## When You See Ghosts

A 34-year-old man saw a psychiatrist because of serious problems in his relationships. No one seemed to like him. He lived as a hermit, ﬁnally getting to the point that he could no longer tolerate the isolation. Although it was the hardest thing he had ever done, he decided to seek professional help.

The man told the psychiatrist about his inability to ﬁnd someone who truly cared about him. Every time he became involved with other people, he ended up feeling that they had lied about their feelings about him. Although they said they liked him, he felt deep down they were just being phony.

The man told the psychiatrist that his mother had been the same way. She had never wanted him and even tried to have an abortion. He had been nothing but trouble as far as she was concerned and could never do anything right. She often put him in his bedroom and left him alone for hours just to be away from him.

When they were with other people, her attitude about him changed. She became afectionate and loving, what he had wished for when they were alone. This hurt him deeply because it reminded him of what he didn’t have.

### Are you struggling with unresolved feelings from your past afecting your present relationships? Read my book where I, as a psychiatric therapist wrote the book to help you as a mental health provider understand and overcome transference issues to foster healthier connections.

The psychiatrist felt bad for his patient and decided that he would do his best to help him feel better. He empathized with his pain, provided emotional support, and reassured him that one day he would have a warm and loving relationship.

After a few months of weekly meetings, the patient had made no progress. He was still alone and unhappy. He was stuck. The psychiatrist pointed this out and encouraged him to take steps to develop a relationship that would satisfy his needs. The patient resisted.

The patient’s resistance frustrated the psychiatrist who ofered stronger encouragement. The patient still resisted.

After this back-and-forth maneuvering had gone on long enough, the psychiatrist sat back to reexamine the problem. In response, the patient became quiet and withdrawn. This piqued the psychiatrist’s curiosity, and he asked the patient what he was thinking.

The patient said that he had suspected all along that the psychiatrist would one day show his true feelings and that that day had ﬁnally come. Confused, the psychiatrist asked what he was talking about. The patient said that he knew the psychiatrist would one day give up on him because the psychiatrist’s caring had been fake.

This startled the psychiatrist who reassured the patient that his concern was genuine and that he had done his best to help him overcome his dificulty with other people. The patient said that the psychiatrist had just appeared to try and that he was actually only interested in collecting a fee.

As time went on, the patient because less and less conversant. The psychiatrist decided to show him that he was reacting because of his relationship with mother who did not care about him. He explained that his mother made him feel unloved when she put him in his room and left him there. The patient was now putting himself in his room. He explained that the patient had come to view him as being like his mother when that was far from the truth. The patient would hear nothing of it.

The patient insisted that the psychiatrist was just like his mother when he pulled back, evidence that the psychiatrist did not really like him just like the other people in his life.

### Are you ready to break free from patterns of negative transference? Get insights from mental health experts like myself through my book. I’ve ofered practical guidance to overcome 0emotional hurdles and build fulﬁlling relationships based on present reality.

The psychiatrist didn’t know what he could do to help his patient. He knew that if he didn’t act quickly, the patient would leave therapy feeling just as bad as when he came in, if not worse. He decided to take drastic action.

Before he saw the patient, the psychiatrist wrote on a piece of paper: I AM NOT YOUR MOTHER!!!

He put the paper on his forehead and waited for a response. The patient said nothing about it and instead talked about his week.

Halfway through the session, the psychiatrist could stand it no longer and the patient, “Did you happen to notice this sign on my forehead?”

The patient replied, “Yeah. That’s just like something my mother would do!”

The patient’s perception of the psychiatrist was colored by a very signiﬁcant relationship in his past. This is called transference. It happens in virtually all signiﬁcant relationships that are reminiscent of the past. It has to do with the transfer of feelings and attitudes from a person in the past to people in the present.

If it is pleasurable (such as when falling in love), we call it positive transference. If it is painful (such as when we feel rejected without good reason), we call it negative transference. In either case, it is as though we have been visited by a ghost from the past.

Transference can damage relationships by removing them from the reality of the present. When we love a person beyond what is realistic, we can miss out on danger signs that would otherwise foretell future problems. When we feel unrealistically uncomfortable in a relationship, we may end that relationship prematurely and miss out on a solid friendship.

Transference is also the basis of racial, religious, gender, and cultural prejudice. But that’s another article, if not a book.

Transference can be hard to see unless we look for it. Recognizing it involves admitting that you might be over-reacting. An over-reaction is based on present feelings combined with past feelings. If you are over-reacting, you must be

experiencing feelings from the past since you cannot feel about the future except as a projection of the past (what we anticipate is based on past experience), and since if you were experiencing only present feelings you would be reacting, not

over-reacting.

### Looking to seek clarity in your relationships and emotional well-being? I’ve written a book with the help of my experiences as a forensic psychiatrist and mental health professional, sharing strategies to identify and address transference dynamics that may be hindering your personal growth and happiness.

Over-reactions provide an opportunity to learn about ourselves and how the past is inﬂuencing the present. Seize the opportunity to learn instead of tossing it aside as “just an over-reaction”.

When you identify the elements from the past that continue to inﬂuence you and let go, the ghosts go with them and your relationships in the present, including your relationship with yourself, become healthier and more fulﬁlling.