

“An Immersive Journey:”

Analyzing the Use of Survivor Testimony in Holocaust Museums

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify interpretive strategies used by museums in connecting visitors to Holocaust survivors through testimony. As the Holocaust recedes further into the past and Holocaust survivors get older, Holocaust museums must find new ways to stay relevant and connect visitors to survivor testimony. Studies have indicated that meeting a survivor and hearing their testimony firsthand can be the most salient part of visiting a Holocaust museum, and therefore understanding how museums use survivor testimony now can help develop ways to continue to use it in the future. Two data collection methods were used: semi-structured interviews and exhibit analysis. The sample for the interviews was five museum professionals at different American Holocaust museums that use testimony in innovative ways. The sample for the exhibit analysis was three of these five museums that use new technologies to make testimony more immersive. This study’s results suggest that new technologies make testimony more accessible and less strenuous on survivors, that museum professionals see testimony as an impactful and unique museum experience, and that interpretive planning and design impact how these stories are told in Holocaust museums. Since this study’s sample was purposive and sites were chosen for their use of interactive testimony features, these results may not be generalizable to all Holocaust museums.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As the Holocaust recedes further into the past, and as Holocaust survivors get older, Holocaust museums must find new ways to stay relevant and connect visitors to Holocaust lessons through survivor testimony. For museums that focus on memorializing a traumatic event or era, the visitor experience is not purely object- or story-based: “In the context of relating to the Holocaust, [the institution] might ask the museum visitor to ask not only who ‘they’ were, but also who ‘I’ am in relation to the objects, history, and individuals on display.”¹ Many Holocaust museums rely on survivor testimony to turn abstract ideas into personally affecting tales that are relevant to visitors.

Modern Holocaust museums deal with “how to make the material new, interesting, intellectually engaging, and emotionally affecting, [and] how to build on what students have previously learned rather than reiterating that which they already know.”² Many Holocaust museums incorporate survivor testimony into their exhibits and/or programming to make the material more engaging, but what will happen when there are no more survivors left to tell their stories? Studies have indicated that meeting a survivor and hearing their testimony firsthand can be the most salient part of visiting a Holocaust museum,³ and therefore understanding how museums use survivor testimony now can help develop ways to continue to use it in the future.

Purpose statement

The purpose of this study was to identify interpretive strategies used by museums in connecting visitors to Holocaust survivors through testimony.

¹ H.J. Garrett, "The Meanings of a Holocaust Museum: Before and After," in *Beyond Pedagogy: Reconsidering the Public Purpose of Museums*, ed. Avner Segall and Brenda Trofanenko, (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014): 94.

² Simone Schweber, "'Holocaust Fatigue': Teaching It Today," *Social Education* 70, no. 1 (2006): 50.

³ Henry Maitles and Paula Cowan, "'It reminded me of what really matters': teacher responses to the Lessons from Auschwitz Project," *Educational Review* (Routledge) 64, no. 2 (May 2012): 136.

Research questions

1. What do museum professionals think survivor testimony adds to the visitor experience?
2. What effect do interpretive planning and design have on survivor testimony in these spaces?
3. How have new technologies impacted how Holocaust museums use survivor testimony?
4. How do museum professionals see survivor testimony being used in the future, when survivors are no longer alive?

Significance

Holocaust survivors are dying, which begs the question: what role will Holocaust museums play in 10 or 20 years, and how can testimony be meaningfully incorporated into these museums when survivors are gone? Studying exhibits and technology that deal directly with making survivor testimony more accessible can inform the greater museum field as to the value of this technology. This area of study will be a useful contribution to the field as we get further and further from the Holocaust, and as more survivors die and can no longer tell their stories firsthand.

Studies such as this will help demonstrate how Holocaust museums understand and use testimony as a defining feature, even when those who gave said testimony are long gone. This area of study is also relevant to other institutions that use first-person testimony as an interpretive device. Additionally, this study's focus on new technologies, and analysis of technology within exhibit spaces, has significance for any institutions that use or are considering the use of such technologies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to identify interpretive strategies used by museums in connecting visitors to Holocaust survivors through testimony. The research in this literature review came from the fields of museology, Holocaust studies, and studies of collective memory and traumatic representation. The first section of this literature review described Holocaust Museums and Memory. The second section included literature about Immersive Experiences in Holocaust Museums. The third and final section synthesized Interpretive Strategies and Affect within Holocaust museums.

Holocaust Museums and Memory

The abundance of Holocaust-era artifacts, as well as the stories that give these objects meaning, have led to a large number of Holocaust memorials and museums being erected across the globe. In addition to in-house programming and exhibits, many of these institutions offer formal educational aid to schools, and provide research help to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive.⁴ Due to the reach and sensitive nature of these institutions, some scholars and survivors consider these institutions not only as museums, but also as sacred, spiritual spaces.⁵ In order to teach the Holocaust in the contemporary world, it is not enough to present the facts. Because of the oversaturation of Holocaust stories in mass media, dating back to the post-World War II era, the general themes and storylines are known worldwide.⁶ Therefore, teaching the

⁴ Stephanie Shosh Rotem, "A Sense of Jewish Empowerment or a Lesson in Universal Values? New Directions in the Design of Holocaust Museums in the USA," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* (Routledge) 27, no. 2 (2013): 136: "Educational centers, libraries, classrooms, and lecture halls...constitute almost 25% of the overall area of the Illinois [Holocaust Museum and Education Center], and 40% of the [Holocaust Museum] Houston."

⁵ Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, "Poetics of Memory: Aesthetics and Experience of Holocaust Remembrance in Museums," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* (Routledge) 30, no. 3 (2016): 318-319, 325-326.

⁶ Schweber, "Holocaust Fatigue," 49.

Holocaust, whether in a classroom or an informal learning setting, must be done in a way as to avoid “Holocaust fatigue” and maintain the human stories of this genocide.⁷ Maintaining these human stories is often achieved through survivor testimony, which is used throughout exhibits, as well as in museums’ internal and external programming.⁸

Museums that focus on the Holocaust or serve as memorials or historic sites have begun to shift from being places where visitors passively learn to “places of active citizen engagement.”⁹ In order to appeal to a broad audience, these museums often tell not only the story of the Holocaust, but also lessons of tolerance, prejudice, and persecution on a larger scale. By relying on these common themes, Holocaust museums gain a universal appeal, and move beyond just being Jewish history museums that appeal to a small segment of the public.¹⁰

Another way to appeal to a broader audience, and to take a deeper look at the era, is to move away from relying on very common images of figures such as Adolf Hitler or Anne Frank, as the proliferation of these “formulaic and habitual” images and stories can reduce the complexity of the issues.¹¹ This can lead to reductionism of this era as presented to the visitor, and can rob the visitor of the chance to learn something new or unexpected.¹² In order for the lessons of the Holocaust to be internalized and understood, it is vital to contextualize the “broader ethical and moral issues” present within these stories.¹³

In the absence of personal voices, issues arise when museums use objects to stand in for history. This is an issue because physical objects that represent trauma may unintentionally

⁷ Schweber, “Holocaust Fatigue,” 44-50.

⁸ Andrew Hoskins, “Signs of the Holocaust: exhibiting memory in a mediated age,” *Media Culture & Society* (SAGE Publications) 25 (2003): 10, 12, 17, 20.

⁹ Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (New York: Berg, 2007): 149.

¹⁰ Rotem, “A Sense of Jewish Empowerment,” 136.

¹¹ Anna Reading, “Digital interactivity in public memory institutions: The uses of new technologies in Holocaust museums,” *Media, Culture & Society* (SAGE Publications) 25 (2003): 76.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Maitles and Cowan, “It reminded me of what really matters,” 134.

distance visitors and lead to them becoming emotionally overwhelmed and unable to process additional information.¹⁴ Visitors can also feel distanced if objects present the past as a distinct moment in time that is removed from their own lives. Static objects in museum cases may prevent visitors from internalizing the lessons of the Holocaust by presenting history as firmly delineated, without a connection to the present, and of a distinctive, explained significance as decided by the curator.¹⁵ Objects within such a constructed space can also be interpreted as “*evidence of atrocity*,” which can mislead visitors, create an abstraction of these objects, and lead to falsely implied relationships between objects and stories.¹⁶

Since these object-based problems can be prevalent within the museum setting, "the choice and arrangement of artifacts and images [call] into question the extent to which a truly authentic depiction of the Holocaust is possible at all."¹⁷ Therefore, presenting an artifact-only space as an immersive experience, without survivors' voices throughout, can unintentionally lead to an inauthentic and misinformed experience for visitors.¹⁸ Museums need to be aware of the perspective they are presenting, the collective memory that often informs a visitor's understanding of the Holocaust, and the pitfalls that come with materializing an era (especially one marked by trauma) through objects.¹⁹

In learning about the Holocaust, one of the most effective ways to connect visitors to personal stories is to hear from Holocaust survivors. Although there are countless hours of testimony recorded audio-visually, there is nothing quite like hearing a survivor's story in-

¹⁴ Michael Bernard-Donals, "Synecdochic Memory at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum," *College English* (National Council of Teachers of English) 74, no. 5 (May 2012): 417-436.

¹⁵ Hansen-Glucklich, "Poetics of Memory," 323.

¹⁶ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 101.

¹⁷ Bernard-Donals, "Synecdochic Memory," 419.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁹ Hoskins, "Signs of the Holocaust," 7-22.

person.²⁰ The power of such an experience is well-documented, and in the case of the participants in an educational program at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum in Poland, nearly all of the teachers who facilitated the program for their students felt that hearing a survivor speak was the most important and effective part of the program.²¹ It is wonderful that so many visitors to memorials and museums get to hear survivors' tales of life during the Holocaust, and the effectiveness and power found in these firsthand accounts cannot be replicated.

Immersive Experiences in Holocaust Museums

Since it is not always possible to have Holocaust survivors speak to visitors at a Holocaust museum, museums must find other ways to connect their visitors to the personal stories contained within their walls. In order to make the stories of the Holocaust feel more personal, many museums add immersive components to their storytelling. Although this can be an effective tool in connecting visitors to the personal narratives of Holocaust survivors and/or victims, it also has pitfalls.²²

One problem with immersive experiences emerges when interactive devices imbue visitors with a false sense of agency and treat the personal stories of the Holocaust as a gaming system.²³ When certain sites have visitors move through the space as though they were making moral choices about, say, whether or not to hide a Jewish family during the Holocaust, the experience can be problematic and give the visitor a false sense of morality, and a sense that

²⁰ Maitles and Cowan, "It reminded me of what really matters," 136.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Reading, "Digital interactivity in public memory institutions," 67.

²³ Ibid., 73.

making these decisions was a one-step process.²⁴ Technology and digital interfaces should also not change the main narrative, or give visitors markedly different experiences or understandings dependent on which interactive component they choose.²⁵

Although there are drawbacks to interactive components in Holocaust museums, they can also be very effective tools for connecting visitors to the stories being told. This can be seen in museums that construct experiences in which visitors are participants within the historical story being told, without experiencing any problematic false agency. Examples include museums, such as the Holocaust Center for Humanity in Seattle, WA, that provide visitors with an identity card at the beginning of their visit. As a visitor moves through the space and learns about the progression of the Holocaust, they find out more information about the person on their card's life during and after the Holocaust.²⁶

These immersive experiences can lead to museums acting as transformational spaces that can affect visitors far beyond their visits.²⁷ When visitors feel a connection to these deeply personal stories of trauma, they can find themselves making a “moral commitment” to apply the lessons they learned in their visit to their everyday lives.²⁸ In 2014, 1.53 million people visited the Auschwitz Birkenau Memorial and Museum, and 1.44 million visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.²⁹ Many visitors to these spaces are searching

²⁴ Reading, “Digital interactivity in public memory institutions,” 74.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 67-85.

²⁶ Holocaust Center for Humanity, *Holocaust Center for Humanity - Museum*, 2018, <https://www.holocaustcenterseattle.org/museum>.

²⁷ Joanna K Garner, Avi Kaplan and Kevin Pugh, “Museums as Contexts for Transformative Experiences and Identity Development,” *Journal of Museum Education* (Taylor & Francis) 41, no. 4 (June 2016): 342.

²⁸ Chaim Noy, “‘My Holocaust experience was great!’: Entitlements for participation in museum media,” *Discourse & Communication* (SAGE Publishing) 10, no. 3 (2016): 282.

²⁹ Daniel Reynolds, “Consumers or witnesses? Holocaust tourists and the problem of authenticity,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* (SAGE Publishing) 16, no. 2 (2016): 334-335.

for something broader than an historical overview; they are searching "for an experience of the Other that is sufficiently alienating as to invite reflection and self-reinvention."³⁰

When thinking of how people visit these spaces, it is important to note that witnessing these spaces does not mean understanding the experience of those who lived through the traumas on display.³¹ In memorial museums and at memorials, tourists can either connect with the trauma on display and be "secondary witnesses to suffering," or they can retreat from what is displayed and feel even more alienated from the victims after their visit.³² The latter can happen when visitors realize just how much they do not understand about the experience, and just how traumatic the stories of the Holocaust and other genocides truly are.³³

Unfortunately, with dark tourism,³⁴ as with any other type of tourism, there is the possibility of tourists using visits to these sites in a stamp-collecting fashion. This was seen clearly in a study that examined visitor comments in a guest book at the Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg, FL.³⁵ Although many comments reflected positive experiences and moving visits, some visitors compared their visit to those at other Holocaust museums, implying some sort of "Holocaust-site hierarchy," and others seemed to treat the experience as just one more stamp to collect on their Holocaust journey: "I loved the experience! Now to the one in D.C.!"³⁶ Of course, those in the Holocaust museum field want to reach as many visitors as

³⁰ Reynolds, "Consumers or witnesses?," 338.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 343-344.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Kim van Kaam, "'This Is Not Happening To Me': Places of Holocaust and the Problem of Traumatic Representation," *Dutch Crossing Journal of Low Countries Studies* (Routledge) 34, no. 3 (November 2010): 219-220.

³⁴ Reynolds, "Consumers or witnesses?," 336: Dark tourism is "travel to places of mass destruction and death that have a strong cultural resonance because of our familiarity with them through the media."

³⁵ Noy, "'My Holocaust experience was great!'"

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 284.

possible, but the idea of only experiencing these spaces as another site to check off a list can trivialize the stories, affect, and empathy innate to these institutions.³⁷

These traits of affect and empathy can be more potent than ever in modern museums, thanks to the increased availability and advancement of technology. These new (or advanced) technologies have led to a difference in how people interact with museums, and how museums can provide for their visitors.³⁸ Immersive technologies can fully engage visitors in a story, just as books or movies do, leading to a more salient museum experience. By having visitors connect to emotional content on a personal level, they can end up retaining more information, since emotional arousal and memory are linked.³⁹

With survivor testimony technology, visitors can choose not only which stories are told, but also which parts of stories are told.⁴⁰ The most promising new immersive technology for survivor testimony comes in the form of the University of Southern California's Shoah Foundation's "New Dimensions in Testimony" technology. This project, which began in 2010, has compiled countless hours of testimony of over a dozen survivors in order to create an "interactive biography" for each.⁴¹ These interactive biographies, 16 of which exist as of May 2018, appear in the form of a pre-recorded holographic video of the individual with which visitors can engage in conversation.⁴²

During the multi-day process of creating these biographies, the subjects were asked thousands of questions and provided countless details of their Holocaust experience, which,

³⁷ Noy, "My Holocaust experience was great!" 284.

³⁸ Maggie Burnette Stogner, "Communicating Culture in the 21st Century," *Journal of Museum Education* (Taylor & Francis) 36, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 190.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

⁴¹ USC Shoah Foundation, "New Dimensions in Testimony: Technology in Service to Humanity," *USC Shoah Foundation*, November 2017, https://sfi.usc.edu/sites/default/files/docfiles/ndt_one_sheet_20171127b.pdf.

⁴² David Traum, et al., "New Dimensions in Testimony: Digitally Preserving a Holocaust Survivor's Interactive Storytelling," in *Interactive storytelling : 8th International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling* (Copenhagen: ICIDS, 2015), 269-270.

when compiled, allow visitors to receive up to 2,000 answers when engaged in conversation.⁴³ These high-definition, multi-capture videos are very realistic, and allow visitors to engage with survivors while looking them in the eye and having a back-and-forth dialogue. This new technology is very promising in that it can keep survivors and their stories “alive” even after they have passed away, and preliminary evaluation data suggests that students feel just as, if not more, engaged by and connected to the stories told through the technology as by testimony given by a live survivor.⁴⁴ However, as effective as it is, this technology should not be the only immersive element in a space, as it is based off personal, subjective experiences and can potentially lack the context that artifacts or other museum features can provide.⁴⁵

By interacting with and being immersed in different stories within a museum space, visitors can connect "to different cultural experiences and to each other in meaningful ways."⁴⁶ Clearly, personal connections can enhance visitors' connections to the material, but when considering how to introduce immersive elements, museum professionals must make ethical decisions. If every component within a space is technological, visitors who are not technologically adept may feel excluded, or those who do not like interacting with screens may be put off.⁴⁷ Therefore, it is museum professionals' responsibility to make this technology easy to use and to intersperse it with other elements in the exhibit, in order to avoid creating technological barriers or exclusory exhibits.⁴⁸

⁴³ Traum, et al., "New Dimensions in Testimony," 271-272.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 279.

⁴⁵ van Kaam, "This Is Not Happening To Me," 217-218, 223.

⁴⁶ Stogner, "Communicating Culture in the 21st Century," 196.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 197.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Interpretive Strategies and Affect

Although creating an immersive feature within a Holocaust museum can do a great job of drawing and engaging visitors, without a purposeful interpretive plan, visitors may not benefit from the exhibit features as much as they could.⁴⁹ Interpretive plans help museums create clarity of purpose in connecting public programming and exhibits not only to their educational goals, but also to their "organization's desired relationship with its audiences and its active participation in its community."⁵⁰ Although many museums create interpretive strategies for particular exhibits or evaluations, not all create them as overarching plans for the museum, which can help distill their mission and make them more visitor-centered.⁵¹ In any case, an interpretive plan, alongside a design strategy, can help a museum communicate what and how they want their visitors to learn.⁵²

Traditional interpretive strategies such as personalizing history, allowing visitors to participate or make decisions, and asking the visitor questions in order to create connections to their own lives are often used in addition to or alongside new technologies.⁵³ These strategies can help center the visitor within the context of the exhibit, while also connecting them with the individuals represented within the space, no matter how different from themselves the visitor may perceive them to be.⁵⁴ This "facilitation of others' experiences" helps visitors personalize the

⁴⁹ Stephen Hague, "How to Plan and Implement Interpretation," *History News* (American Association for State and Local History) 68, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 1-8.

⁵⁰ Judy Koke, "Comprehensive Interpretive Plans: The Next Step in Visitor Centeredness and Business Success?," *The Journal of Museum Education* (Taylor & Francis, Ltd.) 33, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 249.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Wolfram Kaiser, "The Transnational Turn Meets the Educational Turn: Engaging and Educating Adolescents in History Museums in Europe," *Journal of Educational Media, Memory & Society* (Berghahn Books) 4, no. 2 (Autumn 2012): 8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

history they are learning, in order to make the concepts more relevant.⁵⁵ Relating visitors not only to objects, but also to stories helps museums ground abstract historical ideas in reality.⁵⁶ These strategies, along with aforementioned immersive strategies, can help visitors gain "developmental engagement" that enhances their "self-concept and worldview."⁵⁷ Therefore, viewing survivor testimony in a Holocaust museum can help visitors gain a better grasp of Holocaust history, and contribute to a deeper understanding of and connection to greater issues of tolerance, trauma, and empathy.⁵⁸

This deeper understanding can come from a so-called "transformative experience" that leads to visitors internalizing concepts they have learned in museums—in this case, lessons of tolerance, trauma, and empathy as understood through stories from the Holocaust—and using them in their daily life.⁵⁹ If visitors take what they learn in the museum setting and apply it to acting or thinking differently in their own lives, they can emerge changed from that visit.⁶⁰ In this case, the concept of a transformative experience is used as a specific marker of the visitors' internalization of a concept and how it affects their perception of experience in their everyday life, not as a marker of the visitor emerging from the museum visit as a transformed individual.⁶¹

Another way that Holocaust museums explore the idea of transformation is through their physical space. Many Holocaust museums use light and darkness to define their spaces: brighter spaces lay out the sociopolitical context of the Nazi regime, while darker spaces are reserved for the horrors of the Nazi regime and individual Holocaust experiences.⁶² Since many Holocaust

⁵⁵ Garner, Kaplan and Pugh, "Museums as Contexts for Transformative Experiences," 348.

⁵⁶ Schweber, "'Holocaust Fatigue,'" 50.

⁵⁷ Garner, Kaplan and Pugh, "Museums as Contexts for Transformative Experiences," 341.

⁵⁸ Maitles and Cowan, "'It reminded me of what really matters,'" 133.

⁵⁹ Garner, Kaplan and Pugh, "Museums as Contexts for Transformative Experiences," 342.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 342-345.

⁶² Kit Messham-Muir, "Into Darkness: Affect and Dark Space in Holocaust Exhibitions," *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 4, no. 3 (2015): 435.

museums focus on the personal experiences of those who experienced the era, dark space is part of the "visual vocabulary" of these museums.⁶³ Even without reading panels or following along with a docent or an audio guide, visitors can perceive shifts in light and darkness as triggers to shift moods and introduce different stages of their museum experience. In conceptualizing how Holocaust museums design their space, it is logical that darker spaces deal with elements such as Nazi death camps, which evoke "dark" in a broad sense: they are clear markers of evil, demoralization, and loss of identity.⁶⁴

These dark spaces are visually and emotionally impactful, and can be used to elicit empathy from visitors: "Dark spaces...assert an affective congruence between the loss of self experienced by victims of the Holocaust and the visitor's empathic resonance with the systematic dehumanization associated with entering into concentration camps."⁶⁵ In order to benefit from the empathy that darker spaces often elicit, exhibit designers often introduce impactful objects in these spaces. Atmospheric darkness, with focused light, helps emphasize objects, making sure the visitor is focused on them and their greater significance.⁶⁶

In contrast, many Holocaust museums end their permanent exhibits with bright spaces, in order to signify the power of life prevailing over the darkness of death and the evils of the Holocaust.⁶⁷ In many cases, this use of darkness and light is a very effective, yet simple, use of design and interpretive strategy that adds meaning to the stories on display.⁶⁸ In many Holocaust museums, designers use darkness and light strategically from start to finish, and the aforementioned brightness at the end of a gallery serves to signal a visible transformation.⁶⁹

⁶³ Messham-Muir, "Into Darkness," 436

⁶⁴ Ibid., 441.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 443.

⁶⁷ Hansen-Glucklich, "Poetics of Memory," 327.

⁶⁸ Messham-Muir, "Into Darkness," 455.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 449.

These museums also use open (“voided”) space as a design element to call to mind all who were lost, and sometimes, natural elements of rock and water are used to serve as stark contrasts and symbols of remembrance.⁷⁰ These spatial design elements turn these museums into performative spaces that allow the visitor to make personal connections, feel strong emotions, and learn how to take action throughout their visit, instead of just learning in a linear fashion.⁷¹

In synthesizing this literature, it is evident that there is a great deal of research on specific visitor experiences and emotional responses to Holocaust museums, but there is not much research on specific Holocaust museum interpretive strategies (beyond light and dark), or how these museums plan to display and use survivor testimony after survivors are gone. Many studies tout the benefits of having students and museum visitors experience survivor testimony, but there is little research on how museums will continue to provide engaging, true-to-life testimony experiences when survivors are no longer able to tell their stories firsthand.

⁷⁰ Hansen-Glucklich, “Poetics of Memory,” 317, 322, 332.

⁷¹ Messham-Muir, “Into Darkness,” 455.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will serve to describe the two methods undertaken during the study, the justification for each method, and the coding strategy for each method. The purpose of this study was to identify interpretive strategies used by museums in connecting visitors to Holocaust survivors through testimony.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What do museum professionals think survivor testimony adds to the visitor experience?
2. What effect do interpretive planning and design have on survivor testimony in these spaces?
3. How have new technologies impacted how Holocaust museums use survivor testimony?
4. How do museum professionals see survivor testimony being used in the future, when survivors are no longer alive?

A multi-site case study approach was chosen to answer these questions. In order to study survivor testimony features within the museum setting, it was necessary to include multiple sites and methods. Five sites across the United States were chosen for their innovative technologies and exhibit design used to present survivor testimony: the Holocaust Memorial Center (Farmington Hills, MI), Holocaust Museum Houston (Houston, TX), Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center (Skokie, IL), Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust (Los Angeles, CA), and Museum of Jewish Heritage (New York, NY). These five Holocaust museums ranged in size, location, and type of survivor testimony features on display.

Method #1: Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff members from all five sites. Three interviews were conducted in person, and two were conducted over the phone. Each interview consisted of approximately 12 questions (see Appendix A) and was an average of 26 minutes long, with the shortest being 20 minutes and the longest, 36 minutes. The semi-structured approach allowed the interviewer to skip over questions that had already been adequately answered, and to ask new questions as they arose through interviewees' responses. Interview guides were sent to participants ahead of time, in order for them to ruminate on the questions being asked.

Sampling: Semi-Structured Interviews

One staff member from each of the five museums participated in these semi-structured interviews. Staff members who worked in exhibits and education were chosen, because they dealt most closely with the survivor testimony features on display. Three interviewees worked in education departments, and two were curators.

Data Analysis Procedures: Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed and coded using NVivo software. The interviews were coded using inductive coding, meaning the themes emerged from the responses of the interviewees and were not pre-conceived. Coding was done through key word searches, word frequency searches, and word maps in NVivo.

Method #2: Exhibit Analysis

Exhibit analysis was conducted at three sites using an original analysis instrument (see Appendix B). This instrument was created using themes that emerged from Chapter 2, the literature review. The instrument is a table consisting of five rows and three columns, meant to give adequate space to describe not only the elements within the exhibits, but also the connections to the literature and the research questions of the study. Interpretive features of light and darkness were highlighted in this instrument, as they were common themes within the interpretive design literature, and interactivity was also highlighted since it had a clear connection to emerging technologies.

Sampling: Exhibit Analysis

The three exhibit analysis sites were chosen due to their innovative, technology-heavy approaches to presenting survivor testimony. Without visiting these exhibits in person, it would have been difficult to understand their impact on visitors and their interpretive planning and design aspects. These three sites were: the Holocaust Museum Houston (Houston, TX), Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center (Skokie, IL), and Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust (Los Angeles, CA). The first two sites featured the aforementioned USC Shoah Foundation's *New Dimensions in Testimony* technology, and the last site had an interactive testimony feature entitled *Tree of Testimony* that featured 70 screens each showing individual testimonies.

Data Analysis Procedure: Exhibit Analysis

The handwritten exhibit analysis data was entered into NVivo software, where it was coded and analyzed. This instrument was coded using deductive coding, meaning that the pre-determined elements that comprised the instrument were used to analyze how each museum approached the use of testimony features and technology, and no new themes were added during the coding and analysis process. Since the pre-determined elements contained within this instrument were deduced from the literature, the data analysis procedure included connecting collected data back to the sources from which the elements were derived.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

Method #1: Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff members from all five sites: the Holocaust Memorial Center (Farmington Hills, MI), Holocaust Museum Houston (Houston, TX), Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center (Skokie, IL), Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust (Los Angeles, CA), and Museum of Jewish Heritage (New York, NY). Three interviews were conducted in person, and two were conducted over the phone. Each interview consisted of approximately 12 questions and was an average of 26 minutes long. One staff member from each of the five museums participated in these semi-structured interviews. Three participants worked in education departments, and two were curators.

The interviews were coded by research question and through emergent coding methods, meaning the themes emerged from the responses of the interviewees and were not pre-conceived. The following section will illustrate how participants' responses aligned with the study's research questions, including support from participants' quotes from their interviews. In order to protect the confidentiality of the museum professionals interviewed, each site was assigned a random number, and the names of neither the institutions nor personnel were used.

Research Question #1: What do museum professionals think survivor testimony adds to the visitor experience?

Since this research question inquired about museum professionals' opinions on the visitor experience, it was only applicable to the interview method, and not to the exhibit analysis method of this study and therefore was only analyzed in this section of Chapter 4. To answer this

question, the researcher asked participants about the outcomes that interactive testimony features are designed to achieve within their museums; how these outcomes are assessed; how, if at all, visitors can express themselves after interacting with these features; and how survivor testimony impacts museum visitors' understanding of the Holocaust.

a) The importance of a first-person account.

The first pattern that emerged from participants' answers to these questions was that testimony adds to the experience because it presents a firsthand account that helps visitors connect to the stories of the Holocaust. Four of the five participants expressed this idea as central to understanding the place of survivor testimony in Holocaust museums. The participant from Site 1 explained that they feel that the biggest impact survivor testimony has on visitors "comes down to that firsthand experience" that testimony provides. They clarified further, "We want that local aspect, so that when people come to visit—90-some percent of our visitors are not Jewish or are not part of the Jewish community—and learn that the people that live in their area experienced this firsthand, I think it really changes how they view the information that they're learning." The participant from Site 2 said, "I really think that the firsthand transmission of the experience is really the most effective way to get the message across." The participant from Site 4 expanded: "It's eyewitness, first-person testimony and documents what the Nazis did. I think it is better for the visitor experience... It steps up education. And there's nothing better than that first person testimony."

The participant from Site 3 went into further detail, explaining how their museum's use of first-person testimony connected visitors to the stories of the Holocaust in deeper, more impactful ways than other sources can: "Speaking with a survivor or even listening to a survivor

[through our museum's interactive testimony feature] is so different than reading it, because it's from their own mouth. The impact is so much stronger...I think it's really deep and meaningful for them." Evidently, this sample of Holocaust museum professionals agreed that the firsthand stories expressed through survivor testimony add impact to the visitor experience in ways that other methods and features within their museums cannot. Expanding on this concept, the second theme that emerged from participants' interviews was the idea that testimony highlights the individualized and powerful nature of Holocaust stories.

b) Testimony means individualized, powerful, impactful experiences brought to life.

All five participants discussed the idea of testimony bringing the history of the Holocaust to life in a way that humanizes the individual experiences of the era that can be lost through other museum methods. Every participant touched on the importance of testimony representing a single person's story, whether expressed through interpretive materials throughout the galleries or the interactive testimony features that led to their inclusion in this study. The participant from Site 5 explained this concept in one sentence: "We're able to personalize and make intimate and humanize a very overwhelming and daunting topic to learn about." This participant continued by emphasizing that testimony helps visitors:

Understand the individual and human story behind the history...I think it's to create a connection, hopefully somewhere within that testimony when you're talking about issues of human behavior and choice, that someone can identify with that individual...All of these survivors, despite what they went through, have this incredible belief in humanity still. And for me, when I met my first survivor I ever met 20+ years ago, that's what still to this day stays with me.

For this participant, one of the hallmarks of testimony is that it humanizes the survivors of the Holocaust and allows visitors who engage with testimony to forge a personal connection to someone's individual experience. As the participant from Site 1 noted, including testimony

and “giving people the opportunity to learn from someone who was there changes everything for them, because it puts a human face and a human experience on what is essentially an abstract concept, and one that, for many people, their brains are actively working against.” They continued by clarifying how testimony aligned with their museum’s values: “We believe that those testimonies really bring the history to life in a spectacular way. One of the core principles that we have here is that the Holocaust was not six million people murdered, it was one person murdered six million times. Survivor testimony turns these stories into individuals; it turns them into real people.”

Expanding upon this idea of putting a human face on the horrors of the Holocaust, the participant from Site 2 said that testimony adds a level of personalization and connection that often is not experienced through exhibits or primary source material:

It’s one thing to see facts or statistics, it’s another to hear from a person saying, “I was a child and I remember walking to school and seeing anti-Semitic posters on the way and hearing kids singing songs that were about beating up Jews and I didn’t understand why.” We can learn what conditions were and what the calorie restrictions were and what the jobs were in the ghetto and know all of those facts, but to hear someone say, “I remember walking down the street and seeing dead bodies of children,” just makes it so much more immediate and so much more real in a way that reading facts just can’t do.

The participant from Site 4 had similar thoughts on how the individual perspective that testimony provides allows for visitors to engage more deeply: “It’s a real person. You’re not reading some dry information in a textbook. This is somebody that’s in front of you. It’s another person. It’s eyewitness testimony. This happened to them, this happened to their family...It becomes more emotional to hear somebody, sad as it may be, talking about their experience in a camp or family members that died.” Evidently, these museum professionals felt that much of the power of testimony lies within the engagement that can only be found within first-person interactions. When asked about the impact that survivor testimony has on the visitor experience

to their museum, the participant from Site 3 stated, “I think that there's no better way to understand the Holocaust than from hearing from a survivor speaker.”

c) Testimony is a unique experience within the museum setting.

The third pattern that emerged from these interviews was the concept that these survivor testimonies are a unique feature within the museum experience, and that they are a limited yet crucial resource. Participants from four of the five sites talked about this concept in their interviews. As the participant from Site 2 explained, “Even though teaching from artifacts and teaching from primary sources is wonderful and I think very impactful and very useful for students and teachers and visitors, I think that having that firsthand account is something that can't be replicated.” The participant from Site 5 had a similar outlook on the value of survivor testimony as compared to primary source material or other interpretive features within museums: “I think that we are able to take our visitors, whether it's through the testimony in our core exhibition or through [our interactive testimony feature], on an immersive journey through the Holocaust that you simply can't get through a book or a film or in the classroom.”

Since survivor testimony is such a valued part of the Holocaust museum experience, as evidenced by this study's literature review and interview data, Holocaust museums need to consider how the visitor experience will be impacted by the loss of survivors who can speak to visitors. The participant from Site 3 spoke about this issue, stating, “When you see students hear from a survivor and they really connect with them, there's nothing like it. There's nothing you can teach students that a survivor can't do better. This is always their favorite part of the tour, and so when we lose survivors we really need to find a way to engage students in that way again.”

Research Question #2: What effect do interpretive planning and design have on survivor testimony in these spaces?

To answer this question, participants were asked about how interpretive planning and design impact how survivor testimony is used within their museums, either within exhibitions or through interactive testimony features. Since this research question had more applications in the actual exhibit space, and not as much in interviews, it was more fully answered by the second methodology of exhibit analysis. However, there were still two significant patterns that emerged from the five interviewees' responses: interpretive planning for survivor testimony means focusing on individual stories, and survivor testimony is a powerful interpretive tool.

a) Interpretive planning for survivor testimony means focusing on individual stories.

In three of the five interviews, participants stated that interpretive planning and design, in relation to survivor testimony, were meant to emphasize the individuality of both survivors and victims of the Holocaust. By threading an individual's story throughout a core exhibit, installing an interactive testimony feature, or inserting video into a wall panel, these museums hope to help their visitors follow individual stories in order to better connect to those affected by the Holocaust, and help them from getting lost in the larger, more abstract narrative on display. As the participant from Site 1 explained,

It's all about the individuals. We try to include stories where we know the names of not just the survivors and their families, but also the people who helped them along the way. We try to tell pre-war stories and post-war stories as well, because the Holocaust is not the beginning or the end of the story. I'm going to continue to include those stories whenever possible, and to tell different types of stories to honor the differences within the survivor experience.

As evidenced by this quote, this participant saw survivor testimony as a crucial interpretive feature that emphasizes the multiplicity of experiences that victims of Nazi persecution had during the Holocaust. The other two participants who mentioned testimony's strength in highlighting individual experiences did not explain it in this way, but rather stated that their museums used survivor testimony and stories throughout exhibits to create a personal thread from start to finish.

The participant from Site 4 explained that in their permanent exhibit, they have "pale yellow panels where survivors provide some quotations or information about" their individual experience during the Holocaust. They are in the process of redoing their exhibit space, and they have recently completed a digitization project for all of their testimonies, and therefore in their new space, "instead of didactic, rather static panels, we will now have clips of eyewitness testimony in the exhibit. So we're very excited to be able to use them in that way." So whether through panels or videos, the design of Site 4's exhibit space relied on individual survivor stories to guide the visitor.

This concept of following an individual's story throughout the exhibit is something that was also mentioned by the participant from Site 5. However, this concept has not been as successful in implementation as it was in design, so this site is still working on how to make following one person's story more intuitive for visitors: "You are, as a visitor, supposed to be able to follow certain survivor stories throughout and, unless you have a docent, or you have someone with you that knows that, as a visitor you don't know that. So we're looking at what we can do via audio tours or other means to make that clearer, to pull that thread through the exhibition." There are, however, interpretive tools highlighting individuals that are very successful within this museum's current core exhibition:

As you go through the core exhibition, it is not an encyclopedia on the wall. There are a lot of artifacts but there's also an exhibit design element where, just even on the walls, you're seeing images of people from that period in time. I had one docent share with me that he said, when he takes groups through, he often feels that the images of people are saying to you, "Remember me. Tell my story."

The idea of having images of people that directly connect to artifacts and panels allows for visitors to understand Holocaust history in a less abstract way. Expanding on this idea, the participant from Site 5 described a particular design consideration made by survivors themselves, as this site was survivor-founded:

Our survivors made a very conscious decision that they didn't want a room full of shoes or a room full of spoons or bowls or whatever. It can be very powerful, but they didn't want that. They always wanted our visitors to see one baby shoe, one toddler shoe, one woman's shoe, one male shoe, so they remembered the individual, the singular, so it doesn't become a heap of nameless objects, and it has a constant face to the story.

Whether through survivor-designed exhibit components or the inclusion of testimony in permanent exhibit spaces, these museums use survivor testimony in ways that highlight the individuals who experienced the Holocaust. Learning about the trauma that individuals experienced during this time can be intense, which leads to the second theme that emerged from responses to this research question: survivor testimony is a powerful interpretive tool.

b) Survivor testimony is a powerful interpretive tool.

The second theme that emerged from interviewees' responses was that survivor testimony is a powerful component within interpretive planning and design. Three interviewees mentioned the word "powerful" in relation to survivor testimony in their museums. As the participant from Site 2 said about testimony, "I just think it's such a powerful tool that we have and we're really fortunate that we have so many ways that it's been documented." Each site that featured *New Dimensions in Testimony (NDT)*, the interactive and three-dimensional technology

that allows visitors to ask a video of survivor questions, is under stipulations from the USC Shoah Foundation who created this technology. Three of the five sites featured in this study were currently using this technology, and the two who were not are already in talks with the Shoah Foundation to implement it, or other Shoah Foundation technology, in the future. Speaking with the sites that have already implemented the technology, it was clear that interpretive planning and design concerns around this technology centered on it being as powerful as possible.

As the participant from Site 4 said, the Shoah Foundation stipulated that to feature this technology, they needed to create a separate room that allowed the technology to stand on its own. This museum also decided to make the *NDT* room the last space visitors enter, in order to increase its impact. As the participant from Site 2 said about implementing this technology, “I know that there was the concern about it being as powerful as possible. I know that the screens that we’re using were chosen very intentionally because they’re very high definition.” This participant also mentioned that they have received feedback from students and teachers alike that the testimony feature is “really powerful.”

The participant from Site 5, where they also have *NDT* technology, described how their museum approached this new technology and its potential for interpretive difficulties: “When we began considering [the use of *NDT*], we weren’t really sure how we wanted to approach it, because we didn’t want it to be, essentially, the Disney-fication of the Holocaust. We didn’t want it to be the ‘Haunted Mansion’ at Disneyland. We wanted the technology to fade away, and the story to move forward.” In order to make this happen, the museum, just as Site 4 explained, built a new room to house the technology, and carefully crafted an environment in which the technology does fade away and the visitor feels as though they are in a room with the survivor. This participant went on to conclude that they believed that testimony in any format, whether

included in their permanent exhibition or through *NDT*, leaves an indelible mark on visitors:

“Yes, there are sad parts, but I think with both the new technology as well as the core exhibition, you ultimately leave light and hopeful, and see the strength and the resilience of the survivors...

I think you can only really get that coming to Holocaust museums that can immerse you in those testimonies and artifacts and photographs.”

Research Question #3: How have new technologies impacted how Holocaust museums use survivor testimony?

When asked about new technologies in use in their museums, participants discussed a variety of topics. Three main themes that emerged from these discussions were: technology makes testimony more accessible and sustainable; technology makes giving testimony less taxing on survivors; and these new technologies constantly surprise museum professionals. Although video technology is not new, updated and emerging technologies allow for previously recorded video to be used in new ways. Due to these new technologies, visitors and educators are no longer limited to using a multi-hour long testimony video as their only form of technology-based testimony. The digitization of these long testimonies and their connection to software that recognizes key words or categorizes them according to theme can make the visitor experience more engaging and less static.

b) Technology has made testimony more accessible and sustainable.

Participants from all five sites mentioned accessibility as a byproduct of new technologies, and the participant from Site 4 mentioned how the technology of *NDT* has aided in

their museum's survivor program's sustainability. As they clarified, *NDT* has "also become sustainable for future generations in the way that it works" because "everything that is asked goes into the computer, which then goes back to the Shoah Foundation" for them to edit based on whether the technology picked up on the right key words or not. Since this technology is always being evaluated and improved, its sustainability is growing and its accuracy is improving after each use. The participant from Site 5 said that during a beta-testing phase, "what we noticed from the technology was excitement from educators, that this was something they could continue to provide their students for generations to come." Since this technology is new and complex, the participant from Site 5 confessed that the data from *NDT* is sent to the Shoah Foundation "to measure the success of the technology itself and the engagement of visitors through algorithms that I will never understand."

Moving beyond these specially-recorded *NDT* testimonies, new or updated technology has allowed for greater access to testimonies that were recorded decades ago. The participant from Site 4 mentioned the completion of a recent grant that allowed their site to digitize all of their oral testimonies over a three-and-a-half year period. With these digitized stories, this site "will get to use our testimonies in new and innovative ways." Their focus on the visitor experience was evident in their response to a question about their role in the museum: "You know, people ask me, 'What's the most important thing for your department?' And I always say, 'Access for the general public.'"

The participant from Site 2 described how new technology, specifically *NDT*, has helped visitors who cannot attend regular survivor speaking engagements interact with a survivor: "From an education perspective it has been wonderful to see because it really has felt like a real-time interaction with a survivor... This is a really nice way of giving people who can't meet in

person with a survivor the opportunity to actually have a conversation and not just sit and hear something that was pre-recorded.”

Even though these technologies have increased access to testimony, they are never going to replace actually speaking with a survivor in person, which was an idea mentioned by most participants. However, as the participant from Site 2 concluded about *NDT*, “One of the things that visitors respond to is authenticity, and it does feel very authentic to sit and have a conversation and be able to ask a question and have it answered.” Therefore, although nothing will replace survivors when they have passed away, this technology can help their stories carry on in a genuine, engaging way. As the participant from Site 5 concluded, the survivors from their site who gave testimony for *NDT* “are happy that they did it and they have this gift to share, not only with their family, but also for a long time to come.”

b) New technologies make giving testimony less taxing on survivors.

The second theme that emerged from participants’ responses to questions regarding technology was that technology lessens the emotional and physical burden on survivors who give testimony. As the participant from Site 2 explained:

One thing I like, as someone who knows how emotional it can be for survivors and how draining it is, since [*NDT*] is a pre-recorded thing, you’re not asking a survivor to sit there and recount their experiences on a loop in person. I like that we can offer this without causing distress to an actual person every single day. Survivors come and speak because they want to, and they feel it's important, but it is still a huge strain on them, so it’s nice that this is recorded and done and we can use it as much as we want without distressing an actual person in real time.

Although the process for recording testimony for *NDT* is very taxing, with long days and the recounting of difficult memories, it is finished after a week and does not require any follow-up. As the participant from Site 5 described, there were “survivors who were hesitant to

participate [in *NDT* since] it was an arduous process for them, eight hours a day for five days, talking about parts of their story they never thought they'd have to talk about or think about again.” As described in the last section, however, these survivors are glad to have participated, since they can “engage” with visitors without retelling their traumatic tales in real time.

The participant from Site 5 also touched on how they have seen *NDT* be embraced by survivors: “Three years ago we began beta-testing [*NDT*] and the reaction from our survivors was phenomenal, so we knew we had something very special, that we had their support in it.” They went on to explain how the technology has also led to less strain for survivors, saying that students who interacted with *NDT* “could ask any question and not hurt the survivor's feelings... best laid plans, kids don't listen to each other and they repeat questions. Sometimes a live survivor will say, ‘No, I already answered that,’ but the system is still going to answer it, and you may actually get a little bit of a different response. And [the students] felt much more uninhibited in a way, but still felt very emotionally connected.”

At Site 3, they are in the process of developing a virtual-reality program that will allow for their visitors to experience a short video of a survivor speaking about their life within the context of their Holocaust experience. For example, a survivor who escaped from a cattle car will be stationed in front of a cattle car for his virtual reality video. Since this technology allows for images “from where they were or recreations of where there were,” instead of having the survivors immersed in that environment again, it lets them tell their stories without any additional stimuli that may make it more emotionally difficult for them.

c) These new technologies are constantly surprising museum professionals.

The final theme discovered in interviewees' responses to questions about new technologies was that using testimonies in new ways has led to unexpected occurrences for three of the five museum professionals interviewed. All three of these professionals work at sites that currently employ the *NDT* technology. All of these surprises were positive in nature, and they all dealt with how visitors, other survivors, or the professionals themselves have interacted with *NDT*.

The participants from Sites 4 and 5 commented on how students have interacted with the technology in ways that have surprised them. The participant from Site 4 mentioned the difference between this technology and that which students use every day: "It's so interesting. This younger generation, they're on computers at 2 years old but they still are really hesitant to step up to the microphone and ask a question. Sometimes you have to tell them, 'He can't see you.'" The participant from Site 5 said, "We saw something I don't think we expected from students...Survey data says this, as horrible as this may sound, that they preferred the two-dimensional over the 'live' survivor because they knew that they could ask any question and the system more than likely would have an answer." This participant continued to describe how they have observed students interacting with *NDT*: "Young people in particular will not say, 'Can you ask XYZ survivor a question,' they say to the survivor, 'Can you tell me about the time...' and they personalize it, which we could have never foreseen, and it really shows the powerfulness of this technology. We're excited about it. We fully admit it will simply never replace our survivors, but I think to have that experience is great."

The participant from Site 4 was able to watch one of their survivors interact with an *NDT* video, and was surprised by how they spoke with each other: "It's fascinating; when we first had [this survivor's video] for the exhibit, we had one of our survivors come in and actually carry on

a conversation with him through key words. She had family members that had been in, I think, Buchenwald, and it was just so interesting that she was talking to him like he was sitting in the room.” The participant from Site 2 was actually surprised at their own interaction with and reaction to the *NDT* technology:

[You can] ask things like “Do you have a joke you liked?” “Can you sing a song?” The wealth of information is incredible...As you’re standing there asking questions, it really does feel like a conversation. It doesn’t feel like you’re talking to a computer. I know it's just a computer with programmed responses picking up on word cues I give to get the pre-programmed answer. I know on an intellectual level all of that stuff, but when I'm actually standing there asking questions, it really feels like I’m talking to the real person, which is pretty incredible.

Evidently, *NDT* is a surprising technology because it so immersive and customizable, and it makes it feel as though the recorded survivor is in the room. As this technology evolves and as other interactive technologies emerge, there are sure to be more surprises on the way.

Research Question #4: How do museum professionals see survivor testimony being used in the future, when survivors are no longer alive?

Since this research question inquired about museum professionals’ opinions on how testimony will be used in the future, it was only applicable to the interview method, and not to the exhibit analysis method. As many of the participants said in their interviews, this is a big question. When the participants were asked about how they saw the future of survivor testimony in museums, three themes emerged: survivor testimony will continue to be adapted into new technologies, with a focus on *New Dimensions in Testimony*; the children and grandchildren of survivors (second and third-generation survivors) will carry on their relatives’ legacy through museum programs and presentation; and lastly, some museum professionals are worried about misuse of these testimonies when they exist only in a digital state. Additionally, four of the five

museums in this study were in the process of updating their permanent exhibitions, and the professionals from all of these sites mentioned that one of their main considerations was to include more testimony and thread individual stories throughout these updated spaces. As the participant from Site 1 explained, they were focused on creating “an exhibit that really centers on local survivors.”

a) *New Dimensions in Testimony.*

The participants from the three sites that feature *New Dimensions in Testimony* (*NDT*) technology all spoke highly of the interactivity of this testimony feature, and the two museums that do not feature this technology mentioned that they have some form of partnership with the USC Shoah Foundation and may introduce this technology into their museums someday. The participant from Site 5 felt strongly about having *NDT* as a feature within museums: “I hope more museums engage in the *New Dimensions in Testimony* and aren't scared of the technology.” While explaining their museum’s use of *NDT*, the participant from Site 2 said, “I think something like this, like *New Dimensions*, is really powerful, because it is that one-on-one interaction.”

In addition to those broader statements on *NDT*, the participants from Sites 2, 4, and 5 also explained specifically why they embrace this new technology as important for the future of testimony. The participant from Site 5 elaborated that this technology allows for diverse Holocaust experiences to be shown and taught:

We engaged [local] survivors and knew that if we were going to be a part of this very expensive project, we wanted to be a part of something that geographically represented a swath of experiences. That it wasn't just all camp survivors or survivors of Auschwitz, but that they also represented survivors from the West,

that they represented hidden children, that they represented stories of people who were able to escape.

The participant from Site 4 said of *NDT*, “I think it is better for the visitor experience. When you watch a video, yes, you do learn from that, but I think the interactive component of *NDT* is cutting edge. It's fascinating to see.” The participant from Site 5 also mentioned that they believe this technology has impacted the visitor experience in a positive way: “A lot of the visitors that come, particularly to the *New Dimensions in Testimony*, often comment on [how the survivors are] still so hopeful, they still have this message of, ‘Keep trying to do better and to make a difference.’ Or, ‘If they went through this, maybe my problems aren't so bad,’ so [*NDT*] is also providing perspective.” This technology seemed promising since it gives all visitors the experience to interact with a survivor and ask questions, which is not always possible during any given museum visit.

b) 2nd Generation & 3rd Generation presentations/programs.

The second theme that emerged from responses to questions about the future of survivor testimony was that museums are training survivors’ children and grandchildren to present their relatives’ stories. These programs were mentioned by four of the five participants in their interviews. These programs help train descendants of survivors to tell their stories in engaging, historically accurate ways, often with the help of technology. The participant from Site 5, where they currently have 20 second-generation survivors in their program, explained how their museum has gone about the training process, which takes place over five days: “We have them do research...but also train them in the actual art of storytelling, how you use your body, use your voice, use your emotions to tell the story in an engaging way, rather than standing and

reading from a piece of paper. We also have each of [them] put together a PowerPoint that includes family photographs, may include video.”

Site 4 has a similar program, where second-generation survivors use clips of their parents’ original testimonies to tell their stories, and they will probably include third-generation survivors in the coming years, since many of them have heard their grandparents speak about this time in their life “now that they’re older and time has passed and they are not driven to assimilate or support families.” Site 4 started this project in 2008, but did not get much interest at that time. However, that is changing: “Since then, it’s kind of rejuvenated because I think families that are losing their survivors think, ‘Hey, we need to do something that’s going to preserve their memory and their dialogue.’”

Site 3’s program has featured four second-generation survivors so far, and they have three more planned for this year. This museum’s second- and third-generation survivors “develop presentations for the classroom or for community groups using recorded video testimony from an organization like the Shoah Foundation to create a PowerPoint that represents their relative’s experiences.” They had these program participants express their family’s stories in a variety of ways: “We had someone who wrote a book, another person who did a lot of research on their parents’ history and is a docent here...One of the women that’s coming up this Sunday will be presenting on her father’s story. She presents with him or without him, and she self-published a book about him.”

Site 2’s program also features both second- and third-generation survivors, and was started last year. Just as in the program at Site 3, these presentations feature clips from Shoah Foundation testimonies. The participant from Site 2 has participated in the program themselves, and was surprised at how effective the program has been in engaging students: “One thing that

has surprised me a bit is how much the students are interested in my experience as the relative of a survivor. I think that having the combination of me saying what [my relative has] conveyed to me and then using clips of her Shoah Foundation testimony from 20 years ago also [gives her] a voice in it.”

The participants from each of these three sites stated how important they think these programs will be in the future. These programs are significant because they allow survivors’ stories to be told at least partially in their own voice. As the participant from Site 2 said, “I still think it’s important that we maintain the survivor’s voice firsthand in whatever way we can, whether it’s something like *New Dimensions* or something like [these presentations].” The participant from Site 5 also stressed the importance of keeping survivors at the forefront of these presentations, commenting that they ask their program participants about what kind of legacy they want their relatives to be remembered by, and how to emphasize that in their presentation.

Lastly, these programs are promising because these museum professionals believe that relatives of survivors should be the ones to continue to tell the individual stories of the Holocaust. The participant from Site 2 said, “I really think that this firsthand transmission of the experience is the most effective way to get the message across...having [survivors’] descendants be a voice for them when they’re no longer able to speak is really, hopefully, going to be a powerful tool.” The participant from Site 3 had a similar point-of-view. They said, “I definitely think we’re going to be utilizing 2G and 3G more and more to tell their family’s stories because it’s their families’ stories and they should be the ones to tell them. They’re the best people to be doing that, I think, other than us helping and facilitating them to do that.”

c) Technology has the potential to contribute to the misuse of testimony.

The last theme that emerged from responses to questions about the future of testimony concerned potential misuse of testimony; as the participant from Site 5 stated, “I'm more concerned about how it's being used than anything else.” The participants from Sites 1 and 5 both mentioned that they have worried about testimonies being fully available online, as the context in which they are used is less regulated than within a museum setting. The participant from Site 1 said, “Having some control over how testimony is used is something that we're constantly thinking about and reworking. Having unrestricted access to complete stories on YouTube, I go back and forth on, to be perfectly blunt...How we can make sure that age-appropriate materials are getting to the right people?”

The participant from Site 5 explained this concern in a slightly different way, noting their concern about how survivor testimonies can be used inappropriately when taken out of context: “I worry about the context to which survivor testimony is used as we move further away, that it's used in a way that might diminish the Holocaust or its history, that it's used to sentimentalize the Holocaust, or as an add-on to a documentary or a PSA connected to issues of bullying or other things like that.” Although technology can be a great benefit to testimony, as the aforementioned new technologies such as *NDT* have shown, these concerns are also valid within this context, and must be considered as technology advances and access to these stories increases.

Method #2: Exhibit Analysis

Exhibit analysis was conducted at three sites with an original analysis instrument created using themes that emerged from the literature review. The instrument was a table consisting of five rows and three columns, meant to give the researcher adequate space to describe not only

the elements within the exhibits, but also the connections to the literature and the research questions of the study (see Appendix B). Interpretive features of light and darkness were highlighted in this instrument, as they were common themes within the interpretive design literature. Interactivity was also highlighted, since it has a clear connection to the emerging technologies studied.

The three sites where exhibit analysis was conducted were chosen due to their innovative, technology-heavy approaches to presenting survivor testimony. These three sites were: the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust (Los Angeles, CA), the Holocaust Museum Houston (Houston, TX), and the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center (Skokie, IL). The latter two sites featured the aforementioned USC Shoah Foundation's *New Dimensions in Testimony* technology, and the first site had an interactive testimony feature entitled *Tree of Testimony* that featured 70 screens each showing individual testimonies. This instrument was coded using deductive coding, meaning that the pre-determined elements that comprised the instrument were used to analyze how each museum approached the use of testimony features and technology, and no new themes were added during the coding and analysis process.

Since two research questions concerned museum professionals' opinions, only two research questions applied to this method, research questions number two and three: "What effect do interpretive planning and design have on survivor testimony in these spaces?" and "How have new technologies impacted how Holocaust museums use survivor testimony?" The instrument for this method was comprised of five different rows that contained different elements of the exhibit spaces and allowed for the researcher to note whether the elements were present, and to describe them.

The five different rows were: Is the testimony portion separate from other features?; Is there the ability to create personalized experience through interaction with the testimony feature?; Is there darkness in emotional portions of exhibit (concentration camp, trauma, etc.)? If so, describe them in relation to testimony features in the exhibit; Is there light at the exit of the testimony area, signaling a transformative experience? (Is light used in conjunction with personal, individual stories?); and other notable interpretive features directly linked to testimony areas/interactives. Rows three and four were created based upon concepts from two readings reviewed in Chapter 2: Kit Messham-Muir, "Into Darkness: Affect and Dark Space in Holocaust Exhibitions," *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, no. 3 (2015): 434-457 and Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, "Poetics of Memory: Aesthetics and Experience of Holocaust Remembrance in Museums," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* (Routledge) 30, no. 3 (2016): 315-334.

These data were analyzed according to how each exhibit space answered research questions two and three. Since some exhibits had technological components that served as evidence of elements in the instrument, and some did not, specific rows did not necessarily correlate to only one research question, and some rows correlated to different research questions depending on the site in question. The Holocaust Museum Houston did not allow pictures in their museum space, so there are no accompanying photographs for that site.

1) Research Question #2: What effect do interpretive planning and design have on survivor testimony in these spaces?

Since this method involved exhibit design and interpretive planning, the bulk of its analysis concerned this research question.

a) Elements #1 & 2: Testimony feature is separate from other features, and the visitor can create a personalized experience through interacting with this feature.

All three sites showed evidence of elements one and two: the testimony feature in question was separate from other features, and the visitor was able to create a personalized experience through interaction with the element in question. The Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust (henceforth referred to as LAMOTH) had an interactive testimony feature called the *Tree of Testimony*, which was set off from the main exhibit in a partially closed-off room (see Figures 1 and 2 in Appendix C). By borrowing a free audio-guide from the front desk and entering the number shown in the corner of each testimony screen, visitors can engage with any of the testimonies on display (see Fig. 3, Appendix C). The testimonies on display at the time of analysis included testimonies in English, Hebrew, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Polish, therefore giving visitors who knew languages other than English the opportunity to interact with testimonies.

The Holocaust Museum Houston (henceforth referred to as HMH) and the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center (henceforth referred to as ILHMEC) featured the interactive testimony technology *New Dimensions in Testimony (NDT)*. This testimony feature was in its own room at both sites, as stipulated by the USC Shoah Foundation. This technology allows for a visitor experience that is completely customizable, as the visitor can ask the digitally-rendered survivor any question they desire.

At HMH, which is currently in a temporary space while their new museum is being built, *NDT* was in a small room with space for only a few chairs, so it did not allow for a full auditorium-style presentation and question-and-answer session. They did, however, have staff on-hand to facilitate the experience and help visitors ask the holographic survivor their questions.

Their new space will feature a mostly closed-off room containing *NDT* to allow for more visitors to engage with this feature.

In contrast, the ILHMEC opened their “Take a Stand” center in October 2017, complete with a custom auditorium (The Abe & Ida Cooper Survivor Stories Experience)⁷² to house *NDT* (see Fig. 4, Appendix C). This auditorium holds 66 guests. There was an introductory video to provide visitors with the context of the survivor’s experience, but beyond that, there was no guidance on what questions to ask. This made for an experience that could be different every time a visitor interacted with it, and it allowed for visitors to personalize their questions in order to receive answers regarding any topics that interested them.

b) Element #3: Evidence of darkness in emotional portions of exhibit, relating to testimony features and/or individual stories.

The LAMOTH’s *Tree of Testimony* was located in a darkened space of the museum (see Figures 1 and 2, Appendix C). As explained in Chapter 2, many Holocaust museums use darker spaces within their exhibits as part of their “visual vocabulary” that serves to “assert an affective congruence between the loss of self experienced by victims of the Holocaust” and museum visitors.⁷³ The darkness of the gallery containing the *Tree of Testimony* made for a distinct atmospheric change from the bright lobby (see Fig. 5, Appendix C). The darkness of the room created a somber atmosphere in which to hear personal stories of how the people on the screens survived the Holocaust.

⁷² *Take a Stand Center* « Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, 2018, <https://www.ilholocaustmuseum.org/tas/> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁷³ Messham-Muir, “Into Darkness,” 435, 441.

Another part of the LAMOTH that was noticeably darker than its surrounding galleries was the back section, which contained the galleries “Deportation & Extermination” and “Labor/Concentration/Death Camps” (see Fig. 6, Appendix C). In contrast to the darkness of the *Tree of Testimony* gallery, this section’s atmosphere evoked “dark” in a different sense, by echoing the darkness of the subject matter on display.⁷⁴ These galleries also featured no natural light, whose absence was noticeable due to the proliferation of natural light throughout the rest of the museum space (see Fig. 7, Appendix C). These galleries featured survivor testimony in the form of 18 touch-screen kiosks that also contained information about specific camps (see Fig. 8, Appendix C). The placement of these screens, coupled with the fact that this gallery was not filled with many artifacts (see Fig. 6, Appendix C), allowed for these segments of survivor testimony to be spotlighted as the emphasis of this gallery. The focus on these monitors gave these stories great impact within the space.

Since the HMH is currently housed in a temporary space, there was not much interpretive design regarding darkness. Their temporary location was a bright and uniformly lit space, with large, high interior windows that let in a lot of natural light. Therefore, their permanent exhibition within this space had no atmospheric changes throughout, and there were not portions of the exhibit that were either lighter or darker than others. However, their room that houses *New Dimensions in Testimony* was dark, which allowed the visitor to see the holographic survivor on the screen very easily, making the one-on-one experience feel more authentic. The new HMH, which is projected to open in the spring of 2019, will feature 56,499 square feet of museum space across three floors, including a partially closed-off room for *NDT*.⁷⁵ In this much larger

⁷⁴ Messham-Muir, "Into Darkness," 441.

⁷⁵ Holocaust Museum Houston, *Remembering Our Past. Building Our Future: HMH Capital Campaign 2014-2018* (Houston, TX, 2018).

and more intentionally designed space, there will be more opportunities for the museum to use light and dark in their interpretive design.

The ILHMEC used darkness as a very clear interpretive tool throughout their permanent exhibit. The exhibit flowed chronologically, and as the visitor moved further into the horrors of the Holocaust, the space got darker. When the visitor moved into spaces that dealt with concentration camps, the galleries were almost completely dark, with spotlights used only for areas with text or powerful artifacts (see Figs. 9 and 10, Appendix C). These spotlights illuminated personal stories within these galleries and drew visitors' attention to interpretive panels that contextualized the stories on display.

One of the most powerful artifacts in the permanent exhibit at the ILHMEC was a Nazi-era German railroad car that was used for deportations during the Holocaust. The railroad car was displayed on its own, in between gallery spaces, with very little interpretive text (see Fig. 11, Appendix C). The power of this artifact becomes evident when the visitor steps inside the car, which is completely unlit, and finds themselves imagining what it must have been like to be transported in this small car with so many others, hurtling towards an uncertain fate. The complete darkness in this railroad car seemed to build on the partial darkness of the many galleries preceding it—it would seem that in this museum, “darkness enhances the historical narrative of the Holocaust.”⁷⁶

c) Element #4: There is light at the exit of the testimony area, used in conjunction with personal stories.

⁷⁶ Messham-Muir, "Into Darkness," 436.

If darkness in Holocaust museums emphasizes emotional and traumatic stories within galleries, what role does light play? As expressed in Chapter 2, light often plays a complimentary role to darkness, in that it emerges as an interpretive tool to accompany galleries that emphasize hopefulness and transformation; “Whereas dark space can create a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty, light space allows for a sense of certainty and assurance.”⁷⁷

The clearest example of this at the LAMOTH was seen in their bright lobby, the S. Mark Taper Atrium, which was lit by natural light that comes through large glass doors and windows. As mentioned in the previous section, the galleries with the least light at LAMOTH contained the darkest subject matter. However, the hairpin shape of the permanent exhibit space at this museum, with its large windows evenly spaced throughout the full interior curve, led to a uniformly-lit space in the rest of the galleries. If the visitor moves through the gallery space as is intended, they will finish their visit at the *Tree of Testimony* and then exit into the bright atrium, which features a clear atmospheric change and brightening of the space around them, as described in the previous section and through Figure 5 in Appendix C.

As explained in the previous section, the HMH was undergoing construction and was housed in a temporary gallery space during analysis. This temporary space did not feature changes in lighting throughout the exhibit, and therefore this element was not present at this site.

The ILHMEC used light very intentionally, just as with darkness. The aforementioned railroad car that served as the darkest point in the permanent gallery also served as a “tipping point” within that space, leading the visitor into the light.⁷⁸ The post-war section of this museum was noticeably lighter, and had a much less somber atmosphere. Sections on immigration were brightly lit by both interior lights and natural light, and featured pictures of smiling people (see

⁷⁷ Messham-Muir, "Into Darkness," 441.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 449.

Figs. 12 and 13, Appendix C). These galleries told stories about the continuation of life for people who survived the Holocaust, and imbued the visitor with a sense of hopefulness. The brightness of these galleries, which stand in direct contrast to the darkness of the railroad car that sits so close by, contributes to a sense of transformation for the visitor, who sees the power of life prevailing over darkness and death.⁷⁹

In similar fashion to the LAMOTH, the ILHMEC had a bright, naturally lit lobby where visitors both entered and exited the permanent gallery space. This light space added to the contemplative and bright final sections of the permanent exhibit, and reinforced the idea of a transformative visitor experience. Additionally, visitors exited the Abe & Ida Cooper Survivor Stories Experience auditorium, which contains *NDT*, into the museum's Take a Stand center, an "immersive permanent exhibition with a forward-looking emphasis" that invited visitors to take action and "stand against hatred in all its forms."⁸⁰

d) Element #5: Other notable interpretive features directly linked to testimony.

One additional interpretive feature at the ILHMEC that stood out was the museum's inclusion of panels and photographs next to artifacts that described who donated or owned the items (see Fig. 14, Appendix C). This additional information about the items and stories on display allowed for a more in-depth understanding of who this person was and how this item contributed to their story and the greater historical context of the era. As the interview participants agreed, these personal stories are paramount in giving visitors a more individualized understanding of the subject matter.

⁷⁹ Hansen-Glucklich, "Poetics of Memory," 327.

⁸⁰ *Take a Stand Center* « *Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center*, 2018, <https://www.ilholocaustmuseum.org/tas/> (accessed April 15, 2018).

2) Research Question #3: How have new technologies impacted how Holocaust museums use survivor testimony?

This method served to complement the participants' answers to this research question via the study's first method, and to further describe technological testimony features on display at the LAMOTH, the HMH, and the ILHMEC. Although these three sites were chosen for their use of specific technologies (the *Tree of Testimony* at the LAMOTH and *New Dimensions in Testimony* at the HMH and ILHMEC), there were also other sections within the museums that used technology to tell individual stories, and therefore those sections were also included in this analysis.

a) Element #2: The visitor can create a personalized experience through interaction with testimony features.

Due to the nature of this study's sampling, all three of the museums had testimony features that allow for personalized experiences. Therefore, this section of the analysis instrument was created in order to analyze and describe these features within the exhibits. The LAMOTH's *Tree of Testimony* feature was linked to the museum's free audio-guide, and visitors could switch between any of the 70 testimonies on display at any given time. Although these audio-guides allowed for visitors to listen to any story they would like to, the stories themselves were long testimonies, and visitors had no ability to control which part of the story they would like to hear. Therefore, the *Tree of Testimony* was not as easily personalized as technologies that allow the visitor to toggle between sections of the story and choose the part that interests them

the most. One section where visitors could get a more curated selection of survivors' stories was the aforementioned 18 kiosks in the galleries about camps and deportation (see Figs. 6 and 8, Appendix C). In these videos, survivors spoke only of their time in the camps described in these rooms, and therefore visitors who watched these videos knew exactly which part of the story they would be hearing.

Since the audio-guide applied to the whole museum, and not just the *Tree of Testimony*, the visitor could learn about a variety of individuals' stories as they made their way through the galleries. Themes, people, and artifacts all had audio-guide content, which made the full museum experience very immersive. A section that featured additional interactive technology was the first gallery, "The World That Was" (See Fig. 15, Appendix C). This gallery featured an interactive touch table that allowed visitors to touch different photographs and documents and learn more. Some photographs had only a sentence or two of information, but some had paragraphs detailing specific families and their lives. This table, the audio-guide, and the *Tree of Testimony* combined made this museum a very tech-heavy institution that made it easy for visitors to learn more about individual stories without participating in a guided tour.

The HMH and ILHMEC both featured the same new technology, *NDT*. This technology affords visitors the opportunity to have a completely customizable question-and-answer session with a holographic video of a survivor. The Shoah Foundation, who creates this technology, mandated that a facilitator be in the room when visitors are interacting with the technology, in order to ensure that visitors understand how to use the technology and take advantage of features such as contextualization. At the HMH, the holographic survivors gave a few minutes' summary of their story when prompted by a specific cue. At the ILHMEC, they created an in-house introductory video that contextualized the survivor's story through two overlapping holographic

screens, allowing for both a personal and historical contextualization before the question-and-answer session had begun. In both cases, having the facilitator in the room made the visitors feel at ease with the technology and helped them understand how to interact with it.

Since these holographic videos were created during a weeklong, multi-session taping with the survivor, there are thousands of cues that the technology can pick up on. Although there are so many of these cues, some questions did not get accurately matched up with their correct answers—one question at the ILHMEC about when a survivor learned to read and write English, intended to receive an answer about life post-Holocaust, cued up a story of his schooling before the Holocaust. However, every question and its answer gets sent to the Shoah Foundation itself, so that they can evaluate these cues and responses in real-time and correct any connections that are erroneous. Each holographic video had also gone through beta-testing in the museum setting to ensure that as many kinks as possible had been ironed out. In the absence of having a survivor speak in person, or in the future when all survivors have passed away, this new technology is extremely promising in recreating the experience of learning about an individual's pre-war, wartime, and post-war experience.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to identify interpretive strategies used by museums in connecting visitors to Holocaust survivors through testimony. A multi-site case study approach was chosen in order to answer these questions. To study a variety of survivor testimony features within the museum setting, it was necessary to include multiple sites and two methods: semi-structured interviews and exhibit analysis.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What do museum professionals think survivor testimony adds to the visitor experience?
2. What effect do interpretive planning and design have on survivor testimony in these spaces?
3. How have new technologies impacted how Holocaust museums use survivor testimony?
4. How do museum professionals see survivor testimony being used in the future, when survivors are no longer alive?

Conclusions

Museum professionals believe that survivor testimony adds to the visitor experience in a number of ways. They believe that survivor testimony adds an important first-person perspective to the history of the Holocaust that cannot be replicated by other methods. Participants mentioned how students and museum visitors appreciate and greatly value the opportunity to interact with survivors, which is concurrent with studies that report that for many people,

survivor testimony is their favorite part of the Holocaust museum experience.⁸¹ The value of these experiences is reflected in participants' responses that indicated the uniqueness and impact of interacting with a survivor face-to-face. Since interacting with a survivor is such a sought-after and powerful part of visiting a Holocaust museum, the museum professionals interviewed in this study were all actively working towards finding immersive, engaging ways to use testimony in the future.

Interpretive planning and design affect the use of testimony in Holocaust museums by focusing in on powerful individual stories and adjusting the atmosphere in these spaces through the use of light and darkness. These concepts are interconnected, because by adjusting the light and darkness within a space, certain sections or artifacts can be highlighted in order to draw attention to a particular survivor or story; Atmospheric darkness, with focused light, helps emphasize objects and their greater significance.⁸² As confirmed by this study's exhibit analysis, these dark spaces are visually and emotionally impactful, and are used so often that they can be understood as part of the "visual vocabulary" of these museums.⁸³

Although there have not been many studies done on how these museums are planning to use testimony in the future, the museum professionals interviewed in this study were all thinking about this issue. New technologies have made testimony more accessible and sustainable than ever before, and the five museums included in this study all have plans to continue the use of technologies such as *New Dimensions in Testimony* in the future. As many of them said, this inevitability both keeps them up at night and motivates them each day to continue their work in the Holocaust museum field. These professionals have all formed close bonds with survivors, and therefore this is an issue that is close to their hearts. It was encouraging to learn about the

⁸¹ Maitles and Cowan, "It reminded me of what really matters," 136.

⁸² Ibid., 443.

⁸³ Messham-Muir, "Into Darkness," 436.

programs and immersive technology being developed at and by these museums, and hopefully other Holocaust museums are equally as invested in figuring out how to keep their survivors' voices heard in the future. Although nothing will ever replace speaking to a survivor in person, there are many promising ways in which Holocaust museums can continue to offer insightful, affecting testimony to their visitors. Additionally, the timeliness of this issue cannot be understated. Less than a month after the researcher visited the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, Aaron Elster, the survivor they encountered in the museum's *New Dimensions in Testimony* interactive, had passed away.⁸⁴

Implications

Implications for Practice

This research, alongside past research on survivor testimony in Holocaust museums, showed the positive impact of survivor testimony on museum visitors. The analysis of the elements of immersive, technology-heavy testimony features within museums may serve to educate Holocaust museum professionals on either improving or implementing similar features in their museums. The findings on what Holocaust museum professionals understand to be the future of testimony have implications for anyone working in or with institutions that use first-person stories as interpretive tools. Even if these sites work with younger populations that provide testimony, they will at some point be dealing with an aging population and therefore be concerned with how to preserve the unique experience that only testimony can provide.

⁸⁴ Howard Reich, "Holocaust survivor Aaron Elster, who shared his story 'to convince people to stop hating each other,' dies at 86," *Chicago Tribune*, April 2018.

The prevalence of second- and third-generation presentation programs among participants showed that this is a trend among Holocaust museums. The participants' enthusiasm for these programs and attestations as to the effectiveness of these programs may encourage other Holocaust museums to implement similar programs, if they do not already do so. The interweaving of Holocaust survivors' testimonies with their relatives' own stories seems to be a powerful, personal way to connect with an audience, and a way to incorporate more easily digestible sections of a large, multi-hour testimony into a presentation.

Findings concerning immersive technological testimony features have implications for how Holocaust museums select and implement new testimony features into their museums. If museums are looking for ways to make testimony more accessible and sustainable, all while putting less strain on survivors themselves, technology seems to be a great solution, although it also has pitfalls. New technologies such as *New Dimensions in Testimony* are very expensive to implement, and therefore are not always a feasible option.

Another important thing to note is that witnessing these stories and participating in an immersive narrative within a Holocaust museum does not lead a visitor to understand the experience of those who lived through the traumas that are told or displayed.⁸⁵ Therefore, these technological experiences must still be considered as interpretations of first-person stories, and not as interactive games. Participants' concerns about the misuse of testimony when it is fully accessible on the internet, as described in Chapter 4, may also have implications for practice. Professionals who are concerned with this potential misuse may refrain from making full testimonies available offsite or online, rather deciding to keep access to those in-house or through partnering organizations such as the Shoah Foundation.

⁸⁵ Reynolds, "Consumers or witnesses?," 343-344.

Implications for further research

This study focused solely on museum professionals' understandings of testimony in their museum spaces and the researcher's analysis of museum exhibits. Therefore, the visitor experience was not studied. Since the use of survivor testimony in Holocaust museums greatly affects visitors, more research should be done on how visitors understand and interact with testimony in these spaces. Speaking with visitors about how they engage with testimony, what it adds to their experience, and how it influences their understanding of the Holocaust could lead to new considerations in how to implement and update testimony in these spaces.

Since technology is constantly advancing, more research could and should be done on interactive testimony features, especially *New Dimensions in Testimony*. This promising technology has captured the stories of 15 Holocaust survivors,⁸⁶ yet only two of these survivors' testimonies were viewed during data collection. There are many ways in which this technology could be studied, and there are 13 more recorded stories to be researched. As this and other immersive technologies become more commonplace in the museum setting, there will be a need for more data on the benefits and shortcomings of these features.

This study used a purposive sample to identify participants, and therefore the results may not be generalizable to all Holocaust museums. These five museums incorporated survivor testimony in immersive ways, and therefore the results of this study can only be understood in the context of similar museums. However, these results may be used as a reference point for museums that may want to implement such features in the future. Hopefully in the coming years, more museums will incorporate and continue to enhance testimony-based elements so that in the future, visitors can still learn about the Holocaust from those who lived to tell the tale.

⁸⁶ As of May 2018.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Consent Script:

I am asking you to participate in a research study that is part of my Master's Thesis work at the University of Washington. The purpose of this study is to identify interpretive strategies used by museums in connecting visitors to Holocaust survivors through testimony.

Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits, and you may discontinue participation at any time. This interview will be recorded, however, your responses will be confidential. Your name will not be identified and while I may quote you, that quote will not be attributed to you or to the museum where you work. If you have any questions now or in the future, you may contact my advisor or myself using the contact information I shared in my email to you. Do you have any questions? Do you agree to participate in this interview?

The goal of this interview is to establish an understanding of how your museum uses survivor testimony, and how new technologies have impacted the use of testimony. I will ask you first about how your museum uses testimony, then ask about your specific testimony features and how they impact the visitor experience, and finally I will ask about how your museum plans to incorporate testimony in the future. There will be approximately a dozen questions. If there are any questions you wish to skip or if you would like a break at any point, please let me know. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview Questions

Section 1: Introductory Questions

1. Would you briefly describe how your museum is currently using survivor testimony, and how it has used it in the past?
2. Why did your museum decide to incorporate this testimony feature into the museum?
3. How does this testimony feature/exhibit relate to the mission of your museum?
4. Could you please describe your position at the museum?
 - a. What was your role in designing the form/content of this testimony feature/exhibit?

Section 2: The Visitor Experience

5. What outcomes are these interactive testimony features designed to achieve for visitors?
 - a. How do you measure these features' success (what are your learning goals)?

6. Is there a way for visitors to express themselves after interacting with this testimony feature/exhibit?
 - a. If so, what is it? If no, why not?
7. How does this testimony feature/exhibit interpret the subject matter in ways that other methods cannot?
8. How does the inclusion of survivor testimony impact your visitors' understanding of the Holocaust?
9. What were major design and interpretive considerations in planning the exhibit?
 - a. Do you have assessment rubrics or criteria for judging how design and interpretive planning impact the visitor experience?
10. Have you done any evaluation for this feature?
 - a. If so, what have you learned from it?
 - b. If not, do you plan to in the future? What methods do you plan on using?

Section 3: Looking Forward

11. How do you see survivor testimony being used in the future, when there are no survivors left to tell their stories?
12. Is your museum already preparing for this inevitability?
 - a. If so, how?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add on the topic of survivor testimony, either in your museum or more broadly?

Appendix B: Exhibit Analysis Instrument

DRATEL – Analysis Instrument		Museum: _____
Element (and source, if relevant)	Evidence of element	Description/Additional notes
<p>Testimony portion separate from other features?</p>		
<p>Ability to create personalized experience through interaction with testimony feature?</p>		
<p>Darkness in emotional portions of exhibit (concentration camp, trauma, etc.) – <i>describe any relation to testimony features in exhibit</i></p> <p>Messham-Muir, p 441.</p>		

Element (and source, if relevant)	Evidence of element	Description/Additional notes
<p>Light at exit of testimony area, signaling transformative experience? (<i>Is light used in conjunction with personal, individual stories?</i>)</p> <p>Messham-Muir, p. 449. Hansen-Glucklich, p 327.</p>		
<p>Other notable interpretive features directly linked to testimony areas/interactives</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>Additional notes</p>		

Appendix C: Figures

Figure 1

The Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust's *Tree of Testimony* feature.



Figure 2

The Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust's *Tree of Testimony* feature.



Figure 3

Detailed image of the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust's *Tree of Testimony* feature.



Figure 4

The Abe & Ida Cooper Survivor Stories Experience auditorium at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center. Pictured is the holographic video of survivor Aaron Elster.



Figure 5

The lobby (left) and *Tree of Testimony* gallery (right) at the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust.



Figure 6

The back galleries at the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust.



Figure 7

Gallery space in the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, with natural light coming in through windows to the right.



Figure 8

A touch-screen monitor in the back galleries of the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust.



Figure 9

The entrance to a section about deportation at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center.



Figure 10

The entrance to a section on Holocaust ghettos at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center.

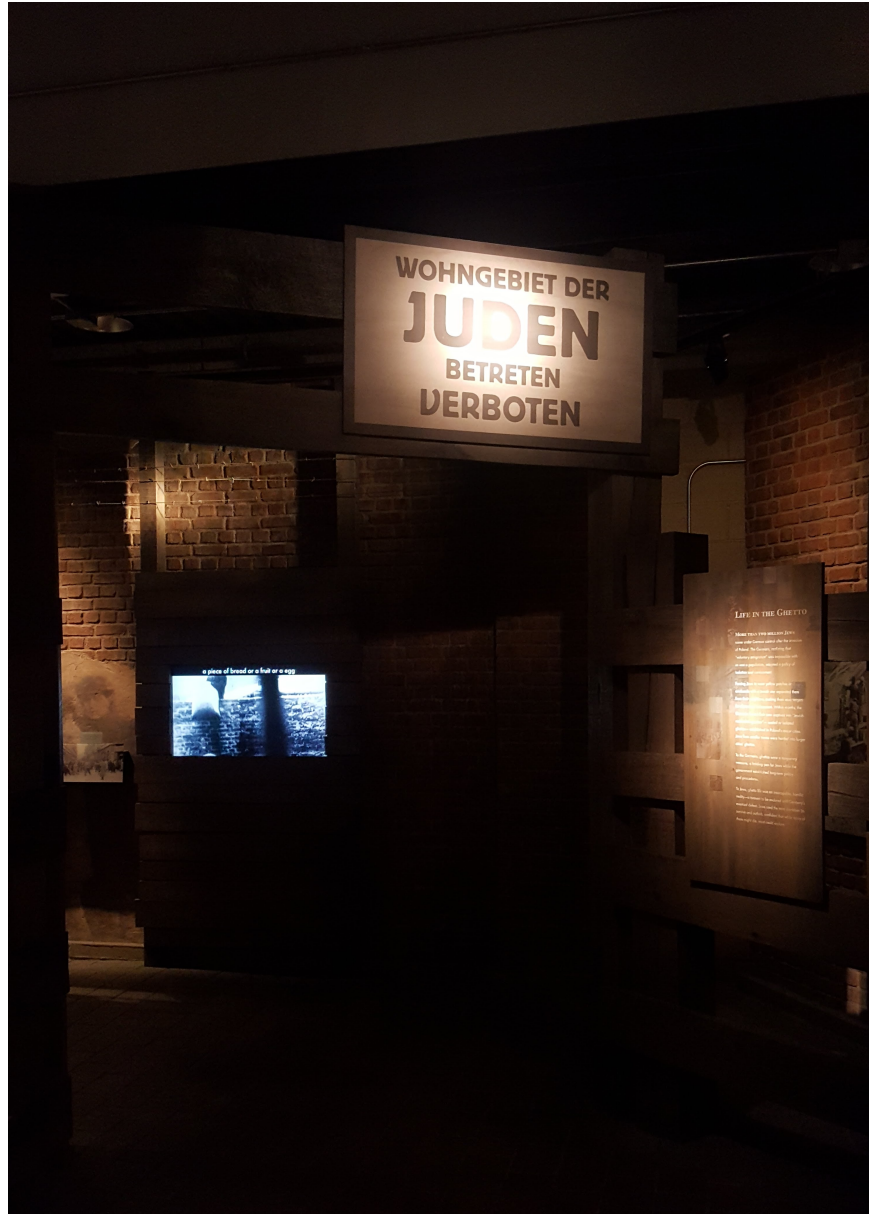


Figure 11

The German railroad car at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center.



Figure 12

A gallery featuring stories of immigration at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center.



Figure 13

A gallery featuring stories of immigration to Israel at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center.



Figure 14

A photo of Aron Dereczunski next to his notebook from 1941, on display at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center.

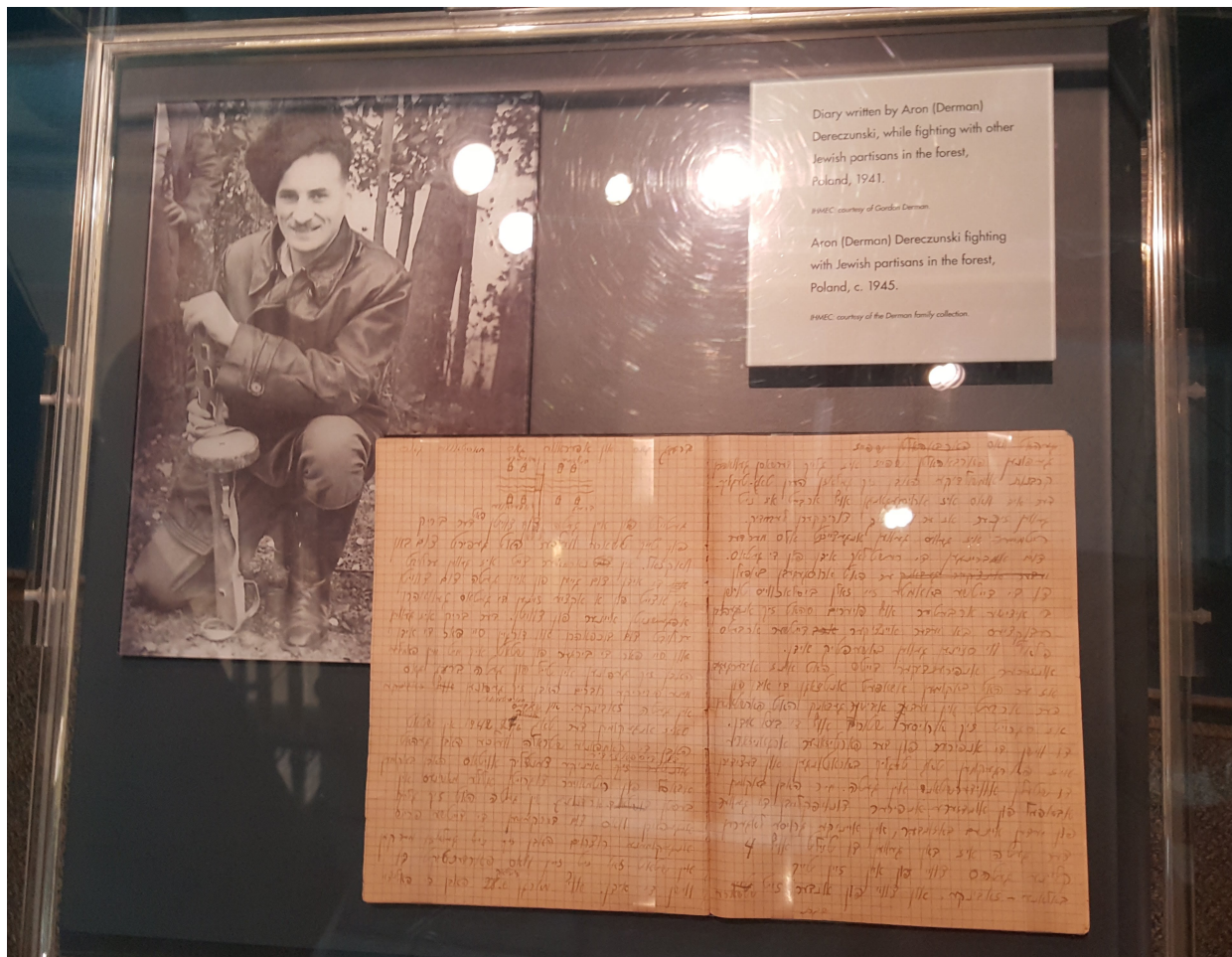


Figure 15

“The World That Was” gallery at the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, with its interactive touch table.

