

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

The following is an introductory description of Transactional Analysis. It is designed to be understood by the layperson, written with approximately the same level of complexity that Berne used for Games People Play.

Psychoanalysis before Eric Berne

While there were many theories purporting to explain human behavior before Eric Berne, the most frequently cited and known is the work of Sigmund Freud. Freud emerged in the early 20th century with his theories about personality. Freud believed that personality had three components, all of which must work together to produce our complex behaviors. These three components or aspects were the Id, Ego, and the Superego. It was Freud's belief that these three components needed to be well-balanced to produce reasonable mental health and stability in an individual. According to Freud, the Id functions in the irrational and emotional part of the mind, the Ego functions as the rational part of the mind, and the Superego can be thought of as the moral part of the mind, a manifestation of societal or parental values.

But perhaps Freud's greatest contribution (and the one that influenced Berne) was the fact that the human personality is multifaceted. Regardless of the classification or name given to a particular area of personality (id, superego, etc.), each individual possesses factions that frequently collide with each other. And it is these collisions and interactions between these personality factions that manifest themselves as an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Thus, under Freud's theories, an individual's behavior can be understood by analyzing and understanding his/her three

factions. But in a point to be emphasized later in this paper, Dr. Berne believes that Freud's proposed structures are "concepts... [and not] phenomenological realities"¹

Another scientist whose contributions impacted Dr. Berne in his development of Transactional Analysis is Dr. Wilder Penfield, a neurosurgeon from McGill University in Montreal. Penfield's experiments focused on the application of electrical currents to specific regions of the brain. Penfield discovered that, when applying current to the temporal lobe of live and alert patients, he would stimulate meaningful memories. In addition, not only were vivid pictures of that person's past revealed, but also the feelings and emotions associated with that event were uncovered. These patients would recite these events, even though in many cases they were events that the patients were unable to recollect on their own.

Penfield carried out these and similar experiments for many years. Some of the key conclusions that he reached that went on to influence Berne in his development of Transactional Analysis include:

The human brain acts in many ways like a camcorder, vividly recording events. While that event may not necessarily be able to be consciously retrieved by the owner, the event always exists in the brain.

Both the event and the feelings experienced during that event are stored in the brain. The event and the feelings are locked together, and neither one can be recalled without the other.

When an individual replays his or her experiences, he or she can replay them in such a vivid form that the individual experiences again

the same emotions he or she felt during the actual experience. Or, as Berne's student Thomas A. Harrissaid "I not only remember how I felt, I feel the same way now"²

Individuals are able to exist in two states simultaneously. Individuals replaying certain events are able to experience the emotions associated with those events, but they are also able to objectively talk about the events at the same time.

These contributions by Penfield and Freud, as well as many others, were used by Berne as he developed his theories on Transactional Analysis and games.

Transactions Defined

Before Berne first published his theories on Transactional Analysis, he spent years formulating the framework of this approach. The key to this methodology was a transaction – the fundamental unit of social intercourse. Berne also defined a stroke – the fundamental unit of social action (strokes are discussed in more detail later in this paper).

Many of the criticisms of the "science" (or lack thereof) behind psychotherapy was the fact that there was no basic unit for study, measurement, and classification. For example, the study of chemistry was revolutionized with the atomic theory of John Dalton; without the atom as a fundamental unit, the advancement of chemistry as a science would have proceeded slowly or not at all. By identifying and defining a transaction, Berne provided to the psychotherapeutic sciences the "atom" that was needed to allow for rigorous analysis.

Although Berne defined transactions long before he published *Games People Play*, his description of transactions in *Games* is the most easily understood:

"The unit of social intercourse is called a transaction. If two or more people encounter each other... sooner or later one of them will speak, or give some other indication of acknowledging the presence of the others. This is called transactional stimulus. Another person will then say or do something which is

in some way related to the stimulus, and that is called the transactional response."³

With this definition, Dr. Berne defined the basic unit of analysis. At its simplest level, Transactional Analysis is the method for studying interactions between individuals. By identifying and standardizing upon a single unit, development and promotion of this theory was easily facilitated. Psychotherapists were able to read about Berne's theories and test them out in their own practices. Dr. Thomas Harris stated in *I'm OK – You're OK* that in Transactional Analysis, "we have found a new language of psychology."

It should be noted that this approach was profoundly different than that of Freud. While Freud and most other psychotherapists took the rather simplistic approach of asking the patient about themselves, Berne took an alternate approach to therapy. Berne felt that a therapist could learn what the problem was by simply observing what was communicated (words, body language, facial expressions) in a transaction. So instead of directly asking the patient questions, Berne would frequently observe the patient in a group setting, noting all of the transactions that occurred between the patient and other individuals.

Berne's Three Ego States

In addition to the analysis of the interactions between individuals, Transactional Analysis also involves the identification of the ego states behind each and every transaction. Berne defined an ego state as "a consistent pattern of feeling and experience directly related to a corresponding consistent pattern of behavior."⁴

As a practicing psychiatrist in Carmel, California in the early 1950s, Berne treated hundreds of patients. During the course of their treatment, he consistently noted that his patients, and indeed all people, could and would change over the course of a conversation. The changes would not necessarily be verbal – the changes could involve facial expressions, body language, body temperature, and many other non-verbal cues.

In one counseling session, Berne treated a 35 year old lawyer. During the session, the lawyer (a male) said "I'm not really a lawyer; I'm just a little boy." But outside the confines of Dr. Berne's office, this patient was a successful, hard-charging, attorney. Later, in their sessions, the lawyer would frequently ask Dr. Berne if he was talking "to the lawyer or the little boy." Berne was intrigued by this, as he was seeing a single individual display two "states of being." Berne began referring to these two states as "Adult" and "Child." Later, Berne identified a third state, one that seemed to represent what the patient had observed in his parents when he was small. Berne referred to this as "parent." As Berne then turned to his other patients, he began to observe that these three ego states were present in all of them. As Berne gained confidence in this theory, he went on to introduce these in a 1957 paper – one year before he published his seminal paper introducing Transactional Analysis.

Berne ultimately defined the three ego states as: Parent, Adult, and Child. It should be carefully noted that the descriptions of these ego states do NOT necessarily correspond to their common definitions as used in the English language.

Before describing each of the three ego states, it is important to note that these are fundamentally different than Freud's Ego, Id, and Superego. Berne describes this best when he writes in *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*:

"It will be demonstrated that Parent, Adult, and Child are not concepts, like Superego, Ego, and Id, or the Jungian constructs, but phenomenological realities." Stated another way, Freud's ego states are unobservable, theoretical states; but Berne's three ego states can be confirmed with observable behaviors.

The following are detailed descriptions of the three ego states:

Parent– The parent represents a massive collection of recordings in the brain of external events experienced or perceived in approximately the first five years of life.

Since the majority of the external events experienced by a child are actions of the parent, the ego state was appropriately called Parent. Note that events perceived by the child from individuals that are NOT parents (but who are often in parent-like roles) are also recorded in the Parent. When Transactional Analysts refer to the Parent ego state (as opposed to a biological or stepparent), it is capitalized. The same goes for the other two states (Adult and Child).

Examples of recordings in the Parent include:

"Never talk to strangers"

"Always chew with your mouth closed"

"Look both ways before you cross the street"

It is worth noting that, while recording these events, the young child has no way to filter the data; the events are recorded without question and without analysis. One can consider that these events are imposed on the child.

There are other data experienced by the child that are not recorded in the Parent. This is recorded in the Adult, which will be described shortly.

Child – In contrast to the Parent, the Child represents the recordings in the brain of internal events associated with external events the child perceives. Stated another way, stored in the Child are the emotions or feelings which accompanied external events. Like the Parent, recordings in the Child occur from childbirth all the way up to the age of approximately 5 years old.

Examples of recordings in the Child include:

"When I saw the monster's face, I felt really scared"

"The clown at the birthday party was really funny!"

Adult– The Adult is the last ego state. Close to one year of age, a child begins to exhibit gross motor activity. The child learns that he or she can control a cup from which to drink, that he or she can grab a toy. In social settings, the child can play peek-a-boo.

This is the beginning of the Adult in the small child. Adult data grows out of the child's ability to see what is different than what he or she observed (Parent) or felt (Child). In other words, the Adult allows the young person to evaluate and validate Child and Parental data. Berne describes the Adult as being "principally concerned with transforming stimuli into pieces of information, and processing and filing that information on the basis of previous experience"⁶ Stated another way, Harris describes the Adult as "a data-processing computer, which grinds out decisions after computing the information from three sources: the Parent, the Child, and the data which the adult has gathered and is gathering"⁷

One of the key functions of the Adult is to validate data in the parent. An example is:

"Wow. It really is true that pot handles should always be turned into the stove" said Sally as she saw her brother burn himself when he grabbed a pot handle sticking out from the stove.

In this example, Sally's Adult reached the conclusion that data in her Parent was valid. Her Parent had been taught "always turn pot handles into the stove, otherwise you could get burned." And with her analysis of her brother's experience, her Adult concluded that this was indeed correct.

In an attempt to explain Transactional Analysis to a more mainstream audience, Dr. Thomas Harris developed the following summary. Although this is a very good tool for beginners to learn, keep in mind that this a wildly simplified approach, and can have the effect of "dumbing down" Transactional Analysis. The summary is as follows:

Parent – taught concept
Child – felt concept
Adult – learned concept

A more comprehensive understanding of Berne's ego states can be obtained by consulting *Games People Play* or *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*, both by Dr. Berne. Information on both of these books can be found in the Bibliography page.

Analyzing Transactions

When two people communicate, one person initiates a transaction with the transactional stimulus (see the above Transactions Defined section for a definition of the transaction stimulus). The person at whom the stimulus is directed will respond with the transactional response. Simple Transactional Analysis involves identifying which ego state directed the stimulus and which ego state in the other person executed the response.

According to Dr. Berne, the simplest transactions are between Adults ego states. For example, a surgeon will survey the patient, and based upon the data before him/her, his/her Adult decides that the scalpel is the next instrument required. The surgeon's Adult holds out his/her hand, providing the transactional stimulus to the nurse. The nurse's Adult looks at the hand, and based upon previous experiences, concludes that the scalpel is needed. The nurse then places the scalpel in the surgeon's hand.

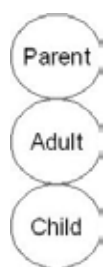
But not all transactions proceed in this manner. Some transactions involve ego states other than the Adult.

Structural Diagram

This leads us to Parent – Child transactions, which are almost as simple as Adult–Adult transactions. Quoting Dr. Berne in *Games People Play*: "The fevered child asks for a glass of water, and the nurturing mother brings it."⁸ In this, the Child of a small child directs an inquiry to the Parent of his/her mother.

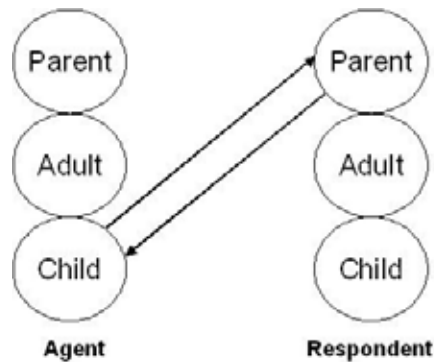
The Parent of the mother acknowledges this stimuli, and then gives the water to the child. In this example, the small child's request is the stimuli, and the parent providing the water is the response. This is nearly as simple as an Adult–Adult transaction.

One of the tools used by a Transactional Analysis practitioner is a structural diagram, as represented on the left. A structural diagram represents the complete personality of any individual. It includes the Parent, Adult, and Child ego states, all separate and distinct from



each other. The diagram was developed by Eric Berne before *Games People Play* when he

was developing his theories of Transactional Analysis.



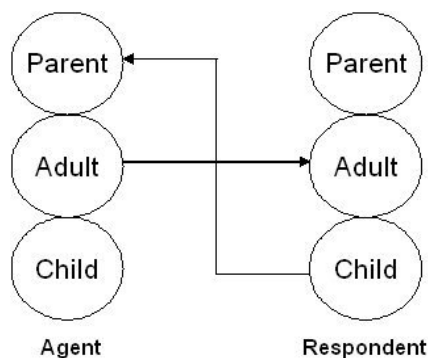
Child interacting with a Parent

Transactional Analysts will then construct a diagram showing the ego states involved in a particular transaction. The transaction to the right shows a Parent – Child transaction, with the Child ego state providing the transactional stimulus, and the Adult responding with the transactional response.

This transaction matches the Parent – Child example listed above, with the fevered child asking his/her mother for a glass of water.

So far, the two transactions described can be considered complementary transactions. In a complementary transaction, the response

must go back from the receiving ego state to the sending ego state. For example, a person may initiate a transaction directed towards one ego state of the respondent. The respondent's ego state detects the stimuli, and then that particular ego state (meaning the ego state to which the stimuli was directed) produces a response. According to Dr. Berne, these transactions are healthy and represent normal human interactions. As Berne says in *Games People Play* "communication will proceed as long as transactions are complementary."⁹



Crossed Transaction

However, not all transactions between humans are healthy or normal. In those cases, the transaction is classified as a crossed transaction. In a crossed transaction, an ego state different than the ego state which received the stimuli is the one that responds. The diagram to the right shows a typical

crossed transaction. An example is as follows:

Agent's Adult: "Do you know where my cuff links are?" (note that this stimuli is directed at the Respondent's Adult).

Respondent's Child: "You always blame me for everything!"¹⁰

This is one the classic crossed transactions

that occurs in marriage. Instead of the Respondent's Adult responding with "I think they're on the desk", it is the Respondent's Child that responds back.

It is important to note that when analyzing transactions, one must look beyond what is being said. According to Dr. Berne, one must look at how the words are being delivered (accents on particular words, changes in tone, volume, etc.) as the non-verbal signs accompanying those words (body language, facial expressions, etc.). Transactional Analysts will pay attention to all of these cues when analyzing a transaction and identifying which ego states are involved.

The importance of these non-verbal cues can be understood by considering the work of Dr. Albert Mehrabian. Berne passed away in 1970, before Mehrabian's seminal work was published. But Mehrabian's work quantitatively proved the importance of non-verbal cues in communication. According to Dr. Mehrabian, when an individual is speaking, the listener focuses on the following three types of communication:

Actual Words – 7%

The Way words are delivered (tone, accents on certain words, etc.) – 38%

Facial expressions – 55%

In the above statistics, the percentage figure indicates the degree of importance the listener places on that type of communication. One can see that facial expressions play a far more important role in communication (and thus, Transactional Analysis) than the actual words exchanged.

Berne went on to discuss other types of transactions, but those will not be discussed here. Once a reasonable understanding of ego states and Transactional Analysis has been achieved, the games as described in *Games People Play* can be understood at a whole new level.

Berne went on to refine his theories beyond *Games People Play*. The classic follow-up to *Games* is *What Do You Say After You Say Hello*. In addition, after Berne's death in 1970,

others continued to build upon Transactional Analysis. Some of these works can be seen in the Bibliography.

Strokes

As stated earlier, Berne defined a stroke as the "fundamental unit of social action."¹¹ A stroke is a unit of recognition, when one person recognizes another person either verbally or non verbally. Berne introduced the idea of strokes into Transactional Analysis based upon the work of Rene Spitz, a researcher who did pioneering work in the area of child development. Spitz observed that infants deprived of handling – in other words, not receiving any strokes – were more prone to emotional and physical difficulties. These infants lacked the cuddling, touching, and handling that most other infants received.

Berne took Spitz's observations of these infants and developed theories about the needs of adults for strokes. Berne postulated that adults need need physical contact just like infants, but have learned to substitute other types of recognition instead of physical stimulation. So while an infant needs cuddling, an adult craves a smile, a wink, a hand gesture, or other form of recognition. Berne defined the term recognition-hunger as this requirement of adults to receive strokes.

Berne also reasoned that any stroke, be it positive or negative, is better than no strokes at all. Or, as summarized in *TA Today*, "any stroke is better than no stroke at all."¹² For example, if you are walking in front of your house and you see your neighbor, you will likely smile and say "Hi." Your neighbor will likely say "hello" back. This is an example of a positive stroke. Your neighbor could also frown at you and say nothing. This is an example of a negative stroke. But either case is better than no stroke at all, if your neighbor ignored you completely.

Dr. Claude Steiner, a student of Dr. Berne who went on to publish many books on Transactional Analysis, did pioneering work in strokes. He developed what he called the Stroke Economy.

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Տրանսակցիոն վերլուծությունը հոգեբանական ժամանակակից վերլուծություն է, որը հիմնադրվել է ամեջիկացի հոգեբան և հոգեբույժ Էրիկ Բեռնի կողմից 1950–ականներին:

Ըստ Բեռնի՝ տրանսակցիոն վերլուծությունը հոգեվերլուծական տեսություն է, որն ուսումնասիրում է անհատի սոցիալական փոխհարաբերությունները՝ հիմնվելով անձի երեք էգովիճակների վրա.

1) երեխա էգովիճակ, 2) ծնող էգովիճակ, 3) մեծահասակ էգովիճակ

Տարբեր իրավիճակներում գերիշխող է դառնում մի էգովիճակը: Ինչպես Զ. Ֆրեյդը և ներշնչված Վ. Փենֆիլդը, որոնց ազդեցությունը շատ է զգացվում Բեռնի ուսումնասիրություններում, նա նույնպես կարևորում էր մարդու անգիտակցականը և մանկական տարիքը:

ТРАНСАКЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ

ЭРИК БЕРН

транзакционный анализ – это современное направление психологии, основанное американским психологом Э. Берном 1950 г.. Согласно Берну, транзакционный анализ является теорией психоанализа, исследующей социальные взаимоотношения личности, основываясь на его трех эгосостояниях:

1) эгосостояния ребенка, 2) эгосостояния родителя, 3) эгосостояния взрослого

В различных условиях доминирует одно из эгосостояний. Вслед за З. Фрейдом и нейрохирургом В. Пенфилдом, влияние которых заметно в исследованиях Э. Берна, автор также особо выделяет в поведении человека бессознательное и эгосостояние "детский возраст".