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Understanding the Holocaust through Film: Audience Reception between Preconceptions and Media Effects

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Empirically, little is known about the individual reception of films about the Holocaust. This has rarely prevented intense speculation about the impact of films on Holocaust knowledge, memory, and consciousness. This article presents key findings from a qualitative study with viewers of recent films. It argues that researching actual audiences rather than mere textual analysis is required to understand the complexities of the reception process, and the relationship between history, film, and memory. It demonstrates that while the impact of feature films about the Holocaust on viewers has been overstated and the role of preconceptions underestimated, the film "text" nonetheless matters for individual film reception.

Keywords: Holocaust; media reception; Britain; qualitative research; education

The research on the representation of the Holocaust in films and documentaries by now constitutes one of the most productive areas of research within the field of Holocaust Studies. Scholars frequently comment on the potential impact of films about the Holocaust on memory, historical knowledge, and historical consciousness.¹ The often purely text-derived analyses of film audiences, studies of critical reception, and quantitative surveys are ill-suited to explore the topic of individual reception, without which the impact of films cannot be fully understood. Wulf Kansteiner notes in this context that "historians of collective memory can profit from the sophisticated discussions about reception and audience behavior in media and cultural studies."² Despite the field of Holocaust Studies' increasingly inter-disciplinary orientation, media and cultural studies approaches have so far played only a minor role for research into the representation of the Holocaust in films and documentaries. Unsettling the current scholarly consensus and widespread reliance on assumptions about audiences' reception of films about the Holocaust, this article will discuss the results from an original and exploratory, empirical qualitative study into audience reception, using the films *Conspiracy* (UK/USA, 2001), *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (UK/USA, 2008), *The Reader* (USA/Germany, 2008), *Defiance* (USA, 2008), and *The Grey Zone* (USA, 2001). It will demonstrate how applying media and cultural studies approaches can add to our knowledge and understanding of the individual reception of Holocaust representations, and yield important insights and evidence not obtainable elsewhere. After a concise consideration of the state of the field and discussion of the reception study's theoretical and methodological framework, the article will present key findings. First, it will focus on how, and which, elements of films are remembered. Subsequently, films' impact on historical knowledge and understanding will be considered, before turning to the relationship between film and history in the eyes of viewers, exploring

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notions of authenticity and critical reflection. Finally, the article will evaluate the influence of viewers' preconceptions on their film interpretations. Restoring the agency of ordinary viewers and highlighting what can be gleaned from studying individual reception, the article will demonstrate that the impact of Holocaust films on viewers has been overstated due to reliance on assumptions and text-derived analysis. By highlighting the tension between media "effects" and viewers' preconceptions, the article will refine our understanding of the potential impact of a "Holocaust film" text on viewers' film reception.

Scholars, Films, and Viewers

When it comes to the representation of the Holocaust on film, historiography has largely focussed on theoretical, philosophical and ethical considerations, critical and public reception, and contemporary media responses.³ Despite the paucity of empirical research into individual reception of films about the Holocaust, scholars have often made and perpetuated assumptions regarding the alleged strong impact of Holocaust representations on viewers, which are not adequately substantiated by empirical evidence. This includes both scholars who warn of film and television's supposed inherent risks and shortcomings, and others whose assessment of "Holocaust films" is more hopeful in terms of positive effects on viewers.⁴ Ien Ang rightly criticizes that in many textual film analyses, "the ordinary viewers' perspective is almost always ignored" and instead, critics, academics, or producers speak "for or about" the audience "from a position of distance."⁵ This is certainly true for the study of Holocaust representations. This article moves away from the discourse on the representability of the Holocaust,⁶ in favor of evaluating responses to Holocaust representations on film by "actual" and "active" audiences. If films have in fact, as some scholars claim, superseded the historical profession in transmitting knowledge and understanding, then we need to explore the process of reception in all its complexity.⁷

Studies on the reception of films about the Holocaust largely deal with the reception in the public sphere or by looking at historical audiences.⁸ In response to Marvin Chomsky's TV series *Holocaust* (USA, 1978), several quantitative studies into its effects were conducted, many of them in relation to West German viewers.⁹ Most of the existing empirical studies tend to share this focus on the impact of films about the Holocaust on German viewers or, more specifically, their understanding of the National Socialist past, and to what extent these viewers accept historical responsibility for war and genocide, and reject racism and anti-Semitism in the present.¹⁰ In a refreshing departure from the focus on Germany, Anna Reading explores the meaning of gender for the memory of the Holocaust. She criticizes assumptions "that Holocaust films in some simple and direct way affect our understanding and memory of the events" and calls for empirical studies aiming to gain insight into the "actual reception of Holocaust films as part of people's everyday lives."¹¹ Whereas, for example, Annette Insdorf maintains that "it is primarily through motion pictures that the mass audience knows—and will

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continue to learn—about the Nazi era and its victims,”¹² The results from Reading’s qualitative study suggest that for young people film and television are in fact less important than conversations with survivors, family or teachers.¹³ This sharp contrast indicates the value of empirical, qualitative research.

In Christian Gudehus *et. al.*’s innovative reception study (which involved 41 face-to-face interviews with people from the United States and Germany), the film *Hotel Rwanda* (USA, 2005) was used “to elicit individual reception strategies.”¹⁴ Most recently, the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education’s (CfHE) research (2016) into pupil attitudes included a sub-study with several focus groups (44 girls and boys aged 8-13) to shed light on the impact of the film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* on English pupils’ understanding of the Holocaust. This film is one of the most successful recent films to emerge since *Schindler’s List* (USA, 1993) and *Life is Beautiful* (Italy, 1997), both in terms of box office success and use in education. Its reception by scholars and educators has been much more critical.¹⁵ Among the study’s findings was that the film had the potential to encourage empathy with “bystanders” and perpetrators of the Holocaust, and strengthen ideas that Germans only knew little about the Holocaust.¹⁶ As we will see in the course of this article, such tendencies are neither limited to children and adolescents, nor to this particular film.

This article compares the reception of different films through ordinary viewers in Britain, that is, lay audiences as opposed to scholars or film critics.¹⁷ This comparative approach allows for the exploration of patterns in the interaction between film and viewers, and highlighting both shared and particular reception processes. The article will also consider the impact of age and the national context of film reception. Due to limitations of space, it will not address how race, class, and gender may or may not have influenced the film interpretations.

The Study

Much of the research on Holocaust representations has been influenced by the work and ideas of the Frankfurt School. By drawing on cultural studies approaches of the Birmingham School (British cultural studies) tradition, the study presented in this article challenges highbrow conceptions of viewers of popular films about the Holocaust as merely passive receivers of media texts. It instead conceptualizes viewers as multiple and “active” audiences, and the reception process, therefore, as an active process of constructing meaning and sense-making. More recent approaches in the strand of audience reception research influenced by British cultural studies stress that there is some stability in meaning because it is produced both by individual and communal influences.¹⁸

This study uses Britain as a case study, where the Holocaust has increasingly assumed an important presence in the public sphere due to education, musealization, and commemoration. In education, around two-thirds of teachers in England reported using feature films about the Holocaust, and more than eighty percent professed to utilize documentaries.¹⁹ Work by Judith Petersen, Tony Kushner, and Andy Pearce has shown that television has played an important role for, at the very least, raising

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awareness of the Holocaust in Britain.²⁰ On a global level, “representations such as images, films, books, events and discourses” are credited with spreading “the Holocaust ... to become a universal symbol with a global resonance” and “the paradigm against which other historic traumas are framed.”²¹ Yet, despite the resonance of *Holocaust*, *Schindler's List*, and *Life is Beautiful*, and now *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, the impact of any single film must be considered with caution. The study presented here will add much-needed nuance by exploring the relationship between film, viewers' responses, and wider beliefs and shared representations within British society.

The five films selected for the qualitative reception study were released in the previous decade (2000—2010) and therefore reflect more recent trends in cinematography, and changing focus of Holocaust films.²² They were English-language films and UK or US (co-) productions, which made them accessible to British viewers. Only feature films and docu-dramas were selected as these formats have the widest reach in terms of viewing numbers and have been most fiercely debated by scholars and critics, while documentaries tend not to be watched by a mass audience. Feature films are also better suited for a conversational interview than a documentary. On the level of genre, the aim was diversity. The films are of different genres and levels of commercial and critical success, and contain films based on fiction and on “true stories.” Finally, each film reflects on different aspects of the Holocaust. The diversity allows exploring differences and similarities in film reception, and the role played by the film text and contextual factors.

One of the five films thus selected is a television film. The BBC/HBO docu-drama *Conspiracy* dramatizes the infamous meeting on January 20, 1942 now known as the “Wannsee Conference,” and is based in part on the meeting's minutes (“Wannsee Protocol”). Three of the feature films selected were economically successful and critically acclaimed: *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is based on the best-selling novel by John Boyne (2006) about the friendship between the son of a concentration camp commandant and an inmate of the camp. *The Reader*, based on Bernhard Schlink's best-selling novel (1997), is a film about Germany's coming to terms with the past, post-war justice, and concentrates on a female perpetrator. Based on Nechama Tec's research, *Defiance* tells the “true story” of a group of Jewish refugees and partisans in the forests of Belarus who ensure the survival of 1,200 Jews. The final film in the selection is the economically unsuccessful *The Grey Zone*, which graphically depicts the predicament and the uprising of the Jewish *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz-Birkenau, based on multiple historical sources.

For this study, 68 people, 52 of them British (predominantly English but they largely identified as British) and one from Northern Ireland, and the remainder from a range of countries, including Germany and France, viewed one of five films selected for this study (Table 1). Subsequently, they were interviewed either individually or in groups about the film after the viewing and completion of a short questionnaire.²³ The individual and group interviews were semi-structured using an interview

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guide which included open-ended questions specific to the individual film the interviewee(s) watched; general film questions; and questions about interviewees' knowledge about and interest in the Holocaust. The interviews were conducted in 2011 and 2012, predominantly in the city of Leicester in the United Kingdom.²⁴

	British interviewees	Other nationalities	Total
<i>Conspiracy</i>	11	2	13
<i>The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</i>	11	7	18
<i>The Reader</i>	10	1	11
<i>Defiance</i>	10	5	15
<i>The Grey Zone</i>	11	0	11
Total	52	16	68

Table 1: Number of participants interviewed for each film and overall, split by nationality British/other.

The study's conceptual cultural studies framework was practically implemented by combining Constructivist Grounded Theory, Hermeneutic Dialogue Analysis, and Qualitative Content Analysis as interviewee-led interpretative approaches to the analysis of the collected material.²⁵

Neither the study nor the "sample" makes any claims to being representative of people in Britain or elsewhere: the age range was 18 to 77, with around sixty percent between 18 and 35 years old; sixty percent were female; two-thirds held, or were studying towards at least a degree; three-quarters identified their ethnicity as "White"; and over sixty percent identified as, broadly defined, left-liberal.²⁶ Despite the inevitable limitations of a qualitative study, such as the limited number of interviewees, the self-selected nature of the "sample," or the impact of the interview situation on film reception,²⁷ it provides important insights into an under-researched area within Holocaust Studies, aiming to open up further routes of enquiry and stimulate discussion. This article concentrates on the key findings with a focus on the British respondents.

Key findings

Remembering films

In their study on the reception of *Hotel Rwanda*, Gudehus *et. al.* suggest that interviewees remembered a variety of scenes and that "no one scene is addressed by a clear majority ... the most well-represented excerpts are highly compressed scenes, in which the basic aspects of the event are described."²⁸ In this study, interviewees also remembered a large range of different scenes, which substantiates that viewers of Holocaust films, too, perceive and remember such films in distinct ways, and that they pay attention to different elements. This was the case across the interviews about all five films. A small number of scenes were discussed by several interviewees, but were interpreted in highly distinctive ways. The most prominent examples of this phenomenon were observed in relation to *Defiance*. Here, 11 out of the 15 interviewees who viewed the film (10 of them British) talked about a

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very dramatic, emotional scene, in which a group of Jewish refugees and partisans beats a captured German soldier (presumably) to death while the group's leader, Tuvia Bielski played by Daniel Craig, stands by without interfering. For 63-year-old retiree Andrew,²⁹ this scene contradicted "some of the messages" Tuvia "said about not killing ... because he allowed that German soldier to be killed and he was involved in some fairly random acts of violence, erm, so he wasn't necessarily true to his beliefs from the beginning of the film but then war <sighs> does that to people ... it brutalizes people."³⁰ By contrast, 22-year-old graduate intern Ellen rationalized the killing of the German as a necessary evil when asked if there was anything she had disliked about the film:

there were bits where it made me uncomfortable ... or ... frustrated ... I don't really like violence ... so it's annoying that their solution to everything seemed to be killing people but then you could see why those decisions were, like with the German soldier who came in, if they hadn't have killed him then, erm, then he could have easily gone back and told people where they were ... so, erm, and then if they would have kept him there like as a prisoner of war he'd have probably just got abused anyway ...³¹

These two readings relate to the same scene but differ significantly from each other. Andrew took the significance of this scene beyond the film itself and placed it within a larger context of war and brutalization. Ellen's response reveals more empathy with the group of refugees as she tried to make sense of their behavior as an act of (pre-emptive) self-defense. It is interesting that she proposed that the German soldier would have been "abused anyway" had he been kept as a prisoner of war (POW). This suggestion may stem from existing knowledge about POWs during the Second World War or it may even relate to more recent revelations about the torture of prisoners during the "war on terror." Andrew's reading of this scene was informed by his own set of preconceptions, consisting of universalizing and anthropological notions of the psychological impact of war. These examples help demonstrate that the film readings were neither entirely free-floating nor completely fixed to the film text. Rather, we can suggest that the text provides points of contact for viewers' preconceptions, and sets the parameters of potential interpretations. As we shall see throughout in this discussion, this tension between the impact of the film text and its resonance with viewers' preconceptions is symptomatic for the reception of Holocaust films.

Among the many film scenes cited by interviewees, those that had an emotional impact were more likely to be remembered. This impact found both explicit (e.g. "I felt exhausted") and implicit (e.g. making sounds of disgust or shivering) expression, and was observed in interviews about all five films. When 37-year-old managing director Meera (MR) was asked for memorable scenes in *The Grey Zone*, she immediately responded, and without waiting for the interviewer (INT) to finish the sentence:

INT: Are there, are there any other scenes in general in the film that left a particular impression, any,
|| MR: Oh, the ovens. ||| any scenes? The ovens. Mm-hmm.

MR: Yeah. I, I don't think there's, erm, there's anything that can, er, that can compare, you know, to those very, very graphic, graphic scenes and yeah, it just pushes all, <laughs> all the, all the, you know, all the buttons that are making one human, <laughs> INT: laughs> you know, "how could

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they,” || INT: Mm-hmm. ||| you know, how could anybody do that, that’s a, it, it never fails, you know, erm, I mean there were all the other aspects, I mean I think, erm, they were, that, I mean the ovens are very, very graphic, || INT: Mm-hmm. ||| very graphic, yeah.³²

Her urgent and emotional response demonstrates how the affective impact of a scene that is particularly shocking, graphic or moving makes it memorable to the person experiencing these emotions. In Meera’s example, this impact was exacerbated by her intertextual familiarity with, or recognition of, the image of the “oven,” and perhaps even the memory of her responses to this image in the past.

For some interviewees, the film and the interview appeared to serve, at least partly, as an opportunity to talk about themselves, their lives and interests. This was also among the findings of Gudehus *et. al*, who linked this phenomenon to what they characterized as emotional approaches to film interpretation.³³ By contrast, here we see a connection between age and the extent to which the interviewees spoke about themselves. It was primarily the more senior participants of this study who shared personal stories. For example, both 77-year-old retiree Michael and 57-year-old administrator Charlotte, when asked whether they had had any prior knowledge about the Wannsee Conference before watching *Conspiracy*, responded only briefly to the question and immediately began to talk about their own lives. Michael recounted how shortly before his father went to war, he warned Michael that his mother was half-Jewish, and that he must never tell anyone in case of a German invasion. Charlotte, on the other hand, positioned herself as part of a generation whose parents and grandparents fought in the war, and cited her grandfather’s stationing in Germany, her own interest in the French Resistance, and a negative encounter with a German exchange student.³⁴ At their age, not only are they more self-assured and confident, but keen to impart their knowledge and experience. Born closer to the events, they regard the Holocaust as connected to their own lives and identities, and a part of their biography. Holocaust education or the lack thereof also plays a role. As the Holocaust became a compulsory topic in the English history curriculum only in 1991, the 18-35 age group had mostly studied the Holocaust at school, whereas older interviewees were more likely to have learned about the Holocaust through sources outside the classroom and often on their own initiative. With less subject knowledge at their disposal, they placed the film under discussion within its wider historical or cultural context and framed it as part of a personal link to the Second World War and the Holocaust.

Learning about the Holocaust through film

One of the key concerns with regards to Holocaust films is that they transmit a simplified, trivialized, and sensationalized version of history to viewers. Conversely, others argue, films may at the very least increase awareness of a given topic and thus help keep the memory of the Holocaust alive.³⁵ Unsurprisingly, one could locate supporting evidence for either argument in the empirical material. The evaluation of the interviews in this study certainly indicates that the films increased many interviewees’ knowledge about specific aspects of the Holocaust, particularly those which are seldom part of education, public discourse, and other representations. This included the films’ depiction of the

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Wannsee Conference (*Conspiracy*), Jewish resistance and survival outside the camps and ghettos (*Defiance*), the Jewish *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz and their rebellion in 1944 (*The Grey Zone*), and German post-war trials of Nazi perpetrators and the country's history of "coming to terms" with the past (*The Reader*). The films thus provided the interviewees with new information or different perspectives, and for some even sparked their interest in these topics.

At the same time, the historical understanding interviewees took away was often reductive and misguided, and was seen to resonate with their existing knowledge and other preconceptions. This was the case, for example, in interpretations of the Wannsee Conference and its relationship to the "Final Solution" as depicted in *Conspiracy*. Frequent problematic misconceptions, certainly enabled and encouraged by the film's portrayal, included overstating the role the meeting played for the development of the genocide (by more than half of the interviewees). Moreover, all interviewees about this film suggested that those present at *Conspiracy*'s Wannsee Conference had moral qualms about the extermination of the Jews and had to be coerced into agreement. The character named most often in the interviews for allegedly being opposed to the genocidal plans was Wilhelm Kritzinger, state secretary in the Reich Chancellery played by David Threlfall, who is portrayed as being "a bold dissenter"³⁶ only reluctantly giving in to the threats of Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the Reich Security Main Office, who was played by Kenneth Branagh. Michael commented on a scene in which Kritzinger, after a tense exchange with Heydrich, leaves the building and takes a walk, that he "thought he was leaving the meeting totally and ... was going away, and I thought, 'he will have his comeuppance and that will be the end of him.'"³⁷ Historically, there is no evidence to suggest that any of the meeting's participants would have spoken out against genocide.³⁸ This example is symptomatic both of the expectation of Kritzinger as opposed to the propositions made at the Wannsee Conference, and of serious consequences facing dissenters; the film left the latter element open to the viewers' imagination and preconceptions.

In interviews about *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, the notion of childhood innocence was frequently transferred onto the historical German adult population, resulting in, or possibly already stemming from, the conviction that only few contemporary Germans knew about the persecution of the Jews, and those who did were too afraid to speak up for them. For example, when asked to elaborate why a scene, in which the main child protagonist Bruno denies his friendship with Shmuel—a Jewish child imprisoned in a concentration camp—stood out to her, 64-year-old educator Ruth responded: "I think he was just frightened ... that's what he said later ... and you realize that a lot of people would act out of fear, that was very powerful, ... so it's either gonna be the fear or the indoctrination (--) or both."³⁹ Ruth saw the reasons for the behavior of "bystanders" and perpetrators as originating in "fear" or "indoctrination." In making no apparent distinction between the fictional story portrayed in the film and the complex historical reality, nor between the behavior of a child and that of millions of adults, she is using the film

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as an analogy. The behavior of a fictional eight-year-old character, who denies his friendship to a Jewish boy of the same age, which results in the latter boy's punishment, and which Bruno later regrets and tries to make up for (which in turn leads to his death), is transferred to a wider entity and generalised as human behaviour, potentially serving to explain how German society (in)acted.

Ruth was no exception: Rather than suggest a "demonisation"⁴⁰ of contemporary Germans by British interviewees and a reluctance to identify with them, the interviews indicate a view of German perpetrators and "bystanders" that shows, overwhelmingly, understanding and sympathy for their situation. Predominantly, interviewees about all films sought to find mitigating or exculpating circumstances, such as fear and coercion, propaganda, or "human nature." In most cases, the film texts promoted these interpretations, but they all depended on viewers to fill in the gaps left by the films. In other words, we see both closeness to the text and the importance of generalizations and preconceptions. For example, in an interview about *The Reader*, 20-year-old student Stephanie was asked for memorable scenes, to which she responded:

I thought in the court ... when people started shouting "Nazi" at her [Hanna], I thought that was quite upsetting because going back to what I said, like how it wasn't really her fault. She was just a person that got caught up, caught up in it. That could have been anybody, like that could have been me, making a choice what you seem, what you think is right at the time. She was just trying to better her life by getting a better job with ... good prospects and that ... completely impacted her whole life.⁴¹

In this example, the film's protagonist Hanna—on trial accused of murdering 300 Jewish women—appears as a victim of circumstance without individual responsibility for her actions, which trivializes both her crimes and agency. Stephanie's seemingly emotional reaction to the scene and her empathy and identification with the character of Hanna is particularly interesting when taking into account that she had studied the Holocaust at school and university, and participated in the UK's Holocaust Educational Trust's (HET) "Lessons from Auschwitz Project." Neither precluded her from interpretations, in which she exculpated the German perpetrators and regarded them as victims of sorts. Absent throughout were any indications of cause-effect relationships and the general context. Her responses either give an indication of the implications of current Holocaust education or suggest that Holocaust education alone may not suffice to transmit in-depth historical understanding. It can certainly not dictate how and which aspects of the education a person ingests and incorporates into their historical knowledge. The CfHE study reports similar findings,⁴² while Thomas McKay demonstrates in his oral history study of English memories of the Second World War and the Holocaust that generalizing and interpreting perpetrator behavior in these ways is not confined to viewers' responses to popular films, but a more general motif of English approaches to the Holocaust.⁴³

It, therefore, remains uncertain whether viewers took what they saw on screen and applied it to their understanding of history, or whether they indeed applied their existing knowledge and ideas and put them in relation to a given film. What was represented by the films was either not doubted and molded

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to fit the interviewees' preconceptions, or, rather, the interviewees focused on aspects *already* relevant and known to them. Such as 37-year old dance artist Margaret, who discussed a film scene in *Conspiracy*, which resonated with her knowledge about the Holocaust, with Nigel (NC), a 40-year-old warehouse operative. In the scene, the meeting's participants are told that the Jews would be forced to work in construction. Margaret "liked" that this was "represented" in the film "and the way it was said ... there was almost like a celebration about that, wasn't there, it was like, 'what a great idea, || NC: Yeah. ||| that's genius,' oh, that was gross. // NC: Dig your own grave. /// Mm-hmm. Unbelievable, isn't it."⁴⁴ The scene caught Margaret's attention because she knew about the history it referred to and because the portrayal affected her emotionally. The focus on familiar elements, along with noting unexpected aspects, was common throughout the interviews.

The above interpretations of the history of the Holocaust in the context of feature films tell us little about the extent to which we actually, as Robert Rosenstone claims, "live in a world deluged with images, one in which people increasingly receive their ideas about the past from motion pictures and television, from feature films, docudramas, miniseries, and network documentaries."⁴⁵ To put it differently, to what degree did the films add to, or even change, interviewees' historical knowledge and understanding? The impact of films on knowledge and understanding is difficult to ascertain. *Defiance* and *Conspiracy* proved to be the most powerful and persuasive films. This was due to their widespread perception and appraisal as both "authentic" (especially in the case of *Conspiracy*), and "different" or novel compared to other Holocaust films in terms of style and/or subject matter. 11 out of 13 interviewees about *Conspiracy*, for example, indicated on 26 separate occasions that facts and knowledge not previously held were taken from the film (similar for *Defiance*). Five of them, in turn, *explicitly* expressed on 13 occasions that the film even *changed* pre-existing ideas and knowledge (significantly fewer examples of this were found in the interviews about the other films). Some voiced their surprise at the film and said that it was contrary to what they had previously thought or known. For example, asked if she would take anything away from the film, 33-year-old accountant Rachel stated in relation to *Conspiracy*'s representation of the decision-making of the "Final Solution" that her "view of how the whole thing was orchestrated has changed."⁴⁶ The fact that she adapted her knowledge, rather than doubting or challenging what was represented in the film alludes to the power of the medium or at least of this particular docu-drama format. Rachel's sentiment was echoed by 64-year-old probation officer Martin, who told the interviewer that he "wasn't aware that there was so much, so many differences of view within the group" and, secondly, he "wasn't aware that they discussed the methods [of killing] they would use either, so that's, that was quite a revelation." He expanded on the former point that he "hadn't realized ... that there was a debate about that, you know, I just assumed that it had been decided they kill people and then left it to local officials to work out how they would do it."⁴⁷ *Conspiracy* thus contradicted his own knowledge, which he then adapted to the new

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information he encountered. None of the elements he took away from the film are firmly supported by the historical record.

How can *Conspiracy*'s impact on Rachel and Martin be explained? The reason is not simply that they lacked criticality, as both reflected on other aspects of *Conspiracy* or other films. Rather, employing their interpretative resources, they judged some of the information presented by *Conspiracy* to be more reliable or authentic than their existing knowledge. Neither had learned about the Holocaust at school, but both professed a strong interest in the subject and for years, they had been actively seeking out literature and further information on the topic. We therefore need to look more closely at the film and its aesthetics. *Conspiracy* draws its powerful impact on viewers' ideas about the history of the Holocaust from a range of factors, particularly its authentic look. This includes its docu-drama format and documentary feel, its potent mix of known facts woven into the film alongside speculation, interviewees' trust in filmmakers as conducting research and using sound evidence for their films, and, arguably, the film's peculiar Britishness (starring well-known British actors, and dispensing with the German accents so common in many other representations). As one of the interviewees, administrator Charlotte, put it, the film was "more of a drama-documentary, the sort of thing the BBC do do very well," comparing it with "the *World at War* that BBC did as well, it's ... that sort of thing that they can do so brilliantly."⁴⁸ Charlotte incorrectly assigned the Thames Television/ITV documentary series *The World at War* to the BBC. An appreciation of, and trust in, the BBC as a production company could, therefore, add to the viewers' experience of an "authentic" film. Although *Conspiracy* may have been the film with the strongest measurable impact on the interviewees, this phenomenon was identified in interviews about the other films, too.

As discussed above in relation to interpretations of the behavior and motivations of Nazi perpetrators, "interpretative communities" play an important role in Holocaust film reception.⁴⁹ The extent to which the particular national context has an impact on film reception is difficult to establish, especially within the limits of a qualitative study, and given that the national context is far from monolithic. Only a few instances suggest a direct link between the film reception and a particular British interpretative frame, or indeed the immediate contemporary context in which the interviews took place. One such example stems from a group interview about *The Reader*. The group discussed their perception of the trial as unjust and the question of guilt. Elizabeth, a 31-year-old primary school teacher with a history degree, wondered whether it was "just Germans who should feel guilty as well, there was a lot of people in Britain at the time that knew what was going on ... and did certain things to try and stop it but did they do enough," to which 35-year-old computer programmer Richard, who professed a strong interest in the subject, added "Allied atrocities" which he argued were often "glossed over."⁵⁰ Interestingly, only four interviewees, all of them viewers of *Conspiracy*, explicitly linked the film they watched to more recent or current events such as the Iraq War, the killing of Bin Laden, or the military

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intervention in Libya. The film seemingly sparked considerations of decision-making in contemporary conflicts.⁵¹ Around a quarter of the British interviewees critically commented on how Britain (over)emphasizes its heroic role in the Second World War, how Britain instrumentalizes the war, how Britain's borders remained largely closed at the time, or the perceived danger posed by the British National Party (BNP) and negative attitudes towards asylum seekers in the UK. But typically, such critique was not linked directly to the films under discussion. Asked specifically about the meaning of the Holocaust in Britain today, most spoke in very general, universal terms about the relevance of the Holocaust.

By contrast, one of the non-British study participants, 38-year-old finance administrator and French national Adele, shared how moved she was by the film *The Round-Up (La Rafle, France, 2010)* which for her was the most powerful film she had seen "because, you know, because of my background, because I'm French and, and it's, knowing that we did that."⁵² Her French nationality clearly informed her views on this film, which specifically dealt with French collaboration in the Holocaust. The six Germans who volunteered for the study also closely connected the histories portrayed in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* to German history and their own positioning. One of them, 24-year-old student Sybille, interpreted the director's intentions for making the film in the following way:

as you can see from ... [Bruno's] mother, you cannot keep your distance to it, you couldn't then and perhaps neither can you today, but it, you come whether you like it or not, into contact with it and ... yes, that's just ... that you eventually ... that the mother eventually realized this, this horror and no longer had her shield ... that it could not prevent her from being involved.⁵³

None of the British respondents voiced any similar sentiments in relation to this film. The suggested inability to keep "distance" to the Holocaust, which Sybille linked with the present and the alleged victimhood of the mother (who is initially supportive of her husband, the concentration camp commandant, but unravels as she finds out about the extermination of Jews in the camp), could be seen as unique to the German discourse of "coming to terms" with the past. The film here serves as an illustration or confirmation for what appear to be existing lines of interpretation.

It is perhaps the relative absence of similarly explicit expressions in the British interviews in relation to their own identities and positions—the aforementioned exceptions notwithstanding—, which is most revealing. Apart from those old enough to have memories of the war and post-war period, or parents who passed on their recollections, such as Michael and Charlotte, films about the Holocaust are not perceived as specifically and personally relevant to Britain/Britons. Instead, the value of learning about the Holocaust—whether through film, at school or in museums—is seen as more universal and general. This disconnect—or indeed dissonance—between the so-called "lessons" and the actual lessons Britons could draw from its responses to the Jewish plight at the time points towards a peculiar British reading of the events and their legacies. Had one of the films addressed more British topics, such as the *Kindertransports*, or had the study taken place more recently in the midst of the "refugee crisis," the

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responses may have been different and addressed the issue more head-on. Instead, the Holocaust remains a distant past and warning for present and future for people in Britain. Films here serve as a reminder of humanity's potential for evil, or a diffuse danger of racism, but do not trigger any particular introspection on Britain's past or current politics, or British identity. This attests to both media effects with the films acting as triggers, but also to preconceptions with which the film content can resonate.

Lothar Probst, who questions whether the Holocaust really serves as European foundational myth or "founding act," notes the very different approaches to marking Holocaust Memorial Day in Germany and the UK. In contrast to Germany, in the UK the Holocaust is commemorated among other genocides and crimes against humanity.⁵⁴ What is more, the UK's commemorations are conceived of in the spirit of "inclusivity" and citizenship education, teaching against racism and "bullying."⁵⁵ In this way, the UK both asserts its global leadership with regards to Holocaust commemoration,⁵⁶ while simultaneously pursuing its own local agenda. But while the UK engages in Holocaust remembrance, it fails, according to Tom Lawson, to confront its histories of slavery and colonialism. He further argues that "globalized Holocaust memory" is, in fact, "a colonial discourse that militates against understanding the critical implications of the Shoah for the modern West as well as acting as a reason for the non-investigation of other, by implication less important, historical traumas."⁵⁷

Yet, the fact that some interviewees did reflect on contemporary politics or criticized British history and politics goes to show the breadth of possible responses against the background of the predominance of universalizing interpretations. With Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznajder, it can be suggested that people in Britain have "reconciled" the "new, global narrative ... with the old, national narratives."⁵⁸ It is, therefore, no coincidence that war stories, such as stories of lucky escapes or tragic events, imparted by parents or grandparents took up a considerable part of many interviews, which occurred even as interviewees were asked how they had obtained their knowledge about the Holocaust rather than the Second World War. These stories serve as the glue between the global and the national. In other words, Britons negotiate the national memory in which the Holocaust is peripheral but the war all-important with the recognition of the Holocaust as a defining event in global history and memory.

We can sum up that viewers indeed take away information from a film, which can take the form of increased or new awareness of a particular aspect of the Holocaust or an alternative viewpoint, through to adding to and overriding their existing historical knowledge and understanding. The extent to which this is the case can only be understood when considering the film text and how it portrays the events, national context and other preconceptions, and the degree to which a film is perceived as authentic.

Authenticating films

As argued in relation to *Defiance* and *Conspiracy*, there is a link between the extent to which viewers take away knowledge and understanding from a film and its perception as authentic. Perhaps more surprisingly, the participants of this study distinguished between different types of authenticity. This

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suggests that “authenticity,” or the experience thereof, can be filled with different meanings, with each film inviting specific notions of authenticity.⁵⁹ In the case of *Conspiracy* and *The Grey Zone*, the perception of historical authenticity dominated the interviewees’ responses. In interviewees’ accounts, historical authenticity is constructed through a range of stylistic devices, aesthetics, and genres. A case in point is an example taken from an interview about *Conspiracy* with 29-year-old IT support officer Faith. Asked to elaborate on what made the film seem “factual” to her, she referred to what “they actually said at the beginning and the end about the report.”⁶⁰ Faith’s response highlights the potential impact of the film’s documentary-style devices. The framing of the film with a narrator, who talks about the evidence for the Wannsee Conference, had a considerable impact on the way in which Faith perceived the film. While acknowledging that elements may have been dramatized, she explained this by suggesting that the “report,” i.e. the minutes, on which the film is partly based, must contain gaps. She concluded this from the interventions in the film, when Adolf Eichmann, played by Stanley Tucci, stops the typist from recording particular parts of the conversation. Faith had no prior knowledge of the Wannsee Conference and was not aware that the Wannsee Protocol does not constitute the actual set of minutes of the meeting but an edited summary written by Eichmann and, as he claims, also by Heydrich. While she recognized that “a bit of drama” may have been added, she was unable to pinpoint the parts where artistic license had been taken. Apparent dramatizations and even inconsistencies may, therefore, be explained and bridged by viewers to keep intact the notion of authenticity or factuality. It would appear that if in doubt, *Conspiracy* is credited with being factual. The film partly achieves this through its “blend of fictional and non-fictional truths.”⁶¹ This is, of course, not limited to *Conspiracy* but can be identified to varying degrees in all representations of the Holocaust.

In the interviews about *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *The Reader*, we more frequently find attempts to tell facts from artistic license and to regard the films as emotionally authentic. It is noteworthy that these films, which are based on fictional novels, were seen authentic to a lesser degree by the interviewees or, rather, as authentic in different ways. Still, several interviewees of both films wondered whether the stories portrayed by the films could have, in fact, happened, or speculated that they may well have been based on a “true story.”⁶² 43-year-old student Lara proposed that there is a difference between stories that are altogether “made-up” and stories that were “closely related to events.” She asked, “as you say, it’s a novel, I mean ... where did the author get his ideas from ...? Is it from personal experience, is it through what somebody has told him so in a roundabout way it could be <laughs> based on true events, that’s, well, that’s the impression that I got with that one.”⁶³ Lara sees both a core of truth and a possibility that the story did actually happen, as the author may have found his inspiration in “true events.” It should be noted here that *The Reader* does draw on Germany’s process of confronting the past, and Hanna has been argued to bear resemblance to historical perpetrators.⁶⁴ *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, on the other hand, takes inspiration from Rudolf Höß’s memoir

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Kommandant in Auschwitz and Gitta Sereny's work on Franz Stangl, *Into That Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder*. Both *The Reader* and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* can appear to be based on historical fact or truth, which could, in turn, intensify their impact.

In the interviews about *Defiance*, all of the previous forms were identified and an additional type, which was to interpret plausible behavior (e.g. responses to the death of a child, or disagreement among brothers) as authentic. To give an example of "emotional authenticity," 19-year-old student Camilla, when asked if she would take anything away from *Defiance*, responded:

I feel exhausted. <laughs; INT: laughs> Erm, but I think that's a good thing though, I think it's good that, like you're refreshed of that, that feeling 'cause I think, like you can carry on hearing about the story that I think that a lot of people, you keep in tune with the way that people felt, I think it's difficult to understand, some of the things that they did, like the exhaustion may have led to them like giving themselves up and then, if you not appreciate it like the emotions they were going through at the time, you might as well see it in a different way, so I think it's, that was good that the film seemed to capture that ...⁶⁵

For Camilla, the film was "exhausting" as she put herself in the refugees' situation. She commended the film particularly for this effect because it helped her to connect and to appreciate the situation the refugees were forced into. The film's portrayal of the refugees' experiences was seen as authentic. Rather than constituting historical accuracy, here the film was credited with "emotional authenticity".⁶⁶

The perception and experience of authenticity, variously defined, must thus be seen as crucial for viewers' acquisition or rejection of historical knowledge and understanding through the medium of film. This is not to say that viewers do not recognize inconsistencies, artistic liberties, and film tropes; in fact, most of the interviewees of this study were highly aware of such issues and reflected on the films and the ways in which they represented the Holocaust.

Critical Reflection

According to Ian Wall, a "film allows no time for reflection, debate or verification. We are carried along by its narrative flow. We are involved with individual characters as opposed to broader issues."⁶⁷ Some of the findings presented above would seem to confirm Wall's assessment, especially in terms of acquiring knowledge and understanding through films. Yet we have also seen that it is precisely the broader issues which viewers connect films with, rather than merely focusing on individual characters. There certainly was evidence of critical reflection in the majority of the interviews. Around 80 percent of the interviewees demonstrated, to varying degrees, critical awareness of the constructed nature of filmic representations of the Holocaust on film. One of them was Ellen, who noted cinematic strategies employed by the filmmakers of *Defiance*. "Perhaps a little bit, when you think of it from a historical point of view it's probably a little bit over-dramatised in places." Asked to elaborate, she suggested:

It's the same with most films, but you know when kind of like, erm, the fighting scenes and stuff like that, it's all kind of drama and glory whereas actually it would have been a bit more, you know, horrible and there would be more like body-parts flying everywhere and stuff like that, || INT: Mm-

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hmm. ||| it wouldn't have been as clean and as like, heroic or something, it just would have been like nasty ...⁶⁸

She was thus well aware that history is sanitized for the screen, and how *Defiance* is a dramatization which fits into established genres and conventions. While she recognized aspects of the film that may have been “over-dramatized,” she nonetheless commended the film overall. A large number of examples signaling critical reflection was recorded across interviews about all five films, distributed largely evenly. This indicates that many interviewees understand films, or at least particular aspects of them, as representations, rather than reflections of history. The interviewees considered questions of genre conventions, the impact of particular actors on their perception of the films, their own expectations, or artistic license. To an extent, this reflection was encouraged through questions by the interviewer and the interview situation. A critical attitude towards certain aspects of a film, however, did not preclude an overall positive assessment of it. While this phenomenon may seem to be a contradiction, and echoes similar findings from the CfHE and *Hotel Rwanda* studies,⁶⁹ it may in fact be linked to viewers' different notions of authenticity and expectations regarding Holocaust films.

As mentioned above, the *Hotel Rwanda* study distinguishes between two different modes of narration in the reception of the film: emotional and factual. What is more, Gudehus *et. al.* proposed that emotional approaches are “less reflexive” than the factual kind.⁷⁰ The findings of the present study point to a more complex picture. Critically reflecting on a film and expressing emotions were not mutually exclusive. Around 40 percent of all study participants even reflected on the emotional impact the films had on them on multiple occasions. One of these is taken from the start of the aforementioned group interview about *The Reader*. Richard suggested that “in the beginning of the film, you're made to feel quite warm towards her [Hanna] but then ... they drop this on you and you're thinking, well, I was thinking, well, you know, it, it, does that, do I still have that feeling for her.”⁷¹ Richard reflected on his own journey with the character of Hanna. When it is revealed that she was an SS guard, he began to question the emotions he had felt for her before. He subsequently asked himself if her crimes outweigh any understanding he may have had for the character. 26-year-old student Marina took this reflection one step further when she responded to Richard: “And the question of why we actually, you know, feel positive towards her at the beginning of the movie when she was considerably older than the boy, he was fifteen, you know ... and she used him for her own ends.”⁷² Marina here questioned the positive emotions evoked through the film and contrasted them with the character's sexual relationship with a teenage boy. This example also highlights the role of the communication process following the film viewing for fostering reflection and introspection.

The number of such “emotionally reflexive” examples was greatest among interviewees about *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *The Reader* and here even outnumbered the solely “emotional” responses. In the case of *Conspiracy*, *Defiance* and *The Grey Zone*—the three films based on “true stories”—the opposite was the case. This indicates the potential of fictitious stories to explore emotions

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without necessarily overpowering viewers but rather encouraging reflection. By contrast, the more “factual” or “authentic” films stimulated this kind of reflection to a lesser extent. This may be linked to their quest for, and claim to, authenticity, their realist style, and their demands on viewers’ knowledge. Audience expectations also play a role. As argued above, viewers expect a high degree of historical authenticity from films based on “true stories,” but are seemingly aware and accept that a more (obviously) fictitious film will contain inaccuracies and exaggerations. Moreover, the interviewees adapted to the type of language—verbal and visual—used in the films: for example, the more explicit a film was in spelling out the crimes against Jews, the more explicitly were these referenced in the interviews. Similarly, interviewees reproduced particular expressions from the film during the interview. Viewers therefore possibly also respond to the emotional language or “tone” of a film. Perhaps, the representational authority of “true stories” allows less leeway to explore emotions, particularly among viewers with limited subject knowledge. In other words, we can hypothesize that the more obviously fictitious or fictionalized a film is, the higher the level of criticality it potentially facilitates among some viewers. When the mode of representation clashes with expectations, while allowing for connection through emotion, viewers need to consider their own positioning.

Preconceptions

Viewers do not enter the film viewing with a blank state of mind. Rather, they bring with them their own unique set of preconceptions. We have already seen that films have the potential to add to—and change—knowledge and understanding about certain aspects of the Holocaust. The CfHE study warns that *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* “is having a significant, and significantly problematic impact on the way young people attempt to make sense of this complex past.”⁷³ While this suggests a strong impact of Holocaust films on viewers, just as many—if not more—examples of the study presented here have pointed to individual film reception as highly influenced, guided and constrained by viewers’ preconceptions. Frequently, as highlighted throughout, films appear to consolidate existing ideas or provide viewers with visualization for their ideas and conclusions received and arrived at elsewhere.⁷⁴ A case in point is an interview about *Conspiracy* with customer advisor Chemmal (age unknown), who voiced a range of conspiracy theories, ranging from the death of John F. Kennedy, doubts as to whether Bin Laden was actually killed, to claims that Hitler escaped to Argentina. His interest and belief in such ideas strongly informed the way in which he interpreted the film. Not only did he focus particularly on the secrecy aspect of the meeting as represented in the film (which particularly resonated with him), but he also believed that one of the participants may have been “a mole” and that Heydrich was actually Jewish and Eichmann was covering for him. These and other elements accounted for more than 30 percent of his interview.⁷⁵

While Chemmal’s example is at the extreme end of the spectrum, the majority of the interviewees related the films to their subject knowledge, other representations of the Holocaust, and other

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preconceptions, in order to make sense of them.⁷⁶ This phenomenon is not limited to Holocaust films as, for example, research by Susan Fiske and Shelley Taylor indicates that preconceptions play an important role in media reception more generally.⁷⁷ This study is adding to existing studies an elaboration of different kinds of preconceptions viewers bring with them. In particular, the interviewees frequently applied existing subject knowledge to make sense of, authenticate, and contextualize the films under discussion. To take an example, Ruth talked about Bruno's sister Gretel in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, who began to wear the uniform of the League of German Girls. Ruth referred to the "Nazi youth movement" of which "we've seen pictures ... so we know it's based on fact."⁷⁸ Viewers thus readily mix film and reality, representation and history, and in their attempt to make sense of the images, refer to images they have seen elsewhere, be that in films and documentaries, exhibitions, books, or other media. A result of this is the blurring of lines between fact and fiction: as long as viewers are provided with some familiar images to trigger their knowledge and the corresponding images in their minds, even fictitious stories or elements may seem realistic, factual or authentic. This persuasive blend of known facts with fictitious elements and "informed speculation"⁷⁹ is key to the power of both feature films and docu-dramas. They appeal to viewers' pre-existing knowledge, providing them with a basic frame of reference. Other, more fabricated elements, are then either disregarded or overlooked, or, in the absence of any more detailed historical knowledge or critical attitudes towards media products, also accepted as factual or at least plausible. Tobias Ebbrecht remarks in this respect that the "combination of documentary and fictional modes of representation corresponds to the audience's desire to see their own received understanding of history confirmed by historical evidence."⁸⁰

For lack of existing knowledge, other representations, or popular ideas about them, are drawn upon using intertextual recognition to be able to make sense of the story and the history represented. Prior to watching *The Reader*, neither 36-year-old manager Nicole nor Lara, a 43-year-old student, had heard of female perpetrators. Both explained their lack of awareness by referring to other films about the Holocaust in which the perpetrators are generally male. Lara said she had "just assumed they were all male" from "what you're shown ... because literally what's shown generally in ... the films mainly ... I can't remember ever seeing another one where it's had a female guard in."⁸¹ Lara's response provides a glimpse into the long-term impact of feature films about the Holocaust, which informed the way in which she thought about perpetrators. Another example highlights the relationship between film genre and the means with which interviewees interpret a film. Ellen likened *Defiance* to other "hideaway" situations and films like *Castaway* and *The Beach*.⁸² *Defiance*'s use of and reliance upon recognizable themes and tropes makes it accessible and universal, which, as this example demonstrates, can have a potentially trivializing effect.

Among the interpretative resources employed by interviewees were professional experiences. In the case of *The Reader*, three interviewees applied their backgrounds in teaching to make sense of the

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central character Hanna's illiteracy. In the interviews about *Conspiracy*, three people drew parallels between the meeting depicted by the film and business meetings they had attended in their professional lives. One of them was Michael who felt reminded of meetings where he had witnessed how "powerful chairmen" can "persuade people" and how some participants could not express themselves with enough "importance."⁸³ He interpreted the Wannsee Conference as a business or bureaucratic enterprise, which he made sense of by referring to his professional experience. Heavy emphasis is thus placed on both universalization (the Wannsee Conference becomes comparable to any business situation) and the bureaucratic and organized character of the Holocaust. We see that viewers seek to authenticate what is presented to them, and that they have varying interpretative repertoires and resources at their disposal to do so.

There were also a few examples of personal experiences being related to a film and influencing the film interpretation. Among them was 58-year-old porter Noel, who linked his experience of fatherhood to *The Grey Zone*. When asked for memorable scenes, he referred to a particularly "harrowing" one for him:

the scenes where the men [of the *Sonderkommando*] were putting the bodies into the ovens ... especially when they were talking about the old man ... whose, er, family came through, erm, and that must have happened ... a lot, I would imagine, erm, so that was, er, that was pretty awful. ... I've got two children of my own and you wonder how anybody can do that to ... children ...⁸⁴

Depending on educational background and level of knowledge, some interviewees also applied academic theories or other, more abstract concepts to the interpretation of the film, particularly to the behavior of perpetrators. Among them was Martin who made sense of *Conspiracy*, and especially of the fact that all the men at the meeting eventually agreed to genocide, by referring to an academic theory, which he had applied in his postgraduate dissertation and which he thought was also applicable to the Wannsee Conference. So much so that his talking about this theory in relation to the film and the behavior of perpetrators more generally took up 25 percent of the interview. Viewers with a certain degree of knowledge of or interest in a particular concept or theory, are more likely to primarily read a film by referring to known concepts, and interpret what is (re)presented to them through the prism of this knowledge.

Finally, genre needs to be considered as a part of viewers' preconceptions. It is true, as Lawrence Baron suggests, that filmmakers use "traditional genres and assume audience familiarity with Holocaust cinema, images and symbols" and that the genres and themes used by filmmakers change over time to make the topic of their films accessible to audiences who are increasingly distant generationally and geographically to the events under discussion.⁸⁵ But viewers' film reception strongly indicates that for them there is nonetheless a distinct genre of Holocaust films. All of the five films were regarded as "different" to other films on this subject, to varying degrees, even when interviewees' exposure to such films was limited, which indicates certain preconceptions regarding the characteristics, content, look,

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and genre of "Holocaust films." This perception was most pronounced among interviewees of *Defiance* and *Conspiracy*, which also had the largest measurable impact on interviewees as argued above. Intriguingly, only interviewees about *Defiance* and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* talked about entertainment or enjoyment in relation to the film. Many of them appeared uncomfortable that they had "enjoyed" the film. If seen through the lens of audience reception, Holocaust films can, therefore, be distinguished from other historical films in terms of audience expectations. Films about the Holocaust are assessed not primarily for entertainment or artistic skill but historical meaning, information load, perceived significance, or fidelity to the historical record, which distinguishes them from films about other subjects, and also other historical periods. The possibility of mere entertainment or skillful storytelling was rarely considered. Films that deviate from established Holocaust film conventions and genres like *Defiance* and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* can open up other possibilities of emotional engagement and can allow enjoyment or entertainment, and *may* lead to a questioning of the filmmakers' motives and the viewers' experience. Enjoying a popular film like *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, which encourages viewers to feel for Bruno and contains some potentially endearing moments, would then require explanation when invited to reflect in a discussion or indeed interview. There may thus also be an element of self-reprimanding, particularly vis-à-vis more entertaining films. 22-year old student Benjamin, for example, initially spoke about his enjoyment of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, but when asked by the interviewer to elaborate on what he enjoyed about it, qualified his earlier statement:

it's not like I enjoy a film regarding this period, because obviously that would be terrible but (--) it shows the naivety of the children and, erm, not their obnoxiousness, erm, but their blas-, blasé nature of, "I'd rather play on a swing than, you know, (---) finding out what's happening," erm, as, as Gretel, she became entrenched with the, the Nazi education, I thought that was (--) particularly well done, erm, not that I say it was enjoyable but, erm, I liked the way that that was put across ...⁸⁶

Benjamin quickly rationalizes any enjoyment by means of what he knows about the subject. The interviewer's follow-up question may have seemed like a criticism or accusation against which he had to defend himself, possibly explaining his reaction here. He may have tried to give the "right" answer to the interviewer, which highlights the issue of "social desirability" often cited as a problem in qualitative research or, indeed, any social research. In this case, the assumed social desirability of the statement highlights popular notions of the limits of representing the Holocaust.

Preconceptions are manifold and constitute a key aspect of individual film reception, which is an active sense-making process: they shape the way in which viewers watch and interpret a film.

Conclusion: the case for audience reception research in Holocaust Studies

These findings call into question assumptions that films have an inevitable or clear-cut "effect" or "impact." Films do not add to knowledge and understanding in any simple, direct, and predictable way, nor will they lead to uniform and singular film interpretations. This article has demonstrated how

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productive it can be to apply media and cultural studies approaches of the Birmingham school tradition to research into Holocaust representations. Studies into individual reception should not replace but rather complement textual analyses of films and the research into the reception of films in the media. Qualitative research methods are well suited to gauge individual reception and draw out nuances, contradictions, and ambivalences. Individual reception is certainly highly complex and multi-faceted, but it is neither beyond comprehension, nor a result of mere fortune or accident. Even a relatively small number of interviews allowed distilling patterns of reception and text-viewer interaction, all of which can form the subject of further research. Individual reception of films and other cultural reflections about the Holocaust remains an under-studied subject despite the ever-increasing presence of such representations in the cultural sphere.

The findings from this empirical qualitative reception study indicate that the direct impact of a given film on its viewers may have been widely overstated in scholarly literature. This is not to say that films do not have any impact at all, nor that meanings are entirely free-flowing. Rather, the potential impacts depend on a range of intersecting factors, including but not limited to existing knowledge, how a film resonates with the interpretative framework a person inherits by their communities along with other preconceptions, expectations as to what constitutes a "Holocaust film," and a person's criticality. To understand films' potential impact it is insufficient, therefore, only to look at the films and their perceived strengths and shortcomings. Of course, the extent to which we can draw any firm conclusions from a qualitative study is limited. The study was able to demonstrate significant variation in the ways in which film aspects resonated with viewers, frequently due to reasons to be found not only in the film text but also, and often perhaps more so, in viewers' backgrounds and preconceptions. It proves much more difficult to ascertain, however, as to where these preconceptions originated, whether in family stories, school education, other films or books, or a more diffuse British, European or global Holocaust memory or "consciousness." This difficulty limits the study's insights, and it is precisely this area, in which further research is required.

Despite the importance of preconceived ideas and understandings, the film text nonetheless matters for individual film reception. The study was able to demonstrate, by virtue of its comparative perspective, which enables the identification of patterns in the interaction between text and viewer, both shared and particular reception processes. Film scenes were more likely to be remembered if they caused an emotional response, indicating a strong link between emotional responses and film impact. The specific ways in which the films represented the Holocaust affected the extent to, and the way in which, they were perceived as authentic. Films that were perceived as historically authentic, were the ones, which measurably added to or changed interviewees' knowledge and understanding the most. Finally, the study indicates that fictional and highly emotional films such as *The Reader* and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* may facilitate critical reflection more so than films based on "true stories."

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Despite technological changes, film and television are still key media for Holocaust representations, not least at schools where both feature films and documentaries play an important role in education. Only a few interviewees for this study, for example, cited the Internet as a source of information. Instead, the “analog technologies” of formal education, exhibitions, family, films, and books were named as most significant for learning about the Holocaust. While this may well change for younger generations, an engagement with film and television still remains a crucial area of research, not least as the long-term impact of films has yet to be comprehensively investigated. Yet, on-demand and subscription services will continue to decentralize and individualize what used to be a shared experience and frame of reference such as the “events” of *Schindler's List* or *Life is Beautiful* in the 1990s, and perhaps even *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. The ability to immediately fact-check on the Internet what is seen on screen by using a smartphone may foster a more critical audience. In the past few years, research into the digital representation of the Holocaust, e.g. in video testimonies or even holograms of survivors, has increased.⁸⁷ The study of audience reception and digital media could be productively linked by exploring how audio and video testimonies of survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators are made sense of by their “users,” the potential learning outcomes, and impact on Holocaust memory resulting from the shift from living to recorded testimony. Bearing in mind how this study has indicated that audiences may respond in unexpected, unintended, and uncontrollable ways to representations of the Holocaust, taking an audience research approach to digital media could aid in evaluating new digital strategies to memory and education.

Understanding individual reception is a crucial prerequisite to understanding films' impact on, and place in, Holocaust memory. If films really are one of the main sources of historical information for many people, and indeed feed into historical consciousness, only a mix of sources and methods can increase our understanding of how the reception process works at both the individual and communal level. In other words, we still only know little about the impact of historical films on historical understanding and consciousness, and collective memory. Acknowledging this, rather than making unsubstantiated assumptions, may be a first step towards opening new routes of inquiry and disciplinary approaches, which may ultimately illuminate the complex relationship between history, film, and memory.

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¹ See e.g. Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschugnall, "*Opa war kein Nazi*": *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2002), 106, 133. The researchers propose that visual representations such as films, computer games and novels, alongside stories that have been passed on within families inform historical awareness and ideas about the past among young people. Their study suggests that images and scenes from film and television were interwoven with autobiographical stories and serve as historical evidence for the past. Feature films (as opposed to documentaries) seem to provide evidence for the past because they appear to carry no pedagogical intentions.

² Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," *History and Memory* 41, no. 2 (2001), 195.

³ See e.g. Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington and Indianapolis Indiana University Press, 1988); Claudia Bruns, Asal Dardan and Anette Dietrich, "*Welchen der Steine du hebst*": *Filmische Erinnerungen an den Holocaust* (Berlin: Bertz und Fischer, 2012); Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002); Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); Wulf Kansteiner, "Nazis, Viewers and Statistics: Television History, Television Audience Research and Collective Memory in West Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 4 (2004), 575-98. The use of textual analysis to formulate assessments about audience reception is not limited to the study of Holocaust, but presents a wider trend in film studies and film history. See Claire Monk, *Heritage Film Audiences: Period Films and Contemporary Audiences in the UK* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 177. A recently published edited volume on empirical approaches to audience reception may be indicative of a shift within Film Studies. The only historical film discussed within the collection is *Saving Private Ryan* (USA, 1998). See CarrieLynn D. Reinhard and Christopher J. Olson, eds., *Making Sense of Cinema: Empirical Studies into Film Spectators and Spectatorship* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

⁴ See e.g. Yosefa Loshitzky, "Introduction," in Yosefa Loshitzky, ed., *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 3; Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust*, 129; Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xix; Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Here, Judith Doneson's broad definition is adopted, according to which Holocaust films are about "the gradual evolution to destruction, as well as the destruction itself," and which includes films "influenced by the Holocaust". Judith E. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 6-7.

⁵ Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 2.

⁶ For these debates, see esp. Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, England, 1992).

⁷ See e.g. Tobias Ebbrecht, "History, Public Memory and Media Event," *Media History* 13, no. 2 (2007), 221; Robert Rosenstone, "History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History into Film," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988), 1174-5.

⁸ For the German and Italian context, respectively, see Martina Thiele, *Publizistische Kontroversen über den Holocaust im Film* (PhD diss., University of Göttingen, 2001); Emiliano Perra, *Conflicts of Memory: The Reception of Holocaust Films and TV Programmes in Italy, 1945 to the Present* (Oxford et. al.: Peter Lang, 2010). For an evaluation of contemporary audience responses to *The World at War* based on audience letters, see James Chapman, "Television and History: *The World at War*," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31, no. 2 (2011), 247-75.

⁹ See e.g. Dieter Weichert, "'Holocaust' in der Bundesrepublik: Design, Methode und zentrale Ergebnisse der Begleituntersuchung," *Rundfunk und Fernsehen* 28, no. 4 (1980), 488-508; Tilmann Ernst, "'Holocaust' in der Bundesrepublik: Impulse, Reaktionen und Konsequenzen der Fernsehserie aus der Sicht politischer Bildung," *Rundfunk und Fernsehen* 28, No. 4 (1980), 509-33; BBC Written Archives, R9/792/446, Viewing Report VR/78/446, "An Audience Response Report. A Study of British Viewers' Reactions to 'Holocaust,'" November 1978; Tim Cole, "'Marvellous Raisins in a Badly-Cooked Cake': British Reactions to the Screening of Holocaust," in Caroline Sharples and Olaf Jensen, eds., *Britain and the Holocaust: Remembering and Representing War and Genocide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 71-89.

¹⁰ One of the first of projects to look systematically into viewers' reception of specific feature films dealing with the National Socialist past was a study conducted by German media psychologists who analysed the effects of the film *Downfall* (Germany/Italy/Austria, 2004) on students and the implications for the ways in which Germany is dealing with the National Socialist past. Wilhelm Hofmann et. al., "Heute haben wir Hitler im Kino gesehen: Evaluation der Wirkung des Films des Films 'Der Untergang' auf Schüler und Schülerinnen der neunten und zehnten Klasse," *Zeitschrift für Medienpsychologie* 17, no. 4 (2005), 137. See also Anna Baumert, Wilhelm Hofmann and Gabriela Blum, "Laughing about Hitler? Evaluation of the movie My fuehrer--The truly truest truth

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about Adolf Hitler," *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications* 20, no. 2 (2008), 43-56. For a more recent qualitative study on the long-term significance of TV programmes related to the Holocaust in Germany, see Juliane Finger and Hans-Ulrich Wagner, "Was bleibt von Fernseh-Darstellungen des Holocaust? Ein integrativer Ansatz zur empirischen Verknüpfung von Rezipienten- und Journalistenperspektive," in Wiebke Loosen and Marco Dohle, eds., *Journalismus und (sein) Publikum* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2014), 335-55.

¹¹ Anna Reading, "Young People's Viewing of Holocaust Films in Different Cultural Contexts," in Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman, eds., *Holocaust and the Moving Image* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 212.

¹² Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, xvii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁴ Christian Gudehus, Stewart Anderson and David Keller, "Understanding *Hotel Rwanda*: A reception study," *Memory Studies* 3 (2010), 349.

¹⁵ See e.g. David Cesarani, "Striped Pyjamas," *Literary Review* (October, 2008); Michael Gray, "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas: A Blessing or Curse for Holocaust Education?" *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 20, no. 3 (2014), 109-136.

¹⁶ Stuart Foster et al., *What do students know and understand about the Holocaust? Evidence from English secondary schools* (London: Institute of Education, 2016), <http://www.holocausteducation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/What-do-students-know-and-understand-about-the-Holocaust-2nd-Ed.pdf> (accessed February 6, 2017), 71; 97.

¹⁷ Their very participation in such a study certainly puts viewers' ordinariness into question. The self-selected nature of any "sample" is a general issue in qualitative research.

¹⁸ Kim Schröder et al., *Researching Audiences* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 132. See also Anna Reading, *The Social Inheritance of the Holocaust: Gender, Culture and Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Christine Gledhill, "Pleasurable Negotiations," in E. Deidre Pribram, ed., *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television* (London and New York: Verso Books, 1988), 70; Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in Stuart Hall et al., eds., *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies* [1980] (London: Routledge, 1996); Philip Goldstein and James L. Machor, *New Directions in American Reception Study* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The practices of film reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Alice Pettigrew, Stuart Foster et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools: An empirical study of national trends, perspectives and practice* (London: Institute of Education, 2009), 45. See also Michael Gray, "Understanding Pupil Preconceptions of the Holocaust in English Schools," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 17, no. 1 (2011), 15-16. According to Gray, who researched English pupils' preconceptions about the Holocaust prior to their formal education about the subject, 54 percent "of pupils asked had either read the book or watched the film of John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*." This compares with 65 percent of pupils who had either read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* or watched the dramatisation, 21 percent had seen *Life is Beautiful* and seven per cent had watched *Defiance*.

²⁰ Judith Petersen, "How British Television Inserted the Holocaust into Britain's War Memory in 1995," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 21, no. 3 (2001), 55-72; Tony Kushner, "From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business': History, Memory and Heritage, 1945-2005," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 12, nos. 1-2 (2006), 189-216; Andy Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

²¹ Aleida Assmann, "The Holocaust—a Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Memory Community," in Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad, eds., *Memory in a global age: discourse, practices and trajectories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 114.

²² See e.g. Gray, "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas", 132-33. Gray raises the question of the longevity of the story portrayed by *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, suggesting that a film or book's relevance is bound to a particular time, place, and generation. See also in Foster et al., *What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?*, 94.

²³ All interviews are part of the collection *The Holocaust in British Popular Culture: Interpretations of Recent Feature Films*, deposited at the Stanley Burton Centre for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the University of Leicester. The study draws on research about Holocaust representation, memory, and education in Britain. Neither of these are monolithic, and there are significant differences within Britain. While most of the 52 "British" interviewees were English, the term "British" is used to reflect both the general discourse, and how the majority of respondents identified themselves. The responses from the Northern Irish interviewee were included in the present analysis, but it is noted that the Northern Irish discourse is distinct from the British and English contexts. The study further included participants from (Greek) Cyprus (4), Germany (6), Spain (2), Czech Republic (1), USA (1), and France (1). The focus of this article is on the responses from the British and Northern Irish interviewees.

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²⁴ Interviewees were recruited using advertising, word-of-mouth and local contacts. In total, 37 individual and 11 group interviews were conducted (c.36 hours of recorded material) and transcribed. The qualitative analysis of the data was assisted by using the qualitative data analysis (QDA) software NVivo. For a detailed discussion and evaluation of the methodology, see Stefanie Rauch, "'The Fundamental Truths of the Film Remain': Researching Individual Reception of Holocaust Films," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 18, no. 2 (2017), <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1702140> (accessed July 17, 2017).

²⁵ Uwe Flick, "Stationen des qualitativen Forschungsprozesses," in Uwe Flick *et. al.*, eds., *Handbuch qualitative Sozialforschung: Grundlagen, Konzepte, Methoden und Anwendungen* (Munich: Psychologie Verlagsunion, 1991), 15; 27; 150; Kathy C. Charmaz, *Constructing grounded theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006); Olaf Jensen, "Zur gemeinsamen Verfertigung von Text in der Forschungssituation," *FQS* 1, no. 2 (2000), 9, 12, 14, 18, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0002112> (accessed April 28, 2016); Olaf Jensen, *Geschichte machen: Strukturmerkmale des intergenerationellen Sprechens über die NS-Vergangenheit in deutschen Familien* (Tübingen: Kummerle, 2004) [translation by the author], 60-62; Mayring, "Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse," 12.

²⁶ 39 of the 52 British interviewees described their ethnicity as "White" (35 of them as British, three as English, and one as Scottish), two as "Jewish," three as "Indian," one as "Chinese," and six as "Mixed," and one did not provide an answer.

²⁷ See also Gudehus, "Understanding *Hotel Rwanda*," 348.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 352.

²⁹ For better readability, only the first names of interviewees are used. Where requested by the interviewees, names were made anonymous and pseudonyms were assigned.

³⁰ Interview AL, *Defiance*, January 11, 2012, Leicester, (transcript lines) 117-22.

³¹ Interview EH, *Defiance*, November 13, 2011, Leicester, 307-13.

³² Interview MR, *The Grey Zone*, May 17, 2011, Leicester, 226-33. Meera's laugh here expresses her being self-conscious about the emotional effect the furnace scenes had on her rather than indicating that she would find this amusing.

³³ Gudehus *et. al.*, "Understanding *Hotel Rwanda*," 358.

³⁴ Interview MF, *Conspiracy*, April 9, 2011, Hook, 49-70; Interview CH, *Conspiracy*, Mary 13, 2011, Leicester, 43-61.

³⁵ For the former position, see e.g. Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences* (New York: Summit Books, 1990); for the latter e.g. Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust*, 129; Omer Bartov, "Spielberg's Oskar: Hollywood Tries Evil," in Yosefa Loshitzky, ed., *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), 41-60; Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*.

³⁶ Alan E. Steinweis, "Review of *Conspiracy* (BBC/HBO Films), directed by Frank Pierson from a script by Loring Mandel," *University of Nebraska—Lincoln, Faculty Publications*, Department of History, Paper 89 (2002), 674, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historyfacpub/89> (accessed April 26, 2016).

³⁷ Interview MF, *Conspiracy*, 131-2.

³⁸ Mark Roseman, *The villa, the lake, the meeting: Wannsee and the Final Solution* (London: Penguin, 2002), 139-40. The historic Kritzinger expressed "feelings of shame" in post-war trials (Roseman, 105), but there is no evidence he spoke out against the annihilation of the Jews at the Wannsee Conference. See also an interview with screenwriter Loring Mandel, in which he talks about exaggerating characters to achieve greater variety of opinion and diversity for dramatic effect. See Steven Bowie, "Interview with Loring Mandel," *Archive of American Television* (June 15, 2010), <http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/loring-mandel> (accessed February 15, 2017).

³⁹ Interview RJ, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, September 27, 2011, Leicester, 87-9.

⁴⁰ Andy Pearce noted a "latent anti-Germanism" in a range of newspapers around the time of the first Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) in 2001. Andy Pearce, *The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain* (PhD diss., Royal Holloway College, 2010), 175. See also Tony Kushner, "The Holocaust and the Museum World in Britain: A Study of Ethnography," in Sue Vice, ed., *Representing the Holocaust* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 14.

⁴¹ Interview SP, *The Reader*, October 26, 2011, Leicester, 29-34. Alice Pettigrew of UCL's Centre for Holocaust Education recently highlighted some of the misconceptions about the Holocaust among young people in Britain even after they received Holocaust education due to insufficient training of teachers. See Alice Pettigrew, "Holocaust education: Misconceptions and myths," February 3, 2016, *SecEd*, <http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/holocaust-education-misconceptions-and-myths/> (accessed February 13, 2016).

⁴² Foster *et. al.*, *What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?*, 92; 158. They ascertained three dominant explanations for the behaviour of the wider German population among British pupils, namely "brainwashing," fear, and ignorance of the Holocaust.

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⁴³ Thomas McKay, *A multi-generational oral history study considering English collective memory of the Second World War and Holocaust* (Unpublished thesis, University of Leicester, 2012), 185-194.

⁴⁴ Group Interview NC and MK, *Conspiracy*, December 9, 2011, Nottingham, 405-10.

⁴⁵ Rosenstone, "History in Images/History in Words," 1174.

⁴⁶ Interview RC, *Conspiracy*, October 4, 2011, Leicester, 407; 21-8.

⁴⁷ Interview MT, *Conspiracy*, May 6, 2011, Leicester, 444-6.

⁴⁸ Interview CH, *Conspiracy*, 169-73.

⁴⁹ Reading, "Young People's Viewing of Holocaust Films in Different Cultural Contexts," 213.

⁵⁰ Group Interview MG, RP, DP, EJ and MS, *The Reader*, 599-602.

⁵¹ E.g. Group Interview EL and MLG, *Conspiracy*, August 3, 2011, Leicester, 340-342.

⁵² Interview AC, *Defiance*, November 11, 2011, Leicester, 323-4.

⁵³ Group Interview BM and SU, November 12, 2011, Leicester, 29-35 [translation from German original into English by the author].

⁵⁴ Lothar Probst, "Founding Myths in Europe and the Role of the Holocaust," *New German Critique* 90 (Autumn, 2003), 55.

⁵⁵ See e.g. the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust's materials for the 2016 Holocaust Memorial Day Theme Vision, which includes several trusts and charities, which are engaged against bullying and various forms of discrimination: *Don't Stand By: Holocaust Memorial Day 2016. Theme Vision*, http://hmd.org.uk/sites/default/files/hmd_2016_-_dont_stand_by_-_theme_vision_0.pdf (accessed February 15, 2017).

⁵⁶ Andy Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), 214.

⁵⁷ Tom Lawson, "Coming to Terms with the Past: Reading and Writing Colonial Genocide in the Shadow of the Holocaust," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 20, nos. 1-2 (2014), 146.

⁵⁸ Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznajder, "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 87 (2002), 87.

⁵⁹ Jan de Groot suggests that authenticity is an "empty category." Jan de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009), 182.

⁶⁰ Interview FJ, *Conspiracy*, June 15, 2011, Leicester, 28-47.

⁶¹ Simone Gigliotti, "Commissioning Mass Murder: Conspiracy and History at the Wannsee Conference," in Michael Paris, ed., *Repicturing the Second World War: Representations in Film and Television* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 127.

⁶² In the study conducted by the CfHE, only one pupil thought the film was based on a "true story." See Foster *et al.*, *What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?*, 91.

⁶³ Interview LW, *The Reader*, February 1, 2012, Leicester, 146-50; Interview NT, *The Reader*, October 21, 2011, Leicester, 348-53. Lara's laugh here serves to emphasise her view that the film could ultimately be based on a "true story."

⁶⁴ Anthony Rowland, "Reading the Female Perpetrator," in Jenni Adams and Sue Vice, eds., *Representing Perpetrators in Holocaust Literature and Film* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2013), 134.

⁶⁵ Group Discussion YJ and CM, November 4, 2011, Leicester, *Defiance*, 431-7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 397.

⁶⁷ Ian Wall, "The Holocaust, film and education," in Haggith and Newman, eds., *Holocaust and the Moving Image*, 205; see also R.C. Raack, "Historiography as Cinematography: A Prolegomenon to Film Work for Historians," *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, no. 3 (1983), 417.

⁶⁸ Interview EH, *Defiance*, 31-8.

⁶⁹ Foster *et al.*, *What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?*, 93; Gudehus, "Understanding *Hotel Rwanda*," 357.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 358.

⁷¹ Group Interview, MG, RP, DP, EJ and MS, *The Reader*, October 11, 2011, Leicester, 12-16.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 17-19.

⁷³ Foster *et al.*, *What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?*, 94.

⁷⁴ Gudehus *et al.* suggest in this context that *Schindler's List* may have been so successful "because it aligned so perfectly with the dominant modes of interpretation and thus delivered illustrative material." Gudehus, "Understanding *Hotel Rwanda*," 359.

⁷⁵ Interview CC, *Conspiracy*, October 29, 2011, Leicester, 68-70.

⁷⁶ See Gudehus, "Understanding *Hotel Rwanda*," 348.

⁷⁷ Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor, *Social cognition* (Sage: Second Edition, New York, 1991). See also Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 118.

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⁷⁸ Interview RJ, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, 53-4.

⁷⁹ Gigliotti, "Commissioning Mass Murder," 125.

⁸⁰ Ebbrecht, "Docudramatizing history on TV," 40.

⁸¹ Interview LW, *The Reader*, 146-50; Interview NT, *The Reader*, 144-67.

⁸² Interview EH, *Defiance*, 113-14.

⁸³ Interview MF, *Conspiracy*, 21-8.

⁸⁴ Interview NB, *The Grey Zone*, July 18, 2011, Leicester, 168-72.

⁸⁵ Lawrence Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the present: the changing focus of contemporary Holocaust cinema* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 6. Annette Insdorf, on the other hand, maintains that films about the Holocaust constitute their own "veritable genre." See Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 245.

⁸⁶ Interview BR, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, 69-74.

⁸⁷ See also projects such as the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation's *IWitness* which seek ways to encourage students and educators to creatively and critically engage with their resources University of Southern California, *IWitness: One Voice at a Time*, <http://iwitness.usc.edu/SFI/> (accessed April 28, 2016).

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