

EMPATHIC HEALING: THE OUTCOME ON HOLOCAUST EDUCATORS WATCHING A VIDEO APOLOGY PROCESS FROM A REPRESENTATIVE OF DESCENDANTS OF BYSTANDERS OF VIOLENCE DURING THE NAZI REGIME.

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BACKGROUND

Using a psychoanalytic conceptualization of the capacity for empathic repair (based on Emmanuel Levin's ethics of responsibility for the other), Gobodo-Madikizela (2008) has described the potential for empathic healing in the participants who witnesses the event of public apologies during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Applying this concept to another setting, the researchers set out to explore this concept as a strategy for impeding intergenerational transmission of trauma to a broader community.

METHOD

A group of Holocaust Centre educators were shown a slide show and a video clip of an apology process from a representative of descendants of bystanders who had lived in Germany in World War II apologising for not stopping a specific act of violence towards 1 Jewish family who were the only Jews in a small German town. Specific research tools were developed to measure participants' components of understanding of the "other's" viewpoint (i.e. the bystander and their descendants' perspectives) around the violence.

RESULTS

THE DISCUSSION CENTRED AROUND THREE AREAS

- A The agency** of the bystanders at the time in Germany and whether they were really able to intercede in the face of violence. One participant said, "You would think there was something that could be done". Another said, "You can't really judge these people".
- B The credibility** of the representative of the bystander. One responded said "that the document that was written that night is very important. There were some people that supported this family". Similarly, another said, "the fact that there were eye witness accounts on the night means that people were trying to talk about it at the time...."
- C The motives** of the bystander. The representative's absence during the violent events made him less able to represent other bystanders. One respondent said "I don't think that you can put the representative and the people he's representing in the same category He is a religious leader. He's an outsider in the community. He has a position in the community. He's able to interrogate what happened..."

CONCLUSION

Apologising for the violence that happened from the perspective of a bystander or their representative and showing the apologies to broader audiences in workshops where people can discuss the extent of complicity and complexity of perpetrators and bystanders even if they disagree with the bystander or representative (or with each other) is a valuable strategy for spreading an awareness that there are several views around role-players following violent societies. A Historical Perspective as well as Empathy are both important to Nurture.

AUTHORS

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REFERENCE

Gobodo-Madikizela, P. (2008). Empathic Repair after Mass Trauma: When Vengeance is Arrested. *European Journal of Social Theory* 11: 331.