

***Empowerment and Trivialization:***  
**Using the Yellow Star of David in Facebook Profile Pictures**  
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This paper presents a theoretical discussion about the use of the iconic Yellow Star of David in Facebook profile pictures during the Holocaust Memorial day. Drawing on literature related to collective memory research and online media, this essay stresses the complex set of opportunities presented to online platforms' users in the context of commemoration as a whole, and Holocaust remembrance specifically. Such complexity is portrayed in this study as a continuum of commemoration acts: on the one hand, the use of the Yellow Star of David represents empowerment through a social recovery process, and on the other hand, the process of trivializing the memory of the Holocaust. Thus, the case of using the Yellow Star of David exemplifies the postmodern nature of memory and identity in our digital era. It comprises, as shown in the following passages, the loss of space and time as well as the conflicting yet simultaneous processes of trivialization and empowerment.

**Empowerment and Recovery – constructing identity and a community via remembrance**

Forcing Jewish people to wear the Yellow Star of David, the Nazis made this symbol into the epitome of persecution, oppression, and genocide. According to Greene & Peacock (2011) after World War II, Jewish people around the world “turned this socially constructed symbol [The Star of David] of humiliation and death into a badge of honor and community... What was once a symbol that signaled acts of degradation however, now has become a source of deep pride” (p. 30). Consistent with such use, both Jewish and non-Jewish people today wear yellow stars on their lapels on Holocaust Remembrance Day as a means of challenging anti-Semitism and hatred (Hasian, 2004). The iconic use of the Yellow Star of David did not skip the online

sphere, where in the Multi-media Learning Center of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance, for example, the Yellow Star of David was used as an icon representing Jewish people online alongside the photos of Anne Frank (Reading, 2003).

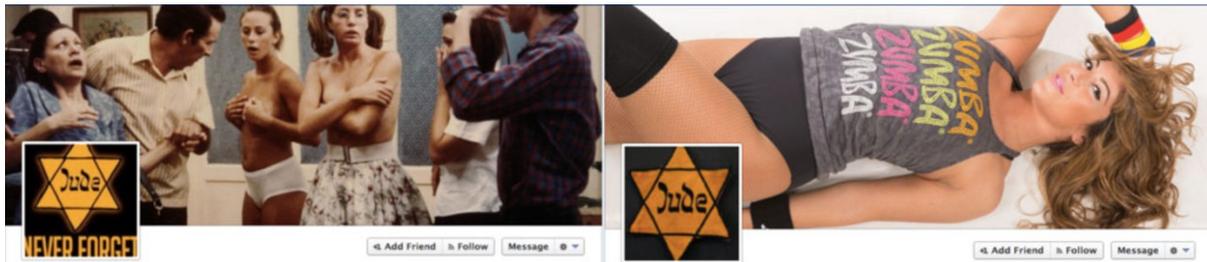
In this essay I argue that the use of the Yellow Star of David as a Facebook profile picture exemplifies processes of recovery and empowerment for its users. This two-folded process relates to the recovery of the representation act, using the Yellow Star of David in spite of its Nazi originated connotations. At the same time, it exemplifies the liberation of the individual from the hegemonic narrative of the Holocaust remembrance in the Israeli context. First, in line with its use offline described above, the Yellow Star of David is used as a source of pride online. It is being voluntarily chosen to symbolize an individual's connections to a larger community both in the past and in the present. While originated as a labeling device marking Jewish people as inferior victims, the Yellow Star of David is now being used as a marker of belonging and remembering. The ability to choose the use of this symbol (in contrast to the forced stigmatization led by Nazi Germany) reflects a process of recovery. This is a recovery of the Jewish community, which can take upon itself the process of symbolizing its own identity and past with pride. At the same time, this is the recovery of the icon itself, no longer a symbol of inferiority and persecution, but an identity marker of the Jewish community worldwide.



"Proud to be Jewish"  
An example of the use of the Yellow  
Star in a Facebook profile picture

### Trivializing the Holocaust: reconstructing the liminal essence of a collective memory

While arguing for the empowering aspect of the use of the Yellow Star of David, this paper engages another aspect of collective memory carried by the same use. Alongside the recovery of the icon, the use of the Yellow Star of David on Facebook trivializes, to some extent, the memory of the Holocaust. The importance of the Holocaust and the Yellow Star of David as its symbol is significantly reduced when looking at the Facebook profile as a whole. While the profile picture is an important aspect of identity representation in that platform, it is also read within the larger context of other identity, cultural, and social markers shared on the profile. Thus, for example, a profile picture presenting the Yellow Star of David can be accompanied by a Facebook cover photo that has nothing to do with Holocaust commemoration, and was there before changing the profile picture on the Holocaust Memorial Day.



The act of commemoration through a profile picture becomes mundane once the liminal time of the Holocaust Memorial Day passes, yet the profile picture stays the same. Thus, the commemoration becomes ordinary, instead of having high social significance and a unique time frame distinguishing it from the rest of the year. Using the Yellow Star of David in an online context broke down the uniqueness or liminality of Holocaust commemoration on the Holocaust Memorial Day, and trivialized its memorialization mixing it with the mundane, shallow content often shared on Facebook.

## **Holocaust commemoration online as Empowerment through Trivialization**

Jameson (1991) argues that the cultural logic of the postmodern movement is constituted as the destruction of the historical and chronological aspects of representation in favor of a fragmented and inconsistent representation. This process intensified a sense of individuality, in which interpretation is being made from a subjective point of view. The reading of cultural artifacts and processes (such as collective memory in the case of this paper) is an individual one, as the vanishing of the historical and the chronological brought along the vanishing of the shared meta-narrative. In the same vein Blair, Jeppeson & Pucci (1991) argue that in the context of the postmodern collective memory, we no longer discuss the dichotomy of “either/or” (either here or there, either now or in the past, either communal or individual). Through the analysis of The Vietnam Veterans Memorial they argue for the change of collective memory from the “either/or” into the “both-and” approach of the postmodern era – combining the individual point of view with the national one. In the context of this paper, the postmodern aspect of Holocaust web-based memorialization reflects a “both-and” approach, both liminal and mundane memorialization, both empowering and trivializing commemoration. It is a contradictory form of remembering the Holocaust as manifested in an online environment.