a program where all German youth would spend a year improving the community, working on roads and structures, helping on farms, or helping mothers to care for their home and their children. The government was also able to reestablish a viable currency and bring unemployment rates down. This, on the heels of high rates of poverty, starvation, unemployment, and the shame and perceived betrayal of the Versailles Treaty, combined to make the Nazi government very popular even for those who were much less interested in the racial politics taking place. *“Such work-obsessed people as the Germans, traditionally obedient to king or Kaiser, could forgive a leader nearly anything, including a little "harassment" of a disliked minority if he provided economic stability. That, in essence, was Hitler's strong appeal.”* (Heck 1985). These programs and successes increased membership, participation, and faith in this new system. Positive experiences and benefits strengthened group cohesion and camaraderie as well as reciprocity and obligation to serve the group. As with any society, group membership was built upon an unspoken social contract that outlined certain expectations and reciprocal obligations to the group. The more the group supported the people, the more the people supported the group.

One thing many Aryan Germans speak of is the “good years”, the early years of the war where Germany had restored its power, success, and honor in the eyes of the world and in the eyes of the volk. During this time group cohesion was high and young Germans especially enjoyed gathering for outings and rallies to demonstrate group strength and unity. They were extremely proud of the great things they were doing for Germany and for their volk. As contradictory knowledge began to infiltrate this picture, many pushed back against it with denial

and trivialization (Charny 2001, Kaplan 1996) because any acknowledgment could be a direct threat to the legitimacy and stability of their *volk*. I will attempt to demonstrate that as Germans had attached themselves and their identity to the success of this group, it became more difficult for them to process information that challenged any notion of the group as positive. As the end of the war progressed from bad to worse for the Germans, they were faced with more and more evidence of the crimes committed by their group. As we will see in the case of Alfons Hack and Bernhard Teicher, their denial transformed as they were met with more and more indisputable information. In this paper, I will trace this process of denial in a critical analysis of two case studies of former Hitler Youth members who grapple with their role and complicity in the crimes of their nation.

Part II: Methods

Initial Concepts as defined below:

Displays of Group Unity and Power - Public displays or shows designed to create a particular perception of cohesion, strength, and number within a group, as in an organized public rally. In order to demonstrate their power, Nationalistic groups have displays of power in carefully controlled rallies. By controlling visual and verbal information, the reality that has been created is displayed for the in-group. At the Nuremberg Rally, hundreds of thousands of Nazis attended, solidifying their perceived reality and displaying a seemingly endless amount of people who shared their vision and their beliefs. This experience strengthened group identity and provided a positive group association. It was a performance for the validation of the audience as well as a display to intimidate opponents.

Nationalism - I would like to present a reading of how nationalism was used in Nazi Germany to control or manipulate group identity in order to empower one group, the in-group or dominant group (Aryans), at the expense of another group, the out-group or marginalized group (non-Aryans and Communists). I would argue that this kind of nationalism, although inherently difficult to define, offers a sense of identity, consciousness or perception of the individual within society, and their purpose or values. Here, George Orwell's definition of nationalism proves informative, situating the totalizing impulse and veneration of nationalism. Orwell identifies nationalism as the propensity of "identifying oneself with a single nation or (in-group), placing it beyond good and evil and recognizing no other duty than that of advancing its interests."

Banal Nationalism: A muted form of nationalism and attachment to the group, driven by positive associations rather than fanaticism (Billig 1995)

Narrative Subversion: Simultaneous acknowledgment and denial of various types of knowledge that challenge or affirm beliefs within a created or accepted reality, which is mentally compartmentalized and separated to allow this distorted reality to remain intact

Positive Group Associations: Experiences that were perceived as positive and led to group bonding or adhesion, positive experiences that reaffirmed the individuals place in the group, privileges and benefits afforded to group members (including things like economic success, social welfare benefits, and increased employment)

Trivialization: Minimizing facts and events, incongruent comparisons (Hovannisian), diffusion of responsibility (Bandura)

Gaslighting and Reverse Victimization: Perceiving the perpetrator as the victim, and/or casting the victim as the perpetrator

Innocent Denial and Moral Innocence: acknowledging facts but continuing to disengage with complicity through trivialization or erasure

Willed Ignorance - “Willed ignorance”, a term by Primo Levi, is when a group of people willingly ignore truths that do not fit within their created reality.

Methods:

Mediators - (+) Association with Dominant Identity, Effort to Maintain Dominant Status, Seeing only in-group needs /Reality Tunnels, Blindness, Trivialization

Moderators - Loss, Nationalism, Out-group Betrayal, Zero-Sum Game, Isolation, Propaganda, Displays of Power

Confounders:

Blind Obedience - A common argument is that Germans, especially soldiers, blindly followed orders without question. In actuality, some soldiers did refuse their orders, especially orders to execute civilians. Many soldiers could be excused from these executions without any punishment or repercussions. Those who were afraid to speak up found other ways to refuse like not firing, or purposefully missing. (Browning 1992).

Ignorance - Another claim is that Germans simply did not know what was happening. Nazis hid the abuse too well. In fact, there are many reports, letters, and interviews from that time that directly contradict this. Within these memoirs, both authors indicate a certain level of awareness which will be addressed throughout this paper.

Sadism - Though the indifference of the Germans is terribly unsettling, I do not believe that this points to inherent sadism. Neither author spoke of any kind of personal enjoyment in any act of killing and were appalled and in fact at first disbelieving of the genocidal acts committed by their peers and their government. Christopher Browning’s book, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland, a study of German Ordnungspolizei (Order Police) Reserve Unit 101*, further addresses this specific confounder.

Operationalization:

For this project, I used NVivo software to code each transcript multiple times as per Grounded Theory. I first used open coding to find recurring themes, and then re-coded these transcripts to look for Group Membership, Power, Trivialization, Accountability, Awareness, and confounders. I also began to quantify patterns in each case including references to Bolshevism + Jewish, Aryan Germans as Victims, Power, and Spoken Opposition against the Government. I used the Thematic Mapping Approach per Braun and Clarke’s Model (2006) to

organize the data collected from coding the interviews. Consent was not applicable as I was not interacting with any living persons.

To gather data from my sources, I coded in NVivo to find certain concepts. After coding, I selected the most representative quotes and examples and listed them under first-order codes, so that I could better analyze the data. These were organized into multiple levels of codes which are listed in the table below.

When considering confounders, I looked for both examples that affirmed and negated these concepts. For instance, when looking for blind obedience, I also looked for refusal to obey orders; when considering ignorance, I also looked for examples of awareness. For sadism, I looked for pleasure derived from thoughts, intentions, or instances of abuse and murder. For the other codes, I looked for quotes and examples that demonstrated these concepts and kept track of the number of references to each. After coding each interview, I wrote a short summary.

For my sample, I chose a critical micro-level approach. Previous research has largely focused on macro-level approaches which examine the German Aryan perspective from the top down. However, in order to gain deeper insight into the transformative process of denial on an individual level, it is necessary to examine this phenomenon from the bottom up. The best way to do this is through memoirs. Within interviews participants often give very polished answers in an attempt to reconstruct their post-war identity in a way that conforms to social expectations of acknowledgment and remorse. In memoirs, authors also try to portray themselves in a similar light, however, as they tend to be much longer and can be found in between the lines. Memoirs also provide insight into the mindset and thought process of the perpetrator as they try to navigate their reconstructed self-image.

Part III: Data

Literary Background

For this project, I chose to examine memoirs by two former Hitler Youth soldiers. The first was by Alfons Heck who wrote a two-part memoir: “A Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika” in 1985 and “The Burden of Hitler’s Legacy” both published by Renaissance Publishing. The second is Bernhard Teicher who wrote: “For All it was Worth: A Memoir of Hitler's Germany - Before, During and After WWII” in 2017 published by his son as an independent publisher HB Teicher, who also published Bernhard Teichers’ books on Earth Science. Both were written in English rather than German which indicates that it was intended for English-speaking audiences. During the time it was written both authors had emigrated from Germany and were living in other countries. Both individuals were former Nazis, writing in English, many years after their experience.

Following the war, Alfons Heck was increasingly engaged in the process of understanding individual, “every day” Germans’ complicity and responsibility in the genocide and abuses that took place during the Holocaust. This began when he traveled to the Nuremberg Trials, after which he read many books and accounts written by both survivors and perpetrators. After an accident that left him unable to work, he began to pursue Journalism. By the 1980s

Alfons Heck had become increasingly frustrated with the perceptions about (Aryan) Germans, in particular, German Hitler Youth members whom he viewed as unacknowledged victims. His wife encouraged him to write about his experiences and explain the circumstances as he understood them. He submitted some articles to the LA Times and the Sun which were reportedly well-received by audiences who were interested in hearing the perspective of a former Nazi, especially one who was willing to acknowledge the genocide that took place. He also states that readers informed him that they were eager to hear “the other side of the story”. “Not infrequently it was put more bluntly: *“All you ever hear is the Holocaust as if there had been only Jewish victims in WWII. Finally, there is another view”*. (Heck 1988, page 237).

His first two articles were written in 1980 following the Schmidt election and commenting on his disgust with both European and American Neo-Nazis and how they differed from German Nazi Youth who did not have the “luxury of knowledge or freedom of choice”. He discusses the rise in extremist attacks by “radical Neo-Nazis” prevalent throughout America and Europe and the need to take these attacks seriously. In 1982 he was contacted by a Jewish Survivor Helen Waterford and invited to join her in a lecture tour across the country speaking about their different experiences during WWII. Encouraged by the interest in his experience and spurred on by several events including the Bitburg Controversy and the Waldheim Controversy he began to write on behalf of himself and his comrades who had been killed in action. During this same time across Germany, many Germans began to push back against international and national focus on “German guilt” while simultaneously criticizing the lack of German pride and “positive history” (Sturmer 1986). Politicians on both sides were arguing over the implementation of the Historikerstreit, and how to teach about this period in German schools. Heck felt that it was important to share his own experiences in order to 1) acknowledge the Holocaust and rebuke Holocaust deniers, 2) reflect on German complicity in the Holocaust, and 3) to share his perspective that Hitler Youth members were equal victims to any other Holocaust victims and deserve to be recognized as such. He details his opinions about this many times throughout both books, but the most striking assertion for me was when he describes his experience at a commemoration service for Holocaust victims: *“It was at a Commemoration Service of Holocaust victims that I faced my moment of Truth: when I sat amid 3 rabbis on the dais before 500 people, many of them survivors and listened to the words of the Kaddish... I looked beyond the six lighted candles, each symbolizing one million victims... I was aware that this was a watershed, my moment of truth. I didn't dare tell this audience that I felt we had also been victimized, and that there should be a seventh candle for the adolescents who had gone to their deaths believing in Hitler.”* (Heck 1988, page 241). This assertion seems to be the primary motivation for his writing this memoir as he says that as Helen Waterford (Jewish Survivor) speaks for her deceased, and he speaks for his.

Now retired, Bernhard Teicher decided to write his memoir for both his family and to share his reflections on the war. After leaving Germany in the 60s, he moved to South Africa and his experience living through both apartheid and its abolishment encouraged him to share first his experience in Nazi Germany, and more recently his experience in South Africa as he

found the two to be very comparable. Although he does not mention it specifically as a reason for writing this book, he points to the rise in Nationalism and xenophobia around the world, and increased attacks on immigrants and other marginalized groups as parallels to Nazi Germany, which I suspect furthered his decision to write both memoirs.

Heck is very clear in explaining his many reasons for sharing his story, including the uptick of nationalism and extreme violence by Neo-Nazis, his need to share the perspective of his deceased comrades, and to share how easily one can be drawn into violence and genocide. Teicher, on the other hand, is very vague about his reasoning and does not offer much insight into his reasoning for doing this beyond what was stated above. Despite being very different in their approaches and reflections, both authors exhibit various patterns of denial. It is striking to see as each are actively seeking to understand and acknowledge the role they played in the Holocaust and the role their group played, each fervently rebuking Holocaust deniers and condemning Nazi leaders. Despite this, they engage in forms of “innocent denial” (Charny 2001) as they attempt to work through their own complicity through confession, but for whom are they confessing? And for whom does this confession truly serve?

Historical Background

Facing defeat in WWI, Germans conceded and signed the Versailles Treaty, leaving many Germans feeling humiliated and betrayed. Notions of German strength and power were not only directly challenged but sanctioned by other nations. Since they were unable to directly attack or even publicly blame the opposing nations, they instead shifted their blame and vengeance towards Jews and Communists. Propaganda was fed to the public that these groups were conspiring for world domination and that any success they managed would result in the direct loss of power from the ‘Aryan’ Germans. This is known as a zero-sum game, where one group's success is dependent on the other group's failure, and vice versa. Aryans were defined against non-Aryans in the Nuremberg Laws which Hitler introduced in 1935. Aryans were defined as non-Jewish with no Jewish ties through marriage or ancestry. For SS soldiers they had to prove their ‘pure’ ancestry going back at least 4 generations. Everyone else was defined against the legal determination of “Jewish blood”.

“An individual of mixed Jewish blood is one who is descended from one or two grandparents who, racially, were full Jews... Full-blooded Jewish grandparents are those who belonged to the Jewish religious community.

A Jew is anyone who is descended from at least three grandparents who are racially full Jews.

One grandparent shall be considered as full-blooded if he or she belonged to the Jewish religious community.

A Jew is also one who is descended from two full Jewish parents, if (a) he belonged to the Jewish religious community at the time this law was issued, or joined the

community later, (b) he was married to a Jewish person, at the time the law was issued, or married one subsequently, (c) he is the offspring of a marriage with a Jew, in the sense of Section I, which was contracted after the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor became effective, (d) he is the offspring of an extramarital relationship with a Jew, according to Section I, and will be born out of wedlock after July 31, 1936.”

Nationalism provides a clear identity for its defined in-group set against the out-group identity, leading to an understanding of who you are, how you fit into that group, how you fit into society, what your values are, offers a sense of purpose, and clarifies that anyone outside of this group is in opposition to these things. Nationalism creates a binary where one group is defined against the other. It promotes an “us vs them” rhetoric, which leads to the dehumanization of the opposing group. The Nuremberg Laws provided clear definitions of who fit into their in-group and who belonged to the out-group. Defining the out-group exerts a certain amount of power and control over them, asserting social dominance by controlling the terms and perceptions of each group. By pitting the two groups against one another, they assert that the success of one is dependent on the failure of another as their interests are in direct opposition to one another. Because the in-group is linked with national identity and national purpose, and the out-group’s interests oppose them, the out-group cannot truly be allegiant to the nation.

After WWI, Germany experienced many terrible losses. Germans suffered economically and emotionally, and felt the loss of status, privilege, and power. In addition to the many soldiers and civilians who had died during the war, Germany suffered a significant military defeat. They were forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles, which included massive reparations on an already war-damaged, impoverished, and starving community. The Treaty also included the “War Guilt Clause” which furthered feelings of loss and humiliation, forcing Germans to accept full responsibility and guilt for all the lives lost in the war. Following this was the Stock Market crash, which led to the Great Depression. Germans suffered humiliation, military defeat, loss of lives, loss of status, loss of respect, financial loss, and starvation. The people demanded the government do something and condemned them as weak and corrupt. The country erupted into intense political division with endless riots and scores of individuals from both sides fighting in the street. When Hitler came to power, he promised stability, success, and economic growth. He completely turned around unemployment, “*by the end of 1938 the government had reduced the number of unemployed from 6 million to 455,000*” (Teicher 2017), restored order in the streets, provided social welfare and benefits, and reestablished Germany as a dominant world power. This was a dramatic change for many Germans who had suffered from unemployment, starvation, and extreme poverty.

People who feel vulnerable or powerless will likely fight to regain that power (Gustav LeBon 1897). Following wartime losses, their primary concern is how to save themselves and

their family in what they perceive to be a competitive, 'dog-eat-dog' environment. Combining fear, financial strife, nationalism, and identity politics with racism and religious bigotry skew perception of enemies and victims, justice and injustice. It asserts that policies that target the out-group are preventative or defensive and clears a path for the hatred and 'vengeance' that is spreading throughout the country. By preying on peoples' implicit fear of the out-group, dehumanizing them, criminalizing them, and repeatedly pointing to the in-group's loss of status, wealth, financial and physical security through reverse victimization, he launches a psychological attack on both his supporters and his victims.

This promise of a return to greatness was part of Hitler's nationalistic platform. Nationalism in Nazi Germany focused not only on restoring the strength and power of the Aryan Germans, but also ensuring economic stability and even abundance. As much as it focused on fear propaganda and criminalization of the out-group, it focused on the success and positive experiences afforded to the in-group. It provided purpose for individuals and helped to guide them. It strengthened their in-group identity and outlined the group's values as well as individual roles. Military training and indoctrination from the age of 6 helped further indifference and apathy towards the enemy, focus on the goals and purposes, and strengthened group identity through shared experiences and deep bonds. Every individual in Germany was affected by this nationalistic program either benefiting as an in-group member or being persecuted and attacked as an out-group member.

Often, Nationalism is used to empower the in-group at the expense of the out-group. In order for Nationalism to be practiced the in-group, or group that will be portrayed as both superior and in need of defense, needs to be identified and defined. Once identified the two groups (in-group and out-group) can then be separated and the process of constructing ideas about each group's values and entitlements can be outlined. In addition to the power that comes with social dominance and privilege, German Nazis sought revenge against the now-defined out-group, whom they felt (and had been told) had betrayed them. Unable to take revenge against the Allies, Nazis redirected the anger and resentment of the German people towards the appointed out-group, mainly the Jewish people, the Communists, and any other political adversaries. The conflation of Jews and Communism (or Bolshevism as it is regularly referred to by Heck and Teicher) as a singular concept and group is something that stands out in the testimony of many former Nazis.

The most historically well-received accusation against the Jewish people is that they cannot truly belong to any nation because their allegiance is to their own people, that is the Jewish community, and to Israel, referring not only to the State of Israel, which did not yet exist during this time, but to the idea of Israel. Jewish people were said not to be able to assimilate to other countries because they have their own language and their own customs that they are unwilling to 'let go of'. This idea of not being allegiant is expounded upon with the accusations of ties to Communism and enemy powers. One of the most damaging documents during that time, which was widely distributed, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, furthered this conspiracy. This completely debunked book associated the Jewish people with both communism

and the Allies. This false association was taught in schools and Hitler Youth programs. This led to many “justifications” for the imprisonment and deportation of Jews, rationalizations that helped people to ignore and rationalize out-group abuse. Other trivializations included the earlier statements about the conditions of the Concentration Camps, and statements such as “these things happen in war”, or “we were starving too”.

Despite massive propaganda criminalizing the religion and “inherent” flaws ascribed to the Jewish community, the focus of most Germans' anger against the Jews seems to be based less on their “Jewishness” or “racial” differences, and more on their assumed association with Communism and the global enemy forces. Interestingly, neither of the authors focused on antisemitism as a key focus during that time, rather they focused on the benefits they received through group membership and association, and largely removed themselves completely from the “situation with the Jews”. Any reference to the genocide of the Jews and other Nazi victims was largely viewed as an unfortunate consequence of war. For instance, Heck states multiple times that “*Despite its enormity, the **death** of six million Jews was an event on the **periphery** of a raging inferno that caused at least 50 million **casualties**.*” (Heck 1988, page 237). I think that the wording here provides great insight into innocent denial within the language we choose. Notice, Heck says “death” rather than “murder” and trivializes these deaths by grouping the genocide of the Jewish people with the deaths of soldiers and civilians as a result of the wars being waged against the Allies. He also demonstrates how what was happening to the Jews was “on the periphery” of what Germans were focused on and engaged with.

Part IV: Results

Tallies	Heck	Teicher
Spoke out / Reality vs Law	46	12
Obedience	13	1
Display Unity	46	8
Germans as Victims	111	10
Power	50	2
References to Jews	/	11

Data Analysis

Individual Backgrounds

Alfons Heck:

Alfons Heck recalls that he was 6 years old when he first saw German soldiers march through his village to take back the Rhineland. He was hoisted high onto his uncle's shoulders and from there witnessed the strength and solidarity being displayed by the soldiers parading through the town. He was very moved by the passion and emotions of the crowd. By age 10 he was allowed to join the Jungvolk and was very excited to finally be a part of this group. By age 14 he had been accepted for training as a pilot in the Luftwaffe, however, he was pulled back to serve and later took command of his regions' Hitler Youth company. At the age of 16, he was promoted to Unterbannfuhrer and commanded more than 2800 individuals. He was 17 when Germany surrendered and had just been promoted to Bannfuhrer.

One of two twin boys, Heck was raised on a farm by his grandmother, after she decided to take him from his mother. Despite protests from his mother, she felt that raising two boys would be too much and so she decided he would stay with her on the farm while his brother would continue to live in the city with their mother and father. He attended Gymnasium and was on the path (at least according to his Grandmother) to Priesthood. His first encounters with Nazism were quite powerful. As a young boy, he was invited to participate in the Nuremberg Parade and immediately felt encompassed by the power and solidarity of the soldiers and party members. He was further moved by the charisma of Hitler both in the way he connected to and honored Hitler Youth members, by maintaining eye contact with the younger members, and avidly praising them, and by his emotional speeches that played with both fear and power. Not typically an emotional person, he was overwhelmed by the display and intimacy of this rally. In order to demonstrate their power, Nationalistic groups have displays of power in carefully controlled rallies. By controlling visual and verbal information, the reality that has been created is displayed for the in-group. At the Nuremberg Rally, hundreds of thousands of Nazis attended, solidifying their perceived reality and displaying a seemingly endless amount of people who shared their vision and their beliefs. This experience strengthened group identity and provided a positive group association. It was a performance for the validation of the audience as well as a display to intimidate opponents. Alfons Heck enjoyed the camaraderie and brotherhood within Hitler Youth, but even more than that he was enamored with the rapid promotions and positions of power afforded to him at such a young age. Reflecting back, he was very candid about this and referenced his own power and his pleasure with this more than 50 times. *"I had enjoyed much of my Hitler Youth career, including the power I had been given."* (Heck 1988, page 187). *"Money, however, was not of the slightest concern to me. Power was infinitely more seductive."* (Heck 1985, page 95).

More than any other theme, Heck wanted to be clear that he perceived the German Youth who participated as soldiers either within Hitler Youth, or as adults in the military following their time in Hitler Youth, were also victims. This is something he mentions at least 111 times in his memoirs. There is sufficient evidence to back his claims that Hitler Youth were

groomed and manipulated into serving as child soldiers (Koch 2000, Bartoletti 2005). Heck describes how in his school he was taught about “Race Science” and was reprimanded in first grade for having a Jewish friend. *“During recess when I was playing with Heinz as we had done in Kindergarten, Herr Becker pulled me to one side and hissed, ‘Good German boys don’t play with Jews.’ I was bewildered. Was Heinz no longer a German?”* (Heck 1988 page 53). Through the schools, Hitler Youth instruction, and government control of information (including a ban on international radios and news), the government was able to carefully construct social reality and public memory for many Germans. Texts and media were censored and even crafted to further Nazi ideology. The government and its propaganda minister launched a campaign based on tropes, misinformation, blatant lies, ½ truths, and omissions designed specifically to target people’s emotions and create an environment of socialized fear and anxiety insisting that Germans were constantly under threat from both external and internal enemies. In addition to this, they exploited wartime conditions to normalize collective violence against any out-group members and portray it as preemptive self-defense measures against those who would supposedly pose a threat to the unity and success of the nation. In addition to attacks led by soldiers and police, citizens were encouraged to take “justice” into their own hands, and of course, no attacks, including torture and murder, against an out-group member would be held to account as the out-group no longer had any legal rights. This was the climate in which German Youth were socialized.

Heck pushes the assertion that German youth were victims even further though by insisting many times that they were just as much victims as the Jews. Within these assertions, he often encompasses not just Hitler Youth, but all Germans. *“(Hitler’s) seduction of German Youth had, to my way of thinking, killed many more people than had the deportation of 60,000 Jews.” “In a country where nearly all became victims, few claimed special attention. Within the neighboring counties of Wittlich and Bernkastel, only 17 people had, by 1948, applied for the status of “Nazi victim”. This designation gave them special privileges in housing, food, and monetary restitution. Most of their fellow citizens didn’t look kindly on them, for the main criterion to qualify was “substantial deprivation of freedom” which most people had experienced to some degree. A farmer’s son in Wittlich had spent three years in Dachau... My uncle was furious when he found out he received restitution as a victim. He reasoned that his own six years in a Gulag camp in Siberia certainly qualified him under the same criteria.” “Was the anguish of a farm woman who had lost all four of her sons in battle less than that of a former Gestapo prisoner?”* (Heck 1988, page 197, 198). At the end of his memoir, he adds his favorite Questions and Answers from talks he gave and proudly writes of how he chastised a Jewish woman for receiving reparations after she asked if he was making money from giving these speeches and if he intended to donate that money. *“I have no intention of turning over the money to any cause... Since you inquired about my finances, may I ask if you receive a check from the West German government - a restitution check as a Nazi Victim?” To which she replied: “That has nothing to do with it. I’m entitled to that money. We lost all we had under the Nazis and what I get is little enough, you smug, arrogant Nazi.”* (Heck 1988, page 256).

Interestingly despite asserting their victimhood many times, he is also extremely frustrated when Germans are not held accountable in the courts. *“I was bothered more by the acquittals than the convictions - they sent a confusing signal to Germany - namely that it was possible to serve evil in a high capacity and yet be exonerated. Millions of low- or middle-class echelon Nazis, in particular, would compare themselves to the acquitted and reach the comfortable conclusion that they too were blameless.”* He also condemns Germans for refusing to take responsibility for their own role, and especially blames teachers, German leadership, and adults in general. He does, though, condemn the same kind of innocent denial and reverse victimization that he employs. *“With the exception of conceding defeat in 1945, millions of former Hitler Youth have never come to terms with their own involvement besides a self-serving admission that they were used.”* (Heck 1988). It is very interesting to see how he is able to hold strongly to and passionately express these two contradictory sentiments simultaneously in his mind.

Understanding and acknowledging trauma is a process, especially for those who were complicit in it, as is denial. Both Heck and Teicher went through different stages in their acknowledgment and denial both in events that took place as well as the extent of their role within this. At first, they were drawn into the group through positive associations: displays of power and unity, social bonding, group membership, and camaraderie. In addition to belonging, their membership in this offered them a sense of purpose and values. Through this group, they formed their self-identity and value system. This conflation of group and self led any challenge to the group to be interpreted as a threat to their very being. Therefore when they were confronted with knowledge, whether it be as direct witnesses or information passed on to them by friends or neighbors, that conflicted with their positive interpretation of the groups' imagined purpose, they struggled to combine these two oppositional images into one coherent reality. Instead, they separated them into two separate entities, even within themselves. This is something that we would like to call “Narrative Subversion” where an individual subverts or undermines their own awareness by separating, distorting, or denying the knowledge they have even within themselves in order to maintain the identity and reality they have created.

When considering Narrative Subversion and Distorted Realities it is important to note that it does not matter if the reality that they have created for themselves or has been constructed for them is true, as it is the reality for those who believe it. This manipulation of reality can lead to very real consequences. When perpetrating groups view themselves as victims and the victims as the perpetrators, they perceive abuse policies to be justified and defensive. To further this perception, policies against the out-group often included their segregation and isolation, which helped to limit public knowledge of their treatment or conditions. Further steps have led to the forced removal of certain groups, such as ghettos and concentration camps in the Nazi State. The physical removal of the victims makes it easier to remain apathetic and ignorant of their plight, including when that ignorance is a choice. In these cases, it is easier for the government to strip out-group communities of their legal rights, through policies that render them stateless, and of their human rights through abuse and dehumanization. Rationalizing and

trivializing actions against the out-group combined with gaslighting, reverse victimization, and victim-blaming add to the ability to deny abuse by constructing an alternate reality, or reality tunnel, where perception is not in line with reality.

Heck was confronted with the reality of what was happening to the Jews many times. He discusses witnessing Kristallnacht and how it made him feel powerful, excited, and ashamed. He saw the mixed responses of his neighbors and family ranging from eager participation to dismay and condemnation. At the age of 6, his best friend, Heinz, of the same age, was forced to move to the city for his own safety and so he could hide his Jewishness easier. He watched as Heinz' uncle, a WWI veteran who had lost his leg in the war, was beaten and loaded onto a wagon with the local butcher as the butcher's wife screamed in agony before turning to look "at the circle of silent faces in the windows, neighbors she had known all her life and screamed, *'Why are you people doing this to us?'*". (Heck 1985, page 28). He witnessed his grandmothers' teary goodbye to one of her dearest friends, the night before her deportation. He saw the Jews of Wittlich before their deportation "*hurrying through the streets like hunted animals*". (Heck 1988). During this time, he accepted this because he believed that the Jews were Bolsheviks and connected to an international conspiracy with the enemies of Germany, as was propagated by his school, his Hitler Youth leaders, and his government. He admits that while he's not sure that all Jews were connected to Communism it is still reasonable and even sensible for the government to deport them to be safe, and that the government as an omniscient entity must have knowledge that justifies their actions because to think otherwise would challenge his constructed reality. "*I still couldn't quite see the connection between Uncle Siegfried, the nice butcher Herr Marks, and international Jewry. But even then, I was convinced that a mysterious, infinitely dangerous Soviet-Jewish conspiracy was constantly plotting against us. Why else would our government declare them to be non-Germans?*" (Heck 1985, 29). This is something that he reflects on as he attempts to understand his process of denial, something he grapples with throughout his memoirs. He also points to collateral in war, and the costs of war. He admits though that these encounters challenged preconceived notions, admitting that he could not see the Jews as viable threats, beaten and run down as they were, but did not give it much attention, as their experience, despite being clearly within his locale, was purposefully separated from his own, something that is portrayed through his writing style.

Some things that stand out in his subconscious rationalizations are that every time Heck mentions any Jew or Jews, he also mentions Bolshevism or International Jewry thereby demonstrating the way that he established guilt between the two unrelated parties. This is also seen when he speaks of the public fear of retaliation from the Bolsheviks, in which he mentions retaliation on behalf of the Jews, the Poles, and the Russians, linking them as one entity rather than three distinct groups. He also plays with acknowledgment and denial. Throughout the memoir, he demonstrates a clear awareness of the camps and their purpose. He refers to them as "**work camps,**" and "**punishment camps,**" yet he also talks about the strong likelihood of those who are sent there never returning, as well as sharing the common knowledge that anyone could be sent to the camps and executed without trial. "*What made the so-called "protective*

camps" even more terrifying was the uncertainty. A person may be kept for years, suddenly released or simply executed." (Heck 1985). There were also many comments in the towns about KZ camps, "Jewish soap", and a clear acknowledgment and condemnation of the murders of disabled peoples in Germany by the Catholic Church that he, as a devout Catholic, could not have avoided. However, these things seem to be disconnected even within his memory.

While serving with the Hitlerjeund, he heard eyewitness accounts from one of his closest friends of massacres and of the government's intention to systematically murder all Jews, "subhumans" and "enemies of the State", yet he could not bring himself to accept this. Even after he went with SS officers and personally witnessed a forced march and corpses along the road, he still was unable to believe the testimony of his friend or the clear confessions (in the form of boasts) of the SS officer he was riding with. His cognitive dissociation is so striking that as he confronts a scene of barefoot and starved prisoners marching in near-freezing temperatures with corpses lying around them, he wonders why the SS didn't take the time to bury them. Despite all of this knowledge he still insists that both he and the German people were completely unaware of what was happening to the Jews, going so far as to say that "*Nobody except a half-demented prophet of doom could have foreseen their terrible fate*" (Heck 1985, 11).

Another way we can see the interplay of knowledge and denial is through the common fear of retaliation among Germans. Heck mentions many times that Germans had to defend themselves from both internal (referring to the "Bolshevik" and "International" conspiracies surrounding Jews, as well as political opponents within the KPD and SPD) and external threats from the Allies who "*(weren't) merely content to eradicate National Socialism, but w(ere) bent on the destruction of the German people.*" (Heck 1985, page 141). Heck talks repeatedly about his fears of Bolshevik Jewish retaliation and Soviet retaliation. I find this very striking as the use of the term "retaliation" or "revenge" clearly indicates that it is a reaction to wrongdoing perpetrated by his group. This demonstrates a certain level of awareness of wrongdoing by Heck during that time, even if on a subconscious level. This fear seems to have been widespread and felt by many at that time, as thousands of Germans killed not only themselves but also their loved ones, including their children and babies, by poison, gunfire, or drowning themselves ahead of the arrival of the Soviet army. (Huber 2020).

Even though Heck knew as a leader that Germany was heading for defeat, he was still shocked when the surrender finally happened, and even briefly considered suicide. After Germany was defeated, Heck was captured by the Americans and shortly imprisoned by the French. A time that he brazenly and repeatedly claims was just as traumatizing as that of any victim of the Holocaust. He described his imprisonment by the French as follows, referring specifically to a moment where he believed he was going to be executed in the morning: "*We, the young fanatics of the Hitler Youth had also become the Fuhrer's victims. My terror that night seemed every bit as gut searing as that of a concentration camp prisoner about to enter the gas chamber.*" (Heck 1985, page 202). Although his ordeal must have been terrifying, he

again trivializes the experience of Holocaust victims, *"They often don't know they're about to die till the last few minutes. I had a dozen hours ahead of me."* (Heck 1985, page 202).

During this time the Allies repeatedly tried to force the Germans to see and accept the truth of what had happened; however, Heck remained in denial. He felt that the information and the newsreels were just Allied propaganda. However, this turning point had a shattering effect on his worldview, and despite what he said, his actions demonstrated that he was beginning to have doubts about the morality and actions of his group. Grappling with doubt and beginning to question the morality of his group, Heck applied for permission from his French captors to visit and attend the Nuremberg Trials in Nuremberg. Through this, he began to accept the truth of what happened, but it left him with many unanswered questions about the guilt and complicity of everyday German soldiers like himself. He began to shift the blame for his troubles away from the Jews and the Allies and towards Nazi leaders and German teachers. He was furious about any defendants who were not hanged *"To me, von Schirach surely had to die. He had been convicted only on count 4, crimes against humanity, primarily for his deeds as Gauleiter of Vienna, but his seduction of German Youth had, to my way of thinking, killed many more people than had the deportation of 60,000 Jews."* (Heck 1988) He now shifted his group identity from Nazi to a nuanced identity of Hitler Youth. He felt very strongly that both German leaders and teachers had betrayed the youth of Germany, used them, and destroyed them. He became convinced that they were the forgotten victims of the Holocaust who would have to carry this burden (of guilt) forever. *"Tragically, now, we are the other part of the Holocaust, the generation burdened with the enormity of Auschwitz. That is our life sentence, for we became the enthusiastic victims of the Fuhrer."* (Heck 1985, page 207).

Over several decades he continued to study and learn about the Holocaust and specifically what happened within the extermination camps. He read both survivor and perpetrator testimonies. He accepted the truth of what Germany had done and spoke out fervently against Holocaust denial. He felt it was very important that people understand the truth of what happened and how an entire nation could so easily be manipulated by its leaders. However, he was unable to see himself in direct relation to the genocide of the Jews, and more than that felt very strongly that he and his comrades also deserved to be recognized as victims, even while insisting that they acknowledge their role in the violence and genocide.

While recasting himself and his fellow Hitler Youth members as victims, Heck actively utilizes trivialization. After first acknowledging the statistics and events of the Holocaust from a distant purview, he then trivializes the victims using definitionalism, indirection and maddening (Charny 2001), practicality, pragmatism, and realpolitik (Charny 2001), Gaslighting, and reverse victimization. First, he insists that while they knew about the forced deportations and "work camps", they were not aware of the intent of these camps; second, he insists that they (the Hitler Youth) did not actively participate in the murder of the Jews, *"Most of us weren't the G-ddamn Gestapo', I said, 'and you know that too. I've never done anything I'm ashamed of except lose the bloody war.'" (Heck 1988).* While this quote more potently captures his feelings at the time, he goes on to say later that the punishments Germans faced far exceeded their deeds,

and that he had personally atoned for any sins many times over. *“The destruction of Germany, the loss of territory, and the savage punishment inflicted on millions are seen as an excessive punishment for the sins of the past. **The Germans, after all, paid a terrible price for their infatuation with Hitler.**”* (Heck 1988). *“If you class fanaticism as a ‘crime’ I have indeed atoned... What lies on my conscience are my comrades who died needlessly for an evil regime. **No, I would not do penance on a Kibbutz since I never laid a hand on any Jew.**”* (Heck 1988, page 257).

Next, he erases the power dynamics and roles of Germans and their victims by comparing the number of Jewish victims to the number of Germans killed, erasing the fact that this number includes German soldiers and civilians, those engaged in battle as well as those killed by attacks, and completely ignoring the genocidal intent of eradication of the Jewish people, the many abuses against them: institutional, physical, emotional, sexual, as well as the torture and execution of these individuals. By doing this he blurs the lines between genocidal murder and war casualties. *“Despite its enormity, the death of six million Jews was an event on the periphery of a raging inferno that caused at least 50 million casualties.”* (Heck 1985, 1988). Finally, he insists that similar travesties have been enacted by other prominent governments including the Allies and especially the United States. He even goes so far as to speculate as to whether there would have been Jewish Nazis if they had been included in the volk and if they would not have aided in the murder of the other victims if given the opportunity. *“Would there have been Jewish Nazis if Hitler had designated only gypsies, for instance, as racially tainted? Very likely for there were tens of thousands of conservative nationalistic Jews who longed for a strong leader as much as other Germans.”* Heck continues using realpolitik to insist that both Germans and himself have more than atoned for their actions, having suffered after the war under French, Soviet, and American Occupation. This leads to his most prominent and reiterated claim that German Youth were just as much victims as the Jews or any other victims.

As Heck processes his information, he appears to follow the format of a religious confession, one of sin, confession, and anger. I believe this to be a key intention of his memoir, his speaking out, and even in his own redrafting of his image. He seems to feel that now that he has acknowledged and confessed his sin, he has been redeemed and although he says he is not seeking forgiveness, becomes abrasive and scornful towards anyone who challenges his redemption. This can be seen many times in the Q&A section, which he included at the end seemingly to showcase his ability to clap back at anyone, especially survivors, whom he feels have challenged his atonement. Following Germany’s defeat, German churches vehemently sought former Nazis and encouraged them to repent in this way so that they could be reformed in the image of G-d. This was seen as a very humbling and transformative experience that could relieve the confessor of their guilt as they would have been forgiven by G-d (Krondorfer 2008). Simultaneously it was suggested that forgiveness was virtuous, and therefore withholding forgiveness would be viewed as cruel and deviant. This again reverses the role of perpetrator and victim. This can be incredibly damaging to victims as it places them in a position where they feel guilty if they are unable or unwilling to offer forgiveness, whilst placing perpetrators

again in a position of power over their victims insisting on redemption, and often the more underlying goal is for the victim to stop talking about this event and to “let it go” so the perpetrator can move past their own guilt. (Auerhahn, Laub 2018). Thus, this type of confession is self-serving, as it only allows the perpetrator to move on with their life, with or without the victim, and erases feelings of debt to them as they’ve already “redeemed” themselves by virtue of their confession.

Bernhard Teicher:

Bernhard Teicher was four years older than Alfons Heck. Unlike Heck, he was not impressed by the parades nor the long-winded speeches given by Hitler. He did, though, enjoy the camaraderie of the Hitler Youth and later of being a soldier. Teicher was less interested in power or advancements, and when not thinking of science, stamps, or girls, which he seemed to value pretty equally, he focused instead on how he and his friends could profit financially from the war in an effort to secure their foreseeable future. What is startling about Teicher’s book is its complete omission of the experience of any of the victims of Nazism within his personal experience. Reading his memoir, you are drawn into a war between Germany (and the axis powers) and the Soviets on the Eastern Front, and the Allied Forces to the West. There is only one mention of the Jewish people within his town and only 11 references to Jewish people at all. Neither does he refer to any other victims of the Holocaust including Russian POWs, LGBTQ+, Political Prisoners, Roma, Sinti, or people deemed mentally unfit. While he definitively acknowledges the truth of the Holocaust and presents multiple times an overview of historic facts, he does not once place himself within that story or discuss any of the things that were happening to the Jews that lived right around him. He doesn’t mention events such as Kristallnacht or deportations at the beginning of the war nor does he discuss his response to denazification. This stands out especially in a 374-page book that thoroughly details mundane things like his stamp collection and where he slept as a child but neglects to acknowledge these core aspects of his experience of the war. He does not, however, make any bold assertion that he and his counterparts were victims, although he does briefly mention the manipulation of Germans, and the wave of suicides that followed the end of the war, which included the death of his parents.

In this way, Teicher offers insight into how many individuals focused only on their individual needs and perspective. They first looked out for themselves, then their families, and then their in-group, and turned away, or in this case silenced and erased the experiences of anyone outside this purview, or as Heck said earlier, anyone in the “periphery”. Teicher also stresses that in the past “this is how things were” often devaluing the past and offering a picture of a time where violence, apathy, and degradation were normalized and acceptable in ways they wouldn’t be now. For instance, he often jokes about political correctness today, feminism, and differences in parenting and schooling, which place much more stress on emotions and empathy today than when he was raised. (Teicher 2017).

Like Heck, Teicher makes a point of acknowledging the statistics and the atrocities of the Holocaust and even writes multiple historically backed detailed overviews of the abuses, executions, and gassings of the Jews by the Nazis during the war. Unlike Heck, he does not cast himself as a victim nor any of his fellow countrymen. Neither does he try to rationalize or justify the actions of the Germans at that time. In this way, he works hard to acknowledge and admit the role the Germans played in the Holocaust. However, he does not address his role directly, nor situate his place within that story. Rather he writes as if they were two separate stories, a story of the war, and a story of genocide, neatly separate and without overlap. He situates himself squarely as a soldier who fought other soldiers on various fronts. He does not say he had nothing to do with the genocide of the Jewish people or other victims of the Holocaust, rather, he just leaves them out of his personal story almost completely. For example, he only mentions Jewish people 11 times in his memoir, always briefly, with minimal detail, and always distanced from himself. This separation and erasure exemplify this concept of Narrative Subversion. It shows how Teicher was able to completely disassociate himself and his complicity by comprehensively separating the two experiences. By purposefully disconnecting his experience from the knowledge he has, he is able to erase any individual agency or complicity in the crimes which helps him to reconcile who he was in the past with who he is today.

Teichers' silence and erasure of the Jewish experience and of individuals who undoubtedly were present, even if he chose not to see them, was startling. For instance, when he spoke of Kristallnacht, he spoke of the destruction of "*Jewish shops and display windows*" (Teicher 2017, page 88), acknowledging the destruction of property, but erasing the violence against the individuals who owned and lived in those spaces. Later he insinuates that the French forced laborers actually came voluntarily because they were better off captured and enslaved in Germany than at home in France. "*In an outbuilding in the villa, they housed a dozen or so French fremdarbeiter, forced laborers, who were working in their sawmill. However, I nowadays have some doubts about this current "forced" terminology: there was nobody guarding these men and they could move around freely. The wages, and more importantly, the food rations in Germany were much better than in occupied France. I suspect that they came voluntarily after the French defeat.*" (Teicher 2017, page 136). This trivializes their position as captured and enslaved workers, the power dynamic, the loss of their identity, purpose, and family, and erases the abuse perpetrated onto them by their Nazi captors.

He also trivializes the seriousness and severity of the atrocities that took place by repeatedly claiming that people today are overly sensitive and too politically correct. He insists that because of their proximity to war and suffering "*pre-WWI generations in Europe were much harder and less emotional than the present ones. And this did not change much between the two world wars. People could not get aroused like today about Human Rights and other emotional issues*". (Teicher 2017, page 157). This statement implies that people are over-emotional and overreacting to the murder and torture of Nazi victims, clearly minimizing the severity of the crimes, and implying that people should "move on." Furthering this last

point, he questions why people continue to focus on this, as aside from some “*blockhead acolytes most Nazis would no longer be interested in killing millions of Jews any more than British Air Marshall Harris would order the bombing and burning down of Dresden and other German cities and towns, killing hundreds of thousands of civilians, Nazis, and non-Nazis?*” (Teicher 2017, page 156). This type of statement demonstrates multiple types of trivialization by again equating Nazi victims with Nazi perpetrators, once again blurring the lines casting the perpetrators as victims, and disengaging from their complicity (Bandura 1999) by conflating two distinctly different types of victims, victims of genocide who are in a very different position than civilian war casualties. It showcases idea linkage distortion, time sequence confusion, and misdirection as exemplified in Charny’s ‘The Psychological Satisfaction of Denials of the Holocaust or Other Genocides by Non-Extremists or Bigots, and Even by Known Scholars’. (Charny 2001).

The other thing that stood out in Teicher’s memoir was his boredom and disinterest in Hitler, Nazism, and rallies. This strongly contrasted Heck’s account of being completely enthralled with the power and emotion of these events, and his complete awe and admiration of Adolph Hitler both times he met him. Teicher found Hitler’s speeches and his rallies to be too long and tedious, which was striking following the religious fervor and fanaticism of the masses as reported by Heck. This did not diminish Teicher’s commitment to the group, however. Demonstrating Banal Nationalism rather than blind or fervent Nationalism (Billig 1995), Teicher valued the camaraderie and shared experiences with his peers as well as positive social movements like the Winterhilfswerk and the Labor Service. “*The 1934 creation of the RAD, or Labor service gave back thousands of unemployed, mostly young, men and women dignity and purpose of life, took them off the streets, gave them some basic training, and imbued some military-type discipline. The party also started the Winterhilfswerk where practically all the people participated in one form or another - nobody ought to be hungry, nobody ought to be cold. Corny as this sounds, (the Winterhilfswerk) motivated and united the people, and the solidarity felt then was repeated during the worst of the air bombardments during the end of the war.*” (Teicher 2017, page 149).

It was these things in addition to (what he perceived to be) defending his country from enemies of the state that gave him a sense of purpose and value and convinced him that what he and his group were doing was meaningful. This is not blind nationalism or fanaticism, it is, however, a type of banal nationalism. Once in the midst of battle, though, he quickly became disillusioned with any kind of nationalism and focused instead on what he could do to protect and elevate himself and his peers both in a military sense and in financial endeavors. This is important because his motivation is not driven by any type of emotional fanaticism, but rather his personal gains and those of his in-group. His interest in their success as an extension of his own is rooted in positive group associations that bound him to the group.

Positive Group Associations:

One thing that came up a lot in these memoirs was their positive associations with the group. This was something that is not often addressed in scholarship, which instead focuses more on Blind Nationalism (Billig 1995), In-group Glorification (Adorno 1969, Castano 2007), and power, all of which were present in these memoirs. However, these positive associations were just as present and even more prominent in these stories. They also play a key role in understanding this process of Narrative Subversion. Positive group associations are one of the key factors in creating and maintaining group membership. These associations offer belonging, pride, solidarity, and purpose. It is important then to the individual, especially when that individual sees the group as an extension of their individual identity, values, and purpose, that the honor and integrity of the group remain intact. Any challenge to that is perceived as an attack on them as individuals and on their own character. When they are confronted with evidence that contradicts this they often will suppress or erase this information, disassociate themselves from this, or trivialize or revise this information in order to preserve their own integrity, and if possible that of their group, or in Heck's case, a margin of that group (specifically the Hitler Youth).

Individuals within a dominant group are offered group membership, identity, belonging, and any privileges associated with the group's status. In exchange, they are expected to offer solidarity, support, and loyalty to the group. This social contract binds them to the success of the group. If they admit their group is bad, they will lose all of these things, not only for themselves, but for all of the individuals within the group. This group contract and idea of solidarity is very prominent in military groups especially where members immediately accept and treat one another as "comrades or family in arms". A key aspect of a successful military is a foundation where the success of the group trumps all else. There is also a strong realization that one only has their comrades to protect them, creating a bond unlike anything one experiences in civilian life. The idea then of betraying that bond is unfathomable. Therefore any information that casts the group as bad, is perceived as an attack on not just the group or Nazism, but an attack on all Germans, an attack on German life, and most importantly an attack on them as individuals and an attack on their brothers. Another important thing to note is that many of their comrades and family members whom they now perceive to be under attack are dead and unable to "defend themselves". How then do you reconcile the perceived (or real) victimization of perpetrators? And if they accept their complicity are they then condemning their friends and loved ones, and how can they reconcile that? Alfons Heck, for instance, makes a point of demonstrating many times the innocence of his grandmother and that his acceptance of the complicity of German adults does not extend to her. This is why it becomes important for them to compartmentalize various events and types of people, including themselves into separate segments that cannot cross without distorting their carefully constructed narrative of accountability, complicity, and denial.

This can be seen as Heck and Teicher struggle to reconstruct their self-identity to suit post-war society. They try to portray themselves as society expects them to be: acknowledging

the facts of the Holocaust and admitting their role in this genocide. However, they struggle with these two conflicting narratives of their life during this time. In their mind are their memories of great and positive experiences with people whom they respected and whom they had thought acted in ways that were honorable and in accordance with their military duties, however, they are aware that these same individuals, along with themselves, were acting to expedite the purpose of a group that was intent on the torture and complete genocide of the Jewish people, the Polish and Russian people, LGBTQ+, Roma, Sinti, political opponents, and people that had been labeled as disabled, asocial, or subhuman in any way. Despite a seeming willingness to consider their complicity in this role, they seem to have compartmentalized their reality into two parts that they are unable to reconcile in their mind. This allows them to separate themselves from any complicity with abuses or events that are too egregious to rationalize even to themselves. This can be seen when both Heck and Teicher proclaim that they never personally harmed an individual Jew. It can also be seen in the way that they separate their story and experience during the war from the story of the victims of the Holocaust, as if the two things were happening in completely different places, far removed from themselves.

Perpetrator Testimonies

Understanding the transformative process of denial (Göçek, 2014, Cohen 1993) within these two memoirs and the interplay of acknowledgment, awareness, and denial is important in order to understand and engage with the continued trend of denial, silence, and erasure of out-group abuse and genocide throughout the world. If we can identify possible factors that lead to denial, then we can try to engage in these factors and work to resolve them. In future research it would be helpful to examine the process of denial within many perpetrator memoirs not just within WWII, but also other historical instances of genocide, to find correlating factors that will lead to a greater opportunity to deter these conditions.

My results suggest that denial as a process begins when one develops a strong positive association with a group that offers (in this case through nationalism) a person belonging, purpose, and identity which leads to strong attachment to the group. When this person is then met with information that the group is committing humanitarian crimes and abuses against individuals within the out-group, they are unable to process this, and engage in trivialization and willed ignorance. Upon facing indisputable evidence, those who acknowledge and accept their role often engage in narrative subversion (Göçek, 2014) where they disassociate themselves and their complicity in any acts of violence. This contradictory interplay of acknowledgment and trivialization culminates in what Israel Charny calls the fourth type of innocent denial which although appears as acknowledgment furthers erasure and silence (Charny 2001). In this way, Narrative Subversion acts as a type of emotional management, where individuals are able to choose which events to acknowledge and which to silence. As Kant and Arendt have explained in their discourses about morality, no one wants to be seen as or see themselves as evil, *“he who does this is actually in contradiction with himself, his own reason, and therefore must despise himself.”* (Kant 1868, Arendt 1994). In order to avoid this self-contempt, man has learned how

to lie to himself and to separate knowing and thinking in such a way that a person may know some fact, but may choose not to think about or even acknowledge it in their mind. By purposefully ignoring truths that contradict their manipulated or structured reality knowledge and truth become relative, and one can continue to hold two contradictory ideas or understandings.

By understanding how perpetrators compartmentalize knowledge and denial we can attempt to understand the convoluted emotions that are at play in the process of denial. This is important because it helps us to understand what is happening within their mind, how they reconcile, separate, or suppress contradictory information, and ultimately how their perceptions of their constructed realities lead them to be an actor in genocide. Memoirs specifically help us work backward to understand how perpetrators construct realities surrounding violence and how they situate themselves and their group within this. They offer us insight into their motivations and the mechanisms they use to rationalize the atrocities being committed and supported by their group and themselves. It also offers insight into what draws people to these groups and what binds them to them. This is especially important today as this type of violence continues to be perpetuated throughout the world, and we need to understand what draws people specifically to these kinds of groups.

There are certain limitations when considering a memoir as a source. First, it is important to consider the effect a perpetrator memoir has on the cycle of violence. As we have addressed earlier, memoirs are often self-serving. They can be used as a public platform where they can perform their required acknowledgments and confession in exchange for public redemption. They can also use it as a platform for gaslighting to cast themselves and their group as victims. They can use it as a platform for denial, revisionism, or erasure. On the other hand, silence and lack of accountability serve to continue the cycle of violence. So how can we balance this?

Another thing to consider is the connection that is created by the narrator and the reader. Memoirs are often told in the first person in a way that invites the reader to see through the eyes of the perpetrator creating both empathy and a connection between them. Through this, the reader is drawn into the perpetrators' "gaze" and drawn into their complicity. This could then cause the reader to also trivialize or minimize the severity of the atrocities committed as well as to accept the perpetrators' version of events without question. It also puts the reader in the position where they are engaged as witnesses to the confessional nature of the narrative, and then, due to social and religious influences, feel pressured to either forgive the perpetrator or feel guilty for withholding that forgiveness.

As such, it is important to keep in mind that memoirs do not have to be and are not historically accurate. They are not peer-reviewed for accountability. They are not a source to turn to for accurate information about what happened in these events. Even if the perpetrator is completely honest and forthcoming, witness testimony is always flawed, especially when recounted decades after the fact. The purpose of this research was not geared towards understanding what happened during WWII. Rather it was an attempt to examine the denial

process through the reflections of perpetrators, a process that continues and transforms through time (as opposed to just a snapshot during that period of turmoil), and to better understand how perpetrators manage and construct their position and the position of their group within that time period while reading for social performance, trivialization, and denial. By no means does the research intend to trivialize the atrocities committed by the Nazis, nor the complicity of the majority of Germans, including both Alfons Heck and Bernhard Teicher. Whether purposeful or not, their memoirs both perpetuate this cycle of abuse by engaging in trivialization, rationalization, relativization, gaslighting, and erasure. By erasing the victims from their stories, it is difficult for them to truly offer any kind of personal accountability or remorse. Remorse is morally necessary for both perpetrators and victims to sustain trust in humanity and justice (Göçek 2014) and to move away from forms of denial towards acknowledgment and accountability.

Limitations

There were multiple limitations within this study. First, the sample was very small. A comparison of two individual case studies obviously cannot offer a representative perspective of the German “Aryan” population nor was that the aim of this paper. As these were memoirs, there was no opportunity to ask specific questions or follow up with these individuals. These memoirs were written after the war and therefore cannot accurately capture the feelings of the individuals during the events they discuss. It also was written after the rise in “Holocaust Consciousness” and in response to the social atmosphere around them. Because of this, the authors likely felt social pressure to portray themselves and their peers in a certain way. Hopefully, future research can expand on this study by looking at a larger sample, as well as comparing it to perpetrator testimonies in other historical situations including genocide, extremism, domestic terrorism, and genocide. By examining more interviews and memoirs, more data can be collected, and more representative findings can hopefully be attained to further understand the process of denial and trivialization in perpetrator testimonies.

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