


**Recognizing and Managing
Countertransference
Reactions in Direct Developmental
Supports**


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Overview



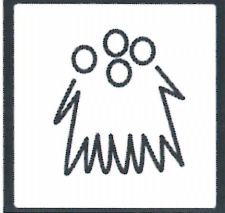
- Exercise
- Definitions of transference and countertransference

Overview




- Influence on the clinical relationship

Overview



- Influence on the supportive relationship


Overview



- Recognizing countertransference reactions
- Managing countertransference reactions

WHAT THE #\$\$@!&*%! IS TRANSFERENCE & COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

Transference



Transference: Beginnings

- The concept of transference is rooted in Freud's psychoanalytic approach.
- Freud recognized early on in his clinical work that his patients related to him as if he were a significant figure from their past (usually a parental figure).
- Freud initially saw this as a major obstacle to the therapeutic process but later changed this stance.

Transference: Beginnings

- Freud came to realize that by working with transference it ...
 - was possible to develop a deeper understanding of his patients, their early relationship experiences and their patterns to others.
 - afforded the opportunity to have a reparative re-experiencing of the earlier relationships in the here-and-now of the therapeutic relationship.

DEFINITION: Transference

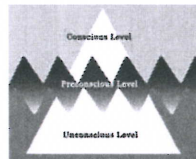


- **Transference** is the unconscious process whereby clients project onto their therapist past feelings or attitudes that are rooted in past experiences with other significant people in their life.

THE CLINICAL RELATIONSHIP



- The clinical relationship has many facets
 - Subtle and overt
 - Conscious and unconscious
 - Progressive and regressive
 - Positive and negative
- Both the client and the worker experience other things beyond an objective reality.



Impact of transference on the clinical relationship



- When attributed to the therapist they are not realistic.
- From the past but are manifested in the present.
- Feelings and attitudes may have a positive or negative tone.

Positive vs. Negative Transference



- Positive transference – the transfer of positive feelings to the professional
 - This can be helpful as it serves as a basis on which a working alliance can be established. However it can also create issues as it may become over-idealizing and therefore a distortion of reality

Positive vs. Negative Transference?



- Negative transference – the transfer of negative feelings to the therapist
 - This can create difficulties in establishing trust and a sound working alliance, and therapists need to understand and contain it without unconsciously retaliating
- Extremely important in counseling—research continues to show that the therapeutic relationship is the key variable in determining the outcome of therapy

DEFINITION: Countertransference

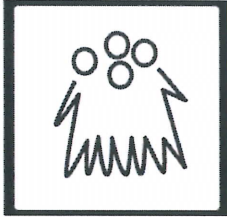


- Countertransference refers to the feelings that are aroused in the therapist by clients; feelings that have more to do with past relationships than with any feature of the present relationship. (Corey & Corey, 1998).
- Feelings and attitudes may have a positive or negative tone.
- When attributed to the client they are not realistic.

Impact on clinical relationship



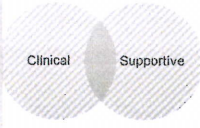
- Countertransference contaminates the helping relationship by producing distorted perceptions, blind spots, wishes and anti therapeutic emotional reactions and behaviour. (Hepworth, Rooney, Larsen)
- In these situations real communication breaks down, both parties hear what they expect to hear, misinterpret what they hear to fit into the stereotype of the other and remember information selectively. (Sullivan)




• *Does this happens in developmental services?????*

Clinical


Supportive



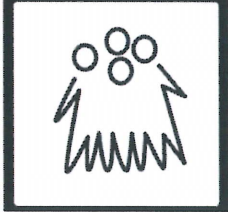
- The phenomena of “transference” and “countertransference” exist in any relationship between two or more people, professional and non-professional.
- They are fundamental processes in human relationships which make use of learning from past experiences. What we learn about ourselves and others from our early relationships helps us make sense of our news ones.



- Often direct support professionals find themselves supporting people who are facing challenging life experiences increasing the likelihood of transference/countertransference reactions



- There is something unique about the therapeutic relationship which increases the likelihood of transference/countertransference reactions.
- The therapist focus their whole attention on the client, maintaining clear boundaries and refraining from unnecessary self disclosure making the therapeutic context special and unlike other social situations.
- This dynamic also occurs in the direct support relationship increasing the likelihood for transference and countertransference reactions




- *Does this happens in developmental services?????*

Recognizing and Managing Countertransference



Recognizing Countertransference



- If recognized, countertransference issues that clients are evoking can be addressed in a non-defensive manner.
- **However, countertransference is difficult to recognize as it....**
 - is located and operates at an unconscious level.
 - Is often involves negative feelings/thoughts which are difficult to acknowledge

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Recognizing Countertransference

Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

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Recognizing Countertransference

Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

- Helpers who reflect on the emotional scars they have collected begin to understand things about themselves and their approach to others that they have could never learn if they remained completely detached. (Kennedy, 1977)
- Analytical dialogue with oneself aimed at discovering sources of feelings, reactions, cognitions and behaviour. (Hepworth, Rooney, Larsen)
- What stirs in the shared experience?

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Recognizing Countertransference

Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

Ways to Become Aware of Countertransference

- Watch for intensifications of departures from usual practice.
- These will usually take the form of behavioural countertransference, such as repeatedly allowing sessions to run over time.
- Recognizing their significance requires vigilance in attending to any changes in practice, however insignificant they might first seem.

Recognizing Countertransference 自覚
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

Ways to Become Aware of Countertransference

1. Feeling responses
 Example - experiencing anger, sadness, or shame
2. Behavioural responses
 Example- repeatedly running over time in sessions with one person

Professionals must attend to their reactions and observe their own thoughts, feelings and behaviour in relation to the people they work with, within and outside of work. This requires a great commitment and skill on the part of the professional.

Recognizing Countertransference 自覚
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

Ways to Become Aware of Countertransference- Reflective Practice

- Involves developing an "internal supervisor"- vigorous and vigilant monitoring of our own responses without becoming punitive or judgmental towards ourselves.
- Routinely ask the questions...
 - What do I feel when I am with this person?
 - What goes through my mind in relation to this person?
 - Do I notice about my practice that seems different when I am with this person?
 - What elements of these experiences relate to my own past?

Recognizing Countertransference 自覚
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

When you have a misappropriate reaction to something.....it is usually about something else

Recognizing Countertransference
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

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Signs of Countertransference (Corey & Corey, 1998)

- You become easily irritated by certain people.
- You feel intense anger toward a person you hardly know.
- With some people you continually run overtime.
- With some people you continually end your session early.

Recognizing Countertransference
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

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Signs of Countertransference (Corey & Corey, 1998)

- You find yourself wanting to “help” (i.e. lend money, pay for their coffee) to some people.
- You regularly feel depressed after seeing a particular person.
- You feel excited knowing that a certain person is soon to arrive.

Recognizing Countertransference
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

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Signs of Countertransference (Corey & Corey, 1998)

- You tend to become very bored with a certain person.
- You are aware of typically working much harder than a person you support.
- You quickly take away pain from a person you support who is grieving.

Recognizing Countertransference

Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

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Signs of Countertransference (Corey & Corey, 1998)

- You get highly emotional and get lost in the person's world.
- You become aware of giving a great deal of advice and wanting the person do what you think they should do.
- You are quick not to accept a certain type of client.
- You find yourself lecturing or debating with certain people.

Recognizing Countertransference

Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

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Signs of Countertransference (Corey & Corey, 1998)

- Being unduly concerned about a person you work with.
- Being consistently tardy or forgetting certain appointments with people you work with.
- Feeling uncomfortable discussing certain topics.


Recognizing Countertransference

Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

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Signs of Countertransference (Corey & Corey, 1998)

- Wanting to focus on certain topics, that the person does not want to discuss.
- Blaming others exclusively for a person you support's difficulties.
- Being overly helpful and performing tasks for a person you support, that they are capable of performing.




Recognizing Countertransference
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

Problems Processing Countertransference

- Once countertransference has been identified, professionals are faced with the task of unraveling the meaning of their response.


- Need to distinguish the degree to which the response is related to themselves (subjective) or the person they support (objective).



Recognizing Countertransference
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

Problems Processing Countertransference

- Often will need to overcome internal defenses which will obscure the meaning of countertransference.
- We can unconsciously defend against recognizing the degree to which our own difficulties impact the relationship because of the damage this may do to their view of themselves as skilled professionals.



Recognizing Countertransference
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

Shifting the focus from "them" to "me"

Questions to ask yourself?

- Why am I feeling uncomfortable with this person? What is going on with me that I'm not able to relate more freely?
- Why do I dislike (or feel bored, impatient, or irritated) with this person?
- Are these feelings rational or does this person remind me of someone in the past?
- What is happening with me that I don't face certain problems with this person?

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Recognizing Countertransference
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

Shifting the focus from “them” to “me”
Questions to ask yourself?

- What purpose was served with arguing with this person. Was I feeling defensive or threatened?
- Why did I talk so much or give so much advice? Do I feel a need to give something to this person?
- Why do I constantly take sides with this person? Am I over-identifying with this person. Could my own similar feelings be blocking my objectivity?

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Recognizing Countertransference
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

Is it Positive vs. Negative Countertransference?

- Positive countertransference – the transfer of positive feelings to the person you work with.
- Negative countertransference – the transfer of negative feelings to the person you work with.

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Recognizing Countertransference
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

Is it subjective or objective countertransference?
Subjective countertransference

- When the professional unconsciously responds to the person they are working with as if she or he were a significant person from their own past, rather than to the person's actual personality or relationship with the professional in the present.
- Example- a professional is intimidated by a person they are working with who reminds them of a bullying family member from their childhood.
- This form of countertransference is rooted within the subjective experience of the professional.
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Recognizing Countertransference
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

Is it subjective or objective countertransference?

Objective countertransference

- Refers to the responses in the professional that have been triggered by the unique behaviour, interaction and relationship of an individual person they are working with.
- For example, a person who behaves passively and produces a powerful countertransference reaction of anger in the professional. Professional later learns that many people in the person's life react in a similar manner. Therefore the reaction is not rooted in subjective experience of the professional.

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Recognizing Countertransference
Step 1: Introspection/Reflective Practice

Is it subjective or objective countertransference?

Objective countertransference

- Some people are abrasive, arrogant or obnoxious, have irritating mannerisms, or are exploitative of and cruel to others.
- Helpers are after all human and are not immune to disliking others or feeling irritated.
- Still even repulsive people are entitled to professional service and in fact often desperately need help because their offensive behaviour alienates others, leaving them isolated and confused as to what creates their difficulties.

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Recognizing Countertransference
Step 2: Monitoring for similar reactions

Recognizing Countertransference

Step 2: Monitoring for Similar Reactions

- Helpers who repeatedly experience countertransference reactions can carry with them long-standing and unresolved emotional conflicts from other relationships/experiences that continue to pervade the helping relationship.
- Start to identify possible themes.

Recognizing Countertransference

Step 3: Managing countertransference

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Managing Countertransference

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- **Maintain a receptive attitude**
 - You are not able to eliminate countertransference altogether. Rather you can learn to recognize and deal non-defensively with whatever reaction a person you support triggers.
 - A receptive attitude entails accepting whatever emotions you are experiencing without feeling guilty or criticizing yourself.
 - Often the awareness of countertransference issues is suffice in addressing the issues.

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Managing Countertransference

- **Seek support**
 - We are sometimes too close to our problems to perceive them objectively.
 - During these times we benefit from assistance to see things from another vantage point.
 - The helper at times needs to step back out of the relationship and view it from the unbiased perspective of a colleague, supervisor, or Social Worker. (Hepworth, Rooney, Larsen)

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Managing countertransference Sharing reactions

- Peer consultation, supervision, and reflection provide opportunities to explore your reactions, foster introspection, and respond in a therapeutic manner (Wickham, 1993).
- You can become more aware of manifestations of countertransference by focusing on yourself in a supervised session.
 - Rather than talking exclusively about caseload issues, spend more time addressing how you feel when you are supporting certain people.

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Managing Countertransference What if it continues to occur?

- Most can work through countertransference issues.
- Others need to recognize that their ability to work with some people is compromised and they are best suited supporting others.
- Few are not suited for their profession and for the benefit of themselves, the people we support, and the profession should consider making an occupational change.
- Example---- person with ongoing power and control issue working with marginalized people

Closing Comment
**Countertransference is no longer
considered a dirty word**

- Mistakenly used to be considered a sign of incompetence.
- Today the skilled professional is one who monitors for, recognizes and manages countertransference reactions.
