

# **The Heart of the Matter: Love, Information and Transactional Analysis**

By Claude Steiner PhD

To Eric Berne  
and  
all the fans of transactional analysis  
around the world.

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## Preface

By Terry Berne

I have always thought that the aims of Transactional Analysis necessarily implied a vision beyond the establishment or search for individual well-being. In its most elementary form the concept of transactions involves an encounter between two people, manifested through a dialogue of varying complexity that is frequently governed by explicit or implicit ulterior motives. In practice, however, this basic paradigm extends to an individual's entire circle of active contacts and everyday dealings with the world at large, including family, friends, acquaintances and co-workers, thus unavoidably expanding beyond an individual's most intimate social surroundings. In fact, society is defined by the collective whole of these everyday interactions, which differ to some extent according to the traditions, conventions and beliefs of each more or less distinct culture.

I am among those who believe that the personal and the social inevitably intersect, and that the very basis of Transactional Analysis is an acknowledgment of that fact, even if the fundamental focus is on the individual's attitudes and behavior with respect to his or her's most immediate social encounters. If mental health in some ways aims for or leads to healthy social integration, then an awareness of the larger issues of what constitutes a healthy society can be neither avoided nor ignored.

I feel sure that TA, as well as other therapeutic methods, must necessarily evolve toward notions that actively confront the effects and influences that our increasingly interconnected, information-saturated world is undoubtedly exercising on our collective psychology. Psychology is both an ancient and—in its more empirical modern metamorphosis—astonishingly recent attempt at describing and untangling humankind's tragic, absurd, poignant and sometimes even inspiring relationship with the world around us and especially with other humans. Is it merely ironic, and perhaps a sign of halting but not fatal adjustments to new global realities, that as the world inexorably draws together, violence, hunger, ethnic strife and war only seem to be on the increase? Or, as I suspect, is this a symptom of deeper-lying, fatal human incapacities?

As Claude Steiner so urgently points out in this book, the most obvious—but also most overlooked—of the possible solutions at our disposal, love, is an under-appreciated and endangered emotion. As he indicates, “...*cultural patterns of cynicism and loneliness are proliferating and standing as obstacles to the recovery of our loving capacities and skills.*”



Love implies the development of so many of our worthiest aptitudes because it demands understanding, intelligence, empathy and above all honesty. As Steiner further affirms, *“Love is a force for collective action on behalf of people’s power and freedom.”* And it is love that we must, at all costs, nurture and encourage. It’s a matter of life or death.

Terry Berne

May 2009

*(Terry Berne is a writer and cultural critic living in Madrid, Spain. He is the youngest son of Eric Berne.)*

## Acknowledgements

This book was originally meant to be a collection of my papers, a legacy piece commissioned by the ITAA. I quickly realized that such a collection, while easily put together, would be unreadable: arcane, unreadable, boring and repetitive. What I did instead was to collect the papers that I thought might be of significance, string them together, and then rearrange them, editing and amplifying them at will. Very little in this book will be recognizable verbatim from my other writings, but any one who has followed my ideas will see they are all here, in one place, and clarified to the maximum extent possible, while keeping the material readable.

I acknowledge above all my teacher and friend Eric Berne for inventing transactional analysis and so generously sharing it with me, in theory and practice, during the short ten years that we were together before his death. Hogie Wyckoff deserves special recognition, as she was responsible for many of the key ideas of my work. My colleagues in radical psychiatry, Joy Marcus, Becky Jenkins, Beth Roy, Robert Schwebel, Carmen Kerr, Darca Nicholson helped me put into words and action the ideas that I present here. I thank Denton Roberts, Steven Karpman, Jack Dusay, Keith Tudor, Carlo Moiso and Ted Novey, my transactional analysis colleagues with whom I pondered and worked over many of my ideas, and finally my colleagues in the emotional literacy movement; Hartmut Oberdieck, Marc Devos, Lilly Roussel, Elizabeth Edema, Michael Epple, Silvia Cavalié, Anne Kohlhaas-Reith, Richard Reith, Heinz Urban, Petra Rieder-Seeger, Norbert Nagel, Manfred Kiewald, Marielle Coeytaux and Becky Jenkins, emotional warriors presently engaged in making this a world safe for emotions. Thanks also to Terry Berne, Eric Berne's son, for writing the inspiring words that introduce the book.

Finally I thank my wife and faithful companion of fifteen years, Jude Steiner-Hall, who suggested the title for this book as well as the term "liberation psychology." She edited this book, often going over it sentence by sentence until we were both satisfied that my meaning was clear. Her struggle to remedy my poor English and sharp eye for my sometimes sloppy theoretical thinking has given my work what extra sparkle of excellence it may contain. I am extremely fortunate and thankful to have such a willing and talented muse by my side.

## Introduction

In a long and, I would argue, colorful, professional life, my purpose has been to help people to develop and enjoy the fullness of their personal powers with the use of transactional analysis tools. It is impossible to develop one's full potential in a vacuum; in order to thrive we need others to thrive with us. Therefore, I have been equally invested in developing systems for creating and maintaining the kinds of cooperative social networks that empower all people to achieve their potential.

It has been my conviction that for millennia human beings have lived under the uninterrupted domination of an oppressive social order. This system is the "civilized" descendant of a simian social structure, the hierarchical pecking order by which primate groups organize themselves, a profoundly territorial and stratified form of social organization. This age-old power structure exploits the majority of human beings for the benefit of an elite minority of powerful men and their chosen descendants, while leaving the rest to struggle merely to survive.

I am a transactional analyst devoted to the study and development of transactional analysis. Transactional analysis was created in the 1950's by Eric Berne M.D., and enjoyed great recognition and popularity in the USA throughout the 1970's. In the many years since its inception, and as it waned in the US, it has grown into a global movement and has become many things to many people. However, there is a common denominator that characterizes transactional analysis world-wide; the belief that everyone is born OK and the fact that it offers the tools needed to fulfill people's potential for growth, well-being and self-expression.

Billions of people around the world yearn for freedom, and millions are actively struggling to bring it about in a variety of ways. As my contribution I am hoping to clarify the nature and promote the development of democratic personal relationships. My wish is to contribute to this quest by providing the practical, love-centered tools needed to advance democratic cooperation and freedom at the level of small group and person-to-person transactions. In this task I propose to use the tools of transactional analysis, amplified by the capabilities that are being developed in the information age.

I base my work on certain selected ideas from Berne's thinking. His own zany wording, which he occasionally put down in writing but largely imparted verbally to me and his colleagues, is included in italics:

1. People have three separate ego states at their disposal--Parent Adult, Child—each capable of specific, valuable functions. *"Everyone is three people."*
2. Everyone has an objective, information processing, problem-solving ego state—the Adult-capable of development and improvement. *"The Adult is a human computer. When in trouble, think!"*

3. Every person is born with the capacity for spontaneity, awareness and intimacy, inherent in the Child ego state; *"I'm OK/You're OK' is the universal position," "The Child is the best part of the personality."*
4. The Parent ego state is the vessel of prejudged tradition and has two possible incarnations; The Nurturing Parent and the Critical Parent.
5. People live their lives according to limiting scripts decided in childhood on the basis of external influences impinging on the young person. *"People are born princess and princesses until their parents turn them into frogs."*
6. Strokes, the units of social recognition, are essential for survival. *"If you don't get strokes your spinal cord will shrivel up."*
7. People are forced by their scripts to play psychological games, in order, in part, to obtain needed strokes. *"Games are instead of intimacy."*
8. People's early life script decisions can be reversed. *"You can close down the show and put a better one on the road; scripts can be re-decided."*
9. Transactional analysis is a method using the Adult to bring about desired change. *"Make contracts," "Achieve Adult control," "Cure people!"*
10. In order to bring about change, transactional analysts speak and write in language understandable to the average lay person. *"We talk in crisp language, understandable to a 16 year old, free of jazz or fogging polysyllables."*

Because strokes will be central in this book, let me supply Berne's definition from his best selling book *Games People Play*, in which he introduced the stroke concept (1964, pg. 15): ***"A stroke is the fundamental unit of social action...an act implying recognition of another's presence."***

In the half century during which my central interest was transactional analysis, I have developed additional views of my own which I summarize below:

1. Love is the fundamental empowering force in human relations. The basic loving transaction is the positive stroke.
2. Many more people than is realized survive on a starvation diet of insufficient positive strokes.
3. The scarcity of love is the result of a "stroke economy" enforced by the Critical Parent ego state, which keeps people powerless, depressed, fearful and hopeless.
4. Stroke hungry people will seek and accept needed but emotionally debilitating negative strokes when they aren't able to obtain positive strokes.
5. Negative strokes are generated when games are played and the three basic game roles—Rescuer, Persecutor and Victim—are enacted.

6. For a script to endure, the games that support the script must be played. Eliminating games undermines the foundation of an individual's script. Defeating the stroke economy by learning to freely give and receive positive strokes makes games unnecessary as a source of strokes and helps people throw off their scripts.
7. To defeat the stroke economy, it is necessary to isolate and eliminate the controlling influence of the Critical Parent so that the innate loving powers of the person are free to develop.
8. Love, in a cooperative and democratic social environment, is a powerful facilitator of personal power, hope and security. Power abuse and power plays have the opposite effect and generate powerlessness, insecurity, hate and fear instead.

These ideas, Berne's and mine, are the building blocks of a point of view I have been developing since I wrote *Scripts People Live* in 1971. I call this point of view "Stroke Centered Transactional Analysis."

My thesis is, in one short, hopefully meaningful paragraph:

**Humanity's full potential for love, joy and productive thought has been selectively suppressed for centuries by an authoritarian abusive social system with the active collaboration of the Critical Parent in each person. This suppressed potential can find release through heart-centered, information based, democratic cooperation, free of power plays, facilitated by transactional analysis.**

**Book One:**

**Quo Vadis TA?**  
**The Politics of the Heart**

## Chapter 1.

# Transactional Analysis in the XXIst Century

### Introduction

From its beginnings as a weekly meeting in the 1950's of a dozen assorted professionals and talented lay people at Eric Berne's apartment in San Francisco's Chinatown, transactional analysis is changing into a growing, world-wide movement, attracting thousands of eager, diverse people of varied vocations, young and old.

What is it about Berne's transactional analysis that so attracts people? Is it the simplicity of its concepts? The zany, provocative nature of Eric's language? The second generation writings of Harris, James, Steiner, Dusay, Karpman, English, the Gouldings, Steward and Joines? Is it the enthusiasm and methods of its many teachers or the missionary zeal of its trainers? Is it the elaborations of relational, psychoanalytic and integrative transactional analysis? Is it the opportunity it offers to become a therapist and make a living? Or is it the friendly, cooperative, open-minded attitude of the people in the movement? All these and more are probably and variously involved, from person to person, occupation to occupation, and place to place.

Yet I gather the strong impression from decades of traveling and teaching transactional analysis (in twenty five countries on five continents) that there are certain features of transactional analysis that attract people universally. Wherever I go, whenever I can, in hundreds of informal interviews over the years, I have asked the question: "What attracts you to transactional analysis?" And the most frequent answers I get from psychotherapists, educators, counselors and consultants, as well as lay people are: "It helps me understand myself," and, "It helps me help people."

### OK/OK

When I inquire further and ask what it is about transactional analysis that makes it so helpful the answers are more varied. Ego states and the "I'm OK, you're OK" concept lead the way, and then strokes, scripts, games and contracts plus an array of other concepts reflecting the specific interests of influential trainers.

I expected the ego states to be a favorite attractor but was surprised that the OK concept had become equally prominent in people's thinking. In the early days I had been opposed to "OK/OK" becoming an identifying feature of transactional analysis, fearful that it would serve as an overly simple definition. The book *I'm OK, You're*

*OK* by Thomas Harris, (1969) a popularization of TA, had become an even bigger best seller than *Games People Play*. I mocked the OK/OK concept in *Scripts People Live* (imok-youreok-chachacha). When an astronomer, on a coast-to-coast flight, asked me: “Isn’t transactional analysis about ‘I’m OK, you’re OK?’” I responded with a playful smile, pointing out the window to the night sky, “Yes...and isn’t astronomy about ‘twinkle, twinkle, little star?’”

Indeed, there is more to it than that. Backing up the OK/OK concept stands a sophisticated theory. Berne postulated that the “I’m OK, you’re OK” position is the “universal position” with which everyone arrives in this world. We deviate from that inborn view when we develop “not OK” attitudes about ourselves and others, and when we do we can always—e.g. with the help of a transactional analyst’s frog canceling kiss—return to the deeply embedded OK position of our birth. This is a fundamental and important theoretical proposition that informs the method of transactional analysts.

The OK concept was intended to clarify certain pathologies in people; their persistent positive or negative attitudes about themselves and others; their depressions, paranoia, resentments, pessimism and so on. Today the concept has been taken further than Berne imagined; it has developed into a dimension of transactional analysis organizations, an attitude of acceptance, cooperation and open-mindedness. This attitude has become a feature of transactional analysis’ culture. Leonhardt Schlegel, a major chronicler of transactional analysis (1998) described it as a characteristic mind set (“Einstellung”) of the movement. (Personal communication, 2001.) I will argue that the OK/OK attitude is an essential aspect of transactional analysis and that it has an important political dimension.

### Berne’s Aversion to Politics

For the longest time I have argued that Berne was thoroughly apolitical. Some have dissented about this view. After all, they argue, he named his San Francisco meetings the “San Francisco Social Psychiatry Seminars.” This has been interpreted as having political significance, indicating the wish to heal society in some way. But Berne mocked people who spoke of “arsacity” (our society), and put them in a box with players of emotional “Greenhouse” games. By social psychiatry, Berne meant the psychiatric study of “specific transactions which take place between two or more particular individuals at a given time and place.” (1961, pg. 12) not of society at large.

In addition, his response to the New Left’s political attitudes of the 1960’s—sympathetic to socialism and passionately against the Vietnam war—was similarly dismissive. His reaction to the heated political conversations of the day was that they were either a game or a pastime of the “Ain’t it Awful” variety. His most political act during those years was an editorial he wrote in the last year of his life in which he says “...(transactional analysis is now) sufficiently well established to undertake one or even two crusades.” “It is the fashion among psychotherapists to



disdain moral judgments ...there must be something worth fighting for.” He then proceeds to advocate making infant mortality the “basic value standard” and concludes: “Thus, the first crusade is against the Four Horsemen: War, Pestilence, Famine and Death...because they increase the infant mortality rate,” a faint hearted anti-war statement at a time when the Vietnam war was at its height. (TAB Jan 1969, V8, #29, Pg 7.)

And yet, I have had to make a correction in my thinking. I recently learned two important facts that Berne (“the Great Pyramid,” as he enigmatically dubbed himself) had kept hermetically hidden from those of us in the San Francisco seminar.

First, I learned from Terry Berne, Eric’s son, (2004, *The Script*, V34 #8) that Berne had experienced severe persecution in the anti-communist era of the late 1940’s and early 1950’s in the US. He was investigated and interrogated and he lost his government job and his passport because he signed a petition of the Citizens Committee to Preserve American Freedoms in 1952, a petition critical of the treatment of certain scientists the government suspected of left-leaning tendencies. I conclude now that the McCarthy era’s persecution must have succeeded in silencing him in his public utterances.

Secondly, I recently learned from Mary Goulding (personal communication, 2008) that she attended numerous lunches at Rings restaurant, in Carmel where he lived, in the late 60’s during which Eric, and his new wife Torre, freely expressed liberal political views, something he never did in San Francisco, openly or privately. It is my impression now that Torre revived Berne’s buried political instincts; in the last months of his life his attitude seemed to soften. In July 1970 I sensed an opening and offered to present the theory of the stroke economy at the San Francisco seminar. On the day I was supposed to present my frankly political ideas about strokes he suffered the first of his two heart attacks and I was never able to share these views with him.

We shall never know how he would have reacted, but in my heart of hearts I harbor the hope the he was, in fact, a person of deep political convictions, who would see eye to eye with me on these matters.

## Berne’s Personal Politics; Politics and Transactional Analysis

Berne may have been silenced regarding the highly charged controversies of the times, but in his theory and practice his politics remained deeply populist, anti-elitist, libertarian and egalitarian. Nowhere did this manifest itself more clearly than during his weekly therapy groups in the closed ward of St. Mary’s hospital in San Francisco, which I observed in the late 1960’s. For an hour Berne led a therapy group for the in-patients of the ward with the staff, seated around the group, observing. Next, switching chairs, Berne conducted a staff discussion of the group therapy session with the staff sitting in the inner circle and the inmates observing.

This was a dramatic and radical upending of the usual boundaries that required staff discussions to take place beyond the patients' hearing. It was a clear anti-elitist statement to both staff and patients, that he saw them as equal human beings. Not only did he emphasize that both staff and patients were to be taken seriously, he expected them to speak to, and about, one another in understandable language. This was very important to him; he wanted laypeople "the average high school graduate" to be included in the discourse; no psychiatric or psychoanalytic "jazz" was allowed.

Berne believed in establishing a level playing field between therapist and client; a process that begins by requiring that there be a contract between them. A contract implies a conversation between two equals, one of whom requires expert help while the other offers his/her expertise. Both are assumed to be capable human beings with a functioning Adult, both in search of a mutually agreed upon relationship, with a purpose. A requirement of the contract is that both people understand its terms and that requires a common language. In addition to demanding that discourse be in simple language, he wanted to deal with observable events that anyone could see. He forbade the use of hypothetical examples and he insisted that we speak about visible transactions between real, observable people, using understandable language. To accomplish that he provided the extremely useful and popular concepts of ego states, games and scripts.

By postulating that all people are born with an OK existential position, Berne asserted the fundamental equality of people, and their potential as human beings. "Every human being is born a prince or a princess; early experience convinces some that they are frogs." (1966, pg. 290) Nevertheless we all have, he argued, an equal opportunity for access to full "membership in the human race." (1966, pg 290) The not OK position, part and parcel of a life script, is adopted under duress and can be changed or re-decided.

His attitude about the debate regarding who could practice psychotherapy was also startlingly egalitarian. At the time only medical doctors could practice legitimately, with the exception of certain psychoanalytically trained "lay" practitioners. But the pressure was mounting, from psychologists, social workers, ministers—or just plain folks who wanted to practice soul healing. Berne's, at the time radical, response was that "a real doctor is someone who cures his patients" (regardless of degrees or credentials), a statement that gave me-a psychologist-and scores of others permission to be "real" doctors regardless of our professional training.

One of Berne's greatest qualities was that he was able to absorb disagreement and contradiction, especially when the contradiction came from reality. As an example, at one of his weekly seminars, before a room full of people, he mentioned during the discussion that having dreams of sex with one's mother was a symptom of schizophrenia. On the face of it, that seemed a reasonable correlation, but then I realized that I had had exactly such dreams myself. So when my turn came I said: "That is very interesting but I have occasional dreams of having sex with my

mother. What do you make of that?" Berne looked at me, sucked on his pipe for a few seconds and, with an ironic smile, said: "Well, there goes that theory..."

## Transactional Analysis and the Advance of Democracy

Berne's introduction of the OK/OK existential position and of the importance of strokes for healthy survival lead the way for my work on positive strokes, the stroke economy and emotional literacy. Over time these concepts were instrumental, with the help of many socially minded people, in shaping transactional analysis into a vehicle for positive, nourishing, generous, emotionally wholesome, as well as honest, transactions and relationships.

Openness to cooperative discussion, acceptance of debate and differing points of view, standing fast or changing one's mind on the basis of new information, and willingness to synthesize differing views are the characteristics of an open, democratic society. Transactional analysis' attractiveness is partially due to the fact that it shares these values. It is a democratizing organization; a small but important link in the world-wide evolution toward democracy.

The advance of democracy, which started in the Greek City of Athens, 500BC, was a reaction against the oppressive, ancient regime of hierarchies and domination of the many by the few. In the 2500 years since its first appearance, democracy has been intermittently engaged in an frequently titanic struggle against the human version of the social order of our simian ancestors: male supremacy and territoriality, also known as patriarchy, which has brought us war, empire, genocide, the Inquisition and countless other calamities.

Today this social system is being widely challenged as the world evolves away from ancestral survival patterns. Democracy is based on freedom and equality and counter to hierarchies of domination. To these principles—freedom and equality—I would add information, that is, accurate, truthful, understandable knowledge without which democratic decisions are not meaningful or possible. These three principles equality, freedom and information have had two millennia to develop to this point as democracy makes progress in a definite, if lurching, trajectory.

One major setback to the progress of world democratization has been George Bush's war in Iraq, which had the ostensible purpose of "spreading democracy" (and US values) to the Middle East. Not only did it not accomplish that simple-minded purpose, but it also gave democracy a bad name and set it back for decades in that region while it endangered democracy in the USA by undermining the US Constitution. (Hopefully the current, new era led by Barack Obama will reverse that effect and maybe democracy is coming to the USA after all.)

Politics is usually thought to be an activity related to government. I want to advance the view that any activity that involves power relations is political, and that applies all the way to the most personal level of power relations whether it be about who eats and who serves, who washes the dishes, who talks and who listens

or when and how to have sex. That is, if we are to understand power in the world, we think of governmental politics, but we must think of personal politics as well. Democratic principles are just as important in the private as in the civic sphere. In that realm of personal politics, democracy's age-long antagonist is patriarchy, the arbitrary rule of the father and his chosen representatives.

Transactional analysis, with its populist, pragmatic, simple and utilitarian language, is a power-conscious, political theory and practice. Transactional analysis emphasizes detailed Adult observation and dialog, openness about interpersonal behavior, non-violence, cooperation and equality. It is a profoundly democratic activity promoting equality, dialog and compromise at the most personal level.

People's longing for freedom and social justice can find solace in the ideas, practices and training methods of transactional analysts. That is why, in my view, transactional analysis is proliferating so dramatically, a fact that I believe would make Eric Berne proud.

## Liberation Psychology

In attempting to characterize my work and myself over the last 45 years, I have tried a number of labels. I am definitely a transactional analyst who hopes to contractually help improve people's lives in their relationships. I am an academic, science-based clinical psychologist who, whenever possible, insists in operating on the basis of knowledge validated by research. I am also a radical psychiatrist, the term that I and my bohemian cohort, only one of us an MD, adopted to describe our soul-healing activities in the 1960's. In our role as radical psychiatrists we analyzed power relationships between people and how people oppress and sicken, or cooperate with and heal each other.

As a radical psychiatrist, I am interested in how children, old people, women, men, people of color, gays, poor-in fact everyone-is alienated from his or her power and potential. I am dedicated to exploring how the alienated can gain liberation and power in the world at the transactional, interpersonal level. I am also an emotional warrior, who, with emotional literacy training methods, struggles to free up people's emotional selves—including, of course, my own. Finally, the essence of my life's work and motivation has been liberating the human spirit from its shackles—instinctual, personal or institutional, while at the same time I have tried, in my way, to be free as well. That is why I can call myself, above all, a liberation psychologist.

## What are the premises of Liberation Psychology?

We are born with enormous potential. With our individual genetic endowment, if exposed to the appropriate and appropriately timed environmental incentives, we can learn to speak ten or more languages, train to become a breathtaking gymnast, a concert pianist, a computer genius or, for that matter, a happy, long-lived person.

Without support, and exposed to fatally timed traumatic experiences, we can, any of us but for the grace of God, be reduced to abject failures, hopeless addicts, calloused criminals, and to living a short, miserable existence.

Psychological and evolutionary sciences are not so far advanced that we can predict or exactly explain people's life stories. Most explanations and remedies are intuitively devised and are based on their authors' beliefs and philosophies, only small portions of which are validated by research. Here are my core beliefs (based on observation, intuition, and scientific research, not necessarily in that order):

People are born OK. Not, admittedly, all people, because a very small minority is born with terrible emotional handicaps, such as an inborn lack of empathy or severe, congenital mental illness. But the overwhelming majority have a tendency to be healthy, and, when sick, to heal themselves, to love and be loved, to experience emotions fully, to think in an orderly way when given accurate information, and given a wholesome environment, to live in harmony with each other and nature. The disruption of people's personal OK nature is the result of external pressures, mainly controlling social influences which are internalized by each person and passed down the generations, which prevent people from bringing their potential to full bloom.

1. Nature's Healing Hand is an inborn mechanism of self-healing which, if allowed, will tend to repair the disruptions of our OK-ness. The function of a healer is to encourage and facilitate the effect of nature's healing hand when people get sick or things go badly.
2. A large portion of the difficulties that people face are due to the disruption of their human relations. Transactional analysis—the analysis of transactions—is the ideal tool with which to understand, rectify, and, if necessary, discontinue dysfunctional human relationships.

## To Illustrate

Let me give an example of how my thinking applies to one of the most common human afflictions of the age; depression.

Donna, 45, sought my help with long term unhappiness, loss of appetite and libido, insomnia, frequent crying and occasional outbursts of anger and hate that had been diagnosed as chronic depression and haphazardly treated for years with a panoply of antidepressants and benzodiazepines as well various psychotherapies, with few enduring results.

As a radical psychiatrist I asked her and myself what it was that was making her so sad and unhappy for such a long time. Rather than assuming that her depression had a hidden, perhaps biochemical or hereditary basis I looked for the possibly oppressive circumstances that were the cause of her emotional distress. When thinking about her unremitting sadness from that perspective Donna reported that

she felt hopelessly unloved by her husband and family and incapable of loving them, or anyone for that matter.

As a transactional analyst I suggested and with her agreement made a contract to cure her depression. From then on our weekly focus was her depression and what could be done to relieve it. We explored her relationships, and I helped her look into the details of her stroking patterns with her husband, children and friends and analyzed the obviously repetitive games that generated her sadness. We discovered that she had a powerful Inner Critic and strong tendency to play the Victim role and occasionally Persecutor in a number of games that were habitual in her family. She had given up on receiving the strokes that she wanted, including sexual strokes from her husband, nor was she able to give any strokes that she had for people.

As an emotional literacy trainer I helped Carol investigate and express the chaotic emotions that dominated her experiences with particular emphasis on sadness as well as related anger and hopelessness. Instead of assuming that her chaotic emotions were simply the result of an emotional or mental illness we sought their logical reasons, and pursued remedies for them.

As a Liberation Psychologist I encouraged her to confront and evict her Critical Parent who interfered constantly with her desire to love and be loved in return. Rather than assuming that she was powerless in a vicious cycle of lovelessness I offered the tools to break free from it and encouraged and supported her in her struggle, while trusting that her underlying healthy nature would carry the day.

As a scientific psychologist I used research-validated facts about depression, the limited effectiveness of medication, the value of social support and various cognitive and behavioral techniques. Within a year, I am happy to report, Donna felt that her depression had lifted and we embarked on a new contract; to find a rewarding new career.

In this manner transactional analysis, radical psychiatry, emotional literacy, scientific psychology and liberation psychology are woven together. Stroke and Information Centered Transactional Analysis is the synthesis of these views; the heart of the matter.

## Chapter 2.

### The Invention of the Human Heart

*Note: This chapter is an edited version of the 3rd Adolescence Health Conference keynote lecture “The Meming of Love; Invention of the Human Heart” at the Royal College of Physicians, in London, October 2000. Full text available at [www.claudesteiner.com/meming.htm](http://www.claudesteiner.com/meming.htm)*

We have come to a moment in our evolution as human beings when we are undergoing a change that affects the whole global population. We are experiencing a shift from our identity as a hierarchical, territorial, inherently violent and competitive genus, to the emerging identity of a species guided by new (or evolutionarily newer) motives. These new motives are the protection, not of territory, but of our offspring and even of those with whom we are not related, and survival, not by elimination of our competitors, but by cooperation with them.

This evolutionary change is not genetic, though it may have subtle genetic side effects, to be explored later in this chapter. For now, suffice it to say that this change is a “memetic” evolution, an evolution of the content of our minds, passed down the generations as surely as genetic traits. Memes, like genes, are carriers of information, but, unlike genes, which are contained in the structure of every cell of our bodies, memes are ideas in our minds: persistent concepts such as Love, War, Marriage, God, Science, Race, Art, and so on.

Genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body, down the generations, via sperm and eggs. Memes propagate themselves in what we might call the “meme pool” by leaping from brain to brain, horizontally within a generation and vertically down the generations. They do this by way of written and spoken discourse (Dawkins, 1998). There are millions of persistent ideas which are being passed down and which affect our lives profoundly. Some are extremely persistent, such as God, War, or Evil, and have been affecting us for millennia. Others are short-lived but still very powerful, as they leave their trace in the collective mentality before they fade. Examples are Joan of Arc, The Beatles, Silent movies, Tulips, and GWB. Other memes are neither persistent nor very powerful, like Monica, K-Fed, Atkins or arugula.

Genetic information is passed on and evolves in an implacable manner. To stop a specific portion of that information from being carried forward, it would be necessary to kill or sterilize every member of the species. Memetic information is more fragile. It can arguably be interrupted when a culture is erased, or by tyrannical thought control. For instance, during the Soviet era, the Kremlin attempted to eradicate the idea of God and many in Russia are now atheists as a consequence. On the other hand, however, many in Russia are fervently religious,

despite the Soviet effort. It seems that certain powerful memes—like God, Freedom, Democracy, and Equality—persist and return no matter how intense the effort to wipe them out.

Love is one such persistent meme—ancient and powerful. But it's probably true that, in the history of human evolution, the love meme (or concept) is a fairly recent apparition. Surely long before people spoke about love they were already speaking about Food, Shelter, Mine vs. Yours, Sun, Moon, Cold, Hot: memes all. When did people become aware that we feel and are motivated by love? How did love originate as a consciously discussed concept and why is it so persistent? I will argue that love has genetic underpinnings in the anatomy of human beings—in their brains—and that as love has evolved as a concept, as it has been spoken and written and sung about and established itself as a reality in the memetic pool. It probably has also caused genetic changes, and these changes are becoming evident now.

## Memes and the Brain

Persistent memetic evolution of culture, language, ideas and aspirations is likely to result in parallel biological changes. That is, over the generations, memetic change will encourage genetic changes, by way of the selective survival mechanisms that affect all of life. Regarding love, people with a genetic tendency to affiliate will be more likely to survive and procreate in an affiliative, cooperative society. Thus, the evolution of memes such as Democracy, Peace, Cooperation, and Love will produce generational changes with corresponding anatomical correlates. These anatomical, genetic developments will grant those with higher capacities for love and affiliation a higher adaptive survival capacity.

As an example, consider the ongoing evolution of the concept—meme—of civil rights and the steady social progress of said civil rights. This evolution could be the result of cultural patterns painstakingly learned by every person in that culture and passed down the generations. But it could also be the result of evolutionary anatomical changes shifting the inborn control of behavior from one portion of the brain (responsible for domination) to another (responsible for affiliation.) Most likely both processes are operating. It is possible that we are developing increasingly equality-prone brains. The arc of history seems to indicate that such a shift from dominance to affiliation is occurring, slowly but surely.

Love or lovingness is another example of such memetic and potentially parallel genetic changes. I will describe below the hypothesis that there is a dominance and violence-prone, hierarchical, territorial portion of the brain, as well as a separate, affiliation, protection and cooperation-prone portion, and that dominance is shifting from the former to the latter.



## The Anatomy of Love: The Triune Brain

In 1973 Paul MacLean, senior research scientist at the National Institute of Mental Health, proposed that the brain is made up of three distinct subdivisions corresponding to three consecutive evolutionary eras: the reptilian, the limbic, and the neocortical.

He called this three-part brain the “triune” brain. He pointed out that in humans, the neo-cortex and the reptilian brain are separated by a structure that is of a different nature than the other two. This clearly demarcated area of the brain was called the limbic brain (after the Latin *limbus*, or border) by Paul Broca, who discovered it in 1879.

These findings, very much in vogue for some years, have recently been questioned by certain neuroscientists, who point out that the brain does not operate as a collection of separate functional units but rather as a set of interlaced networks that evolve in intimate connection with each other.

In spite of these objections, it can be said without violating any neuroanatomical data that the two evolutionary stages—reptilian and limbic—are anatomically distinguishable from each other in the human brain. The reptilian and limbic brains are likewise distinguishable from the neocortical brain that developed in the later stages of human evolution. Exactly how they interact is not entirely clear as of now, though a huge amount of research on that question has been made possible by recent MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) technology.

### *The Reptilian Brains*

The reptilian brain, the first highly complex neural bundle to appear in evolutionary history, supports the basic physiological functions: circulation, respiration, digestion, elimination, mating. It is also involved in defense, aggression, and the emotions of anger and fear. In the human being, it sits atop the spinal cord, resembling the business end of a golf club with the spinal cord being the handle. While it has evolved from its original form in lizards and snakes, it performs similar functions in humans as it does in lizards, while at the same time communicating with the more recently evolved limbic and the neo-cortical portions of the brain. (Lewis et al., 2000).

### *The Limbic Brain*

Reptiles have no visible concern with their offspring and have no protective behavior repertoire so that they will abandon or even eat their own eggs as soon as they issue from the female. As evolution progressed and protection of the offspring became an effective survival strategy, the limbic brain, developed to fulfill that function. Protection of the young—usually within a territory secured by a powerful male—is the limbic brain’s purpose. (Lewis et al., 2000) Such protection required an affiliative drive (love for short) based on a hunger for contact and mutual

recognition. The hunger for contact (strokes in transactional analysis terminology) maintained the bond between mating pairs, between mother and offspring, and, to a lesser extent between father and offspring. It thus generated closely knit social groupings, all of which maximized survival of the young. The emotions of love, sadness, jealousy, and hope have their source in the limbic brain and can be observed in so-called higher species such as cats, dogs, horses, apes and other mammalian, warm-blooded animals.

### *The Neo-cortical Brain*

Anatomically, the limbic brain is wrapped around the reptilian brain, which in turn is wrapped by the cortical and neo-cortical brain. The cortex and neocortex are the convoluted portion of the brain that most people are familiar with.. The neocortex is engaged in the higher functions of imitation: speaking, writing, planning, symbolic reasoning and conceptualization. Evolution of a larger and larger neo cortex--and therefore larger brain--exceeded the capacity of the mother's birth canal and required that humans be born before achieving full brain size. This in turn required that the neonate be protected while further brain size and function are accomplished; the protective social environment generated by the limbic brain made that possible.

Once the social networks needed to protect the development of the cortical brain were established so that the brain grew to its present size, memetic evolution was possible. This evolution took the form of ideation and language, specifically regarding maternal love, love between father and mother, and between members of the social group. In *A Natural History of Love*, Diane Ackerman (1994) chronicles the evolution--from early Egypt, to Romeo and Juliet--of the many ways in which humans have expressed the loving emotion.

On the other hand, parallel with the elaboration of affiliative ideation, was the elaboration of adversarial ideation and language regarding territorial, hierarchical, aggressive and defensive emotions. The language, poetry and music of fear, jealousy, anger, aggression, and war has had its own fervent proponents. Affiliative ideation gave rise to of a myriad of expressions; passionate affairs, family sagas, love novels and songs, romantic movies and plays, love-making and parenting manuals. Adversary ideation developed equally elaborate methods of territorial attack and defense, as well as military strategies and the weapons, texts, military academies and concepts (patriotism, nationalism) that accompany adversary behavior. If one compares the elaborations of the affiliative, love meme with the elaboration of the adversary, hate meme, it is difficulty to believe that love has any sort of a chance. Nevertheless, in spite of constant severe set backs, love seems to be undaunted, probably because the limbic and cortical brains have ascendancy over the activities of the reptilian brain and, some would argue, in the arc of history, love is the *only* engine of survival.

Neo-cortical functions are applied to the modulation and even modification of the limbic and reptilian functions. Rational control of the procreative, aggressive,

protective and affiliative drives is one of the byproducts of human neo-cortical evolution. However, as Joseph LeDoux points out in *The Emotional Brain* (1996), there is a distinct asymmetry in the way these two portions of the brain affect each other in the untutored human. Specifically, the reptilian and limbic brains have a great influence upon the neocortical brain, making it possible for emotional arousal to dominate and control thinking. Although thoughts can easily trigger emotions, we are not very effective at turning emotions off. Modulation of the emotions is the most difficult task of the neocortex, a primary goal of emotional literacy training, what Berne called Adult control.

## Ego States

There is a correspondence between these developments in brain theory and a parallel development in transactional analysis. A quarter of a century before McLean postulated the triune brain, Eric Berne introduced the theory of three ego states. Initially, Berne divided people's behavior (the ego in psychoanalytic parlance) into two portions: the archeopsyche, which he called "the Child" for short and the neopsyche, which he called "the Adult." (1961) The Child was allied with our emotional nature and the Adult was rational and untrammelled by emotion.

Berne assumed that the two ego states, and later a third one which he called the Parent, had specific anatomical representations within the brain; in particular, that the Adult was located in the neocortex while the Child was located in a more primitive portion of the brain. Within short spans of time, he postulated, the ego states can become dominant-one at a time-and can be easily recognized by the average person.

Berne's thinking was deeply influenced by two major scientific trends: evolution and neuroscience. Though there is considerable slippage between his ego state theory and the triune brain theory, there are also suggestive similarities. Recently, writers in evolutionary psychology have proposed that the mind is composed of "modules" that have evolved because of their adaptive benefits. These modules were first suggested by Noam Chomsky when he postulated that there exists a genetic grammar inborn in all humans that generates all human language (Chomsky, 1998). The language module has been confirmed by ensuing developments in neuroscience and evolutionary theory. Further study has shown that there are similar modules for many other distinct traits such as how we process visual information or how we treat biological offspring. Steve Pinker in his book *How the Mind Works* (1999) gives an excellent account of evolutionary psychology's mental modules. The ego states are, I believe, three such distinct modules to be acknowledged as part the human toolbox of adaptive capacities.

### *The triune brain's operation*

Let me give an example that I observed, of how we might speculate that the three brains operate and interact in humans:

Harold is a caring and loving father. On a slightly chilly fall day his son, Pedro, 11 years old, is leaving for school. Harold suggests that he wear a warmer coat. Pedro is not interested and politely declines: "That's OK"

Father insists "C'mon you'll get cold and this way you can be sure to be comfortable."

"Thanks, no," Pedro responds.

Again Harold tries with a repeated rejection by Pedro. Suddenly, Harold's face turns red. His attitude changes completely. He is abruptly angry and, holding Pedro by the shoulder, tries to force the coat on his arm. Pedro resists and now Harold is furious. "I told you to wear a coat, so put it on!"

Pedro is now angry as well. "Leave me alone!" he grabs the coat and with an unhappy face is off to school. Harold seems stricken, no longer angry but sad and forlorn.

I observed this interaction and noted the sudden shift in Harold from a loving, nurturing person to a critical, persecuting bully, a shift from limbic to reptilian control behavior.

I asked Harold how he felt about the interaction with his son. He was visibly shaken and in response to my question said: "He won't take care of himself, he'll get cold and have nothing to wear. Now at least he will."

"Are you feeling badly about what you did?" I asked.

Harold reflected a few seconds and said, unconvincingly: "I shouldn't have yelled at him but it's the only way to make sure he stays warm." After some more thinking he said: "Of course, I'm not really sure; in fact he's likely to lose the coat rather than wear it."

He looked at me sheepishly: "Actually, it's pretty clear that there was something wrong with how I acted. It's a game we play a lot; I try to protect him and wind up being mean to him."

I said: "Perhaps he's old enough to be making these types of decisions on his own. You may be Rescuing him, with the inevitable consequent Persecution." Harold thoughtfully responded; "Yeah, you're probably right. I'll work on that."

"You might consider setting the stage for a change by apologizing for getting angry this morning."

"Good idea," he agreed.

In this example

1. Harold's limbic, protective behavior is rejected by Pedro.

2. This triggers Harold's reptilian, territorial, dominant behavior.
3. Harold's bid for dominance in turn triggers Pedro's own angry, reptilian reaction.
4. Finally, my neo-cortical questioning inhibits Harold's reptilian behavior and elicits a neo-cortical, rational response, and a limbic, cooperative, apologetic response.

### *The transactional analysis view*

From a TA perspective we can see the following:

1. Ego states. Harold's ego states shift from Nurturing Parent to Critical Parent when Pedro refuses his nurturing, from Critical Parent to Child when Pedro rebuffs him and from Child to Adult as a response to my questions.
2. Drama Triangle roles. Harold begins as Rescuer, doing more than his share in a situation that concerns his son's health. Predictably, as illustrated by Karpman's Drama Triangle (See Book Two, Introduction) he shifts from Rescuer to Persecutor and then to Victim when his son turns on him. When I engage him in Adult dialogue he exits the Drama Triangle.
3. Games. This is game of "I'm only trying to help", a repetitive set of transactions beginning as an attempt to give helpful strokes and ending in an exchange of negative strokes. As is the case in all games it contains an existential "payoff." The existential payoff in this case is the reaffirmation of Harold's script (a tradition in his family) that calls for alienation between father and son, with life-long consequences. My intervention establishes Adult control and alternative options for future behavior.

Can transactional analysis incorporate the facts of brain functioning into its theory?

The attempt may prove to be something of a Procrustean bed. Berne identified the Adult ego state with the neocortex, hence the neopsyche. He called the Child the archeopsyche, which could be vaguely connected to the reptilian brain, and (here the correspondences with neuro-science break down) he called the Parent the exteropsyche, suggesting that the Parent is an acquired rather than inborn function. From the triune brain perspective the Parent (at least the Nurturing Parent) is a deeply embedded, evolved function. On the other hand the Critical Parent may be an acquired ego state though it may have its origins in the reptilian Child.

By ascribing different histories to the three ego states Berne established a certain, intuitively appealing relationship between them: The primitive inborn emotional Child, the equally inborn but more recent, rational, reality testing Adult, free of strong emotions, and the acquired, rather than inborn Parent.

In my own thinking at this time the limbic system may well be best represented by the Nurturing Parent with its protective functions and the reptilian system by the Critical Parent with its territorial and hierarchical functions. This view somewhat reconciles evolution with history inasmuch as the development of the limbic and cortical brains parallels the shift away from competition and patriarchy in the direction of cooperation and democracy.

*Why three egos states?*

Ego states, three of them, each of them relevant to full functioning, are not only concepts in our theory but its icons, its emblems. Even before the possible contradiction of their validity by research, people have been tilting at them, eager to depose them. Why not two ego states, why not four, or five or eight or sixteen why not one that integrates all?

Ego states are extremely useful concepts that dramatically facilitate human understanding of human behavior. It may be that eventually three ego states will not be theoretically tenable. That should be decided by research rather than debate.

Meanwhile the triune brain and the three ego states are a daunting set of overlapping theories that could enjoy a felicitous marriage.

*What's love got to do with it?*

As a transactional analyst I am interested in people's everyday attempts to connect with each other--at the grocery store or bank, in phone conversations, e-mail letters, twitters and blogs; while making love or arguing, eating at a restaurant or driving, teaching or being taught, talking to accountants or to babies. The raw data of this analysis is found in the constant stream of daily transactions between people. I have studied the positive, affectionate expressions of recognition, which constitute bonding, trust and intimacy; in short the loving experience. No subject is as often on people's lips, in songs, TV and movies, books and thoughts and, I expect, the Internet, as is love. One would think that with all that interest, love should be an easy subject to explore. But there seems to be a problem. Diane Ackerman says it well in *A Natural History of Love*:

“As a society we are embarrassed by love. We treat it as if it were an obscenity. We are reluctant to admit to it. Even saying the word makes us stumble and blush. Why should we be ashamed of an emotion so beautiful and natural? Love is the most important thing in our lives, a passion for which we would fight or die, and yet we're reluctant to linger over its name.” (1994)

Ackerman's comments are about romantic love, mostly the love between a man and a woman. In fact almost everything that is said, written and sung about love relates to that narrow band of love's realm; adult heterosexual relationships. But love in real time, in the here and now, as we feel it or fail to feel it, for like or differently

gendered, openly or in twisted knots, intertwined with anger and hate toward our “loved” ones, our friends, our coworkers or ourselves, is all too often fraught with conflict and avoidance. The only situation in which love talk comes easily is either at the height of sexual passion or when it concerns children, and even there it is losing ground due to overriding fears about sexual abuse. Still, with children we can usually freely express heartfelt, sincere, love feelings. But as soon as children pass into what Freud called the “latency” period the barriers go up.

How often does a father look his teenage daughter in the eye, face to face and from the bottom of his heart, eyes moistening, say: “I love you!” How often do a grown brother and sister embrace and without embarrassment or fear declare their love for each other? The ban on love is not merely a speaking ban; among psychological research projects love is not the subject of the intense inquiry as often as it deserves to be. As an example, the classic book about emotions, *The Emotional Brain; The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* by Joseph LeDoux, (1996) fails to mention love even once in its index; this otherwise excellent book’s first chapter is called “What’s love got to do with it?” a question that is never addressed in the text. Daniel Goleman’s influential book *Emotional Intelligence* (1996) has twenty index entries related to anger, and only three index entries on love, again in Chapter One, and none in the rest of the book. The American Psychological Association in its January 2000 *Special Issue on Happiness, Excellence and Optimal Human Functioning* reports on the great strides being made in theorizing and researching the positive side of the human experience. Joy, optimism, contentment and “flow” get the attention and research; love is mentioned but gets only lip service and is seldom discussed, let alone investigated by experts in the field.

Yet love is the instant antidepressant, and a proven insurance against disease and morbidity. One of the principal researchers of this fact, Dr. Dean Ornish, a Harvard educated physician, recognized by *Life Magazine* as one of fifty most influential members of his generation, writes in his book, *Love and Survival*:

“...love and intimacy are at the root of what makes us sick and what makes us well. If a new drug had the same impact...it would be malpractice not to prescribe it ... I am not aware of any factor in medicine -- not diet, not smoking, not stress, not genetics, not drugs, not surgery-- that has greater impact on our quality of life, incidence of illness and premature death from all causes.” (1998)

### *Love’s Adolescent Battleground*

Nowhere are the crosscurrents between love and violence as evident as in adolescence. The struggle between these two great human currents: love vs. hate, cooperation vs. competition, the individual vs. the family or tribe which is occurring world-wide is reflected in all of us as we go through puberty. I recall, in my own adolescence in Mexico, how painful a subject love was for us; we simply would not or could not admit to having any affections. I had a best friend; he and I were practically inseparable but we would not confess our friendship even to our

mothers, let alone age mates. When we eventually became attracted to a girl we hid the fact in shame, lest we be mercilessly mocked. At the same time we were free to express hatred and aggression especially, ironically, against the United States and its role in Mexican politics.

By all accounts teen depression, suicide and homicide are serious adolescent problems in which love and hate conflate. Kipland Kinkel, the fifteen-year-old Oregon boy who in 1998 killed both of his parents and then proceeded to go to his school and kill two and injure 25 others wrote the following, prior to his rampage:

"I need help. There is one person that could help but she wont. I need to find someone else. I think I love her but she could never love me...today of all days I ask(ed) her to help me. I was shot down I feel like my heart has been ripped open and ripped apart...I gave her all I have and she just threw it away... Every time I see (her) face my heart is shot with an arrow. I think she will say yes but she doesn't. She says 'I don't know.'" (1999)

In response to an essay question about love at first sight Kipland wrote:

"Love is an evil plot to make people buy alcohol and firearms. When you love someone something is always taken away from you... it's easier to hate than love... I don't believe in love at first sight. But I believe in hate at first sight...(love) does more harm than good...love is a horrible thing. It makes things kill and hate." (1999)

Not many teenagers kill as Kipland did, but his terrifying sentiments about love and hate are not unusual. "Love," as Stevie Wonder sings, "is in need of love today."

### *The Evolution of Love*

The evolution of concepts associated with love has been accelerating since Jesus of Nazareth made love the center of his doctrine. There is a huge leap between Jesus and the Bard, but Shakespeare's contribution was equally crucial, according to Harold Bloom in *Shakespeare; The Invention of the Human* (1998). Romeo and Juliet, sixteen and not yet fourteen years old, have become an example of adolescent love in its most uncompromising form. They meet at a dance one evening, before dawn declare their undying love for each other, marry the next day, and are dead within a fortnight. This story has become a guiding idea, a "memetic" standard for romantic love.

Many in the arts have written and spoken about love eloquently enough so as to advance love to a highly refined and powerful meme. In the sciences, Eric Berne made a major contribution to the potential quantification of love when he postulated the "stroke" as the unit of recognition (1964, p. 15). With the development of transactional analysis he provided a method to study the exchange of affection and aversion. (Positive strokes are units of positive recognition or



affection, as in “you soothe and comfort me” and negative strokes are units of negative recognition or aversion, as in “you’re a pain in the neck”.)

### *The Enemies of the Heart*

As a transactional analyst I see all aspects of health reflected in people’s transactions. In addition I believe, as a psychotherapist, that the royal road to recovery and health is the analysis and correction of transactional behavior. This is especially true when working with the pathologies of relationships and the way in which love can be heartbreakingly corrupted from its potential as a life-giving force.

Berne spoke of people’s need for recognition-recognition hunger-and how people transact to satisfy that need. Berne also observed that people undertake certain repetitive transactional patterns which he called games. He labeled these games with eye-opening names such as “Why don’t you yes but,” “Now I have got you, you SOB,” “Do me something,” “Shlemiehl,” “Rapo,” or “Uproar.” (1964)

Games are played from the Child ego state, often masquerading as a grown-up and in large part to obtain strokes. Every time we start a game the inner Child is hoping to get positive recognition or strokes, yet every time we play a game that purpose is defeated, and instead of strokes we get negative recognition or hateful transactions. We play games because we are hungry for positive recognition or love and we wind up getting hate instead. Still, we persevere because we need the recognition and hope springs eternal.

As is the case with every other instinctual behavior, the drive for recognition motivates the organism to act. We know about the needs for water, food, activity, sex, and we know that being deprived of any of them will motivate vigorous effort to restore them. Berne named the need for recognition, recognition hunger (1964) I have renamed the need for recognition, “stroke hunger.” Years ago I came to the conclusion that people as a whole are not only periodically stroke hungry, but actually chronically stroke starved; that is to say that most people are in a constant state of stroke deprivation. The fact is that just as we can become starved for food, we can become stroke starved. A starved person will pursue food in any form and eat rotten food if hungry enough. Likewise with strokes; we will pursue them hungrily and if we can’t get good ones we’ll settle for bad ones and that can be our undoing.

## Chapter 3.

### Love, The Stroke Economy and The Critical Parent

Why are people stroke starved? I began asking myself that question in the late 60's. Before I uncovered the reason, I wrote a story: *The Warm Fuzzy Tale*, which seemed to contain an explanation. I include a slightly edited version of the story, written in 1969.

#### The Warm Fuzzy Tale

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there lived two happy people called Tim and Maggie with their two children, John and Lucy. In those happy days everyone was given at birth a small, soft Fuzzy Bag. Any time they reached into this bag they were able to pull out a Warm Fuzzy. Whenever someone was given a Warm Fuzzy it made them feel warm and fuzzy all over. Anytime that somebody felt like it, he might walk up to you and say, "I'd like to have a Warm Fuzzy." People were always asking each other for Warm Fuzzies, and since they were always given freely, getting enough of them was never a problem. There were always plenty to go around, and so everyone was happy and healthy and felt warm and fuzzy most of the time.

At the edge of this happy land lived a warlock who made potions and salves. He became angry because everyone was so happy and no one was buying his products. The warlock was very clever and devised a very wicked plan. One beautiful morning he crept up to Tim while Maggie was playing with her daughter and whispered in his ear, "See here, Tim, look at all the Fuzzies that Maggie is giving to Lucy. You know, if she keeps it up she is going to run out and then there won't be any left for you!"

Tim was astonished. He turned to the warlock and said: "Do you mean to tell me that there isn't a Warm Fuzzy in our bag every time we reach into it?" And the warlock said, "No, absolutely not, and once you run out, that's it. You don't have any more." With this he rushed away cackling all the way.

Tim took this to heart and began to notice every time Maggie gave up a Warm Fuzzy to someone else because he liked Maggie's Warm Fuzzies very much and did not want to give them up. He began to complain or sulk when he saw Maggie giving away Warm Fuzzies and because Maggie loved him very much, she stopped giving Warm Fuzzies as often, and reserved most of them for him. The children watched this and soon

began to get the idea that it was wrong to give Warm Fuzzies any time you were asked or felt like it. They too became very careful. And even though they found a Warm Fuzzy every time they reached into their bag they reached in less and less and became more and more stingy and jealous.

Before the warlock had appeared, people used to gather in groups of three, four or five, never caring too much who was giving Warm Fuzzies to whom. Now people began to pair off and to reserve all their Warm Fuzzies for each other, exclusively. Soon people began to feel less warm and less fuzzy. Some of them began to shrivel up and, occasionally, people would even die from lack of Warm Fuzzies. More and more people went to the warlock to buy potions and salves even though they didn't really seem to work.

Well, the situation was getting very serious indeed. The bad warlock who had been watching all of this didn't really want the people to die (since dead people couldn't buy his salves and potions), so a new plan was devised. Everyone was given, free of charge, a bag that was very similar to the Fuzzy Bag except that this one was cold while the Fuzzy Bag was warm. Inside of the warlock's were Cold Pricklies. From then on, every time somebody asked for a Warm Fuzzy, people who were worried about losing their supply had a choice to give them a Cold Prickly instead. Sometimes, two people would walk up to each other, thinking they might get a Warm Fuzzy, but one or both of them would change his mind and give a Cold Prickly instead. They expected to feel good, but they came away feeling bad instead. But something is better than nothing and Cold Pricklies did prevent people from shriveling up somewhat. The end result was that while few people were dying a lot of people were very unhappy and feeling very cold and prickly.

So since the coming of the warlock there were fewer and fewer Warm Fuzzies around and Warm Fuzzies thought as free as air, became extremely valuable. This caused people to do all sorts of things in order to get them. People who could not find a generous partner had to buy their Warm Fuzzies and had to work long hours to earn the money. Some people became "popular" and got a lot of Warm Fuzzies without having to give any back. These people would then sell their Warm Fuzzies to people who were "unpopular" and needed them to feel that life was worth living. Other people coated Cold Pricklies in fluffy plastic and gave them away freely but that did not feel very good, as you might expect. The situation was very, very dismal and it all started because of the coming of the warlock who made people believe that some day, when least expected, they might reach into their Warm Fuzzy Bag and find no more.

Not long ago a very special young woman came to this unhappy land. She seemed not to have heard about the warlock and was not worried about

running out of Warm Fuzzies. People called her the Hip Woman because she had very generous hips. She gave out Warm Fuzzies freely, even when not asked. Many people who were under the warlock's spell were shocked and disapproved of her because she was giving the children the idea that they should not worry about running out of Warm Fuzzies. But the children liked her very much because they felt good around her and began to follow her example giving out Warm Fuzzies whenever they felt like it. The warlock noticed that people were snapping out of his spell realizing that there were plenty of Warm Fuzzies to go around and that didn't need to buy potions to be happy. Overjoyed, they went out in the streets to celebrate. The warlock sent his guards to restore order, and to put people in jail for giving away Warm Fuzzies without a license. But the word started to spread, and more and more people joined the dancing in the streets. The struggle spread all over the land and is probably going on right where you live. Will the warlock succeed and keep selling potions or will the people realize how abundant Warm Fuzzies can be when people give them away freely? If you want to, and I hope you do, you can help by freely giving and asking for Warm Fuzzies and being as generous and loving as you can.

### THE END

You can find the full story in book form (1977) and translated into fourteen languages on my website: [www.emotional-literacy.com](http://www.emotional-literacy.com). The story has been endlessly reproduced, frequently without my name, and has even occasioned a phrase—"warm and fuzzy"—much used by politicians and in the popular media.

In real life, it turns out, we have strokes instead of warm fuzzies, and a set of rules, "the stroke economy," (Steiner, 1971) instead of the warlock's lies.

### The Stroke Economy; Definition

The stroke economy is essentially a set of prohibitions that, like the nasty plot of the warlock, prevent people from loving and being loved in return.

I will refer to the stroke economy frequently in this book. Here I just want to outline its injunctions, the mandate constantly delivered by the Critical Parent, which prevents us from getting the strokes we need.

The rules of the stroke economy are

- ◆ If you have a positive stroke you would like to give, don't give it.
- ◆ If there is a stroke you would like to get, don't ask for it.
- ◆ If you are given a stroke you would like, don't accept it.

- ◆ If you are given a stroke you would prefer not to accept, don't reject it.
- ◆ Don't give yourself positive strokes.

When a whole population obeys one or more of these injunctions, the result is a dramatic reduction of positive strokes and widespread stroke scarcity. When people are hungry they are submissive, depressed, hopeless, obedient and, most importantly, when stroke starved, people are willing to take negative strokes rather than go without any strokes at all.

## The Stroke Economy - History

In the late 1960's, myself and a handful of war resisters in the mental health professions established a RAP Center at the Berkeley Free Clinic and anointed ourselves into radical psychiatry. RAP stood for "Radical Approach to Psychiatry" and we were a protest movement against the abuses of psychiatry as practiced in those days. (I myself was a psychologist, not an MD, but we were using an alternative definition of psychiatry, "soul healing," going back to the Greek: psyche; soul, and iatreia; healing.)

While intrigued by the difficulties that people seemed to be having when exchanging strokes, I was guided by Hogie Wyckoff to Wilhelm Reich's ideas about the "sex economy." Reich introduced the concept in the 1930's at a time when the Nazis were dominating the social landscape of Germany. Reich argued that since, according to Freud, sexual repression was the cause of neurosis, the remedy would be a guilt-free and active sex life. In his book *The Sexual Revolution* (1936) Reich argued that fascism was a symptom of sexual repression and that the Nazis intentionally controlled sexual exchanges among German youth for the purpose of promoting conformity to their fascist program. As an antidote to this sex economy Reich established the Socialist Association for Sexual Counseling and Research, which organized counseling centers for German youth and workers. You can bet these centers were disbanded as soon as Hitler took power.

While I could see that Reich was making a valid point in his argument, I found it misguided in its single focus on sexuality. I did see a similar inhibiting trend in our culture, applied to simple affection and love, and called it the "stroke economy." I initially shared Reich's view that both of these "economies" were capitalist plots to subdue youthful independence and freedom but eventually saw that as excessively paranoid even though—as is the case with most paranoid ideation—it contained a certain grain of truth. The fact that these rules about sex and love existed (e.g. laws against homosexuality, harassment of young couples caught necking, laws against oral sex, etc.) and were enforced, sometimes violently, sometimes by the police and other governmental agencies, gave our paranoid fantasies foundation in reality.

The rules of the stroke economy are enforced internally and externally. Internally, by the Critical Parent, a set of ingrained ideas, acquired in childhood, which deeply affect the way we love ourselves and others. These ideas can be seen as fascist dicta

implanted by our elders or they can be seen in less paranoid fashion as powerful mandates that shape every emotional experience according to an archaic blueprint. Disobedience to these rules results in painful feelings of anxiety, guilt, shame and unworthiness.

Externally, the rules of the stroke economy manifest as social mores enforced by the disapproval of society. Sometimes, as in the case of homosexuality, the rules have been brutally imposed by force of law for millennia. Such laws continue to be passed as late as 2008, against gay marriage in the US, for example. Meanwhile in Iran, homosexuality by a man or adultery by a woman continues to be punished by death.

As people--intimidated by these internal and external sanctions--follow the stroke economy's implicit rules on a culture-wide basis, the outcome is a lowering of affectionate exchanges resulting in generalized "stroke starvation". The end result is that our innate capacity for love, and its attendant survival benefits, becomes increasingly unavailable. At the same time cultural patterns of cynicism and loneliness (See *Bowling Alone* by R. Putnam) are proliferating and standing as obstacles to the recovery of our loving capacities and skills.

## Stroke City

As part of the RAP Center program we started a number of "contact" groups, in which participants were taught the principles of transactional analysis, as it applies to cooperative relationships. The most popular contact group to evolve from this work was called "Stroke City."

Three times a week, "Stroke City" gathered at the RAP Center. For two hours in the afternoon about twenty people found themselves in an emotional oasis in which they could "trash the stroke economy," by exchanging and giving themselves positive strokes in a safe, protected environment. The leader of the group scrutinized every transaction. It was his or her job to make sure that the strokes given were positive and unclouded by hidden or overt criticism. When needed, the leader helped the participants correct their transactions to make sure the strokes were heard and accepted when wanted. This proactive, transactional analytic monitoring was an important improvement over the somewhat sloppy, "touchy-feely," and often suspect hugging and stroking already in vogue at the time. The improvement was that the strokes exchanged were cleansed of subtle negative aspects and were freely given and freely accepted or rejected.

We soon observed an unexpected side effect. Participants would often look around after some time and declare, as if in a trance, that they "loved everyone in the room." Many people left these meetings with a light step and a happy, loving glow on their faces experiencing a feeling that had been called "oceanic" by Freud. (1969) This feeling of quasi-religious heart-warming openness in the group was in fact a condition of emotional-limbic-resonance.

## Limbic Resonance

Limbic resonance is the fundamental psychological mechanism that is responsible for empathy between individuals and also for mob behavior in large groups. Limbic resonance is mediated by mirror neurons (located in the limbic brain) whose function seems to be reflecting the emotional states of others. In groups, limbic resonance will generate emotional unanimity, whether loving or hopeful, angry or fearful. This explains why, in a crowd, people who are ordinarily peaceful and non-violent can become angry, violent and even murderous. It also explains the effects of Stroke City on its participants.

I assumed at first that people were just cheered up by Stroke City in a manner similar to the crowd experience at a ball game in which our side wins. This was not a wholly mistaken interpretation, but upon closer scrutiny it became clear that these exercises had a significant and profound effect on the participants' emotional states far beyond that experienced in a stadium. They spoke of loving feelings, of having an open heart and of a transcendent experience of affection and universal love. What had started as a group exercise to practice how to be cooperative and positive towards others turned out to have profound limbic consequences. The immersion in positive strokes, relatively unclouded by negative emotions of anger or fear, amplified in each person by their mirror neurons affected the participants' loving capacities in a powerful and heart-expanding way. It was then that we began to see that learning how to exchange positive strokes might have an effect on people's overall capacity to love. We also discovered the pervasive activity of the Critical Parent.

## The Critical Parent

Strokes empower people. Therefore, in order to maintain control, the Critical Parent is especially interested in preventing people from getting strokes. When trying to give, ask for, or accept strokes, people often experience extreme, sometimes paralyzing, anxiety, embarrassment and even self-loathing. Some people hear a voice saying, "You don't deserve all this fuss. How dare you ask for anything?" or "This is stupid, you'll make a fool of your-self; shut up," or "Nobody wants to hear what you feel." Others just feel anxious or self-conscious every time they give, accept or ask for a stroke. In the face of such Critical Parent opposition, very few find it easy to exchange strokes.

When we pursue the strokes that we need, the Critical Parent tells us we are not OK, and don't deserve to love or be loved. It threatens us with humiliation, ridicule and guilt. In short, it terrorizes with the ultimate threat: exclusion from the group, to be left alone in the cold in total alienation. Even though most people enjoyed "Stroke City" and wound up feeling good, there were always a few who felt badly, left out, afraid or hurt. It became clear that they had succumbed to the attacks of the Critical Parent.

## The Critical Parent Exposed

- ◆ In a session of Stroke City, James becomes aware that he wants to address a man sitting across from him with a compliment about his masculine looks. He immediately hears a voice in his head that says “What’s wrong with you? Do you want people to think you’re a faggot?” He suppresses his wish and spends the rest of the hour brooding about the situation while strokes are given and taken all around him. When asked if he wants a stroke he refuses. He winds up believing that the whole exercise was disgusting and feeling very sad and angry.
- ◆ In a lively class discussion, Marge is asked a question by the professor. She is convinced that everyone is smarter and better read than she. She fears that her teacher will find out that she is a fraud and her mind becomes a blank as her whole body is frozen with panic. She cannot answer the question even though she has an excellent answer.
- ◆ Doug hears voices in his head every time that he has an interaction at work: “Can’t you see how weird and awkward you are? Every one else does!”
- ◆ Whenever Charlotte makes phone calls to sell customers her company’s services, her heart beats wildly and she is filled with dread. Yet she has developed a system with which she manages to appear calm and self-assured. She suffers from constant stress related headaches.
- ◆ When he approaches a woman he likes, Jacob has overwhelming emotional responses and expectations of ridicule. He is unable to be affectionate and ask for the affection he wants when he is in a relationship.
- ◆ Hillary is in constant fear of danger; danger of bad food, bad air, dangerous people and risk of being stalked and raped. She performs complicated, extremely time consuming steps to keep herself safe and has to limit her activities radically.
- ◆ Almost every night, Daniel wakes up and spends long periods of sleepless time tossing in bed while plagued by fantasies of problems and bad things that could happen the next day. He is unable to control his doom-ridden thoughts, even though his fears fail to materialize. He is often tired and sleepy in the middle of the day at his high-tech, high achievement job.
- ◆ Sally lives under a cloud of sadness. Every so often she cries uncontrollably and for no reason and is convinced that she is doomed to a life of unhappiness. She puts up a workable front and on occasion she has a short period of well-being and that gives her hope.
- ◆ Drew regularly compares her appearance with other women’s. She ignores people who, she decides, are not as attractive as she and focuses on those who are “better” than she. She is plagued by continual feelings of inferiority and



competition about her body—her weight, breasts, hips, legs, hair, skin—and she obsessively reads fashion magazines.

## Pleased to Meet You, Hope you Guess my Name

It has been called by as many names as the Devil himself. Nearly every psychotherapy system has a name for it; the harsh superego, negative self-talk, catastrophic expectations, low self-esteem, social phobia, self-hatred, stinking thinking, the punitive protector, internalized oppression, the Inner Critic, the Alter, the Beast, the Pig Parent, the Critical Parent and so on, on and on. Psychotherapists recognize the importance of this near universal phenomenon; that inner voice that tells so many of us, over and over, in good times and bad, in whispers or shouts, from childhood to old age, when we are doing well or when we are doing badly, that our life is mediocre and hopeless, that we are not OK, that we are stupid or bad or ugly or crazy or sick, doomed or weird.

The Critical Parent gets its start as an external influence, force-fed by people with power over us when we are children. Primarily parents, but other relatives as well as teachers, neighbors and very importantly, other children, have the power to superimpose their judgments over our OK nature when we are young. Children find that their comfort, and at times survival, depends on accepting what they are told without protest. When they do so they change from free-ranging, autonomous humans to enslaved beings, governed by outrageous external ideas and rules. Accepting and internalizing these ideas and rules is a condition for psychological survival when we are children. Consequently the Critical Parent can perpetuate the myth that it is our ally and that it does what it does only to help us. The truth is that with such a friend we don't need enemies; its constant presence effectively diminishes life for most of us, ruins it for many, and undercuts the capacity to succeed and be productive for all of us. Even if any one person is personally free from a Critical Parent, that person will still suffer from the corrosive effects of the Critical Parent of others.

The voices in Doug's head would be called his harsh superego by a psychoanalyst, Jacob's predictions of doom would be called catastrophic expectations by a rational-emotive therapist, Marge's demeaning feelings about her worth would be called low self-esteem. Charlotte's panic attack would be called a phobic reaction. Daniel's mental conundrum would be called an obsession and Hillary's fears would be called negative self-talk by cognitive therapists. Sally would be diagnosed as having a major depression. Drew's constant self put-downs have been called punitive alter by multiple personalities advocates and pathological self-criticism by academic psychologists; all of it has been called stinking thinking in twelve step programs.

Some will see these agonizing situations as symptoms of scores of emotional disorders and mental illnesses like depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, social phobia and so on. I would argue that they are variants of Critical Parent activity.

Everyone of the real-life situations described above can be seen as the result of a set of mental patterns or ideas, which has acquired a firm grip over each person's emotional life. This possession can be non-verbal and deeply, somatically embedded and reflexive or it can be a vicious, brutal voice that has been called the Pig Parent. When it is a relentless, nagging critical voice, it has been called the Inner Critic; when a constant "rational" evaluation, the Critical Parent; when a silent, depressing presence, the Enemy. They all start in the past as powerful, external influences fed to us by important people in our lives and eventually run our lives as they are incorporated and internalized.

These internalized negative ideas are normally not acknowledged or even noticed and discussion of them is not welcome. Consider this: In the most tyrannical of political regimes people are prohibited from speaking their tyrant's name. Why? Because if we can't talk about what is oppressing us we are limited in our ability to fight it. In addition, if we can't clarify how the tyrant works, we are more easily persuaded that we are the cause of our own troubles.

Being able to talk about oppressors is the first step to overthrowing them. Likewise with our internal oppressor; it is important to be aware that it ruins our lives and to refer to it by name. I will call the particular demon that makes our lives miserable, the Critical Parent, The Enemy or the Inner Critic. Feel free to use these names or make up your own, but do give this malevolent influence a name and let's talk about it.

The Critical Parent is acquired in the past and we can delete it as an influence in our present life. To do this we must do two things: one is cognitive—change our thinking—and the other behavioral—alter the daily interactions that support those self-hating thoughts.

The most important cognitive obstacle in fighting the Critical Parent is that most people believe that its mission is legitimate: to keep us and others on the right path, prevent us from making mistakes, guide us in our decisions, advise us of our flaws. The Enemy is also mistaken for our conscience, that core aspect of our soul that reminds us of our legitimate obligations as human beings. But unlike our conscience, which is built on the love of ourselves and our neighbors, the Inner Enemy's mission is to undermine the affectionate bonds between people. Without clear awareness of its true nature, we believe that the Inner Enemy is beneficial, worthy of being taken seriously and followed.

Sometimes the Enemy manages to create the illusion that expressing its toxic qualities is actually a badge of distinction, as in the case of the self-destructively alcoholic bohemian writer who sees himself as high-spirited, truth-telling iconoclast, or the amoral sexual psychopath who brags about his exploits and cultivates a glamorous sense of "wickedness".

In addition, theorists in transactional analysis have developed the concept of the "positive Critical Parent" as a counter-argument to my insistence that the Critical

Parent is all-negative. The argument is that children require the application of Critical Parent feedback and power to educate them and to ensure that they stay out of trouble. To this I respond that forty years of experience with three children and six grandchildren, as well as the testimony of innumerable readers and followers convinces me that that Adult critique and nurturing parenting are quite sufficient to accomplish those goals. The Critical Parent is simply not needed for childrearing in a cooperative, democratic society.

Glamorizing or defending the Critical Parent will empower it by rationalizing it with the appearance of Adult support; on the contrary, I believe we must jettison it from our lives altogether. The behavioral obstacle in this enterprise can only be overcome by deliberate, conscious action that goes against the Critical Parent's prohibitions. In Chapter Ten I will elaborate on the methods we utilize to help people to rid themselves of the Critical Parent.

The Inner Enemy is principally the enemy of love. It is devoted to making sure that we not only don't love ourselves but that we also not love others. When we don't love ourselves or others, no one will love us. Bonding and affiliation invariably weaken the Enemy's control over us. Thus a premier action against the Critical Parent is to love and allow ourselves to be loved in return. This is why love is the antidote to the Critical Parent's poison. These ideas will be deeply shocking to some. Militating against rules that are considered essential to the survival of civilization, and advocating indiscriminate love of self and others will be seen as wrong headed in some quarters; sinful, Godless and dangerously close to communism and worthy of vigorous opposition. That has often been the reaction to democratic liberation and should surprise no one.

The basic message of the Critical Parent is:

YOU ARE NOT OK:

- ◆ You are bad (sinful, lazy, wicked, etc.)
- ◆ You are stupid (retarded, can't think straight, confused, etc.)
- ◆ You are crazy (mentally, emotionally, irrational, out of control, etc.)
- ◆ You are ugly (ugly face, ugly body, old, etc.)
- ◆ You are sick (weak, diseased, polluted, etc.)
- ◆ You are doomed (hopeless, self destructive, etc.)

Therefore

- ◆ You will not be loved and
- ◆ You will be excluded from the tribe.

The murderous teenager, Kipland Kinkel's writings provide a dramatic example: [the Critical Parent inserts, in brackets, are mine.]

"God damn these voices in my head. I want to die I want to be gone...I sound so pitiful. People would laugh at this if they read it. I hate being laughed at...I hate every one of you. Because everything I touch turns to shit [doomed]...If I had a heart it would be gray... My cold black heart [bad] has never and will never experience true love [doomed]... Why aren't I normal? [sick, weird] Help me. No one will. I will kill every last mother fucking one of you." (1999)

Where does this Critical Parent come from? Why this bloody-minded, love-corrupting presence in our innermost self? The Critical Parent is the product of an evolutionary process emanating from the reptilian-brain instinct for territorial and dominating behavior. These reptilian instincts persisted through mammalian and simian evolutionary stages and have evolved into the patriarchy, a persistent system of supremacy of men over women, the powerful over the weak, of the middle aged over the young and elderly.

The Critical Parent is the enforcer of the patriarchal system of domination. It's ultimate threat against those who would defy it is exclusion from the tribe and death; the utter loss of love from those who would protect us. Love is a particular target of patriarchal control because in its many forms it challenges and threatens patriarchal domination. Domination, embodied in the Critical Parent, is the antagonist of love; instead of direct, empathic, loving cooperation and negotiation, the Critical Parent insists on power plays, lies and secrets.

Patriarchy has undermined the collective potential of humanity, and had no challenge until the advent of democracy. Since the first imperfect forms of democracy emerged, the principle that everyone is born with equal rights, especially the right to freely develop their potential, has gained greater and greater currency. Imperfect as democracy is in its present state, it is still the best system we have to allow every person the opportunity to fully develop. This is the historical framework for the ideas I offer here; ideas first advanced in the world of psychiatry by Eric Berne, intended to help people in their arduous search for personal fulfillment.

## Meanwhile, Back at the OK Corral

Returning now to the limbic effects of Stroke City, I have mentioned that not everyone shared in the positive outcome. The Critical Parent intruded in some participant's experiences thereby clouding the limbic response of the whole group and undermining everyone's potential for bonding and stroke exchange.

To protect the participants from transactions that triggered or supported the Critical Parent's activity, I decided to start each meeting with an agreement, called a "cooperative contract," which promised that the participants and the leader would not, under any circumstances, permit or engage in any attempts to manipulate or

power play anyone in the group. It also specifically required that no one would do anything he or she did not honestly want to do and promised that the leader would not permit any transactions that came from the Critical Parent. Finally, I asked the participants to precede transactions (such as an offer of a stroke) with a request for permission to proceed to make sure that people were prepared and receptive to what was to come.

These contracts, designed to protect the group from the Critical Parent and facilitate emotional safety, succeeded in dramatically reducing the number of people who felt badly during and after the meetings. The absence of Critical Parent transactions facilitated limbic resonance, an interpersonal commonality of feelings of trust and safety, thereby facilitating the love-enhancing effects of the exercise.

I continue to apply the Stroke City exercise, upgraded and renamed “Opening the Heart,” as a part of the Emotional Literacy Training program outlined in my book *Emotional Literacy; Intelligence with a Heart*, a third of which is dedicated to teaching people the simple, basic transactions of love: loving and being loved in return.

## Opening the Heart - Theory

The pressing question becomes: “How do we recover our capacity to love and how do we develop our loving skills?”

In their cutting-edge book *The General Theory of Love*, Thomas Lewis et al convincingly establish the limbic brain as the seat of the loving emotion. They write about the genetic basis for the development of love and how, in a child’s earliest days, when the capacity is developing, the child and the mother inhabit an open system in which their limbic connection affects each other profoundly. This mutual neural modification is most powerful for the very young child who is fully open to developing and setting down loving patterns.

While loving patterns are set in childhood, later relationships in which the person establishes a limbic resonance with another can restructure a limbic design damaged earlier in life. Lewis et al conclude that this is possible through long-term individual psychotherapy with a therapist who, for all intents and purposes, needs to be a paragon of limbic virtue. I arrived at similar conclusions by a very different path. My work was primarily in groups in which limbic resonance develops differently from the way it develops in individual psychotherapy. Based largely on intuition and trial and error I refined the original format of “Stroke City” to include what one might call limbic resonance facilitators—the emotional literacy trainers who lead and moderate the exercise—and eventually renamed the exercise, “Opening the Heart.”

The goal continues to be defeating the stroke economy, helping people satisfy their stroke hunger and teaching them how to obtain what they most want: to love and be loved in return. But the exercise noticeably restructures people’s experiences at a

far more profound level than expected. Over the last twenty years I have become convinced that positive, lasting effects in limbic patterns can be produced with focused transactional analysis group work that concentrates on loving transactional behavior and the emotional consequences of it.

Very likely the reader will wonder how the practice of a few transactional exercises could possibly create a genuine, lasting ability to love. I can understand that skepticism, but I am not proposing some sort of psychological alchemy that turns a few daily transactions into gold. In my experience love is a powerful drive that will seek and find satisfaction if encouraged and facilitated. What I am promising is that these heart-opening exercises, frequently practiced in safety with as many people as possible—but with at least one other willing and sympathetic person—will release the love locked away, inside of us. Giving and receiving strokes will lure open the prison gates, the rest is up to that irresistible power of human nature available to everyone: Love.

It may be specially hard to believe, given the massive resistance and deeply ingrained deficits which we encounter, that such a thing is possible without years of intense, expert help. But love is like a coiled spring ready to expand when we find a way to release it from its bonds and nurture it as it grows. Each and every one of us can learn to give and take love. By systematically opening our hearts to one another, in an environment of trust and safety, we avail ourselves of the possibilities of our full emotional potential. That is the aim of emotional literacy training.

## Opening the Heart - Practice

When practicing the heart opening exercises, I simply encourage people to personally defy the stroke economy by:

- ◆ Asking for permission and then,
- ◆ Giving the strokes they want to give,
- ◆ Asking for and accepting strokes they want,
- ◆ Rejecting strokes they don't want and
- ◆ Giving themselves strokes.

These processes require a secure base, which is provided in these training groups; an environment made scrupulously devoid of hostility or coercion by the cooperative agreements designed to produce a safe experience. A skilled trainer leads the exercises, sees to it that agreements are kept and helps the group to analyze the interactions, transaction by transaction. In addition, the trainer encourages the participants to, as a priority, become aware, reveal and disallow Critical Parent messages interfering with the process. This sets up an atmosphere of trust and

openness that offers the participants an opportunity to give and take love in a setting of limbic resonance which encourages the heart to open in a fundamental way.

Opening the Heart is the first phase of emotional literacy training. Part two: Surveying the Emotional Landscape and part three Taking Responsibility will be explored later in this book. Practiced over time, this first phase of emotional literacy exercises can actually transform people, making them more capable of giving and receiving love; they represent an advanced technique for building or rebuilding a person's loving capacities. Like a highly sophisticated dietary regime, in which we learn what, when and how much to eat or not eat, this stroke regime aims for similar healthy goals in our emotional lives. In conjunction with a program of meditation or other therapeutic activity that is aimed at restructuring the feelings of unworthiness that are so often associated with stroke starvation, these exercises can transform the love and intimacy quality of a person's life .

## Chapter 4.

### Love and Power

Why does the restoration of the human capacity to love require such a concentrated effort if it is, as I claim, a powerful force, eager to burst forth all on its own? The reason is that it is under massive, suppressive attack. To the untrained eye love is a simple, highly elusive emotion, sought by some, feared by others, more or less free to exist in people's hearts depending on previous experience. Why should it be the target of focused suppression? Is it to protect us from the way it can disrupt one's life, how it can "mess you up," or for that matter how good it feels? That is certainly what the Critical Parent is bound to claim.

But love is far more than a quotidian source of good or bad feelings. Love is a major motivating power, interacting in a complex, human power field. Love is a force for collective action in behalf of people's power and freedom. That explains why there has been such a focused, age-long, effort and investment in suppressing the loving instinct and preventing it from expressing itself freely.

Am I saying that there exists a conspiracy against love? The answer is yes, because to undermine a person's loving relationships and the affiliative, loving processes of a society is a most effective way of maintaining power and control. Loving and being loved in return are the source of awesome personal and social power, while being alone and loveless is equivalent with being powerless. The aim is to keep people powerless in the face of the control of others.

The awesome power of love is scarcely recognized not just as it occurs between two people in love but far more widely, as it occurs in families, social groups, and even nations. Still, when we try to understand the power of love we fall short because we barely understand either love or power.

I have spoken of emotional literacy, the sophisticated understanding of emotions—love most importantly among them—and of the productive, humane methods of managing them. A similar sort of literacy, power literacy, applies to the understanding of personal power.

Before we deal with the power of love, let us investigate the concept of power itself. The definition of power I will use here, and this applies to all the sciences, from physical to psychological is:

**Power is the capacity to create change against resistance or to resist unwanted change.**



We have power when we can bring about what we seek and prevent what we don't want. We are powerless when we cannot bring about what we want and can't resist what we wish to avoid, especially when we can't resist other people's controlling and oppressive behavior.

Power and its effects, like the air we breathe, are all around us. We know that people power trip us and we know that we abuse our own power. We unleash awesome power with a kick of the accelerator or the squeeze of a trigger; we feel the penetrating power of people's eyes. Power is spoken, written and sung about, horsepower, the power of the people, power plays, power hunger, and especially the power of love. We hear and read about power and yet we do not really understand what it is. We don't understand how it works, when it's beneficial or harmful, where it begins and ends, how to get it, how to keep it, how to give it up, or how to fight it.

## The Politics of Power

Power in the human domain has been inaccurately defined as the capacity to control other people. The definition of power as nothing more than control is part and parcel of the difficulties we have with power because we don't recognize the many ways to be powerful outside of the control sphere. Control, while definitely a manifestation of power, is predicated on disempowering others. When power is expressed in the form of control, it is equivalent to oppression. The control of many by a few becomes our ultimate concept of power. But personal power is more than the mere ability to manipulate or control others. In chapter eight, I explore the overlooked varieties of power. There are. In my view, seven sources of power: Grounding, Passion, Love, Communication, Information, Transcendence and, yes, Control. By attending to all seven we achieve a fuller and more positive understanding than when we only acknowledge Control.

Power, like love, has never held center stage in psychological theory. Though it is surely one of the key factors that affect human behavior, it has been overlooked. A long list of themes and supposed phenomena: the unconscious, self-esteem, sexuality, scripts, childhood trauma, orgasm, complexes, blocks, repressed primal screams, birth and pre-birth traumas, have all claimed major importance and achieved some prominence in the field at one time or another. Power has not.

Power did figure heavily in Alfred Adler's thinking (1999). Adler, along with Wilhelm Reich, was a politically involved member of Freud's largely apolitical following. The concept of the importance of power was not greeted with enthusiasm either inside or outside of psychoanalytic circles, because to speak of power as a variable of human behavior is not just a scientific statement but a political act as well. When attempting to allocate to power its proper importance in human affairs, a political struggle is sure to ensue. The history of science is replete with instances of valid concepts or variables, which, like the concept of power, were refused recognition for decades. Only after intense struggle by their proponents, against

heavy reaction, did these variables finally gain scientific acceptance, long after the evidence of their validity was available.

A horrifying example is provided by Ignaz Semmelweiss who, in 1847 discovered, decades before the germ theory was established, that the staggeringly high rates of deadly post-partum puerperal fever in labor hospitals was being propagated by the doctors in the labor wards. The remedy he proposed, which would have required doctors simply to wash their hands between deliveries, was considered an affront to the medical profession and was derided and fought by physicians for decades, even after it was conclusively proven effective. In the meantime, Semmelweiss died in a madhouse, presumably driven insane by the life and death quandary he was placed in by his discovery. Similarly Galileo Galilei's heliocentric theory of the universe, contrary to the literal interpretation of the Scriptures, challenged and offended the Church's patriarchs, whose enforcement arm, the Inquisition, got Galileo to recant under threat of torture and death, and put him under house arrest for the rest of his life.

The suppression of ideas applies to the concept of power as well. It seems that the investigation and discussion of power in human behavior similarly challenges the professional status quo in the behavioral sciences. My own experience in the transactional analysis movement is that theories regarding power are largely ignored or misunderstood by the members of the organization who are responsible for training—even though the training systems in place are sensitive to power abuse and strive to avoid it. At the same time, not surprisingly, there is strong resistance to the concept of the Critical Parent and its powerful and, in my strong opinion, irredeemably undesirable nature.

The process of elucidating reality through the scientific method requires great effort, but when investigation is resisted for personal, political reasons, the process is doubly arduous. Because the investigation of power inevitably leads to revelations of power abuse, it is the people with power who react with the greatest resistance. When those who have power seek to understand the workings of power, they must start by gaining awareness of the dimensions of their own power, and therefore of their potential power abuse. This is true in the fields of psychiatry and psychotherapy, where medical professionals who are accustomed to holding a position of power are liable to be made uncomfortable by its investigation. Because they also tend to be liberal they are likely to use power in gentle, self-effacing, hidden ways and doubly inured to recognizing it. Investigating power, then, is both a scientific and political—at times even revolutionary and dangerous—activity.

## Power Plays

In their drive for power, people attempt to control all manner of aspects of the world. When we try to dominate other people, we use a family of transactions I call power plays.

**Power plays are transactions designed to cause others to do something they would rather not do, or to stop others from doing what they want to do.**

We are largely unaware of how power operates because we are immersed in, and forced to accept, its uses and abuses from the earliest moments in our lives. After spending our young years under the routine sway of other people's power, we quite naturally adopt oppressive roles when we grow up. The acceptance of power imbalances and power abuses is drilled into us through our life-long experiences of hierarchies and competition.

There are two main forms that the abuse of power can take: physical and psychological. Power abuse can be expressed in both subtle and crude or gross ways. Let us imagine, as an example, that you are sitting on a park bench on a sunny spot that I want to occupy. If I can take the place away from you, I will have manifested my power. If I am sufficiently strong, I may be able to push you or lift you out of your seat. This is an example of gross physical power. On the other hand, I may have the psychological power to get you out of your seat without using physical force.

Psychological power depends on my capacity to harness your energy to cause you to do what you don't want to, to get you to move yourself out of the bench. All psychological power techniques depend on obedience. I can intimidate you out of the seat, or I can cajole you. I can cause you to cede the seat to me by creating guilt feelings in you. I can bully you with threats, or with the sheer volume of my voice. I can seduce you with a smile, or with a promise, or I can convince you that giving up your seat to me is necessary for national security. I can trick you, con you, or sell you a lie. In any case, if I overcome your resistance to giving up your place without using physical force, I have used a psychological power maneuver, a power play, which relies entirely on obedience on your part.

If we imagine a two-dimensional field in which one axis is the continuum crude-subtle and the other axis is the continuum psychological-physical, we can divide all the power plays into four quadrants.

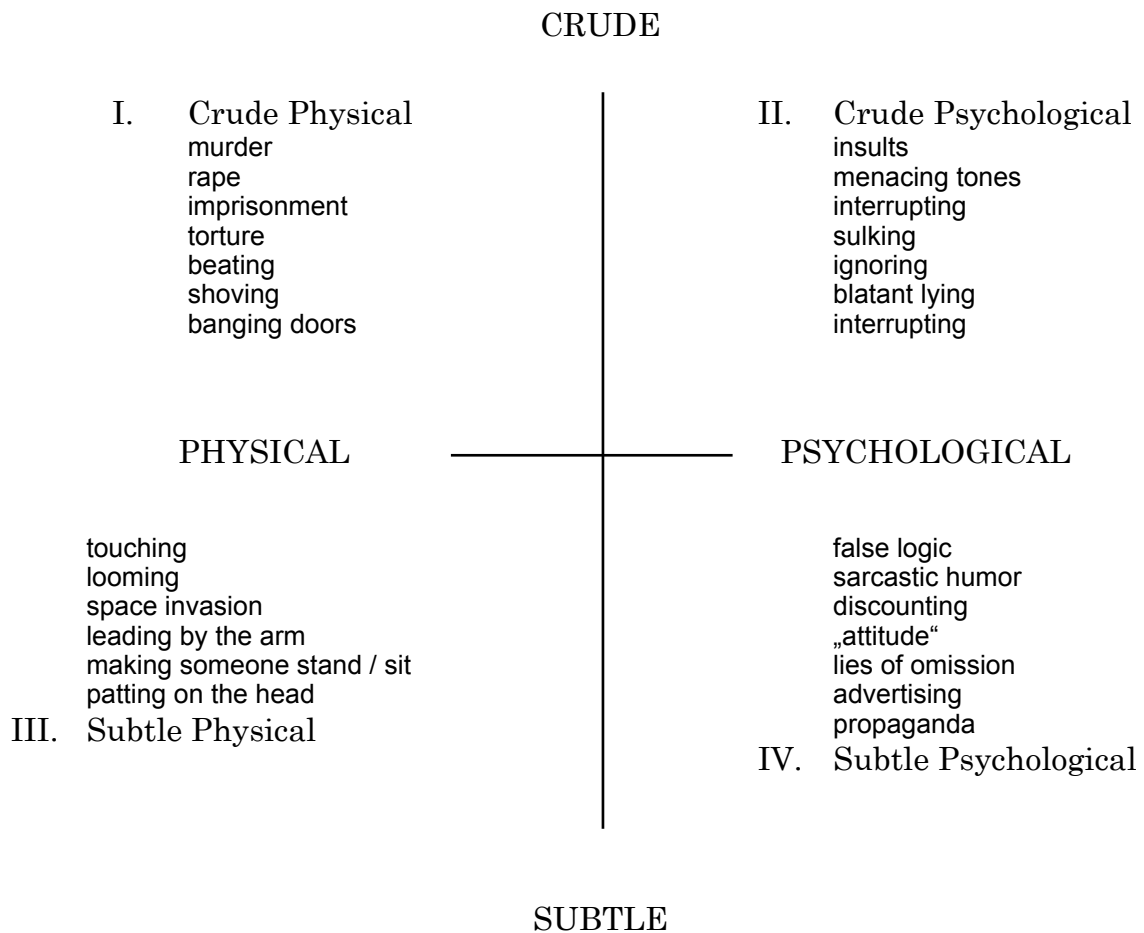


Figure 1. Power Plays

Quadrant I. Crude-Physical Power Plays: Murder, rape, torture, imprisonment, forced feeding and medication, starvation, assault, throwing things, and banging doors are, in descending order of crudeness and physicality, all power plays in this quadrant.

Quadrant II. Crude-Psychological Power Plays: Menacing tones and looks, insults, bold face lies, obvious sulking, interrupting, obvious redefinition and discounting, are examples of crude, but still psychological (because they don't involve physical force), power plays.

Quadrant III. Subtle-Physical Power Plays: More difficult to describe than the more crude physical power plays so far described, these control maneuvers depend nevertheless on the use of the body and its musculature. Towering over people, sitting behind a desk, standing in a prominent place in a room, standing too close to people, invading people's personal space, subtle intonations of the voice. These power plays are of special interest to women, because they are often used on them by men.

Quadrant IV. Subtle-Psychological Power Plays: Subtle lies, lies of omission, sulking, sarcastic humor, negative metaphors, gossip, pseudo-logic, and the most subtle and most psychological power plays: advertising and propaganda.

A description of the large variety of power plays that people use can be found in my book *The Other Side of Power* (1981) also available for downloading on my web site [www.claudetsteiner.com/osp](http://www.claudetsteiner.com/osp)

Most of the oppression or abuse of power that people experience is psychological in nature. Ordinarily, people, even in the most violent environments, do not experience direct, physical power plays. But physical violence is all around and under the surface, backing up psychological power abuse. This is especially true in the case of the abuse and battering of women and children. For example: one violent outburst by an abusive man is sufficient to keep his wife and children terrified and in-line for weeks or even months. During that time, his menacing tones and looks are enough to remind them of the latest violence and keep them submissive.

The ultimate manifestation of psychological oppression can be found in the “slave mentality.” The slave mentality is a frame of mind in which the rationale for abuse is accepted and internalized so that a person accepts the oppressive circumstances of his life and even defends his oppressors against anyone who criticizes them. The classic case can be found in the battered wife who will defend and justify, and not take action against, or leave, a brutal husband even when it would be safe to do so.

A more common and less perfect case of internalized psychological oppression occurs when people come to feel responsible for the consequences of power abuses on their lives. As an example, extremely hard working people will feel guilty and responsible for the fact that they cannot make ends meet with the money that they earn, or that they cannot afford decent clothes and shoes for their children, or because they cannot find a reasonable job.

In Radical Psychiatry, when we first conceptualized the mechanism whereby we collude with and internalize our oppression we called it the Parent.” The “Pig Parent” was a colloquial term, appropriate to the anti-war and anti-police times, suggested by Hogie Wyckoff. It was intended to represent all of the thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, attributions and prohibitions which people carry within their heads and which aid our oppressors by making them into their own prison guards. For instance, the battered wife, above, quietly suffers endless indignities and accepts them, even though, in her heart, she knows better. She does so because her Pig Parent constantly reminds her, literally whispering in her ear, that a good wife obeys and does not contradict her husband. Any hints of self-pity are countered, by her Pig Parent’s message: “Don’t be a complainer; be a good wife.”

The Pig Parent label was criticized from a variety of perspectives, so we replaced it with the term Critical Parent. The concept of the Critical Parent, though not as dramatically named or as emotionally apt as the Pig Parent, nevertheless performed the same function. Whatever it is called, it is because of this willing, internalized self-oppression that a fairly small number of people can oppress millions without more than occasionally raising a finger, or slamming a fist to enforce their abuse. Clearly, a large portion of our task is to get rid of the Critical

Parent, our internalized oppression, as it is responsible for our deep-seated tendency to obediently go along with the abuses of power around us.

## Power and Love; The Creation of Scarcity

In the competitive marketplace, the value of an item is determined by the need for it and by its scarcity at any given time, rather than by any inherent or intrinsic value. Air, even though indispensable for life and therefore extremely valuable, has no market value, because, for the time being, it is in abundance.

Scarcity of an item, real or perceived, is a necessary condition for the appearance of power plays. Scarcity of food, of space, of commodities, of the things that we need or believe that we need, increases their value to us. When things become valuable because they are scarce, they become the object of power plays. Conversely, anything that is freely available and which is not in scarcity will not be seen as valuable and will not be the subject of power plays. Scarcity can be real or it can be artificial. There are certain things that we absolutely need to survive, such as food, water, air. These can be in actual short supply, in which case the scarcity is real. If there is a famine in the land and there isn't enough food to go around, that is a real scarcity. However, a lot of scarcities that we experience are artificial.

Artificial scarcities can be the result of the fact that someone has "cornered the market" by simply taking the item out of circulation. Artificial scarcities are a drain on people's energies, as more and more effort is put into obtaining the needed items. That is why laws were written to outlaw scarcity-generating monopolies. But these laws do not prevent all sorts of other artificial scarcities, such as the latest fashions, the most popular brand name or access to the latest great guru. These artificial scarcities are created by instilling in people a desire or illusory need for an item hyped to be uniquely valuable. Such illusory needs cannot, in fact, ever be completely satisfied. Just as artificial scarcities can be created in commodities such as food and shelter, artificial scarcities can also be created in human resources. Love, recognition, and affection between people have been made scarce through people's adherence to the rules of the stroke economy. Consequently, people will power play each other over strokes, monopolize them, barter them, sell them, and cheat and lie to get them.

## The Scarcity of Power; Powerlessness

The ultimate manifestation of scarcity of human resources is the scarcity of power itself. People's personal power, including their power over all aspects of their lives and over their destinies, is widely curtailed and made scarce, so that power too has become a competed-over human resource. Because we feel powerless, we seek power for power's sake. Thus, we want to take power away from each other and we compete to establish or seize that false feeling of self-determination and competency that comes from dominating others.

How much power we have is not an illusion. Each one of us has a quantifiable, objective amount, related to how much opposing power we are able to overcome. In addition, there is the subjective *feeling* of power, which is not necessarily related to objective power and which may be illusory, either greater or less than the objective reality. Subjective power is an important human variable that is affected by the activities of the Critical Parent as well as the Nurturing Parent. The Critical Parent undermines and the Nurturing Parent enhances a person's subjective feeling of power. With the Critical Parent constantly undermining our power, we develop what theologian and social theorist Michael Lerner calls "surplus powerlessness" (1997); a power deficit that, albeit real, is self-generated and unnecessary. All of the artificial scarcities that we are prey to—of commodities, of love, of power—keep us off balance, obedient, pliable, too concerned with the needs of the moment to struggle against their causes. Thus, artificial scarcities benefit the already powerful materially, and they keep the powerless constantly in the red, with their heads barely above water, struggling just to survive.

To defeat the scarcity of power we need to free up our personal powers. Not our powers to dominate others or feel strong at their expense, but our powers to create positive change and resist coercion, to be strong from within ourselves, and to work cooperatively with others. These powers are accessible to all of us. We need to reclaim them so that we may help each other to give up our acceptance of hierarchies, competition and power plays.

### Authoritarian Control vs. Charisma

Of the many sources of power available to us, Control has held hegemonic sway as a tool of the oppressive, patriarchal, competitive system. We are taught that power equals control and that control is the way to bring about change and to be powerful in the world. This denigrates other equally significant sources of power, such as love, communication, or knowledge, and reduces the multidimensional realm of human potential into a one-dimensional "ladder of success" on which people line up according to their power to control others, some above, some below, stepping on each other as they struggle to climb to the top.

The deeply ingrained tendencies of people to participate in control ridden, one-up/one-down hierarchies have the dangerous potential of getting out of control. This occurs when widespread resonance between authoritarian and powerless people produces a polarization in which power is relinquished by the many to one who willingly takes it from them. The Master/Slave, Leader/Follower, one-up/one-down relationships in families, schools, and workplaces can become a social tide that on occasion, when there are conditions for a "perfect power storm," that can sweep whole countries or continents, as it did with Hitler's and Stalin's regimes.

Still, even in the authoritarian conditions, there are always individuals with a sense of personal power who respond badly to efforts to control them. These people become the resistance to authoritarian regimes. People who resist domination are

powerful in their own right. How does one acquire this kind of power? Later in the book I will fully explore six sources of power, which together with Control make it possible for us to cultivate our personal power.(See Chapter Eight.) I have mentioned these before but will name them again: Balance, Passion, Control, Love, Communication, Information and Transcendence. The totality of a person's power or charisma depends on the development of these seven sources of power, each of which adds to a person's capacity to have an effect in the world. This multifaceted view of power implies that the fixation on control as a source of power is a restrictive view that renders large numbers of people powerless in the face of individuals who occupy the high positions on the control hierarchy. The greatest antidote to the control of the many by the few is for people to develop individual power in its multidimensional forms and to dedicate themselves to passing on power to as many others as can be found in a lifetime. Everyone can do that; after we learn we can teach; when we make some extra money we can adopt a child in a far continent; we can inspire people with our writings; we can encourage the shy to dance; we can share our feelings; we can inspire a sad person and help him regain hope. The possibilities are endless.



## Conclusion; Book One

We need power, we want power, we deserve power. Love is a fundamental source of it. Yet, we need to understand which expressions of power are harmful to ourselves and others and which are beneficial. The heart centered transactional analyst's job is to assist people in their empowerment, while staying clear of power abuse.

The first avenue to this process is opening the heart. But practicing the love enhancing transactions can be difficult in a love-averse, Critical Parent dominated, fiercely competitive environment. To every extent possible we need to establish a fertile social matrix in which love is encouraged to spring forth, powered by the genetic, limbic impulse. Here are four social attitudes, which will be helpful in establishing a love-enhancing environment.

- ◆ Cooperation: No power plays, asking for 100% of what we want, followed by generous negotiation, until mutual satisfaction is achieved.
- ◆ Power Parity: Giving up power by the powerful, empowering oneself by the powerless.
- ◆ Radical Honesty: No lies of omission or commission.
- ◆ Gentleness: Empathic response to other people's needs.

These attitudes will enable us to create helpful and fertile settings for the power of love to be practiced.

We can introduce these heart-liberating behaviors into our everyday lives, on the street, at work and at home. We can do this with each other, with our clients, our friends our families, and with our children especially as they grow up and become teenagers, ready to take on the world. Opening one's heart in the real, concrete-jungle world can be a most complex and perilous endeavor. If we devote ourselves to this task, we can count on a formidable ally, human nature, our powerful limbic instinct for affiliation and love, which, given the opportunity, will flourish and thrive.

# **Book Two:**

# **The Stroke Centered Theory**

## Introduction: Metaphor, Method, Science

Stroke Centered Transactional Analysis is an elaboration of and, at times, a departure from Berne's view. The purpose of this section of the book is to present these ideas as clearly and concisely as possible.

Before proceeding I want to make some observations about the nature of behavioral theories in general and transactional analysis in particular. Theories like Sigmund Freud's, Carl Jung's, Wilhelm Reich's, Albert Adlers', Albert Ellis', Gestalt, cognitive-behavioral, neuro linguistic programming (NLP,) eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR,) client-centered and twelve step methods as well as transactional analysis can be regarded from a variety of perspectives; as metaphors, as a method and as a science. (Method and science are clear concepts, I will elaborate on metaphors below.)

Everyone of the theories named above contains a mixture of the three aspects. Some are heavy on metaphor and methodology (Freud, Gestalt) some are heavy on methodology and science (Ellis, cognitive-behavioral) some are heavy on method (Gestalt, client-centered, twelve steps) and so on. Generally the development of psychological theories goes through stages. They get their start when a method appears to be successful in creating beneficial change. Success leads to metaphorical explanations, which provoke research that may generate validation for the theory. As an example, the beneficial effects of talking led to the "talking cure" method, which was later elaborated into psychoanalytic theory, a set of complex metaphors. Eventually after psychoanalytic method and metaphor showed some promise, scientific research was undertaken which failed to validate some of the metaphors (id, Oedipus complex, penis envy) and methods (free association, interpretation, transference analysis) while other psychoanalytic concepts established themselves as valid (the importance of childhood dramas and traumas, the relevance of instinct and emotion, the interaction between mental and somatic processes, the value of catharsis.)

At the moment, transactional analysis partakes of all three aspects of this process:

### 1. Metaphor

Transactional analysis began as a collection of captivating metaphors, snappy aphorisms and neologisms, which were the basis for its initial popularity in the 1970s. A metaphor is a figure of speech that directly connects two or more seemingly unrelated things in order to clarify the nature of one of them as *being equal to* a second one in an unspecified, intuitively grasped way. For instance, John turns away from Jane while she is crying and Jane accuses him of breaking her heart. "You are breaking my heart" is a metaphor for intense pain associated with

betrayal in love. Here “breaking” (a metaphor for pain and disappointment) and “heart” (a metaphor for love) are connected with a seemingly unrelated act, John’s unsympathetic reaction to Jane’s tears. While there is no objective connection between breaking, the heart, and lack of sympathy, the words have the power to make sense of the metaphor and evoke a meaningful image in John’s mind; he knows what she means.

Metaphors always precede scientific findings. Before germ theory was developed, medical scientists blamed disease on miasma or bad air. The metaphor was widely accepted because it had intuitive validity. By creating an association between dirtiness and disease it paved the way for modern germ theory. On the other hand, a very popular medieval metaphor--balancing the humors--that justified bleeding, the removal of blood from a patient as part of a process to “balance” the four “humors”(blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile.) This balancing was needed for the human body to function properly, it was thought. In addition any “sanguine” or overactive or boisterous person was thought to be suffering from an excess of blood and could profit from bleeding as well. These metaphors did not have any basis in reality; they did not lead to any scientific validation and were eventually abandoned. If they briefly succeeded as methods it was only because of a placebo effect. Some metaphors are better than others.

Transactional analysis is replete with metaphors. In ego state theory certain impulsive irrational behaviors are connected to childhood generating the Child ego state metaphor. “I’m OK” comes to mean feeling good about oneself; three circles stacked one over the other come to mean a person; an arrow between two ego states represents a transaction, and so on. These metaphors are accepted and used as attractive and cleverly effective concepts rather than as rigorous scientific realities.

## 2. Methodology

Transactional analysis would not have any lasting credibility if it were based only on metaphors. It is also a pragmatic, information-based method of producing desirable human behavior and change; a heuristic development of useful behavioral and cognitive techniques; a modern therapeutic/educational practice based on a coherent and persistent theory; and on a method verified by trial and error. The effectiveness of the transactional analysis’s approach, as evaluated by its clients, has been supported by rigorous, replicated research carried out by Ted Novey. (2002)

## 3. Science

In addition to being a heavily metaphorical endeavor and a field tested method, transactional analysis is a theory of personality based on scientific information. From the beginning, Berne drew from the scientific findings in social psychology, neurology and evolutionary science of his time. Current research in the social

sciences continues to validate some of the fundamental propositions of transactional analysis: contracts, strokes, OK/OK, scripts. (Steiner, 2003) The durability and acceptance of these concepts, formulated a half a century ago, demonstrate the visionary nature of Berne's theory and method.

Not all transactional analysis concepts have strong representation in all three areas (metaphor, method and science). Some have none at all except in the realm of metaphors.

As an example, the three specific ego states, Parent Adult and Child, the major icons of transactional analysis, have not been validated in any peer-reviewed research and therefore have no scientific standing. Yet the ego states are oft mentioned reasons for people's interest in transactional analysis because they are useful as powerful metaphors. This presents a problem when transactional analysts, given the great interest in ego states, attempt to develop ego state theory and fall into the error of hypostatization, the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.

Hypostatization is what we do when speaking of metaphors as if they represent actual, measurable phenomena. If ego states are metaphors, we can't "study" them as if they were validated and replicated realities. Further and further extensions of ego state theory become increasingly less meaningful and begin to resemble medieval debates about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. The same is true of proliferating transactional arrows on the script matrix, multiplying "drivers" in scripts or any other promiscuous hyperextension of transactional analysis metaphors.

Even so, without need to hyperextend the ego state metaphor we can take ego states very seriously; they are the basis for an extremely attractive and effective method for bringing about important, desired change.

This is important to those who wish to have transactional analysis recognized by the professions and academia. When we speak openly of ego states or other transactional analysis metaphors as established realities rather than pragmatic and useful metaphors and methods, we are perceived as naïve, insular and unsophisticated by professionals in the field. For those transactional analysts who seek a place in the academic, scientific community and yearn to become respectable among modern therapy and educational methods, scientific language and validation is the only possible way to make reliable progress. In my opinion, it is very unlikely that transactional analysts can do the needed research unless they are already members of the academic community with research funds and graduate students to do the studies; an unlikely circumstance. In addition, if we want to be taken seriously by the professional and scientific communities we need to drop our zany neologisms, such as stamps, gimmick, hot potatoes, rackets, etc., and replace them with words from the standard English dictionary.

The best approach to obtaining scientific validation for transactional analysis at this time, is finding research in the behavioral sciences that corroborates our views.

In my capacity as the Vice President of Research and Innovation of the ITAA (International Transactional Analysis Association) between 2001 and 2003, I undertook such a project and found ample corroboration for the concepts of OK/OK, scripts, strokes, contracts and some of our behavioral and cognitive methods. The abridged findings were published in the *The Script*, the ITAA newsletter (Steiner, 2005) but did not find their way into the *Transactional Analysis Journal*. They are available on my web site: [www.claudesteiner.com/corro.htm](http://www.claudesteiner.com/corro.htm). Further corroboration research will be needed as behavioral research makes additional progress in areas that coincide with our interests.

## Strokes; metaphor, method or science?

Let us reexamine the concept of strokes, which is central to the thesis of this book: “Love is the answer.” Is the concept of strokes largely metaphorical? Is it the basis for an effective method? Is it scientifically founded?

### *Strokes as metaphor*

The concept of strokes is an extremely successful metaphor standing for the need for recognition. It generated Berne’s aphorism “If you are not stroked your spinal cord will shrivel up,” (1964 p.14) and stimulated the writing of *The Warm Fuzzy Tale* (see Chapter 3), which in turn has impacted popular culture by creating the ubiquitous turn of phrase: “warm and fuzzy.”

### *Strokes as method*

The use of strokes as a method of therapy and education is thoroughly supported by decades of experience with the efficacy of TLC (tender loving care), support groups, and all sorts of encounter groups encouraging contact, interaction and touching, long before any scientific validation for the efficacy of strokes was available.

### *Strokes as science*

There is no replicated research at this time in which strokes are specifically named as a concept. However, what we, in transactional analysis, refer to as strokes has been written about and studied extensively as “contact,” “attachment,” “intimacy,” “warmth,” “tender loving care,” “need to belong,” “closeness,” “relationships,” “social support” and yes, love.

That the procurement of recognition or strokes (“need to belong”) is a fundamental human motivation has been investigated by Baumeister and Leary (1995) in an excellent and exhaustive review of the literature from which they conclude that “existing evidence supports the hypothesis that the need to belong is a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation.”

The fact that nurturing physical strokes are needed to maintain physical and psychological health has been investigated in innumerable research studies. Excellent reviews of these studies, showing the pervasive relationship between love and health, are provided by Lynch (1988) and Ornish (2000).

These concepts are also embedded in the all-important series of attachment studies by Bowlby and Ainsworth (1991) which also support the view that secure reliable contact with a caretaker is essential for positive child development. The totality of these findings can be taken as undeniable scientific corroboration of the transactional analytic concept of strokes.

If specific, peer reviewed investigations on strokes are to be undertaken, the concept needs to be rigorously defined so that it can be researched. In an effort to stimulate research some time, somewhere, I will attempt a strict definition of strokes below:

1. A stroke is a unit of communication. Specifically, a stroke is a transaction in which one person (A) consciously transmits information to another person (B) who receives it. (See Chapter 13 for an explanation of how I use the term “information” here)
2. The information transmitted in the stroke from A (the transactional stimulus, as per Berne) is intended to impart information to B, about B.
3. The acknowledgement of the stroke from A, by B (the transactional response as per Berne) completes the communication.
4. The information contained in the stroke can be a) An evaluative verbal statement or, b) non-verbal in the form of an action or c) both verbal and non-verbal.
5. The verbal evaluative information contained in a stroke is primarily in the form of an adjective and can be either positive or negative or a mix of both. (beautiful, ugly, smart, stupid, good, bad, etc.)
6. The non-verbal information is embodied in a friendly or unfriendly action (attention, dismissal, smile, frown, caress, slap, etc) accompanied by a corresponding emotion of love (from affection to passion) or hate (from annoyance to loathing) or a mix of both.
7. A stroke is positive from A’s perspective if it is accompanied by positive affect (love, hope, joy, trust) and negative if it is accompanied by negative affect {anger, fear, hopelessness.) From B’s perspective a stroke is positive if it feels good, negative if it feels bad regardless of how it was meant by A.
8. The response to a stroke will vary depending on what information is received by B.

Hopefully this provisional, partial definition of the concept will be helpful to students of strokes. I invite your feedback and make a standing offer of my expertise in the subject and in experimental methods to anyone who might be interested in undertaking research on the subject, especially on the effectiveness of strokes as anti depressants. Contact me through my web site: [www.claudesteiner.com](http://www.claudesteiner.com).

To sum up:

1. The concept of strokes is a central and very successful metaphor of transactional analysis, a concept that ties together the whole theory in a neat system, as I will demonstrate.
2. Strokes and their importance have been amply corroborated by independent research in the behavioral sciences.
3. Strokes have been recognized as crucially important factor of healing methodology by health and psychotherapy practitioners for centuries.

Let us now look into the stroke centered theory in more detail.



## Chapter 5.

### Games and Scripts

#### The Games that People Play to Get Love

Two major concepts of transactional analysis theory are games and scripts. A game is a series of transactions, by nature repetitive, with a beginning, a middle, an end, and a payoff. Anyone who observes human interaction will notice that sometimes people engage in repetitive, unpleasant, even obviously harmful interactions with each other. These reoccurring patterns, called “games” by Berne, are, in every instance, unsuccessful efforts to obtain affection—positive strokes—that produce negative strokes instead.

The payoff of the game is the advantage accruing to the players of the game. Berne specified a number of advantages: time structuring, internal, external, social, psychological, biological and existential (1964, pp 56-57). I will focus on the biological and existential advantages. The biological advantage is the strokes that are derived from the game’s transactions. The existential advantage is the way in which the game confirms the existential position and narrative of the person’s chosen life script.

A classic example of how a game provides these two advantages is the depressive game of “Why Don’t You? Yes, But.” Bruce hates his job and his boss and he is sure that his coworkers hate him. He is depressed and discouraged. What is he to do? Hanging out at a bar on Saturday night, he tells his friends. They try to help:

Ted: “Why don’t you quit and find another job?”

B: “Yes that’s a good idea, but there are no jobs that pay as well as this one.”

Ned: “Why don’t you get a union mediator and work it out with your boss?”

B: “Yes, I thought of that but the union mediator right now is a woman, and she doesn’t understand these kinds of problems.”

Fred: “Why don’t you go to a yoga weekend workshop and develop a white light around you that protects you from harm?” B: “Yeah sure, have you seen how much those weekends cost?”

The game is well on its way. When playing a game, the players will occupy certain roles in the game and switch between these roles. There are three principal game roles, as outlined by Karpman (1973) in his Drama Triangle: the Rescuer, the Persecutor and the Victim. Note that these three roles are capitalized to contrast

them from rescuing, persecuting and victim activities that are not part of a psychological game but of everyday reality as in the rescue of a drowning person, or the persecution of gays, or the true victimhood of an earthquake fatality.

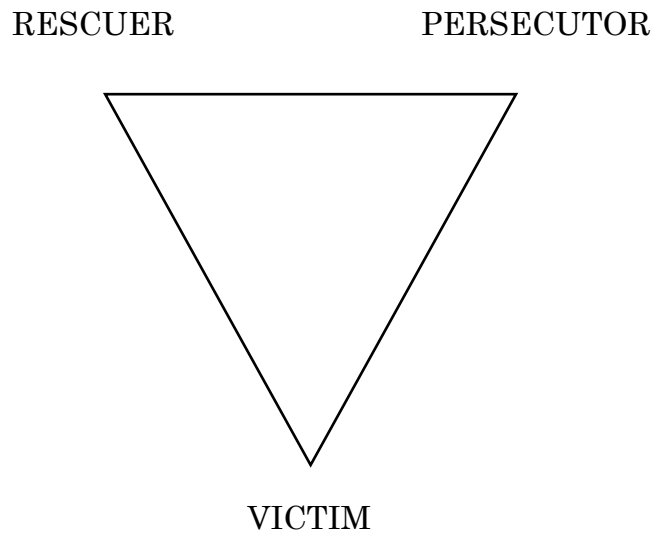


Figure 2. The Drama Triangle

In this game Bruce, in the Victim role, hooks one or more people into the Rescue role of giving advice on a problem that he considers hopeless. After a number of “Why don’t you’s,” followed by the inevitable “Yes, but’s,” Ted loses his temper.

Ted (Irritated, switching from Rescuer to Persecutor): “I guess you’re right; it’s a pretty hopeless situation. Why don’t you kill yourself?”

Bruce (Angry, switching from Victim to Persecutor): “You are such a jerk, what’s wrong with you?” (Sad, switching back to Victim): “I know there’s no use. I guess you guys can’t help me. It’s really up to me, isn’t it? Let’s get drunk.”

It must be pointed out that the game is not just Bruce’s but also Ted’s, Ned’s and Fred’s; everyone is playing the game in some role. At this point, everybody is depressed. Bruce is feeling a sense of satisfaction over his power to sober up a roomful of drinking buddies. A round of strokes—mostly negative—has been distributed and Bruce’s gloomy view of the world is vindicated. In addition, Bruce’s buddies have been persuaded that he can’t or won’t be helped; this is their game payoff.

Some people can’t seem to stop playing these damaging games, but others effectively avoid them by refusing to get hooked into Victim, Rescuer or Persecutor roles. When Bruce introduced his problem, apparently seeking advice, one of his friends, Jed, abstained from Rescuing by not offering any suggestions, and Jed did not get angry and Persecute, feel Victimized, or vindicate a negative script in the end.

The games and roles that people play can vary greatly, as shown by Berne in *Games People Play*. All the people playing in any one game will play one or more of the game's roles, and each player will, in the end, obtain the biological and existential advantages of playing the game. In the above game, Bruce's buddies' biological advantage is the strokes they get, and the existential advantage is the confirmation of the position that "You really can't help anybody."

Husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, daughters and sons, bosses and workers can be seen to play this and other wrenching games in their daily interactions endlessly—around the dinner table, in the bedroom, at work, on the street.

Instead of wasting energy and time playing these fruitless roles, people who avoid games are able to be helpful, accept advice, cooperate with, support, nurture and love each other on an ongoing, no-drama basis. What makes the difference between these two—drama or no drama—ways of living? Why do some people seem to enjoy each other's affections, find friends and partners, love their children and be loved by them? Why are some appreciated by their co-workers and bosses and why do others, somehow, for some stubborn reason, continue to do badly or even fail in their human endeavors?

## The Scripts that People Live to Make Sense of Their Lives

People, Berne postulated, live according to a narrative he called a script, which predicts and dictates the general, and sometimes specific, aspects of most people's lives. No one would be surprised by the claim that, early in life, children can decide to become firemen, ballerinas, engineers, doctors, lawyers or, lately, computer geeks. And most will agree that making that early-life decision is likely to influence the person those children will grow into.

In the same manner, children can come to the conclusion that they will be happy or unhappy, live long or short lives, be loved or abandoned, and then proceed to develop a preference for feelings of anger, sadness, fear or shame, and to live accordingly. These conclusions—decisions if you will—have embedded in them an existential, lifelong position that defines, in a short few words, who we believe we are. The most fundamental scripts and existential positions have to do with whether we will love and will be loved in return.

Some scripts are tragic and dramatic, such as murder, suicide or addiction; they are difficult to ignore. Other scripts are banal, melodramatic, garden-variety scripts that can be easily overlooked, such as lovelessness, depression, impotence, rejection or incompetence. Either way, tragic or banal, scripts limit people's choices. Sometimes the limitations are minor and sometimes they completely sap people of their power.

Some script decisions are made at a specific moment in life, and in a most detailed manner. Others are not so clearly or well remembered. A remarkable example of the former was Andre Gide who decided, at age 12, to devote his life to making his 14-

year-old cousin Madeleine Rondeaux happy. He married her in spite of his homosexuality and persisted to the last day of her life with disastrous results to her and himself, all of which he documents in his extensive writings on the subject (Gide, 1935).

Our expectations influence our lives powerfully. True, they don't always come to pass, but they affect our lives every step of the way. Two psychological phenomena--the self-fulfilling prophecy and the placebo effect--are powerful manifestations of expectations that determine outcomes. Research shows very clearly that optimism has an effect on life's outcomes, as does pessimism (Matlin and Stang, 1978). Our scripts, those secret lifetime decisions made in childhood, are a form of prophecy that tends to come true unless we become aware of them and decide to change them.

We describe our lives in terms of stories or narratives. Some narratives are positive and expansive, like "I am a good-natured person," "I make loyal friends easily," or "When I put my mind to something I usually succeed." Some narratives are negative and restrictive, like "I am stupid and will never amount to anything," "I am a misunderstood genius," "I am ugly and crazy and will always be abandoned by people I love," or "I make bad decisions and will never get ahead."

When such a narrative forces us into a restrictive path and we lose the capacity to choose, that narrative becomes a script, which then directs our lives in damaging ways. In this view, scripts are never positive. Still, there are scripts that, while damaging to the protagonist, may have positive effects for others. For instance, imagine the workaholic script of a skillful heart surgeon who saves several lives every week. This script may appear to be positive but is in fact a negative influence in her life as she endangers her own heart by her overwork.

I have observed that people often fall into one of three scripts: 1) My life will be loveless; 2) My life will be joyless; or 3) My life will be chaotic. Each one of these three script narratives is propelled daily by corresponding, matching, supporting games without which the script would run out of fuel. Lovelessness is supported by games of emotional disappointment and depression, like "If It Weren't For You"; "Why Don't You, Yes But"; and "I'm Only Trying to Help." Joylessness is held up by games like "Alcoholism," "Debtor" and "River Gambler." A chaotic life will be supported by violent, mindless games like "Uproar," "Kick Me," and "Shlemiehl."

The stroke-centered hypothesis is that the most effective way of ending the script and "closing down the show" is to stop relying on these games for the procurement of strokes and engaging instead in genuine, honest, above board, stroke-rich transactions. Without the support of their games, scripts will run out of steam and it will be possible to give them up.

Let us now see how emotional literacy training is an effective way of pursuing the goal of replacing negative game strokes with positive loving ones.

## Chapter 6.

### Enter The Emotions

Although Eric Berne advanced psychological and psychiatric knowledge at many levels, it is probably fair to say that he did not apply his great acumen to the study of human emotions. As a therapeutic goal he preferred that people think about (rather than feel their way to) solutions to their problems. He discounted therapy that he deemed mushy and overly focused on feelings and nurturing. He called such therapeutic efforts “chicken soup” and “greenhouse” therapy. When asked, “But what about feelings?” he was fond of quipping, “Feelings, schmeelings, as long as you love your mother,” (Personal communication, ca 1966). By this he meant that unless a person’s basic bond with his or her mother was disturbed, in which case s/he needed therapy to deconfuse the Child, the focus of therapy should be on Adult problem solving, without excessive attention to emotions.

Berne, in a manner consistent with the medical, professional standards of his day, was no great knower of emotions. Speaking of intimacy, for example, he often defined it by default: as the absence of rituals, pastimes, games, work, or withdrawal (San Francisco Seminars, ca 1959), as something people play games to avoid (1964, p. 172). Elsewhere he describes intimacy as “the liberation of the eidetically perceptive, uncorrupted Child in all its naiveté, living in the here and now” (1964, p. 180)—not, in my mind, a great improvement. But he seldom mentioned the emotions of intimacy and he believed that intimacy itself occurred very rarely, 15 minutes in a lifetime on the average (San Francisco Seminars, ca 1958).

In a section on the game of “Greenhouse” in *Games People Play* (1964), he wrote:

The expression of such a feeling may be preceded by the announcement that it is on its way...the feeling is described, or rather presented before the group as though it were a rare flower which should be regarded with awe. The reactions of the other members of the group are received very solemnly and they take on the air of connoisseurs at a botanical garden. The problem seems to be...whether this one is good enough to be exhibited in the National Feeling Show. (p. 142)

Despite his mocking pronouncements about “greenhouse,” and “chicken soup” therapies, and despite his reactionary caricature of “genuine feelings” (p. 143), however, Eric was not a cold fish. Nowhere is his relationship to the loving emotion more clearly revealed than in the one page, written in his last years, devoted to the discussion of love in *Sex in Human Loving* (1970): “Love is a sweet trap no one escapes without tears,” “the greatest adventure open to the human race,” and “the

most personal reality there is” (p. 119). Overly skeptical yes, emotionally battered and helpless perhaps, emotionally illiterate almost certainly, but Eric had a great loving heart—easily seen through his humor, which never once, in my experience, was at the expense of people, for whom he genuinely and openly cared.

Unfortunately, in his pronouncements, he focused unduly on people’s emotional self-indulgence, which he abhorred and which caused him to create a number of cynical, anti-emotional neologisms like “rackets,” “marshmallow throwing” and “trading stamps,” all of which centered on the illegitimacy of certain forms of emotional expression. Yet, in spite of his uneasy attitude toward emotions, Berne relished and respected the Child and, perhaps unwittingly, developed concepts—strokes, transactions, transactional analysis—that paved the way for others to study emotions.

People—and even therapists—have to reckon with emotions. Some would like to exclude them from the human stage. I believe that Eric Berne was one of those, as was I, in my early days as a therapist. Others realize that emotions are essential to life and the therapeutic process, and attempt to encompass them in their work. Thanks to the influence, in my personal life, of the great emotional force of feminism, I came to realize that the full-blown inclusion of emotions is essential to good therapy, as essential as the contract and the problem-solving Adult. Emotional literacy training is my contribution to the open-hearted incorporation of emotions in the practice of soul healing and in a good life.

Being emotionally literate means we have emotions, we know what and how strong they are, and we know what causes them in ourselves and others. We learn how, where and when to express them, and we learn how to control them. We learn how they affect other people, and we take responsibility for their effects. When we are emotionally literate we are sophisticated, gourmet cognoscenti of the texture, flavor, and after-taste of emotions, good and bad. We allow our Adult skills to work hand-in-hand with our emotional skills to produce the changes we desire in our lives.

Emotions are essential to our survival. They are instinctive responses to situations that require some sort of action. We need them to make decisions, as Antonio Damasio (1999) has shown in his research; without them we find ourselves unable to choose between alternatives. Yet, most of us have little awareness of what emotions we experience, how strong they are or what triggers them. Without such awareness, especially our awareness of the loving emotion, we cannot hope to develop the empathic and interactive skills that are the highest achievement of emotional literacy.

Berne created the tools for a detailed examination, transaction by transaction, of emotional issues. With the concept of positive and negative strokes he introduced the behavioral units for the two most basic emotions, love and hate. By providing us with a method for the investigation of human interaction (the analysis of transactions), he made it possible to systematically examine the genesis and communication of emotions.

## A Brief History of Emotional Illiteracy

Emotions have long been a controversial area of psychology. At the dawn of scientific psychology, introspection was considered to be the road to understanding the human experience. The scientific flaws of that approach, its proneness to observer bias and self-delusion, the inadequacy of sample size, and the impossibility of double-blind experimentation soon turned introspection into a scientific pariah, replaced by the far more systematic methods of experimental psychology.

Despite being shunned by psychologists, emotions did not go away; interest in them continued, mostly in the practice of psychotherapy. But the professional, scientific attitude dismissing them prevailed. Emotions became generally undesirable—the unwanted guest relegated to the seething cauldron of the id; the fly in the ointment; the disturber of civilization; the enemy of science and technology; the spoiler of rationality and logic; the curse of womanhood, children, and people of color; something that takes the starch out of the professional stiff upper lip; messy, disturbing, and out of control. Berne shared in this aversion: although he taught us to relish and admire the Child, he also held to a suspicious disregard of human emotion.

Condescension toward emotions fit neatly with elitist, professional, male-dominated, “depth” therapy (one-to-one, psychoanalytic) practiced on “real” patients (neurotics capable of paying their fees), as opposed to the “superficial” practice (group therapy, psychodrama, supportive and short-term therapy) practiced by unreal therapists (social workers, psychologists, nurses, ministers) on unreal patients (schizophrenics, indigents, the emotionally out of control). With this latter group of “unreal” patients, deemed unsuitable for depth psychotherapy, emotions were not easy to ignore. Courageous, committed therapists began to grapple with the messiness of the “lesser” therapeutic approaches and patient populations, and ran headlong into the disturbing, sometimes irreducible emotional issues of real life. As a result, emotions were once again attended to. It can be assumed that, in the course of these courageous experiments, mistakes were also committed; games were played, probably in the form of therapeutic Rescues of people who used their emotions to manipulate others, and the inevitable Persecution that followed.

### “I Can’t Make You Feel, You Can’t Make Me Feel!”

The human potential movement has provided us with a great deal of information and techniques of varying usefulness, but one of the most harmful ideas it generated was the idea that people cannot cause feelings in others. The idea, which reached near hegemony in the 1970’s and 80’s, probably had its genesis with Fritz Perls (1969) and his Gestalt prayer, which eventually became one of the movement’s canons.

I do my thing, and you do your thing.  
I am not in this world to live up to your expectations

And you are not in this world to live up to mine.  
You are you and I am I,  
If by chance we find each other, it's beautiful.  
If not, it can't be helped. (p. 4)

I believe that Perls was trying to critique the excessive, guilt-based emotional demands that people often make on each other. This may have been a worthy therapeutic goal: dealing with paralyzing emotional symbiosis or what has become commonly known as codependency and what we, in transactional analysis, call the Rescue role. However, what Perls wrote was vulgarized into a call for emotional irresponsibility and transformed into a hotly held point of view against the notion that people could cause feelings in others, let alone be responsible for them.

To Perls' prayer, I responded with a clearly contradictory one of my own:

If I do my thing and you do your thing  
And we don't live up to each other's  
expectations  
We might live but the world will not survive.  
You are you, and I am I, and together,  
Joining hands, not by chance,  
We will find each other beautiful.  
If not we can't be helped.

I consider the conviction that people cannot make each other feel—held by so many as a great, wise, and liberating revelation—to be a high point of emotional *illiteracy*. It is obvious to feeling persons that we can indeed cause emotions in each other. And, if one thinks about it, it is no surprise that this emotionally illiterate dictum was most passionately defended by white, middle-aged, heterosexual, professional men, who were probably being challenged about their paltry emotional lives by women empowered by the feminism of the times.

At a lecture in which I was presenting this point of view, just such a gentleman got up and interrupted me:

"I completely disagree," he exclaimed. "You cannot make me feel anything."

I took the bait. I stared at him, and faking anger, I said, "That is the stupidest thing I ever heard. Sit down!"

Stunned, he turned crimson and sat down. Changing from the harsh, Critical Parent ego state to Adult I said, "Can I ask you something?"

"Go ahead," he said.

"What are you feeling right now?"

"Nothing," he replied. Bewildered, I said, with a hint of sarcasm, "I guess you are right. I can't make you feel anything."



I turned to the rest of the audience and asked, “Did anybody feel anything?”

Many hands shot up. People volunteered that they had felt angry at me, embarrassed, afraid, and on and on. Still, even as I made my point, I felt uneasy because I had acted in direct contradiction to an important principle: not to use power plays and to keep transactions free of Critical Parent. I felt guilty about the way I had treated my interlocutor and responsible for the hurt that I might have caused him. I tried to apologize, but he would not accept my apology and held fast to the conviction that he had not been injured or made to feel badly, afraid or angry.

This debate used to be a standard staple in all my presentations and workshops. I notice that lately the “can’t make me feel” belief is no longer in vogue. I never again used this somewhat brutal confrontational technique to illustrate my point and still regret having done it then. I am even uneasy about using the example today, to make my point here. Ironically, this may read as an overwrought example of a “Greenhouse” game; I call it emotional literacy. The point is that people *can* make other people feel fear, anger, shame, and all sorts of negative emotions. And, if we can make others feel, we need to be responsible for what feelings we may cause. It goes without saying that people can make others feel good, joyful, loving, proud, or hopeful--for which we can also take credit.

Obviously, we do have a choice as to whether we let others generate unwanted feelings in us, and whether we continue to feel them. Clearly, if someone assaults us with emotionally upsetting transactions, we should take measures to prevent them from continuing to do so. And if negative emotions stubbornly persist, we may want to get beyond them. But not always, and it is not necessarily a sign of failure if we cannot. That depends on the viciousness of the attack and the power of the attacker as much as it depends on our own personal power and determination. We may need to hang on to the feeling to isolate and analyze it in order to get important information about ourselves. And let’s not forget that there are some feelings of sadness or anger that we may not want to get over, and that it may, at times, be injurious to our mental health to do so prematurely or when we ignore grievously oppressive situations. In the radical psychiatry days we used to say, in defense of the Black Panthers, who were being accused of being pathologically angry, that “any black man who is not angry needs psychiatric help.”

### “You Are Just Paranoid!”

Another concept, related to the interconnectedness of emotions, is the phenomenon of paranoia. In our emotional lives we often intuitively pick up negative feelings from other people. These negative feelings in others are usually unacknowledged and, if confronted, are usually denied. For instance, people often develop suspicions and fears about the motives and opinions of other people, sometimes to the point of what seems unrealistic paranoia. In some psychiatric circles, the standard approach to paranoia has been to blame it on “projection.” So, for example, if David thinks

that Maria, his housemate, hates him, and Maria denies it, the traditional psychiatric wisdom presumes that it is David who hates Maria. Because he can't face angry feelings in himself so—it is thought—he “projects” his hatred onto her. The recommended remedy was to argue with and disprove the paranoid suspicions, point by point.

This approach, in my experience, made people more rather than less paranoid. I found in my work that paranoia generally builds itself around a grain of intuitive truth, just as a pearl builds itself around a grain of sand. That is why I coined the phrase, “Paranoia is heightened awareness.” I found that if a “grain of truth” in the paranoid fantasy was acknowledged, the person was usually able to let go of his paranoid ideas. This approach, in David's case, would entail searching for some measure of validation from Maria—the grain of truth—for his conviction that Maria dislikes him.

Maria repeatedly denies that she hates David. But if Maria admits that she is, in fact, very annoyed at David's sloppiness when he does the dishes, or cleans the bathroom, then David can let go of the idea that she hates him. That belief, he can now realize, is a paranoid exaggeration of her actual, much less strong feelings of annoyance, which he sensed or intuited. David had simply picked up—intuitively—hidden negative feelings from Maria and, because she denies it, the original, valid, intuitive suspicion has blown up out of proportion. When that happens, the Critical Parent usually gets involved and fans the fires of suspicion with its own negative messages. Once David senses that Maria is angry at him, the Critical Parent can easily, without fear of contradiction, add: “Sure she's mad at you; you're so insufferably obnoxious that she can't admit to it.” When she acknowledges her relatively mild anger and the reasons for it, he can substitute his Child paranoia with Adult understanding and ignore the Critical Parent.

This validating method was inspired by the work of Ronald Laing, the Scottish psychiatrist who pointed out that when we invalidate or deny people's experiences, or the way they see things, we make mental invalids of them (1971). Laing found that, when one's intuition is repeatedly and thoroughly denied, we can be made to feel crazy, even if we are perfectly healthy, mentally.

Another example: Margaret's husband Chris is very attracted to a neighbor, and Margaret picks up the subtle but frequent clues about his hidden infatuation. If she confronts Chris with her suspicions and he denies them over and over, while continuing his subtle behavior, her nagging fears, augmented by the Critical Parent, might continue to build to the point of paranoia. She may develop the conviction that he is having an affair. If Chris admits to his infatuation, Margaret may be angry and sad but she won't be paranoid anymore. For her, that is a far preferable state of affairs.

Using this approach, when people developed intuitive, even paranoid, hunches, rather than accusing them of being irrational and discounting their way of seeing things, we in the radical psychiatry group of the 1970's learned to search for the

grain of truth in them. By finding this truth, no matter how small, we move a relationship away from suspicion, paranoia and denial, back toward communication, feedback, and honesty. At the same time, by testing the validity of people's emotional intuitions and hunches, we train their empathic capacities, which, we shall see, are essential to emotionally literate relationships. This approach—validating paranoia—is a basic technique of emotional literacy training, wherein we encourage people to express their hunches, intuitive perceptions, and paranoid fantasies and, instead of discounting them, seek their validation, even if only with a small grain of truth.

How is this view of paranoia related to the way people can make each other feel? The emotional connections between people and people's intuitive perceptions are fundamental aspects of interconnectedness. Empathy and intuition are interrelated. They are both innate human capacities, arguably mediated by mirror neurons in the brain (Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004; Ramachandran, 2006). Undermining and interfering with these innate connections between people keeps people separate. It is one way in which the Critical Parent protects the patriarchal system from the dangers of free and open communication. Both of these examples of emotional illiteracy: a) "You can't make me feel and I can't make you feel; and b) "You are just paranoid," require focused attention in the quest for emotional literacy.

In Chapter 3, I outlined the first part of Emotional Literacy Training: "Opening the Heart." The second part, "Surveying the Emotional Landscape" (described below), deals with intuition and empathy training.

## Surveying the Emotional landscape

Our emotions are frequently unfamiliar to us, like an uncharted, albeit very real, terrain of our inner self. In order to survey that emotional landscape in a systematic manner, so as to become familiar with, and comfortable in it, I designed two specific transactions, each made up of a stimulus and a response: the Action/Feeling transaction and the Validation transaction.

### *Action/Feeling transaction*

Contradicting the emotionally illiterate statement, "I can't make you feel," we use the action feeling statement in which A says to B:

"When you (describe an action) I felt (name an emotion)," as in, "When you interrupted me just now, I felt angry."

The required, emotionally literate response to that action/feeling statement is an acknowledgement of the fact that a specific action by B caused a specific feeling in A, as in,

"I understand that you felt angry when I interrupted you."

### *Validation transaction*

When we become aware of a paranoid suspicion or hunch, we use the validation transaction in which A says to B:

”I have a hunch, or paranoid fantasy, that (describe intuitive hunch).”

B then responds by validating the hunch or providing a grain of truth that may explain it, as in:

Dick: “I’m worried that you no longer love me.”

And the response, from Jane, “Well, I have been disappointed with you—sad and angry—but I love you very much.” Or perhaps, “I am sorry to say that you’re right, I have fallen out of love with you.”

Again, both of these statements will, ultimately, be an improvement over the complications and anxiety caused by uncertainty.

These two transactions together constitute the process of “Surveying the Emotional Landscape” which, added to the transactions of Part One, “Opening the Heart,” and Part Three, “Taking Responsibility,” are the elements of Emotional Literacy Training.

## Emotional Literacy Training and Transactional Analysis

Emotional literacy training is the extension of transactional analysis concepts and techniques into the understanding and mastery of our emotional lives. Emotional literacy adds to our personal power. It makes us better parents, partners, coworkers, teachers, ministers, business people, employers, merchants, scientists, activists, and politicians.

### *Basic Assumptions of Emotional Literacy*

1. The healthy human being is emotionally responsive and responsible, both capable of being made to feel and responsible for how he or she makes others feel.
2. The free exchange of emotional information is essential for effective interpersonal communication; without emotional information, we have only half the data relevant to a transaction.
3. Effective interpersonal communication is essential for human productivity and personal power.

Having established these principles, I developed emotional literacy training as an application of transactional analysis.

How then do we apply transactional analysis to the teaching of emotional literacy? The emotional literacy training program consists of teaching and learning a set of emotionally literate transactions. Each transaction that we practice is of increasing complexity and difficulty. In every case the exercise is preceded by a request for permission to interact. As they are put into practice, these transactions will have the effect of increasing a person's emotional literacy. A more detailed account of this process is provided in Chapter 11. My book, *Emotional Literacy: Intelligence with a Heart* provides a complete description of the process. What follows is a brief outline:

### *Emotionally Literate Transactions*

There are four categories of increasingly difficult, emotionally literate transactional exchanges:

1. Obtaining permission (preparing the ground)
2. Giving and accepting strokes (opening the heart)
3. Information (actions, feelings, motives)
  - a. Action/Feeling statements (feelings associated with actions)
  - b. Fears and suspicions (validation of intuition)
4. Responsibility (apologizing and making amends)

### *Emotional Literacy Training workshops*

Basic emotional literacy skills can be taught in a group (ideally 16 but no larger than 24 people) over a period of two or three days. Each of the above four steps is detailed with the aid of handouts. This enables people to understand as well as experience the emotionally literate process and use and to replicate it in their family and work situations.

When people practice this graded introduction of emotional tasks in a carefully protected, safe social environment, they will acquire emotional literacy skills. Of course further practice, in the "real world," is essential for the retention of these skills.

The order of these various emotionally literate transactions indicates the increasing level of difficulty. Only the first transaction—permission to transact emotionally—is "obligatory." All the others are tailored to the situation at hand.

In every instance in which emotional literacy training is taught, three basic elements are required:

1. A safe, cooperative environment, achieved by a cooperative contract and supervised by a competent trainer;

2. A set of emotionally literate training transactions; and
3. A group of two or more people who are interested in, and want to learn emotional literacy.

All three are needed for an adequate mixture of information and limbic resonance to occur and for emotional literacy to be learned. Two out of three will not suffice. Having the transactions and the people will not be sufficient without the protected environment in which people can feel safe to discuss their emotions honestly and freely. On the other hand, a safe environment and willing people, without the directed, emotionally literate transactional techniques, will not generate emotional learning in any systematic or reliable way. Nor will any situation that lacks participants who are earnestly engaged in learning emotional literacy be of any particular value.

Emotional literacy skills can be taught in a variety of cooperative contexts: workshops, therapy groups, couple's counseling or coaching. The transactional analytic tools developed by Berne are ideally suited for this process, and without them it would be far more difficult to teach or learn emotional literacy skills.

The application of emotional literacy in the "real world"—at work, in schools, and on the street—is an area that needs to be further explored and written about. I encourage the reader to develop techniques for such special situations and to write about them.

## Chapter 7.

### Stroke-Centered Transactional Analysis

By the time he finished *Games People Play*, Eric Berne's transactional analysis theory had had almost 10 years to differentiate itself from psychoanalytic thinking and to mature in its own right. In the Introduction to that book, Berne presents the concept of strokes with one of his characteristic colloquialisms: "If you are not stroked your spinal cord will shrivel up" (p.14). In a more scientific vein he explains: "A biological chain may be postulated leading from emotional and sensory deprivation through apathy to degenerative changes and death" (p.14). He goes on to write, "Stimulus hunger has the same relationship to survival of the human organism as food hunger" (p. 14).

In this manner Berne makes it clear that he considered strokes to be the fundamental motive for human behavior. Later he states, "The most gratifying forms of social contact...are games and intimacy. Prolonged intimacy is rare...significant social intercourse most commonly takes the form of games" (p.19). Elsewhere he writes:

The individual for the rest of his life (after infancy) is confronted with a dilemma upon whose horns his destiny and survival are continually tossed. One horn is the social, psychological and biological forces which stand in the way of continued physical intimacy in the infant style and the other is his perpetual striving for its attainment. (p. 14)

In the following pages I lay out the full theory of stroke-centered transactional analysis. Here you will find all the principal concepts of the theory, in one place. Each major concept is presented as a theoretical premise in bold lettering. Each premise is followed by further explanation. These 18 premises constitute the theoretical basis of stroke-centered transactional analysis.

This highly concentrated presentation of the theory is written with theory wonks in mind. You may wish to skip it. All that is said in these next 18 premises is stated, repeatedly, in a less concentrated and systematic form, in the rest of the book.

#### Basic Premises

##### *I. Purpose and Function of Transactional Analysis*

**Premise #1. The activity of a transactional analyst is the analysis of transactions for the purpose of contractually improving people's lives.**

Transactional analysis is a complex social theory with psychodynamic components. However, as a practice, TA focuses on the objective analysis of social transactions, in short: analyzing transactions. The role of the transactional analysis practitioner is defined by an information-based contract. The contract is initiated by and designed to benefit the client. It is arrived at consensually between the client and the transactional analysis provider.

**Premise #2. The information extracted from the detailed analysis of an individual's transactions is the transactional analyst's principal source of data. With this data, the analyst endeavors to understand the personality structure, behavior, and experience of that individual.**

Transactional analysis was designed for, and is ideally practiced, in groups. The transactional analyst focuses on the analysis of visible or verifiable social transactions. This analysis is a rich source of the information necessary for the successful pursuit of a contract.

**Premise #3. The method for achieving contractually agreed-upon change is the purposeful modification of human interactions.**

Changes in transactional behavior can directly modify personality structure, human behavior, and experience. The changes that are agreed upon in the contract are primarily achieved through a two-fold process: the analysis of social behavior, and the application of skillfully designed interventions intended to change that behavior. This view stands in sharp contrast to the psychodynamic view that change can come from insights into a person's psychodynamic structure derived from intimate one-to-one conversations.

## *II. Transactions and Strokes*

**Premise #4. *The transaction* is the basic unit of transactional analysis and consists of a transactional stimulus and a transactional response. A transaction is an exchange of information between two distinct ego states (to be defined below) of two individuals.**

Ego states are separate units or personality clusters in each person. Berne identified three ego states that he named the Parent, the Adult and the Child (to be defined below.)

**Premise #5. A stroke is a specific sort of transaction with which one person recognizes and imparts evaluative information, positive or negative, about the other, who receives it.**

While every stroke is a transaction, a transaction can transmit a great deal more information (values, feelings, or data) than the information of simple recognition. The information in a stroke transaction is simply a statement of recognition of a certain positive or negative magnitude.



Strokes can be divided into positive and negative, based on the subjective experience of the recipient. Positive strokes are pleasurable and beneficial. Negative strokes are painful and potentially toxic. Strokes can vary in order of magnitude from low to high intensity. Strokes will also have different values for the recipient according to their source.

Wide-ranging, recent research has shown that strokes are required for actual survival in young children and for psychological survival and health in grown-ups. Because people need strokes to survive physically and psychologically, stroke-seeking behavior is a powerful motivational element in people's lives.

**Premise #6. The stroke economy is a set of rules that interferes with the exchange of positive strokes by keeping us from asking for, giving, and accepting the strokes that we want. The scarcity of strokes creates heightened stroke hunger, which in turn stimulates less discriminating stroke-seeking behavior and the consumption of negative strokes.**

Stroke-hunger can be satisfied by negative strokes; such strokes can placate the need for recognition and contact, and guarantee survival. Where the Stroke Economy is active, positive strokes become scarce and people resort to accepting negative strokes. Failure to procure sufficient strokes can result in stroke starvation, with behavioral, cognitive and biological consequences. Positive strokes are commonly referred to, in abbreviated form, as, simply, strokes.

### *III. Power: Use and Abuse*

**Premise #7. Power is the capacity to create change against resistance and the capacity to resist unwanted change.** We are innately equipped with power potential, which our interactions and environment either amplify or diminish. The transactional analyst's major task is to aid people in understanding and modifying their interactions in order to enlist and develop the necessary personal power to obtain what they need—especially strokes.

Personal power is a desirable attribute, which, a) makes it possible for people to overcome the resistance (internal or external) that prevents them from achieving their goals; or b) enables people to resist changes that are not desired.

Personal power is expressed through transactional behavior. The most effective method of acquiring personal power is through effective cooperation.

**Premise #8. In people's quest to satisfy their needs, power can be used in a manner beneficial to themselves and others or it can be abused to benefit only themselves without regard for others.**

Power plays are transactions to coerce others; cooperation is free of power plays and is based on openhearted negotiation.

A power play is defined as:

A conscious or habitual, preconscious transaction or set of transactions designed to a) cause another person to do something he or she would not do on their own accord; or b) to prevent another person from doing what he or she would prefer to do.

People have needs and will go about satisfying them. In the process, people have a choice between cooperation and competition. Competitive, adversarial interaction is based on the assumption that it is acceptable to power play others in order to satisfy one's needs. Cooperation's basic premise is that everyone has equal rights and that it is not acceptable to coerce others at any level. Instead, people's needs must be pursued by mutual agreement in openhearted negotiation.

The analysis of interpersonal transactions can help differentiate between cooperation and competition.

**Premise #9. The capacity to recognize and love each other is made possible by the limbic evolution of the mammalian brain.**

Cooperation, emotional literacy, and, eventually, democracy are the interpersonal manifestations of that limbic evolution. Transactional analysis is ideally suited to the analysis and refinement of those developments, with the aim of improving people's lives.

The limbic brain and its mirror neurons generate limbic resonance, necessary for nurturing, empathy, trust, cooperation and emotional awareness. Games and power plays are obstacles to limbic resonance and can be eliminated through the analysis and modification of transactions.

**Premise #10. Two aspects of human interaction are the principal source of problems for which people seek solutions: stroking behavior and power behavior.**

The manner in which people seek power in order to pursue satisfaction can be beneficial or it can be harmful and toxic. In people's quest to satisfy their needs, power can be either abused, or used to benefit themselves and other people. Likewise the strategies used by people to gain recognition—strokes--can be harmful or beneficial. Changes in stroke and power-seeking behavior patterns are fundamental avenues to healing.

#### *IV. Games and Scripts*

**Premise #11. Games and Scripts are early life adaptations to the strictures and demands of the Critical Parent of the various, significant persons in the child's life.**

Scripts are life plans that are acquired and sometimes consciously decided in early life. Games are short-term maneuvers to acquire strokes, and scripts are long-term strategies to acquire or maintain power and meaning. Scripts and games are

inextricably related to each other, in that scripts depend for their maintenance on daily games.

A game is defined as a series of transactions, by nature repetitive, with a beginning, a middle, an end and a payoff. The payoff is the advantage, to the player, of playing the game—its biological and existential gains.

The existential advantage of the game is the reinforcement of the script. Every instance of a game played, in addition to procuring strokes, validates the existential position of the person's life script.

The biological advantage or payoff of a game is the strokes it procures. Games are power plays for strokes; they are habitual, dysfunctional patterns of stroke procurement, usually learned in the family early in life. Games are the day-to-day transactions that maintain the script's significance and meaning. Without the short term gains of games, the long-term script strategy cannot be realized. Every person who plays games has a favored set of games and resulting emotions, to which he or she is habituated.

Psychological games and long term life scripts are the pathological consequences of the scarcity of positive strokes created and maintained by the Critical Parent. The procurement of strokes, when strokes are unavailable or in short supply, is a major cause for the self-defeating and abusive behavior of games.

**Premise #12. There are a great variety of games that people can play (Berne, 1964). Within those games, people assume certain roles. Three roles occur in all games: The Persecutor, the Rescuer, and the Victim. When playing any game, people are compelled to switch between these three roles.**

Within their daily struggles for strokes and power, people repeatedly play out these three self-defeating game roles. These roles can be avoided and the games and scripts they are embedded in can be given up by learning to acquire strokes in a direct, game-free manner. The most direct method of giving up scripts and their attendant games is to learn to give and accept positive strokes, thereby avoiding the stroke hunger that motivates games.

### *V. Ego States*

**Premise #13. The three ego states are the visible manifestations of separate, distinct, internally coherent, expert neural networks, developed by evolution. Each ego state has a different, important, specialized function handling different sorts of information.**

Roughly (because these are somewhat vague, intuitive categories), the Adult is expert at predicting and controlling events, the Child is expert at maintaining emotional motivation, and the Parent is expert at preserving and applying value judgments. In addition, Berne separated the Parent into Nurturing and Critical

Parent and the Child into Adapted and Natural Child. I have chosen the Nurturing Parent, the Critical Parent, the Adult and the unitary Child as being the four most easily observable and useful ego states in stroke-centered work.

While there is no research evidence that conclusively establishes the reality of these four precise ego states, they are distinct and identifiable enough to be extremely useful in the process of transactional analysis. In addition the acceptance and application of these metaphorical divisions of the personality to the explanation and modification of one's behavior will in turn bring about cognitive and structural changes in the personality; changes that will make the ego states real. Each ego state represents an evolutionary and memetic achievement, and the most effective life experience depends on the independent function of each of the ego states, minus the Critical Parent, in coordination with each other.

The so-called Adult is the rational, problem-solving ego state. It is devoid of powerful emotions, which tend to disrupt understanding and logic. Of the three ego states, it is the most likely to have a specific brain correlate: the neocortex, which is the seat of imitation, language, and abstract thinking.

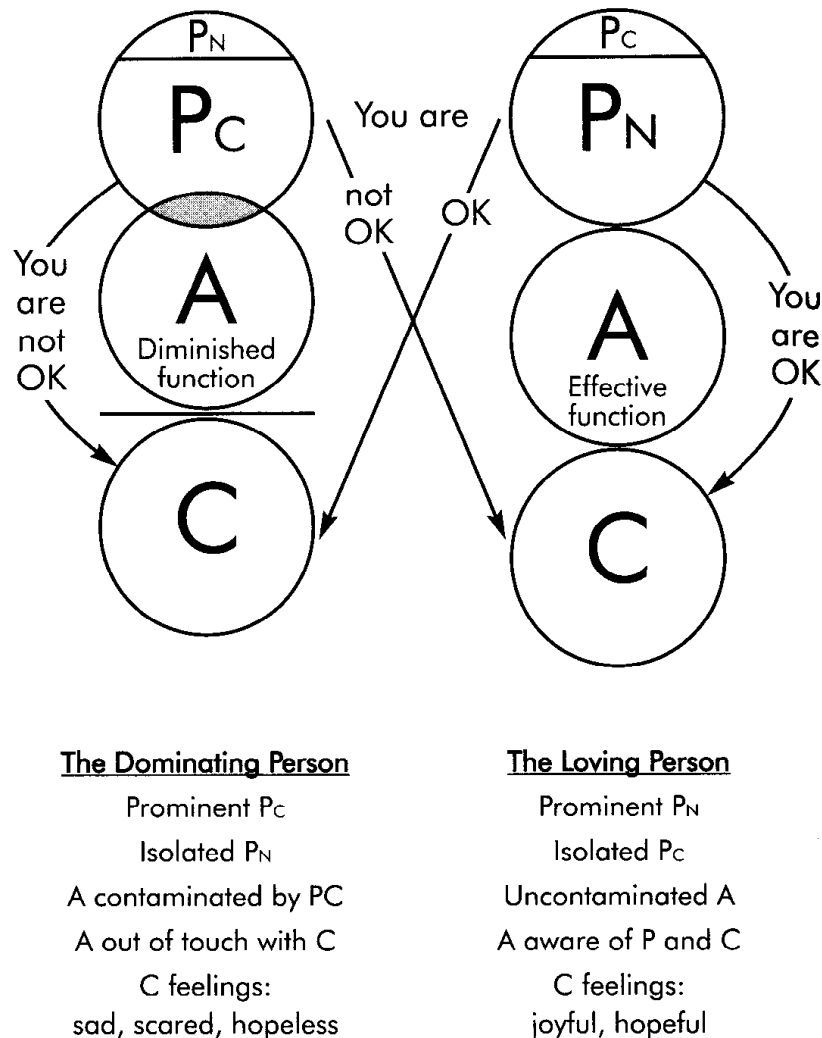
The Child is the emotional ego state. All the primary emotions and their combinations--such emotions as anger, sadness, fear, and shame, on the one hand, and love, joy, and hope, on the other--have their origins in the Child. The Child is the source of empathy, the capacity to feel what others feel.

The Parent is the judging, tradition-based, prejudiced, regulatory ego state. The Parent can manifest in one of two equally prejudiced forms: The Critical Parent, (prejudiced against people), and the Nurturing Parent (prejudiced for people). The Critical Parent is expert in control, and the Nurturing Parent is expert in support and encouragement. Both of them are capable of being augmented or reduced with transactional analysis techniques.

A distinction between the Critical Parent and the Nurturing Parent is essential to the effective application of stroke-centered transactional analysis. In order to control the Child, the Critical Parent judges the individual as not OK—bad, stupid, crazy, ugly, sick, or doomed—and therefore undeserving of love. The function of the Critical Parent ego state is to control people. It has been called the “witch” or “ogre,” “electrode,” or “internalized oppression,” among many other names.

The equally prejudiced Nurturing Parent argues to the contrary, that the person is OK: smart, good, sane, beautiful, healthy, and deserving of freedom, choice, and love, and capable of succeeding.

The ego states seldom appear in their potentially pure forms and are usually contaminated or influenced by each other. The influence of the Child or the Parent on the Adult is especially significant because effective Adult functioning--detached from emotional, "irrational" influences and prejudices--is essential to the contractual, Adult, problem solving goals of transactional analysis. Contaminations of the Adult are the metaphorical representations of neural connections between the neocortex and more primitive areas of the brain, caused by repeated or dramatic events—traumas—in the person’s life.



**FIGURE 3. The Three Basic Ego States**

Research shows that the emotional portions of the brain have the capacity to flood and disable the neocortex with stimulation in what can be interpreted as an asymmetrical relationship of dominance of Child over Adult or “contamination” of the Adult by the Child. Reversing that asymmetrical relationship is one of the tasks of emotional literacy training.

## *VI. The Critical Parent: from Patriarchy to Democracy*

**Premise #14. Authoritarian systems of governance, in place for millennia, are highly dependent on the capacity to control and dominate others. Dominance and control, by way of power abuse, is the function of the Critical Parent.**

When the Critical Parent is dominant, the Adult and Child are proportionately inhibited. It is therefore desirable in an egalitarian, democratic, cooperative society, to sharply limit the Critical Parent's participation in human affairs, so as to release the Adult and Child ego states.

Starting at the end of the second millennium AD, there has been a globalization of the struggle that began in Athens, 500 BC, to replace coercive, authoritarian methods with democracy, equality, universal human rights, cooperation, and nonviolence in support of every person's goals. The premise of this movement, in transactional analysis terms, is that every child is OK, that the Child's needs are legitimate, and that the most desirable and beneficial form of interaction is a cooperative, nonviolent, nurturing relationship. This stands in contradiction to the function and assumptions of the Critical Parent, whose premise is that the Child is not OK (stupid, bad, crazy, ugly, sick, or doomed) and that children don't need or deserve strokes and may even be harmed by them. Instead, children, to be educated—according to the Critical Parent's views—require physically and emotionally violent power plays, including, especially, the curtailment of strokes. This curtailment of strokes is the Critical Parent's enforced function of the stroke economy.

**Premise #15. The widespread cultural shift toward democracy requires that the functions regulating the Child, heretofore exercised by the Critical Parent, should be performed by the Adult and Nurturing Parent instead. Just as important as maximally reducing the Critical Parent is the strengthening of the Adult and Nurturing Parent.**

In the absence of a strong, functioning Adult, the Critical Parent can convincingly argue that the unregulated Child could potentially endanger the person. Given the goals of transactional analysis—to improve people's lives by teaching them more effective ways of interacting—it is essential to strengthen the Adult ego state. It is just as important to strengthen the Nurturing Parent, since Adult interactions by themselves are not a powerful source of strokes.

Therefore, the paradigm shift from control to cooperation and non-violence depends on a culture-wide increase of healthy and strong Child, Adult and Nurturing Parent ego states, as Critical Parent influences decrease. The Child, Adult and Nurturing Parent ego states, although each essentially beneficial, can overtake the personality by excluding the two others. Instead, they need to operate in balance with each other.

*VII The Practice of Transactional Analysis: The Heart of the Matter*

**Premise #16. Transactional analysis was designed for, and is ideally practiced, in groups. The role of the transactional analysis practitioner is defined by a contract decided between the client and the therapist, counselor, teacher or consultant.**

Group work is ideally suited for personal change, provided that the group is safe from Critical Parent intrusion and that people develop a sense of trust and security, which is essential for the development of the limbic resonance necessary for limbic readjustments to occur.

**Premise #17. People are born with an inherent tendency for health and healing. Nature's helping hand, "Vis Medicatrix Nature" (the tendency to heal), is the transactional analyst's principal ally. Facilitating Nature's helping hand with healing techniques is the transactional analyst's principal tasks.**

The basic existential position of "I'm OK, You're OK" reflects the belief that Nature is on the side of life, growth, and health, and always ready to heal and make whole.

**Premise #18. The stroke-centered transactional analyst's fundamental healing methods are: radical truthfulness, the exclusion of the Critical Parent, and the 3 P's: Permission, Protection and Potency.**

In addition to excluding lies of commission or omission and excluding Critical Parent transactions, we use Permission to change unwanted behaviors, Protection from the Critical Parent, and other influences that will resist or counteract the desired changes, as well as the transactional analyst's Potency, in the form of information, skills, and personal loving support, and investment in the process. A potent transactional analyst will scrupulously avoid toxic game roles and pursue the above healing techniques to the completion of the contractual relationship. Stroke-Centered Transactional Analysis is basically a prescription for helping people to design and achieving satisfactory personal power.

## Chapter 8.

### Seven Sources of Heart-Centered Power; Further Refinements

Throughout, I have been referring to personal power: its importance, its loss, its acquisition and its abuse. To explore this crucial subject I will refer to seven sources of personal power available to everyone who cares to develop them. These seven unique configurations of skills enhance our capacity to obtain what we want and to avoid what we wish to avoid. I have named them Balance, Passion, Control, Love, Communication, Information, and Transcendence. Students of Eastern religions will recognize the origin of these ideas in the ancient theory of Kundalini yoga, and the seven chakras: Earth, Sex, Power, Heart, Throat, Third Eye, and Cosmos.

No one of these powers should be valued over another. Instead, they should be allowed to develop and be used together, for each has its own unique capacity to bring about change. Together these seven sources of power constitute charisma, that personal quality that confers to an individual an unusual ability to accomplish important tasks in social situations. When used in combination, coordinated by the Heart, you will find that this rainbow of options is much more powerful than the blunt, sometimes subtle, but often brutal forms of control power that we are familiar with.

#### Balance

Balance or grounding, as it is also called, is the capacity to be rooted and comfortable while standing, climbing, walking, or running.

When you are well grounded, you “know where you stand” and you are able to “stand your ground.” Your body will be firmly planted, and your mind will be steady. Knowing where you stand, you will not be easily pushed out of your physical or personal position.

In patriarchal society, women have been consistently prevented from attaining a strong sense of physical balance: foot binding, tight corsets, contemporary women’s fashions designed to please men—tight clothes, miniskirts, high heels—in the Western world; clumsy concealing clothes in the Muslim world, as well as the requirements of modesty (limited and careful motion) for women the world over—all these have interfered with women’s physical freedom and stability.

Men, on the other hand, are free to be as physically comfortable as they desire, to wear roomy clothing and shoes, and they have minimal requirements of grooming



and modesty. However, as women move toward equal status with men, they are casting aside many of the dictates of dress and grooming that have been required for them. As a result, they are feeling more powerful—more grounded and balanced—and threatening patriarchal dominance in fundamental ways.

The optimal level of development desirable for each of the power sources is the middle road, a “happy medium.” Regarding balance or grounding, if you are deficient in that power, you will be too obedient, timid, easily thrown off balance and frightened. On the other hand, if overdeveloped, you will be stubborn, stony, dense, unmovable and dull, and you will not be able to tolerate or handle being thrown off equilibrium.

## Passion

The power of passion is an inner fire that can invigorate like nothing else. Passion rises up against conformity and passivity, forces confrontation and change. Passion brings opposites together.

Passion can create or destroy. When passionate, love will move mountains, and hate can destroy whole societies. In the absence of sexual passion, there would be no Romeo and Juliet, few marriages, no unrequited love. But passion is not only sexual. It fuels missionary zeal, quixotic quests, invention and revolution.

A person whose passion is diminished will be tepid, boring, and gutless. Excessive passion can mislead a person, get out of control and become destructive.

## Control

Control has been badly used but it is an essential form of power. Control allows you to manipulate your environment and the objects, machines, animals, and people in it.

Control, which can be both physical and psychological, also gives you power over yourself. Control is especially important when, in the form of self-discipline, it lets you regulate your other powers, such as passion, love, information, communication. Control is vital when events around you run amok and threaten your survival. Emotional Literacy is partially a matter of controlling emotions: expressing them or holding them back for the benefit of all concerned.

If you lack control power, you can be victimized by your inner turmoil and become addicted, depressed, sleepless, and slothful. Or you may be victimized by the outer world, becoming unemployed, homeless, battered, persecuted, mentally ill, or sickened by pollution. You will be seen as lacking discipline, unable to control what you feel, say, and do, and what you put in your mouth, up your nose or into your veins. On the opposite end of the spectrum, when obsessed by control, you become fixated on the absolute control of every situation and living soul.

| <b>Function</b> | <b>Energy</b>  | <b>Power</b>                            | <b>Impotence<br/>(Excess / Deficit)</b> |
|-----------------|--|---|---|
| Transcendence   | Psychic  | No fear of death                        | Spaced /<br>Humorless                   |
| Knowledge       | Information:<br>science,<br>history,<br>intuition,<br>vision | Ability to predict                      | Super-intellectual /<br>Ignorant        |
| Communication   | Interaction  | Ability to induce<br>ideas and feelings | Gossip / Silent                         |
| LOVE            | Emotion  | Emotional<br>Literacy                   | Hyper-emotional /<br>Numb               |
| Control         | Force  | Ability to<br>manipulate                | Control freak /<br>Passive              |
| Passion         | Acceleration   | Quickening human<br>process             | Manic / Depressed                       |
| Balance         | Gravity  | Stability                               | Stubborn /<br>Lightweight               |

Figure 4. Seven Sources of Love-Centered Power

## Love

Everyone wants to love and to be loved, knowing how good it feels when it actually happens. But few people look beyond love's obvious pleasures to see its power. Fewer yet fully develop that power.

Love is more than a Valentine's Day card, the out-of-body thrill of seeing or touching one's beloved, or the warm hug of a mother's child. Love has the power to bind people together, enabling them to work tirelessly side by side on the hardest tasks, instilling hope that can propel them out of the most hellish situations: floods, famines, combat, massacres.

If your power of love is underdeveloped, you will be cold, lacking in warmth or empathy for other people, unable to nurture or to be nurtured, unable even to love yourself. If this power is overdeveloped, you are in constant danger of giving your heart away: a habitual Rescuer, driven to excessive sacrifices for others while neglecting yourself.

Shifting from a Control-centered culture to a Love-centered society is the central task of our age. This will require the support of especially committed emotional warriors around the globe working together to bring about such a massive change.

A loving attitude guides the emotional warrior. This attitude applies to three elementary realms: love of self, love of others, and love of truth. These three loves are necessary for a heart-centered approach to living:

1. Bedrock individuality; love of self. When we love ourselves we will stand our ground in defense of our personal uniqueness. Individuality keeps us firmly focused on what we want and makes us capable of deciding what will contribute or detract from our personal path. Only a passionate love of self will provide the strength to persevere in our decisions when everyone loses faith in who we are or what we are doing.
2. Steadfast loyalty; love of others. Loyalty makes us aware of our involvement in the lives of other human beings and as passionate about others as we are about ourselves. Love of self and love of others are powerful forces that must be balanced. Love of self without love of others is equivalent to selfishness and, in an otherwise powerful person, can be singularly destructive. Love of others without love of self will turn us into Rescuers ready to give everything away.
3. Conscious truthfulness; love of truth. Love of self and love of others are intimately dependent on the love of truth, especially the truth about our own feelings on one hand and the feelings of others on the other. Without loyalty to what we know to be true we cannot decide between selfishness and magnanimity—where the love of self ends, and the love of others begins.

Truthfulness is especially important in the information age, where we can be “well informed,” and at the same time under the influence of false and deceitful information. Love of truth is the attribute that keeps a person actively involved in pursuing valid information, that is information that reflects the realities of the world. “Radical truth telling” is the application of the love of truth to relationships.

## Communication

The power of communication is the capacity to transmit one’s thoughts and feelings to others so that they will experience those very thoughts and feelings in themselves. Communication is a transactional process, which will not work without the willing ear of its recipient. Two operations are involved: sending and receiving, speaking and listening. Both of these are needed to transmit knowledge, to solve problems with others, to build satisfying relationships.

If you are lacking in communication power, you will be unable to learn or teach much. If you overstress communication, you can become a compulsive, careless talker, a gossip who pays little attention to what you are saying or its effect on others. Too little communication will turn you into an enigmatic, sullen, isolated and disquieting person.

All the sources of power work with each other. A very powerful combination of powers used by great teachers consists of communication, information, and love. In a good teacher, communication is inspired by the love of truth and the love of people. Good teachers do not browbeat or use control to persuade. Instead they explain, and if they are not understood they find out why, and try again. Their students are free to compare what they are learning with what they already know, and are urged to form their own well-grounded opinions.

## Information

The power of information is that it reduces uncertainty so you can make effective decisions. When you have information, you can anticipate events and you can make things happen or prevent them from happening.

If you are lacking in the power of information, you suffer from ignorance. If this power is overdeveloped, you tend to rely excessively on science, technology, and digital information becoming hyperintellectual and lacking in the other sources of power.

Information comes in four forms: science, intuition, history and vision. Science gathers facts methodically, by taking a careful look at things and noting how they work. Science is like a camera taking focused and sharp pictures of reality. It is a powerful source of certainty.

Intuition grasps the flow of things. It produces “educated guesses” about the way things are. Intuition is fuzzy, not exact like science, but it is a powerful guide toward what is probably true. Because of this, intuition is often vital in the early stages of important scientific discoveries.

Historical knowledge comes from awareness of past events, either through personal experience or through the study of history. Historical perspective can be a powerful tool to help forecasting events.

Vision is the ability to see what lies ahead directly, through dreams and visions. We all have visions of the future but it takes great self-confidence to be a visionary. Vision when recognized is a highly valued form of information.

Science has been considered to be the only valid source of knowledge; history is for old people, intuition for women, and vision for lunatics. However, each of these forms of information has its own power and validity and we are beginning to realize how, when effectively used, all four sources of information can empower its users.

Information has been badly misused over the ages. It has been used in the service of control, to wage war, to seize land, and to impose political and religious views. Today, in the Information Age, the misuse of information comes in the form of disinformation, false advertising, negative political ads and other forms of modern propaganda. These are used to manipulate millions of people—through radio, television and the Internet—to persuade people to vote certain ways, live certain life styles and buy the products that go with them. On the other hand a new development, digital social networking, is leveling the playing field by facilitating communication, freeing information and empowering everyone to use information to their own advantage rather than being manipulated by it.

This book focuses on Information and Love. Working together, Love and Information have the power to change the world (see Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, 2008, p. 140). Information in the service of Love is starkly different from Information in the service of Control. Freely available on the Internet and fueled by the loving efforts of billions of people who want to share their knowledge, it would be used to build people's power: their everyday lives through practical knowledge; their health through medical and psychological knowledge; their wisdom through education; their relationships through emotional literacy.

## Transcendence

When viewed as a source of power, Transcendence is the power of equanimity, of letting events take their course. Transcendence, a state of mind alternately referred to as a State of Grace, Nirvana, and even Nothingness, is the power of detachment from the material and the earthly. When viewed as a source of power, transcendence is the power of equanimity and fearless joy, of allowing events to take their course, of not letting negative emotion, attachments or aversions hold sway, of allowing laughter to take us above the clouds.

Transcendence lets us see clearly, in the midst of earthshaking changes, as we realize how brief life is before we return to cosmic dust, how ephemeral our successes and failures, how much larger than ourselves the world and the universe really are. Whatever our situation may be, we can deal with it when we see it as a speck in the immensity of time and space. With this understanding, there is no fear of the future or even of death because our existence cannot be disrupted by ordinary events. The power of transcendence gives us hope and faith that there is a meaning to life even if our limited intelligence can't grasp it. With it we can "rise above" a particular situation and trust and feel our power in spite of material conditions. For some, such a state of mind is natural and easy; others need meditation and discipline to achieve it.

If your capacity for transcendence is underdeveloped, you will see yourself at the very center of things and cling desperately to your beliefs and desires, aversions and cravings, successes and failures, no matter the cost. You will fail to see the effect that you have on other human beings and the environment, because all that

matters to you, is you. On the other hand if transcendence becomes an overused method of coping, you will become detached from earthly matters, so that you will “float away” oblivious of events around you, unwilling and unable to touch the ground.

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The above seven diverse sources of power are presented as an alternative to the control-obsessed form that is so often seen as the ideal avenue to personal power. Heart-centered power replaces Control with Love while giving control its due as one of the indispensable seven. This suggests that a person who wants to maximize his or her personal power—charisma--should cultivate all seven sources optimally. For a group to operate optimally, be it a couple, a family, a neighborhood, a work force or an electorate, requires that every member of the group be as powerful and charismatic as possible. People are most effective when they exercise their heart-centered, individual powers, in cooperative concert with each other.

## Conclusion: Book Two

During my undergraduate and graduate school years, I lived under the influence, first of Einstein, and then of Freud. I was steeped in theories: relativity, wave and particle theories about light, subatomic particles and later, when I switched to psychology, theories of neurosis, oedipal complexes, the genesis of dreams, the id, and civilization and its discontents. Theorizing was in vogue, especially in psychology, and anyone who had an audience was free to theorize at will. The success of a theory depended on how much popular appeal it had and was not so much tied to scientific validation as it would be today. When I arrived at Berne's San Francisco seminar in 1956, I expected impressive theorizing and accepted it without question.

I did not realize (and neither did he) that Berne and I were both under the influence of my great uncle (by marriage) Ludwig Wittgenstein, the great logical positivist philosopher who argued that philosophers must return to the "rough ground" of ordinary language: bring words back from their metaphysical use to their everyday use. Wittgenstein's influence in the world of thought, was arguably the reason why Berne created a wholly new sort of personality theory, one that he endeavored to base on verifiable, everyday reality. This is why he developed transactional analysis, ego states and games: three concepts that invited and sought scientific verifiability. This also was the reason he dispatched me to the University of Michigan in 1959 where I was to study scientific psychology—to eventually be transactional analysis' first "research director."

The task of scientifically validating transactional analysis has proven to be daunting and has so far defeated everyone who has sought to implement some sort of peer reviewed scientific evidence for our theory. The best I was able to do as the vice president for research and innovation (2000-2003) was to research the scientific literature that corroborated concepts akin to Berne's principal ideas. Substantial research on actual Bernian theories awaits actualization. Meanwhile I have added my own set of theories about strokes, stroke scarcity, personal power, cooperation, and healing, which I have presented here believing them to be grounded in reality. My own theories also await scientific validation. Briefly, here are a few of these theories.

1. Positive strokes are in chronic scarcity.
2. Scarcity of strokes results in depression.
3. The cause of stroke scarcity is the result of internal inhibitions that are learned in childhood.
4. Learning how to give and receive strokes will result in increased exchange of strokes and decreased drama triangle transactions.

5. People who are stroke satisfied tend to be more personally powerful, free and actualized.

So far the validity of these theories, and the methods derived from, them lack scientific validation. However, the fact that these methods are being used by satisfied practitioners with satisfied clients is considerable evidence for their validity. In the last portion of the book, I present the field and time-tested practical applications of the theories so far put forth.



**Book Three:**  
**Love and Information;**  
**The Practice**

## Introduction

Transactional analysis is no longer restricted to a method of psychotherapy. The complicated art, knowledge and pragmatic skill that transactional analysis brings to the behavioral sciences has application in education, counseling, mentoring, business consultation and coaching.

Any competent health, education or business professional working with people needs to be in possession of some basic skills: Maintaining an empathic attitude while avoiding negative judgments and codependency. This alone will make for a beneficial experience in most situations. I call it the basic healing power of nice.

In addition, competent mental health or human resources professional will stay in touch with the cutting edge of well-researched and validated areas of relevant knowledge. Finally, she or he should seek supervision and/or therapy when needed and pursue a healthy life-style. These requirements are basic for any modern professional. That is the healing power of smart.

Nice and smart are good but practicing transactional analysis requires more. In his last book, *What do you say After you say Hello?* (1972) upon which he made his final corrections on his death bed in Carmel, Eric Berne states:

“Any system or approach which is not based on the rigorous analysis of single transactions into their component specific ego states is not transactional analysis.” (pg 20)

Needless to say I like that statement; that’s why, when someone asks me what a transactional analyst does, I answer: “A transactional analyst analyzes transactions.” I would add that transactional analysis is a contractual process preferably applied in a group setting in which permissions are tendered, and powerful protection for those permissions is provided.

Because of its contractual nature, in which a promise is made and performance is expected, this is highly demanding work. The transactional analyst must remain actively engaged with the client in pursuing a clear goal. It is difficult to establish and then keep focused attention on a satisfactory completion of the contract. Making contract-driven demands and offering creative and effective suggestions can be quite challenging. Working with couples and groups is far more demanding than working in a one-to-one setting. It will not do to simply meet with the client and hope for the best trusting in the transactional analyst’s brilliance and soulful nature; more must be offered. Let us begin with the beginning; the contract.

## Chapter 9.

### The Contract

Transactional Analysis is a contractual form of helpfulness, which must be distinguished from other activities that may be of value. A person may do all sorts of beneficial things alone or in groups. Going to a football game or a dance, joining an encounter group, spending a weekend in the woods meditating or beginning psychoanalysis are all activities that might be helpful. The basic difference between these activities and Transactional Analysis is the contract.

Most of us have a healthy desire to teach, nurture and take care of people who may need us. Many of us have also had the experience of starting out with such laudable motives and eventually suffering at the hands of the very person we were trying to help. Drawing up a contract is an effective first step to avoid the three game roles—Rescuer, Persecutor and Victim—that will inevitably lead to a muddy “helping” relationship. The Rescuer plunges in when it is not clear that help is wanted (though it may be obviously needed). The Rescuer turns into angry Persecutor when his help is not effective or appreciated and eventually becomes the Victim of the chaotic consequences of hapless helpfulness. Therapeutic contracts are designed to avoid these mistakes.

Contracts between a client and a person who holds herself out to be a competent therapist, teacher, counselor, coach or consultant, should be regarded with as much respect as legal contracts in a court of law. Two aspects of legal contracts are fully applicable to such contracts: (1) informed mutual consent and (2) consideration. These requirements of a legal contract were developed and refined over the centuries, so it is reasonable to accept them as pragmatically effective as well as socially desirable in the establishment of a transactional analysis contract.

#### A case study of a contract

To illustrate, I will be using a contract with an alcohol abuser because precise contracts with alcoholics are most challenging and essential. This case study can serve as a template for other sorts of contracts. For example: It's common for alcoholics to seek therapy as a result of pressures applied by family or by the courts. In such cases the therapist and client often undertake a course of therapy that fails to satisfy either of the two requirements of a contract. The client does not really consent to the therapy and does not offer sufficient consideration, and the therapist does not specify what she is offering and what she will require of the client. The same set of circumstances apply to all sorts of helping relationships.

Anyone helping alcoholic needs to be aware of the risks involved. A good analogy would be the situation in which a person, while walking on the beach, sees someone drowning in the surf. He jumps in the water fully clothed, swims up to the victim, and, in the process of rescuing him, drowns, while the victim, ironically, survives.

Lifeguards learn techniques designed to prevent being drowned by a swimmer in trouble. A person who is interested in helping others with substantial problems needs to develop techniques to avoid a similar outcome. These techniques will be helpful in making sure that we don't waste our helpful energy, but they also safeguard us against being dragged down by the very ones we aim to help.

Alcoholics and other substance abusers, gamblers, overeaters, and sufferers of other self-damaging compulsions seem to have a knack for attracting the good graces of people who start out feeling that they can be of help and wind up overwhelmed and bitterly disappointed. We begin a helping relationship with love in our hearts and a true desire to assist, even if our help is not wanted. If we are successful in being helpful, this desire remains part of our motivation as we continue to help others. Very often, however, our desire to help is undermined by defeat, and vanishes. Contracts help us avoid such a sad outcome.

## Informed Mutual Consent

The establishment and execution of a good therapeutic contract is dependent on a sophisticated, egalitarian, democratic, two-way exchange of information, perfected by feedback. Mutual consent implies that both of the parties in a contract are consciously and sincerely agreeing to the terms of the contract. Therapeutic consent implies the request, offer, and acceptance of a service. The client is in need and seeks some sort of specifiable help, and the practitioner understands the situation and is willing to make a contribution to the client's desired improvement.

In order to make an informed, intelligent offer, the practitioner should clearly understand the client's situation and what the client wants to accomplish. In order for the acceptance to constitute informed consent, the client needs to understand what the practitioner requires as conditions for the work.

A therapist may mistakenly assume that there is mutual consent in the ensuing relationship when, in fact, the client is not willingly involved, but instead feels coerced and even victimized in the situation. In such situations the therapist is automatically and unwittingly placed in the Persecutor role. Establishing mutual consent is particularly relevant with alcoholics, who are often accustomed to being placed in a therapeutic relationship without any contract at all.

On the other hand, it is also typical that a well meaning, willing client blindly agrees to enter therapy without any understanding of the requirements of that brand of psychotherapy—only to find out that what is expected is far different and more complicated than anticipated.

A mutual, informed-consent relationship involves three transactions.

1. The request for treatment for a particular problem,
2. An offer by the therapist of treatment to resolve that particular problem
3. An acceptance of treatment by the client.

It is not unusual for therapists and clients to engage in a therapeutic relationship without these three elements having been fulfilled.

Consider the following conversation between Jonas, an alcoholic, and Janice, a therapist. Janice: "What can I do for you, Jonas?"

Jonas: "I need to get into therapy. "

Janice: "Fine I have an opening available for you on Tuesday at six o'clock. Can you make it?"

Jonas: "Yes, I can. I guess I'll see you on Tuesday."

Janice: "Good."

This conversation may seem to achieve mutually informed consent. But it may turn out that the client's request was really only as follows.

Janice: "What can I do for you, Jonas?"

Jonas: (My wife is leaving me and I was arrested for drunk driving and my mother, the judge, and my wife say that I need to get into therapy, so) "I need to get into therapy."

This is not really a request for therapy, and could, instead, be the opening move in a frustrating game of "Rescue," in which, after a number of frustrating weeks, months, or years, no positive results are obtained, to everyone's great disappointment.

Let's try again.

Janice: "What can I do for you?"

Jonas: "I need to get into therapy."

Janice: "Why do you want therapy? "

Jonas: "Well, I guess I need it."

Janice: "Maybe you don't need it. What makes you think you do?"

Jonas: “Well, I’m drinking too much, and I’m getting sick. My wife is going to leave me, and I may have to go to jail for drunk driving. I want to stop drinking because it’s ruining my life. Do you think you can help me? “

Janice: “Yes, I think I can. I have an opening available on Tuesday at six o’clock. Can you make it? “

Jonas: “Yes, I can. I’ll see you on Tuesday.”

This example involves a request for therapy, but it doesn’t involve a proper offer because the therapist has not stated what she intends to do or what she hopes to accomplish. She hasn’t really got the information to understand whether she can actually help and she has not stated her conditions for help.

In fact they are both still considerably in the dark with respect to informed mutual consent. A therapeutic offer by the therapist implies that she understands the problem, that she is willing to deal with it, and that she has reasonable expectations to be successful in the process. For informed mutual consent to occur in an alcohol abuse contract, the therapist needs to have certain information, which Janice doesn’t have so far. In my experience, the following facts must be investigated before a therapist can enter into a therapeutic contract with an alcoholic client.

Does the person recognize himself to be an alcoholic? Does the person feel that his drinking is out of control and/or that it is harming him? Does the person want to stop drinking?

If the therapist has adequate information about the client’s drinking, she can now involve herself in mutual, informed consent. Consider the following:

Janice: “What can I do for you, Jonas?”

Jonas: “I’m drinking too much and I’m getting sick. My wife is going to leave me, and I may have to go to jail for drunk driving. I want to stop drinking because it’s ruling my life. Do you think you can help me? “

Janice: “Okay, Jonas, I think I can help you. Let me tell you what is involved if you get into therapy with me. I will have certain expectations: you need to come to group meetings every week for a two-hour session and an occasional individual or family session with your wife and maybe your children. You need to attend regularly and on time and not have had a drink for 24 hours previously. This kind of therapy doesn’t work while you are drinking, so it is necessary that you stop drinking altogether as soon as possible and that you don’t drink at all for at least one continuous year after that. During that year, in addition to attending group regularly, I expect you to be actively involved in working on your problem and that will include doing homework between meetings on life-style and diet changes, and perhaps attending AA. If you come to group regularly and don’t drink for a year, and if we work together on your problem, I expect that you will be cured of your

alcohol abuse. If you are willing to agree to this, we can proceed. I have an opening available for you on Tuesdays at six o'clock."

Jonas: "I understand. I'll see you on Tuesday."

This highly condensed example contains the three requirements for mutual informed consent: a request, an offer, and an acceptance. The problem is defined: alcohol abuse. The cure is specified: no more alcohol abuse. It is a model for a successful beginning contract, applicable to problems other than alcoholism, and it is likely to result in satisfying work for both of the parties (client and therapist) as well as the other members of the group. It could be validly argued that this conversation should occur during an intake session. I am suggesting that it might occur upon first telephone or e-mail contact to insure that there is a basis for a contract, and so that no time and money be wasted on an untenable situation.

On occasion, an individual seeking therapy wants to work on a minor problem and ignore his main difficulties. For example, Jonas may want to work on his relationship with his wife but leave his drinking alone. Making an offer to treat a lesser disturbance such as marital troubles without dealing with the far more disruptive problem such as alcoholism is a mistake that will surely lead to difficulties. It can be compared to performing plastic surgery on a patient with a life-threatening disease and should be declined on the ground that the alcoholism is so disruptive in itself that it will defeat any efforts to deal with some other lesser problem. Such a request should be politely denied with a frank explanation.

## Consideration

The consideration is the second (after informed mutual consent) requirement of the contract. A helper gives of himself. The person helped needs to give sometime in return. In legal terms, this is called the consideration. Every contract must be based upon a valid consideration. Valid consideration refers to benefits that pass between the therapist and the client. The benefit conferred by the therapist should always be a competent attempt to remedy the problem. In exchange, the client will usually pay a fee.

Berne developed the idea of contracts because he objected to the apparent sense, on the part of psychoanalysts, that they did not need to make any sort of a promise or commitment in return for their fees. Psychoanalysts also speak of therapeutic contracts (Menninger, 1958), but these contracts are one-sided and refer only to what the patients must agree to do: be on time, free associate, pay for missed sessions and so on, never mentioning the duties and obligations of the analyst. These contracts lack consideration. Let us look at the consideration in some detail.

As stated above, the benefit conferred by the therapist should be a cure of the problem. That is why it is important that the client clearly explain what in her life is unsatisfactory and what would be required for satisfaction. The client, let's call her Alice, needs to state specifically what is making her unhappy. Is she drinking

too much? Is she unable to sleep? Does she cry all the time? Does she fail to have good relationships? Do her friends shun her? Is she unable to keep a job? And so on. Alice should also be able to state what would make her life satisfactory. Getting a job and keeping it, being in a pleasing love relationship, being able to sleep and wake up refreshed and happy most days, making friends, getting rid of headaches or stopping drinking.

The therapist has delivered his consideration in the contract when the client and the therapist (and if in a group, the majority of the members in the group) agree that the problem described at the beginning of therapy is no longer present. That is why problems and their cures need to be stated in clear, behavioral, simple, observable terms, as in the case of Alice above. Without this initial statement, it is impossible to determine whether the problem has been solved.

Completion of the contract, called a cure by Berne, is the transactional analysts consideration. On the other hand, the consideration given by the client can vary. The most common consideration in the therapeutic contract is money, either a full fee or a fee adjusted to the client's capacity to pay. But money alone is not enough. In addition, the client's consideration must be ongoing good will efforts throughout the process, during sessions and between them.

For effective therapy, a client needs to have a clear contract throughout. As each contract gets worked through, the question becomes: "Is therapy complete, or should we start on another contract?" The answer to this question is up to the client rather than the therapist. At times an initial contract may prove to be mistaken or unworkable and needs to be revised. Any new contract should be made with the same scrupulous attention to mutual involvement as the first contract. Therapists need to look out for that common tendency in our profession, which compels us to tell our clients what they should (or shouldn't) do. This is essential to ensure that any contracts arrived at are based on the needs and desires of the client rather than those of the therapist. This is not to say that the therapist should not freely express his opinions on this or any other matter-only that these opinions should take a back seat to the client's needs and opinions.

I have focused on the sort of contract one might make with an alcoholic; here are some additional possible contracts:

- ◆ Finding a better job.
- ◆ Stop eating sugar. (Or drinking coffee) (Or smoking) (Or all three)
- ◆ Making friends.
- ◆ Improving sex life.
- ◆ Fighting the Critical Parent.
- ◆ Stop Rescuing. Stop headaches.
- ◆ Developing a Nurturing Parent.



- ◆ Earning a better salary.
- ◆ Giving more strokes.
- ◆ Overcoming depression.
- ◆ Being more productive.
- ◆ Overcoming anxiety.
- ◆ Being more truthful.
- ◆ Showing feelings.
- ◆ Loving and being loved in return.

And so on.

### A Little Help from our Friends

People who wish to help another as a friend need to be equally scrupulous about their involvement in the helping relationship in order to avoid engaging in a Rescue. Rescuing is defined as involving either:

1. doing something you don't want to do, or
2. doing more than your share in a situation.

To avoid Rescuing a friend, we must first be sure that we actually want to be helpful to this person and, second, that the person we help is willing to work on the problem at least as hard as we are. It is also important that we get something in return (not necessarily of a material sort) for our effort. If I am willing to speak to you on the phone for an hour about your problem, then I expect you will be willing to listen to me for an hour at some future date, should I need such support. If I come to your house and help you clean up a mess you have allowed to pile up in your house, then I expect you to help me, should I need to clean out my garage. I will make an effort to ask you for your help so that we keep the energy we devote to each other in balance. The energy-in/energy-out equation has to maintain some semblance of balance between us or we will slip into a Rescue game and I will inevitably become angry with you, cease to have an interests in helping you, and may eventually Persecute you.

These agreements between friends are usually taken for granted without the need to make them explicit. That can work, but it may not. Sometimes people “selflessly” help others with their personal problems while expecting nothing in return—not always a wise approach. At the very least, a helper can expect, from the one being helped, an energetic effort to change, a willingness to work hard, and an eagerness to learn. For many helpers, this type of positive attitude is sufficient consideration for their work. If so, well and good, it is the very least that should be expected. To expect more is also reasonable.

## The Cooperative Contract; No Power Plays

In addition to the specific personal contract that each client works on, there is another contract I establish in my groups or with individuals: the Cooperative Contract. This contract specifies that there shall be no power plays in our work together: no Rescues and especially no lies. This of course includes both the client and the transactional analyst. I have explained power plays in Chapter Four and Rescues in this Chapter; let me briefly discuss the significance of the ban on lies.

### No Lies

“No lies” means an agreement to abstain from lies of commission or omission. The capacity to perceive, to understand, and effectively deal with the world is severely curtailed by the lies in our lives. The process of sorting out what is true and what is false, when to lie and when to tell the truth, what to believe and what not to believe, occupies our minds and prevents them from working at their optimal level. It is said that we use only a small fraction of our mental capacity. If this is so, it surely is because most of our mental capacity is squandered by confusing information: misinformation, disinformation, falsehoods and lies.

The agreement not to lie means that no deliberate untruths or lies of commission will be told, and that no secrets or lies of omission will be allowed either. As an example, if an alcoholic group member who has been drinking is asked about it and denies it, this is a lie of commission. But if she is not asked and fails to mention it, she is lying as well: a lie of omission, the *deliberate* act of keeping a secret, hiding what someone else wants or needs to know. This includes the hiding of feelings, desires, or opinions. If a person has enduring angry or loving feelings, not expressing these feelings is keeping a secret. Similarly, not expressing desires or critical opinions is a form of lying as well.

Agreeing not to lie encourages clients to honestly voice their emotions and opinions and discourages them from keeping secrets that could interfere with the work. It creates an ideal context in which to ask for what one wants and avoiding Rescuing. Knowing that no power plays, Rescues or lies are allowed facilitates the trust and feelings of safety that are essential for the open and honest discussion of all the facets of one’s life, right down to the most embarrassing.

Truthfulness involves asking for 100 percent of what one wants, 100 percent of the time. Once everyone’s wants are on the table, cooperation requires negotiating until everybody is maximally satisfied.

Cooperative contracts, together with each member’s individual contract, are aids to effective and efficient problem-solving work. By keeping attention focused on the task at hand, avoiding the wasteful consequences of Rescues, and the confusion of lies, cooperative contracts are a powerful social structure within which people can radically improve their lives.

Radical truthfulness, no lies ever, is the logical extension of this view. However, radical truthfulness is clearly an extremist proposal which, if taken seriously, has to be approached with care. Any person who insisted on being completely truthful would be so out of phase with the rest of the world that he might soon be jailed or hospitalized. If one considers that being radically truthful involves never lying about anything, as well as saying everything of significance that one wants, feels, or believes, it can be seen that the project has its dangers. In fact, it is only advisable, initially, in the most intimate and close relationships, and only by mutual agreement.

Radical truth is an ideal worth striving for and can be practically exercised in our personal lives. I do and expect it from my close associates, friends, and family. In fact one of the requirements that we have set in the Emotional Literacy Training program is that the potential trainer's personal life must be free of lies. If that is not the case, he or she must make a commitment to clear all lies from intimate family and friendship relationships before being certified as a trainer. Is this something that, some day in the future, could be expected of our politicians and decision makers?

## Chapter 10.

# Permission, Protection, Potency and the Critical Parent

The basic operations of the transactional analysis method—colloquially know as the 3 P's—are Permission, Protection and Potency. To this I will add, Decommissioning the Critical Parent.

### Permission

The first of the three P's of transactional analysis treatment—Permission—is a transaction intimately tied to the theory of scripts. Script theory proposes that people's script behavior is controlled by the Critical Parents' mandates. Alcoholism, which is most often a script, provides a good example.

Eric Berne took the view that an alcoholic needs *permission not to drink*. This makes sense if one keeps in mind that an alcoholic is involved in a script, and that a script is the result of parental pressure in the form of injunctions and attributions. As a consequence, theoretically, the alcoholic is under orders to drink, and needs permission not to. The concept of Permission becomes very clear when applied, for example, to a young alcoholic who is surrounded by hard-drinking co-workers; he might feel a loss of support and self-esteem if he decided that he should stop drinking. He would clearly need permission to stop drinking and go against the covert and overt challenges of his substance-abusing culture. The same mechanism applies in a variety of self-damaging activities which to be stopped require permission. Working too hard or not hard enough ("it's OK to not work so hard," or "its OK to work harder"). Likewise for having too much or not enough sex, being friendlier or less friendly and so on.

Permission is a multi-ego transaction in which the transactional analyst attempts to align the client with his original Natural Child ego state, free of injunction and attributions. On the transactional analyst's side the Nurturing Parent says, plainly: "Stop Drinking, it's the right thing for you to do," the Adult says: "Drinking is not a rational strategy in life," and the Child says: "Please stop drinking, its hurting you!"

The alcoholic's Adult needs to understand the ineffectiveness and harm of drinking. If the alcoholic's Adult is not convinced of the damage caused by drinking, Permission simply becomes a command that will probably be resisted. For instance, the alcoholic who is about to lose his job because he drinks may ignore the statement "Drinking is not a rational strategy; you will not keep your job unless you stop drinking," because he believes, on the contrary, that he will not keep his job unless he can drink socially. Thus, if the Adult-to-Adult information is not received and accepted, Permission will not work. The therapeutic task at this point would be

to recognize the problem, namely, that the alcoholic believes that he has to drink in order to keep his job.

Permission requires the involvement of the alcoholic's Child responding to the analyst's Nurturing Parent and Child who wish that he stop drinking. If the client's Child is not open to the therapist's Parent, the Adult information will lack the power to overcome the script injunctions. The Parent giving Permission should be the Nurturing Parent and by no means the Critical Parent. The difference between these two ego states is sometimes hard to discern, except by the tone of the transaction. For instance, a therapist working with a woman who finds herself being promiscuous can say "Stop having sex with strangers." Depending on the tone of the statement it can mean "Stop having sex with strangers (you whore,)" or it can mean: "Stop having sex with strangers (it's a good idea and you can do it)." which will be heard very differently.

Finally the therapist's Child wishes that the client stop hurting himself and learn instead to have good, clean, harmless fun. Here it is crucial that the therapist avoid the "gallows transaction," a transaction in which the therapist's Child colludes with the unhealthy "fun" that the client may be having with his self-destructive behavior. In the work with alcoholics the gallows transaction occurs when people laugh—usually at the alcoholic's invitation—about some pathetic and harmful alcoholic behavior. The client may say "Boy, was I drunk last night, I was so drunk that I got into bed with my wife with my shoes on, Haha." If the therapist cracks an amused smile, his Child will be taking sides with the alcoholic's self-destructive script, a common sort of transaction that must be avoided at all costs. Gallows transactions are common in alcoholic conversations and must be avoided even at the cost of being a humorless "wet blanket".

The use of Permission as a therapeutic maneuver may include permission to think, talk, move, demand, laugh, cry, or to give and take, accept and reject strokes. For instance, a heroin-addicted patient who had very visibly improved her situation by remaining clean for a whole year never initiated social relationships, but relied on whatever activities her few friends initiated. It became evident that she needed social contact and Permission to ask people for it. She agreed, as part of her homework, to ask a friend to a movie. This proved to be a very difficult task, which became the contractual focus of the therapy, the patient's "sick point" or "impasse". She had to move beyond this impasse in order to proceed toward permanent improvement. The therapist's insistence and interest in this specific action and the discussions that ensued eventually had the desired effect. She finally overthrew the strong Critical Parent injunctions against making demands of people ("Don't ask people for company, you will seem needy and they will reject you"). She gathered her courage and invited a friend to a movie, an act that proved to be a critical first step in overcoming a crucial impasse, and her eventual recovery.

## Protection

Protection is the necessary corollary to Permission. Given that Permission bids the client to act against the injunctions of the Critical Parent and its formidable societal support, it stands to reason that the client will need reliable, trustworthy, muscular back up. Experience has shown me that when people abandon their obedience to the Critical Parent, they experience a specific sort of anxiety I call existential anxiety. Nature abhors a vacuum, and when we stop harmful activities that have filled our days for a lifetime, a void is left which urgently, anxiously seeks to be filled. It is this anxiety that Protection is designed to counteract. The reassuring, nurturing protection of a potent therapist in the form of telephone or e-mail availability, the possibility of having unscheduled one-to-one appointments and extra, special supportiveness (short of Rescue) is crucial at this time. Group members should be encouraged to be available for protective support (phone calls, joint activities, getting together for lunch or tea-time) whenever possible. Without these protective social contacts the client will be at risk of being overpowered by the script's mandates.

## Potency

Therapeutic Potency refers to the competency needed to bring about an effective, and hopefully speedy cure. The Potency of the therapist has to be commensurate with the potency and severity of the damaging injunctions laid down in the client's past. Potency implies that the therapist is willing to commit all of his resources to bring about a cure, and to estimate the time and expense involved. It means that he is willing to confront the client and to exert pressure for change. It means that the therapist will provide appropriate Permissions and Protection when needed. Potency, when striven for by therapists, is often interpreted as implying an illegitimate wish for omnipotence. However, the difference between Potency and omnipotence is quite clear, and transactional analysts, aware of their limitations are seldom plagued by "fantasies of omnipotence" or, in transactional terms, being hooked into the Rescuer role. Omnipotence implies effortless effectiveness, potency requires effective, hard work.

The wish for therapeutic Potency implies a willingness to consider the use of any technique that has potential, or demonstrably works, to complete the contract. Therapeutic techniques are myriad and are constantly being innovated. The potent therapist knows what techniques are available, their ethicality, their advantages and disadvantages, and is able to creatively customize techniques to the specific needs of the client.

## Chapter 11.

### Decommissioning the Critical Parent

The Critical Parent, first called the Pig Parent, was one of the early concepts of the Radical Psychiatry movement and was introduced by Hogie Wyckoff, who was the first to suggest that the Critical Parent was a wholly negative influence in people's life and needs to be isolated and disempowered if personal empowerment is to occur.

Remembering that ego states are really metaphors, concepts that represent something important and real in a symbolic and intuitive manner we must realize that the Critical Parent is what we call the system of rules, attitudes, behaviors lodged in our minds, that have oppressed people for time immemorial. The Critical Parent embodied in the Inquisition, Sharia, National Socialism, Soviet and Cambodian Communism and endless other "isms" will kill, torture and maim people who deviate from its wishes. It will eliminate dissenters, throw acid in the faces of women who dare show them, stone to death adulterers, rape women and infect them with AIDS; the list of atrocities is endless. These barbarous behaviors might be more appropriately ascribed to the Inner Beast than to the relatively urbane Critical Parent we are familiar with, but they originate in precisely the same place in the mind, the same neural bundles that calls us and others bad, stupid, crazy, ugly, everyday of the week, in our schools, churches, bedrooms, kitchens and streets. The difference is only its magnitude; the source is the same. This is why we must radically exclude it from having power in our lives.

Dealing with the Critical Parent is the *raison d'être* for the three P's. Permission countermands Critical Parent mandates, Protection defends the person from Critical Parent attacks and efforts to undermine the beneficial changes that Permission seeks to promote. Potency requires that the helping professional have power beyond the power of the Critical Parent. All the exercises of the emotional literacy training program are designed to challenge the Critical Parent's injunctions against positive stroking, against honesty about our feelings and about the shame of taking responsibility when we make mistakes. In addition, the making of contracts undermines the Critical Parent's influence by specifying the details of its undermining effect and by targeting it with effective action.

Stroke-centered transactional analysis targets the Critical Parent and seeks to eliminate it. In the 1970's, the earliest exercise to help individuals rid themselves of the Critical Parent was called "Off the Pig." It has since been refined and given a less provocative name: "The Critical Parent Exercise."

## The Critical Parent Exercise

From time to time a person may want to target his or her Critical Parent. The exercise takes place in a group, as it requires several participants in addition to a group leader. Sean has expressed the wish to finally do something radical about the way his Critical Parent has undermined him over many years; a fact that has become gradually evident in his six months of group treatment.

The exercise consists of three parts:

- ◆ The setup
- ◆ The exorcism
- ◆ The wrap-up

### *The set up*

Sean is asked to recall as many of his Critical Parent messages as possible and they are written down on a blackboard. At first he can think of only one: "You are a fraud, people will find out." As we probe further he comes up with a long list: "Stupid;" "Can't think straight;" "Loser;" "You'll never succeed; never be as good as your brother;" "You don't have any brains and can't make it." When all the statements are written down, Sean and the therapist, with suggestions from the group, boil them down to their essence. Redundant messages are erased and the rest are grouped by categories until a concentrated list of about six is crafted saying, essentially: "You are stupid," "you are worthless" and "You are a fraud".

Sean is now asked to pick any person in the group that could take the role of the Persecuting Critical Parent. If that person declines another person is chosen. The therapist should not offer to play that role under any circumstances, as that could hopelessly interfere with his primarily Adult role as a leader of the exercise and potentially contaminate Sean's perception of him. Next, Sean is asked to pick a person to take the role of a Nurturing Parent. The Critical Parent sits facing Sean at an appropriately aggressive distance and the Nurturing Parent sits or stands silently behind Sean's shoulder. The blackboard is placed behind Sean in plain view of the Critical Parent, the group and the therapist, who sits to one side and equidistant to Sean and the Critical Parent.

### *The exorcism*

The therapist instructs the Critical Parent to read the messages, close his or her eyes, and mentally organize an all-out verbal attack based on the messages on the board. The Critical Parent is urged not hold back, as the exercise depends on a frontal confrontation, no holds barred. When everyone is ready, the Critical Parent opens her eyes and starts the attack as aggressively as possible. The Critical Parent



can shout, or hiss, or talk calmly; the important thing is that there be no holding back.

Sean is at first stunned, as are the members of the group. With the therapist's encouragement and, when needed, suggested responses, Sean begins to fight back. At first Sean's responses are weak and incoherent; others might cry, or be totally silent. Eventually with the support of the therapist and while all others observe silently, Sean begins to focus his defense. The Critical Parent says: "You are stupid, you can't think straight" Sean answers in a shaky voice "No, I'm not stupid." The therapist urges him to repeat that in a more convincing way. Sean does and adds "I know that you are the stupid one. Shut the fuck up." The therapist mutters "Good!" The Critical Parent shouts: "You'll never succeed Sean, you're fraud, a fraud do you hear me?" Sean is silent, the therapist whispers "you're the fraud" Sean picks it up "Yeah! You're the fraud, you pretend to know and know nothing!"

The Critical Parent comes back: "You'll never succeed and you know it." Sean: "I have already succeeded, I got a degree, I've raised two children and I will get rid of you. That will be my greatest success." After 10 to 15 minutes of this the Critical Parent will begin to run out of ideas and tactics, at which time the therapist may suggest new insults based on the information on the board. "You don't have the guts to get rid of me. You are not as good as your brother." And so on.

The dialogue will go on, and eventually the Critical Parent will literally run out of steam and have nothing to say. This will not be an act, or a compassionate withdrawal, but a genuine loss of energy. This exercise highlights the concept that the Inner Enemy is an actual person that has been introjected and whose only power is aggressive, prejudiced, misinformation which Sean hasn't known how to confront. With the active support of the therapist and the group, and the quiet physical support of the Nurturing Parent, Sean has acquired a persuasive poise and the arguments to beat back the real, muscular Critical Parent within him. When it seems that Sean has won the argument against the Critical Parent who is now speechless, the therapist calls an end to the exercise.

### *The wrap-up*

The group claps and celebrates Sean's victory. Sean is invited to "brag" and he accepts the challenge. He stand in the middle of the group and in a strong convincing voice says: "This was great. I realized that I have been feeling stupid all my life when in fact I am anything but stupid, all you have to see is my grades in college. I am important to a lot of people and loved by a few. And I am certainly not a fraud, I am known to be as good as my word. The real fraud is my Critical Parent and from now on I am going to kick his ass!" More cheers and people comment on the process and their response to it. Usually some people will have cried, some may have been frightened and even scandalized by the apparent brutality of the process. The therapist thanks the Critical Parent volunteer, checks out that she is OK. Sean thanks the Critical Parent for a good job and they are encouraged to hug. People are encouraged to give strokes to Sean, the Critical Parent and Nurturing Parent

volunteers, and the therapist. Sean is encouraged to write down his winning arguments and rehearse them daily while shaving, before going to work.

If anyone in the group is upset or is under “enemy attack,” time should have been planned for processing the person’s emotional response. In the extreme case—never in my experience—that the Critical Parent somehow manages to maintain control, the therapist will have to re-establish optimism and faith in the healing process by pointing out and clarifying the power of this particular Critical Parent and contracting for a future return to the exercise.

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The Critical Parent exercise is a showcase example of the radical psychiatry approach to people’s emotional difficulties. Radical psychiatry theory holds that people regain their alienated powers by way of three coordinated processes: contact, awareness and action. To wit:

Power in the world = Contact + Awareness + Action

Sean’s power and effectiveness were severely impacted by the Critical Parent constant harassment. The Critical Parent also undermined his relationships with others with its constant interference and judgments. Contact in this case is the support of people in the group. Awareness is the detailed documentation of the Critical Parent oppressive influence and, finally, Action is the positive steps Sean takes to fend off the Critical Parent. In addition, all three P’s of transactional analysis are involved as well. Permission to fight the Critical Parent, Protection of Sean by way of group and therapist’s support and Potency in the therapist’s back-up and input. (See [www.claudesteiner.com/rp.htm](http://www.claudesteiner.com/rp.htm) for more information on radical psychiatry.)

I have likened this exercise to an exorcism and in fact there is an obvious similarity with that process. But there is a difference. An exorcism is a passive experience for the possessed. This exercise depends on Sean taking back his power and poise with tools and support provided by the group and therapist. The crucial difference between passive acceptance of help and active participation in self-help is summarized in the well-known dictum: “You can give a hungry person a meal or you can teach him how to fish.”

## Chapter 12.

# Emotional Literacy Training; The Application of Transactional Analysis to the Emotions

As I have mentioned before, dealing with the emotional side of the therapeutic process was not a major emphasis in Eric Berne's thinking as he developed transactional analysis. Although Berne taught us to relish and admire the Child, he also held to a suspicious disregard of human emotion. Nevertheless, by inventing the concept of strokes and designing techniques for the analysis of transactions-the exchange of strokes-he laid the foundation for a pragmatic method of studying the emotional aspect of human interactions. Emotional literacy training is the application of transactional analysis to the study and effective use of our emotions. In this chapter, emotional literacy is defined, training methods are outlined, and different contexts for training are explored.

### Emotional Literacy Theory

As a consequence of being shunned by research psychologists early in the XXth century, emotions went out of favor in psychological and psychiatric practice. They became the unwanted guest; the fly in the ointment; the 300 pound gorilla in the room; the great disturber of civilization; the enemy of science and technology; relegated to the seething cauldron of the id; the spoiler of rationality and logic; the curse of womanhood, children, and people of color; the source of therapeutic disturbances; taking the starch out of the professional stiff upper lip; messy, disturbing, and out of control. Lately, experimental psychologists with the aid of sophisticated high-tech techniques have been able to bring the study of emotions back into the scientific fold (National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1995). The possibility of monitoring minute facial muscle movements, respiration, perspiration, heart rate, brain activity, and other correlates of emotion has resulted in a great deal of research being reported in the literature.

Daniel Goleman in his breakthrough book *Emotional Intelligence*, (1995) brought the emotions back into the center of attention. In his international best seller he provides a loosely knit but convincing argument, using available scientific research by emotional intelligence pioneers Mayers and Salovey (2008) and others. The book's singular point is the importance of EQ (emotional quotient) in how well we do in life. Yet, Goleman failed to provide any specific techniques about how to improve EQ.

By the time Goleman's book appeared I had developed my own perspective on the subject of emotions. At the center of my interest was emotional awareness which caused me to develop an emotional awareness scale.

### An Emotional Awareness Scale

Awareness of emotions is a fundamental skill of the larger ability, which I call emotional literacy. The emotional awareness scale represents a hypothetical continuum--0 to 100%-- of emotional awareness.

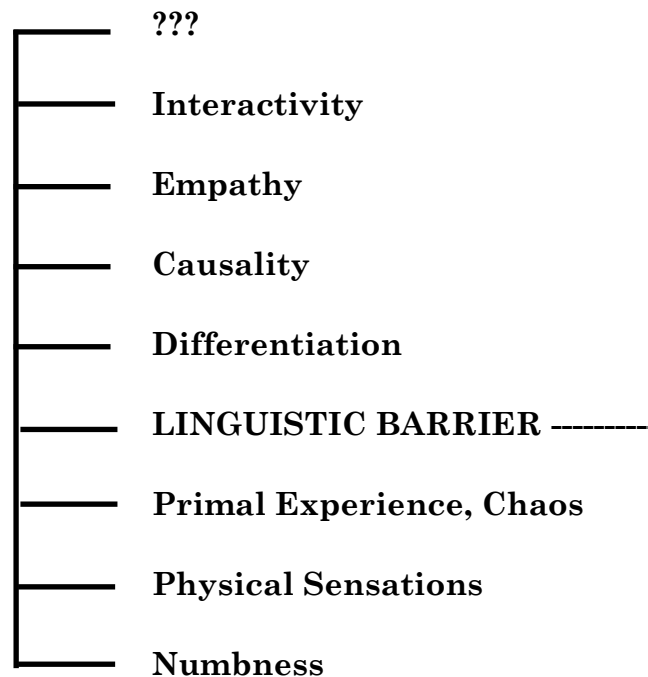


Figure 5. An Emotional Awareness Scale

#### *The Primal Experience*

We enter life in a highly emotional, potentially chaotic state. At this primal level of emotional awareness, the emotions are conscious and experienced as a heightened internal energy level that cannot be put into words or controlled; undifferentiated but unquestionably real. Arguably this emotional state is shared with other animals and can be easily observed in mammals such as dogs, cats, horses, cows, etc. From this chaotic differentiated state, humans animals alone, with their linguistic and abstract abilities can develop a highly sophisticated level of emotional awareness. Also, usually as a consequence of emotional trauma, awareness can descend into lesser levels ending perhaps in complete emotional numbness. Both of these opposite developments of awareness are illustrated in Figure 5.

### *The Linguistic Barrier*

People's ability to communicate and exchange emotional information makes it possible to develop elaborate states of emotional awareness. Without discourse regarding the emotions in which the people speak about their feelings, the next stage of emotional awareness-differentiation-is highly unlikely, if not impossible, to develop. This is where transactional analysis comes into play. With the techniques of transactional analysis-our systematic, fine-grain analysis of transactional events and our focus on contracts-a person can successfully engage in the communication process essential to developing the elaborate, differentiated awareness of emotions.

To be able to effectively use language and "cross the linguistic barrier" we need a very special social context. We require an "emotion friendly" environment in which truthful, Adult transactional exchanges about emotions can occur, with people who are willing to honestly discuss their feelings. The usual emotional insincerities and lies have to be put aside in favor of a mutual desire to investigate and understand our feelings in their subtlest manifestations. Only this will make it possible to move in the direction of differentiation, empathy, and interactivity.

### *Differentiation*

Differentiation is the process of recognizing different emotions and their intensities. From the primal, emotional chaos we are able to extract the anger, love, fear, joy, sadness or hope that make up our tangled experience. We learn to realize, as an example, that sometimes we feel single emotions and other times combinations such as love and sadness, hate and fear, joy and sadness, or anger, fear and hope in complicated combinations of primary emotions. In addition to learning what the emotions are, we also recognize that they appear in different intensities; from anxiety to terror, sadness to deep depression, mild happiness to intense joy, affection to passionate love. We learn to verbalize these experiences so that we can say for instance: "I am feeling very sad but I am hopeful" or "I love you deeply and I am afraid," or "I am furious." We learn that there are at most two handfuls of emotions (sad, happy, angry, loving, afraid, guilty, ashamed, hopeful or hopeless) and we realize that much that goes under the rubric of emotion is not (confused, humiliated, discounted, unloved and other expressions that do not specify an emotion)

### *Causality*

As we understand the exact composition and intensity of our feelings, we also begin to understand the reasons for them, why the strong hate, the subtle shame, the intense joy. It is here, since our emotions are almost always triggered by other people's behavior, that the inevitability of emotional interconnections between people has to be understood. We can cause feelings in others and they can cause feelings in us. We discover how people's actions combine with our tendencies to react emotionally. Eventually we are able to investigate and understand why we feel what we feel. We learn to express this knowledge with sentences like "I am

furious because of the way you interrupt me” or “I love you because you are such a loyal friend but I’m afraid of trusting you because you have lied to me repeatedly” or “I am sad because of my breakup with Jack but hopeful that my next relationship will be good.”

### *Empathy*

As we learn to differentiate our emotions, the intensity with which we feel them and the reasons for them, our awareness becomes textured and subtle, and we begin to perceive as well as to intuit similar texture and subtlety in the emotions of those around us. At this level of emotional literacy we come to intuitively know other people’s feelings. Our emotional intuitions are not likely to be 100% accurate but in a cooperative setting where truthfulness can be assumed we can verify our intuitions by checking them out.

For instance:

John: “I have the feeling that you don’t like me anymore.”

Joan: “Actually I do still like you because you are such a loyal friend but I’m afraid of trusting you because you have lied to me repeatedly.”

John’s ‘intuition (that Joan didn’t like him) was partially correct. This checking process greatly improves our empathic skills; by speaking to Joan about his intuition John is learning to sharpen his intuitive perceptions. In this manner we can learn to become aware of other people’s feelings, how intense they are, and why they occur, as clearly as we are aware of our own.

We receive other people’s emotional signals at two levels: One, we read emotional signs coming from facial muscles and tones of voice. Two, we receive emotional information on an intuitive emotional channel mediated by the mirror neurons system (Rizzolatti and Craighero, 2004) (Ramachandran, 2006) that inform our awareness automatically. When being empathic we do not figure out or think about other people’s emotions. Instead, we feel them, just as we feel ours. One ambivalently regarded result is that we develop an incapacity to ignore or abuse other people’s feelings of pain, and that has important ethical and social consequences.

### *Interactivity*

Emotions are not static events; they are fluid, chemical, and protoplasmic, unlike thoughts and ideas, which are much more delineated, electrical, and contained. Emotions merge, fade, grow, and shrink, in the presence of other emotions and over time. Accordingly, awareness of how emotions interact with each other within people and between people affords an additional level of emotional sophistication. I call that Interactivity. When we are interactively, emotionally aware we are aware

not just of our and another person emotions but of the emotional climate of groups of people and how it affects the individuals in the group, as well us.

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I include this category of emotional awareness because it is quite possible that we are capable of developing levels of awareness that are not so far generally recognized. Some have claimed to respond to the suffering of plants and forests or even of the earth's ecosystem. This category was added to indicate that we do not know what possible further developments in emotional awareness we may look forward to. Such developments are possible and shouldn't be discounted. Let us now turn to the descent of awareness below the Chaotic Experience.

### *Physical sensations*

Descending from the Chaotic, Primal Experience we find Physical Sensations. At this devolved level of emotional awareness, feeling is cleansed from awareness and experienced solely as the physical sensations that normally accompany the emotions. The person will feel a quickened heart beat but not be aware of fear, a pressure in the chest but not identify it as depression, a hot flash, a chill, a knot in the stomach, ringing in the ears, tingling sensations, shooting pains-the sensations of the emotion devoid of awareness of the emotion itself.

In this very common state of emotional awareness the person will resort to a variety of over-the-counter, prescribed or illegal drugs including alcohol, marihuana, coffee and energy drinks to allay the bothersome physical sensations that originate in the unacknowledged emotional state. These chemicals will have noticeable, soothing effects on aches, nausea, anxiety, laxity and irritability. They will also have side effects, and may interact dangerously. Understandably, most people prefer to be in this state of unawareness, alleviated by drugs, than to be under the sway of emotional chaos in which emotions are out of our control. Certainly an employer will prefer a worker who takes massive doses of coffee and pain killers than one who cries or rages uncontrollably at work.

### *Numbness*

When asked how he or she feels, a person in this stage of emotional illiteracy is liable to be baffled or to report feeling only coldness or numbness. Emotions are unavailable to awareness. People in this state are not aware of anything they call feelings. This is true even if they are under the influence of very strong emotions. In fact, other people are often more aware of the numb person's feelings than she is. A person in this state may not feel her own emotions, and yet those around her can. Her emotions are unavailable to awareness and her experience is similar to that of an anesthetized patient with a numb feeling covering up the pain of a dental procedure.

Occasionally, perhaps under the influence of alcohol or another drug, one major emotion irrepressibly breaks through and is vented in a sharp, brief outburst, which is quickly replaced by renewed anesthesia. In psychiatric terms, this state of emotional numbing is known as *alexithymia*. A similar numbness to pain is a common experience of those who experience extraordinary physical trauma. The temporary emotional numbness that follows trauma can become permanent when the emotional trauma continues over an extended period of time.

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The emotional awareness continuum shown in Figure 5 is intended to clarify the concept of emotional awareness rather than to establish a scale with clearly definable points. People can find themselves at any point in the scale at any one time. However a person will tend to inhabit an area on the full range of awareness below or above the linguistic barrier. Some people are mostly in a chaotic state, some in numbness, some in the process of differentiation and empathy and so on.

Emotional illiteracy manifests in two emotional extremes; too much feeling, out of control or not enough feeling, no feelings at all. Both emotional numbness and incapacity to control chaotic emotions can severely handicap a person's potential. When emotionally numb a person cannot make decisions that require emotional motivation. On the other hand, an emotionally chaotic person will be continually disrupted by uncontrollable eruptions of anger, sadness, hopelessness, fear or guilt, or even love, joy and hope.

## Emotional Literacy and Transactional Analysis

Emotional awareness is not the same as emotional literacy but an essential aspect of it. Literacy requires awareness but goes beyond awareness and requires the competent management of our emotions. The transactional analytic tools developed by Berne are ideally suited for this process, and without them it would be far more difficult to learn emotional literacy skills. How do we apply transactional analysis to the teaching of emotional literacy? The detailed steps of this process have been elaborated elsewhere (Steiner, 1997, 2003), but I will present the basic principles here.

- I. Establishing a cooperative contract: The honest communication of feelings requires an atmosphere of trust and acceptance devoid of power plays. Without a cooperative environment emotional literacy cannot be efficiently taught or learned.
- II. There are four categories of increasingly emotionally literate transactional exchanges:
  1. Permission (preparing the ground).
    - a. asking for permission to engage in an emotionally charged transaction.



- b. agreeing to proceed in an emotionally charged transaction.
2. Strokes (opening the heart).
- a. giving others or ourselves positive strokes.
  - b. asking for strokes.
  - c. accepting strokes we want or rejecting unwanted strokes (learning what we want and don't want).
3. Information (actions, feelings, motives)
- a) Action/Feeling transactions:
    - i) telling people, without judgment or accusations, the feelings that their actions have caused in us.
    - ii) accepting without defensiveness, that our actions have caused certain feelings in another person, putting aside feelings of shame, guilt, or anger.
  - b. Fears and suspicions:
    - i) telling people, without accusations or judgments, the fears and suspicions (intuitions, paranoid fantasies) that their actions have generated in us.
    - ii) acknowledging these fears and suspicions without defensiveness and seeking for the grain of truth that could be their legitimate source.
4. Responsibility (making amends)
- a. acknowledging that we have acted in a manner that warrants apologizing and asking for forgiveness.
  - b. accepting or rejecting an apology, forgiving, refusing to forgive, and requesting a change in behavior, or declining the apology.

The order of these various emotionally literate transactions indicates the increasing level of difficulty. Only the first transaction-permission to transact emotionally-is obligatory. All the others are tailored to the situation at hand. The order in which they are presented indicates their level of difficulty, apologies being the most difficult but they should be used when appropriate rather than in the order given.

## Emotional Literacy in The Real World

The greatest challenge for those who want to pursue emotional literacy is its introduction in real-life situations; that requires an “emotional warrior” with

genuine dedication, ingenuity, flexibility, creativity, and courage. Asking for and giving oneself and others strokes; telling people about one's feelings, fears, and suspicions and their causes; asking for validation and apologies; accepting our mistakes; and asking for forgiveness are all possible in the real world, but in the absence of an agreed upon cooperative contract, this process can be fraught with difficulties. The full spectrum of emotional literate transactions cannot be realistically applied in most real-world situations at any one time. But any one transaction can become relevant and usable at any time. We can reject a stroke we don't want, or ask for one we want, we can tell people how we feel when they do something repeatedly; we can apologize or reject an apology; we can do all of these in the absence of a cooperative contract and succeed in improving the emotional dialogue of any situation.

The book on emotional literacy in the real world needs to be written and it will be a major challenge given the strong anti-emotion cultures we live in. But a majority of people are, in their hearts, interested in cooperation, honesty, awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy, all of which have strong emotional components. This commonality of interest makes the everyday application of these ideas easier than one would expect. In fact, emotional literacy can be lived and taught (even if imperfectly and haltingly) even in the real, cruel world. In every case that emotional literacy is advanced, the participants learn useful, empowering information, and feel a heartening, comforting, even thrilling sense of the human commonality that can be found in our emotional lives.

## Chapter 13.

### Transactional Analysis in the Information Age

Transactional Analysis as developed by Eric Berne was a visionary theory. In addition to providing a highly effective approach to psychotherapy it also anticipated the theoretical, psychological and psychotherapeutic issues that would hold center stage in the Information Age.

Practitioners of the healing arts are beginning to recognize that psychological change is more the consequence of efficiently acquiring and applying valid information than of uncovering unconscious motivations as was previously believed. Transactional analysts have been studying the details of information exchange and are experts, therefore, in information-driven (rather than belief-driven) knowledge that will be central in the psychologies of the future.

#### Pressures Upon the Brain

Psychotherapy, it might seem, would necessarily have information and communication at its operating core. When, at the dawn of the last century, Sigmund Freud invented psychoanalysis he was, by implication, asserting that certain maladies that had been thought to be medical in nature would respond to a “talking cure.” It was believed that disorders such as phobias, obsessions, anxiety, synaesthesias and paralyses were caused by anomalies of the brain and nervous system, and the notion that simply talking could have a therapeutic effect upon them was unheard of and quite radical, at the time.

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The talking cure was the successor of “moral” treatment, which in turn succeeded “heroic” treatment. Both moral and heroic approaches tended to follow the notion that mental disturbances were the consequence of anomalous pressures in the brain. Heroic treatment in psychiatry consisted of such tactics as forced inactivity through restraints, shocks and pain to jerk patients out of their state, purges and bloodletting and even trepanation (drilling a hole in the skull) to relieve pressure in the brain. (Caplan, 1969)

The moral cure that followed eschewed heroic methods but still held to the belief that mental disturbances, to be treated, required relief from pressures in the head. The pressures were now understood as having a social rather than physical origin. Relief now was best accomplished by offering the patient a “sanatorium” in a soothing environment away from urban hustle and bustle. The pursuit of the arts—music, painting—and, very importantly, pleasant conversation at mealtimes with

the hospital director, his family and staff were an important aspect of the treatment.

When talking, however, no attempt was made to discuss the problems of the patient. Rather, following the customs of English drawing room and after-dinner conversation, interesting subjects in the letters or politics were artfully pursued. In fact, discussion of patient's problems such as suicide, addiction or mental illness was avoided, for it threatened to create anxiety and thereby worsen rather than improve, the dread intracranial pressure.

Freud's "talking cure" arrived on the psychiatric scene at the height of moral cure methods. Still its purpose was, in keeping with historical precedent, to relieve pressures, this time the pressure of repressed psychic or psycho-sexual energies. The "talking" that Freud's pursued with his patients did not, as did the moral cure, avoid the unpleasant subjects of the patient's condition, nor on the other hand, did it advocate their discussion. The patient was encouraged to free associate; speak freely and utter whatever came to mind.

Yet, the psychoanalytic interchange fell short of what would today be considered communication. There was not to be a free exchange of information between physician and patient; in fact the psychoanalytic ideal was that the therapist would impart no information at all as he sat silently behind the patient. His role was to analyze the misperceptions that the client projected on him (known as transference) and to analyzing the unconscious meanings of people's dreams and free associations. This (psycho) analysis had the aim of rearranging the energies trapped in the mind as a result of childhood traumatic experiences. A very narrow segment of the person's mental life and thoughts, and an even narrower aspect of the person's current experiences, was to be discussed. The patient's task was to free associate; say whatever came to his or her mind.

The psychoanalyst's response was to be even more constricted; any broadening of the information by the analyst was deemed to be harmful excess. The patients would be helped, Freud believed, by the release of energies-catharsis—and by the rearrangement of awareness facilitated by the analyst's interpretations. Feedback, (the use of information to modify information and behavior) an essential aspect of efficient communication, was not a part of the process.

Still, narrow as this approach was (from the communication point of view) it was the beginning of an information, and potentially feedback-based (as opposed to drug, surgery or placebo and quackery based) healing science. This new approach to human suffering, not coincidentally, emerged at the same time that other information-driven developments began in telephone and radio communications. Talking, not just to one's family confessor, minister or doctor but to a strange physician, endlessly, about one's most intimate thoughts was a shocking novelty. This loosening of the tongue went along with all the other ways in which information increasingly circulated in the culture by way of film, radio, telephone and newspapers. As the Information Age gained momentum this process continued

and accelerated so that today people are willing, even eager, to reveal their innermost thoughts and secrets to millions on television talk shows or digital social groups.

## Enter Information

Starting with the invention of the one-sided Freudian talking cure, talking in psychotherapy gained momentum. Eventually, breaking the psychoanalytic shackles it became a matter of increasing equality and two-way communication and feedback. Carl Rogers, in his non-directive, client-centered method (1951) kept faith with the psychoanalytic restrictions by taking pains to only reflect, without elaboration, what the client said. Rogers did, however, loosen the communication reins by introducing the concept of “unconditional positive regard” which consisted of expressions of sincere positive affect and empathic response by the therapist throughout the therapeutic process. Elsewhere, Harry Stack Sullivan advanced the freeing of information with his emphasis on two-way communication in the psychiatric interview (1954). Still these developments fell short of a free, two-way flow of information.

In 1962, with the development of rational-emotive therapy, Albert Ellis became the first therapist to introduce the notion of problem solving through a process of communication involving an exchange of information and feedback.

At the same time that information-based problem solving grew into a recognized therapeutic mode, increasingly useful information regarding physical as well as emotional health became more elaborate, available and reliable. The effects of nutrition and physical activity, the effects and side effects of legal and illegal drugs, the consequences of power inequalities and power abuse; emotional, physical and sexual, elder and child abuse, the need for a “secure base,” the importance of gender, sexual identity and preference, culture and age, and the significance of death and dying are some of the areas of knowledge that inform competent psychotherapy today. And yet many psychotherapists still disdain the use of this type of information, continuing to believe that people will benefit more from insight and catharsis than from the knowledge and application of facts.

The 1960's was a freeing decade which spawned liberation movements for women, gays, blacks, mental patients, the physically challenged and so on. At the same time psychotherapy was going through its own liberation from the shackles of psychoanalysis and psychiatry. The Radical Therapy and Radical Psychiatry movements, psychotherapists like Fritz Perls, Abraham Maslow, Albert Ellis, and Eric Berne radically broke through the professional barriers erected against equality and two-way communication between psychotherapist and client. Both in his theory of transactional analysis and in his private and hospital practice, Berne insisted on two-way communication, on a level playing field.

In my work with alcoholics and suicidal clients, following Berne's open communication example, I began to insist on finding out details, which at the time therapists were loath to pursue. For instance, I inquired about the exact extent of their drinking or what precise suicide plans they might have and eventually developed the "no drinking" and "no suicide" contracts. Both of these tactics were challenges to the reticence, rooted in psychoanalytic custom, to discuss disturbing subjects, because, it was believed, such discussion might stir up self-destructive behavior rather than help cure it. Instead of fearing the exchange of information regarding the details of the client's drug abuse or suicide plans, I assumed that, on the contrary, the more accurate information that passed between us, the more effective the therapy and the more rapid the "cure." I believe I was the first to seek "no suicide" contracts in my profession as a psychotherapist, starting in 1967, and I am happy to be able to say that I have not had a single suicide in my practice.

In those days, open, candid communication was considered reckless behavior on the part of a therapist, especially a non-medical practitioner such as myself. But Berne had abandoned psychoanalytic theory in favor of a theory centered on communication and I merely followed his guidance. By isolating transactional stimuli and responses he provided us with a method with which to study how people influence each other, and made possible the fine-grained analysis of person-to-person communication. In addition, by laying down the premises of script analysis, he anticipated the examination of the information passed down from parents to their children, information which we in TA believe determines people's life-shaping childhood decisions.

Berne did not provide a clearly detailed hypothesis as to what about Transactional Analysis facilitates the all-important cure. Clearly, talking was the method. But what kind of talking? He favored "straight" talk, Adult-to-Adult (Martian, he called it, because it is so rare, so foreign to our usual way of operating), free of covert Parent to Child content. He used the blackboard and gave his patients information about ego states, transactions, games and scripts. Unlike any psychiatrist until then, he actually taught patients his theory during therapy sessions. That encouraged him to keep the theory clear and the words simple, in contrast with, in his opinion, psychoanalysis and other therapies, which were mystified and confusing. And when he was accused of oversimplifying he quipped, "I'd rather oversimplify than overcomplicate." He chided professionals who spoke in pompous psychiatric lingo—jazz, he called it—claiming that "if your patient can't understand what you're saying, it's not worth saying," (Personal Communication, circa 1967, SF seminars)

## How Do People Change?

That of course is the question. Let us briefly consider that double-edged placebo effect. It is well known that people will react to any novel effort to remedy their plight, be it economic, moral, psychological or physical by improving temporarily, regardless of the actual effectiveness of the method applied. People with serious

diseases improve briefly when given sugar pills by an impressive healer. Likewise people will improve psychologically when first visiting a healer, especially if the treatment is accompanied by some hocus-pocus, be it a theory, a book, a special touch or consumable, or some other prop (Shapiro & Shapiro, 2000).

This creates considerable confusion for patients and healers alike. For patients who improve after the initial sessions with a healer, it can be a powerful attractor to the method used, regardless of its effectiveness, even if it stops working after a few weeks. For the therapists who see the initial improvements generated by the treatment, the placebo effect can create a false sense of effectiveness, which, amplified by ambition or venal self-delusion, can lead to outright quackery. On the other hand a professional who understands the very real and yet evanescent power of placebo can use this effect to good results. To start a process of change with the placebo wind in our sails, an optimistic attitude, and great expectations is a positive way to begin, provided that the professional quickly facilitates real change and improvement, to take the place of the effects of the placebo.

I am assuming that the effectiveness of Berne's version of the talking cure was not just due to a placebo effect, though we can never discount that entirely. What was it about Berne's talking cure that caused people to change? Berne never postulated a concise mechanism but it is clear from his statements and writings that the strengthening and decontamination of the Adult was definitely considered to be a healing factor. As a neural network "focused on data processing and probability estimating" (Berne 1972, p. 443) and reality testing, the Adult will, if it is energized, allow the person to understand his games and their illicit gratifications and thereby help him stop playing them when "he becomes convinced that there are better (transactional patterns) available," (Berne 1972, p. 303). How "he becomes convinced" is not clear. Is it through insight, due to the rearrangement of ideas in the mind? Or through feedback, the process of assimilating information which affects behavior that produces new information which, in turn, produces new changes and so on?

Berne also established the importance of liberating the Child and strengthening the Nurturing Parent, though he held these goals to be secondary to learning how to think with the Adult. These processes are less information and feedback driven. They are the result of therapeutic transactions facilitating release from the Critical Parent and sudden behavioral change, as in the case of "permission" (releasing childhood inhibitions) or "reparenting" (replacing one's Parent ego state with a better one from the therapist).

Berne's emphasis on a pragmatic, common sense, fact-based approach is exemplified by his "splinter in the toe" metaphor presented in his last public speech on June 20 1970.

"This has to do with a splinter in the toe. Now, if a man gets an infected toe from a splinter, he starts to limp a little, and his leg muscles tighten up. Then, as he keeps walking around, in order to compensate for his

tight leg muscles his back muscles have to tighten up. And then, in order to compensate for that his neck muscles tighten up; then his skull muscles; and pretty soon he's got a headache. He gets a fever from the infection; his pulse goes up. In other words everything is involved-his whole personality including his head that's hurting and he's even mad at the splinter or whoever put the splinter there, so he may spend a lot of time going to a lawyer. It involves his whole personality. So he calls up this surgeon. He comes in and looks at the guy and says, "Well this is a very serious thing. It involves the whole personality as you can see. Your whole body's involved. You've got a fever; you're breathing fast; your pulse is up; and all these muscles are tight. I think about three or four years-but I can't guarantee results-in our profession we don't make any guarantees about doing anything-but I think in about three or four years-of course a lot of it is going to be up to you-we'll be able to cure this condition." The patient says, "Well, uh, okay. I'll let you know tomorrow." And he goes to see another surgeon. And the other surgeon says, "Oh, you've got an infected toe from this splinter." And he takes a pair of tweezers and pulls out the splinter, and the fever goes down, the pulse goes down; then the head muscles relax and then the back muscles relax and then the feet muscles relax. And the guy's back to normal within forty-eight hours, maybe less. So that's the way to practice psychotherapy. Like you find a splinter and you pull it out." (Berne 1971, pp. 6-13)

This approach, in which he mocks the psychoanalytic—"the whole personality is involved; years will be needed"—views of the day may seem radically simplistic. In fact, a radically practical approach is what Berne had in mind when he invented transactional analysis.

Having once been an automobile mechanic I found this approach compelling. I saw a similarity between the effective therapeutic cure and an expert-assisted, owner-repair of an automobile (without the aid of the placebo effect). To me, the process had three elements:

1. Finding out what the client wants to fix (information-based contract)
2. Figuring out what needed to be done to fix it (information-based diagnosis)
3. Assisting the client to do what needs to be done to bring about the desired repair (information-based problem solving.)

## Information as Prime Mover

Any complete theory of behavior requires an explanation of the motivation, the moving force, the energy that causes behavior. When accounting for why people engaged in transactions at all, Berne explained it in terms of the need for



stimulation. It was here that he prefigured the issue that, in my opinion, will become central in XXth century psychology and psychiatry; information hunger.

A basic tenet of Berne's early theory is that "the ability of the human psyche to maintain coherent ego states seems to depend upon a changing flow of sensory stimulation." (Berne 1961, p. 83). Not just stimulation but changing stimulation because human tissue adapts and eventually atrophies when subjected to stimulation that does not change. Based on this observation he coined the concept of "stimulus hunger" (p. 85) and its "first order sublimation...recognition hunger." (p. 84) Stimulus hunger gets further elaborated into "structure hunger," (p. 85) the craving for social situations in which recognition and stimulation can be obtained. Berne also pointed out that while stimulation needs to be variable to maintain psychological life, mere variability was not enough since random change has the same deadening effect than steady stimulation. What organisms seek and are motivated by is stimulation imbued with meaning, in short, information.

These statements are well supported by research: In the 1950's, psychologists discovered that rats, monkeys and people find simple stimulation rewarding. Prior to that discovery, animal researchers used only food and water as rewards in their experiments. Hungry and thirsty animals would eagerly learn complicated tasks to get food and water. Thousands of learning experiments were done with hungry and thirsty rats, cats, dogs and monkeys using food and drink as the motivating reward.

Somewhere along the line, however, psychologists noticed that animals that were neither hungry nor thirsty were motivated to solve the very same puzzles, seemingly for the plain privilege of receiving interesting stimulation such a simple show of flashing lights. This discovery led to a novel hypothesis which Berne was well aware of: that in addition to the drives that animals have toward food and drink there was also a drive for stimulation and exploration, a drive which is aroused by lack of stimulation, or boredom.

Clearly, people had similar needs. Research psychologists Bexton et al paid their subjects an above average hourly wage and fed them to stay in a small room and do nothing, and see, hear and touch next to nothing, twenty-four hours a day, as long as they were willing to stay. Within eight hours most subjects become increasingly unhappy and developed what appeared to be a strong need for stimulation. The subjects, who were college level students, would repeatedly listen to an anti-alcohol talk for grade school children or to a recording of an old stock market report if that was all which was available to relieve their boredom. They reported that after some hours of sensory deprivation they could not follow a train of thought and that it took them a whole day to regain the motivation to study after the experiment was over.

Anecdotal evidence regarding people stranded on desert islands and other such isolated places is plentiful and will attest to the fact that the need for stimulation can become extraordinarily compelling. Later researchers took the matter further and developed isolation chambers in which people were floated in a dark, sound proofed, body temperature, water tank and discovered that sensory deprivation had

dramatic, sometimes disturbing effects on the human psyche resulting in a “trip,” sometimes a “bad trip,” similar to those that can be the consequence of LSD usage. The mind painfully craves stimulation and when radically deprived of it, manufactures its own, often dredging its darker recesses to do so. Modern day torturers have learned how effectively stimulation deprivation—white torture, its called—breaks a person down. (Cesereanu, 2006) White torture was used extensively in George Bush’s Guantanamo prison.

Finally, in investigating the relationship of stimulation to information, psychologists Berlyne and Jones found, in a series of experiments, again with college students, that it was not stimulation alone but information—that is stimulation imbued with meaning—that their subjects sought. We seek stimulation but if the stimulation has no information content, it quickly loses its capacity to satisfy the need for stimulation and leaves us needy. It becomes therefore appropriate to speak of “information hunger” when describing people’s constant search for stimulation.

## Information Hunger

A decade ago in pursuit of an understanding of power plays I became interested in propaganda. At first it seemed that propaganda is simply a conspiracy by some, to brainwash an innocent population. But it soon became clear that people weren’t simply passive victims of propaganda but actually sought out propaganda and welcomed it, and if it wasn’t available manufactured it for themselves. Just as in the case of food, where people come to prefer junk food to the nutritious choice or, in the case of strokes, where harmful games are played instead of obtaining positive strokes, people hungry for information will accept and seek mis and disinformation—infojunk—and even come to perversely prefer it to the truthful, valid alternative. In each of these cases there is an abiding hunger, which will cause people to accept and eventually seek the toxic substitutes manufactured by propagandists, stroke monopolists as well as food companies, to satisfy their various hungers.

Here I am broadening Berne’s notion of stimulus hunger to include “information hunger.” Most people think of information as 411 on the telephone dial or more recently Google. But to clearly understand what information is, we have to go to the field of cybernetics, where information has been defined by mathematicians (Shannon and Weaver 1963, pp. 12-13) as a means of reduction of uncertainty or in even more technical terms as a reduction of entropy; entropy being a measure of the level of disorganization in any part of the universe.

The second law of thermodynamics dictates that everything in the universe declines. Dedicated to reversing this implacable law is the life force, nature’s healing hand, *vis medicatrix naturae*. The life force is fueled by the energy from the sun accumulated in our cells, and its mission is the constant battle of regeneration against decay and entropy.

An example: You cut your finger in the kitchen. It's a deep cut and blood rushes to the cut and stains your sink. You suppress your panic even before you feel the pain. Immediately, as you cut yourself, the self-healing begins. At first you will be numb and feel no pain, long enough to put your thoughts in order and deal with this emergency. You need only aid in the process by pressing and holding together the two sides of the cut with a band aid or perhaps with couple of stitches and the blood will stop flowing and clot, a scab will form, the skin will start growing together, pain will prevent you from moving the wound and if left alone and kept clean the wound will seal over and in time be completely healed with only a scar to remind you of the cut. This is an example of how the life force decisively counteracts disorganization by healing a wound that could be life threatening.

At the most elemental level the life force is equivalent with information. Information acts at all levels of life to counteract decay; in nations, organizations, workplaces, families and relationships. At the human communication level, information works against the dissolution of mental capacities, which occurs in its absence. Just as oxygen is fundamental to the function of plant life, information fuels mental life; without it, brain death is certain. Info-junk, (mis and disinformation) is the toxic version of information and while it quells the hunger and prevents brain death it disrupt and disorganizes mental and emotional life.

### Information and Transactional Analysis; Stroke Hunger

According to Berne, stimulus hunger motivates and directs human activity just as surely as hunger, thirst and the need for oxygen (there is no name for oxygen hunger, yet) It is the need for stimulation that generates "social pathology"—covert transactions, games and scripts, all in an effort to obtain the stimulation that we cannot easily get in its wholesome form, as intimacy. From this line of thinking emerged the concept of strokes (1964, pp. 14) as exchanges of recognition, and the unit of exchange, the stroke. Strokes and stroking define, in one simple brilliant concept, the most basic human need for stimulation, in the form of love and hate.

Strokes are a particularly powerful, information rich source of stimulation; human stimulation. Arguably, strokes can be exchanged between humans and higher animals; cats dogs, horses and so on; perhaps warm blooded stimulation would be a better concept. Due to the stroke economy, strokes have become a commodity that can be bought, sold, traded, bartered, accumulated and monopolized.

Strokes do not only fulfill the biological need for love but they also feed the need for information. They are in fact tightly packaged, powerful bundles of information about ourselves. Whether we seek strokes or meaning we are seeking information in concentrated, human, symbolic form.

Interestingly, what can be said for strokes can also be said for information: we hunger for information, will accept and even seek toxic information in the absence of useful or constructive information and there is an information economy in which

information has become a commodity. The result is that some people are info-rich and others are info-poor but most are chronically hungry for information while consuming large quantities of info-junk. Fortunately, there are powerful interests militating against the impoverishment of information in the form of search engines like Google and numerous digital social networks like Facebook and even Twitter which dispense both infojunk and valuable information. These organizations are making information easily accessible to people with computers around the world; the problem is becoming one of information overload and how to separate valid from junk information. And an important related question is whether the digital recognition provided by social networks is an adequate substitute for the biological need for strokes; this is a central question in the nascent science of cyberpsychology.

### Script messages as information

Clearly, information comes to us in a variety of ways; life is full of lessons. The flow of information is constant and from the information available to us we select and prioritize that which will serve as feedback and that which will be ignored. What messages are taken to heart and which are passed by depends on a variety of factors.

Early in life, children's predicaments frequently force them to make important decisions that have life-long consequences. These decisions, based on available information made in a context of powerlessness, can become obsolete and the source of trouble later in life when power relations change and the childhood decisions are no longer necessary or relevant. That is the essence of scripts.

In developing the script matrix (Steiner, 1966) I attempted to illustrate the messages that we take to heart in our childhood. Berne's ego states gave me a number of informational levels to consider. A subject's script is based on messages from another person's ego states; injunctions and attributions which are underscored by a variety of factors; the importance of the source, (father, mother, significant others); the emphasis that is added to the message, (punishment, rewards, repetition); the subject's powerlessness and susceptibility (ripe for imprinting, scared, tired, upset, drugged or in hypnagogic state.) Source, emphasis, and susceptibility have an effect on the attention that the subject, usually a child, pays to the message.

Script messages are essentially lies—disinformation and misinformation—designed to restrict the child's autonomy and undermine the child's power. The messages to the young person can be received by all three of the ego states: Parent, Adult or Child but the most vulnerable ego state is the Child. The young person's Child ego state will learn and modify his or her behavior and the change will sometimes be gradual and sometimes be discontinuous, a leap in behavior modification. When there is such a leap we speak of a script "decision." However, much scripting, especially "banal" scripting, occurs gradually without such a dramatic decision point.

Changing script decisions, whether dramatic or banal, requires accurate information, permission to change and protection while changes are made (See Chapter Eleven). In the same manner in which scripts can be created in a decisive leap, script redecisions or changes can also, though rarely, occur in a relatively short leap of faith as described in the book *Changing Lives Through Redecision Therapy* by Mary and Robert Goulding (1997). However most script changes occur as an evolution in a series of gradual, cognitive and behavioral changes.

### *Lies and Information*

We lie when we say something that we know is not true or when we knowingly hide what we believe to be the truth.

Lies have always been used as an avenue to power. Denial of information and deception are age-old forms of power abuse. Lies are conscious power plays; the most significantly destructive political act in the information age is lying.

Lying is always a means of staying in control—a political act—and is part and parcel of the constant power behavior and abuse that we are exposed to. In spite of the fact that every major religion proscribes lies, lying is an aspect of everyday life almost from the first day of our existence, even in the most devoutly moral and religious households. Certainly, by the time a child is able to speak, parents are lying to it routinely and, eventually, the child is expected, as an aspect of proper socialization, to learn to lie as well. We tell our children not to lie, yet we lie to them constantly. We tell them to be truthful as we continually do otherwise and we never tell them what a lie is, how it is different from the truth, and what we mean when we tell them that lying is wrong. To be sure we have all manner of rationalizations for lying to children and each other; we assume that children can't take the truth or don't want to know it or would be harmed by it and we believe that little white lies are harmless and that we are, in fact, obligated to protect them from the truth. But the real reasons for lying are far more practical; the fact is that we lie to maintain control. Being truthful might require that we give up power and comfort as we face the realities of our abuses of power.

The capacity to perceive, to understand and effectively deal with the world is severely curtailed by the presence of constant lies in our lives. The process of sorting out when to lie and when to tell the truth is an ongoing drain on our mental energies. When we are being lied to, sorting out the truth is equally daunting. We can discount our intuition and believe the lies, putting ourselves at a great disadvantage. Or we can refuse to believe lies and construct paranoid scenarios that put us at risk of madness. In the process love and trust are steadily undermined. Given all of these uncertainties, the mind is prevented from working at its optimal level.

### *Lies in the Information Age*

We are in a magical moment in history when we have the mental capacity and the technical knowledge to efficiently and powerfully satisfy the most basic of human hungers; the hunger for information. We have the information terminals and processors, we have the networks and we have the information economy. Unfortunately we have a great problem with media information, namely that it is badly polluted with a variety of lies. Lies without the amplifying power of technology are harmful but manageable, but the high-tech media lies of today can be overwhelming.

Witness the election and reelection of George Walker Bush the United States' 43rd president. Bush was well known; his deficient education, his anti-science stand, his alcoholism, his dodgy military service, his alleged religiosity, his dislike of facts and more. Still, Karl Rowe, an extraordinarily skillful propagandist was able to erect a public relations effort so effective that all these facts were ignored so that George Bush attained a level of acceptance high enough to be installed as president. After starting an catastrophic and unnecessary war and four years of utter mismanagement he was elected again with the aid of more lies, this time lies and disinformation heaped on his opponent—John Kerr—about his military service. It took eight long years—a tribute to the power of mis and disinformation—for people to realize the magnitude of the lies they had believed and the error they had committed as he left office in public disgrace.

Given people's info-hunger, information has become a hugely profitable commodity and those who profit from that commodity continue to manufacture more and more attractive forms of it. Just as in the case of the increased potency of drugs; wine to cognac, coca leaves to crack, opium to heroine, weed to sinsemilla and hashish, potent information that is virtually irresistible is being designed and produced. We have to develop means to defend ourselves against this sort of info-junk, for we have no inborn protection against it.

Fortunately a great sea change is occurring. There are several venues in which corrective measures are being taken as organizations that are devoted to accurate information are taking hold. As an example Google, Wikipedia, myriads of blogs, YouTube and even YouPorn provide powerful antidotes to the waves of info-junk being broadcast. Of course it can be argued that these organizations themselves broadcast a good deal of info-junk but the important fact is that, increasingly, a person can freely choose from a wide selection of information available.

One information-cleansing measure, for people to practice at the personal level, is "radical truth telling." Being radically truthful involves never lying about anything, as well as saying everything of significance that one wants, feels or believes. It can be seen that, given the levels of deception that surround us, the project only makes sense, initially, in the most intimate and close relationships and only by mutual agreement.

If we are to begin taking the information age seriously, we must take lying and truthfulness seriously. We must learn everything we can about information. We must become info-literate, that is to say we must learn what information is and what noise is, what is a lie, what is truthful and what is true and the important difference between them. (Steiner 2003, pg 226-227) and we must begin this process close to home, in the personal realm before we can expect advertisers, teachers and politicians to follow suit. Above all, in the information age, we must know when we lie and why and when we are being lied to and why.

### *Transactional Analysis as an Information Psychology and Psychiatry*

Here I would like to tell a brief, apocryphal story:

A physician was called to visit a remote village in the jungle because of epidemic of dysentery that affected 8 out of 10 people. After a brief tour of the town he called a meeting of the elders: "I noticed that your latrines are next to the river. Here is what you must do. Always take your drinking water upstream of the latrines and your problem will be solved.

The villagers followed this basic, generic, public health principle and the epidemic abated. Still 15% of the villagers continued to be ill. Later measures such as boiling the water, moving the latrines away from the river, drugs, etc reduced disease by another 10%.

How does this apply to the practice of transactional analysis? Elaborate academic research has been finding over the years that the outcome of psychotherapy is generally beneficial at a par with medication but that no method seems to be better than any other method. All psychotherapy works, it seems and overall, users of psychotherapies are equally satisfied. My point is that most psychotherapies share many generic, beneficial, mental health principles. Therapists tend to be nurturing and endeavor to be attuned, thoughtful and soothing while the client is encouraged to talk about problems and vent feelings. That generic approach alone, regardless of the problem it is being applied to, will solve 80% of the difficulties.

But after some sessions these generic technique will generate diminishing results. Each client's unique situation will need techniques that are specific to the person's situation and a higher level of expertise will be needed; no amount of tinkering with the basics will do.

In addition, every therapist has a ceiling beyond which his or her expertise does not reach. Those rare therapists that are truly effective, with up-to-date information and techniques, can deal with just about any situation that can be remedied. They will soon know when a problem is not resolvable, given their expertise and the client's circumstances. Those professionals will then decline to enter into a contract that has little chance of being accomplished.

I believe that properly trained transactional analysts are likely to have access to the highest level of information and expertise available today; a belief strongly supported by two studies undertaken by Ted Novey (2006). However, when transactional analysis therapy users were questioned and the results were analyzed using Consumer Reports' methodology and vast data base, the results were that users of transactional analysis are significantly more satisfied than users of the psychotherapy practiced by psychiatrists, psychologists, marriage counselors, physicians and psychoanalytic psychotherapists. In his second trials with a larger, international sample, Novey found that results were even more favorable.

Why should all therapies be roughly equally satisfactory and transactional analysis more? Novey's hypothesis (personal communication, 2005) is that it has to do with the quality of transactional analysis group training and supervision methods. To that I would add that transactional analysis has a powerful theory and methodology. We are a behavioral-cognitive, information-based psychotherapy using the analysis of transactions and contracts combined with an theory based on OKness, strokes, ego states, the drama triangle, games, and scripts. It is these concepts and techniques, incorporated into our training methods, that are the cause of Novey's findings, in my opinion.



## Conclusion: Book Three

It seems that many in Transactional Analysis are impatient with the state of transactional analysis as a dynamic, developing theory. For myself, I have thought at times that transactional analysis has had its day. Many of its ideas have been silently incorporated into the professional and popular cultures, but on the whole its point has been missed and it has not been given a place among the great psychiatric theories of the century. I was ready to put it to rest. Accordingly I followed my interest in power plays away from transactional analysis into propaganda, journalism and Central American politics. From the distant perspective of an investigator into media and information, in a dawning information age I came to see transactional analysis in a brand new light; as a visionary theory of information age psychology and psychiatry.

As the world peers into the twenty first century with every one wondering how they will be affected by the looming millennial changes, we, in transactional analysis, are in possession of a legacy which is only now becoming clear: we have the tools and the insights of a democratic, egalitarian, empowering information age psychology and psychiatry.

# Summary Appendix:

## Notes for psychotherapists

*This chapter is a updated version of a 1995 article “Thirty Years of Psychotherapy and Transactional Analysis in 1,500 Words or Less.” Written in a provocative tone at the time, it was nevertheless a valid view. Hopefully, my attitude has matured: I present this heavily edited version of the article for your consideration.*

The practice of transactional analysis has been adopted by counselors, educators, consultants and coaches, but transactional analysis was originally developed as a form of psychotherapy. I write this last section with psychotherapists specifically in mind. If you are willing to read one more repetition regarding contracts, ego states, games, scripts, Critical Parent and strokes you may get yet another, final version of my views.

For me the practice of psychotherapy flowed quite naturally from my early work as an auto mechanic. Except for the fact that cars aren't subject to the placebo effect or the ministrations of nature's healing hand, fixing cars and curing people are quite similar in some aspects. Berne's basic mandate –“curing patients”—was right up my alley: Client brings in car, mechanic looks under hood, figures out what's wrong, fixes it, and submits a bill. That was Eric's premise to the end, as evidenced by his last lecture in 1970 (See Chapter 13 under “How do people change?” Berne, 1971).

I would like to think that I have become an excellent therapist, starting 40 years ago with a good attitude and a top-notch theory—transactional analysis—and eventually learning good techniques and acquiring a measure of wisdom. I came to psychotherapy, after years of supplementing my income as an auto mechanic where I witnessed the many small, and occasionally large dishonesties that are common to auto mechanics: charging for a botched job; exaggerating the severity of the problem to seem magically skilled; hooking the client into a dependent, possibly sexually tinged relationship; pretending to know what is wrong while having no clue; sleeping on the job; denigrating the customers who want to understand and snowing them with jargon designed to confuse; and giving myself airs or disguising my ignorance and mistakes—to name a few variants of lying, power playing, and plain laziness. Luckily, having witnessed, and arguably on occasion participated, in these abuses as an auto mechanic I was able to recognize them as a psychotherapist and succeeded in avoiding them in my practice.

Starting from the basic mandate “cure the patient,” we, who follow Eric's dictates, endeavor to do so in the first session. If we are unsuccessful, we go home, think about it, and try again in the second session, and so on until the job is done, more

often than not in between one and two years. This is to reemphasize that the only goal of transactional work is to accomplish the contract and that the competent transactional analyst will stay focused on that goal, just as any professional in other mature disciplines would.

There are, in my mind, three all-important factors in getting the psychotherapy job done: attitude, technique, and information. With the right attitude, the most effective technique, and the most accurate information, therapy will be maximally successful in its goal of a contractual cure. Absent these requirements, the best one can hope for is the “power of nice” namely that, since we are caring, well meaning people, no harm will be done (except, perhaps, to the client’s bank account), and that, since nature’s healing hand is always at work, 1/3 of our clients will get well no matter what we do.

## I. Attitude

Among the three factors, the therapist’s attitude is without a doubt the most immediately perceived by our clients and therefore first among equals in importance.

### *Critical Parent-Free Attitude*

Nothing can grow in a toxic environment. Therefore, it is essential to operate from a position devoid of transactions from the Critical Parent and to create a radically Critical Parent-free territory and environment within which the client feels safe and capable of trust. Most therapeutic training teaches a pleasant, friendly and hopefully tolerant attitude, but these implicit attitudinal assumptions are not precise enough to guarantee the limbic resonance that is required for truly potent psychotherapy.

A Critical Parent-free zone is free of power plays, lies in particular. No exceptions; no white lies, protective lies, or “therapeutic” lies. No lies of omission hiding important facts or paradoxical techniques that rely on mystification. No lies about what we want and how we feel no matter how well meaning or how therapeutic they may be deemed.

I’ll accept quibbles over terminology (Critical Parent, Enemy, Oppressor, Inner Critic, what have you), but the principle—No Critical Parent—is not open to debate. A radically Critical Parent-free environment is the indispensable condition for the liberation of the Child’s healing energies, which fuel the positive limbic process and which make possible the reversal of script decisions. Critical Parent-free means free of prejudiced negative judgments. Most importantly, we must remain free of that resentment or anger—for which the therapist is wholly responsible—that is the inevitable consequence of what we, in transactional analysis, call Rescuing. Rescuing defined as doing more than one’s share or doing something one doesn’t want to do, is a serious therapeutic mistake that inevitably leads to Persecution.

Critical Parent-free means that a therapist that finds himself lying by commission or omission, developing Critical Parent judgments, feeling chronic resentment or anger or working with a client that he doesn't want to work with, urgently needs to find supervision to correct the situation.

### *Nurturing Attitude*

The right attitude has as its main embodiment an active, loving Nurturing Parent; a warm, protective, concern that signals: "I will watch over you and back you up while you and nature do the healing," the combination of unconditional motherly, fatherly, brotherly and sisterly love, the only human power that is able to imbue the hopeless, sad, disappointed, and frightened Child with the hope and energy to pick itself up and decide to walk the walk. The nurturing attitude needs to be aimed at the oneself as well as the client, since powerful healing skills are based equally on self-love as on love of others.

### *Adult Attitude*

Love of others and love of self are essential for good therapeutic work. Equally important is love of truth; the third essential component of an effective attitude. The transactional analyst must be capable of Adult-centered, pragmatic open-mindedness, ready to stand firm and yet accept new and contradictory information. This attitude involves the dispassionate tough-mindedness to stand by what one believes, and at the same time the open-minded willingness to instantly change one's perceptions and opinion when the facts demand it. Loving confrontation with reality, free from Critical Parent, with a healthy dose of Nurturing, under uncontaminated Adult guidance, is the right attitude in my opinion.

## II. Technique

The technique in question, of course, is transactional analysis—that is (forgive me for the endless repetition of such a basic precept) analyzing transactions. That means we do not primarily analyze ego state structure or personal history (which, though often relevant and useful, are not central). Nor do we focus on the psyche—psychoanalysis—an avenue that had been tried and was specifically abandoned by Berne as an effective principal line of theory and technique. (If we are going to call ourselves transactional analysts, we should not regress to psychoanalytic thinking and language.) The three transactional analytic therapeutic techniques, again, are contracts, questions, and healing transactions.

### *Contracts*

The contract is the basic feedback mechanism in this approach to psychotherapy. It establishes what the goals of the therapy are and what the criteria of their completion will be. It levels the playing field between therapist and client by using simple, understandable language, and makes it possible to verify and correct the

therapy's path. Aside from the obvious and recognized beneficial effects of therapeutic contracts, the contract dramatically and radically sets this therapy apart from non-contractual therapies and propels it to the cutting edge of post-modern psychotherapy, the therapy of the information age. In fact modern consumers are becoming skeptical of therapy systems that are loaded with pseudo-facts; instead they expect results. As there are nowadays more aspiring therapists than clients seeking therapy to support them with their fees, it is inevitable that old, untested and unproven methods and techniques will eventually become extinct.

### *Questions*

Instead of "establishing a diagnosis," a good therapist keeps asking questions. That is to say, effective therapy is free of easily summoned, but basically meaningless, terms like "schizophrenic," "borderline," "passive," "contaminated," "loser script," "rackets," and other often-denigrating psychiatric jargon. Instead of looking for a psychiatric diagnosis, I am proposing that we first establish an atmosphere of trust that will reassure the client that it is safe to be completely honest in his or her answers. Given that willingness to be open and keep no secrets the therapist can gather meaningful information by asking whatever profound, fearless, and penetrating questions are required to find out what is really going on with the client. With the information thus gathered we can come to a lucid, three-dimensional image of the client so that we really understand, rather than simply finding a convenient DSM-IV pigeon hole. This three-dimensional representation of the client, much like a hologram in which every bit of information is part of the whole picture, aids us in offering a custom-made, creative, open-to-feedback, self-correcting, and effective treatment plan which no existing diagnostic manual offers.

### *Healing Transactions*

The question becomes: "What is to be done so that healing can be allowed to occur?" Three elements amply described in this book make up that process: Permission, Protection, and Potency. If you are annoyed by repetition please skip ahead to the next section: Information

**(1) Permission:** The universal principle that Berne summarized when he said, "People are born princes and princesses and then their parents turn them into frogs," implies that they can be turned back by a transactional analyst's kiss, so that the process of therapy consists of a reversal of deeply influential childhood events. The events in question triggered the decisions, sensible at the time they are made, which were based on the information available to the young person, often under conditions of traumatic stress.

Permission is the process whereby the therapist presents the client with upgraded information and suggests that rescinding previous life decisions is appropriate so that new decisions can be made: to trust people, to seek human contact, to become active in self-preservation, to learn, to express deep feelings and yearnings, and to stop defeating or poisoning oneself. Following these ongoing Permission

transactions, therapy primarily involves protecting the natural healing process as it takes place.

**(2) Protection:** The drive to health has strong opposition from the Critical Parent-based culture of violence and domination. This toxic culture is propagated and enforced through Critical Parent transactions. It is the therapist's job, having offered Permission, to provide Protection (See Chapter 10) from the opposition—internal and external—of the Critical Parent so that the process of change can run its course.

**(3) Potency:** The combined functions of Permission and Protection define the therapist's Potency as a facilitator of nature's healing process. The fact is that nature's wondrous self-healing can be derailed. The healing process has ways of dealing with small incompetencies but it can be overwhelmed; people have been known to die of blood poisoning that started with a paper cut. The same is true of the emotional wounds that affect people. Nature is ready to restore health with the help of a competent healer, but nature can also be overwhelmed by continuing trauma and incompetent ministrations. In the case of psychotherapy today, such incompetence occurs primarily by way of therapist passivity and even neglect on one hand or the excessive and blindly misguided administration of drugs, especially "drug cocktails," on the other. It's the potent therapist's task to avoid such undermining influences and to allow nature's healing hand to do its work.

Potency's greatest impediment is *hubris*, the self-serving arrogance of a therapist who imagines him or herself as a prime mover in the healing process, rather than its humble facilitator. On the other hand, love is Potency's greatest enhancer; love of the client, love of self, and love of truth.

### III. Information

The third and final basic ingredient of good psychotherapy is good, valid information. We have come a long way from the point in psychotherapy when it was believed that healing comes from releasing pressure in the brain by trepanation, leeches, or, for that matter, by merely speaking. We know that it takes more than that to satisfy the demands of modern, contract-savvy consumers of psychotherapy services, who expect us to apply a process in which valid, useful, and constructive information is exchanged.

In the 45 years since I received my license to practice psychotherapy, a great deal has been learned about what is and isn't helpful in the profession. Here are four areas in which we now have essential information (based on research and/or experience) for the pursuit of efficient therapeutic cures.

### *Body-Mind*

**(1) Strokes:** A plentiful supply of positive strokes is essential for mental and physical health. Surprise: depression is caused by stroke deficit, lack of exercise, bad housing, and a lousy job – or no job at all. Strokes, exercise, good shelter and a good job will work better than Prozac. A contractual transactional analysis treatment group is the most effective source of the support and strokes needed to facilitate the healing process.

**(2) Emotional literacy:** Emotions are the representatives of the body in people's mental life. Knowing one's own and other people's emotions is absolutely essential in an effective life. Another surprise: I can make you feel (good and bad) and vice-versa.

**(3) We are Animals:** As descendants of the chimps, much of what we want and often what we do is rooted in our animal nature and drives. These drives have to be acknowledged before we can tame them in the service of cooperation and well-being in a modern, democratic, cooperative society.

**(4) We Are What We Eat:** Well-being is connected to what we consume. Junk food is harmful to our mental health; info-junk as well. So is the inappropriate use of nicotine, caffeine, over-the-counter and prescription drugs, illegal drugs and—most importantly—alcohol. Addiction, chemical dependency (a different issue from addiction), and appropriate use of drugs, and sobriety must be thoroughly understood by an effective therapist.

### *Power Abuse*

Power and power relations—abusive and cooperative—are essential aspects of life and have a powerful effect on emotional well being.

**(1) No Power Plays:** We need to understand the difference between being on top, being on the bottom, and equality. Power abuse in therapy, specifically sexual, but also subtle anger, and emotional violence and harassment, must be understood and radically avoided in the therapeutic process.

**(2) Mars and Venus:** Gender relations are at the core of most of couple's difficulties with each other. Sexism, feminism, men's liberation, and the importance and extent of inborn, gender differences in gender relations must be thoroughly understood by a good therapist.

**(3) Oppression:** To be a member of an oppressed minority is a decisive factor in a person's life. We need to understand the toxic, often violent, pressures on young and old, poor, gay and lesbian, overweight, challenged, third-world, and other vulnerable people.

**(4) Sex and Children:** Child sexual and emotional abuse were buried as topics for psychotherapists early in the century by Freud's fatal theoretical misstep:

postulating that women's adult recollections of sexual abuse were mere wish fulfillment fantasies. In fact, many of our clients, male and female, were sexually and emotionally abused as children. This must be dealt with, keeping in mind our Bill of Rights: recovered memories are not evidence and an accused person is innocent until proven guilty.

### *Transcendence*

An understanding of the phases along people's journey through life, from birth through death, is a new, important area of information. Passages, life crises, birth, aging and death, grief work, and mourning must be understood. Suicide must be dealt with as an issue. Spirituality, values, the religious experience and the power of transcendence are essential topics in effective practice.

### *Why Transactional Analysis?*

I will name some of the new and endlessly proliferating techniques useful in bringing about specific desired results: cognitive and behavioral approaches, homework, role playing and psychodrama, assertiveness training, bio-feedback, relaxation, guided imagery, bioenergetics, mediations, therapeutic separations and other prophylactic measures in family and relationship therapy, and, last but not least, techniques to defeat the Critical Parent. Any of these techniques may be useful in facilitating the Permission and Protection process.

What can transactional analysis contribute to this process? The fact is that trained transactional analysts are optimally equipped, as follows:

- ◆ We are trained to observe the transactional process and analyze it as a medium of information exchange.
- ◆ We are trained to distinguish transactional nuances generated by three different ego states and the three levels of meaning transacted between them. We are aware of the peculiar characteristics of Parent-to-Child ego state transactions compared to Adult-to-Adult ego state transactions.
- ◆ We understand the pathology of transactions. We know how attempts to communicate can turn into games and we know how to help people stop these harmful patterns of information and stroke exchange. We have techniques to help people to love and be loved in return.
- ◆ We know the characteristics of healthy transactions—rich in positive strokes—and how to give people permission and protection to engage in them. We know how to respond to lies and how to help people stop lying and stop accepting other people's lies.
- ◆ We know the importance of therapeutic contracts and we are skilled at establishing them. The reality based pressure to achieve the completion of a



contract encourages the use of valid information rather than opinion, speculation, prejudice or false information.

An honest therapist works for a living and is mindful of her job. She is humble as to what, in the end, helps the client: a combination of nature's healing power, the clients efforts to take responsibility and bring about changes, and the therapist's guidance and skills. During every session, she reviews what progress is being made, openly rejoices with the client's positive changes being scrupulously analytic about the process and using the most advanced information to inform her work. She recognizes the unique individuality of each client and applies her creativity to the client's specific difficulty. She provides permission to change and protection against the demons that beset the client in strange, new waters. And she provides constant, potent attention and commitment to the whole process. Her love of truth keeps her honest about the effects of her therapy—positive, negative, or neutral.

These are the elements that we must study and master to qualify as effective, productive, postmodern soul healers: Love, Effective Technique, and Valid Information; it's that simple. Any questions?

# Last Word

Over the last half century I have written about transactional analysis, without interruption. After fifteen years of tireless editing of my work, my wife, Jude Steiner-Hall (a.k.a. Jenae Marks), confessed that she was tired of reading the same ideas over and over. She had long encouraged me to consolidate my theories into one academically respectable piece. It occurred to me that I could do so in preparation for moving on to new insights, and so I did, with this book.

Valuable as time is becoming in the next years of my life, I hope to use it to investigate the new information age and how it may help redeem the urgently wretched situation human kind is facing; this is my emerging interest.

Ever powerful in human affairs, love alone has not been equal to the redemptive task. Teamed with information, love, I believe, is still the answer.

Love is the answer.

Claude Steiner

Berkeley, 2009

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