

Visualizing the Holocaust: The Perceived Benefits and Concerns of Including Holocaust Atrocity
Images in Museum Exhibits

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Abstract

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The Association of Holocaust Organizations (AHO) is an organization of 150 members in the United States spread over 37 states and the District of Columbia. With this proliferation of Holocaust organizations, came an important question: How should the Holocaust be represented on the walls and galleries of such organizations? There was a large body of research about Holocaust history and education, as well as Holocaust atrocity photography, Holocaust representation, and the role of imagery in collective memory. However, there appeared to be little consensus about the issue of Holocaust representation in museums, and in particular, the use of graphic or violent Holocaust atrocity images.

This qualitative study examined the practices and opinions toward the exhibition of Holocaust atrocity images by professionals who worked in Holocaust institutions in the U.S. and Canada. The study found that professionals working in the field largely believed that the use of

Holocaust atrocity images was important to the teaching of the Holocaust. However, the research also showed that there were big concerns about who would see these images, how often, and the effects Holocaust atrocity images had on visitors. This study provided important factors for exhibit designers and developers to consider when deciding to exhibit or not exhibit Holocaust atrocity images.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

American playwright William Saroyan once said that "one picture is worth a thousand words, but only if you look at the picture and say or think the thousand words."¹ That is the basis for an issue facing organizations and exhibit designers hoping to create Holocaust related content. The Association of Holocaust Organizations (AHO) lists 150 member organizations in the United States alone.² While not all of these organizations are museums, it illustrates the reach Holocaust education has in the United States. For many of these organizations a major component for the facilitation of learning is exhibits, and the inclusion of Holocaust atrocity photographs in exhibits may affect how well it is received, and may influence whether the goals of that exhibit are reached.

The goal of this research is to describe the perceived problems and benefits of including graphic imagery in Holocaust exhibits. The two big questions at the core of this study are: "why should exhibits use Holocaust atrocity images?" and "Why should exhibits not use Holocaust atrocity images?" By interviewing AHO member organization employees, this research will answer such questions. Additionally, this project will look at published research on formal education and Holocaust education, collective memory and atrocity photography. The findings will be helpful to any exhibit designer or exhibit development team that wish to understand the potential impacts of including graphic or violent imagery in an exhibit, regardless of the subject.

¹ Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 5.

² "Geographical Index of Member Organizations," Association of Holocaust Organizations, Accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.ahoinfo.org/membersdirectory.html>.

The Holocaust

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. defines “Holocaust” as, “the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.”³ During the Nazi era in Europe, from 1933 to 1945, the German authorities also targeted Roma/Sinti, the disabled, Slavic people including Poles and Russians, Communists and other competing political parties, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and homosexuals:⁴

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing units) and, later, militarized battalions of Order Police officials, moved behind German lines to carry out mass-murder operations against Jews, Roma, and Soviet state and Communist Party officials. German SS and police units, supported by units of the Wehrmacht and the Waffen SS, murdered more than a million Jewish men, women, and children, and hundreds of thousands of others. Between 1941 and 1944, Nazi German authorities deported millions of Jews from Germany, from occupied territories, and from the countries of many of its Axis allies to ghettos and to killing centers, often called extermination camps, where they were murdered in specially developed gassing facilities.⁵

Context

One example of negative responses to content in a Holocaust exhibit is from 1995 at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial museum in Israel. According to the New York Times, images from a 23-year exhibit had “fallen victim... to a painful dispute among Jews over whether it is proper for Yad Vashem to hang even a few pictures showing the dead and near dead without clothes.”⁶ Orthodox rabbis called the photographs “an offense to the living because it is sinful to

³ “Introduction to the Holocaust,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Accessed May 21, 2014, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005143>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Clyde Haberman, “In a Museum of Hell, Qualms About Decorum,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1995, sec A, 4.

look at naked bodies."⁷ The issue became so prominent that the deputy mayor of Jerusalem threatened to pull support for the museum, saying, "If they will turn this into a matter between religious and secular, I have the means to affect them financially."⁸ One man summed up the personal argument against the use of these images: "In July 1943, my parents were marching to their death at Sobibor. If my mother's picture would be hanging on the walls of a museum - naked, shamed, and frightened the moment before her death - I would do anything, and I underline 'anything,' to get her off the wall."⁹

Eva Lux Braun, a survivor of Auschwitz, wrote to the Jerusalem Post: "Are the pictures indecent, immodest, demeaning, humiliating? The facts are, not the pictures. We could not cover our nakedness then. Don't cover it up now."¹⁰ In the end, Yad Vashem decided that it would leave the exhibit as it had been. Avner Shalev, the memorial's chairman, explained the decision: "We have no reason, and I don't have the authority, to cover up the terrible truth or to beautify it."¹¹

What to include in a Holocaust exhibit is a topic that seems to be regularly discussed within Holocaust institutions, however it does not appear to be a point of discussion between institutions. The issue addressed in this project centers around what institutions should consider when deciding to exhibit photographs depicting the violent acts or aftermath of Nazi crimes, also known as Holocaust atrocity images. There is a large amount of research in formal education

⁷ Haberman, "In a Museum of Hell."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Literature regarding how best to teach the Holocaust, as well as ample research regarding photography and the ethical use of photographs. Further, there has also been research into collective memory, and the role that photographs play in the transmission of collective memory from generation to generation. However, these topics have not been widely applied to Holocaust exhibits, and conflicting arguments have yet to be compared.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Formal Education and the Holocaust

One area where informal institutions can gain helpful information and standards is through formal education, and how the subject of the Holocaust is dealt with in classrooms. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) provides educators with standards on how to teach the Holocaust, and answers the question “why teach the Holocaust?” The USHMM outlines some strategies for deciding what to choose when teaching the Holocaust. They encourage teachers to answer these questions: “Why should students learn this history? What are the most significant lessons students should learn from a study of the Holocaust? Why is a particular reading, image, document, or film an appropriate medium for conveying the topics that you wish to teach?”¹² The USHMM also provides specific information regarding age appropriateness and Holocaust education in the classroom:

Students in grades 6 and above demonstrate the ability to empathize with individual eyewitness accounts and to attempt to understand the complexities of this history, including the scope and scale of the events. While elementary students are able to empathize with individual accounts, they often have difficulty placing them in a larger historical context. Such demonstrable developmental differences have traditionally shaped social studies curricula throughout the country; in most states, students are not introduced to European history and geography—the context of the Holocaust—before middle school. Elementary school can be an ideal location to begin discussion of the value of diversity and the danger of bias and prejudice. These critical themes can be addressed through local and national historical events; this will be reinforced during later study of the Holocaust.¹³

¹² “Guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed April 22, 2013, <http://www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust/general-teaching-guidelines>.

¹³ Ibid.

In her article ““What happened to their pets?’: Third graders encounter the Holocaust,” University of Wisconsin-Madison Education and Jewish Studies professor Simone Schweber addressed the issues surrounding children and learning about the Holocaust. To open her article Schweber noted that children often learn about scary, challenging, or difficult subjects from other children rather than from a teacher in a classroom.¹⁴ She gave an anecdote about a third grade girl being asked to “play Holocaust” on the playground, and she went on to explain that situations like this are why teachers decide to teach the Holocaust to younger children.¹⁵ However, some believe there is a danger in attempting to bring the complex lessons of the Holocaust to a level that is relatable for children. University of Arkansas professor and genocide scholar Samuel Totten was particularly adamant about how watered down the Holocaust would have to be to teach to young children. He argued that you could only teach the Holocaust to children if you ignored the “intertwining nature of traditional christian antisemitism, political antisemitism and racial antisemitism, Social Darwinism, extreme nationalism, industrialism, the differences between fascist, communist and democratic states, the complexities of the results of World War I and Germany's reaction to the Versailles Treaty, the Nazis' false notion of the "stab in the back" by the Jews, and the ensuing economic downturn in Germany, if all of this is totally passed over, largely ignored, or

¹⁴ Simone Schweber, ““What Happened to Their Pets?’: Third Graders Encounter the Holocaust,” *Teachers College Record* 110:10 (2008): 2074

¹⁵ Ibid.

simplified beyond recognition, then, yes, it can be taught.”¹⁶ Schweber agreed, saying “[Holocaust] representation in classrooms is too sophisticated for young children to process intellectually... the subject matter is too frightening for young children to handle psychologically, and thus if taught about in its appropriate fullness, it would cause distress.”¹⁷ There are clear arguments for not teaching the Holocaust to young children. However, that is not the end of the debate.

In her article “‘What happened to their pets?’: Third graders encounter the Holocaust,” Schweber also outlined the counter argument to this issue. In particular, she looked at a teacher recognized for excellence in teaching, Abe Kupnich. Mr. Kapnich taught third and fourth graders units on slavery, the genocide of Native Americans, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Holocaust.¹⁸ He believed in starting kids early in order to position young people to stand up to injustice later in their lives.¹⁹ She quoted him in the text, “if you start early enough ... then all of the sudden it’s not this foreign concept that’s just dropped on them in high school... At least they’ll have the foundation.”²⁰ He also noted that there are always children who are more mature and able to deal with these subjects better than other students.²¹ Schweber analyses a

¹⁶ Samuel Totten, “Should There be Holocaust Education for K-4 Students? The Answer is No,” *H-Holocaust Professional Papers*, accessed May 28, 2013, <http://www.h-net.org/~holoweb/papers/holoed.html>.

¹⁷ Schweber, “What Happened to Their Pets?,” 2077.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 2080

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ *Ibid*, 2081

²¹ *Ibid*, 2080

Holocaust unit being taught in Mr. Kupnich's class, by looking at how the children responded. Schweber found that "such youngsters either do or do not understand the subject matter. When they do understand it, they become depressed, albeit appropriately. When they do not understand it, they recognize the absence. The situation poses 'no wins'."²²

Schweber and Totten have argued that teaching the Holocaust to children is not widely effective, with Totten having taken what appears to be an all-or-nothing approach to the subject. However, not all literature or professionals share those views. Both Abe Kupnich and the USHMM argued that you can start younger people with smaller lessons about injustice, prejudice, and other subjects that they can understand.

Holocaust Atrocity Imagery and Collective Memory

In her article "Choosing Not to Look: Representation, Repatriation, and Holocaust Atrocity Photography," history professor Susan A. Crane examined "unconditional public access to Holocaust atrocity photographs."²³ In the article, she proposes a repatriation process similar to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) for Holocaust photography.²⁴ Crane argued that returning

²² Schweber, 2105

²³ Susan A. Crane, "Choosing Not to Look: Representation, Repatriation, and Holocaust Atrocity Photography," *History and Theory* 47:3 (2008), 309.

²⁴ "The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was enacted on November 16, 1990, to address the rights of lineal descendants, Indian tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations to Native American cultural items, including human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony." from "National NAGPRA," National Park Service, accessed May 7, 2014, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nagpra/>.

the photographs to the places they were created would serve the memory of the Holocaust better than hanging them on museum walls.²⁵ She wrote, "What is the purpose of looking at atrocity photographs? I would like to consider whether the role that atrocity images have played historically had played out: whether, in fact, their role in documenting the extremities of human cruelty and offering material evidence for moral lessons has been completed, and whether new roles are emerging."²⁶

The question of whether to show Holocaust photographs became an issue almost as soon as the first photos from Nazi concentration camps were available for public consumption. In April of 1945, the concentration camp at Ohrdruf in Germany was the first to be liberated by the U.S. Army. Nordausen, also in Germany, was liberated six days later. The British paper *Newspaper World* printed a series of brief articles shortly after photographs from the camps at Ohrdruf and Nordausen began circulating. Before printing the articles, the paper released an editorial recognizing the conflict, and justifying the printing:

A spate of horror or atrocity pictures dealing with German crimes against humanity have reached London newspapers from the Western front during the past week and editors have once more been faced with the problem of to print or not to print... There was the conflict of bringing home the realism of German brutality and sadism with the desire not to offend against the standards of good taste and cause offense to readers... Shocking readers on certain occasions into the realization of some outrage by the publication of pictures which in the more normal way would be withheld is justifiable, so long as a step is taken with a full sense of the responsibility involved.²⁷

²⁵ Crane, 309.

²⁶ Ibid, 310.

²⁷ Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 94-95.

Dr. Barbie Zelizer of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania addressed the issue of civility and decency, writing, "whether depicting victims or survivors, dead or living, perpetrators or traumatized, the photographers' normally prying behavior proceeded with a certain insensitivity to the boundaries between public and private that was intensified by the challenge posed by the scenes of the camps to common standards of decency and civility."²⁸ Author Virginia Woolf tempered the conflict of decency with the issue of responsibility while noting the potent power of atrocity images. She was asked by an unnamed man how war could be prevented, and she related the question to her viewing of photographs from the Spanish Civil War:

Those photographs are not an argument; they are simply a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye... When we look at those photographs some fusion takes place within us; however different the education, the traditions behind us, our sensations are the same; and they are violent. You, Sir, call [the photographs] 'horror and disgust.' We also call them horror and disgust. And the same words rise to our lips. War, you say, is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped. For now at last we are looking at the same picture; we are seeing with you the same dead bodies, the same ruined houses.²⁹

Opinion regarding the use of atrocity photographs began to change along with the proliferation of Holocaust images. Just as President Eisenhower announced, "Let the World see," the issue transformed from *if* the images should be used, but to why and how.³⁰ At the center of this discussion was the intersection of atrocity photography, public

²⁸ Zelizer, 87

²⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), 14-15.

³⁰ Quoted in Zelizer, 86

opinion, and collective memory.³¹ Early on, Holocaust images were used to counteract public skepticism.³² The *Christian Century*, which had originally questioned the facts of the Holocaust, wrote, "It will be a long time before our eyes cease to see those pictures of naked corpses piled like firewood of those mounds of carrion flesh and bone."³³ In April 1945, after the widespread publication of Holocaust photographs, 81 percent of the British public believed the atrocity stories coming out of Europe, as opposed to just 37 percent six months prior.³⁴ The images from the camps and mass burial sites moved the realities of the Holocaust from abstract, hard to believe stories into the realm of widely accepted fact. In short, the images coming out of the Holocaust were giving non-participants means of bearing witness. "...Bearing witness calls for truth telling at the same time as it sanctions an interpretation of what is being witnessed. Bearing witness implies that there is no best way of depicting or thinking about atrocities, but that the very fact of paying heed collectively is crucial."³⁵ Holocaust literature scholar Lawrence Langer referred to this as "the [next] stage of Holocaust response, moving from what we know of the event to how we remember it."³⁶ Visual artist Thomas Hirschhorn discussed

³¹ Collective memory is the memory of a group of people, generally passed down from one generation to the next. "Collective Memory," Oxford Dictionaries, accessed May 15, 2014, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/collective-memory>.

³² Zelizer, 138.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, 10.

³⁶ Quoted in Zelizer, 171.

the power that visual media has on viewers, noting that, "we want to know, but we don't want to see. Because when we see, we are involved. This is the power of visual arts."³⁷

In contrast to those points, Barbie Zelizer wrote that we do not fully understand the impact images in general have on memory:

"We do not know enough about how images help record public events, about whether and in which ways images function as better vehicles of proof than words, and about which vehicle - words or image - takes precedence in the situations of conflict between what the words tell us and the pictures show us... We know even less about how images function as vehicles for collective memory. Beyond recognizing that they conveniently freeze scenes in our minds and serve as building blocks to remembering, we do not yet fully understand how images help us remember, in particular circumstances we did not experience personally."³⁸

University of London professor Rick Crownshaw, a specialist in Holocaust representation in museums, pointed out that, "the question remains as to whether vicarious witnessing, 'seeing through another's eyes, of remembering through another's memories' might collapse into seeing through one's own eyes and remembering one's own memories."³⁹

Holocaust Images and Museums

Rick Crownshaw summarized the next stage of Holocaust response as an issue facing museums. It is the problem of Holocaust studies, including Holocaust institutions, "to theorize adequately a means of Holocaust memory's transmission from the generation that witnessed the event to those born after. In other words, the challenge is how to conceive of a means of thinking the after-life of Holocaust memory."⁴⁰ He refers to

³⁷ Quoted in Wayne Morrison, "Atrocity and the Power of the Image," *Social Justice* 36:3 (2009-2010) 61.

³⁸ Zelizer, 2.

³⁹ Rick Crownshaw, "Photography and Memory in Holocaust Museums," *Mortality* 12:2 (2007), 176.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

professor James E. Young's argument that shock "provokes remembrance of things not witnessed (a vicarious or secondary witnessing)"⁴¹ While Crownshaw warns that the idea of vicarious witnessing requires careful thought, he goes on to explain that research on Holocaust memory "is also underpinned by a concern that trauma be shared."⁴² Bowling Green State University professor Vivian Patraka expands on this, including the potential role of museums:

Along with the notion of a moving spectatorship, the museum is a performance site in the sense that the architect, the designers, and the management of the museum produce representations through objects and so produce a space and a subjectivity for the spectator... A Holocaust museum, in particular, can be a performance environment where we are asked to change from spectator/bystander to witness, where we are asked to make our specific memory into historical memory. In a Holocaust museum, when we are really solicited to change, we are asked to become performers in the event of understanding and remembering the Holocaust.⁴³

Is this where the shock of Holocaust atrocity images plays its role in museums?

Susan A. Crane did not seem to think so. She acknowledged the importance of these images as an important type of testimony of Nazi crimes but she pointed out "for succeeding generations, however, access to certain 'recirculated' images has created a sense of familiarity with the Holocaust and with the National Socialist era that may prevent, rather than facilitate, engagement with the historical subject, particularly for students."⁴⁴ Crane argued, while promoting the NAGPRA style repatriation program mentioned previously, that it may be better for these images to essentially be considered

⁴¹ Crownshaw, 176-177.

⁴² Ibid, 177.

⁴³ Vivian Patraka, "Spectacles of Suffering: Performing Presence, Absence, and Historical Memory at U.S. Holocaust Museums," in *Performance and Cultural Politics*, ed. Elin Diamond (London: Routledge, 1996), 99-100.

⁴⁴ Crane, 309.

sacred and removed from public view, so as not to become "atrocious objects of banal attention."⁴⁵ In his article "Emptying the Gaze: Framing Violence through the Viewfinder," German cultural historian Bernd Hüppauf addressed this idea:

A very limited number of photographs have been continuously reproduced in illustrated history books on the Holocaust, textbooks for schools and universities, exhibition catalogues, tour guides, and similar publications. They continue to be shown either for educational purposes or as visual evidence in support of written texts, although they have now become metonymical and no longer produce the urge to look away. It is intriguing to question in what ways these photos contribute to the creation of memory.⁴⁶

The literature from both formal education, Holocaust representation, and collective memory showed that there is little consensus about what is and is not effective in regards to teaching about the Holocaust. Samuel Totten argued against the teaching of the Holocaust to children, while the teacher Mr. Kupnich had positive experiences with teaching the subject to his young students. Susan A. Crane took a strong stance against the exhibition of Holocaust atrocity images, but Rick Crownshaw wrote about how such images can play an important role in the transmission of collective memory. Despite the lack of consensus, this body of work shows the kinds of questions that exhibit designers and developers should ask when deciding to include or not include Holocaust atrocity images. A major missing piece from this discussion is that of museum professionals who work for Holocaust institutions.

⁴⁵ Crane, 309.

⁴⁶ Bernd Hüppauf, "Emptying the Gaze: Framing Violence through the Viewfinder," *New German Critique* (1997), 4.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Sampling

The purpose of this research is to identify the perceived benefits and problems associated with including graphic imagery in Holocaust exhibits. In order to accomplish this, two email requests were sent to the Association of Holocaust Organizations (AHO) email list outlining the main research question and goal, and asking for participants. The AHO is, “an international network of organizations and individuals for the advancement of Holocaust education, remembrance and research.”⁴⁷ The AHO is made up of museums both large and small, educational institutions, memorial centers, and individual Holocaust educators. The letter asked for members to self-select based on the criteria that they work for an AHO member organization. By asking participants to respond to an email, the sampling is naturally self-selecting, meaning those who received the email personally made the choice to participate. It is unknown how many AHO member organizations have exhibits, however the decision was made to utilize this resource because of the scope of its members. With 150 members in the United States alone, and many more world wide, there were few resources with as wide of a reach as the AHO.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ “About Us,” Association of Holocaust Organizations, accessed June 6, 2014, <http://www.ahoinfo.org/aboutaho.html>.

⁴⁸ “Geographical Index of Member Organizations,” Association of Holocaust Organizations, Accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.ahoinfo.org/membersdirectory.html>.

Participants

Approximately 15 AHO members responded to two separate emails soliciting participants. Of those 15, five did not pursue participation further. Ten interviews were conducted, 4 of which did not fit into my criteria. Those four represented a Holocaust scholar, two university professors, and an educator who develops Holocaust curriculum. The remaining 6 organizations became the sample for this project. Participants were given the option of anonymity for this research, and as most accepted that option a decision was made to keep all participants anonymous. The interviewees consisted of executive directors from Michigan and Texas, an exhibit designer from Washington D.C., and education staff from British Columbia, Long Island New York, and Pennsylvania. The institutions they represented ranged from smaller institutions in Vancouver, Texas, Pennsylvania, and New York, to large institutions in Michigan and Washington D.C.

Interviews

The goal of this method was to conduct as many semi-structured interviews as possible, contingent on the number of responses. The interviews were unstructured, meaning the participants could bring up ideas and theories of their own, but that there were set topics that each was asked to comment on. Some questions the participants were asked were:

- Does your organization use graphic or violent Holocaust atrocity images in your exhibits or displays?

- [If "yes"] Can you describe the reasons for including graphic or violent images in your exhibits or displays?
- [If "yes"] Do you see any reasons why an organization should not include graphic or violent Holocaust images in exhibits?
- [If "no"] Why not?
- [If "no"] Can you see any benefits to including graphic or violent Holocaust images in exhibits?
- Has your institution ever received complaints for including [or not including] graphic or violent images in exhibits?

Coding

Once the interviews were completed a spreadsheet was created with the main questions address across the top, and the information entered under those groups. Outlier information, or ideas not originally considered were included in the chart in order to identify trends in those areas. Answers to the open-ended questions were coded, and "yes" or "no" questions were color coded. That system was used to identify trends in the answers. To honor anonymity direct quotations were not used. Rather, paraphrases of comments were written, and double checked during the interview. See figure 1 for a sample of the coding.

Does your institution use graphic or violent images in any way?	[If yes] Can you describe the importance these types of images have in a museum or exhibit setting?	[If yes] Do you see any down sides to showing graphic or violent Holocaust images?
Yes	It is important. Evidence. Inform people.	Didn't Answer
Yes	Can't tell the story without them. Picture is worth a thousand words	Painful to look at. Takes a toll emotionally.
No (But not a policy. Exhibit wasn't up. Would use them)	Can't teach the Holocaust without them.	Don't believe in shock education. Kids will shut down, not learn the lessons.
Yes: "We have."	Want to be historically accurate	If people don't read the [context], all they have left is sensationalization.
Yes	You cannot have a Holocaust museum without including that kind of imagery. Impossible to teach about 11 million people killed without it.	An over abundance showed to an inappropriately prepared audience could cause people to shut down emotionally. You can prevent the very thing you are trying to do.
Yes	Against the showing of atrocity images.	we don't need to show those images [graphic news reel images] to teach a 6th grader that the holocaust was terrible

Figure 1

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter will analyze the results of the interviews by showing how each major required question was answered. It will then look at the results in terms of the big questions behind this study: “Why should exhibits use Holocaust atrocity images?” and “Why should exhibits not use Holocaust atrocity images?”

Does your institution use graphic or violent images in any way?

Of the six respondents, five institutions used graphic Holocaust atrocity images in exhibits. The one “no” answer was an interesting outlier, as she indicated that the reason they did not include any was that they did not currently have an exhibit. She pointed out that the institution does not have a policy against the use of graphic images in their exhibits, and they were open to including them. These responses show the overall positive attitude toward including these types of images in exhibits and museums.

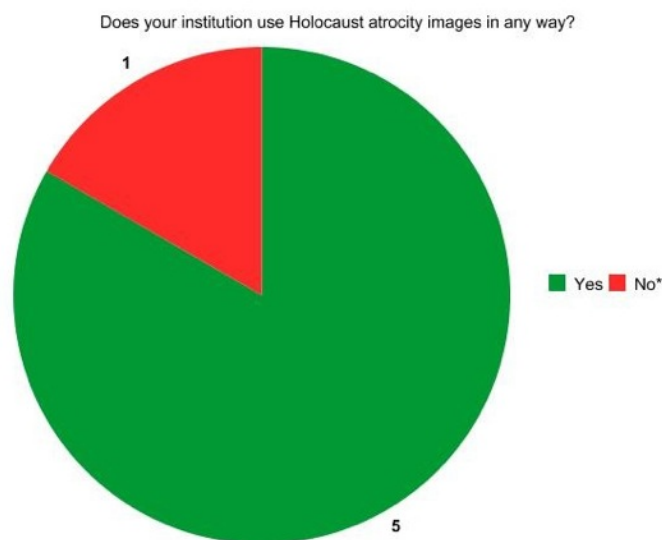


Figure 2

Can you describe the importance Holocaust atrocity images have in a museum or exhibit setting?

When asked why the use of Holocaust atrocity images is important, four of the respondents indicated that they believe it is an important tool for fully teaching the Holocaust. They said things like, “You can’t teach the Holocaust without them,” “you cannot have a Holocaust museum without including that kind of imagery,” and indicating that it is important as evidence of Nazi crimes. Another respondent noted that they believed Holocaust atrocity images should be included to be “historically accurate.” The outlier answer to this question was one respondent who was largely against the use of graphic images in museums, though even that respondent had a nuanced answer about the possible importance of their use. The responses they gave centered around the idea that you cannot ignore the existence of Holocaust atrocity images, however they believed that you do not need to show 6th graders these types of images in order to teach that the Holocaust was bad.

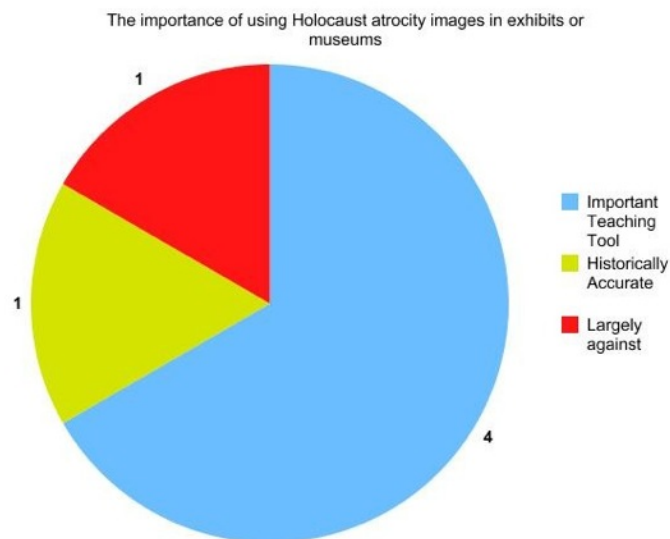


Figure 3

Do you see any down sides to showing graphic of violent images?

This question provided the widest variety of responses, which points to the complex nature of this issue. Of the six interviewees, two mentioned the impact Holocaust atrocity photos could potentially have on children. One indicated that they do not approve of the use of “shock” in education, while another, as indicated above, argued that young people do not need these images in order to understand that the Holocaust was a bad thing. Another two responded that there is concern about visitors not being able to emotionally process the images, and shutting down. One participant recognized that these images are difficult to look at, and that they take a toll emotionally. Another had concerns about the impact of too many Holocaust atrocity images on an unprepared audience, and that it could cause visitors to emotionally shut down. One respondent indicated that they were concerned that visitors would look at the image, and not at the context of the image and only be left with a kind of sensationalization of Holocaust violence. One interviewee did not respond.

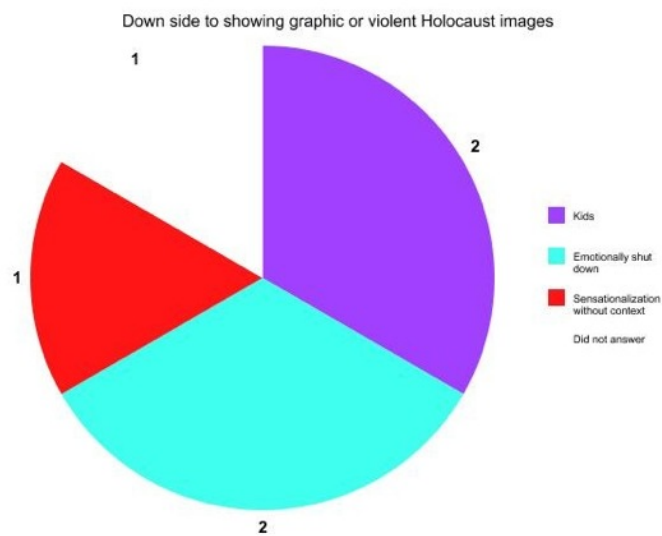


Figure 4

Do you think showing graphic or violent images has an effect on potential audiences?

With the exception of one interviewee who did not respond, all participants indicated that using Holocaust atrocity images can influence whether people visit your exhibit or not, but they did not all agree on how. Only one responded that the use of these images has a positive impact on potential visitors, noting that it could play on the fascination of visitors. One interviewee noted that it could have a negative impact on whether Holocaust survivors visit your exhibit. Another said that their community is small, and that if they did not use the images carefully, word of mouth would get around quickly and people would potentially chose to not visit. Two respondents had neutral answers, one just saying a simple “yes” and the other indicating that the use of Holocaust atrocity images draws an older audience. One person did not respond to this question.

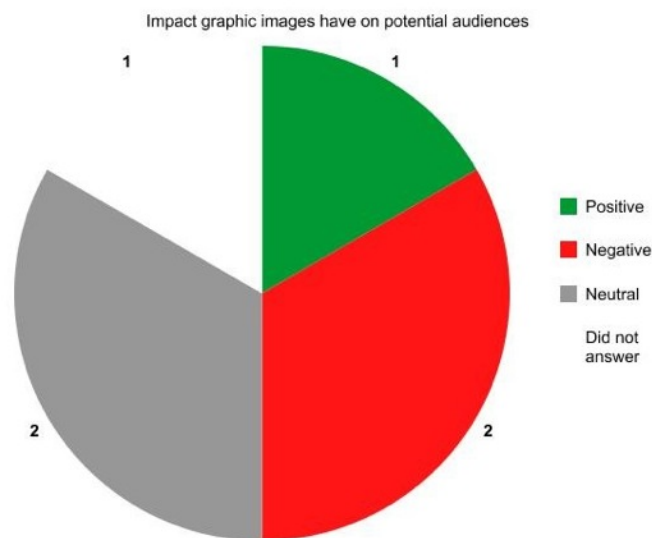


Figure 5

Does your institution have a policy or way of limiting access to graphic images from young people, or visitors who would rather not see them?

This question was meant to address whether or not everyone who walks through the exhibit is able to view Holocaust atrocity images, or if they are in some way hidden or restricted from the view of those who would rather not see them, or may be too young. There were two “no” answers to this question, one institution is on a college campus and rarely gets children and younger visitors. The other “no” indicated that while they do use Holocaust atrocity images, it is not very common, and they did not feel the need to have a policy of limiting access. There were three “yes” answers. One was from a large institution that keeps especially graphic Holocaust atrocity images out of direct view. Interested visitors must look over a barrier that young people and children cannot see over in order to view the images. Another “yes” indicated that the institution keeps Holocaust atrocity images in a binder for those who wish to see them. The third “yes” noted that some of their Holocaust atrocity images had restricted access, but that others did not. The question was not applicable to the exhibit that was not currently open.

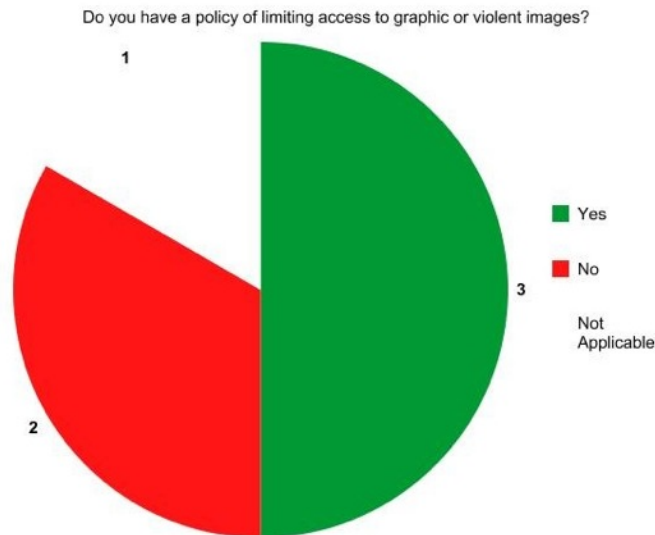


Figure 6

Do you warn visitors, or believe they should be warned, that they may see disturbing images?

This portion of the interview did not specifically define what warnings might look like. Some institutions have signs at the ticket counter notifying visitors that the museum contains graphic images, other put signs at the entrance to rooms or specific exhibits. Four of the respondents to this question indicated that yes, visitors are warned. However, they did not turn out to be clear answers. One interviewee noted that they do warn visitors, but not for special exhibits. Another indicated that they notify visitors, but only if the group contains young people. Only two of the four affirmative answers gave unqualified “yes” answers. A fifth respondent, from the institution with the closed exhibit, indicated that they would warn visitors. There was only one institution that does not inform visitors that they may see images that could disturb them.

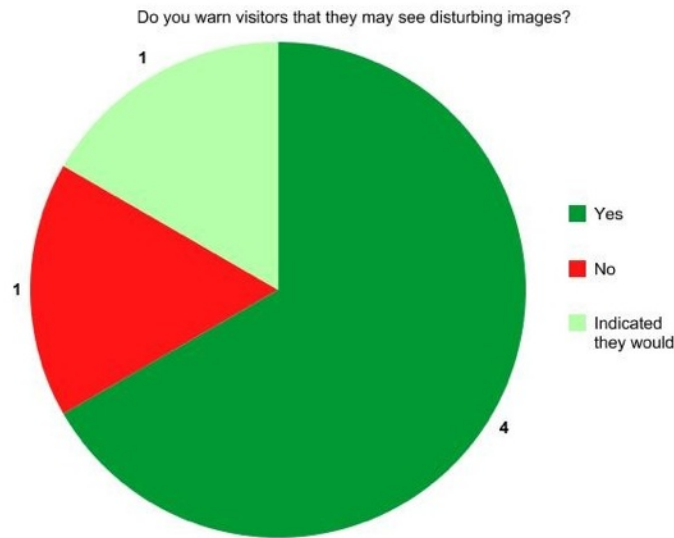


Figure 7

Has your institution ever received complaints about showing [or not showing, if relevant] graphic Holocaust images?

Three interviewees indicated that they had not received any complaints about graphic imagery. One of those respondents indicated that some visitors had spoken with her about images that made them uncomfortable, but that they were not complaining. The visitor simply wanted to express how the images made them feel to someone who worked there. Two more of the interviewees indicated that they had not heard of any complaints, and both also indicated that they would have known if complaints had been made, and they were reasonably sure that there

had been no complaints. The question was not applicable to the institution with the closed exhibit.

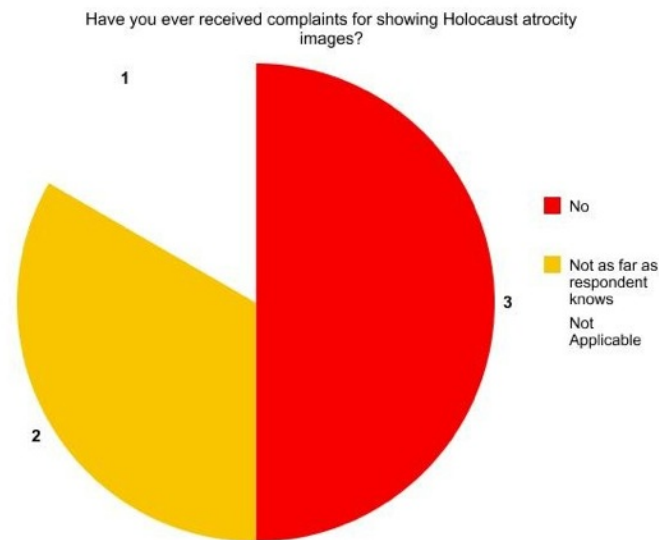


Figure 8

Emergent Topics

There were two emergent topics that came out in discussions with both my sample set, and those who participated in interviews but were not part of the sample set. The topic that came up the most was that of violent video games and movies, and the impact those have on young people. In particular, the concern that video games and movies are desensitizing young people to violence and graphic images, and thus Holocaust atrocity images might have less of an impact on young museum visitors. The other topic that emerged from these discussion was in relation to unrestricted access to Holocaust atrocity images. Specifically, the availability of these images on the internet. Thanks in part to massive online archives from museums like the USHMM or Yad Vashem, a simple Google search brings up seemingly endless

examples of Holocaust atrocity images. The discussions centered around the fact that this kind of access could make the use in a museum less impactful. Another that with modern photo editing software, the ability to manipulate these images could make the public suspicious of the authenticity of Holocaust atrocity images.

Discussion

Why should exhibits use Holocaust atrocity images?

The responses from these participants indicated several reasons they believe a museum or exhibit should include Holocaust atrocity images. For the interviewees, these images are necessary for accurately teaching the Holocaust. Between presenting a more "realistic" history of the Holocaust, or the belief that one simply cannot teach the Holocaust without the use of graphic imagery, the majority of those interviewed fall on the side of wanting to exhibit Holocaust atrocity images.

The positive impact of displaying graphic Holocaust images is backed up by the literature. As Susan Sontag points out, "Something becomes real - to those who are elsewhere, following it as 'news' - by being photographed."⁴⁹ Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn took the power behind visual media a step further, indicating that once seen, viewers become a part of what they are seeing: "We are living in a dictatorship of information, of facts. We know everything, we know from our endless 24-hour news channels that every day [ten] people die here or there. We want to know, but we don't want to see. Because when we see, we are more

⁴⁹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 21.

involved. This is the power of visual arts."⁵⁰ Perhaps the most powerful statement supporting this line of thought, and one specifically about the Holocaust, comes from Barbie Zelizer, who writes:

It is no surprise, then, that nearly all of us share some memory of the atrocity photos of World War II. In the years since the camps' liberation the atrocity photos have undergone strategic recycling, and the photographs that appeared on the camps' liberation have reappeared over the past half-century in history textbooks, commemorative journals, and documentary films. These memory practices make clear that those of us who did not experience the Holocaust personally now know it in part through its photographs.⁵¹

Other positives and potential positives were noted by participants, including the power that fascination could have on visitors. Zelizer tells of an unnamed writer's memories of seeing Holocaust images: "Others who had not seen the atrocity photos on their original display testified to the shock produced by seeing later. It was with a 'mixture of distance, horror, pity, curiosity, and titillation' that one author remembered seeing pictures of the Holocaust dead many years after the camps' liberation. 'I recall that pull of fascination, of seduction, that fear that I might keep looking and never be able to stop'"⁵² It is the relationship between fascination and shock that could be utilized by institutions, if they are so inclined. Rick Crownshaw uses Professor James. E. Young to make the point that "it is this sense of loss that provokes in those who visit and remember at these sites a sense of shock, perhaps something akin to trauma. As [James E.] Young (2000) argues, it is this shock that provokes remembrance of things not witnessed (a vicarious or secondary witnessing)."⁵³ He goes on to use Marianne Hirsch's ideas of "vicarious

⁵⁰ Quoted in Wayne Morrison, "Atrocity and the Power of the Image," *Social Justice* 36:,3 (2009-2010), 61.

⁵¹ Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 12.

⁵² *Ibid*, 159.

⁵³ Rick Crownshaw, "Photography and Memory in Holocaust Museums," *Mortality* 12:2 (2007), 176-177.

memory” or “postmemory,” and that they can be “an ethical means of memory’s transmission from one generation to another.”⁵⁴ Susan Sontag also has a positive view on the role shock can play as a tool for motivating the otherwise disinterested or those divorced from the event by distance, writing “Who are the ‘we’ at whom such shock-pictures are aimed? That ‘we’ would include not just the sympathizers of a smallish nation or a stateless people fighting for its life, but - a far larger constituency - those only nominally concerned about some nasty war taking place in another country. The photographs are a means of making ‘real’ (or ‘more real’) matters that the privilege and the merely safe might prefer to ignore.”⁵⁵ This idea of making the Holocaust “real” to visitors, especially younger visitors and people new to the subject, could be a major factor in Holocaust exhibits and museums, especially as the survivor population declines and opportunities to hear first hand accounts begin to disappear for subsequent generations.

While the museum professionals in this study seem to believe in the value of exhibiting Holocaust atrocity images, it is not without conditions. Half of the participants indicated that they restrict access for the images they do use. Four of the interviewees also indicated that they warn visitors that they will see disturbing images in an exhibit, and one indicated that they would do the same.

Why should exhibits not use Holocaust atrocity images?

One issue brought up by two of the six museum professionals was the concern that the use of graphic imagery could cause visitors - and younger visitors in particular - to emotionally

⁵⁴ Crownshaw, 177.

⁵⁵ Sontag, 7.

shut down. The worry was that the images could be too much for visitors to process, and the results would be that the effected would not process anything else in the museum or exhibit. This was supported by a third interviewee who voiced a concern that graphic images are difficult to look at, and another who also had concerns about the emotional impact on children. Zelizer pointed to the emotional difficulties that can be brought about by Holocaust atrocity photographs: “Yet what kind of reference point did [Holocaust atrocity photographs] provide? As we stand at century's end and look back, the visual memories of the Holocaust set in place fifty odd years ago seem oddly unsatisfying. The mounts of corpses, gaping pits of bodies, and figures angled like matchsticks across the camera's field of vision have paralyzed many of us to the point of critical inattention.”⁵⁶

Playwright William Saroyan said "one picture is worth a thousand words but only if you look at the picture and say or think the thousand words."⁵⁷ To put that in context of this project, if visitors are not able to look at the exhibit because they do not want to see the photographs, it would be exceedingly difficult for the exhibit or museum to achieve its goals. Concerns about the emotional impact on museum visitors can also be expanded to the issue of visitor numbers. Two interviewees expressed potential concerns that showing graphic Holocaust atrocity photographs would have a negative impact on attendance numbers.

This research also uncovered important questions regarding the ultimate value of exhibiting graphic or violent Holocaust images at all. One interviewee said that it is not necessary to show violent images to sixth-graders in order for them to understand that the

⁵⁶ Zelizer, 1.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 5.

Holocaust was terrible. The same participant also noted that it is easy to make people cry, it is much more difficult to make them think.⁵⁸ These ideas are backed up in the literature as well.

Zelizer brings up several important points about how little we know about the impact of images on collective memory:

We still do not know enough about how images help record public events, about whether and in which ways images function as better vehicles of proof than words, and about which vehicle - words or image - takes precedence in the situations of conflict between what the words tell us and the pictures show us. Moreover, as the technologies for photographic manipulation have changed and public skepticism about photos has grown, the questions themselves have changed too. We know even less about how images function as vehicles of collective memory. Beyond recognizing that they conveniently freeze scenes in our minds and serve as building blocks to remembering, we do not yet fully understand how images help us remember, in particular in circumstances we did not experience personally.⁵⁹

Susan A. Crane take the issue further, suggesting that there are no longer strong arguments for exhibiting or utilizing Holocaust atrocity photographs:

For the generations immediately following the genocide, atrocity photos and images of Nazi crimes served as vital testimony. For succeeding generations, however, access to certain "recirculated" images has created a sense of familiarity with the Holocaust and with the National Socialist era that may prevent, rather than facilitate, engagement with the historical subject, particularly for students... While I am not advocating the wholesale destruction of Holocaust photographs, I will suggest that removing them from view or "repatriating" them might serve Holocaust memory better than their reduction to atrocious objects of banal attention.

These arguments all point to the idea that Holocaust atrocity photographs and images no longer serve the memory of the Holocaust, and may not work toward the goal of teaching the Holocaust to generations that came after the events of the 1930s and 40s. Emotional impact, attendance, and even over use of Holocaust atrocity photos are issues that exhibit designers and developers should be keeping in mind.

⁵⁸Stephen M. Goldman, interviewed by Mark Mulder, March 13, 2014.

⁵⁹ Zelizer, 2

Limitations

There are several limitations that should be noted for this research. While six Holocaust institutions were represented in this study, there are many, many more in the United States and Canada alone. The opinions expressed in this study come from an intentionally selected association, and while the results are not generalizable, they are indicative of the people spoken to for this study. Further, international opinion was not taken into account, or the opinions of Holocaust survivors themselves unless quoted in the literature. The self selecting method for finding participants could mean that responders were the most opinionated of potential subjects. It is possible that the participants for this study were the most passionate in the field, and had given the subject a lot of time and thought. A more random sampling of Holocaust museum professionals may have provided different types of answers from people who care about the topic. Finally, when taken with the ideas in the literature, these are the opinions of professionals in the field and academics. The visitors perspective is not represented in this study, which could provide valuable information about the emotional impact of viewing graphic or violent Holocaust atrocity photographs and how that effects the museum or exhibit experience.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Review

The goal of this research was to describe the problems and benefits of including graphic imagery in Holocaust exhibits. The interviews conducted in this project supported by the literature provided answers to both the big questions of why should exhibits use Holocaust atrocity images and why exhibits should not use Holocaust atrocity images. The methods employed successfully identified a small group of passionate respondents who shared their ideas on both the benefits and problems surrounding the exhibition of Holocaust atrocity images. While these results are not generalizable to the field as a whole, they give excellent ideas the field should consider when creating exhibits. Similarly, these types of questions are helpful for any exhibit designer or developer to ask when considering the use of graphic or violent images for their exhibits.

The question of whether to exhibit Holocaust atrocity images is a complex issue, and requires careful consideration. This is evident in the answers given by participants in this study. While the majority of those interviewed believe that Holocaust atrocity images are important tools for effectively and fully teaching about the Holocaust, most also recognized that visitors should have a choice to view the images, or to not view them if they are not so inclined. These types of nuanced discussions illustrate just how complex of a topic this really is. However, by interviewing a small group of passionate museum professionals who have considered this topic professionally, this study has uncovered several recommendations for those who are considering the use of Holocaust atrocity photographs in exhibits.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations for those who are designing exhibits about the Holocaust, and who are wondering about whether to include violent, graphic, or atrocity images:

1. Know your audience
2. Have a strong purpose statement for your exhibit
3. Conduct evaluations, especially front end evaluations
4. Give visitors the option to not see potentially troubling images

Possibilities for Further Research

The data collected from this project was from academics and museum professionals. I found that the professionals were concerned how visitors, especially younger visitors, would react. Specifically, they showed concern about visitors emotionally shutting down and not experiencing the rest of an exhibit or museum. An audience evaluation project would help answer these fears, and tell exhibit developers and designers exactly how the public reacts to graphic and violent images. It can also help them to understand if the visitors believe Holocaust atrocity images are an important part of telling a “complete” or “authentic” story, and whether or not they expect to see them or want to see them.

More data could also help understand the trends found in the interviews conducted in this project. The self-selecting sampling style may have encouraged only people with strong opinions about the topic to respond, a different sampling style could bring more varying opinions. It

would also be valuable to collect information from exhibit designers themselves, and especially designers who do not expressly work within the subject of the Holocaust. Getting a wider range of opinions from people who do this kind of work will serve the conversation well.

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