

## Reclaiming the Lost Jewish Identity of a Second Generation Holocaust Survivor Raised as a Christian: The Role of Art and Art Therapy

**Authors :** Bambi Ward

**Abstract :** Children of Holocaust survivors have been described as inheriting their parents' trauma as a result of 'vicarious memory'. The term refers to a process whereby second generation Holocaust survivors subconsciously remember aspects of Holocaust trauma, despite not having directly experienced it. This can occur even when there has been a conspiracy of silence in which survivors chose not to discuss the Holocaust with their children. There are still people born in various parts of the world such as Poland, Hungary, other parts of Europe, USA, Canada and Australia, who have only learnt of their Jewish roots as adults. This discovery may occur during a parent's deathbed confession, or when an adult child is sorting through the personal belongings of a deceased family member. Some Holocaust survivors chose to deny their Jewish heritage and raise their children as Christians. Reasons for this decision include the trauma experienced during the Holocaust for simply being Jewish, the existence of anti-Semitism, and the desire to protect one's self and one's family. Although there has been considerable literature written about the transgenerational impact of trauma on children of Holocaust survivors, there has been little scholarly investigation into the effects of a hidden Jewish identity on these children. This paper presents a case study of an adult child of Hungarian Holocaust survivors who was raised as a Christian. At the age of eight she was told about her family's Jewish background, but her parents insisted that she keep this a secret, even if asked directly. She honoured their request until she turned forty. By that time she had started the challenging process of reclaiming her Jewish identity. The paper outlines the tension between family loyalty and individual freedom, and discusses the role that art and art therapy played in assisting the subject of the case study to reclaim her Jewish identity and commence writing a memoir about her spiritual journey. The main methodology used in this case study is creative practice-led research. Particular attention is paid to the utilisation of an autoethnographic approach. The autoethnographic tools used include reflective journals of the subject of the case study. These journals reflect on the subject's collection of autobiographical data relating to her family history, and include memories, drawings, products of art therapy, diaries, letters, photographs, home movies, objects, and oral history interviews with her mother. The case study illustrates how art and art therapy benefitted a second generation Holocaust survivor who was brought up having to suppress her Jewish identity. The process allowed her to express subconscious thoughts and feelings about her identity and free herself from the burden of the long term secret she had been carrying. The process described may also be of assistance to other traumatised people who have been trying to break the silence and who are seeking to express themselves in a positive and healing way.

**Keywords :** art, hidden identity, holocaust, silence

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