



Lost in Transmission: Studies of Trauma Across Generations

M. Gerard Fromm

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A central thesis of this volume is that what human beings cannot contain of their experience - what has been traumatically overwhelming, unbearable, unthinkable - falls out of social discourse, but very often onto and into the next generation, as an affective sensitivity or a chaotic urgency. What appears to be a person's symptom may turn out to be a symbol - in the context of this book, a symbol of an unconscious mission - to repair a parent or avenge a humiliation - assigned by the preceding generation. These tasks may be more or less idiosyncratic to a given family, suffering its own personal trauma, or collective in response to societal trauma. This book attempts to address this heritage of trauma - the way that the truly traumatic, that which cannot be contained by one generation, necessarily and largely unconsciously plays itself out through the next generation - and to do so both from clinical and societal perspectives. The book looks first at the legacy of the Holocaust, the study of which broke ground for the new field of transmission studies; then the analysis and enactments of trauma in more ordinary clinical practice; and finally more recent, large-scale traumatic events within American society. Throughout, the links between the "little histories" of people and families and the "big history" of a society are illuminated and taken seriously.

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