

The Pink Triangle as an Interruptive Symbol

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ABSTRACT

The Pink Triangle is a symbol of collective memory and meaning for two very different, but similarly marginalized groups: gay male prisoners held in concentration camps in Nazi Germany, and the modern LGBTQAI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, asexual/allied and intersexed) community. Since the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps in the mid 1940's, many memorials to the Holocaust, as well as several for the Pink Triangle victims have sprung up around the world. While there are a number of reasons for these memorials, one premise is that these monuments serve as a way to create a collective memory, with the intent that these atrocities will never be repeated. Using qualitative methodology, the purpose of this project was to explore how the LGBTQAI+ community has been "memorialized" from the incidents of Nazi Germany, and how these memorials may serve as "interruptive symbols" to help circumvent hate and oppression of this historically marginalized group. Findings from interviews, observations and photographs revealed three themes as well as information for community consideration. These themes are "Serves as a Reminder", "Made Me Think" and "Taints It". The results of this study, through historical insights combined with first-hand memorial observation and interviews, can heighten understanding to highlight resilience and promote hope and healing through government/citizen reconciliation.

Keywords: Pink Triangle, Holocaust, Homosexuality, Memorial, Collective Memory, Interruptive symbols

THE PINK TRIANGLE AS AN INTERRUPTIVE SYMBOL

The history of the Pink Triangle begins with the rise of Nazi Germany and Kaiser Wilhelm's installation of the Prussian Penal Code, Paragraph 175 (Giles, 2005; Ziv, 2015). This code made all homosexual acts between men punishable by law and prescribed a mandatory jail sentence for any male found participating in activities deemed sexually inappropriate or asocial. Prisoners in the death camps were labeled according to their "crimes"

and the mandated colored triangle cloth patches worn on their clothing represented various offenses. While there are a number of different colors, in general, the “regular” criminals were assigned a green triangle, political prisoners a red one, Jews wore two overlapping yellow triangles (symbolizing the Star of David), homosexual men were assigned the pink triangle, and the “lowest form” of prisoner, the gay Jew, wore overlapping yellow and pink triangles (Edelheit & Edelheit, 1994). These gay prisoners endured the most punishment by SS soldiers and were most likely to face torture and death at the hands of the Nazis (Weingart, 2011). As a result of Paragraph 175, there were an estimated 50,000 to 63,000 men persecuted, many of whom were executed in the concentration camps (Plant, 1988).

To date, there are twenty-eight memorials around the world dedicated to the Pink Triangle Holocaust victims (Koymaksy, 2016). The theory behind creating these monuments is that individual memory can be preserved only insofar as it becomes embedded in the social framework. Thus, the transformative power of this symbol, the Pink Triangle, may serve as an interruption to the spread of hatred that fuels crimes against humanity, and in this case, creates communities of collective memory (Weingart, 2011).

Today, the pink triangle is a symbol of the LGBTQAI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, asexual/allied and intersexed) community that has “mobilized vigilance against contemporary oppression, from queer bashings to antigay initiatives” (Jensen, 2002, p. 320). The pink triangle, which “originated as a symbol of persecution and torture, has been transformed—by the very group it targeted—into a symbol of solidarity and hope” (Weingart, 2011, pp. 8-9). This “interruptive symbol” is attributed in some degree to LGBTQAI+ political consciousness and to a particular collective memory, although, somewhat from “particular social and national contexts and quite often independently of historical research on the subject” (Jensen, 2002, p. 320). Thus, the Pink Triangle has both historical and modern understanding and symbolism.

There is a fair amount of research that has been done on the Holocaust (i.e. Krieg, 2015; Loiederman, 2017; Starratt, Fredotovic, Goodletty, & Starratt, 2017), Pink Triangle prisoners (i.e. Haeberle, 1981; Jensen, 2002), and modern LGBTQAI+ matters (i.e. Berstein, 2015; Fassinger, Shullman & Stevenson, 2010). To date, however, exploring the nature of interruptive symbols like the Pink Triangle Memorials, the implications as historical and collective memory, as well as modern political consciousness have not been investigated. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore visitors’ perceptions of the Pink Triangle Memorial in the Castro Neighborhood of San Francisco, California, and the impression the symbols and monument have on them. We chose the San Francisco memorial because it is a fairly prominent memorial (an actual park, not just a statue or monument) and sits in a

well visited area of the United States. The Castro District, commonly referred to as “The Castro,” is a neighborhood in Eureka Valley in San Francisco, and was one of the first gay neighborhoods in the United States. Having transformed from a working-class neighborhood through the 1960s and 1970s, The Castro remains one of the most prominent symbols of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQAI+) activism and events in the world (Timberlake, 2005). With this research, we hoped to use the San Francisco Memorial a means of investigating the effects of such memorials generally, as well as further exploring interruptive symbols as a concept.

Additionally, an investigation into how the LGBTQAI+ community has been memorialized from the incidents of WWII, and how these memorials serve as “interruptive symbols” to help circumvent hate and oppression of this historically marginalized group was considered. Furthermore, how these memorials support inward and outward messaging to both Holocaust survivors and the LGBTQAI+ community as a reminder of past victimhood and continued vigilance to prevent atrocities was also examined.

BACKGROUND

While there are twenty-eight memorials around the world dedicated to the Pink Triangle Holocaust victims (Koymaksy, 2016), in the entire modern-day camp Memorial at Dachau, Germany, there is only a *single* Pink Triangle. This symbol representing thousands of persecuted men is buried deep within the Visitor’s Center museum that now fills the Nazi’s original administrative building. At Dachau, there are thirteen permanent exhibits in this building, and it appears by the organization that the intent is to tour the displays in chronological order. A pink granite triangle is tucked away in the last exhibit, but given the horror and torment of the tour, it would seem that many visitors never make it that far, preferring to depart the building for the main barracks area and the rest of the camp.

Dachau was one of the main Nazi concentration camps in operation from 1933 to 1945. Over the 12 years of use, the Dachau administration recorded the intake of 206, 206 political prisoners and the deaths of 31,951 (<http://www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de/>). While the number of gay men in German concentration camps is hard to estimate, Plant (1988) gives a rough estimate of the number of men convicted for homosexuality in Nazi Germany “between 1933 to 1944 at between 50,000 and 63,000” (p. 149).

Harold Marcuse offers a potential explanation to the seeming disregard of Pink Triangle prisoners at Dachau. Marcuse (2014) discusses that when the camp was being converted into a Memorial by the Comité International de Dachau in the 1960s, at that time, many people still saw homosexuality

as a crime. “Thus, the pink triangle and its related history was proscribed by the survivors who commissioned the memorial. When gay activists wanted to put up a pink granite triangle memorial in that space in the 1970s, they were refused” (Marcuse, 2014). Thus, initially the Pink Triangle memorial was placed in the Protestant memorial church at the far end of the former camp (Marcuse, 2014). At some point, the granite panel was quietly moved to the obscure memorial room in the museum, where it still sits today.

It was not until the 1980s that the local Munich LGBTQAI+ community took the initiative to have memorials to the Pink Triangle victims erected worldwide. From that initiative, the Pink Triangle is the basis of the design of the Homomonument in Amsterdam, the Gay and Lesbian Holocaust Memorial in Sydney, and several others, including the Pink Triangle Park in the Castro neighborhood of San Francisco. Thus, in the United States, on the far side of the world from Dachau, lies this more recent Pink Triangle Memorial, one that is completely different than Dachau’s display in appearance.

The Pink Triangle

Today, the Pink Triangle has become one of the most widespread symbols of the gay movement. There is seemingly a parallelism between the contemporary conceptions of homosexual identity and sympathizing with the Pink Triangle Holocaust prisoners. Certainly, the generation gap between the holocaust victims and today’s campaign creates a long-term cultural difference. The urgency to add a physical reminder, like memorials to honor the victims, is not there simply for grandchildren of those who suffered. Seifert (2003) explains that the very act of testifying to historical events, the memory of which has been actively repressed by survivors themselves and the surrounding societies that have maintained negative attitudes towards homosexuality, is not only a way of drawing public attention to the injustices done to homosexuals. It also becomes a means of “rescuing” a historical experience from oblivion. This process of remembrance is an act of constituting a “collective memory”, which is never entirely private, but is bound to specific social groups and delineated in public time and space, such as a memorial (Halbwachs, 1980).

Collective and Dangerous Memories

French philosopher and sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs, designated the central function of a “collective memory” as a record of resemblances, whereas what have changed are the group’s relations or contacts with other

groups. If the group always remains the same, any changes must be imaginary, and the changes that occur in the group are transformed into similarities. The function of collective memory is to develop the several aspects of one single content—that is, the various fundamental characteristics of the group itself (Halbwachs, 1980). The theory is that individual memory (in this case, the unspoken experience associated with shame), is only preserved insofar as it becomes a part of the social framework. Thus, the symbol of the Pink Triangle and the subsequent memorials are most likely intended to make tolerance and acceptance part of social framework. The “authors” of the collective memory are then compelled to find ways of bridging gaps that lie between present and historical events. In her thesis, Kelly Weingart (2011) referenced two important constructs, dangerous memories and interruptive symbols. Interruptive symbols (such as the Pink Triangles) evoke dangerous memories (such as Nazi persecution), which, she argues, stop us cold in our tracks and make us aware of a reality that we often choose to ignore. Usually, this means an astonishing realization will take place that creates the opportunity for improvement (Weingart, 2011). German Political Theologian Johann Baptist Metz (2007) describes dangerous memories as those that challenge us to examine human history, to re-evaluate our present circumstances, and that call into question our future. He describes them as:

These are dangerous memories in which earlier experiences flare up and unleash new dangerous insights for the present. For brief moments they illuminate, harshly and piercingly, the problematic character of things we made our peace with a long time ago

. . . Memories of this sort are dangerous and incalculable visitations from the past. They are memories that one has to take into account, memories that have a future content, so to speak (Metz, 2007, p. 31).

This commitment to history and the memory of suffering dares us to wrestle with the redemption of history and dangerous memories of a nation, which many consider conceived in violence (Copeland, 2004, p. 75). Copeland’s (2004) premise is that attempts to evade dangerous memory are passive and block the resolute work of authentic peace. For the modern LGBTQAI+ community, the dangerous memory of the holocaust and the Pink Triangle prisoners is the catalyst for transformation and liberation. This past calls into question the present, and may create the possibility for collective change for tolerance in the future.

Interruptive Symbols

Before we can experience dangerous memories, we must experience (with our senses) the interruptive symbol of those like the Pink Triangle. This symbol acts as an interruption to our present circumstances, and preserves or invokes dangerous memories that have the potential to be radically transformative. The Pink Triangle is a liberating and transforming symbol that possesses a dangerous, albeit practical, memory (Jensen, 2002). It preserves the integrity of the people it represents (*all* the people – LGBTQAI+ and Holocaust survivor alike), to unify them for mobilizing political action against oppressive and even cruel social structures. Symbols have the potential to nurture solidarity and action against suffering in the present. These symbols also give hope to anyone working to achieve true social justice whereby all humans are given the opportunity to flourish. In addition, these symbols can “serve as the ground for criticism of the status quo and [are] the impetus to transformation” (Metz, 2007, p. 35). In order to conquer suffering, dangerous memories must be accurately preserved and acted upon collectively and mobilized in a practical and political way. Standing in solidarity with the voiceless and the marginalized is the Pink Triangle symbol’s call to action (Weingart, 2011). Thus, interruptive symbols such as the Pink Triangle must be strategically placed in order to reach the people who *need* to experience dangerous memories. Hermeneutics alone does not create the necessary changes that allow for social justice. Rather, proximity to the symbols is a necessary element. These may be expressed as making a memory public in a society that acts in compassionate solidarity with the deceased as well as past victims of injustice in history. Interruptive symbols should evoke a conversion of the heart as well as a concrete, practical conversion with the living, calling for the disruption of every attempt to disregard the history of human suffering, or to deface the [current] suffering of human subjects (Copeland, 2004, p. 75).

Copeland (2004) discusses methods of interruption in a three-fold manner. She was speaking to symbolism of political ideology, but the concepts generally apply to the Pink Triangle memorials as well. Symbols may disrupt by: 1) interrupting subjugation and commodification of human “others”; 2) interrupting expressive and symbolic culture like identity politics and differences; and 3) interrupting the murky, disturbing connection between terrorism and violence (Copeland, 2004, p. 73). Here, violence is defined as the coercive attempt to limit or thwart the exercise and realization of the essential and effective freedom of a human person or social group (Copeland, 2004, p. 78). The premise being that deep seated ambivalence, such as forgetting about the Pink Triangle prisoners, may contribute to attitudes toward violence and social oppression for modern LGBTQAI+.

Copeland suggests three “duties”, which can be adopted by memorial visitors to begin the interruption through a monument visit: 1) witness, 2) memory and 3) lament (Copeland, 2004, p. 80). As witnesses, we must experience the symbol at a technical level through the senses, to gain familiarity with historical moral, ethical and ontological data in order to interrupt the violence that tears at the fabric of our society. Thus, this research intended to determine if we could find occurrences of Copeland’s methods of interruption.

Memorials

The protection and recovery of memory presents us with a second method for interruption, as we resist the loss to history of stories of the despised and excluded. All stories of all cultural and social groups, Holocaust survivors and modern LGBTQ alike, are hopefully brought to the table at a memorial to be told, held, shared, examined and understood. We allow them to interrupt as we resonate with stories from another generation. These stories challenge us to overcome the temptation of selective memory (Copeland, 2004, p. 80), but also encourage collective memory (Weingart, 2011). Rather than erase memories, we confront brokenness and hurt. Memorials help us to battle cultural, historical and generational amnesia, or even the all too swift revision of events, in order to expose memories that we have been too ashamed to admit and confront. Inclusion of historical data at a memorial is important, because it allows us to be able to expose the negativity and suffering of history with interruptive truth-telling. Finally, lament makes spaces of recognition and catharsis that prepares individuals for justice. (Copeland, 2004, p. 81). Well-designed memorials are such spaces. They interrupt the cycle of cultural and social decline, creating a genuine healing of culture and spirit, provide adequate transformative social solutions, and make possible forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Pink Triangle as a symbol is not meant for homosexuals alone. Inward and outward messaging is another dimension of the memorials (Jensen, 2002). The Pink Triangle has come to represent the collective suffering of homosexuals from hate crimes, everyday discrimination and in the struggle for civil rights. These symbols speak not only inwardly to the communities directly affected by the narratives they represent, but they also reach outward into the global community at large, mobilizing collective memory and advocating for positive cultural and social change (Weingart, 2011). Copeland writes, “All peoples need to stand up for the humanness of all human persons, especially the despised and excluded, as they endure marginalization and containment, economic exploitation and powerlessness,

cultural degradation and physical assault, systematic and random violence” (Copeland, 2004, p. 75).

The Pink Triangle memorials also raise the political consciousness of gays and lesbians, who argue that broader awareness of past transgressions lead to greater social tolerance. As such, Jensen comments,

Activists in the United States, more so than in West Germany, tended to direct the memory of Nazi persecution outward, in order to secure the support of broader society. Whereas a certain segment of West German gays enjoys relative tolerance of post-liberalization, and may need the reminder of past victimhood. American gays in general, have never doubted the omnipresent hostility of the society in which they live. (Jensen, 2002, p. 329)

Americans tend to wear Pink Triangles, and erect more visible monuments as a means of galvanizing support inside the community and outside of it. However, as the new global situation of modern LGBTQ in society begs for interruption, frequent exposure to logos or symbols such as the Pink Triangle may increase empathy with regard to civic and citizen responsibility, and can support creating and healing in society by exposing the inability to be empathetic. Authentic achievement of humanity may lie in visiting and remembering, thereby interrupting individualistic destructive behaviors.

Sense-making

How we learn is critical to making meaning of these monuments and symbols, no matter on which continent they are located. Sense-making is coupled together with the concept of transformation. Transformation occurs when one is able to step back and reflect on something and make decisions about it (Berger, 2006). How people construct understanding about their experiences, even decades later, can be viewed through Karl Weick’s (2001) lens on sense-making, including the study of symbols such as the Pink Triangle. The Pink Triangle has become a tool to help people remember both the specific event in history and the collective memory of suffering. Sense-making is a retrospective process: Remembering and looking back are primary sources of meaning (Weick, 2001). Meaning is constructed when targets link received cues (observing a Pink Triangle monument) with cognitive structures such as WWII, the gay pride movement, or a vast spectrum in between or outside those concepts. According to Weick (2001), definitions of meaning should vary from one group to another, and that different groups can define the same situation in different ways. Thus, things such as interruptive symbols do not have the same

meaning for different people in different periods of time and in different parts of the world. The symbolic environment from which definitions arise is a shared environment, and the outlook can be a shared outlook of collective memory.

METHODS

To explore the perceptions of the visitors of the Pink Triangle Memorial and the nature of the interruptive symbols and inward/outward messaging, the researchers used a phenomenological approach that included on site observations, six participant interviews and visual artifacts (photographs). All participant interviews were done face-to-face, and included individuals who live in the area, are active in re-establishing the memorial, to those visiting the city from other countries. Ultimately, four men and two women contributed their perceptions and insights to the study and all but one self-identified as being gay or lesbian (which was unsolicited). From all of the data collected, several themes emerged. These themes include “Serves as a Reminder”, “Made Me Think” and “Taints It”.

In measuring the “effectiveness” of the memorial, the sample of respondents for the interview was chosen from the visitors to the monument who stopped to consider the memorial, not just pedestrians passing through on their way from here to there. Observations were conducted in the park on three different days, and the “lingerers,” were invited to answer the interview questions. For the study, we defined memorial effectiveness as the ability of the memorial to stop the observer and urge further consideration and study of the surroundings, but further insight to this was gained from the interviews.

For the purpose of this study, the central question asked was, “What does this memorial mean to you?”, but this was further explored with the following interview questions:

- What brought you to the park today?
- Do you know the history of the Pink Triangle?
- Why do you think this memorial exists?
- Who do you think this memorial is intended to reach?
- How has this memorial changed your perceptions of the Holocaust?
- How has this memorial changed your perceptions of LGBTQAI+ matters?
- How does this memorial impact you emotionally?
- What has this experience inspired you to do with this information?

The intent of these inquiries was to try and gauge the extent of collective memory if any, whether sense-making was occurring, if the

messaging was going inward or outward, how effective this interruptive symbol was, and was it evoking dangerous memories. To try to answer these guiding research questions, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed coded per qualitative methods. From the field observations, artifact collection and participant interviews three themes emerged as well as some general findings.

Observations of The Castro

The Pink Triangle Memorial Park is on the edge of the Castro Neighborhood, at the intersections of 17th, Castro and Market streets in San Francisco, California. Market, Castro and 17th are all very busy multiple-lane arterials, and carry a high volume of traffic. There are stoplights and crosswalks in all directions, and pedestrians can easily get to the park and back. There is also a pedestrian walkway, which passes right through the middle of the 15 triangle pylons at the monument. The only information posted is a two foot by three foot metal plaque on one end of the park which includes one sentence on the history of the historical events being commemorated by the monument. The sign is deteriorating, but is still fairly readable. It says, "PINK TRIANGLE PARK AND MEMORIAL: In remembrance of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender victims of the Nazi regime (last word unreadable)." It goes on to list the artists, non-profits, politicians, funders, government and community groups who were responsible for the erection of the park, dedicated on Human Rights Day, December 10, 2001. The plaque includes a photo of Pink Triangle prisoners wearing the symbol on their concentration camp uniforms.

There is no parking area near the monument, nor is there street parking on the busy streets adjacent to it. A covered bus stop shelter at the park has been moved recently due to constant vandalism, including repetitive breaking of glass to get to the power source that lit the shelter. Signs posted around the monument now redirect bus passengers to new stop locations. There is a Muni (train) stop across the street from the memorial in the Harvey Milk Plaza, an entrance adjacent to the park that leads pedestrians underneath Market Street to the train platform.

The City of San Francisco had a large role in getting the memorial built and participating in the 2001 dedication ceremony, but since then has largely forgotten about it. This is evident in the obvious neglect of the park, including dilapidated pillars, and shabby maintenance. While there is no seating in the park, there is a two-foot wall along one edge of the park, which had graffiti on it, including a swastika in permanent marker, but mostly Pride-supportive messages. An electrical box had been painted pink to match the theme of the park, and it had several small stones placed on

top, making it look like an altar of a sort. Much of the ground cover of the park is simple sand, gravel or bark, where there may have been plants or vines as groundcover at one time. Several garbage and recycling cans have their permanent storage areas adjacent to the park. While rainbow flags are highly prevalent throughout the neighborhood, Pink Triangles are less so, except at the monument.

While San Francisco and Mayor of the City, Willie Brown Jr., were active members responsible for the erection of the park at the time of inception, there is obviously little continued investment in the memorial. The park is not actually a part of the City of San Francisco's parks system, but rather under the purveyance of the Eureka Valley Neighborhood Association (EVNA).

Initial Observations

During three days of observations, 144 people passed through the Pink Triangle Park. Of these individuals, only six noticeably stopped to consider the monument as they had made an intentional effort to seek out the park. These six individuals were ultimately interviewed as a part of the study. The perceived gender breakdown of these 144 individuals passing through included 85 males, 50 females, and nine "other" (either indeterminable or children) that were observed passing straight through the main sidewalk of the park and directly walking on a pink triangle made of rose quartz, and through (between) fifteen triangular granite pylons which symbolize the 15,000 gay men imprisoned during the Holocaust.

Themes

From the six participant interviews, as well as field observations and artifacts, three themes emerged from the data. These themes include, "Serves as a reminder," "Made Me Think," and "Taints It." In addition, other insights were gained which included the impact of memorial sustainability and group/community messaging, the need for foresight in memorial planning, and re-traumatization of marginalized groups.

Serves as a Reminder

The theme, "Serves as a Reminder" was discussed by all of the participants. The contributors discussed that the Pink Triangle Park was not just a physical reminder of the bigotry and hate that the Nazi's had for gay men, but also "to memorialize our connection to that point in history, in the hopes that it will never happen again." One participant commented, "That's

one of the points of public monuments. That they offer themselves promiscuously to all passers-by, and state to them, as a city, this is a historical moment that we want you to know about, remember and understand.” Another premise of this theme included the desire that the park reinforce the message to society that we should be diligent in our attention. Thus, this is not only a reminder of historical atrocities, but that the park and its message speaks to the future so that these same barbarisms, bigotry and hate, are not repeated.

A second aspect of this theme includes a social justice component. For example, several of the participants voiced an understanding that the Pink Triangle Park is directly connected to the Castro district of San Francisco (a long established and predominantly LGBTQAI+ area), and in addition, that this neighborhood is home to Harvey Milk. Milk, an LGBTQAI+ activist and elected official, was at one time known as “The Mayor of Castro Street” even before he was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors (Shilts, 2008). As such, this particular area is embedded in a historical preponderance towards activism and human rights. However, as one participant commented also about the monument,

It has changed my perception because now I’m seeing that some members of the LGBT community feel safer by being quiet, being wallflowers, not addressing their anger and frustration with society, and they’re content in the marginalization, So, I become angry at community members because of that.

This participant went on to say, “I just see the division and the hate speech, the troll-like behavior is becoming normal. And I’m refusing it, but at the same time, I’m seeing it happen more openly.” Thus, in this participant and others’ minds, there is a need to remember and regenerate this activism.

A further aspect of the theme Serves as a Reminder included the desire by several of the participants to make the park more dynamic and effective. For example, several had lofty goals for the park, and these not only included a garden space for weddings, reflection and other public events, but also that the message and intent of the park reach as many people in the community as possible. This outreach of inclusion included a gamut of individuals, both from the local LGBTQAI+ community, but also the sentiment that:

I think it’s a park for everyone. A people’s park type situation because during the Nazi regime, there were so many different victims . . . women, people with disabilities, immigrants, church leaders. I mean it’s just extensive . . . But this park is putting a spotlight on one particular group

of people, but ah, we can all be marginalized and victimized through laws created by the government.

Thus, the intent for those close to the Pink Triangle Park was that, not only did the memorial serve as a symbol of the past; but that it helped people remember the challenges faced by LGBTQAI+ people today. The hope voiced by many of the participants in the study is that this space could become a place of gathering, community, activism, and life and culture for both the neighborhood, and those that traveled to San Francisco.

Made Me Think

The second theme encompasses the range of emotions that the participants felt when they engaged with the history of oppression that the LGBTQ+ community has faced, and how symbols such as the Pink Triangle remind them of the on-going need to stay vigilant. While this discernment was triggered by the symbol of the Pink Triangle, for a couple of the participants, this perspicacity also came with other interruptive symbols such as the gay pride flag.

The assortment of feelings and emotions that the participants discussed came from a merging of both the past actions of governments such as Nazi Germany, but also from the current political climate. Discussion included statements reflecting on the bygone era, such as:

we are committed to commemorating one of the darkest moments in the history of the queer community, and making sure that the victims are not forgotten, and that the means of persecution are remembered, and that we remain alert, attentive and prepared to fight back now, if we see similar things starting to happen.

Another participant discussed this by saying, "I think, because LGBT also want to remember their ancestors or be the pioneers of their own history. And try to make their [LGBTQ+] separate history inside the main history." There was also an understanding that today there are people from around the world from "wildly different cultures. . . cultures where it's still illegal for LGBTQ people to live their lives in some kind of comfortable way where they still face persecution, or the death penalty, or a variety of horrible experiences." To the awareness that in the US there are still a number of challenges that the LGBTQ+ community contends with, and that diligence and atonement to these issues is still needed. In addition, that there are "cultures that are more open and more welcoming than ours" is a part of the needed attentiveness, because many of the rights that LGBTQ+ individuals have are still new and fragile. Furthermore, several of the participants

have lived in the Castro district for years, and vividly remember the AIDS epidemic, as well as the park's conception. For these individuals, the Pink Triangle serves as a graphic memory of both the atrocities of Nazi Germany, as well as the marginalization and neglect that local and national government has done to the LGBTQAI+ community. For example, as one participant reiterated, LGBTQAI+ people were "called 'asocial'. And so the genesis of it was, if you weren't going to contribute to procreating and the human race and the master race, then you're, you know, seen as criminals." As another participant commented "the Nazis categorized their enemies of the state, degenerates, or whoever they thought was not Aryan enough, or didn't meet their moral and social profile by a series of symbols, and for homosexual men, it was a Pink triangle."

For another participant, the memory of the AIDS crisis rose to the top in this theme:

So we, in the 1980s, it's interesting that it also is happening in the darkest years of the AIDS crisis, when in the United States, and here in San Francisco, a city that was very, very deeply hit by that crisis, that we saw a horrible public health disaster and watched the majority of the power structure here in our country turn its back and say nothing other than, "At least it's killing the right people."

A number of the participants talked about this kind of government marginalization, and why Pink Triangle memorials and imagery are important to combat this ostracism. As an example, one individual stated:

There as a great resonance at that moment to say, and indeed there were people who referred to what was happening as 'a Holocaust', and said that it was the result of deliberate decisions to ignore this health crisis, and that people were being "persecuted" because of who they were. So I think there's a great resonance at that period of time to say we need to remember this earlier moment, and we need to draw strength from that to fight this current moment of crisis that our community is facing.

There was a deep sensitivity by the participants that "remaining alert" and "staying connected to our culture" is essential to not repeating the atrocities of the distant and recent past. For the participants, this theme of reflection, discernment, and remaining attentive and alert empowers them into action. As one commented, "It's really become more important to me, in the past year specifically, because I have been having a lot of anxiety about the political climate." This participant went on to say, "In order for me, rather than to be a victim of the political situation, I have become empowered by, taking action, working locally, and strengthening community building and finding sanctuary in my community."

Taints It

The third and last theme that emerged from the participant interviews and observations was “Taints It.” This theme discusses the memorial itself, and how the neglect and decline of the Pink Triangle Park impacts the message of the monument. The proposition is that this degeneration re-marginalizes the Pink Triangle Prisoners as well as the present LGBTQAI+ community. As one participant claimed, the “folks running it early on didn’t actually know the real history. So to the extent that they were sending a pedagogical message, it was folkloric rather than historical, and it confused people about the actual history that took place.” In addition, there was the observation by most of the participants that “there is really no signage, if you don’t come already knowing something about the pink triangle, you won’t know what it means.” Additionally, this “scruffy, triangle-shaped lot right adjacent to the Castro was kind of allowed to go into decline.” As the participant reflected, “it has not been an effective monument because it has not been made effective. . . .” Another participant commented, “In a more complicated way in that I never felt the design was very strong. Uh, that the location is right next to the Castro, but if somebody doesn’t tell you it’s there, you won’t notice it. It’s not on a main pedestrian thoroughfare.”

Currently there is a movement to revitalize the park, “but it went through a long period of time where it had fallen into disrepair and neglect, and was really quite embarrassing . . . and terrible.” Several of the participants discussed that they were ashamed and embarrassed by the state of the Pink Triangle memorial, so much so that as one stated “I didn’t want to tell people about it because, or to come see our memorial to the victims of Nazi persecution and homosexuals where we can’t even be bothered to pull up the weeds or mow the lawn.” Another commented “that it was basically abandoned by the Eureka Valley Neighborhood Association that had launched it, and they just handed it off to the City” without any plan of maintenance or care.

Due to this neglect and abandonment, one of the participants commented that they felt, “because it’s a little decrepit, it sadly makes me feel. . . it taints it somehow. Yeah, there’s like, ‘Oh, it’s not important anymore?’ or ‘Oh, is it being phased out?’ So it actually takes me to a more negative, sentimental place.” These sentiments were woven through a number of the comments the participants made, and were a vivid reminder of the precarious balance between memorializing a people or time, and working to not re-victimize them in the efforts. As one individual stated,

The Pink Triangle Park in San Francisco means that here in the City that for the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first cen-

ture, around the world in people's imagination, this is one of the capitals of LGBTQ life and culture. One of the places where we've created space for ourselves, and created power for ourselves, created a welcome to visitors from around the world.

However, the current state of the park affects this message, in that there is a need to regenerate the messaging, such that the memorial and surrounding neighborhood can use the pink triangle symbol to help themselves and others remember the persecution that LGBTQAI+ people have faced. As one participant commented, "I think there's a great resonance at that period of time to say we need to remember this earlier moment, and we need to draw strength from that to fight this current crisis that our community is facing."

DISCUSSION

The observations and the participants' insights brought several things to light regarding the Pink Triangle as an interruptive symbol and as a tool for inward and outward messaging. First, it became apparent that for the participants, the need for both the memorial, as well as the Pink Triangle symbol itself was foundational to create and perpetuate their collective memory (Weingart, 2011). Participants related to the historical implications of the pink triangle, for political prisoners, but even more so they understood the modern significance of the symbol and the need to stay diligent in their activism and community engagement. This initial observation parallels Copeland's (2004) idea of witnessing.

However, in design, the park is strongly oriented toward the modern definition of a pink triangle as a symbol of LGBTQAI+ rights. The only physical element at the park relating to Copeland's (2004) concept of memory (or Holocaust memory, in this case), is the small historical marker referring to the initiation of the pink triangle as a Holocaust symbol in concentration camps. If interruption occurs by confronting brokenness and hurt, rather than erasing or revising the memories, perhaps the representation of both generations' testimonies to homophobic persecution needs to be *equally* represented at the monument. This would allow for greater shared examination and collective memory, and would discourage selective memory or revision of events. One interviewee suggested a QR code at the monument, which when scanned with a cellular device or tablet, would take the visitor/observer to a web page perhaps, which could illustrate the history of LGBTQAI+ struggles from the Holocaust through the present.

Another insight came in the form of the Pink Triangle Park itself. While the intent of the park was, in the words of one of the participants,

initially was “a rescue operation, because it was a neglected piece of land that was becoming a place of crime, and so the residents came forward and reclaimed the space,” the space became a memorial out of convenience rather than a deliberate and intentional act. Perhaps if this were the case, park planning would have been organized such that future maintenance, funding and preservation would have been made. Currently there is a movement underway by several of the neighborhood activists to revitalize the park. Several of the participants were very passionate about the possibility of a resurrection for the monument. At one point, one of the individuals had even begun to fundraise by making their own pink triangle buttons, which had softer curved edges and a rose in the middle, for a “new generation.” This community member sold these at the monument, but did not make enough to make a significant contribution to help the decaying park. Another of the participants called this effort his passion and coined the term “Pink Triangle 2.0,” which is the name of the restoration project.

Thus, future endeavors, perhaps the “Pink Triangle 2.0” should have a clear objective and consider the intention and ultimate goal of the memorial/park. For instance, having more information in a visible and interruptive manner may help. Use of modern technology for a more effective monument, providing both historical as well as current information can serve to better inform the park’s visitors. Moreover, the park has suffered from vandalism, homeless people taking up residence, and other neighborhood challenges. Thus, clear buy-in from the city and neighborhood to protect and maintain the park is needed for a deeper impact. Furthermore, addressing these neighborhood challenges directly may be necessary as apparently the area has had them since the original inception of the park.

The last insight has to do with the unintended consequence of the Pink Triangle Park. By creating a memorial for a persecuted group, re-marginalizing their successors by failing to maintain the park, neglecting care of the people in the neighborhood, or by failing to recognize the systemic oppression and persecution of these people is careless in one regard, and deeply reckless and unethical in another. Future efforts to revitalize the memorial, or create new ones in the future can take a lesson from the Pink Triangle Park in this regard. Deep care and attention should be paid to those working with, or for marginalized groups. This supports Copelands (2004) concept of lamenting.

CONCLUSION

While this research looked at interruptive symbols, authentic symbols can also challenge perceptions and the messaging of memorials like the Pink Triangle. As Polzer (2014) states, an “‘authentic symbol’ designates a

reified symbol, exemplified here by Holocaust sites and other relics. Documentation universally, yet unreflectively, insists that Holocaust relics must be 'authentic' to be considered functional sacred symbols that evoke and internalize appropriate ideological collective response" (p. 699). As human beings, we need to be constantly and consistently reminded of the atrocities that we inflict on others. One way to do this is through interruptive symbols and inward and outward messaging. In these tools, we create meaning and a collective history that can help us avoid mistakes of the past. As Greenleaf (1977) stated, "Meaning is a stern taskmaster: one must aspire, one must persevere, one must accept the discipline of dealing thoughtfully with symbols" (p. 338). Through the use of memorials and their related symbols, we can learn.

The power of a symbol is measured by its capacity to sustain a flow of significant new meaning. The substance of the symbol may be a painting, poem or story, allegory, myth, scripture, a piece of music, a person, a crack in the sidewalk or a blade of grass. Whatever or whoever, it produces a confrontation in which that much of what makes the symbol meaningful comes from the beholder. (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 329)

The experience of this particular monument seemed to miss the mark in terms of creating a collective memory, which was a direct purpose of the condition, location and design of the Park. The research results revealed that to be a true interruptive symbol, to best reach all parties to create and share a collective memory, and for the viewers to best make sense of the symbol, the memorial/monument *must* reach the viewer in location and design (be accessible to the senses). In addition, it must also include both the dimensions of historical and modern contexts (WWII History and Pride in this case). Both are a necessity in the memorial/monument for disruption and sense-making to occur.

The basic symbolic interactionist effect of a logo (or symbol) upon sense-making, meaning-making, and collective memory is a study of the human emergent reaction to the world around him/her. A larger, more altruistic question lies in this study of interruptive symbology. How can we as leaders, using interruptive symbols to persuade observers to action, up to and including greater social justice? Continued research of the epiphanic disruption of symbols which provoke or urge collective memories, can potentially lead to the betterment of humanity.

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