

I offer this paper first in the context of the Holocaust, particularly the specific experience of one of the authors, who was a child of survivors and who replaced siblings who were murdered by the Germans. There is also an obvious parallel in the context of the cultural revolution in China, in which 30 million people lost their lives, many of them children. Furthermore, we hypothesize that many only children harbor the fantasy that they once had siblings who died in the womb while they survived, and so experience themselves as replacement children, cf Arlow. China since 1978 has been a nation of only children; if this hypothesis is correct, on a deep psychological level it has become a nation of replacement children, as well. Obviously if a child in a one-child family dies, one would expect there to be considerable effort to replace the lost child, if that is biologically possible.

Finally, I would like to add a personal note. My first name, Arnold, was “purchased” for \$50 from my mother by two spinster sisters, who wanted a replacement for their brother Aaron. My middle name, David, was the name of my father’s younger brother. Petlura’s White Russian bandits came to my father’s town looking for my father, who was a Bolshevik and the librarian for a unit of Trotsky’s Red Army. They mistook my uncle for my father because he was wearing my father’s hat, and killed him.

## **The Replacement Child: Variations on a Theme in History and Psychoanalysis**

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In this paper I review the literature on the replacement child syndrome and examine its historical, theoretical, and biographical ramifications. Although a replacement child in a literal sense is one conceived to take the place of a deceased sibling, the concept may be extended to many other situations in which a child is put in the place of someone else in the family system. In his experience of survivor guilt for his deceased brother Julius, Freud may be regarded as such a metaphorical replacement child. The collective tragedy of the Holocaust gives the replacement child concept a special meaning, since the children born in its aftermath had to fill the void in the lives not only of individual parents, but of the Jewish people as a whole. One of the coauthors of this paper, Leon Anisfeld, was born after World War II to parents who had lost previous spouses and children, and his personal experience as a replacement child informs the theoretical issues considered here.

Our investigation will proceed along three converging paths: (1) a brief reflection on Freud's life and work and the importance of his own experience as a replacement child; (2) an examination of the theme of the replacement child as it occurs in more or less typical contexts; and (3) a meditation on the Holocaust as a collective tragedy that defies comprehension, against the backdrop of which the issues of survival and replacement take on their most urgent meaning. What we continually find is that an insight that confronts us in any one of these three contexts also lies in wait in each of the other two, and it is this cumulative convergence of perspectives that affords us the closest approximation to understanding.

The theme of survivor guilt inheres in the very origins of psychoanalysis. In his letter to Wilhelm Fliess on October 3, 1897, Freud declares that he greeted the birth of his brother Julius “with adverse wishes and genuine childhood jealousy,” and that Julius' s death, when he himself was less than two years of age, left the “germ of reproaches” in him. He adds that his relationships to Julius and to his half-nephew John, who was his elder by a year, “have determined what is neurotic, but also what is intense, in all my friendships” (Masson, 1985, p. 268).

Although even in psychoanalytic writing it is relatively rare for authors to acknowledge the subjective motivations that inform their work, we cannot avoid doing so here. For one of us (L.A.) is a replacement child, born in 1948 in a D.P. camp outside Berlin to parents who had both been previously married to other spouses, with whom they had had children. His sister, Ina, was born two years later in Munich, where his parents had gone to search for their families of origin. All had been murdered by the Nazis—his parents' parents and fourteen of their children, seven in each family.

In Munich his parents also looked for the families of their first marriages. His mother's first husband, a gentile, was taken away and killed by the Nazis. Their eleven-month-old daughter died of starvation as his mother fled across the Polish countryside. His father' s first wife died in a concentration camp, as did their two daughters, both approximately six years of age. Anisfeld is not certain of their ages because, as so often happens with Holocaust survivors, the matter was not discussed as he was growing up in New Jersey. What is more, his father was fifty years old when he was born while his mother was thirty. The author' s father died of a coronary when the author was eleven, in large measure, he believes, because of the horrors of the war and the losses his father suffered during the Holocaust.

Thus, he is a replacement child, and both of us, like Jews everywhere, have struggled to come to terms with the legacy of the defining traumatic event of the twentieth century. In this spirit, we offer this paper as a contribution to a collective act of self-reflection, in the hope that it will inspire readers to bring their own subjectivity to bear as one or another aspect of our discussion resonates with their experience.

In addition to the definition in the narrowest sense of a replacement child as a child born to parents who have experienced the death of a child and then conceived a second child in order to fill the void left by the loss of the first, other situations may show a similar configuration, as when one sibling dies at an early age and another must fulfill the expectations the parents had previously invested in their deceased offspring. Or a couple unable to conceive may adopt a child, who then has to take the place of the biological child who never was, with all the parents' attendant fantasies. In yet another permutation, a child has a severe mental or physical handicap; and whether he or she is reared in the family or institutionalized, the other siblings will inevitably be affected by the demands of their “special” brother or sister. As Bergmann and Wolfe (1971) observe, “Just as the sick child wondered ‘why did it happen to me?’, many of the healthy children wondered ‘why did it not happen to

me?', or even, 'can it happen to me?'" (p. 146). Parental anxiety typically takes one of two forms, both of which inflict damaging consequences: "The parents are either preoccupied with the sick child and in this way arouse in the healthy child depressing feelings of being neglected and slighted, or they concentrate on the healthy child, pushing him to succeed and forcing him to strive for achievements, so that he might compensate for the inability of the sick child and so alleviate the parents' feeling of failure and defeat." (p. 146)

As Wolfe and Bergmann make clear, even when a child does not literally die, the healthy sibling may have to cope with survivor guilt and thus be a replacement child. The psychological dynamics of parents who have themselves survived the trauma of the real or symbolic death of a child mediate between the sick or deceased child and the sibling who is his or her surrogate. In the most far-reaching extension of the concept, Jacob Arlow (1972) has proposed that even an only child experiences sibling rivalry and survivor guilt because "the only child blames himself for the fact that there were no other children" (p. 533). As Arlow contends, "What is striking about the 'survivor guilt' of only children is that it appears whether or not there has actually been a sibling who died before or after the birth of the only child" (p. 514).

From this standpoint, there is no great difference between being an only child and a replacement child since the only child regularly entertains the fantasy that "while he was in his mother's womb, he eliminated his rivals by devouring them in one way or another" (p. 516). The only child thus holds himself responsible for his status and comes to believe that "the power of his wishes has denied life to an unspecified number of potential children" (p. 516), from whom he then, by the law of talion, fears retribution.

As this series of examples suggests, the replacement child in a narrow sense forms part of a continuum in which the extreme case metamorphoses into one that is normal and even universal. As Arlow remarks, every first child was for a time an only child, and many youngest children—especially if widely separated in age from their predecessors—may entertain a similar fantasy: "The early attitudes of the oldest child, formed during the period when he was an only child, are overlaid with the subsequent conflict connected with the birth of a younger sibling" (p. 513).

In the Ashkenazi tradition, it is customary to name a child after a deceased person, thus making him or her a replacement not only of another sibling but of the ancestor whose name has been bestowed as well.<sup>3</sup> One of us (L.A.) is named after his mother's beloved younger brother, while his sister was named after their mother's mother, who was regarded more ambivalently. Each of these names carried its own emotional freight and had a great deal to do with how the two of them were treated in childhood. But a child born to Holocaust survivors replaces not simply a specific dead child or ancestor but all those who have perished. As Bergmann and Jucovy (1982) remind us, on Israel's annual day of commemoration, "the children participate in the mourning ritual and replace for their parents the generation that perished" (p. 24). Such collective rituals of mourning hold out hope for the future for the Jewish people, but

they likewise underscore the incalculable magnitude of the loss. It might be said that the state of Israel itself is a replacement child for the entire civilization that was destroyed in the Holocaust

In a clinical paper dealing with the fantasies of children who take the place of deceased siblings, Vamik Volkan (1997) introduces the concept of deposit representations, a form of Klein's projective identification. In Volkan's words, "This concept refers to a type of intergenerational transmission where a parent or other important individual deposits into a child's developing self-representation a preformed self-or object-representation that comes from the older individual's mind" (p. 89). A precondition for the development of the intrapsychic structures characteristic of the replacement child, according to Volkan, is "the permeability between the psychic boundaries of the very young child and his mother, which allows the 'various psychic contents' to pass from one to the other's self-representation" (p. 92).

Volkan's formulation provides a theoretical framework for the observations of Wolfe and Bergmann about how the psychological dynamics of parents intervene between an incapacitated or deceased child and the sibling who is the latter's surrogate. Masud Khan (1963) has elucidated the mother's function as a protective shield against trauma for the infant. Because a depressed mother is often unable to perform this task successfully, this leads to what Khan calls a "cumulative trauma" in the child.

In the Holocaust context, the way the deceased child functions as an intermediary between the parent and the replacement child is illustrated by the experience of Anisfeld, who as a child was reminded of his father's lost children, not because they were ever spoken about, but because of his father's periodic "absences" or dream-like escapes from the present into the past. These fugue states of his father became Anisfeld's psychic reality. That his half-sisters were never spoken about left more room for him to fantasize about his father's relationship to these daughters. But rather than reducing the pressure to live up to the memory of these idealized first children—which is bad enough even in non-Holocaust families with replacement children, where the dead child is often talked about continuously—this intensified it, since Anisfeld and his sister felt as though they were saving an entire generation of people who were dead. Although his mother initially did not speak about her baby daughter who had starved to death, she eventually recounted this story. In contrast to his father, whom Anisfeld imagines gazing into the void and waiting to rejoin the children who were still present to his mind's eye, his mother loved all the people she had lost—but also succeeded in loving her new children for who they were in their own right. How she managed not simply to survive but to bring Anisfeld and his sister into the world and make it possible for them to live fully remains for him a mystery as incomprehensible as the tragedy of the Holocaust.

More than oedipal dynamics are involved in the case of the children of Holocaust survivors, for, as Bergmann and Jucovy have shown, the fantasy is transmitted across the generations that "the child has a special mission: his or her life goals are to be

directed at restoring family pride by personal achievement, in order to heal past injuries” (1982, p. 288).

A key factor contributing to the ambivalent feelings of specialness in replacement children is the overprotectiveness often displayed by their parents, who hold themselves responsible for the deaths of their previous offspring. Bergmann and Jucovy report that the replacement children of Holocaust survivors “were often passionately protected; and when they became ill or were even mildly injured, the response of the parent was often more intense than in an average family or even in one where a child had died from illness or accident” (p. 12). This either leads to spoiling the replacement child or makes him or her vulnerable and dependent, or both.

The consequences of extreme overprotectiveness can, of course, also be pathological in replacement children of parents who have nothing to do with the Holocaust. In one of the first and still most illuminating papers on this topic, Albert and Barbara Cain (1964) remark that “the mother's normal or, in some cases, initially abnormal phobic concerns over illness and accidents were much magnified. She carried the constant panic-laden fantasy of this child, too, dying” (p. 447). In four of the six cases of “substitute children” they studied, Cain and Cain found that “the child had been very closely tied to the mother—the world was much too dangerous a place for the child to move freely and explore. He must stay nearby, lest ‘something’ happen.” Not surprisingly, the results of such an upbringing were “infantile, immature, home-bound children, with strong passive-dependent elements and widespread ego restrictions” (p. 449).

Valuable support for the Cains’ conclusions is provided by the Hungarian analyst Terez Virag (1984). Although Virag's concern is with the transgenerational transmission of trauma among Holocaust survivors, her material bears on the replacement child syndrome. In the case of Paul, a phobic boy brought to treatment by his mother because he resisted going to kindergarten, Virag reports that on one occasion he received an electric shock from a lamp, following which his mother grabbed him and dashed from the room. The salient feature in the family's history is that the mother, born in 1948, sought to keep secret from Paul the fact of her Jewish origin and that her own mother had been deported with her parents to Auschwitz, where the latter had been gassed. Paul's mother, who had several accidents involving gas poisoning and explosion in her life, was acutely sensitive to the danger of death from electricity, as she knew that the fence around the concentration camp was electrically charged. Thus, in this case of a grandchild of the Holocaust, as well as in others studies by Virag, “unconscious identification with the persecuted or exterminated members of the family was clearly observable—the more strikingly when the parents never talked about their Jewish origins with their children.” She continues: “The symptoms, the play activity, the dreams, and fantasies of the children made it very clear that they knew about the family ‘secrets’” (p. 58).

Virag's narrative exemplifies Volkan's concept of deposit representations, though it must remain an open question whether the boy knew of his mother's anxieties about electricity before the incident in which he received the shock or whether it took on its

cathexis (Strachey's translation of *Besetzung*, one definition of which is an electrical charge) of trauma only after witnessing his mother's horrified reaction. In any event, Virag's vignette bears out Cain and Cain's emphasis on the tendency even of non-Holocaust parents to magnify "phobic concerns over illness and accidents" that seem to threaten their replacement children. What is more, the mothers' proclivity to inhibit their children's natural desire to explore the world lest disaster strike is exemplified in Virag's report by the fact that the grandmother had "tied the daughter to herself in an extreme manner, insisting, for instance, that they take baths in the same tub even after the daughter had passed adolescence" (p. 52). As she elaborates, "the mother becomes unable to detach her child from herself as gently as she should for she knows that the external world is more likely to destroy than to nurture the child" (p. 57). Little Paul's kindergarten phobia thus becomes comprehensible as the third-generational outcome of a dynamic in the family system, in which his inhibition symbolizes the anxiety transmitted from his grandmother, the Auschwitz survivor, to his mother, for whom, tragically, this legacy was a shameful secret.

The behavior of Paul's mother, although contaminated by the factor of Jewish self-hatred, raises the question of the attitude of the children of Holocaust survivors toward their parents. Such a child—whether or not literally a replacement—inevitably has an image of parents who were weak or humiliated, although this may be counterbalanced by a view of them as heroes for having survived the concentration-camp ordeal. In its negative aspect, the need for a child of Holocaust survivors to come to terms with the realization that his or her parents—far from being omnipotent—were actually powerless can be regarded as the cultural culmination of the famous incident, reported by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which his father told him how, in his youth, an anti-Semite had knocked his cap off his head and ordered him to get off the pavement. Upon learning that his father had meekly picked up his cap, Freud was fired with indignation at his "unheroic" conduct and consolidated his own identification with the vengeful Hannibal.

In his own childhood, Anisfeld looked upon his parents as heroes for what they had been through and upon his half-siblings as martyrs. At the same time, he recalls an anecdote that strikingly parallels that in the life of Freud. As a boy of seven years old, he began attending a primarily non-Jewish—indeed, anti-Jewish—school in southern New Jersey, where his recently immigrated parents had bought a chicken farm. During one of his first days at this new school, another child jumped on Anisfeld, bit a chunk out of his back, and called him a "dirty Jew."

In retaliation, he knocked out the attacker's two front teeth. When he came home, he told his parents what had happened; the next day his father accompanied him to the school and confronted the principal. The principal tried to make light of the incident, but his father would not let him do so. Anisfeld felt proud of him, but at a deeper level it wasn't enough. He wished that his father too had beaten up whoever was responsible for what happened—the principal, the child's father, anyone! Anisfeld's father—who as a Holocaust survivor knew what anti-Semitism really meant—behaved with

irreproachable dignity under the circumstances; but the boy, in the grip of his own inner world of fantasy, experienced a bitter feeling of disillusionment.

The last set of issues to be explored can be classified under the dual heading of incomplete mourning and identity disturbance. Since a replacement child in the strict sense is one who has been conceived in order to take the place of another child who has died, the first child has not been properly mourned—or even thought of as genuinely existing at all. Rather, in the parents' fantasy, he or she has been magically restored to life by the birth of the second. As C. Legg and I. Sherik (1976) point out, the premature replacement of a dead child by a new one may interrupt, distort, and delay the mourning process but cannot resolve it even though the expectations once held for the dead child are now transferred to a new one. They caution that in order for such a child to have a possibility of becoming a person in his own right, there should be an appropriate lapse of time between the death and either conception or the start of adoption proceedings for a new child. Along the same lines, Cain and Cain conclude that parents of replacement children exhibit a “distortion of the mourning process, a pseudo resolution of mourning” (1964, p. 452), beginning with the failure to accept the reality of their initial object loss. If there has been only a “pseudo resolution of mourning,” the child who has been put in the place of someone else will necessarily have only a “pseudo identity.” Cain and Cain observe that the parents of replacement children “compelled them to be like their dead siblings, to be identical with them, yet made it clear that they would never be accepted as ‘the same,’ and could never be really as good” (1964, p. 451).

The luxury of having time to wait was not available to Holocaust survivors. Having just emerged from a shattered and depopulated world, Jews both as individuals and as a group felt a great urgency to marry and have children as soon as possible. Each new child born in the D.P. camps was viewed as a phoenix rising from the ashes and celebrated as a “victory over Hitler.” At the same time, the impossibility of adequately mourning everyone and everything that had been lost frequently gave rise to identity disturbances in the children of the postwar generation. Anisfeld idealized his parents as heroes and his perished half-siblings as martyrs, but what were he and his sister? He could not escape the thought that they were opportunists. He could never be certain that he was loved for who he was or for the genuineness of his achievements. When he performed an action from which he reaped a reward at someone else's expense, he was convinced that he had initiated it; if his deeds were in any way altruistic, he doubted their sincerity. He believed that he should have been able to do the impossible and save the lives of his half-sisters even though he had not yet been born. This grandiose fantasy paradoxically made him scorn his actual accomplishments as worthless and even led him to be taken advantage of by others for their own glorification. Being unable to save the lives of his half-sisters led him, he believes, to treat his sister, Ina, in a manner that would not reveal to his murdered half-siblings that he loved Ina but not them. “I am sure” says Anisfeld, “that writing this paper is motivated in large part by my need to apologize to my sister Ina.”

The literary and clinical dimensions of the replacement-child phenomenon have been probed in a richly suggestive paper by Andrea Sabbadini (1988). For Sabbadini, the key issue is that of dissociative ego processes, or what Freud (1919) described as the uncanny. As Sabbadini observes, the replacement or substitute child “is treated more as the embodiment of a memory than as a person in its own right” (p. 530).

This takes us to a motif regularly found in replacement children and those afflicted with survivor guilt. It is summed up in the title of Maurice Apprey's 1987 paper, “When One Dies Another One Lives.” This is, of course, the law of talion that is so often revealed in the unconscious thoughts and fantasies of those whose very survival was and continues to this day to be ruled by an unconscious sense of guilt. If someone else had to die so that I could live, I must have caused that person's death, and I will then be haunted by the ghost of the rival I have slain, who becomes my double. As in the case of the oedipal victor, triumph and guilt are inextricably fused. Indeed, this is precisely what it means to be a survivor—to be forced to wonder why fate took someone else's life instead of one's own. As Magda Schoenfeld, born in Hungary after World War II to a mother who had lost all her family in the camps, told Anisfeld in an interview, her mother never ceased to lament: “Why did she have to live when the others had died? Why couldn't she die too? Why did she have to go on? Why did she have to live to carry on their memory?”

Symmetries and repetitions are regular features of the replacement-child syndrome. A truly uncanny example is provided by Vincent van Gogh (Nagera 1967). His brother, Vincent Willem van Gogh, was a still-born baby; one year later to the day, the artist was born and given exactly the same name (including Willem) as his brother. What is more, he was inscribed in the parish register under the same number as his brother had been a year earlier—that is, 29—and he later committed suicide on July 29, a few months after the birth of yet another Vincent, his brother Theo's child.

In a series of influential papers, George Pollock (1970) has studied the dynamics of mourning and anniversary reactions. In his view, “anniversary reactions result from unfinished or abnormal mourning, usually from childhood. With the resumption and resolution of mourning in the therapeutic situation, anniversary phenomena disappear permanently, leaving memories devoid of conflict” (p. 480). If anniversary reactions are the symptoms of incomplete mourning, what appears to be coincidence in the suicide of van Gogh can be seen as a psychologically motivated expression of emotional conflicts dating back to before his birth.

What is more, according to Pollock, in the case of replacement children “the dead sibling usually remains remembered at the age he was at the time of his death, and hence there is some arrest of the image in the minds of the survivors” (p. 478). That the image of the dead sibling—or anyone who is incompletely mourned—tends to be introjected at the age he or she was at the time of death Pollock has coined the term “double coincidence” to describe how the “temporal triggers” of anniversary reactions can reinforce each other (p. 347), as when a man arrives at the age that his father was at death while the man's son is now the age that he was at that time. Pollock contrasts

replacement with succession: “In succession we have progression, differentiation, and further development; in replacement we have the wish to keep time and events as they are or once were” (p. 353). Unfortunately, even when the analyst possesses theoretical understanding and seemingly inexhaustible patience, the wounds of trauma may be too deep for this transformation to be possible.

At the conclusion of his chapter “World Beyond Metaphor” in *Generations of the Holocaust*, James Herzog writes:

Elie Wiesel has repeatedly stated that survivors of the Holocaust live in a nightmare world that can never be understood. Although his opinion has its stark and bitter truth, we believe that the nightmare can be dispelled; that, through words, analysis can penetrate the shadowy inner world of the patient, which operates in metaphor, and, by illuminating it, diminish pain, and heal. Furthermore, analysis can demonstrate how the tragedy of one generation may be transmitted to the next, and then break the chain of suffering. Then survivors, children of survivors, and their children can remember, but not relive, and concentrate on the difficult task of being (1982, p. 119).

This passage eloquently expresses the dilemma with which we have struggled in this paper—the conflict between despair stemming from our participation in the legacy of the Holocaust and hope engendered by our belief in the curative powers of analysis. Wiesel's pessimistic attitude is echoed even more insistently by Claude Lanzmann, whose eleven years devoted to the making of *Shoah* were guided by the conviction that, in his words, “there is an absolute obscenity in the very project of understanding” the Holocaust (1991, p. 478). Much as we admire Lanzmann's achievement as an artist, however, we share with Herzog a faith that this cannot be the last word. As Harold Bloom (1991) has put it, “Freud's peculiar strength was to say what could not be said, or at least to attempt to say it, thus refusing to be silent in the face of the unsayable” (p. 135). As adherents of analysis, we refuse to be silent in the face of the unsayable, even when that unsayable thing is the horror of the Holocaust.

Whether or not one is literally a replacement child, there will always be what Selma Fraiberg and her colleagues have called “ghosts in the nursery” (1975) whenever there is a personal or collective history of suffering. But unless the agonizing experiences that called these ghosts of the past into being can be recalled, and at least imperfectly communicated through the resources of language and art, they will remain unsaid and unclaimed forever.

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