

Suspect Survival:  
Matrophobia in Postmemory Generational Writing

ELIZABETH KELLA  
Södertörn University, Sweden

**Abstract**

Family and kinship carry special significance to Holocaust survivors and their descendants. In autobiographies and family memoirs, writers of what Marianne Hirsch terms the postmemory generation employ different narrative strategies for coming to terms with the ways in which the Holocaust has marked their identities and family ties. This article focuses on women's writing of the postmemory generation, examining three works in English by daughters of survivors in the UK, the US, and Canada, written during the 1990s. It investigates the narrative strategies used by Anne Karpf, Helen Fremont, and Lisa Appignanesi to represent maternal sexual agency and vulnerability in a survival context. It suggests that these representations are strongly influenced by matrophobia and matrophilia, defined as the conflicting dread of becoming and desire to be one's mother, which are themselves strongly conditioned by Holocaust history, particularly the gendered history of vulnerability among women in open hiding during the war.<sup>1</sup>

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Among Holocaust survivors and their descendants, family and kinship frequently carry special significance. As Anne Karpf, daughter of an Auschwitz survivor, notes, "Most survivor families are highly sensitive to the rupture of the family line and find different ways of trying to come to terms with it" ("Chain" 96). Karpf primarily refers to psychological and social mechanisms for coping, but it is also possible to observe that writers of what Marianne Hirsch terms the postmemory generation employ different narrative strategies in their efforts to come to terms with