



New Trends
in Psychology

Transgenerational Trauma “Generations are Boxes Locked in Boxes”

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Abstract: Transgenerational trauma, also known as intergenerational trauma can occur biologically, socially, mentally or emotionally. We inherit a certain way of being from our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. Through our family’s experiences, we involuntarily end up repeating their choices. Sometimes we may copy their life path, for example family relationships or behaviour at work. At other times, we may copy the emotions and feelings our parents or grandparents experienced.

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1. Introduction

Transgenerationally, each of us is a product of the history of the family we belong to, the area we were born in, the culture and tradition we and our predecessors were brought up in. When we are born, we have a wealth of information inscribed in our DNA, much of which is passed on from our ancestors, both on our father’s and mother’s side.

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When the laws of love are broken, it doesn't stay that way, it must be fixed. If someone has been excluded from the family (for example because they married someone of lower status) or if a child takes over the role of parent or if the balance between giving and receiving is damaged, then someone in the next generation will first have to repair these "black holes". Often, when we look at what is happening to us now and what has happened in our family over the generations, we tend to think that we are subject to "divine punishment".

It is not a question of any punishment, it is rather a question of some injustices, errors of judgement, failings of some family members that are perpetuated until someone has enough strength to look at these things, understand them and bring them peace.

In order to repair, it is first necessary to be aware of the present problems that are weighing us down and preventing us from feeling free, creative, fulfilled. This is most often seen when the same kind of things happen to us, when we develop the same kind of relationships, when we have the same kind of reactions or have dreams and desires of the soul that, no matter how hard we try, we cannot fulfill. Also, permanent attachments to lost people or feelings such as hatred, anger, fear, guilt can be a way of remaining loyal to the principles and values of the family/culture of origin even if they no longer serve us. Sometimes it is more important to be loyal to family than to live one's own life, and this is because BELONGING, no matter what, is more secure for people than BEING FREE. Even if belonging brings us much suffering, it is often preferable because it is known to us. The novelty of being free, though perhaps healthier, is still dangerous in some ways. It's up to the individual...

Raising children is a dance of generations. Whatever has affected one generation, if not fully resolved, will be passed on to the next. Lance Morrow, journalist and writer has succinctly expressed the multigenerational nature of stress in his book, *Heart*, a painful account: "Generations are boxes locked inside boxes: inside my mother's violence you find another box, containing my grandfather's violence, and inside that box you will find another box, with a dark, secret energy - stories within stories, carving through time."

Alexandro Jodorowsky is considered a trailblazer in this current of transgenerational universe discovery.

What does "transgenerational" actually mean? It means taking into account - especially as a therapist - everything that physically, soulfully or spiritually connects us to our family, to the lineage we come from.

Where should we start?

First of all we must know how to position ourselves in this family tree and understand that this tree does not belong to the past: it is very much alive and present in each of us.

Our problems are not individual: the whole family is involved. There is a family unconscious. The father decides to start therapeutic analysis and suddenly the whole family resonates and begins to evolve. As soon as we become aware of something, the other members of the family start to become aware of it.

What happened yesterday affects our present today!

2. Family Secrets

The three conditions for the emergence of a family secret:

A secret is formed whenever something is kept hidden and when it is forbidden to find out what it might be about, or even to think that something is hidden. To these two elements of secrecy - the unspoken and the forbidden to know - is generally added a third: the family secret is related to a painful event.

As far as family secrets are concerned, the triggering event is less important than the way it is lived. "Good secrets" do not cause us inner conflict: we do not question whether or not we should share them with others. On the other hand, every time there is a conflict between the desire to keep the secret and to talk about it, it is likely to be harmful. The result is, in fact, that the child grows up with the impression that he or she is being kept away from something important and painful that has to do with his or her person. This definition includes many situations in which silence is kept about certain things, because a child tends to think he is the navel of the earth and to be convinced that what is being kept from him has something to do with him!

A common consequence of family secrets that emerge in the second generation is learning difficulties.

First, certain subjects, such as geography and mathematics, may prove problematic by the very nature of the secret if it involves knowledge of the subject. Psychological insecurity can also contribute to the aggravation of mental disorders, which, surprisingly, will boost the child's learning efforts. Finally, the child who senses that something is hidden from him or her tends to lose trust in his or her parents and, by

generalisation, in teachers or teachers, whom he or she perceives as representatives of parents. Some children react by saying that they can only learn by themselves, as autodidacts. Others lose confidence in their own abilities, especially those whose parents deny the existence of secrecy and try to convince the child that things are not as they have seen or heard them. They close themselves off.

But the main learning difficulty for children growing up in a family that carries a Secret is related to the way their curiosity and psychic energy are diverted towards elaborating the experiences their parents are dealing with, which they intuit and try to represent. In this way, they no longer use their mental energy for symbolizing their own life experiences and learning process. Some children will spend their whole lives trying to act out the images and scenarios that their suffering parents have saddled in them.

A never-ending struggle

The reason why Secrets have many days is that our desire to talk about them always conflicts with the illusion that keeping the Secret allows us to better control our environment, our “image”, and even our own or our family’s past. The tendency to keep a secret is born out of a desire for control.

Our memory is not inflexible, but dynamic, and every time we call upon it, we reinvent it, to such an extent that, in a memory, the real part cannot be distinguished from the invention. This characteristic is necessary for the slow assimilation of the past and the creation of new connections around it. We are not just talking about mourning the deceased, but also about the bonds that are created in this way between the living. And these connections generate new perspectives on the past. Therefore, the past is as much ahead of us as the future.

What is transgenerational trauma and how does it manifest itself?

Transgenerational trauma, also known as intergenerational trauma, can occur biologically, socially, mentally or emotionally. We inherit a certain way of being from our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

Through our family’s experiences, we involuntarily end up repeating their choices. Sometimes we may copy their life path, for example family relationships or behaviour at work. At other times, we may copy the emotions and feelings our parents or grandparents experienced.

The transmission of psychological content from and between family members can be twofold:

- Intergenerational transmission: i.e. between generations that know each other and are in direct, spatio-temporal contact - this is how most conscious, known, verbal contents are transmitted;
- Transgenerational transmission: i.e. between generations that are distant, especially in time, most frequently transmitted from ascendants to descendants - in this way unconscious contents, those kept secret, hidden, unknown, unformulated and even unsaid, are transacted.

For example, if your grandfather survived the war, it is possible that the fear you felt of him then will affect you. Your grandfather's fear of war may be part of the anxiety you feel today. To further understand what this trauma is, we'll recount a study about mice.

3. Case Study

Some time ago, to test the hypothesis of transgenerational trauma inheritance, an animal study was conducted. A few mice were brought into the lab for testing, and the result was astonishing.

First, the mice were exposed to a certain smell, and then given an electric shock. It was observed that these mice passed on the feeling of fear to their children and grandchildren. Even though the researchers stopped the electric shock in the second generation of mice, the children and grandchildren remained fearful. The moment they smelled that smell, the feeling of fear automatically arose.

The study concluded that humans do the same. Quite simply, emotions and feelings are passed on, generation after generation. This is because our biological drive to survive is so strong. So the transgenerational effect has a certain evolutionary meaning.

The problem arises, however, when the useful biological impulse overlaps with our daily lives. Often, events in our family's past have generated feelings that we no longer need today. So, going back to Grandpa's example, we can say that your anxiety stems from unwarranted fear. Since the war is over and we live in a time of peace, fear has no place.

Therefore, in order to heal the emotions we don't understand today, it is very important to know our family history.

Mark Wolynn in the book "Your Story Began Long Ago" said this, "What I have learned from my own experience, training and clinical practice is that the answer may not lie so much in our own story as in the stories of our parents, grandparents and even our great-grandparents. (...) Scientific research also tells us that the effects of trauma can pass from one generation to the next. (...) Pain does not always dissolve by itself or diminish with time. Even if the person who suffered the original trauma has died, even if his or her story remains submerged in years and years of silence, fragments of life experience, memory and body sensations can remain alive."

This theme is extremely deep and underdeveloped in scholarship. It is particularly important to know your family and its members. You can discover your self by getting to know your family members and the relationships between them.

Recreating events from the past in similar times in the present!

4. Anniversary Syndrome

The most common form of manifestation of the dysfunctional retrieval and elaboration of such content is represented by the anniversary syndrome: like a compulsion to repeat, the anniversary syndrome is itself a repetition, carried out at certain significant and significant dates for the family tree, of those past events that need to be brought back whenever necessary to be elaborated and integrated.

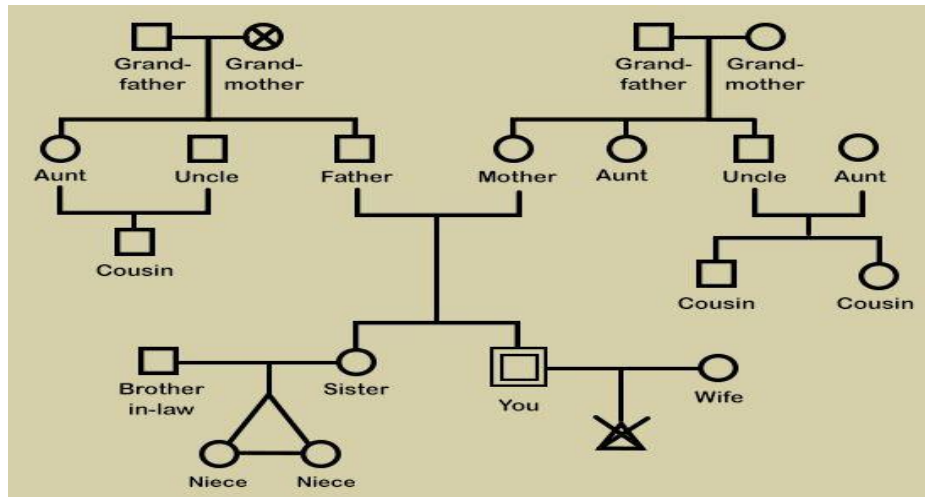
But since genealogical time takes little - if any - account of the real, objective time in which an individual or a generation lives, the repetition will not take much account of the external context either, but will manifest itself, as the case may be, through illnesses, accidents, traumas, shocks or bereavements as significant as they need to be for the family framework.

What sustains this mechanism in itself is the feeling of invisible family loyalty: each member of a family is the repository of a heritage for which he or she feels responsible, regardless of the value that is attributed to this content, transmitted and taken over alike.

Acting on the basis of identification with various elements or members of the unfinished past, the one bound in the present by the strings of loyalty will effectively be compelled to compulsively repeat this time of his ancestors, and may even

become the symptomatic member of the family - but no less the one to whom the restorative, healing potential of the tree has been assigned.

To decode the past it is necessary to draw up a genogram.



The genogram is a tool for assessing the structure and functionality of a family, a collection of information on dates of birth, marriage, divorce or death, where they lived and the various degrees of kinship of the ascendants and descendants.

There is quite a lot of work behind the genogram, since to be as accurate as possible it has to be done for at least four generations.

You can only really know yourself if you do some digging into the past and some serious documentation work. The hidden secrets of our ancestors' past influence us transgenerationally. They often weigh us down and hinder our personal and professional development.

5. Transgenerational Analysis

a) Psychogenealogy

“We are not as free as we imagine,” says Anne Ancelin Schutzenberger, “but we can conquer our freedom and break out of the repetitive destiny of our family history by understanding the complex bonds that have been woven into this framework and shedding light on the secret dramas and untold sorrows...” (“Psychogenealogy and the wounds in the family”).

Anne Ancelin Schutzenberger is a psychoanalytically trained psychotherapist and the founder of this method. She has noticed in working with her clients that there are certain patterns that recur within families.

For example, a 35 year old woman she worked with, who had cancer, and who found out that her mother also had cancer and died at the age of 35, noticed that there were repeats in her own family: she was the older of two brothers, the second of whom died, in her mother's family there were two children, the second of whom died, and in her father's family. In her turn she had two children, the second of whom died. Following the thread of these repetitions she developed a way of working called "Clinical Contextual Psychogenealogical Transgenerational Therapy", which aims to track "invisible loyalties" and repetitive unconscious identifications. Psychogenealogy is a holistic field of approaching family issues in context of the analysis of the transmission mechanisms of the family unconscious. It defines field from the intersection of systemic theory and psychoanalytic theory, taking up the idea of the family as a system and elements of family psychodynamics. Psychogenealogy is both an orientation and a clinical diagnostic method in psychology and psychotherapy developed in the 1970s by Anne Ancelin Schutzenberger. The field of psychogenealogy explores and analyses the events, traumas, secrets, conflicts experienced by ancestors and how they condition the disorders that arise in the present life context of descendants, which at first sight seem to have no logical explanation and therefore it is necessary to look for answers by referring to the inexplicable behaviours in the individual's life. On the basis of a psycho-genealogical analysis we will see how these inexplicable behaviours find their explanation by reconnecting the individual with the part of affective memory. In the affective memory, the events that have marked the life of the individual's predecessors are encoded, events whose resonance is felt in the choices that the individual makes today.

The particularity of this approach is that it takes into account the unconscious family dynamics, with effects on the individual's life scenario. Psychogenealogy proposes a reading of the family tree, highlighting the global picture of the links between family members. Through psychogenealogy we can capture the different types of loyalty to which relate to, the repetitions and transgenerational life scripts that tell us who we are in our lives in present.

According to this approach, the events, traumas, secrets, conflicts experienced by the ancestors are transmitted to the present of the analysed person and manifest themselves in various illnesses or disorders that are inexplicable to the subject.

Psychogenealogy is a therapeutic approach that has the study of family ties, dysfunctions and the place of each person in his or her family.

The specifics of the psychogenealogical approach provide relevant information about the social, somatic and psychological dimensions of each individual member of a family. Beyond the study of the position of each member in his or her family, psychogenealogy proposes a reading of family tree, thus representing the complex structure of the family and the specific way of functioning over the generations. Working with the family tree allows us to discover the place of each member and the often unconscious links that form between the family members. Birth dates, surnames, occupations, religion, rituals, roles, rehearsals, migrations, celebrations are all psychologically relevant elements discovered with the help of the socio-genogram. By understanding the history of a family, which spans several generations, we can try through the therapeutic approach to transform and give a new meaning to the events that follow one another from these generations, events that are part of what today we call the **transgenerational scenario**.

The traumas experienced by our ancestors, which were not given a meaning or an end by closing them, even symbolically, reappear over several generations in various forms, from the simplest to the most tragic, affecting our lives and destiny repeatedly.

Through the work processes, programs that are active at a transgenerational level can be approached, programs that are also found in our soul body.

b) Family constellations

Family constellations are a process of awareness through the external representation of a pattern in a member of the family system.

This awareness process was created by psychotherapist Bert Hellinger.

The method of family constellations is considered a psychogenealogical therapy, which intervenes in solving some difficult experiences, which we live in the present, but which have roots in our past or that of our family.

Family constellations do not only address a system as a whole, but also the relationships within the system, such as family, work colleagues or friends.

Much has been said about the systemic/family constellations. And their creator, Bert Hellinger, was talked about a lot and was contested by some specialists. It is certain that B. Hellinger has the merit of bringing together a multitude of psychotherapies through a method that resembles a psychodrama. It can be called a genogram created through live representatives (if it is done in a group) or through doll representatives, stones, etc. (if it is done individually). The past of an ancestor affects us and the generations to come. We take from our ancestors the talents and abilities, the physique, the profession, the way of relating, the defects, the qualities, the pains, the weaknesses, the traumas, the ability to be happy or unhappy. Awareness and breaking these patterns may not be easy to do, but I think it is absolutely necessary to be able to truly live ourselves.

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