

# Transference

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**Transference** ([German](#): *Übertragung*) is a theoretical phenomenon characterized by unconscious redirection (projection) of the feelings a person has about their parents, as one example, on to the therapist. It usually concerns feelings from a primary relationship during childhood. At times, this projection can be considered inappropriate.<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> Transference was first described by [Sigmund Freud](#), the founder of [psychoanalysis](#), who considered it an important part of psychoanalytic treatment.

## Occurrence

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It is common for people to transfer feelings about their parents to their partners or children (that is, cross-generational entanglements). 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 *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.<sup>[4]</sup>

Only in a personally or socially harmful context can transference be described as a pathological issue. A modern, social-cognitive perspective on transference explains how it can occur in everyday life. When people meet a new person who reminds them of someone else, they unconsciously infer that the new person has traits similar to the person previously known.<sup>[5]</sup> This perspective has generated a wealth of research that illuminated how people tend to repeat relationship patterns from the past in the present.

High-profile serial killers often transfer unresolved rage toward previous love or hate-objects onto "surrogates", or individuals resembling or otherwise calling to mind the original object of that hate. It is believed in the instance of [Ted Bundy](#), he repeatedly killed brunette women who reminded him of a previous girlfriend with whom he had become infatuated, but who had ended the relationship, leaving Bundy rejected and pathologically rageful (Bundy, however, denied this as a motivating factor in his crimes).<sup>[6]</sup> This notwithstanding, Bundy's behavior could

be considered pathological insofar as he may have had [narcissistic](#) or [antisocial personality disorder](#).<sup>[7]</sup> If so, normal transference mechanisms cannot be held causative of his homicidal behavior.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

[Sigmund Freud](#) held that transference plays a large role in male homosexuality. In *The Ego and the Id*, he claimed that eroticism between males can be an outcome of a "[psychically] non-economic" hostility, which is unconsciously subverted into love and sexual attraction.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Transference and countertransference during psychotherapy

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In a therapy context, transference refers to redirection of a patient's feelings for a significant person to the therapist. Transference is often manifested as an erotic attraction towards a therapist, but can be seen in many other forms such as rage, hatred, mistrust, [parentification](#), extreme dependence, or even placing the therapist in a god-like or guru status. When Freud initially encountered transference in his therapy with patients, he thought he was encountering patient resistance, as he recognized the phenomenon when a patient refused to participate in a session of [free association](#). But what he learned was that the analysis of the transference was actually the work that needed to be done: "the transference, which, whether affectionate or hostile, seemed in every case to constitute the greatest threat to the treatment, becomes its best tool".<sup>[9]</sup> The focus in [psychodynamic psychotherapy](#) is, in large part, the therapist and patient recognizing the transference relationship and exploring the relationship's meaning. Since the transference between patient and therapist happens on an unconscious level, psychodynamic therapists who are largely concerned with a patient's unconscious material use the transference to reveal unresolved conflicts patients have with childhood figures.

[Countertransference](#)<sup>[10]</sup> is defined as redirection of a therapist's feelings toward a patient, or more generally, as a therapist's emotional entanglement with a patient. A therapist's attunement to their own countertransference is nearly as critical as understanding the transference. Not only does this help therapists regulate their emotions in the [therapeutic relationship](#), but it also gives therapists valuable insight into what patients are attempting to elicit in them. For example, a therapist who is sexually attracted to a patient must understand the countertransference aspect (if any) of the attraction, and look at how the patient might be eliciting this attraction. Once any countertransference aspect has been identified, the therapist can ask the patient what his or her feelings are toward the therapist, and can explore how those feelings relate to unconscious motivations, desires, or fears.

Another contrasting perspective on transference and countertransference is offered in [classical Adlerian psychotherapy](#). Rather than using the patient's transference strategically in therapy, the positive or [negative transference](#) is diplomatically pointed out and explained as an obstacle to cooperation and improvement. For the therapist, any signs of countertransference would suggest that his or her own personal [training analysis](#) needs to be continued to overcome these tendencies. Andrea Celenza noted in 2010 that "the use of the analyst's countertransference remains a point of controversy".<sup>[11]</sup>

## See also

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- [Acting in](#)
- [Body-centred countertransference](#)
- [Demand \(psychoanalysis\)](#)
- [Displacement \(psychology\)](#)
- [Infatuation § In transference](#)
- [Parallel process](#)
- [Parataxic distortion](#)
- [Projective identification](#)
- [Psychological projection](#)
- [Repetition compulsion](#)
- [Transference neurosis](#)
- [Working through](#)

## Notes

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1. <sup>^</sup> [Kapelowitz, Leonard H. \(1987\). \*To Love and To Work/A Demonstration and Discussion of Psychotherapy\*. p. 66.](#)
2. <sup>^</sup> [Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary \(8th ed. 1976\).](#)
3. <sup>^</sup> [Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language \(2nd College Ed. 1970\).](#)
4. <sup>^</sup> [Jung, Carl C. \*The Psychology of the Transference\*, Princeton University Press, \[ISBN 0-691-01752-2\]\(#\)](#)
5. <sup>^</sup> [Andersen, S. M. & Berk., M. \(1998\). The social-cognitive model of transference: Experiencing past relationships in the present. \*Current Directions in Psychological Science\*, 7\(4\), 109-115.](#)

6. [^](#) "Michaud, Stephen G., & Aynesworth, H. (2000). *Ted Bundy: Conversations with a Killer*, Dallas: Authorlink.
7. [^](#) Describing Ted Bundy's Personality and Working towards DSM-V. Douglas B. Samuel and Thomas A. Widiger. Department of Psychology at the University of Kentucky. *Independent Practitioner* (2007), 27 (1), pp. 20–22.
8. [^](#) Freud, S. (1960). *The ego and the id*. J. Strachey (Ed.). (J. Riviere, Trans.). New York: W.W. Norton. (Original work published 1923)
9. [^](#) Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (PFL 1) p. 496
10. [^](#) [Horacio Etchegoyen](#): *The Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique*, Karnac Books ed., New Ed, 2005, [ISBN 1-85575-455-X](#)
11. [^](#) *Celenza, Andrea (October 2010). "The guilty pleasure of erotic countertransference: searching for radial true". *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*. **11** (4): 175–183. doi:10.1080/15240657.2010.513222.*

## References

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- [Heinrich Racker](#), *Transference and Counter-Transference*, Publisher: International Universities Press, 2001, [ISBN 0-8236-8323-0](#).
- Herbert A Rosenfeld, *Impasse And Interpretation*, 1987, Taylor & Francis Ltd, [ISBN 0-415-01012-8](#).
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- [Horacio Etchegoyen](#), *The Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique*, Publisher: Karnac Books, 2005, [ISBN 1-85575-455-X](#).
- Margaret Little, *Transference Neurosis and Transference Psychosis*, Publisher: Jason Aronson; 1993, [ISBN 1-56821-074-4](#).
- Nathan Schwartz-Salant, *Transference and Countertransference*, Publisher: Chrion, 1984 (Reissued 1992), [ISBN 0-933029-63-2](#).

## External links

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- [On Transference](#), Freudian quotes on transference.