EPONAQUEST BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

Projection & Transference:
What They Are, How They Work, and Their Gifts to Us

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Transference

A state of **psychological transference** exists when a person's thoughts and feelings regarding another person, animal, or group are strongly influenced by the emotions and attitudes originally occurring in significant past relationships. The person projects these old and now unconscious internalized feelings and thoughts from the past onto the other as if they belonged to him/her. Transference can be either positive or negative associations.

Simply put, experiencing and reacting to a current relationship as if it were actually an old one.

Projection

Projection occurs when one is experiencing an unconscious feeling, attitude, or attribute of one's own as if it were coming from or exits in someone else. Projection reduces our anxiety by having us see our unwanted subconscious impulses, attitudes or desires as outside of us, preventing the conscious mind from recognizing them as our own, thus keeping us unaware of those hidden and uncomfortable parts or potentials in ourselves.

In essence then, by recognizing and owning our projections, we can mine the **gold** of the **personal truths** in our shadow (parts of us in the darkness of the unknown) as a path of growth, evolution, and conflict resolution.

– Extrapolated from R. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*

How and Why Explore These Dynamics?

- Opening to what we don't know about ourselves enables greater self-awareness and understanding, and ultimately promotes a compassionate level of self-acceptance.
- Because they are unconscious processes, they are very, very difficult to look at and own – that's why they have been relegated to the unconscious in the first place! But remember, this is not about self-judgment! It is about self-awareness and taking responsibility for who we are, what we believe, and how we behave.
- The value of going through what may be a painful/challenging process of reclaiming our projections (especially difficult for our ego's self-image) can be a release of dysfunctional or limiting views of reality and ourselves. We can discover what we are blind to in ourselves. "By finding a way to hide or avoid aspects of ourselves, by definition, we're **not** enabling ourselves to be fully human. … R. Johnson
- People will turn up at workshops who will be projecting/transferring onto us or others in the workshop, and we need to be savvy about what is going on and able to cope with the situation with understanding and sensitivity.

Recognizing When Projecting or Transferring is Occurring.

The "tip off" that a projection or transference may be happening is when our emotional reaction to the other person, group or animal seems all out of proportion to the situation at hand (as opposed to the emotions on the Emotional Message Chart, which are at an appropriate level and offer a process for addressing the situation effectively). Once recognizing the possibility of a transference or projection, we can examine, with ruthless honesty, the situation for its **personal truth.** What about us is being revealed here? What can we take responsibility for that is our own – what we fear, hate, reject in the other that also belongs to us in some way but until now has hidden in our unconscious? Once we know what it is, we can take responsibility for it, manage it, and benefit from it. When we do this, the level of arousal will diminish, and we are able to relate to the other in a clearer, less charged way and take action that is not contaminated by unconscious energies.

Projection and transference are perfectly normal and everyday psychological dynamics that all human beings experience throughout their lives. Because they are unconscious processes, they cannot be prevented. However, they can be recognized, understood, and mined for their gifts. The blessing of owning our shadow is a more conscious, loving and effective way of being in the world – a more fully human way of living.

Also interesting to know about Projection and Transference is that they only occur when the "screen" onto which they are projected HAS some of the quality that is being projected. Thus, 10% does belong to the other, and we can leave it with them or address it with them if need be. The other 90%, however, belongs to the projector (us) and is where the **personal truth** is to be found and embraced as a gift of insight