



Klein and Projective Identification

Projective identification is an unconscious phantasy in which aspects of the self or an internal object are split off and attributed to an external object.

The projected aspects may be felt by the projector to be either good or bad. Projective phantasies may or may not be accompanied by evocative behaviour unconsciously intended to induce the recipient of the projection to feel and act in accordance with the projective phantasy.

Phantasies of projective identification are sometimes felt to have 'acquisitive' as well as 'attributive' properties, meaning that the phantasy involves not only getting rid of aspects of one's own psyche but also of entering the mind of the other in order to acquire desired aspects of his psyche. In this case projective and introjective phantasies operate together.

Among British Kleinians, there is a tacit assumption that 'projection' and 'projective identification' mean the same thing, and that 'projective identification' is an enrichment or extension of Freud's concept of 'projection'.

Key papers

Klein, M. (1946, 1952)

1946 '**Notes on some schizoid mechanisms**'. Gives a definition but the actual term 'projective identification' is mentioned only in passing two pages after the definition.

1952 '**Notes on some schizoid mechanisms**'. This 1952 version gives the same definition as the 1946 version but adds a definitive sentence: 'I suggest for these processes the term "projective identification"'.

Rosenfeld, H. (1947, 1964, 1971)

1947 '**Analysis of a schizophrenic state with depersonalization**', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 28: 130-139; republished in *Psychotic States*. Hogarth Press (1965). First published description of projective identification in a particular clinical case.

1964 '**On the psychopathology of narcissism: a clinical approach**', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 45: 332-337; republished in *Psychotic States*. Hogarth Press (1965). In narcissistic states, identification may be formed both by introjection and projection.

1971 '**Contribution to the psychopathology of psychotic states: The importance of projective identification in the ego structure and the object relations of the patient**'. P. Doucet and C. Laurin (eds.) *Problems of Psychosis*.

Amsterdam: Excerpta Medica; republished in E. Spillius (ed.) *Melanie Klein Today*, Vol. 1. Routledge (1988). Motives for projective identification.

Bion, W.R. (1959, 1962)

1959 '**Attacks on linking**', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 40: 308-315; republished in *Second Thoughts*. Heinemann (1967); and in E. Spillius (ed.) *Melanie Klein Today*, Vol. 1. Routledge. (1988). Distinguishes normal and pathological projective identification.

1962 **Learning from Experience**. Heinemann. Introduces 'container/contained' model of thinking of which patient's projective identification is an important aspect.

Other

1988 Joseph, B. '**Projective identification: Clinical aspects**'. E. Spillius (ed.) *Melanie Klein Today*, Vol. 1. Routledge; republished in J. Sandler (ed.) *Projection, Identification, Projective Identification*. Karnac, pp. 65-76; and in *Psychic Equilibrium and Psychic Change*. Routledge (1989). Lucid clinical description of projective identification in three patients.

2004 Sodré, I. '**Who's who? Notes on pathological identifications**'. E. Hargreaves and A. Varchevker (eds.). *In pursuit of Psychic Change*. Routledge. Normality or pathology depends on whether thinking is concrete or symbolic, not on whether identification is introjective or projective.

1957 Klein, M. '**Envy and gratitude**'. Klein's seminal paper on envy and gratitude, where the two are first explicitly paired.

1959 Klein, M. '**Our adult world and its roots in infancy**'. A straightforward and comprehensive outline of the paired concepts of envy and gratitude.