

Projection and Transference

TRANSFERENCE

Transference is a phenomenon in psychology characterized by unconscious redirection of feelings of one person to another. For instance, one could mistrust somebody who resembles an ex-spouse in manners, voice or external appearance; or be overly compliant to someone who resembles a childhood friend.

In a therapy context, transference refers to redirection of a client's feelings from a significant person to a therapist. Counter-transference is defined as redirection of a therapist's feelings toward a client, or more generally as a therapist's emotional entanglement with a client.

Transference was first described by Freud, who acknowledged its importance for psychoanalysis for better understanding of the patient's feelings. Transference is often manifested as an erotic attraction towards a therapist. It's also common for people to transfer feelings from their parents to their partners (emotional incest) or to children (cross- generational entanglements).

Although transference is often characterized as a useful tool for building trust between a client and a therapist, transference can also interfere with a therapist's ability to help a client. Some therapists become confused between clients and intimate partners.

In *The Psychology of the Transference*, Carl Jung states that within the transference dyad both participants typically experience a variety of opposites, that in love and in psychological growth, the key to success is the ability to endure the tension of the opposites without abandoning the process, and that this tension allows one to grow and to transform.

Transference is common. Only in a personally or socially harmful context can transference be described as a pathological issue. There is, however, an experimental new theory of transference known as AMT (Abusive Multiple Transference), put forth by David W. Bernstein, in which the abuser not only transfers negative feelings directed towards their abuser to the victim, but also transfers the power and dominance of their own abuser to themselves.

This kind of transference is sometimes part of the psychological makeup of murderers -- for example the serial killer Carroll Cole. While his father was away in WWII, Cole's mother engaged in several extra-marital affairs, forcing Cole to watch, and later beat him to ensure that he would not alert his father. Cole would later come to murder many women whom he considered "loose", and those in general who reminded him of his mother. AMT also ties in very closely with Power/Control Killers, as the feeling and view of control is passed from one abuser to those preceding him or her.

PROJECTION

Psychological projection (or projection bias) is a defense mechanism in which one attributes ("projects") to others, one's own unacceptable or unwanted thoughts or/and emotions.

Projection reduces anxiety by allowing the expression of the unwanted subconscious impulses/desires without letting the ego recognize them. The theory was developed by Sigmund Freud and further refined by his daughter Anna Freud.

According to the theories of Sigmund Freud, it is a psychological defense mechanism whereby one "projects" one's own undesirable thoughts, motivations, desires, feelings basically parts of oneself onto someone else (usually another person, but psychological projection onto animals, inanimate objects - even religious constructs - also occurs). The principle of projection is well- established in psychology.

To understand the process, imagine an individual (Alice, for example) who feels dislike for another person (let's say Bob), but whose unconscious mind will not allow her to become aware of this negative emotion. Instead of admitting to herself that she feels dislike for Bob, she projects her dislike onto Bob, so that her conscious thought is not "I don't like Bob," but "Bob doesn't like me." In this way one can see that projection is related to denial, the only defense mechanism that some argue is more primitive than projection. Alice has denied a part of herself that is desperate to come to the surface. She can't flatly admit that she doesn't like Bob, so instead she will project the dislike, thinking Bob doesn't like her. Another, and an ironic, example is if Alice were to say, "Bob seems to project his feelings onto me."

Peter Gay describes it as "the operation of expelling feelings or wishes the individual finds wholly unacceptable too shameful, too obscene, too dangerous by attributing them to another." (Freud: A Life for Our Time, page 281)

The concept was anticipated by Friedrich Nietzsche:

"He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you."

Beyond Good and Evil

The philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach based his theory of religion in large part upon the idea of projection, i.e., the idea that an anthropomorphic deity is the outward projection of man's anxieties and desires.

Psychological projection is the subject of Robert Bly's book *A Little Book on the Human Shadow*. The "Shadow" a term used in Jungian psychology to describe a variety of psychological projection refers to the projected material.

Counter-Projection

When addressing psychological trauma the defense mechanism is sometimes counter projection, including an obsession to continue and remain in a recurring trauma-causing situation and the compulsive obsession with the perceived perpetrator of the trauma or its projection.

Jung writes that "All projections provoke counter-projection when the object is unconscious of the quality projected upon it by the subject."

Common Definitions

- "Projection is the opposite defense mechanism to identification. We project our own unpleasant feelings onto someone else and blame them for having thoughts that we really have."
- "A defense mechanism in which the individual attributes to other people impulses and traits that he himself has but cannot accept. It is especially likely to occur when the person lacks insight into his own impulses and traits."
- "Attributing one's own undesirable traits to other people or agencies, e.g. a man who has promiscuous impulses attributes those impulses to others."
- "The individual perceives in others the motive he denies having himself. Thus the cheat is sure that everyone else is dishonest."
- "A man harboring attractions for a woman would perceive other men as having the same attractions for her."
- "People attribute their own undesirable traits onto others. An individual who unconsciously harbors his or her aggressive/sexual tendencies may then imagine other people acting in an excessively aggressive or sexual way."
- "An individual who possesses malicious characteristics, but who is unwilling to perceive himself as an antagonist, convinces himself that his opponent feels and would act the same way."

In Psychopathology

Projection is an especially commonly used defense mechanism in people with certain personality disorders:

- Paranoid personality disorder
- Narcissistic personality disorder
- Antisocial personality disorder
- Psychopathy