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# The Research Trajectory of Judith Kestenberg

## From the Study of Movements to Research with Child Victims of the Holocaust

### Abstract

The physician and psychoanalyst Judith Kestenberg created a method of body movement analysis called the “Kestenberg Movement Profile” (KMP). She proposed an innovative approach to prevention and intervention in early childhood development and conducted extensive research on child survivors of the Holocaust and on the children of survivors. This latter research produced a great deal of knowledge about the psychological effects of severe childhood trauma. Most of the published material about Kestenberg addresses the KMP. However, her research on child survivors of the Holocaust and on the children of survivors is still the subject of little systematic research in the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis. This article aims to present the course of Kestenberg’s research and characterise her work on child survivors of the Holocaust, with a view to contributing to the appreciation and dissemination of her work.

Judith Silberpfennig Kestenberg was born in 1910 in Krakow, Poland, and died in 1999 in Sands Point, New York, in the United States. She studied medicine at the University of Vienna and specialised in neurology and psychiatry. In 1934, she received the title of Doctor of Medicine, and in 1935, she began her psychoanalytic training with Eduard Hitschmann at the Psychoanalytic Society of Vienna.<sup>1</sup> In an interview conducted in 1989, and published in 1991, Kestenberg reported that, in 1937, she moved to the United States to continue her education. According to Klara Naszkowska,<sup>2</sup> her visa to the United States was sponsored by physician Paul Schilder, who offered her an internship in the Department of Child Psychiatry at Bellevue Hospital in New York. In New York, she also continued her psychoanalytic training with Herman Nunberg at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute (NYPI). K. Mark Sossin, Susan Loman, and Hillary Merman<sup>3</sup> commented that Kestenberg became known for her contributions to a psychodynamic theory of development, her innovative approach to prevention and intervention in early development, the creation of the Kestenberg Movement Profile (KMP), and for her extensive research on child survivors of the Holocaust. She became a professor of psychiatry at New York University Medical School, a teaching analyst at NYPI, and a professor and medical staff member at the Long Island Jewish Medical Center. She was a teacher and mentor to

1 K. Mark Sossin, Susan Loman, and Hillary Merman, “Remembering Judith S. Kestenberg, Our Mentor and Friend”, *American Journal of Dance Therapy* 21, no. 1 (1999): 53–55.

2 Klara Naszkowska, “Give Me Permission to Remember: Judith S. Kestenberg and the Memory of the Holocaust”, in *Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Jewish Thought: Answering a Question with More Questions*, eds. Lewis Henik and Libby Aron (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2023), 197–217.

3 Sossin, Loman, and Merman, “Remembering Judith S. Kestenberg”, 53–55.

psychiatrists, psychologists, psychoanalysts, dance therapists, and movement specialists.<sup>4</sup>

In 1972, Kestenberg founded and directed the nonprofit organisation Child Development Research (CDR). This entity was devoted to the mental health of children and included, among other organisations, the Center for Parents and Children.<sup>5</sup> Together with her husband, the attorney Milton Kestenberg, she created, in 1981, the Jerome Riker International Study of Organized Persecution of Children, a project that was also sponsored by the CDR. With the collaboration of mental health experts from different parts of the world, this project involved interviewing a large number of people who, as children, survived the Holocaust, as well as the children of Nazi parents.<sup>6</sup> Her research covered a wide range of issues related to neurology, psychic development, femininity, mother-child interactions, psychosomatic relationships, and parenting, among many other topics. According to Sossin, Lomin, and Merman,<sup>7</sup> Kestenberg published approximately 150 articles and seven books.

Most published material about Kestenberg focuses on the KMP. Her research on child survivors of the Holocaust has been little studied systematically in the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis. This article intends to present the course of her research and to characterise her work on child survivors, with a view to contributing to the recovery and dissemination of her work.

### Her Initial Research Trajectory

Janka Kormos<sup>8</sup> comments that, early in her training, Kestenberg became interested in the relationship between thought processes, neurological functions, and movement when studying people with brain damage in Vienna. Between 1933 and 1940, Kestenberg published several studies resulting from her neurological investigations, which laid the foundation for her later research on the interaction between mental functioning and movement patterns. According to Kormos,<sup>9</sup> while working at Bellevue Hospital, Kestenberg realised the limitations of using verbal data to assess the mental processes of young children, and she started to explore a method of systematic observation and psychological interpretation based on movement patterns. She began this quest by training in Laban movement analysis and Labanotation with Marian North, Warren Lamb, and Irmgard Bartenieff, all of whom were students of Rudolf von Laban.

In an article published in 1965 describing her research on movement patterns, Kestenberg<sup>10</sup> explained that the problem of excitation, tension, and discharge was addressed in several of Sigmund Freud's writings,<sup>11</sup> and that many of his theories about instinctual drives were based not only on neurophysiologic models but also on

4 Naszkowska, "Give Me Permission to Remember", describes and analyses the life and career of Judith Kestenberg.

5 Ibid., 197–217.

6 Sossin, Loman, and Merman, "Remembering Judith S. Kestenberg", 53–55.

7 Ibid., 53–55.

8 Janka Kormos, "History and the Psychoanalytic Foundations of the Kestenberg Movement Profile", *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy* 17, no. 2 (2022): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432979.2021.1915871>.

9 Janka Kormos, "Kinaesthetic Attunement, Clashing and Mismatches of Early Interactions and Their Influence in Later Development – Theoretical Introduction to the Kestenberg Movement Profile", *Imágó Budapest* 10, no. 1 (2021): 42–54.

10 Judith S. Kestenberg, "The Role of Movement Patterns in Development I – Rhythms of Movement", *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1965): 517–563, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21674086.1965.11926363>.

11 She quotes the *Studies on Hysteria*, *Three Essays on a Theory of Sexuality*, and *The Ego and the Id*.

the direct observation of movements. Observations of muscle tension and relaxation during certain affective and ideational states were an additional source of Freud's theory of energy. Kestenberg comments that this issue was also addressed by Sandor Ferenczi,<sup>12</sup> who contrasts the expressions of emotions in which the explosion predominates with those in which the inhibition prevails. Ferenczi<sup>13</sup> agrees with Freud that the regular parallelism between motor innervations and psychic acts of thought and attention, their mutual conditioning and their often demonstrable quantitative reciprocity, indicate an essential similarity between these processes.

Kestenberg<sup>14</sup> notes that Freud and Breuer used their clinical observations of individual predilections for certain movement patterns as an indicator of differences in individuals' nervous systems. They concluded that the characteristics that constitute people's natural temperament are based on profound differences in their nervous systems and on the degree to which functionally quiescent brain elements release energy. However, she stated that these initial theories, based on neurophysiology and the observation of movement, were set aside as the interests of analysts migrated from drives to ego functions. From then on, studies on character formation predominated in psychoanalytic thinking, while research on how temperament and thought styles are expressed in movement patterns became almost obsolete.

Among others, Kestenberg<sup>15</sup> mentioned a study by Ernst Kris<sup>16</sup> in which the author demonstrates that the primitive rhythm of affective discharge, as it is modified by the ego, becomes a vehicle for nonverbal communication. Kestenberg also cited studies by Margaret Fries,<sup>17</sup> who pioneered efforts to relate early motor behaviour to later psychic manifestations. Kestenberg commented that Fries proposed a classification of temperaments but did not take into account the individuality of motor rhythm and did not realise that characteristic motor patterns, although not well defined, are detectable in early childhood. Kestenberg emphasised that there were no systematic studies of the rhythms of motor discharges and that the lack of a classification of the qualities of movement in adults and children made it difficult to compare primary and secondary forms of motor behaviour. With her research, she tried to fill this gap.

In 1953, Kestenberg initiated a longitudinal study with the objective of establishing a classification of movements. In this study, three children were observed for twenty years, from birth to adulthood. The study sought to analyse the relationship between the development of children's movement patterns and the movement patterns of mothers at different stages of their child's development.<sup>18</sup> According to Kormos,<sup>19</sup> in 1962, a group of child psychiatrists, mental health professionals, and

12 Sandor Ferenczi, "Laughter", in *Problems and Methods of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 3 (New York: BasicBooks, 1955), 177–182.

13 Sandor Ferenczi, "Thinking and Muscle Innervation", in *Further Contributions to Theory and Technique of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 2 (New York: Basic Books, 1952 [1919]), 230–232.

14 Judith S. Kestenberg, "The Role of Movement Patterns in Development I", 517–563.

15 *Ibid.*, 517–563.

16 Ernst Kris, "Laughter as an Expressive Process: Contributions to the Psycho-analysis of Expressive Behaviour", *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1940): 314–341.

17 Margaret Fries, "Interrelationship of Physical, Mental and Emotional Life of a Child from Birth to Four Years of Age", *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 49, no. 6 (1935): 1546–1563, <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.1935.01970060150013>.

18 Larissa Sato Turtelli and Maria da Consolação Gomes Cunha Fernandes Tavares. "Movimento Humano no Contexto do Desenvolvimento: Estudos de Judith Kestenberg", *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa* 24, no. 3 (2008): 295–303, <https://doi.org/10.1590/s0102-37722008000300005>.

19 Kormos, "History and the Psychoanalytic Foundations of the Kestenberg Movement Profile", 1–16.

researchers,<sup>20</sup> led by Kestenber, started a study group called the “Sands Point Movement Study Group”. This group worked for twenty years to develop the KMP method for observing and analysing movement. This method integrated Labanotation into Kestenber’s theory of child development, which integrated elements of drive theory, ego psychology, self-psychology, and object relations theory.

Kestenber<sup>21</sup> explained that, based on the study of the role of movement patterns in development, the Sands Point Movement Study Group constructed a movement notation and introduced a movement vocabulary that are related to psychoanalytic categories of psychosexual development and allow for an examination of movement patterns in psychomotor development from its earliest origins. In the KMP, according to Kestenber,<sup>22</sup> the flow of muscle tension is understood as serving the purposes of self-regulation, the satisfaction of needs and drive discharges. Thus, the method allows the interpretation of the spectrum of drives, affects, and types of defensive or adaptive movements based on the analysis of the distribution of movement in an individual.

According to Kormos,<sup>23</sup> in 1965, to obtain additional validation of the KMP, Kestenber took the technique to the Hampstead Nursery in London, an institution that later became the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families. Kestenber<sup>24</sup> reported that, at the time, there was much discussion in Hampstead about developmental profiles, and she compared her movement profile with the developmental profile constructed by Anna Freud. According to her, Anna Freud was amazed by the accuracy of Kestenber’s interpretation based on the analysis of movement alone. The KMP made it possible to perform a developmental evaluation similar to that performed by Anna Freud but based solely on the analysis of movement patterns.

Between 1969 and 1970, the KMP was applied to the observation of 150 children in various Israeli kibbutzim. In 1972, with the help of her husband, Kestenber founded the organisation Child Development Research, which managed the Center for Parents and Children.<sup>25</sup> In a letter to the editor, Kestenber wrote:

I have been grappling with the problem of optimal child care for many years and in the last 17 years I have been running a center for parents and children in the hope that preventive interventions will make child care easier and more enjoyable.<sup>26</sup>

According to Kormos,<sup>27</sup> in that centre, interventions were performed to prevent emotional disorders based on the evaluation of mother-child interactions with the use of the KMP and other techniques.<sup>28</sup>

20 These included Jay Berlowe, Arnhilt Buelte, Hershey Marcus, Esther Robbins, Martha Soodak, Irmgard Bartenieff, Warren Lamb, Forrestine Paulay, Marion North, Jody Zacharias, and Islene Pinder, among others. Kormos, “Kinaesthetic Attunement, Clashing and Mismatches of Early Interactions and Their Influence in Later Development”.

21 Judith S. Kestenber, “On Narcissism and Masochism in the Fetus and the Neonate”, *Journal of Prenatal & Perinatal Psychology & Health* 5, no. 1 (1990): 87–94.

22 Judith S. Kestenber, “Dr. Judith S. Kestenber Talks to Kristina Stanton”, *Free Associations* 2, no. 2 (1991): 157–174.

23 Kormos, “Kinaesthetic Attunement, Clashing and Mismatches of Early Interactions and Their Influence in Later Development”, 42–54.

24 Kestenber, “Dr. Judith S. Kestenber Talks to Kristina Stanton”, 157–174.

25 Judith S. Kestenber, “Preface: Tribute to Milton Kestenber”, in *Children during the Nazi Reign: Psychological Perspective on the Interview Process*, eds. Judith S. Kestenber and Eva Fogelman (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), ix–xiv.

26 Judith S. Kestenber, “The Debate on the Day Care Continued”, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 28, no. 6 (1989): 963–964.

27 Kormos, “History and the Psychoanalytic Foundations of the Kestenber Movement Profile”, 1–16.

28 A description of the work that was carried out in this centre can be found in Susan Loman “Judith S. Kestenber’s Dance/Movement Therapy Legacy: Approaches with Pregnancy, Young Children and Caregivers”, *American Journal of Dance Therapy* 38 (2016): 225–244.

## Research on Child Holocaust Survivors and Children of Holocaust Survivors

In the years that followed, Kestenberg began to focus on a new area of research, the study of children who survived the Holocaust and the children of survivors. In 1974, Kestenberg formed the Group for the Psychoanalytic Exploration of the Effect of the Holocaust on the Second Generation, in order to study the impact of the Holocaust on the children of survivors from a psychoanalytic perspective. Monthly conferences were held, with a psychoanalytical report on a child of a survivor being presented and discussed at each meeting. Kestenberg explained that the group tried to find similarities and differences in the clinical material of different cases and to isolate the influence of the experiences of the parents during the Holocaust on the conflicts of the patients.<sup>29</sup> Kestenberg<sup>30</sup> reported that, when the group was formed, the main interest of its members was the transmission from parents to children. She wrote:

We wanted to find out what was transmitted to the children of survivors and how was this intergenerational communication accomplished. We began by trying to identify syndromes characteristic to children of survivors, if indeed there was such a specificity. Since then, we have come to recognize that a syndrome of survivor's children – that is a pathological entity – is not an appropriate term for what we have seen in the cases of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy which we have scrutinized and discussed. I thought it more apt to speak of a survivors-children's complex, similar to the Oedipus complex, which is shared by all, but can become a source of pathology in some.<sup>31</sup>

In 1981, Kestenberg and her husband, Milton Kestenberg, initiated the Jerome Riker International Study of Organized Persecution of Children, an international study of child victims of the Nazi persecution that was sponsored by Child Development Research. At that time, therefore, her research also began to focus on the first generation of survivors, that is, people who had experienced Nazi persecution as children. According to Naszkowska,<sup>32</sup> this project, which received funding from Jerome Riker, brought together a group of approximately twelve mental health professionals, including Eva Fogelman, Helene Bass-Wichelhaus, K. Mark Sossin, Robert M. Prince, and Ira Brenner.

In the preface to the book *Children during the Nazi Reign*, Kestenberg<sup>33</sup> described the history of her research on child survivors of the Holocaust. She wrote that, although the study formally began in 1981, its foundations were laid two decades earlier, when her husband represented clients who were survivors seeking compensation from the West German government. To substantiate their claims, Milton Kestenberg had to help these clients document their lives under the Nazi regime. Judith Kestenberg explains that the compensation system evaluated the damage suffered by the person; a percentage of the “damage” was allocated by doctors to the survivor and, depending on this percentage, the survivor received or did not receive a pension or compensation. This assessment depended largely on what survivors could remember of

29 Judith S. Kestenberg, “Children of Survivors and Child Survivors”, in *Echoes of the Holocaust*, ed. Shalom Robinson (Jerusalem: Talbieh Mental Health Center, 1992), 27–50.

30 Judith S. Kestenberg, “The Psychological Consequences of Punitive Institutions”, *Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences* 18, no. 1 (1981): 15–30.

31 Kestenberg, “The Psychological Consequences of Punitive Institutions”, 16.

32 Naszkowska, “Give Me Permission to Remember”, 197–217.

33 Kestenberg, “Preface: Tribute to Milton Kestenberg”, ix–xiv.

their persecution and on them report that coherently. If their reports were considered inconsistent or if they gave contradictory information about details such as the dates and locations of their imprisonment in concentration camps, they were considered liars and punished with a denial of benefits. Memory impairment resulting from physical and mental violence suffered by survivors was not taken into account.

Judith Kestenberg<sup>34</sup> states that it became increasingly evident that the survivors had memory problems and were not always able to remember specific dates and locations. For people who had been victims of the Holocaust as children, the problem was twofold because, in addition to the disturbance of memory caused by persecution, many of them were too young to remember exactly what had happened to them, let alone when and where. In this context, Milton Kestenberg began interviewing survivors and trying to help them remember and connect past and present events so that these events could be used to document the trauma inflicted upon them. Experienced at interviewing due to his work as a lawyer and seeking to help the interviewees as quickly as possible, he learned to focus on the main concerns of survivors and became an expert in detecting overt or hidden feelings of guilt, to which he reacted like a benevolent father absolving his children. Judith Kestenberg thus attributed the initial stimulus for her research on the psychological consequences of the Nazi persecution of children to her husband.

Milton Kestenberg also noticed that German officials, many of whom had grown up in Nazi Germany, covertly continued the policy of the Nazi persecution of “inferior races,” albeit under the new laws of West German democracy. The survivors were again placed in the position of being judged by their “superiors” and punished within the limits of the law for trying to defraud the German people. It became clear that persecutor and persecuted carried with them traces of the previous roles for which they had been trained during their childhoods.<sup>35</sup>

According to Judith Kestenberg, her desire to help the victims to devictimise themselves, and the aggressors to become sensitised to the pain of the survivors, remained dormant for years. It was awakened when, through her psychoanalytic practice, she encountered children of survivors who suffered from the consequences of the persecution of their parents by the Nazis. Her interest in survivors who had been children under the Nazi regime arose in turn when she analysed a survivor who had been born in a ghetto and who, at the age of two, had been deported to a concentration camp. She reported that:

This analysis unfolded before my eyes, the development of a child under Nazi persecution, and as I discussed this very complex analysis with Milton, we both came to the conclusion that we must study the development of child survivors of the Holocaust.<sup>36</sup>

Judith Kestenberg emphasises that, when she began to analyse such survivors, she had the help of her husband:

When I began to analyze children of survivors and child survivors, my first consultant before we formed groups of researchers was always Milton. I would tell him what I heard from my patients and he faced me with what had happened during the Holocaust in different countries, through him, I recognized how important it was for Psychoanalysts to know the history of the patients' country of origin.<sup>37</sup>

34 Kestenberg, “Preface: Tribute to Milton Kestenberg”, ix–xiv.

35 *Ibid.*, ix–xiv.

36 *Ibid.*, xii.

37 *Ibid.*, xiii.



According to Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer,<sup>38</sup> the Jerome Riker International Study of Organized Persecution of Children grew rapidly after the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, a meeting held in 1984 in Philadelphia. At this event, the Kestenbergs set up a table to solicit interviews with such child survivors who were willing to speak with them. Eva Fogelman and the Kestenbergs organised monthly discussion groups in New York, similar to those of the rap groups of Vietnam veterans. There was initially a core group that participated regularly, survivors of ghettos or concentration camps, and additional participants began attending over time. Those attending were encouraged to participate in interviews, and those who considered the interview process a transformative experience encouraged others to be interviewed.

Paul Valent<sup>39</sup> comments that the psychosocial consequences of the Holocaust in adults were recognised only in the 1960s and that in the 1970s attention turned to the children of adult survivors. With rare exceptions, people who had experienced the Holocaust as children themselves were recognised as survivors only in the 1980s, that is after a period of almost forty years. Valent explains that, in the meantime, even the surviving children did not recognise themselves as survivors. They believed that only their parents were survivors, as they had been “just children” during the war and had no memories of it.<sup>40</sup> However, the lack of perception of the impact of war on younger people contrasted with clinical observations that indicated that the younger the survivor, the greater the potential harmful effects of traumatic experiences.<sup>41</sup>

According to Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer,<sup>42</sup> most child survivors of the Holocaust did not talk about their war experiences in the post-war years. For many, “not remembering” was key to dealing with the pain and trauma. They sought to adapt and integrate into the new environment. However, despite their silence, they carried their painful memories with them, and as they grew older, many began to manifest the desire, even the need, to talk about their past experiences and recover parts of themselves that had been foundational to their lives. This phenomenon, according to the authors, occurred in parallel to the development of the historiography of the Holocaust.<sup>43</sup> And we can think that they were facilitated by it. Soon after liberation,

38 Sharon Kangisser Cohen, Eva Fogelman, and Dalia Ofer, eds., *Children in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath: Historical and Psychological Studies of the Kestenberg Archive* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017).

39 Paul Valent, “Child Survivors: A Review”, in *Children Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing*, eds. Judith S. Kestenberg and Charlotte Kahn (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 109–123.

40 Rebecca Clifford explains that, before the 1980s, the term “child survivor” did not exist. Children who lost both parents in the genocide were commonly referred to as “Jewish war orphans”. For those who still had one or both parents, there was no meaningful identity label for the experience of confusion, terror, and loss, emotions that had often deeply marked their early years. The author also reports that this situation changed only in the 1980s. Rebecca Clifford, “Who Is a Survivor? Child Holocaust Survivors and the Development of a Generational Identity”, *Oral History Forum d’histoire orale*, Special Issue: *Generations and Memory: Continuity and Change* 37 (2017): 1–23.

41 Judith Kestenberg and Yolanda Gampel comment that Reinhart Lempp examined 44 protocols and reports from files of compensation offices and concluded that the younger the child was during the persecution, the more they subsequently suffered from depression, asthenia, and failures in academic and professional life. Judith S. Kestenberg and Yolanda Gampel, “Growing Up in the Holocaust Culture”, *Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences*, 20 (1983): 129–146; Reinhart Lempp, *Extrembelastung im Kindes- und Jugendalter* (Bern: Huber, 1979). This initial perception was confirmed by Kestenberg’s studies “Children Who Survived the Holocaust – the Role of Rules and Routines in the Development of the Superego”, *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* 67 (1986): 309–316, and “Children Under the Nazi Yoke”, *British Journal of Psychotherapy* 8, no. 4 (1992): 374–390, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0118.1992.tb01200.x>.

42 Kangisser Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer, *Children in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*.

43 Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer cite Debórah Dwork’s book *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991). Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer, *Children in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, 2. Another important publication was the book *Generations of the Holocaust*, edited by Martin

witnessing projects emerged that involved interviewing child survivors, but it was not until 1979 that historian Yaffa Eliach dedicated her oral history project at Brooklyn College specifically to people who had survived the Holocaust as children.<sup>44</sup> However, the study led by Judith Kestenberg gathered the largest collection of testimonies of child survivors.

### The Characteristics and Objectives of the Interviews

The researchers in the Kestenberg group defined a “child survivor” as any Jewish child, aged thirteen years or younger at the beginning of the persecution in their country, who survived in German-occupied Europe by any means, whether in hiding, as a guerrilla, in the ghettos, on the run, or in concentration camps. “War children” were non-Jewish children who lived in Germany during the Third Reich, from 1933 to 1945, or in Poland from the time of the German invasion in 1939 until the country’s liberation.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to the surviving Jewish children, Polish and German children whose war circumstances could be understood as traumatic, as well as children of Nazi parents, were interviewed.<sup>46</sup> Kestenberg<sup>47</sup> pointed out that once the persecution of children began, it encompassed not only the victims but also the children of the victimizers, so that the trauma often also extended to the children of the Nazis. Thus, she concluded that it was not enough to understand the victims, but it was also necessary to understand how parents raised their children to become persecutors, which prompted her to include people who had been children under Hitler’s regime in her research.<sup>48</sup>

According to Kestenberg, from the beginning, her research on the consequences of the Holocaust on children was motivated by more than scientific curiosity. She wanted to contribute to the prevention of another Holocaust, and she believed that prevention could not be applied only to potential victims: it was necessary to study what the Nazis had transmitted to their children and how this transmission had been accomplished.<sup>49</sup> Thus, in addition to seeking to understand the effect of persecution on children, she sought to understand the effect of indoctrinating children to become persecutors.

Eva Fogelman notes that a moral obligation accompanied the group’s research on child survivors:

Interviewers and survivors are linked by a mission that goes beyond the recording of a narrative. When a survivor-witness reconstructs a detailed his-

Bergmann and Milton Jucovy and published in 1982. This book brings together the first results of the Group for the Psychoanalytic Study of the Effects of the Holocaust on the Second Generation, led by Judith Kestenberg. Martin S. Bergmann and Milton E. Jucovy, eds., *Generations of the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). Other relevant works include Martin Gilbert, *Atlas of the Holocaust* (London: Macmillan, 1982), and Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

44 The Yaffa Eliach child survivor interviews are now housed in the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City. Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer, 2017.

45 Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer, *Children in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*.

46 Paula S. Fass, *Children in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath: Historical and Psychological Studies of the Kestenberg Archive*, eds. by Sharon Kangisser Cohen, Eva Fogelman, and Dalia Ofer, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 11, no. 2 (2018): 281–283, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2018.0043>.

47 Kestenberg, “Children Under the Nazi Yoke”, 374–390; Judith S. Kestenberg, “Nazi Fathers”, in *Children Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing*, eds. Judith S. Kestenberg and Charlotte Kahn (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 124–138.

48 Kestenberg, „Preface: Tribute to Milton Kestenberg“, ix–xiv.

49 Kestenberg, „The Psychological Consequences of Punitive Institutions“, 15–30.



torical portrayal of events along with a subjective perception of persecution, it is not merely regarded as a source for the formation of scientific epistemology. A moral obligation accompanies the interviewing process in order to preserve the history and warn future generations of the impending dangers of racism, which was at the core of Nazi ideology. The tasks started with the interview for the survivor as narrator and mental health professional as listener are never-ending.<sup>50</sup>

When the study began,<sup>51</sup> the group members were convinced that interviewing child survivors would produce significant data on the impact of child persecution only if they obtained a large sample, preferably from several countries to which such children emigrated or where they remained after the war. So, child survivors were then located in different countries<sup>52</sup> and groups were organised to interview them. According to Fogelman and Flora Hogman,<sup>53</sup> 1,500 people from 15 countries were interviewed.

One of the distinctive characteristics of this research group, according to Kestenberg,<sup>54</sup> was that it was made up of mental health professionals, while most other groups that studied this subject were composed of historians. Another characteristic that stands out, emphasised by Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer,<sup>55</sup> was that the interviewers were not only well aware of the historical facts of Europe before the Second World War, during the war years, and in the post-liberation period, but they were also attentive to the psychological ramifications for the lives of women and children during and after the Holocaust.

Kestenberg<sup>56</sup> explains that the interviews combined historical and psychological perspectives. She emphasises that knowledge of history was essential in the interviews. Before conducting them, the interviewers sought to obtain information about the places where the people were from, the places where they had remained hidden, or the concentration camps in which they had been imprisoned; in short, they sought to understand the context in which the survivors had experienced the Holocaust.<sup>57</sup> According to Fogelman and Hogman,<sup>58</sup> the interviews were semi-structured so that respondents were instructed to talk about their life before, during, and after the Holocaust, and the interviewer guided them but followed their lead to ensure that the data collection did not interrupt the narrative.

Kestenberg<sup>59</sup> reported that the need to tell the world what had happened was common to all survivors, but child survivors seemed to have a greater need than adults to elaborate on their traumas by sharing their experiences. In *Memories from Early*

50 Eva Fogelman, "Introduction", in *Children during the Nazi Reign*, eds. Judith S. Kestenberg and Eva Fogelman (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), xxi.

51 Judith S. Kestenberg, "Children of Survivors and Child Survivors", in *Echoes of the Holocaust*, ed. Shalom Robinson (Jerusalem: Talbieh Mental Health Center, 1992), 27–50.

52 Kestenberg mentions Canada, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Poland, Sweden, Yugoslavia, and the United States. Kestenberg, "Children of Survivors and Child Survivors", 27–50.

53 Eva Fogelman and Flora Hogman, "A Follow-Up Study: Child Survivors of the Nazi Holocaust Reflect on Being Interviewed", in *Children during the Nazi Reign*, eds. Judith S. Kestenberg and Eva Fogelman (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 73–80.

54 Kestenberg, "Children of Survivors and Child Survivors", 27–50.

55 Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer, *Children in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*.

56 Judith S. Kestenberg, "Overview of the Effect of Psychological Research Interviews on Child Survivors", in *Children during the Nazi Reign: Psychological Perspective on the Interview Process*, eds. Judith S. Kestenberg and Eva Fogelman (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 3–33.

57 Kestenberg, "Dr. Judith S. Kestenberg Talks to Kristina Stanton", 157–174.

58 Fogelman and Hogman, "A Follow-Up Study: Child Survivors of the Nazi Holocaust Reflect on Being Interviewed", 73–80.

59 Kestenberg, "Children of Survivors and Child Survivors", 27–50.

*Childhood*, she commented that, at times, the surviving children “act as if their very life depends on their memories being complete. They deplore memories that cannot be recovered and may be forever lost. They seek help in remembering.”<sup>60</sup> According to her, the interviews were not intended as therapy, but to help survivors to unburden themselves and tell their stories. However, it ended up having unintended therapeutic consequences:

The trauma is comparable in some respect to abuse, but it’s not the same thing. So, for instance, these people lost continuity of life; they say they have a hole in their childhood. That’s not necessarily so in other abuses. As we are listening and allowing them to tell us whatever they want to, they speak, sometimes for the first time. The last person I interviewed said, ‘I never spoke in such a sequence, I didn’t have a chronological feeling about it, and now I have’. And that’s extremely important for structuring identity, for feeling understood and understanding yourself.<sup>61</sup>

She also commented that:

Child survivors feel a void in their past. They lack normal childhood images of parents and the building blocks of a secure self. Interviews can act as triggers for the restoration of continuity, a linking of the fragments to provide a past upon which to construct life in the present.<sup>62</sup>

In fact, Kestenberg<sup>63</sup> stated that the most important aspects of the interviews were to provide a structure so that people could order their memories, and to give the interviewees permission to remember, which they had often been denied elsewhere.<sup>64</sup>

A special technique to aid recall was used. Kestenberg<sup>65</sup> reported that, in her efforts to help those who wanted to remember, she focused on ways to communicate very early memories that differed from those of adults. Based on the understanding that young children do not clearly distinguish between reality and fantasy, she began asking respondents to imagine certain crucial events in their childhood and was met with a variety of responses, from total cooperation to complete refusal based on a rigid and highly defensive adherence to reality. Thus, she sought to promote remembering by trying to evoke different types of sensorimotor memories, such as smells and memories of movement, instead of visual images. Her experience showed that early memories are expressed as movement, that often was not conscious. It is clear, therefore, that Kestenberg’s prior knowledge of movement patterns and psychological development played a very important role in her investigations of child survivors of the Holocaust. According to Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer,<sup>66</sup> the team of interviewers learned and used Kestenberg’s kinesthetic techniques to aid the interviewees’ recall.

60 Judith S. Kestenberg, “Memories from Early Childhood”, *Psychoanalytic Review* 75 (1988): 561.

61 Kestenberg, “Dr. Judith S. Kestenberg Talks to Kristina Stanton”, 159–160.

62 Judith Kestenberg, “Child Survivors of the Holocaust – 40 Years Later: Reflections and Commentary”, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 24, no. 4 (1985): 408, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0002-7138\(09\)60558-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0002-7138(09)60558-6).

63 Kestenberg, “Children of Survivors and Child Survivors”, 27–50.

64 Kestenberg stated that children who survived with their parents often did not have the possibility to talk about their own stories and the stories of their parents. She explained that the parents had a great need to protect their persecuted children from the effects of the persecution and often believed that the children were not traumatised because they did not understand what was happening and could not remember in the same way as the parents did. The author points out that this parental attitude acted as a command for the surviving child not to remember and not to understand. Judith S. Kestenberg, “Adult Survivors, Child Survivors, and Children of Survivors”, in *Children Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing*, edited by Judith S. Kestenberg and Charlotte Kahn (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 56–65.

65 Kestenberg, “Memories from Early Childhood”, 561–571.

66 Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer, *Children in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*.

Several of the child survivors were interviewed at least twice. The interviewers reviewed the first interview and assessed what was missing from the interviewee's life story. In the second interview, the survivors often spoke about experiences that they initially may not have been prepared to talk about. The second interview was also an opportunity to ask more specific questions about getting older, identity, memory, and childhood play, among other, more idiosyncratic subjects.<sup>67</sup> According to Fogelman and Hogman,<sup>68</sup> some survivors had four interview sessions across a total of eight hours. The interviews were audio recorded but were not shared with family members. This anonymity allowed the respondents to be more open about their emotions, current lives, and relationships. Fogelman and Hogman pointed out that the protocol for the interviews evolved over time and that some child survivors became interviewers themselves. In such cases, they had to be interviewed before being allowed to conduct interviews. Judith Kestenberg, Milton Kestenberg, and Eva Fogelman organised training sessions for the interviewers in New York, and a central committee met regularly to review the questions that would be asked.

### The Psychoanalytic Perspective in Research on Survivors

When asked if the psychoanalytic perspective had helped in any specific way in the interviews, Kestenberg<sup>69</sup> explained that psychoanalysis, by providing a theoretical framework of development, had helped the study and that her research was a study of development. In her words:

We look at which developmental phase the child was in before the Holocaust; how this phase was either delayed or changed with the events of the Holocaust; what happened during the Holocaust; and, finally, what happened after liberation. So it's a developmental study. We ask questions, or just ask people to tell us about their pre-Holocaust environment and personality, and we see how they progressed.<sup>70</sup>

In the following passage, Kestenberg identified some of the questions that guided her research:

I want to know whether there is a clear correlation between the following aspects of trauma: where and how it happens, in which part of the body it happened, and what were the effects of each trauma. I want to know: What happened to narcissism? What happened to masochism? I hope this will emerge when we finish the study. We must also take into account that persecution did continue or recur after the Holocaust.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, the psychoanalytic perspective on development guided the interviews to some extent, as acknowledged above. On the other hand, her conception of development was significantly altered by the data obtained. Kestenberg stated that "we are learning a great deal not just about survivors but about development as such".<sup>72</sup> She emphasised that these interviews transformed her as an analyst, making her much more connected to the reality to which the child survivor was exposed; she now understood the meaning of continuity in people's lives, realising that it was not only

67 Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer, *Children in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*.

68 Fogelman and Hogman, "A Follow-Up Study", 73–80.

69 Kestenberg, "Dr. Judith S. Kestenberg Talks to Kristina Stanton", 157–174.

70 *Ibid.*, 159.

71 *Ibid.*, 163.

72 *Ibid.*, 160.

possible to reconstruct events, but also necessary to see the connection between what had happened then and what the person had become in the present. She noted that she had also learned that, at each stage of development, trauma is managed in a different way.

Kestenberg's research on child survivors and on the children of survivors took place in a context in which psychoanalysts and other mental health professionals were trying to understand, and formulate strategies to deal with, the psychological effects of experiences during the Holocaust.

Kestenberg<sup>73</sup> and other authors<sup>74</sup> reported that mental health professionals were initially unprepared to deal with survivors. According to Milton Jucovy,<sup>75</sup> the initial plans to rehabilitate victims of the Holocaust emphasised material assistance, while psychological issues were ignored. Jucovy believed that psychiatrists and psychoanalysts had failed to confront the psychological problems of survivors, with the exception of Paul Friedman, who investigated the mental problems of Jewish refugees in Europe and devoted special attention to the problems of children.<sup>76</sup>

In a 1948 publication, Friedman commented that the first rehabilitation plans for survivors in Europe entirely neglected the psychiatric aspect, and he raised the following question:

How then explain the indifference and even often downright opposition on the part of many people to psychiatric aid for the survivors? It was not due – let me hasten to explain – to any lack of devotion or interest. It was rather that all of us – I do not by any means exclude myself – were filled with sharp and pervasive feeling of guilt towards those very victims we were trying to help. As a defense against this omnipresent emotion, leaders in relief work tended to credit the optimistic stories about the survivors, while at the same time they discounted those describing psychological misery and disorder. We accepted the theory that the very fact of survival was evidence of physical and psychological superiority – without looking too closely the implications of this statement, which dishonored millions of martyred dead.<sup>77</sup>

Jucovy<sup>78</sup> explains that it was only in the 1960s that psychiatric problems resulting from persecution were recognised.<sup>79</sup> Until that point, traditional German medical

73 Kestenberg, "Children of Survivors and Child Survivors", 27-50; Judith S. Kestenberg, "What a Psychoanalyst Learned from the Holocaust and Genocide", *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 74 (1993): 1117-1129.

74 Milton Jucovy, "The Background of Persecution and Its Aftermath", in *Children Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing*, eds. Judith S. Kestenberg and Charlotte Kahn (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 19-42; Robert Prince, "Historical Trauma: Psychohistorical Reflections on the Holocaust", in *Children Surviving Persecution: An International Study of Trauma and Healing*, eds. Judith S. Kestenberg and Charlotte Kahn (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 43-55; Robert Prince, "Psychoanalysis Traumatized: The Legacy of the Holocaust", *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 69, no. 3 (2009): 179-194, <https://doi.org/10.1057/ajp.2009.13>.

75 Jucovy, "The Background of Persecution and Its Aftermath", 19-42.

76 Friedman carried out a study in the Holocaust refugee detention centre in Cyprus, with the aim of researching the mental state of survivors and laying the foundations for a mental hygiene program in Palestine and the Displaced Persons camps. In this study, he paid special attention to the psychological symptoms presented by children. Some of the results were published in the article "Some Aspects of Concentration Camp Psychology" and in the text "The Road Back for the DP's: Healing the Psychological Scars of Nazism". Paul Friedman, "The Road Back for the DP's: Healing the Psychological Scars of Nazism", *Commentary Magazine* (December 1948): 1-18; Paul Friedman, "Some Aspects of Concentration Camp Psychology", *American Journal of Psychiatry* 105 (1949): 601-605.

77 Friedman, "The Road Back for the DP's", 1-18.

78 Jucovy, "The Background of Persecution and Its Aftermath", 19-42.

79 This change in the position of German psychiatry appears to have been influenced by the growing public recognition of the trauma of the Holocaust and the condition of the survivor at the time. Clifford comments that, in the 1960s and 1970s, as public interest in and knowledge of the Holocaust began to grow, a link between the camp experience and the concept of the survivor became entrenched. This was supported by a number of fac-

theories had held that any traumatic experience that affected the psyche, regardless of its severity, could have only temporary effects on mental functioning. More lasting disorders and trauma sequelae that appeared later were arbitrarily considered to be determined by genetic factors and therefore not to be related to persecution. In addition, German psychiatrists argued that, since individuals who had spent their first two or three years of life in a concentration camp or in hiding would not remember the details of their suffering, these traumas could not be psychologically harmful.

Regarding psychoanalysis, Kestenberg<sup>80</sup> stated that studies on the children of survivors and on child survivors had uncovered the analysts' lack of skill in dealing with the psychological consequences of the Holocaust.<sup>81</sup> Many patients were discharged after a supposedly successful analysis with the advice to live in the present, as the past was considered insignificant. Some therapists considered that recalling the Holocaust was a defence that emerged from a present conflict. Kestenberg also pointed out that some of the first therapists who treated survivors considered them not to be analysable.

Ferenc Erős<sup>82</sup> argues that, for a long period, the Holocaust remained a blind spot for psychoanalysts, and that only after several decades was the trauma of the Holocaust recognised by psychoanalysts. This was also the case for society as a whole. Erős points out that, after Hitler's rise to power in 1933, psychoanalysis practically disappeared from Central Europe. Most European psychoanalysts continued their lives and careers in the United States, and for most of them, and for subsequent generations of psychoanalysts, the Holocaust remained a blind spot. After World War Two, the main focus of psychoanalysis was the exploration of the "Nazi mind", that is, the psychological and character traits of war criminals. In the same vein, Paul Marcus and Irene Wineman<sup>83</sup> noted that, during the 1940s and 1950s, although psychoanalysts had integrated themselves into life in the United States and secured many important positions like everyone else, they were still too close to the event to realise its significance and broader meaning. Although few theoretical works had been written about the Holocaust, there was interest in the personality of antisemites.

According to Naszkowska,<sup>84</sup> a questionnaire sent to child analysts in the United States, Canada, Israel, Germany, England, and the Netherlands between 1969 and 1970, after the conference of the International Psychoanalytical Association in Rome, showed that the vast majority of interviewees were indifferent to the problems of survivors of Nazi persecution. Illustrative of this is the following account by psychoanalyst Dori Laub:

Working as a psychiatrist in a state hospital in 1965 to 1966, we knew that there was an Auschwitz patient who was regularly admitted every year during the same month. We administered our usual protocol of twelve electro-

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tors, including the coverage of the testimony of camp survivors at the Eichmann trial in 1961, the recirculation of images of the concentration camps in the public sphere, the growing interest in the literature of prominent camp survivors such as Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, and the accessibility of cultural products such as the widely viewed 1978 television miniseries *Holocaust*. According to the author, these were some of the vectors of memory that shaped public perspectives at the time. Clifford, "Who Is a Survivor?", 1–23.

80 Kestenberg, "Children of Survivors and Child Survivors", 27–50.

81 Kestenberg comments on some cases of questionable treatment by therapists in "What a Psychoanalyst Learned from the Holocaust and Genocide", 1117–1129.

82 Ferenc Erős, "From War Neurosis to Holocaust Trauma – An Intellectual and Cultural History", *S:I.M.O.N. Shoah: Intervention. Methods Documentation* 4, no. 1 (2017): 41–58.

83 Paul Marcus and Irene Wineman, "Psychoanalysis Encountering the Holocaust", *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (1985): 85–98.

84 Naszkowska, "Give Me Permission to Remember", 197–217.

convulsive treatments, and he felt better and was discharged. Everybody knew he was a survivor. Nobody asked why he returned at the same time on a yearly basis. Decades later, I found out that there had been thousands of Holocaust survivors hospitalized in Israeli institutions for decades, some since the end of the war. In their charts there was very little information about their Holocaust experience. They were largely diagnosed schizophrenic or bipolar and given conventional treatment, which was of limited help.<sup>85</sup>

Jucovy<sup>86</sup> argues that classical psychoanalytic approaches were insufficient to conceptualise and explain the bewildering variety of symptoms presented by survivors. In psychoanalysis, the prevailing idea at the time was that external traumas would be transposed into internal traumas only if they evoked or symbolised the fulfilment of deeply rooted anxieties or wishful fantasies. The author points out that the definition of trauma as a singular acute event, as posited by Freudian theory, could not be applied to the experience of months or years of daily degradation and almost certain death.

Trauma was conceived by Freud<sup>87</sup> as an experience in which the mental apparatus is suddenly flooded with a large amount of excitement that breaches the protective barrier of mental functioning. The traumatic experience disorganises the psychic apparatus, which then needs to dominate the stimuli by carrying out what Freud calls repetition compulsion.<sup>88</sup> This definition of trauma is found in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”:

We describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on large scale in the functioning of the organism’s energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure.<sup>89</sup>

According to this conception, traumatic neuroses result from the economic disruption of the psyche caused by a traumatic experience, and the symptoms represent an attempt by mental functioning to elaborate and gain control over the overflow of stimuli in the psyche.

In “Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety”, Freud<sup>90</sup> argues that the common characteristic of all anxiety states is that they represent a “reaction to danger”, and that the prototype of the anxiety experience is the trauma of birth. In the experience of birth, the “danger” in question lacks any psychic content, since the newborn is only capable of feeling an enormous disturbance in the psychic economy resulting from the in-

85 Dori Laub, “On Leaving Home and the Flight Trauma”, *Psychoanalytic Dialogues: The International Journal of Relational Perspectives* 23, no. 5 (2013): 568–580.

86 Jucovy, “The Background of Persecution and Its Aftermath”, 19–42.

87 Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1962 [1920]), 3–66.

88 This definition of trauma, presented by Freud in 1920, picks up on initial ideas that he had outlined in the “Project for a Scientific Psychology”, written in 1895, but which he had left in the background until 1920. Sigmund Freud, “Project for a Scientific Psychology”, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), 283–397; Fátima Caropreso, “Dor e desejo na teoria freudiana do aparelho psíquico e das neuroses”, *Revista de Filosofia Aurora* 21, no. 29 (2009): 569–590, <https://doi.org/10.7213/rfa.v21i29.2629>.

89 Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”, 29.

90 Sigmund Freud, “Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety”, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 20, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1962 [1926]), 77–178.



tensity of the stimuli reaching the sensory organs. However, the anxiety reappears in all situations in which the individual is again confronted with the risk of an increase in stimulation, whether external or internal, in which they are powerless. Freud identifies a series of typical sequential anxieties in the course of development: the anxiety of losing an object, the anxiety of castration, and the anxiety of the moral conscience. For him, anxiety functions as a sign of the danger of reliving a traumatic situation, such as is experienced during birth, which can lead to repression and psychoneurosis. In this way, Freud links trauma to anxiety, repression, and neurosis. Traumatic experiences, according to this conception, symbolise unconscious content and acquire a traumatic value because they evoke previous traumatic experiences.

Robert Prince<sup>91</sup> also comments that, according to the classical position of psychoanalysis, the external events have a traumatic effect due to their resonance with pre-existing intrapsychic themes, so the resulting symptoms ultimately symbolise unconscious content. This model, however, did not fit the experience of Holocaust survivors because massive trauma destroys the ability to symbolise and disturbs the organisation of the personality. The author argues that, in traumatic neurosis resulting from massive trauma, symptoms, including traumatic dreams, are not susceptible to interpretation because they have no unconscious meaning. In this type of situation, the capacity for metaphorisation is reduced.

Therefore, the Holocaust brought about a new reality and posed a great challenge for psychoanalysts and other mental health professionals. According to Jucovy,<sup>92</sup> in 1967, when the Congress of the International Psychoanalytical Association directed attention to the problems of survivors, the general tone of the discussion suggested that the traditional psychoanalytic understanding of the effects of trauma lacked important elements necessary to understand and treat survivors with significant psychological impairment. Symposium participants emphasised the permanent damage to the ego – expressed, for example, in the alteration of an individual's personal identity and clinical manifestations of the psychotic type – and recognised that many of the main sequelae indicated that the pre-traumatic personality might play only a small role in the symptoms. It was argued that, if other channels were blocked, survivors would often direct aggression toward the descendants of their persecutors, thus perpetuating the original impact of the Holocaust. Due to the extreme circumstances in concentration camps, where only survival behaviours had meaning and the difference between life and death was arbitrary and unpredictable, memories often usurped fantasies in the mental lives of survivors. Jucovy points out that, at that time, there was no consensus on effective forms of treatment.

The work of Kestenberg and her group therefore began in this context of perceiving the limitations of psychoanalytic and psychiatric knowledge and of seeking ways to understand and treat survivors and their descendants. Many publications were derived from these studies, and a wealth of knowledge about the psyche was produced. Fogelman and Hogman<sup>93</sup> clarified that most of the results of interviews with Holocaust survivors consisted of the interviewers' clinical observations.

The records of the interviews were donated by Eva Fogelman to the Oral History Division of the Avraham Harman Institute for Contemporary Judaism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Under the direction of Sharon Kangisser Cohen, 1,500

91 Prince, "Historical Trauma: Psychohistorical Reflections on the Holocaust", 43–55.

92 Jucovy, "The Background of Persecution and Its Aftermath", 19–42.

93 Eva Fogelman and Flora Hogman, "A Follow-Up Study: Child Survivors of the Nazi Holocaust Reflect on Being Interviewed", in *Children during the Nazi Reign*, eds. Judith S. Kestenberg and Eva Fogelman (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 73–80.

the records were digitised, catalogued and preserved, enabling their use in academic research. Currently, the archive is known as the “Kestenberg Holocaust Child Survivor Archive”.<sup>94</sup>

Gila Sandler Saban, K. Mark Sossin, and Anastasia Yasik<sup>95</sup> comment that the narratives of the interviews as they were conducted and considered within the scope of the International Study of Organized Persecution of Children “underscore each survivor’s uniqueness while contributing to more-generalized conclusions about children’s psychological processing of their encounters with atrocity, brutality, loss, separation, fear, encampment, hiding, and more”.<sup>96</sup> The authors emphasise that this material is particularly relevant to the understanding of the long-term effects of trauma resulting from systematic persecution.

### Some of the Main Findings

In “What a Psychoanalyst Learned from the Holocaust and Genocide”, Kestenberg<sup>97</sup> summarised some of the most important findings from her research on the first and second generations of child survivors. With regards to the second generation, she refers to the mechanism of “transposition”, the split of the superego, and the psychosomatic sequelae. Regarding the first generation, she mentions the split of their ego, the somatisation of drives, and their unusual adaptations to their new environment.

In “The Psychological Consequences of Punitive Institutions”, Kestenberg<sup>98</sup> stated that she realised that children understand what had happened to their parents both when they are informed and when the story is silenced. Her analysis of the children of survivors of concentration camps, ghettos, and the early stages of Nazi persecution showed that they involuntarily lived in a double reality, the present reality and that of Nazism. This mechanism is called “transposition”. She explained that survivors have a tendency to relive the Holocaust in any regression that follows stress, and that “children learn from their parents to live on two levels, such as looking at a hay stack as a place to play and at the same time selecting it to hide from the Nazis as if they were present today”.<sup>99</sup>

Commenting on Kestenberg’s concept of transposition, Ilse Grubrich-Simitis<sup>100</sup> explained that this mechanism goes beyond what psychoanalysis usually means by identification. It is an incorporative rather than an identificatory process “characterized both by the totality of immersion in another reality and by the involvement of the body”.<sup>101</sup> Kestenberg<sup>102</sup> explained that, in extreme cases, transposition causes the

94 Cohen, Fogelman, and Ofer, *Children in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*.

95 Gila Sandler Saban, K. Mark Sossin, and Anastasia Yasik, “Age, Circumstance, and Outcome in Child Survivors of the Holocaust: Considerations of the Literature and a Report of a Study Using Narrative Content Analysis”, in *Children in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath: Historical and Psychological Studies of the Kestenberg Archive*, eds. Sharon K. Cohen, Eva Fogelman, and Daria Ofer (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 15–40.

96 Saban, Sossin, and Yasik, “Age, Circumstance, and Outcome in Child Survivors of the Holocaust”, 15–40.

97 Kestenberg, “What a Psychoanalyst Learned from the Holocaust and Genocide”, 1117–1129.

98 Kestenberg, “The Psychological Consequences of Punitive Institutions”, 15–30.

99 *Ibid.*, 28.

100 Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, “From Concretism to Metaphor: Thoughts on Some Theoretical and Technical Aspects of the Psychoanalytic Work with Children of Holocaust Survivors”, *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 39, no. 1 (1984): 301–319.

101 Grubrich-Simitis, “From Concretism to Metaphor”, 303.

102 Kestenberg, “What a Psychoanalyst Learned from the Holocaust and Genocide”, 1117–1129.

person to identify with deceased relatives and to transpose themselves into the past. She described the pathological effects of transposition, such as anxiety and somatisation. Grubrich-Simitis<sup>103</sup> clarified that transposition can lead to “concretism”, a type of mental functioning in which the quality of imagination is absent. In this case, the patients regard what they have to say as thing-like rather than something imagined or remembered. She stated that this characteristic is usually present in the children of survivors, and she hypothesises that it results from egoic damage caused by the extreme traumas experienced by the first generation of survivors. Survival in extreme conditions such as the concentration camps damages the ego’s ability to metaphorise, as well as the psychological ability to structure time into past, present, and future. The author believed that this damage to the ego may have produced a timeless concretism in the mental functioning of the second generation born after these events. For her, moving from concretism to metaphor would be the general direction of the analysis of these patients.

Another phenomenon observed in the children of survivors, as reported by Kestenberg,<sup>104</sup> is the split of the superego. This split can be of several types. She pointed out that there can be a split between the punitive aspects of the superego and the ego ideal. Or there can be a split between different specific aspects of the punitive superego, such as the split between being alive and being dead. This split of the superego can also produce a split of the ego, depending on the degree of regression and sublimation capacity retained by the child. In “The Psychological Consequences of Punitive Institutions”, Kestenberg<sup>105</sup> commented on other superego alterations presented by the children of survivors. She pointed out that the distortion of the superego caused by Nazi ideology and the extreme suffering they experienced often led them to accept the guilt attributed to them. This irrational guilt, in turn, was often passed down from survivors to subsequent generations. As a result, the persecution continued in the minds of its victims even after the end of Nazism.

Kestenberg<sup>106</sup> also commented on the manifestation of somatisation both in the children of survivors and in the child survivors themselves. Regarding the former, she stated that the survivor mother sometimes lacks the ability to help the child individuate and, if the child is unable to create an internal representation of a comforting environment and identify with this “internal” mother, the lack of a protective figure persists and can lead to somatisation. Regarding somatisation in child survivors, Kestenberg explained that extreme experiences of hunger, physical pain, lack of sleep, and cold produce a regression to the oral phase with a reduction in other vital needs and a weakened narcissism, which means that, later in life, frustration leads to somatisation.

The impact on the superego of child survivors has also been described by Kestenberg and other researchers. Kestenberg and Brenner<sup>107</sup> stated that the earliest trauma inflicted on infants was the cradle of a later disruption in the superego. The authors explained that early rules and routines influence the development of the ego and leave their mark on both the most archaic and the most advanced structures of the superego. During development, as the child moves from one phase to the next, the regulatory system changes and requires organisation on the part of the mother and child. This organisation must not only incorporate the previous rules, but also inte-

103 Grubrich-Simitis, “From Concretism to Metaphor”, 301–319

104 Kestenberg, “What a Psychoanalyst Learned from the Holocaust and Genocide”, 1117–1129.

105 Kestenberg, “The Psychological Consequences of Punitive Institutions”, 15–30.

106 Kestenberg, “What a Psychoanalyst Learned from the Holocaust and Genocide”, 1117–1129.

107 Kestenberg and Brenner, “Children Who Survived the Holocaust”, 309–316.

grate them into a new set of rules. However, sudden and repeated changes in conditions that prevent the child from reorganising its self-regulation become traumatic, and its sense of sameness is shattered. Sameness is a regulation that is a source of well-being and is essential to the formation of psychic structures, the authors explained. Without the sameness of the laws that govern our actions, the superego is split or fragmented. In this way, the disruption of the rules in the lives of the babies and children born during the Holocaust, as well as the physical suffering they experienced, resulted in a recurrent affective-motor or somatic state of feeling bad, which is conceptualised as being bad. What appears in consciousness as guilt often turns out to be a generalised feeling of pain, death, or loss. Underlying deep guilt, the authors said, is a broken, empty, inactive, incomplete body image.

Another phenomenon that Kestenberg<sup>108</sup> identified as common in child survivors is the splitting of the ego that leads to acting out. She explained that they act out when confronted with the inability to remember. The repressed is encapsulated and it is very difficult to bring it back into consciousness. She commented that the lack of continuity both in the sense of self and in time is evident in all those who have been victims of persecution. One of the goals of the treatment was to promote memory and integration between the past and the present, to bring back their childhoods that had been forgotten along with their traumas. Regarding the acting out in the children of survivors, Kestenberg<sup>109</sup> reported that the parents of survivors almost always began to act out when their children reached the age that the parents were when they were persecuted, and the children also began to act out the parents' Holocaust experience.

The author emphasised that, in contrast to children with a single severe trauma, most children under Nazism experienced multiple traumas, chronic stress, sudden and repeated abandonment, and uprooting. They showed a unique ability to adapt, but underneath that adaptation there was an identity problem that made them shy, feel excluded, and distrustful. According to her, the younger the child was at the time of the uprooting, the more dead and empty they felt inside as adults. Although these younger children did not show as much anxiety as those who were older during the persecution, a depressive core overshadowed everything they did and robbed them of an intensity of joy.<sup>110</sup> Saban, Sossin, and Yasik,<sup>111</sup> in their piece discussing data from the interviews conducted by Kestenberg and her group, comment that this indicated that the younger the children were when they suffered Nazi persecution, the more severe the psychological sequelae.

Kestenberg stated that she learned from interviews and in treatment that parents did not want their children to remember their traumatic experiences and often fooled themselves into believing that children did not suffer because they were too young to understand. One objective of treatment was to help them trust their own memories and respect themselves as they were.

These are just a few of the many things that Kestenberg and her group learned from their work with first- and second-generation survivors.<sup>112</sup>

In a text published in 1915, Sándor Ferenczi commented that war events provide a unique opportunity to learn about the psyche and a fuller understanding of human nature:

108 Kestenberg, "What a Psychoanalyst Learned from the Holocaust and Genocide", 1117–1129.

109 Kestenberg, "Dr. Judith S. Kestenberg Talks to Kristina Stanton", 157174.

110 Kestenberg, "Children Under the Nazi Yoke", 374–390.

111 Saban, Sossin, and Yasik, "Age, Circumstance, and Outcome in Child Survivors of the Holocaust", 15–40.

112 These issues will be explored in greater depth in subsequent publications.

The worst and most upsetting events could appear as unbridled experiences of experimental psychology, a kind of 'Naturexperiment' that the scientist cannot realize in his study, but at most, within the laboratory of his mind. War is one of those laboratory experiments taken to a cosmic level. In peacetime, only through the complex examination of dreams, of neurotic symptoms, of artistic creations, of diverse religions can one demonstrate [...] that the human psyche presents multiple layers, the culture is but a prettily decorated shop-window whilst at the back of the store, the more primitive merchandise is piled up. War had brutally wrested off this mask and has shown us man in his deepest, truest nature at the heart of man, the child, the savage, the primitive.<sup>113</sup>

This passage applies to the experiences of child victims of the Holocaust, which are of great research value and can provide knowledge about the human mind that cannot be obtained in other circumstances.

### Final Considerations

From the beginning of her career, Judith Kestenberg's path was marked by a pioneering spirit and by the search for original ways of understanding, treating, and preventing mental disorders. This perspective expanded with the research she conducted on child victims of the Holocaust. Among other mental phenomena, her studies produced comprehensive knowledge about psychological development, the impact of early trauma and persecution on the psyche, the functioning of memory and remembrance mechanisms, the transgenerational transmission of trauma, psychosomatic relationships, and the functioning of the ego and superego. According to Clifford,<sup>114</sup> Kestenberg became one of the main researchers in the field of the psychological investigation of the effects of the Holocaust on child survivors.

Despite her pioneering spirit and the originality and relevance of her clinical and theoretical production, Kestenberg's work is still the subject of little systematic research in the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis, so a great deal of work remains to be done in the analysis and discussion of the material derived from her research. In the current context, marked by a large number of child victims of persecution and refugees and by the intensification of prejudice and ethnic and racial violence in various parts of the world, the recovery of Kestenberg's work has much to contribute to, including the understanding of the psychological effects of extreme traumatic experiences in childhood, the treatment of victims of these traumas, and the search for strategies to prevent the emergence of racism and the violence resulting from it. I hope that this article contributes to the recovery of her story and her work.

113 Sándor Ferenczi, "The Ice-Age of Catastrophes", in *Selected Writings of Sándor Ferenczi*, ed. J. Borossa (London: Penguin, 1999 [1915]), 125.

114 Clifford, "Who Is a Survivor?", 1–23.

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