

## **The Therapeutic Relationship and Projection**

The therapeutic relationship, or therapeutic alliance, is the relationship between a counsellor or therapist and a client. Research has shown that the therapeutic relationship is one of the most important aspects of successful recovery from an addiction. It is even more important than the therapeutic approach that the therapist uses. However, matching clients and therapists is a difficult process, and usually a good match occurs by luck rather than judgment.

Important characteristics of a good therapeutic relationship include:

- **Trust** - the client needs to trust the therapist, and the therapist needs to trust the client, although building trust may take time.
- **Rapport** - the client needs to be able to talk openly and honestly, and the therapist needs to be able to listen without judgment.
- **Collaboration** - the therapist and the client must work as a team to develop mutual understanding, and to set and follow through on goals.

A therapeutic relationship should never involve:

- **Sexual contact** - even if the client "makes the first move," a sexual relationship between a client and a therapist is never acceptable.
- **Abuse** - neither the client nor the therapist should ever engage in abuse of any kind, whether verbal, physical or emotional.
- **Prejudice** - neither the client nor the therapist should ever use racist or sexist language or behaviour, or express any prejudice based on characteristics such as religion, background, sexuality, marital status or other personal characteristics.

Carl Rogers's book *Counselling and Psychotherapy*, published in 1942 discusses the "therapeutic relationship" between the client (patient) and the therapist and centres on what he describes as the directive versus the non directive approach. Rogers goes on to discuss his findings that empathy plays a crucial role in the therapeutic relationship.

## **Projection**

Projection means the expulsion of a subjective content into an object; it is the opposite of introjection. Accordingly, it is a process of dissimulation, by which a subjective content becomes alienated from the subject and is, so to speak, embodied in the object. The subject gets rid of painful, incompatible contents by projecting them. It is possible to project certain characteristics onto another person who does not possess them at all, but the one being projected upon may unconsciously encourage it. We find a situation too difficult to deal with or a feeling too hard to express and project that feeling onto another person as a way of dealing with these emotions.

Psychological projection or projection bias is a psychological defense mechanism where a person unconsciously denies their own attributes, thoughts, and emotions, which are then ascribed to the outside world, such as to the weather, or to other people., involving imagining or projecting that others have those feelings. The theory was developed by Sigmund Freud and further refined by his daughter Anna Freud; for this reason, it is sometimes referred to as Freudian Projection. Projection can be relatively benign - such as in attributing one's own likes, dislikes, opinions, beliefs or feelings to another person. Projection can become malignant when it involves attribution of one's own actions, words, blame, fault, hatred, liability or flawed character onto another.

Projection can be conscious - where the perpetrator knows they are deliberately deflecting blame or liability onto another person. Projection can also be subconscious - where the perpetrator is unaware that they are distorting or dissociating the facts. Projection can simply be a result of 'Blaming' - where blame or responsibility for a problem is conveniently attributed to another person. It's extremely difficult to prove if a person believes their own statements of projection. No matter whether the projection is conscious or subconscious, it can inflict a great deal of hurt, confusion, fear and loss of self esteem for its subjects. But whenever someone is falsely accused, slandered or held in disrepute, great harm can be done to a person's relationships, self confidence and sense of well-being. Acts of projection commonly result in defensiveness, indignation, annoyance, argument or even retribution and retaliation on the part of subjects or victims.

### **Examples of Projection:**

- A mother assumes that her children only like the same food that she likes.
- An abusive father hits his children, but blames his teenage son for the bruises.
- A wife empties the joint checking account and accuses her husband of wasting resources.
- A mother who is embarrassed about her weight problem repeatedly calls her eldest daughter "fat".

### **References**

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