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If I leave home, who will take care of mum?: Intergenerational transmission of parental trauma through projective identification

Using the construct of projective identification and integrating it with the body of literature on intergenerational transmission of unsymbolized parental trauma, I describe the case of an adult daughter that illustrates intergenerational transmission of unsymbolized parental trauma. It is suggested that the daughter has unconsciously identified with the disavowed feelings of anxiety projected into her by her mother. The daughter's projective identification of her mother's unresolved past traumas prevents her from

leaving the parental home for the first time, despite being 35 years old. In turn, it is thought that the mother's unconscious grasping onto her daughter is an attempt to avoid the confrontation of her own unprocessed fears implanted into her by her own mother, thus linking three generations of disavowal. As a way of extending the existing theory, it is proposed that when there are long-term and inexplicable experiences of anxiety that coalesces around the intergenerational transmission of parental trauma, the term 'intergenerational transmission of traumatic anxiety' can be used to describe it.

Biography

Zelda G. Knight Ph.D. is a graduate of Rhodes University and an experienced practicing psychotherapist as well as a Professor of Psychology at the University

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of Johannesburg. She has been a leading academic for more than two decades and has taught and supervised research for the same length of time in the field of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. She has published widely in international journals and academic books, including produced two recent edited books on psychoanalysis. She has presented numerous papers at international conferences worldwide and given several keynote addresses at such conferences.

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