

Lecture “Erotic transference in therapy”

Erotic transference can occur in situations where the contact between adult people is not equal and father or mother projections arise.

It can happen in teacher/pupil, employer/employee or leader/participant relationships, but I will stick here to the therapist/client relationship. Only here, there is responsibility for the emotional balance of the other involved.

When a client comes into therapy, he (read here and in all further situations as he/she) expects to be seen, heard, supported and helped to solve his problems. The therapist is paid to help and to keep all his own personal unsolved stuff away from the client. The client does not want the therapist to need anything from him! Especially, when he is coming with sexual or relational problems.

It happens sometimes that a therapist misuses a client. We often hear about a male therapist abused a female client. In this case, he will be sued with painful consequences. Sometimes, the therapist complains then that the female client was seducing him. In these cases, the unsolved oedipal problems of the therapist were triggered by a client who was in fact looking for an ideal father that confirms her inner little girl and her sexual attractiveness without needing something for himself.

Sometimes, a therapist and a client even start a private relationship, but underneath the client always fears that the therapist will fall in love with a another client again.

But there is also abuse in therapy that is not so obvious. Often, there is a sexual charge under complaints of clients. The therapist did not react in a way that was appropriate to the clients’ desire, conscious or not. For example: when the client want to work on sexual problems and the therapist is avoiding or rationalizing it. And there are also cases, that the client swallows his anger. Let’s have a look what is happening underneath in this cases.

The sexual development of the child

To get more insight, we have to go back to the sexual development of the child. The way the child relates sexual to the world depends on how the parents or educators treated the child. At the age of 3 to 5 years, every child is innocent in his excitement and curiosity about his and others’ genitals. That’s normal, because he is born out of sexuality and his own flow of energy is awakening for further reproduction. Very often, parents cannot handle this excitement and curiosity. They ignore or even punish the child for that. In the worst case, they abuse it.

The child may react with exaggerating or denying his arousal energy. When a boy exaggerate this energy he becomes more masculine (while losing his basis), when he starts to deny this energy, he becomes more feminine. For a girl, it works the same way: exaggerating the arousal energy means exaggerating the feminine energy while losing the ground, denying means that more of the masculine energy is developed. Boys become either a more masculine type (“phallic narcissic” in therapy terms) or a more feminine man (“passive feminine”), girls a feminine type (“hysteric”) or a more masculine woman (“masculine aggressive”). In reality, all nuances in between exist. But here, I will describe the most typical patterns:

The masculine man: this boy was supported in his expression of anger, but repressed in his sexuality. The mother treated him like a little husband because she did not have a good sexual relationship with the father. So, the boy is misused by the mother and not supported by the father. He is angry at both about that. His heart closes and that’s why he has difficulties to build up monogamous relationships later on.

The feminine man: had a dominant mother that feared the sexuality of the son. Both parents suppressed their aggression and had an alliance against the child. The boy felt betrayed and learned to suppress both: anger and sexuality. Because he identifies on an ego level with the mother and on a genital level with the father, he has confusion about how to express his sexuality. He will keep pleasing women like he did with his mother and doing his best in sex.

The feminine woman: The father promised oedipal love but withheld it because the mother had a problem with that, the mother despised the father. The girl felt betrayed by the father and unsupported by the mother but kept expressing her longing for the father. Out of frustration, she develops seductive behaviour and often, she remains a doll for men.

The masculine woman: had a weak father that directed his anger in a hidden way to the mother while trying to get the daughter on his side. The mother suppressed her own sexuality and competed with the girl. Father and mother played off the girl against each other. So, the girl develops confusion about how to express her sexuality because on an ego level she identifies with the father and on a genital level with the mother. She is striving for sexual independence and blocks her sexuality by rationality like the feminine man. She covers up her receptivity by acting like a man.

In all cases, these blocked people will repeat the past in their relationships in order to finally find a solution. Also, they want to have control in order to avoid getting hurt again. Which is not possible if there is no clarity about the survival patterns underneath.

In therapy

So, when a blocked man or woman, either blocked in the heart or in the genitals, comes into therapy, he or she wants a therapist who can handle this without needing something for himself. In fact these clients need an ideal parent to solve their problem. They need a readjustment of their old belief patterns about not being attractive, not able to satisfy needs and so on. They want to be supported in their own expression and expect that the therapist can regulate himself and express his own sexuality in a healthy way outside the therapy. But if the therapist himself is blocked or confused, the client is in danger.

What will happen when a sexual blocked therapist meets a blocked client? In fact, that happens all the time, because we are all blocked more or less by our education and twisted sexual moral in this society.

It's only a problem when the therapist is not clear about it.

Let's take some examples:

A masculine male therapist meets a feminine woman: the client will start to seduce the therapist because she still needs the confirmation of the father. Also she wants control about the situation and unconsciously knows how to achieve this by having sexual power. This therapist will respond to her advances because the behaviour of the woman promises the oedipal love he didn't get from his mother.

A masculine female therapist meets a feminine male client: sexuality will stay under the table and is rationalised. There is a desire for sexual revenge in the client (he is in fact very angry but afraid of woman!), this will awaken negative transference material to the therapist. But on the surface he will anticipate all her expectations like he did with his mother. She will feel endearment with the helpless, charming boy and the sexual security it offers.

A masculine female therapist meets a masculine male client: inherent to their character, there will be competition because both had power struggles at home and want to have sexual control. But then, the client is not able to open his heart and surrender, which is exactly what he needs to stabilize his relationships.

A feminine female therapist meets a feminine male client: They both have fear of sexual rejection because they had no confirmation about their sexual attractiveness in a pure way in their childhood. So they start to exhibit charming behaviour to avoid the chance of a new rejection. The client may withdraw into even greater passivity and fear, because again he is not confirmed in his male sexuality.

As we see, often the projection on the therapist feels good for his ego, but is not helpful for the liberation of the client.

What is important for the therapist?

The therapist has to be a proper mirror, without the risk of being sexually confused by the client. Only then, he is able to help clients with their sexual and relational problems. Therefore, the therapist has to be aware of his own patterns, traps and limits in this field. It is better to be open about this to the client.

A good help in unbalanced situations can be the visualisation of own ideal parents behind you as a therapist. Pay attention to your body signals: what you feel about the client is probably the same other people feel in relationships to your client. You should use that for feedback and to determine your strategy. The client has to feel supported in his desire to stop the repetition of the past.

It is also important that the therapist should have a fulfilled sex life himself when working with sexual issues. Then, he is more able of non egoistic love and eventually, he can send the client into the arms of another man or woman. Of course, you can also ask for supervision, when you feel challenged, or work together with a therapist of the other sex.

In cases of doubt, you can eventually send the client to another therapist.

A possible inner dialog in a female therapist:

“O.k., I see that this cute young man is charming you. Your inner puber is triggered, right? I understand that, because you missed a lot of confirmation from your father. But this client is not interested in your inner puber. I think, he tries to keep control of the situation by his charming. You better stay professional. Make him conscious about his charming behaviour and ask him what he want to achieve with it....”

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