

A Brief Introduction to Transactional Analysis

By Elliott Green TSTA © 2015

Transactional analysis is a model for understanding human behaviour and psyche, developed by the late Dr Eric Berne, in the 1950s and 60s. It was originally developed as a means of addressing what goes on between people, be they couples, groups, families or organisations. Transactions are the interactions that occur when we signal or communicate with each other. The analysis of transactions enables the Transactional Analyst to identify games and develop new, healthier strategies to replace old, unhealthy and familiar patterns of behaviour.

As well as external communication between people, Transactional Analysis considers the internal communication that takes place within each of us. This communication is most often taking place unconsciously, or outside of our awareness. Transactional Analysis is therefore able to address both the private psyche of the individual (via psychotherapy) and the public communication between people (via behavioural therapy).

This ability to address both inner and outer world experiences serves to distinguish Transactional Analysis from other forms of psychotherapy. It is based on what is happening to the client in the present, as a means of showing him where and how he is trapped in hurtful or destructive patterns that affect his everyday life.

Used in organisations it can promote better communication as well as provide systemic interventions where games are identified as part of an unhealthy culture.

TA as it is called for short, is based on three philosophical principles:

People are OK. We all have worth, value and dignity as people. At times, I may not like nor accept what you DO, but always I accept who you ARE. 'Label the act not the person.'

Everyone has the capacity to think for themselves, with the exception of the severely brain damaged. We cannot be MADE to feel or behave in particular ways by others, or by our surroundings. 'We are responsible for our own feelings and behaviour.'

People decide to be the way they are. The decisions that we made in childhood, (strategies that were the best ways we could work out as infants to survive and get what we wanted from a world which was dominated by big people) may still determine how we feel and behave today. We can trace the decisions and change them for new and more appropriate decisions. 'These decisions can be changed.'

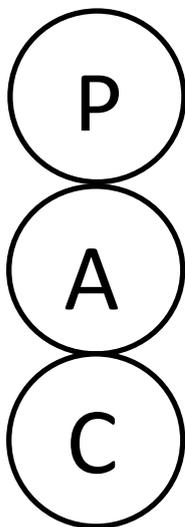
TA is a contractual form of intervention. It has clear goals and direction. The contract is agreed between the client and Transactional Analyst at the start of their work together. This specifies clearly what outcome the client intends from the interaction, be it a change in attitude, feeling, response or action. Responsibility for change rests with the client who is expected to take the initiative in his own reflections. TA uses simple language to get across complex theory. The client is encouraged to explore TA ideas and to become aware of how they might apply to him. Part of the work will involve learning about self, and becoming aware

of how we go about setting up problems for ourselves. In order to be effective, TA demands involvement and sustained commitment. Those seeking help from it must be prepared to be confronted by their own self-destructive behaviour.

TA is a Humanistic psychotherapy (Moreno, Maslow, Rogers) and is distinct from Psychoanalytic (Freud, Jung, Erikson) and Behavioural (Pavlov, Skinner) approaches. TA does have some links with the other two camps, but it has several key ideas that set it apart.

The Ego-state model (PAC or Structural model):

An ego-state is a set of related thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Each person has three distinct ego states and therefore three different ways of being himself.



Sometimes, I may think, feel and behave in ways which I have internalised from others around me such as my culture and those who were parent figures for me. When I do so, I am in my PARENT ego-state.

When I think, feel and behave in response to what is going on around me, here-and-now, using all the resources available to me as a grown-up person, I am in my ADULT ego-state.

At times, I may return to ways of thinking, feeling and behaving which I used when I was a child. Then I am in my CHILD ego-state.

The Structural model is the one used by psychotherapists in addressing issues to do with the private psyche of individuals.

Knowing which ego-state we are in at any particular point is an important part of TA psychotherapy. Each ego-state contains its own information on values, feelings and ways of being. Because the information in any one ego-state is often significantly different to that in the others, a person's beliefs, feelings and behaviours may be very different depending on which ego state is in charge at any particular time. The person may then experience internal conflict as he shifts out of one ego-state and into another. Confusion, depression, inappropriate anger, overwhelming sadness and addiction are some of the ways in which he may express his inner conflict. As he finds out the content of each ego-state, he starts to separate out the different parts of himself, enabling the resolution of that conflict to take place.

For instance, Julie may have high expectations of success in her P, yet low self-esteem in her C. This affects her A and causes her distress whenever she is under pressure over deadlines.

The Functional Model:

The Transactional Analyst makes use of behavioural indicators such as tone of voice, the words used by the person, his gestures and body posture. Behaviours alone are not enough however, to successfully diagnose which ego state a person is in. Behaviours serve to point the way, as long as they are backed up by Phenomenological, Social and Historical evidence. Behaviours then are clues to aid in ego state diagnosis. However, they need to be used with caution.

For instance, “You’re in your Parent” said to someone who shakes his index finger is simply not universally true (James, 1974). “The pointed index finger may be a Parental admonition, an Adult indicator, or a Child’s accusation” (Berne 1966).

Behaviours are not ego states, even though we often describe behaviours as ‘parental’, ‘childish’ or ‘adult’. In TA, we use a behavioural model, called the FUNCTIONAL MODEL, to separate out behaviours that may then in turn be used to help diagnose ego states. Confusingly perhaps, these behavioural states are called Functional Ego States:

CONTROLLING PARENT
BEHAVIOURS INCLUDE:

**naming, shaming,
blaming, sarcastic,
fault finding,
direct,
limit setting ...**

ADULT BEHAVIOURS
INCLUDE:

**reasonableness,
open-mindedness,
evaluating, asking,
estimating, learning,
option seeking ...**

ADAPTED CHILD
BEHAVIOURS INCLUDE:

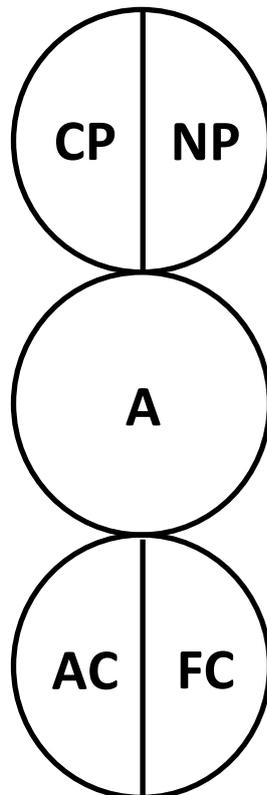
**compliance, hurtful,
helpful, helpless,
pleasing others,
manipulating, rebelling ...**

NURTURING PARENT
BEHAVIOURS INCLUDE:

**accepting, responsive,
empathetic, supportive,
attentive, affectionate,
letting off the hook,
smothering, spoiling ...**

FREE CHILD
BEHAVIOURS INCLUDE:

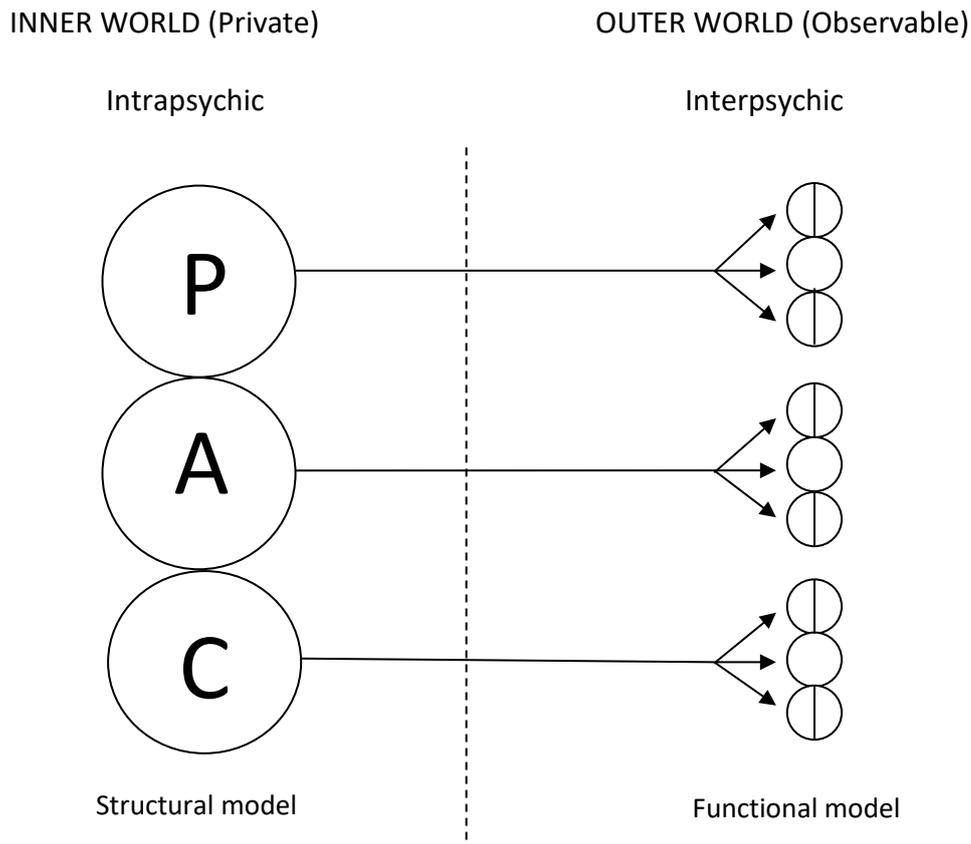
**wanting, having fun,
playing, curious, pleasing
self, self-centred, lively,
unrestrained, open ...**



Each Functional ego state can have positive and negative aspects. Since they are observable, they are useful to the behavioural transactional analyst, as opposed to the Structural model of the psychotherapist.

The Structural/Functional Interface:

Just how do the structural and functional models interrelate? The interface was arguably Berne's greatest achievement – however it was also the area of TA that attracted the most criticism. It resulted in people applying TA theory incorrectly and confusing intrapsychic with intersychic processes and vice versa. It was not the theory that was at fault, but its over-popularisation and subsequent misunderstanding. The following explanation aims to put this right.



The observable or behavioural functional ego states are like gears in a car, which can be chosen. Hence a person can act in any of 5 ways as described previously. i.e. CP, NP, A, AC or FC. The Adult in functional terms is defined very differently to the Adult Structural Ego State. That is because a person can appear to function in a reasonable, open-minded and option-seeking manner (functional Adult). However, that does not necessarily mean that they are coming from their Adult ego state (structural Adult). They could have chosen the Adult (functional) gear from their Parent or Child (structural) ego state. They may give the appearance of Adult but this is not necessarily so.

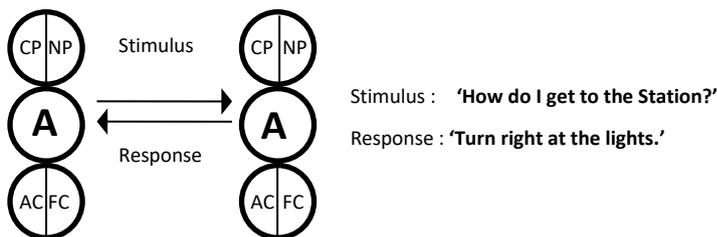
Is this important? Yes. If the person is not actually in Adult (structural) they may not be stable under stress. Their mask will start to crack. That then is the realm of psychotherapy. The psychotherapist needs to know which structural ego state a person is in at any given time. To do this, the therapist needs to use information which is more than simply the way a person behaves, or the functional model. By taking a detailed history, the therapist gets

information that helps with that diagnosis. How did they behave in the past and what historical patterns of behaviour might be influencing the present? Additionally, by observing the client's social interactions, they get a sense of how that person interacts with others, engages in games, what sort of games etc. Lastly the therapist looks for phenomenological evidence. That is moments when the client momentarily regresses to developmentally younger experiences (indicates Child) or uses responses that appear 'as if their training has kicked in' (indicates Parent). Having established where a person is coming from, the process of helping them change the internal dance can begin – the process of growing up, so that the Adult (structural) takes charge of the other two ego states.

Communication Model - Transactions, Strokes, Time Structuring:

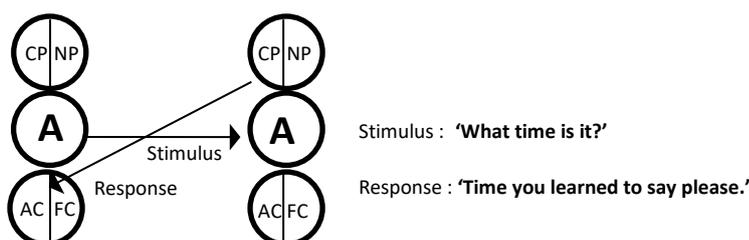
When I communicate with you, I can choose to address you from any one of my five functional ego states. You can reply in turn from any one of your functional ego states. This exchange of information is called a Transaction. Transactions can be COMPLEMENTARY, where the ego state addressed is the one that responds – a 'boomerang effect'. Such transactions can carry on indefinitely. Complementary transactions are the most efficient way of exchanging information. Socially however, they can become boring.

EXAMPLE



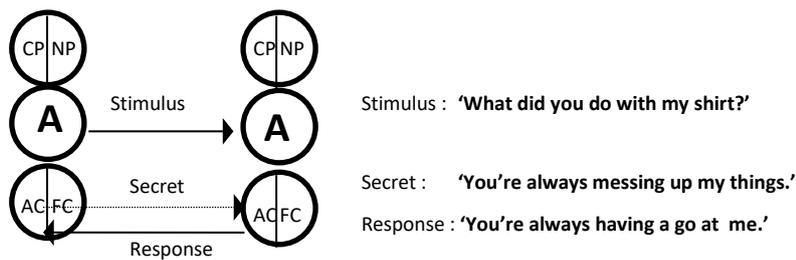
Transactions can be CROSSED, where the ego state addressed is not the one that responds – or responds to an ego state different to the one that started proceedings. Such transactions usually result in a break in communication by denying the 'boomerang effect'. This indicates that either one person has deliberately attempted to interrupt proceedings or, most often, that something else is going on – a type of spell or transference. Left unaddressed, this could be an indication that a game is afoot. A misunderstanding perhaps, leading to hurt feelings maybe?

EXAMPLE



Sometimes, transactions can be of an ULTERIOR type, where there is a secret message given as well as the obvious one. The response is usually aimed at the secret part of the stimulus. These are more sophisticated social interactions, involving often invisible exchanges such as flirting or bullying. These are the type of transactions that indicate we are getting into a psychological game. The sender puts out a superficially plausible message that carries with it a hidden subtext. The recipient receives both messages but responds to the secret one without acknowledging the socially obvious one. Both are in the grips of the transference & countertransference spell.

EXAMPLE



Ulterior transactions are the starting point for psychological 'Games'. It is the secret messages that 'hook' us into a hypnotic spell, reacting in ways that we might later regret. TA allows us to understand what is really going on when people talk together. It enables us to see how it is that we might go about repeating past discomforts with friends, work colleagues or bosses. By making sense of how we might 'set ourselves up' it opens up exciting possibilities for change.

When you and I transact, I signal recognition of you and you return that recognition. In TA language, any act of recognition is called a STROKE. People need Strokes to maintain their physical and psychological well-being. Strokes can be positive or negative, conditional or unconditional.

- EXAMPLE :
- 'I hate it when you leave your socks lying about.' (Negative Conditional)
 - 'I hate you.' (Negative Unconditional)
 - 'I love your clothes.' (Positive Conditional)
 - 'I love you.' (Positive Unconditional)

Some people are brought up on a 'diet' of negative Strokes and cannot easily accept positive ones. Parents who only Stroke a child for 'doing', rather than for 'being', may promote a later preference for conditional Strokes (i.e. performance).

Learning how to accept and reject strokes is a vital part of TA therapy as well as behavioural change. Many of us do not recognise the social politics of strokes. Being able to reject unwanted strokes (such as from someone who is sexually interested in you, but you not in them) is a social skill. Being able to tolerate disappointment is another skill we need to learn. Once we are able to face disappointment, in the form of receiving a negative stroke, we increase our willingness to take social risks (such as asking someone out on a date). As we

address our programming around our stroke diet, we become more assertive, more powerful human beings and release ourselves from the shackles of low self-esteem.

When we transact in a group or pairs, we use time in very specific ways. An analysis of how we spend time **with others** is called TIME STRUCTURING. There are six ways in which we structure time.

1. **Withdrawal** is not the same as taking ourselves off on our own. Instead it is appearing to be involved yet switching off – like being in a classroom yet not paying attention to the teacher because we’re off to the beach in our imagination! Sometimes we do the same thing at work or with our partner - ‘the lights are on but there’s no-one at home’.

2. **Rituals** are actions that we engage in with others, that are repetitive and do not require thinking. Anything done ritualistically can have a purpose (such as prayer) or serve to push down our feelings of anxiety (such as cleaning something that does not require cleaning). Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is an example of the latter, where the ritual has become meaningless in terms of interacting with other human beings.

3. **Pastimes** usually involve complementary transactions and ‘talking about’ topics that are either non-contentious (the weather, cars, fashion) or topics that have previously been done to death (the state of the planet, men, women). There is no useful social purpose other than maintaining social discourse.

4. **Activities** involve us doing something together. The emphasis is on the doing, such as planning a project, painting a room, engaging in a sport, gardening, watching a film. This can be a good source of strokes. However, this is not the same as having fun by playing and being intimate. Activities are more about participating in a ‘doing thing’.

5. **Games** are attempts at intimacy that go wrong. The guy misinterprets the gal’s signals and goes in for a kiss when all she wanted was friendship; the underlying signals were ignored and/or misleading signals were sent. Games involve ulterior transactions so there is a much greater risk of experiencing crossed transactions. If a person is in the habit of re-experiencing the same painful pattern of behaviour, then this is the indication that he is hooked on games.

6. **Intimacy** is about being able to be one’s true self with another. This often involves honesty and being able to be vulnerable as well as engaging in close emotional, physical, spiritual and sometimes sexual encounters. Intimacy involves stripping away the mask and enjoying being the person you are with another who feels the same way. Unlike games, there are no crossed transactions.

Withdrawal -> Rituals -> Pastimes -> Activities -> Games -> Intimacy

———— Greater chance of getting Strokes —————>

———— Greater psychological ‘risk’ —————>

We each have our own 'Stroke Bank', and we structure our time so as to create our unique balance of Strokes. We manage our accounts by either **giving** strokes or **withholding** them from others, and by **accepting** or **rejecting** strokes that others give us. When we manage our accounts well, the psychological payoff is good (we feel good about ourselves and/or others), but mismanagement results in us feeling bad about ourselves and/or others. An analysis of how a person structures their time can reveal a lot of information about the type of strokes they need to receive, and about the types of strokes they need to give.

The six Hungers:

Strokes are vital for our health – we are fundamentally social in our nature and require interaction with others to maintain our psychological, emotional, spiritual and physiological well-being. Berne recognised that we need strokes to fulfil 6 human hungers. These are hungers for:

Structure Stimulation Contact Recognition Incident Sex

We get and give **structure** strokes by working, doing familiar things, eating familiar foods, engaging in rituals and pastimes. The importance of structure strokes is predictability and certainty. However, Structure hunger strokes may make us passive and unwilling to try new things. Over-reliance on structure strokes may lead us to become 'workaholic' or 'institutionalised' since we depend on external time-tables for our strokes. Think of 'formula feeding' babies after the war.

Stimulation strokes are given/sought for being, seeking unfamiliar things, taking risks, having fun, engaging in games and intimacy. Stimulation strokes may be pleasant or unpleasant. Someone seeking intimacy may end up in a game, unprotected and experiencing unpleasant feelings. Stimulation strokes are riskier yet often more rewarding. Over-reliance on stimulation strokes can result in us engaging in ever more dangerous pursuits in order to get the thrill. It can lead to recreational drug use, manic hedonism and extra-marital affairs.

Contact strokes are given/sought to counteract loneliness, to experience the warmth of another, as well as for safety, love and connection. These strokes can be physical, emotional or spiritual in nature, and serve to remind us that we are not alone. Over-reliance on contact strokes may result in us being dependent on others or having to be dependable for others, caught up in symbioses. It can lead to alcoholism, compulsive self-reliance, stalking or obsession with social media.

Recognition hunger is fundamentally about a need for acknowledgement. We need to know that we matter to someone else, that we belong, that our life has meaning and purpose. Whereas we need to know this for ourselves, we also need to hear it from significant others. Over-reliance on recognition strokes usually occurs because we don't fundamentally recognise ourselves in the first instance. We try to compensate for this by relying on others to tell us how great we really are. It can lead to an ego-centric, low self-esteem individual who is desperate to plug into others who feed this narcissistic hole.

Incident hunger is the need to experience the unexpected. It stops us becoming bored and keeps us fresh and ready for events that are unprepared and unrehearsed. The Scout's motto 'be prepared' is a good example of this. Over-reliance on this type of stroke can lead to a person creating incidents – making mountains out of mole-hills – to keep their supply levels high. This can lead to a person who is hyper, unreliable, always making excuses and difficult to be in relationship with.

Sex is a complex hunger because it is related to so many other factors. For some it is part of being in a stable partnership. For others, it is for comfort. Others relate it to power and engage in dominant-submissive encounters. For some it is casual whilst for others it is intense. For some it is a product to be sold, whilst for others it is about having children. For some it is about giving/receiving pleasure, for others it is about giving/receiving pain. Over-reliance on sex strokes can result in meaningless encounters, engaging in demeaning practices and becoming obsessed with pornographic material. This can lead to a person who becomes cut off from their true sexuality, has identity issues and yearns for more sex in the vain hope of finding love.

Life Script:

From the point of conception, we are susceptible to external world influences. Some of these influences are obvious and observable such as the mother who takes out her frustration by physically beating her child or the teacher who dislikes the creative student and shames them in front of the rest of the class. Others are less obvious, such as the subtle signs of disapproval when the father feels threatened by his son's feisty nature or the sibling who is jealous of the prettier sister. Likewise, society exerts a significant influence, sometimes in the form of a backdrop – those born during the war years had to contend with scarcity and often developed a make-do mentality. Sometimes the influence was more direct - those born in a 'nice' village are less likely to expose the 'paedophile' who abused them for fear that they will expose the fact that the village was not so nice after all. These influences are exerted on us as we begin the process of growing up.

In TA, there are at least 12 injunctions, which are prohibitive influences that we hold unconsciously. Each of us may carry a number of these injunctions which influence and prevent us from reaching our true potential.

Don't Exist Don't Be You Don't Feel Don't Think Don't Succeed Don't Be Important

Don't Be Well Don't Belong Don't Be Close Don't Grow Up Don't Be A Child Don't...

The injunctions are invisible influences that are passed on through the generations. Because they are non-verbal, we receive them almost as part of our DNA, as part of our inheritance. For instance, Dad passed on a Don't Feel injunction to his son. Having lost his own father in the war, Dad learnt that by cutting off his own feelings, he wouldn't feel the pain. Dad's decision was Don't Feel, and this was passed unconsciously to his son. When his son was born, he had inherited the Don't Feel injunction which in turn would then be passed on to his children. The 'Don't feel' injunction affects many millions of us throughout the world and can

often be traced back to losses suffered in the World wars. Likewise, other injunctions that we receive as children, can be attributed to traumatic events or difficult circumstances (e.g. potato famine) endured by our ancestors.

When we are very young, we all need to make decisions as to how to exist, to survive and how to get our needs met. Usually between the ages of birth to five years, we make decisions about ourselves, about others and about the world we live in. These decisions are made at a time when the world is experienced through the eyes of a young child, not our grown-up view. We make sense of the world magically instead of through more logical understanding. This 'Land of the giants' may appear friendly or hostile, and we adapt to the pressures of socialisation, to the demands made upon us by others, and find our own unique way of being in the world. We adapt as best we can to the world as we experience it AT THE TIME. These adaptations will affect our later behaviours, beliefs and feelings.

In adapting, each of us grabs hold of at least one of the following 5 antidotes to counteract the poison of the injunctions. These are called 'Drivers'.

Be Perfect Try Hard Hurry Up Be Strong Please Me/Others

So, the person who has a Don't Feel injunction may cover it up with a Be Strong Driver. As long as the person is 'strong' (i.e. not vulnerable) he will not feel the discomfort of his feelings. However, if for some reason, he is no longer able to hold the Be Strong shield, he will expose the 'Don't Feel' injunction and will experience distress. Unable to 'feel' because of the injunction, the energy will not show in the emotions but elsewhere. Such a person may often develop unusual medical conditions such as 'skin rashes' or panic attacks. Usually this person will experience themselves not as vulnerable but as weak and judge themselves critically for being 'pathetic'. They will often live and work in an environment that equates vulnerability with weakness, and does not acknowledge that all of us have a soft human core.

Another example is the person who has a Don't Exist injunction and covers it up with a Please Others driver. As long as the person pleases others the injunction is not in play. However, if that person does not please others (e.g. the comedian does not please the crowd), he will experience the Don't Exist injunction often in the form of severe depression or suicidal thoughts.

Adaptations such these are decisional in that we decide how to best adapt to the injunctions we receive. These decisions are not based on thought. They are instinctive, survival responses that are often irrational and held unconsciously. Based on these early decisions that we make, we create a narrative that forms the plan for the rest of our lives. This is called the LIFE SCRIPT, and it is a story of how life is going to be for us. For instance, are we going to have to work hard and struggle through life or are we going to have plenty and expect there is always going to be someone who will bail us out. This narrative is initially primitive and non-verbal. We write the basic plot in our infant years, before we are old enough to talk more than a few words. Revisions may be made to alter the details in later childhood and adolescence, but the basic plot remains the same. As grown-ups, we are no longer aware of the Life Script we have written for ourselves. Yet we are likely to set up our lives so that we move towards the final scene we decided upon as infants.

In SCRIPT ANALYSIS, we use the concept of the Life Script to understand how people may unknowingly set up problems for themselves, and how they may set about solving those problems.

For instance, Sarah received a Don't Be Important injunction from her father and a Don't Think from her mother. She adapted by Trying Hard to Please both her parents, teachers etc. (2 drivers). Her parents praised her and wanted her to do well. Yet, at the vital moment in exams, she blanked out and failed to deliver the promise that her teachers knew she was capable of. Under the stress, she was unable to maintain the drivers. She exposed both her injunctions – her blanking out is the Don't Think from mother, while her underachieving is the Don't Be Important (i.e. Don't Be more important than me) from father.

Left unaddressed, Sarah will be following her script. She will continue to falter at the vital moment. Through therapy she may learn new strategies that update the original adaptation programme. She may even get to grips with the meaning of the original injunctions and trace these back through several generations. She can re-decide.

Frame of reference, Discounting, Redefining:

The way I see myself in the world, and the way I see others, is my FRAME OF REFERENCE. The decision I made about myself and others, early on in my childhood, may be one of:

I'm OK, You're OK	(Healthy position)
I'm OK, You're NOT OK	(Paranoid position)
I'm NOT OK, You're OK	(Depressive position)
I'm NOT OK, You're NOT OK	(Futility position)

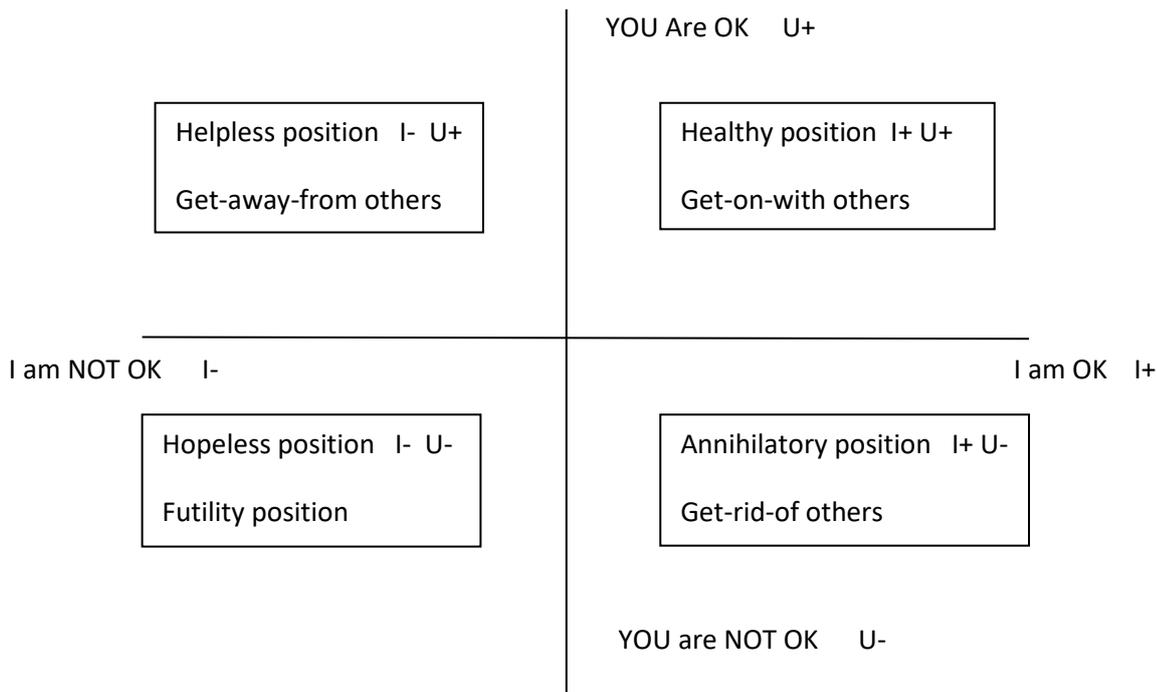
This is my EXISTENTIAL position, because it describes how I experience my existence in the world.

In order to maintain the validity of my original decision, I will need to ignore (DISCOUNT) or reinterpret (REDEFINE) a lot of what is happening to me, in the here-and-now as a grown up, that may contradict this view I have of myself and others. I discount outside of my awareness. I maintain my own particular blinkered view on life, as I have always done, by discounting in my own unique way. By discounting, I do not allow myself to see all the possible ways that are open for me to solve a specific problem. I may convince myself that I cannot solve it, or that only I can solve it, or that no-one can solve it. In doing so, I confirm and reinforce my original existential position.

For instance, Tom is in a restaurant and feeling restless while watching others being served, knowing that they arrived long after him. He does not know at first that he is angry at this point but is becoming restless and agitated. He starts getting hot under the collar. He pretends to himself that he is not bothered (Discount) and that the waiters are very busy this evening. He does not attract attention by calling a waiter and explaining that he has not been tended to since arrival. He does nothing to solve the problem. He imagines that he is

purposely being ignored (Redefine). His anger is turning into righteous indignation. How dare they! By the time a waiter arrives he snaps in a rather aggressive way. Realising the shocked expression on the waiter’s face, to his overreaction, he capitulates and ends up apologising!

Through applying TA, Tom realised that he had entered a game and was left feeling very uncomfortable. By discounting his initial feeling of anger, he did not take appropriate action. He escalated into rage, an annihilistic response rather than a problem solving one. His apology rescued the waiters from the fact that they did not tend to him properly in the first instance.



‘The OK corral’ adapted from work by Franklin Ernst Jnr MD

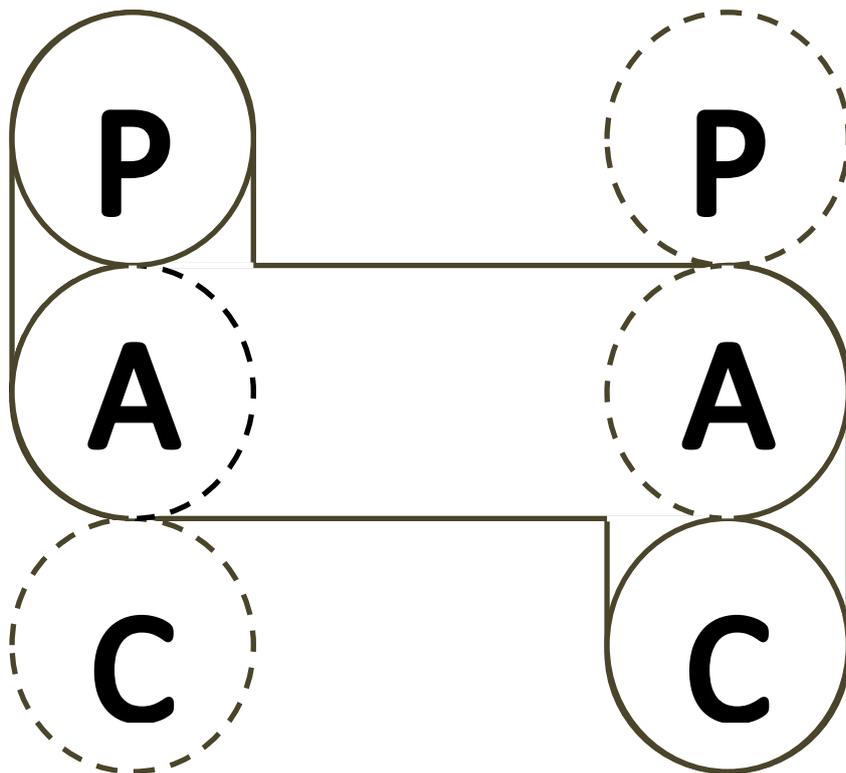
For instance, Tom’s position in the previous example started off as I am NOT OK, You are NOT OK (I-U-) “the waiters are very busy tonight”. It was a hopeless position and he did nothing about the situation...other than to discount and ignore his growing sense of agitation. As he cut off his anger he also cut off his options. He later became aware of the injustice of his situation as other were being served before him. Through redefinition of the problem, he skipped anger and went straight to righteous indignation, a rage response I+U-. When he saw the shocked expression on the waiter’s face he realised he had overreacted and felt ashamed. He had entered the I-U+ quadrant which was his final script position.

The transactional analyst helps the client to become aware of his discounting and to explore options, to allow the solution of problems where the client has become stuck.

Symbiosis:

In our infancy, we make a decision around dependency. To a large extent, this decision is based on how we interpreted our parents’ actions or those who were important to us. We

may for instance have learned that we got a lot of Strokes for being little and needy, or for being grown up and responsible. We may then have decided to be dependent on, or to be dependable for others. For us, this decision determines how we survive in the world. We establish with our parent figures an early SYMBIOSIS (you look after my needs, and I'll look after yours). Later on in life, we attempt to recreate this original symbiosis through psychological games.



A symbiosis is a union of structural ego states so that two or more people function as one. The person on the left contributes their Parent ego state while that on the right contributes their Child ego state. Each also contributes part of their Adult ego state, so that neither has a full Adult ego state available. This loss of Adult by both parties means that neither are fully present in the here-and-now and are in a type of spell or countertransference with each other. When asked a reflective-type question, they are apt to look at one another as if neither understands the question and each expects the other to provide the answer.

In addition to the degradation of the Adult, the person on the left has cut off their Child ego state, while that on the right has cut off their Parent ego state. This means that instead of a total of six ego states being available between them, three have been decommissioned.

Why is this significant? Surely a symbiosis is a useful way of dividing labour – she does the stuff in the kitchen and I entertain the guests. She does the ironing and I cut the grass!

This is not about dividing the chores. It is about HOW we go about making decisions. Do we do it from a Full Adult place each or from a Partial Adult place? In full Adult, I may realise that

I'm opting for doing the grass cutting because I lack ironing skills. In choosing from partial Adult, I'm taking the more comfortable route and so avoid learning how to iron. In doing so I'm maintaining my dependency on my partner and avoid growing up.

In addition to a symbiosis degrading our Adult capacity, it also means sacrificing another ego state each. For instance, the Child ego state of the person on the left may be introverted and withdrawn, while that of the person on the right may be extroverted and expressive. By cutting off the Child to the left, the couple may come across as friendly and fun at parties. However, the person to the left may become depressed and drink too much as their Child receives no strokes, whereas the Child to the right hogs the limelight.

Similarly, the Parent of the person to the left may be responsible and intelligent while that of the person to the right may be irresponsible and dull. The couple may come across as intelligent and responsible but the person on the right may secretly harbour a shame of being uninformed or of harbouring ideas they dare not voice. They may be racist without really realising it or dull because they have never developed their inherited ideas. Once again, the excluded ego state does not receive strokes and the person on the right suffers as a result.

A functional symbiosis is not necessarily unhealthy whereas a structural one is. Just because a couple function by dividing their chores, it does not necessarily indicate that there is a structural symbiosis. A structural symbiosis is indicated by the absence of a full Adult in each and the absence of one other ego state each. A three-legged-race approach to life!

Rackets:

"It reminds me of that old joke- you know, a guy walks into a psychiatrist's office and says, hey doc, my brother's crazy! He thinks he's a chicken. Then the doc says, why don't you turn him in? Then the guy says, I would but I need the eggs. I guess that's how I feel about relationships. They're totally crazy, irrational, and absurd, but we keep going through it because we need the eggs." *Woody Allen in Annie Hall*

Rackets, like that above, exist everywhere. They are based on a superficially plausible statement (social stimulus) such as 'I have a problem.' This social level message is most often seductive. However, they also contain a more powerful message (psychological level stimulus) such as 'I need the problem'.

The psychological level message will most often be coercive. In this case, it is 'I need to have a problem'. The mistake is in trying to take the problem away by solving it! Here the Dr converts the racket into a game by suggesting a solution – we shall return to games later.

In America during the great depression, shopkeepers were subjected to what came to be called protection rackets. They were visited by mobsters who 'offered to protect them', from those who might wish to damage their livelihood, in return for a slice of their profits. Those who refused were later visited by the same mobsters who trashed their shops - 'should have taken the insurance!' The racket is 'You need protection.....*from us*'. In this case the coercive nature of a racket is obvious – 'choose to pay us.....*or we'll make you pay*'

A racket is a self-reinforcing system of feelings, thoughts and actions, designed to maintain a contradiction or ambivalence within it. For instance, an organisation that markets itself successfully with a 'caring' image in the public eye, *whilst mistreating its workforce or suppliers in private*. Or a celebrity marriage that appears happy and committed, *while each partner is secretly having affairs*.

The TA concept of 'sweatshirts' captures this well. A sweatshirt often carries a message on its front. This contains the superficially plausible message. This is what we call the racket. *Yet on its back it contains the psychological level message, often at odds with the former*. Each of us may carry ambivalent messages on our own sweatshirts. The first part of the message is the racket. It is the inauthentic, superficially plausible message; the message on the front of the sweatshirt. The second part (in italics) is its conversion into the game which lies in waiting - the message on the back of the sweatshirt. Here are some examples.

You make me feel miserable.....*make yourself miserable to cheer me up*
If only I had more money/sex/time.....*and even then I'd still feel bad*
You're much cleverer than me.....*I'll show you clever*
We're so happy together.....*we can't stand each other*
Children nowadays have no shame.....*shame I wasn't more carefree in my day*
Little boy lost.....*I just don't want to grow up really*
I don't know what to do about.....*Yes but I'll reject all of your suggestions*
Why don't you?.....*please reject me for giving you advice*
I'm the perfect host.....*I need to keep feeling lonely by keeping you out*
I'm doing it all for you.....*and you don't care about me*
I feel depressed.....*more like raging inside really*
I have a pain in my body.....*and you're it!*
I'm sooo totally in love with you.....*well, myself actually*
Kick me.....*and you'll feel how awful I feel*
Schlemiel (mess maker) I'll mess up.....*and you'll have to forgive me*
Schlemazel (unfortunate) I'll get messed about by you.....*and have to forgive you*
You can depend on me.....*to control you*
I'm committed.....*until I up sticks and run away*
Let's.....*I meant you*
I'm a beautiful princess.....*but you're not a patch on my daddy*
I'm quite a catch.....*but you'll regret the day you caught me*

Rackets often rely on racket feelings. In the case of the shopkeepers in America, the mobsters induced fear. The shopkeepers were more frightened of the mobsters than they were trustful of the law's ability to protect them. Not only were many of the cops and judges corrupt, but many of the shopkeepers were themselves acting outside of the law. In many cases, they relied on the same mobsters to provide cheap, illegal alcohol for them to sell on for a profit. Like the Woody Allen character, the shopkeepers had a problem, yet needed 'the eggs'. Racket feelings are often 'coercive' in nature. Unlike real feelings, they are designed to manipulate the other by making them feel bad.

A coercive feeling attempts to get the other person feeling uncomfortable, since they feel blamed for it. Someone saying, for instance, 'you make me feel miserable' creates a feeling in the other person by blaming them. The other person now feels obliged to sort the problem out for the first: 'I'm sorry...I didn't mean to make you feel bad'. However, it is the second person who now feels bad and is left squirming. The first person has manipulated the second who now feels one-down and is open to doing whatever the first suggests.

A racket that has a seductive quality to it is 'If only...I had more money/a home/ a job etc.' In its genuine form, it is what attracts people to give to charities. People are attracted to offering help to others who are in distress. In its racket form it mimics the distress. However, the distress is not alleviated by any suggestions or offers of help. The need is not met or satisfied. Instead the person remains unsatisfied – a 'poor me, I'm still miserable' racket.

Feelings which can be used for coercive purposes include: Depression, Tears, Rage, Anger, Guilt, Desperation, Anxiety, Helplessness and being Tired, Confused, Scared, and Hurt.

Rackets also involve racket beliefs. For example, a person saying 'you're much cleverer than me' is projecting a belief on another person. This is a set-up. Chances are that they secretly believe that they themselves are superior in some way.

Similarly, a projection can be onto a larger audience. The seemingly happy couple project this 'happy contentment' onto society often producing envy in others who believe they themselves are not as happy with their lot. Very often this is a sham, more energy going into appearing happy than actually being so. Think of Selma and Troy in the Simpsons episode 'A fish called Selma' where Troy says to Selma that even though their marriage is a sham, she will be 'the envy of every other sham wife in town'.

A very common one is to look at the current generation of young people and find fault. The lack of some quality in young people such as shame, often hides our secret wish that we had been allowed similar permissions in our day. Seeing others behave in a carefree way often produces a reaction formation of disapproval in us, based on regret of having missed out.

Sometimes we appear to be needing something when in essence all we need to do is grow up. In 'little boy lost', the person appears to be lost and in need of directions. However, the person is not really after information, instead they demand reassurance from others. This reassurance is that they don't have to grow up because we will intervene when they mess things up.

Linked to 'little boy lost' is the 'I don't know what to do about...'. Racket. It allows the racketeer to experience a secret glee when they triumph in 'yes butting' all suggestions put to them by others.

A complementary racket of 'little boy lost' and 'I don't know...'. is 'Why Don't You?' Here the person believes they can sort out the problems of others. While they relish their problem-solving skills, secretly they are after rejection, because sooner or later their ideas will be trashed.

Resembling 'why don't you?' in it appearing to take care of others is the racket of 'perfect host'. Here the host/hostess takes great care to ensure that everyone is perfectly looked after, their every need met. Secretly, they are lonely (perhaps even resentful that no-one else cares enough about them to look after them in the same way). However, they would never allow themselves to be looked after because they need to remain in control and keep others out, thereby maintaining their loneliness.

The martyr racket involves a person doing far more for another than is necessary or even requested. Having sacrificed so much for the other, the person holds a resentment because they secretly feel unappreciated. This resentment grows with every passing transaction, the person not taking responsibility for themselves and the proper budgeting of their resources.

Often the martyr racket results in anxious depression. Unwilling to take the risk of expressing the growing frustration and resentment, the rage grows. This depression is simply a way of holding down the rage. It may become physiological as so much energy is needed to push down the deeply uncomfortable feelings. This describes the racket of anxious depression not clinical depression which is quite another matter.

With 'I have a pain in my body', the person may appear vulnerable and wanting reassurance. Yet, as opposed to someone with a genuine condition, they seem to get a lot of strokes for their ailment. People can structure a lot of time getting sympathy strokes, yet not do a lot to help themselves. That is because their condition imposes a racket belief that people must react with sympathy; surely only someone who is cold and uncaring would react otherwise? Secretly however, they hold that others are the problem – 'you're the pain in my neck'.

The racket of 'I'm sooo totally in love with you' is very different to a genuine 'I love you'. ISTILWY is grandiose and often experienced in relationships where the person is projecting their ideal image of a lover onto the other person. Often, they haven't known each other for long enough to develop real feelings and what is termed love sounds more like infatuation. This relationship inevitably goes wrong when the 'lover' behaves outside of the projected version and does things that cannot be covered up by discounting and pretence. The person will no longer put up with their professed loved one and starts to look elsewhere for their next 'soul mate' (or 'sole mate' perhaps).

Kick me involves someone saying or doing something that invites another to kick them. In its on-going form, one person get his 'kicks' from being kicked, the other from doing the kicking. It is a form of sado-masochism and is often played sexually, physically or emotionally.

Schlemiel is a racket where one person commits messy acts and says 'I'm sorry'. They expect (demand) forgiveness. For example, the clumsy waiter who keeps dropping food and wine on his customer. In order to be a successful racket, it requires the right customer. If the customer is a schlimazel (unfortunate) they will simply say 'that's ok' each time the waiter messes up. In time, this will convert into a game usually when either the schlimazel gets fed up or the schlemiel escalates to breaking point. The schlimazel will blame the schlemiel who will in turn appear hurt and innocent. The schlimazel will appear to have overreacted and offer an apology, whilst the schlemiel will accept the apology whilst secretly being gleeful. The example of Tom given earlier fits this description.

In 'you can depend on me', the person creates a dependency by not allowing the other to do things for themselves. For instance, a father doing all the DIY and not teaching his son how to do such work. When the son is older, he still needs dad to do the DIY, and the father is controlling the situation by curtailing the son's independence.

The racket of 'I'm committed...' is different to the genuine thing. In a genuine commitment, the person stays with the difficult situation and whatever difficult feelings arise. The commitment is 'for good and for bad, in sickness and in health'. In the racket version, there is a get out clause... 'I'll run away if I get uncomfortable.' Thus, the person avoids growing up by avoiding life's lessons.

In 'Let's...' the person appears to be acting as if they were part of a team. Only later do we discover that they have remained behind and left us to face the world alone. This could take the form of 'Let's... get married/commit suicide/you and him fight etc.' In its racket form, 'Let's...' appears as an activity. Once the switch is pulled it converts into a game.

One day, the Lone Ranger and Tonto were out on patrol when they came to a mountain pass. As they rode through the pass, the Lone Ranger noticed a large number of Indians looking down at them from the ridge above. He looked to the opposite ridge, and found it similarly populated. Glancing ahead and behind, he discovered the pass completely blocked by more Indians.

"Well, Tonto, it looks like we're headed for some trouble," the Lone Ranger said to his faithful companion.

"What do you mean WE, white man?" came the reply.

In 'I'm a beautiful princess...' the woman remains a pampered 'princess'. All she has to do is stay beautiful and be waited on hand and foot. She does not take responsibility for herself or her whimsical nature. When her needs are not met exactly and promptly at that, she may have a tantrum (switch) and compare her partner unfavourably to her perfect 'daddy'

In 'I'm quite a catch...' the initial appearance is deceptive. As the relationship proceeds, the person changes...they may become fat, violent, unpleasant or controlling. The initial presentation was just a front with which to hook the unsuspecting other. If the other person does the 'I'm loyal' racket, they may find it difficult to consider options other than to live a miserable life together.

Before we leave this subject let's look at the bigger world picture. We have experienced a recession generally blamed on the banks. Their racket can be summed up as 'Too big to fail' TBTF. In essence, if enough financiers/banks act recklessly with the public's money, they coerce us into bailing them out. This fairly new racket is about 'privatising the profits whilst socialising the losses'. Few financiers have jumped from buildings as opposed to the great depression!

Likewise, some people borrow money that they cannot afford to pay back. In Berne's day, this game would have been called 'debtor' with its consequent uncomfortable payoff. In a modern world, however, there are so many people engaging in over-borrowing that the rules have needed to be changed. There is now a comparatively easy way out of debt – again TBTF has become part of our modern culture and the traditional uncomfortable feelings of guilt and shame and social disapproval are disappearing.

A Racket is a way of behaving that is 'scripty'. It entails the person feeling a familiar childhood feeling, which is maladaptive as a grown-up means of problem-solving. These feelings are real enough; however, they are the result of us attempting to manipulate reality. Someone needs to end up NOT OK and we might achieve that by choosing to interpret events in certain ways or by setting up situations to justify the same end. **Psychological Rackets are engineered outside of our awareness by our unconscious self** and serve to keep us feeling, believing and behaving as we have historically done.

Those rackets that are consciously engineered are termed manipulations. For example, the salesperson may consciously manipulate us into buying goods by saying "it's the last one in stock." This is not a racket because it is conscious manipulation. It uses the same coercive or seductive techniques, but here the salesperson is consciously manipulating the customer.

Rackets are ways of being that we have grown used to in ourselves and are held unconsciously. We are unlikely to recognise our own rackets until they are pointed out to us by others, often painfully through psychological games.

Each racket is based on a scripty set of beliefs, feelings and behaviours. Feelings of **inadequacy, guilt, depression** and **rage** are racket feelings. They substitute for the real feelings that are buried deep down. Similarly, racket beliefs such as **life's unfair, why me?, I'll never forgive** and **I don't need**, avoid us taking responsibility for ourselves as grown-ups. Rackety behaviour includes **addiction, exhaustion, psychosomatic ailments** and **antisocial acts**.

We learnt our rackets in childhood as we got stroked for rackety ways of being. Very often, real feelings may not have been encouraged or allowed in childhood, e.g. anger, sadness or fear may have been prohibited. Parent figures may not have responded to a child in distress if the child showed anger, or may have reacted inappropriately meeting anger with aggression. The child may then have decided to have another feeling instead, one which the parent-figure would permit. This might have been anxiety or guilt or helplessness.

Sometimes the child learned to engage in rackety behaviour, such as committing antisocial acts instead of expressing vulnerability. For instance, a child may have learned to lie in a culture that punished honesty and rewarded deception. Or they may have learned to steal rather than ask for they wanted, knowing that to take was considered preferable than to ask.

In other instances, the belief system is rackety. It may be that the person believes that all problems can be resolved through hard work (the Try Hard driver). In that case, the individual may believe that if only they engage in hard work their personal problems will resolve

themselves or disappear. Another example is the belief that if we get things perfectly right (the Be Perfect driver) we will do such a perfect job that others will have to stand back and admire. We will not encounter conflict since no-one could possibly complain and have a go at us!

Racket feelings would have covered up the real feelings and because they were stroked, the child would have learned to continue in this way. Similarly racket beliefs and behaviours can be seen as a compromise, decided upon in infancy, in order to ensure the child's survival. As a grown-up, the person is not likely to easily let go of such decisions, making for habits that are difficult to break out of, e.g. substance dependency, anxiety, losing one's temper, running away....

Racket feelings, beliefs and behaviours attempt to mimic the real thing. Thus, the man covered in tattoos may give the impression that he is 'hard' and that others are better off steering clear of him. Yet the mimic may be a man who covers himself in tattoos, yet is sensitive and feels vulnerable. The tattoos serve the purpose of keeping others away.

The feeling of tiredness may bring sympathy from those who believe that the person must have exerted themselves or be under a lot of stress. Yet this presentation may disguise the feelings of rage that may reside within. As others are drawn into helping the 'tired' person, they could be accepting an invitation into a game – 'I'm tired of all you lot trying to help!'

A **real feeling** has a natural, healthy quality about it. Once expressed, the person can get on with his life. On the other hand, a **racket feeling** feels uncomfortably familiar, and tends to linger well after the situation that gave rise has passed. Because racket feelings are a substitute for the real thing, they do not satisfy or complete the experience. A racket is rather like picking at a scab; pain is felt, and another one grows in its place. Some people structure a lot of their time in such a way as to set up their familiar bad feelings. These rackets, whilst unpleasant and disagreeable, may nevertheless be paradoxically 'comfortable' because they are so familiar.

Games and Stamps:

Years ago, I came across a group of parents whose children had severe special needs. They were fervently discussing the fact that the school did not provide their children with a minibus, and that consequently the children were not taken out on trips. 'If only the school had a minibus' was the cry. Naively I stepped in, having procured minibuses in the past from a well-known charity and said 'I know how to get a minibus for free'. Expecting to be greeted with thanks for solving the problem, there was stunned silence. Eventually someone piped up '...But we won't be able to afford a driver' and the conversation assumed its previous fervour. This was an example of a seductive-coercive racket 'the first person to attempt to solve the problem will be rewarded with... a group shun and be left with a sense of 'what an idiot I am'.

Games are an escalation of rackets. Whereas we can engage in rackets on our own... *we need at least one other person to convert them into games.* For instance, 'I'm a beautiful princess...'

or 'little boy lost...' are rackets. They need a second person to convert them to into a game: '*...you're not a patch on my daddy*' or '*...I just don't want to grow up really*'. Like Rackets, 'Games' involve us manipulating reality so as to justify our own existential position. Unlike rackets however, they involve a 'switch' or unexpected twist that often leaves us feeling confused. When the 'switch' is activated, the contradiction or ambivalence is revealed, and the racket is converted into a game. It is this surprise element that intensifies the negative payoff received at the end.

Vann Joines defined a game as "the process of doing something with an ulterior motive that:

- (1) Is outside of Adult awareness
- (2) Does not become explicit until the participants switch the way they are behaving, and
- (3) Results in everyone becoming confused, misunderstood, and wanting to blame the other person."

Games start off with a 'Con', that is, a secret invitation to play. For instance, someone racketeering from a 'Little Boy Lost' position might say something like **"If only I could make up my mind what to do about my...job/house/spouse/children/holiday/life..."**

The secret message is '*I can't think for myself...*'

The second player, in accepting the invitation to play, replies with a 'Gimmick'. This might be something like **"Why don't you?..."** or **"I'll tell you what..."** or **"Give it here."**

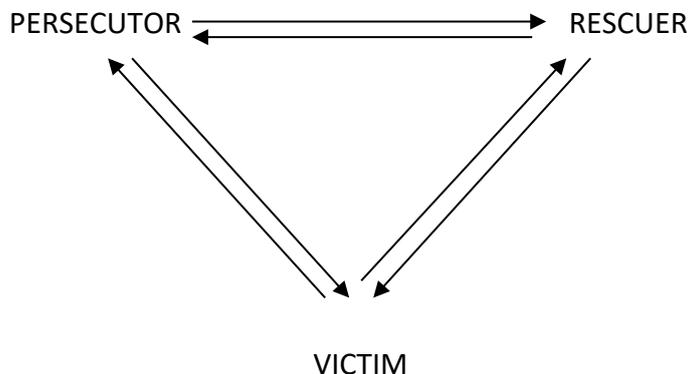
The secret message in this is '*I can do your thinking for you*'.

As long as the two players continue to racket along the lines of '*I can't think for myself ..*' (HELPLESS) and '*I can do your thinking for you*' (HELPFUL), each will be collecting strokes for their eventual payoff. They are in a symbiosis where the first player is excluding their Parent ego state, while the second player is excluding their Child needs. Each receives strokes that maintain their existential position.

However, if either player gets bored or tries to get out of the situation, the other player may pull the 'SWITCH' and turn the racket into a game. For instance, the 'Little Boy Lost' player may decide that he won't be told what to do any more and cross the transaction by saying **'What gives you the right to tell me what to do?' (HURTFUL)**. The other person gets into their '**I feel rejected**' (HURT) position. This stops the rackets and there follows a momentary period of confusion where the real-yet-secret intention of each player is out in the open. At the switch, the messages on the back of the sweatshirts come into play. This painful realisation of a 'trap' brings with it the intense negative payoff that is the hallmark of a 'Game'. The essence of a Game then is to experience intense negative strokes.

Each player then collects a STAMP, which is a bad feeling about self or others, which will serve to justify the person's rackety way of being. The game therefore reinforces our existential position as well as maintaining our original symbiosis. This particular game is sometimes called **'Why don't you....Yes but..'**

In his famous book 'Games People Play', Eric Berne describes how we use games to set up our own favourite bad feelings. Stephen Karpman devised a DRAMA TRIANGLE to describe what happens in a Game. There are three roles in a game - PERSECUTOR, RESCUER and VICTIM.



In a Game, the players take up roles at the start; in this case '**Little Boy Lost**' (Victim), '**Why don't you?**' (Rescuer). When the switch is pulled, the players take up different roles; in this case 'Little Boy Lost' becomes '**NIGYSOB - Now I've Got You Son-of-a-bitch**' (Persecutor). '**Why don't you?**' becomes '**I feel rejected**' or '**I was only trying to help**' (Victim). It is the 'switch' in roles that produces intense negative strokes. Because Games are played outside of awareness, the players experience momentary confusion as they move into their new roles. It is as if neither player had anticipated the (inevitable?) ending and its awaiting payoff.

So, what's in it for the participants and how come all of us succumb to games at some time? Eric Berne famously said "don't ask 'am I in a game?', ask instead 'what game am I in?'" Because games are played outside of our awareness, we are unconsciously on the constant lookout for partners who have complementary rackets. If our stroke balance is low, we may be vulnerable to invitations from others to play. Alternatively, we may be the ones that unknowingly initiate proceedings.

Games leave us with very uncomfortable feelings, often accompanied with very uncomfortable beliefs about ourselves and others, as well as actions that we may well regret. All of these are negative strokes that quickly fill up our stroke account.

Played at a level 1, the strokes may be uncomfortable yet familiar and may fill up the stroke account just enough.

Say someone is playing 'I'm doing 80 mph in the fast lane – catch me if you can' (A form of 'cops and robbers'). The police may be playing the complementary game 'let's scare the stupid ***** - we'll not bother with a speeding ticket because the courts won't likely issue a fine.

In this instance, the motorist is stopped and cautioned by the police. With adrenaline pumping, not knowing what the outcome will be (yet pretty sure that no further action will be taken), the motorist (Persecutor) becomes scared/excited to have been caught. He is now the Victim, being told off by the authority figure. The police have also had their thrill. There

was no point in chasing after a motorist doing 80mph, knowing that they would not likely secure a conviction. Yet the flashing lights, fast car chase has also pumped them with adrenaline. Telling the motorist off has also relieved their boredom and filled their stroke account. The police have moved from the Rescuer to the Persecutor position on the drama triangle.

This is a level one game. The motorist and the police are likely to tell their story to someone else. It makes for good story-telling at parties and is likely to get a laugh and possibly builds up the status. The motorist tempted the dragon and then tamed it, while the police gave chase and then stopped the dragon. In an environment where there is an anti-establishment or anti-authority stance, the motorist can even appear 'sexy' – the one who is 'cool' and is not frightened to break the rules. It is however a masochistic position, where the person puts themselves in harm's way and risks getting hurt.

The police may get strokes for re-establishing authority. Some of the strokes may be sadistic however, since their real intention was to scare the *****motorist, a position more associated with glee than genuine protection.

Yet, if a level one player meets a level two player, things can get more uncomfortable since a game is played at the level of the highest participant.

If say the same motorist doing 80mph encounters a car doing 100mph behind him, he may increase his speed to 100mph instead of moving to the slower lane and letting the other car pass. Both cars are now doing 100mph. The first driver is now in over his comfort zone, but is getting strokes for not letting the other driver past. His adrenaline has kicked in and he is getting strokes for stimulation. However, if he is now caught by the police, he is likely to face a fine and a likely ban on his licence. The strokes have escalated and he may not wish to tell his mates that he cannot drive, because getting caught may make him appear stupid. This is not such a 'sexy' prospect. He has been caught and neutered! The game was played at level two, the level of the driver in the second car. The level two driver may well have spotted the police car from afar and pulled back, avoiding getting caught. After all, they are experts at playing at this level. Thus, the game was played at level 2 and the payoff was far more intense.

At a level three, games are played in a far more intense way, often resulting in tissue damage, ending up in the hospital or morgue.

Thus, our driver encounters a driver doing 130pmh behind him. The driver of the second car is driving dangerously and recklessly and may have either stolen the car or is high on drugs and alcohol. Should our driver attempt to play, he is the one who most likely ends up crashing, since he is not used to this level of game playing. He is likely to end up in hospital, possibly taking others with him, or may end up in the morgue. The driver of the second car may end up escaping prosecution, since the police are having to deal with the scene of carnage left in the wake of this level three game.

This then leaves us with a frightening prospect. We all play games, yet whereas we can decide whether to play or not, we do not determine the level of the game alone. It is determined by

the level of the most dangerous player. What may start off as a titillating encounter may become dangerous, even devastating. Remember Glenn Close in 'Fatal Attraction'?

Can we stop playing games?

Not easily once we're in them, because to step out is to risk triggering the switch leading to the payoff. Thus, unless we take the early payoff of bad feelings, we may remain in the game, building up to a more intense payoff at the end. We may try our hardest to keep the rackets from turning into a game. Yet if one of the participants starts to get bored or believes that the other is about to jump ship, this may be enough to trigger the switch.

Going back to the example of the level two car driver, should he realise that he is doing 100mph and has not given way, he may then decide to move over. The second driver, in going past him, may well indicate that he considers the first driver a 'chicken' or gesture something sexual, a signal that 'you're not really a man after all, are you?' The first driver has not been caught by the police, but is unlikely to boast to his friends. He is not going to get 'sexy' points for pulling out. He has pulled out of a level two game but is experiencing bad feelings. However, he has retained his licence and avoided a fine.

We can become addicted to getting our strokes by playing games. The same driver may, minutes later, return to the 80mph game, hoping to entice a level one player. Giving up old habits is hard work, especially if we remain convinced that ... 'we are not in a game/the bad feelings aren't that bad really/that's life/everyone plays games/I can't stop/I would like to stop but...'

One of the aims of TA is to enable the person to get in touch with their real feelings and to express these in a healthy way. Given the motivation to learn and determination to give up on their script, a person can learn to structure his time so as to produce good strokes for his real feelings. He will then give up the old destructive patterns, replacing them with authentic, satisfying ways of being.

The integrated Adult:

The concept of Life script implies that we are all programmed, to some extent. Childhood experiences, and our own early decisions based on these, lead us to follow a predetermined course in life. Games are the lifeblood of our script – like scenes in a play. To realise our full potential as grown-ups, we need to update the strategies for dealing with life which we decided upon as infants. When we learn that the old strategies are no longer working for us, we need to replace them with new ones which do work. In TA language, we need to move out of script and gain AUTONOMY. It implies the ability to solve problems using the person's full resources as a grown-up, and achieve independence.

TA is not about being constantly in Adult. Having the Adult in charge of every single decision would be exhausting. The aim of TA is to enable the individual to engage the most appropriate ego state at any given moment, be it Adult, Parent or Child. The choice of which is the most appropriate ego state in a given situation is best made by the Adult, since by definition, this

is the part of the individual concerned with the here-and-now. Sometimes it might be quite appropriate for someone to engage their Child or Parent Structural ego state. Someone having fun at a party for instance, might engage their Child ego state and 'let their hair down', much as they did as a teenager. Or at the same party, they might engage their Parent ego state, becoming responsible for ensuring everything runs smoothly, in a way that their parents may have done. Alternatively, if they had to be serious and responsible in their childhood, their Child ego state might be serious and their Parent ego state, carefree. Ideally, the Adult ego state would seek to balance the needs of oneself with those of others, so that C and P are engaged appropriately. For instance, at a party a person might experience fun and be care free, while also being available to take appropriate action should there be a need to deal with a serious matter.

The Adult needs to be able to distinguish between what is beneficial to the individual, and what is a racket. The idea of having the integrated Adult in charge sums up the eventual aim of TA. That is, Adult ego state that has access to the beneficial parts of both Child and Parent ego states. Therapy involves updating Child and Parent ego states, so that the old data is filed away and replaced by redecided information. Muriel no longer throws a tantrum when things don't go her way. Instead she has learnt how to be assertive. John no longer pushes people away with homophobic rants. He has accepted that sexual identity comes in many forms and varieties. The old information has not been destroyed, simply stored away and deattached.

With the integrated Adult in charge, the person is able to problem solve in the here-and-now, and respond rather than react to situations. TA psychotherapy aims to mobilise the resources already present within the person, enabling him to make the behavioural changes he wants to make, thus allowing him to become the person he has the potential to be.