7

Transactional analysis

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this chapter is transactional analysis and its use in the context of counselling and therapy. Transactional analysis is a psychoanalytically inspired approach which links problem behaviour to early experience. According to the theory, this early experience exerts considerable influence in the present and is discernible in the 'ego states' each person feels and exhibits at any given time. In the course of this chapter we shall define and discuss these ego states, and we shall consider a number of other important concepts which are central to the theory of transactional analysis.

The approach also highlights each person's aptitude and capacity for change. This means, for example, that through awareness and insight, the events of early childhood can be redefined by the individual and self-defeating patterns of behaviour altered. These ideas are similar to those expressed in psychodynamic theory, where the emphasis is also on childhood experience and the possibility of change through therapeutic intervention in later life.

The goals of psychodynamic counselling and transactional analysis have much in common, since both aim to help clients bring unconscious material into consciousness. In transactional analysis terms this means helping clients to become more autonomous and 'script' free. A similar view is implicit in the person-centred approach where the individual's 'actualising tendency' is seen as a powerful force for improvement and change. However, transactional analysis differs greatly from both the psychodynamic and humanistic approaches since it stresses the importance of social transactions – a dimension not emphasised by the other two.

Eric Berne (1910–1970)

Eric Berne, who was the founder of transactional analysis, completed his medical training in 1935 and later studied psychiatry at Yale University. In the 1940s he trained as a psychoanalyst at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, and in 1956 applied for membership there. This request was refused, possibly because of Berne's divergence from, and criticism of, traditional Freudian teaching.

Berne was greatly influenced by his father (also a doctor) who died when his

son Eric was eleven years old. This early bereavement had a lasting effect on Berne and when he came to formulate his own method of helping the patients in his care he dedicated his most important work to the memory of his father (Berne, 1961). It is worth mentioning this, because it serves to underline a degree of commitment to patients (or clients) which Berne shared with his father, a man who exemplified dedication to the poor and disadvantaged. Berne demonstrated his own concern for the patients in his care through the design and use of transactional analysis. As a method of communication, and as a psychotherapeutic tool, it was meant to translate complex ideas and concepts into more accessible and user-friendly language which could be understood by ordinary people. In addition to his work with patients, Eric Berne also wrote several very successful books. These include *Transactional Analysis In Psychotherapy* (1961), *Games People Play* (1964), *The Principles Of Group Treatment* (1966) and *What Do You Say After You Say Hello?* (1972) which was published after his death. The principles of transactional analysis are expressed very clearly in these books, and should be first choice for anyone wishing to specialise in this approach.

Terminology

Already we can see that the terminology used in transactional analysis is quite different from that used in any other approach. This is both a strength and a weakness of the model, because although the language is memorable and accessible, it is also regarded by some critics as simplistic and superficial. Berne was concerned to demystify the esoteric language of psychotherapy so that it could be grasped by anyone. He was especially interested in helping his patients to understand the basic principles of the approach and the origins of the psychological problems which they had come to experience. In this respect Berne was certainly successful, not least because transactional analysis does appear to help clients and patients to participate more fully in their own therapy. Since its inception, however, Berne's model has been extended considerably by different schools and theorists, and new and more complex ideas have been added to it. While the fundamental principles of transactional analysis remains intact, the accessibility which Berne valued so much is often obscured.

Apart from these criticisms, however, transactional analysis continues to gain popularity, not only as a theoretical approach to counselling and therapy but also as a communications skills model which is used extensively in education, management, industry, health care and many of the caring professions. The International Transactional Analysis Association (ITAA) was formed in 1964 as a training and accreditation body, while the European Association for Transactional Analysis (EATA) performs a similar function. Many of the people who become involved in transactional analysis do so because they are interested in it as a communications

model. It is important to remember this fact, since it highlights the point that transactional analysis is first and foremost about the development of effective interpersonal skills.

Groupwork

Transactional analysis therapy usually takes place in a group setting. Berne believed that many problems could be addressed more readily in groups, since such a format lends itself to the identification and analysis of faulty social interactions and communication styles. He himself had gained a great deal of experience of groupwork in the 1940s while working as a psychiatrist in the United States Army Corps, and he set up the first transactional analysis group in 1954. Invaluable information about the way people relate to each other is readily available when clients work together in groups. Each participant is afforded the opportunity to monitor and perhaps change the interactive styles they habitually use. As we shall see, Berne formulated his user-friendly theory of personality in a way which seems to owe something to Freud's concept of Id, Ego and Superego, although Berne did point out that his concept of personality was different in the sense that his ego states represent 'phenomological realities' (Berne, 1961). In simple terms, this means that the three ego states are real and observable, whereas the parts of personality which Freud described were not always clearly seen in this way. Group participants can, therefore, learn about personal styles of social interaction and any problems associated with these, while at the same time becoming aware of the intent behind their ways of relating to others.

Ego states

An idea fundamental to transactional analysis is that of ego states. Berne suggested that human personality is made up of three elements which he referred to as Parent, Adult and Child. These familiar words were used by him to describe states of 'self' or states of mind which he believed gave rise to their own individual patterns of behaviour. In transactional analysis Parent, Adult and Child are always spelt with capital letters in order to distinguish between their usual meaning and that which Berne assigned to them. Ego states are, of course, common to all of us and govern our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. In any given situation an individual will exhibit a certain pattern of behaviour which corresponds to the way that person is actually feeling at the time. As feelings change, so also do the patterns of behaviour which the person displays. As a result of his experience with groups, Berne observed that these patterns included noticeable changes in voice, posture, vocabulary, viewpoint 'and other aspects of behaviour' (Berne, 1964). The principles of transactional
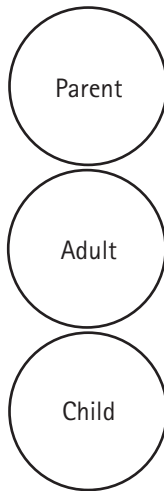
Figure 7.1 Structural diagram of personality

analysis are illustrated in diagrammatic form, the most basic of which is the structural diagram illustrated in Figure 7.1.

Each of these states, Parent, Adult and Child, is present from early childhood, and all are described by Berne as 'psychological realities' (Berne, 1964). In the structural diagram Figure 7.1, the ego states are separated from each other because they are incompatible and differ considerably.

Parent ego state

The Parent ego state represents a set of thoughts, feelings and behaviour which are derived from parental figures. According to Berne (1964) the Parent ego state is exhibited in both indirect and direct form. A person may, for example, respond as one of his parents actually responded in a given situation. When this occurs, the ego state is directly shown. When the parental influence is an indirect one, then the person is likely to respond as his parents would have wished him to respond. A distinction between these two forms is important, and explains how:

1 people can sometimes 'become' one of their own parents when the Parent ego state is directly active, and
2 how people exhibit the kind of response which parents required in the past.

A client called Viv recounted the following experience.

CASE STUDY Parent ego state

Sometimes I feel that the children are driving me crazy. Most of the time I cope quite well, and my husband is supportive and helpful. At other times, especially when I have just got in from work, I simply don't know where to start. Then I find myself getting into a panic and I start to shout at them. When this happened to me yesterday I suddenly realised that I sounded exactly like my mother. It wasn't just the tone of my voice … it was the words as well. I actually used the word 'weary' as she used to do, and later on I used another expression of hers as well. I'm sure I looked like her too, standing there with my hands on my hips glaring at the children. It pulled me up short and made me really think … do I want to become old before my time and end up hassled and bad tempered the way she always seemed to be?

COMMENTARY In the example just given, the client described a situation in which she felt she had 'become' her own mother in her response to her children. Her actions and her state of mind were the same as her mother's used to be in a similar situation. It is important to point out here that the word Parent refers to parental substitutes as well as to actual parents, and could include, for example, teachers and others who exerted influence on a person's early life.

Do as I say: Indirect Parent

The second category of Parent which Berne identifies actually operates in conjunction with a person's Child ego state. Stewart (1992) describes this as an 'internal dialogue' taking place between ego states. When a person responds in this way, the parental 'influence' is evident. Another way of saying this is that the response shown is one which clearly stems from the instruction 'this is how one should behave' or 'do as I say'. This adaptation to parental influence is evidence in the 'adapted Child' ego state which we shall consider later in this section.

Aspects of socialisation

Whether shown in direct or indirect form, the Parent ego state resembles a compendium of the entire socialisation process which each person has received in early life. This early socialisation is passed from parents, teachers and other significant people in childhood, and is usually absorbed without question by the growing child. However, it is not just parental pronouncements and injunctions which are recorded in this way; the example which parents and other significant people give is also relevant here. Both negative and positive influences are recorded in the Parent ego state, and everything which is experienced by the child is internalised to become part of the personality. Once again Berne's psychoanalytic training is evident in his theory, since the idea of parental internalisation is common to all branches of psychodynamic teaching, including object relations theory.

There is an important point of difference, however, between Berne's theory of personality and those described by the various branches of psychodynamic theory. This difference concerns the 'paternal' influence which, in Berne's formulation, is potentially just as influential as the

CASE STUDY Paternal influence

During bereavement counselling, a client called Kavita remembered her experiences in childhood and her relationship with her father, which she described as follows:

My mother was talkative and outgoing. She was the one who seemed to have an opinion about everything. I can see many aspects of my mother in myself, but I can identify characteristics of my father too. When he came to this country he concentrated on working hard, setting up a business and working virtually non stop from early morning to late at night. I only really started to think about him after he died, and to appreciate all that he did for the family. Though I can't remember him directly influencing me when I was a child, I know now that his unspoken influence was immense. I have absorbed his attitude to work and to family, and I am very grateful now for the many positive messages he conveyed to me.

'maternal'. If we consider the theories discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 it is clear that such an equal emphasis is absent from many of the psychodynamic approaches. In transactional analysis, therefore, both parents are believed to impart information explicitly and implicitly to the developing child's Parent ego state.

Information from the past

Information which is recorded in the Parent ego state enables us to cope with all aspects of living. It also provides all the data necessary to enable people to function as parents themselves and raise their own children. Another significant aspect of the Parent ego state is that it enables people to respond automatically in many situations, so that many 'routine matters' as Berne describes them can be dealt with without unnecessary expenditure of energy (Berne, 1964). Problems arise, though, when the Parent ego state is inappropriate or counter-productive in a given situation. One example of this is the bank cashier who adopts a certain 'superior' stance in relation to the account holders she is meant to serve. Her critical parental attitude is likely to stem from a childhood in which attitudes to money (and especially those who borrow it) are fraught with ambiguity and moral disapproval. In the present situation, however, the bank cashier's Parent ego state is liable to cause problems, since it is sure to encourage a 'Child' response from the customer and an end to real productive communication.

Berne (1972) elaborated on his structural diagram of personality, so that the Parent ego state is now commonly divided into 'Nurturing Parent' and 'Critical' or 'Controlling' Parent – see Figure 7.2. This diagram also illustrates the subdivision of the Child ego state into 'Free' or 'Rebellious' Child, and 'Adapted' Child.
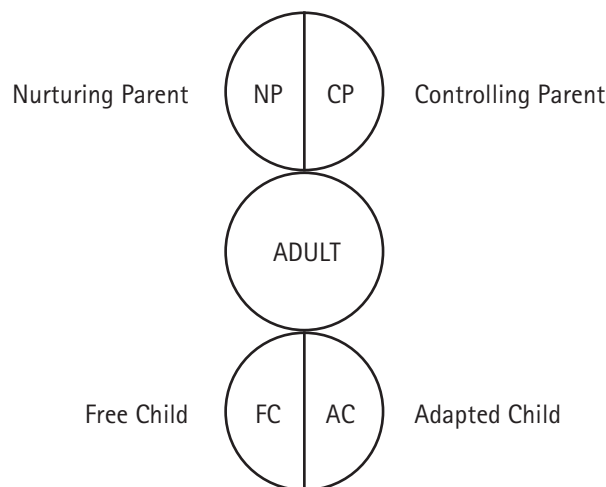

Figure 7.2 Descriptive diagram of personality

Nurturing Parent and Controlling Parent

The terms 'Nurturing Parent' and 'Controlling Parent' refer to two different sets of influence which are absorbed in early childhood and are clearly distinguishable from each other when they are manifest. Berne originally used the word 'prejudicial' instead of controlling to describe the second form in which the Parent ego state is exhibited (Berne, 1961). However, both these words, 'Controlling' and 'Prejudicial', are meant to denote arbitrary and prohibitive attitudes which are borrowed from parental figures and are usually exhibited automatically and without question in certain situations. The example of the bank cashier is a case in point here, and serves to illustrate the way in which some people respond to particular situations exactly as a parent or parents would have done. The 'Nurturing Parent' ego state is shown in a completely different way, and is usually manifest as sympathy or support for others in need or distress. It is important to remember that children are also capable of responding in all three ego states, and when they are in 'Nurturing Parent' it tends to be demonstrated as concern for someone or something smaller, weaker and more vulnerable, including toys and dolls.

> ### EXERCISE
>
> **Parent ego state**
> Working individually, try to identify as many situations as possible where you respond in a Parent ego state. How do you think, feel and act when you respond in this way? Think carefully about your tone of voice, your gestures, your facial expressions and any other observable features which are manifest in your Parent ego state.

> ### EXERCISE
>
> **Nurturing Parent and Controlling Parent**
> Working individually, identify any situations where other people responded to you as either 'Controlling Parent' or 'Nurturing Parent'. How did these people sound and look when they responded to you in these two ego states? How did each style of communication affect you, and how did you respond to each?

Child ego state

While information is being recorded in the Parent ego state, another recording is taking place simultaneously. This second recording also derives from the past and represents a young child's actual reactions to what is going on in the environment. Later on in adult life the Child ego state is evident when the emotions which the original situation produced are felt once again. Harris (1967) makes the point that a young child has no vocabulary in the critical early years, so most experience is recorded as 'feelings'. These feelings responses can be evoked at any time in adult life, and often the individual concerned is unaware that the response is an archaic one. The following is an example of this.

CASE STUDY Child ego state

Gwyneth, who was in her early forties, received counselling because she was unable to cope at work. Her problems arose when she had to deal with complaints from staff or customers, or when any situation arose in which there was conflict. When things became difficult, Gwyneth either felt angry and defensive or extremely tearful. She was aware that her responses were inappropriate, but was unable to modify the strong feelings which certain people and situations evoked. In the course of counselling she revealed that her parents had been habitually critical, so that she reached a point in her childhood where she despaired of ever pleasing them. Her transferential responses to staff and customers was an exact replica of the way she responded to parental criticism in the past. When she understood this Gwyneth was in a position to alter her responses and access her Adult ego state when conflict or disagreement arose. This was not something she achieved immediately, however. Understanding and practice are necessary before long established ways of responding are changed in this way. Gwyneth's counsellor taught her the basic principles of transactional analysis and showed her how 'complementary' and 'crossed' transactions work in practice (see also Figures 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5).

Adapted Child and Free Child

We have seen that the Child ego state is preserved from childhood, so that a person functioning in this way behaves as he or she did at a very early age. Like the Parent ego state, the Child is demonstrated in speech, stance, demeanour and overall appearance. In addition to these outward signs and behaviour, there are what Steiner (1974) refers to as accompanying 'perceptions, thoughts and feelings' which correspond to the visible indicators. In referring to the Child ego state, Berne stressed that it was not intended to mean 'childish' or 'immature' (Berne, 1961). Berne was aware of the danger that his terminology could be misinter-preted and used in a disparaging way. In his early writing he uses the terms 'Adapted' and 'Natural' Child to describe the two broad manifes-tations of that particular ego state, though the word 'Free' is now often substituted for 'Natural'.

Adapted Child

In the section entitled 'Do as I say' we looked briefly at how people adapt to parental influence, and the way in which this adaptation is revealed through the Child ego state in adult life.

The person who is functioning in Adapted Child will demonstrate behaviour meant to conform to the expectations of parents and parental

figures. Different parents have different expectations, however, and behaviours which please one will not necessarily please the other. This means that people learn to respond or adapt to both parents, and in later life these responses will be triggered in situations which are reminiscent of earlier ones. A young woman who has received poor grades in college assignments, for example, might respond to a male lecturer by becoming silent and withdrawn since that was the way she responded to her father's disapproval when she was a child. A woman teacher might, on the other hand, evoke a different, perhaps more combative response, which stems from the relationship the student had with her mother. The point to make here is that both these 'adapted' responses are outmoded and archaic, because in each case the student is communicating in the way that she would have done at a much earlier time with the important people in her life. The Adult ego state, which we shall consider later, represents a much more effective way of communicating.

Free Child

The Free Child ego state is the source of strong feelings and can be classified as either positive or negative. Spontaneous expressions of joy, anger, sorrow and a sense of fun are characteristic of Free Child. These are all feelings which have escaped the inhibiting influence of parents, but when they are expressed inappropriately these uncensored impulses can be problematic. On the other hand, positive Free Child ego states are often observed in social situations or contexts where such expressions are permitted. Steiner (1974) lists sports events and parties as examples of structured situations in which the Free Child ego state is given unlimited opportunity for expression. Apart from aspects of behaviour which can be identified with Free Child, there are also words and phrases like 'super' and 'wow', for example, which are associated with it.

Adult ego state

The Adult ego state denotes the feelings, attitudes and behaviour patterns which belong exclusively to the individual, and which are in touch with current reality and relationships in the present. Once again it is possible to detect similarities between Berne's description of personality and aspects of psychodynamic theory, since the Adult ego state appears to have much in common with the Freudian concept of the Ego. Like the Ego, the Adult ego state represents reason and common sense. It is that part of the personality which can truly be described as autonomous and free from parental influence, or strong feelings emanating from the Child ego state. The Adult ego state is characterised by objective, logical thinking, and an ability to make independent judgements and decisions in any situation. Experiences gained throughout life are examined and used by the individual when in Adult ego state, so that realistic choices can be freely made. Every so often the material which is stored in the

Adult ego state is re-assessed and updated, in order to keep in touch with changing circumstances and needs. Children too have an Adult ego state, which represents that part of personality which has absorbed and tested information passed to them from parents and other significant people. The central concern for the Adult ego state is the development of individual autonomy and the ability to make informed and realistic decisions on one's own.

EXERCISE

Looking at ego states

Working individually, look at the responses given to the situations described. Say whether you think these responses come from each person's Parent, Adult or Child ego states.

1 Helen has been asked by her manager to work extra hours at the weekend. She asks for some time to consider the situation. Next day she replies that she has given it some thought and is willing to do the overtime.

2 Bruce has been admitted to hospital for an operation. He is approached by a doctor who wishes to carry out some diagnostic procedures which Bruce does not understand. Instead of asking, however, he keeps silent and worries for the rest of the day.

3 Catherine has just learned that she has not got the promotion she hoped for. She has a confrontation with her boss and finds herself becoming angry and tearful.

4 Joanne and Lyn are friends and attend the same university. Joanne has a row with her boyfriend and Lyn responds in the following way:

  'He's not worth it. I never thought he was good enough for you. To be quite honest, I thought you were wasting your time.'

5 Phil and Simon are friends who share the same office at work. Phil's girlfriend breaks off their relationship and Simon responds in the following way:

  'Look, I know you must be feeling rotten. If you like, I'll clear up those files for you and you could leave a bit early.'

6 Karen's husband asks her to consider changing their next year's holiday plans. They had planned a sightseeing holiday, including visits to the local art galleries and museums. He suggests they need a more relaxing break. Karen responds by pointing out that they had both resolved to improve their knowledge of art and anyway, she has better things to do than waste time on the beach.

7 Mrs Rae is an eighty-year-old resident in a nursing home. One of the attendants asks her if she would like to go out for a walk since the day is warm and sunny. Mrs Rae is enthusiastic about the suggestion, and adds that she wouldn't mind paddling at the local beach as well.

8 James, who is eight, has been told by his parents that he must not play in the sun without wearing sunscreen lotion. He replies that he knows not to do this because he got burned on holiday last year.

9 Carolyn's mother has asked her to visit home more often. Carolyn, who is twenty and sharing an apartment with some friends, replies that her mother needs to get out and about more so that she can have a life of her own.

10 The manager of a small firm is concerned that her secretary is repeatedly late for

EXERCISE

work. The manager, Mrs Burrows, waits until her irritation is under control then makes an appointment to speak to her secretary. She expresses her concern and asks for an explanation.

Answers

It should be stressed that it is not possible to be totally accurate about the correct answers to this questionnaire. This is because so much depends on the manner and tone of voice of the person responding in each case. However, from the evidence given, the answers are shown at the end of this chapter.

Application to counselling

Berne's main objective in formulating transactional analysis was that it should provide a frame of reference for helping clients in therapy. He developed his theories as a result of working directly with patients, whose behavioural changes he observed and then identified in the ego state model. The behavioural changes he noted included alterations in voice tone, gesture, choice of words, facial expression, posture, body movement and even sentence construction (James and Jongeward, 1971). Berne was intrigued by this phenomenon, and observed that people seemed to be governed by different 'inner' personalities whose influences were manifest at different times and according to circumstances. He also observed that people communicated in a variety of ways, depending on the ego state which dominated the personality at any given time. These 'transactions', as he called them, could be analysed in order to help people identify some of the problems they experienced in communicating with others. Transactional analysis, therefore, is meant to help clients gain intellectual insight through analysis of the way they relate to other people. It is concerned with four major areas of analysis:

- structural analysis – this is the analysis of individual personality or ego states
- transactional analysis – refers to the analysis of communication styles or social behaviour
- game analysis – this is analysis of the psychological games which people play
- script analysis – analysis of a complex set of transactions which people act out compulsively.

Structural analysis

We have considered Berne's structure of personality which was shown in diagram form (see Figure 7.1). Berne believed that structural analysis

should always come before transactional analysis, and can be taught to clients in either group or individual settings (Berne, 1961). It is important for clients to understand the ego state model before they can move on to consider the way they conduct transactions with other people.

Transactions

While structural analysis refers to the individual, analysis of transactions refers to social behaviour. The word 'stroking' is used by Berne to describe the social exchanges which take place between people. Stroking implies recognition of another person and is defined by Berne as 'the fundamental unit of social action' (Berne, 1964). Any exchange of strokes is called a 'transaction' and is the basic unit of social interaction. We exchange strokes through verbal greetings, non-verbal recognition, touching, kissing, hugging and so on. According to Berne, strokes are a necessary and integral part of human interaction, and we all need them even when they are negative. Children will, for example, seek recognition from parental or other important figures, and when positive recognition is not forthcoming negative strokes are seen as preferable to none at all. When patterns like this are established in early life, it may take some time for people to change them. Transactional analysis counselling is one way in which clients can learn to change the way they communicate with, and seek approval and recognition from, other people.

Complementary transactions

People communicate with others from either the Parent, Adult or Child ego state. The person making the response will also do so from either of the three ego states. A complementary transaction will take place when, for example, one person addresses another from the Adult ego state, and the second person replies from Adult (see Figure 7.3).

STIMULUS: Have you seen my glasses?
                 (Adult to Adult)
RESPONSE: Yes, they're on the dining room table.
                 (Adult to Adult)

Berne illustrated his theory of transactional analysis in diagram form in order to make it easier to understand. He also stressed the point that when transactions remain complementary, communication proceeds indefinitely. Complementary transactions don't just take place between Adult to Adult ego states. Berne (1972) identifies nine possible types of complementary transactions, in which the responses given were those which the question or stimulus intended. Figure 7.4 is an example of one.

STIMULUS: Isn't it dreadful how long it takes to get through these
                 checkouts?
                 (Parent to Parent)

RESPONSE: Yes, it's disgraceful. They should have more staff.
(Parent to Parent)

The following is another example of a complementary transaction, this time Parent to Child. Figure 7.5 illustrates this.

STIMULUS: That's twice this week you've kept me waiting.
(Parent to Child)
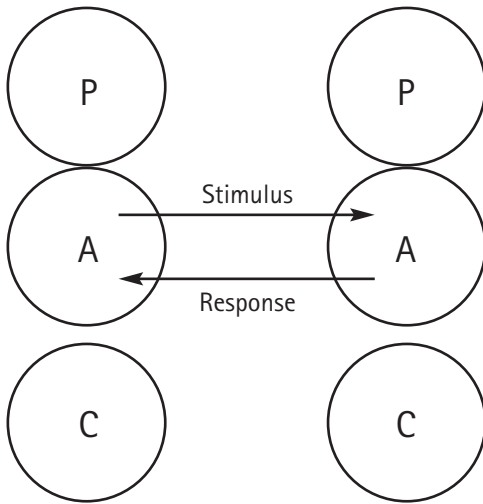**RESPONSE:**   I'm sorry to be such a nuisance.
(Child to Parent)

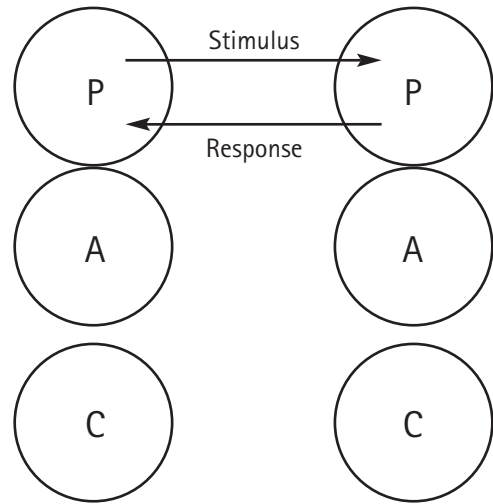
Figure 7.3 Complementary transaction

Figure 7.4 Complementary transaction

Crossed transactions

A crossed transaction occurs when the response given is not the one which the stimulus intended. When such a situation arises, communication tends to break down. Figure 7.6 illustrates this.

STIMULUS: Have you seen my glasses?
(Adult to Adult)
RESPONSE: Oh you haven't lost them again!
(Parent to Child)

The response to the question 'Have you seen my glasses' might have been given from a Child ego state as follows:

STIMULUS: Have you seen my glasses?
(Adult to Adult)
RESPONSE: You can't expect me to look after your things.
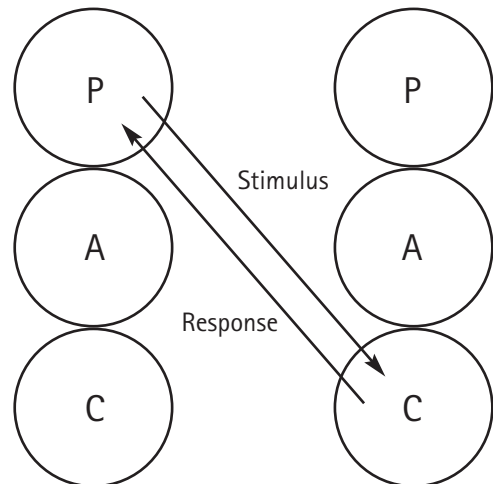(Child to Parent)

Figure 7.5 Complementary transaction

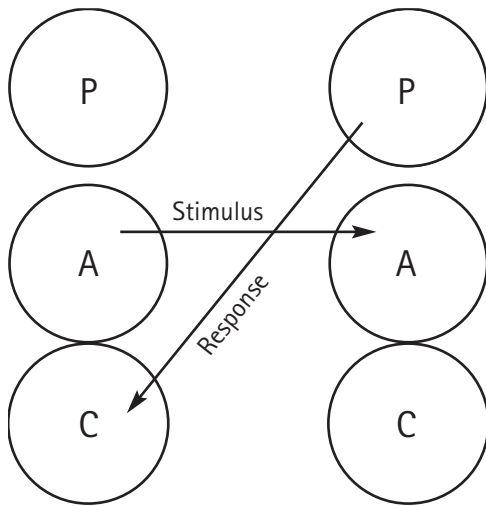Once again this is illustrated in diagrammatic form (see Figure 7.7).

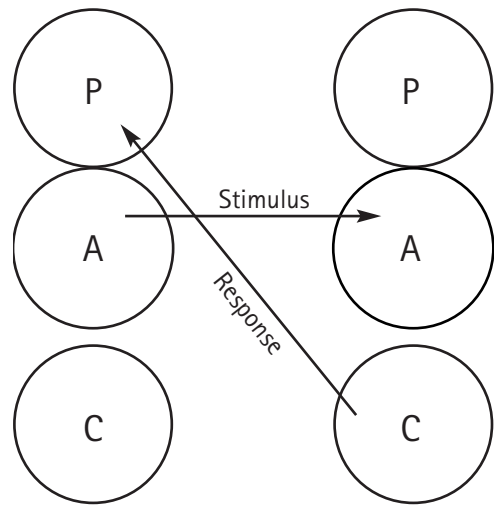**Figure 7.6** Crossed transaction

Figure 7.7 Crossed transaction

Ulterior transactions

Both complementary and crossed transactions are relatively simple and operate on one level. However, Berne describes another, more compli-cated, transaction which operates on two levels and conveys a double set of messages. These are referred to as 'ulterior' transactions because they contain a hidden agenda. Another way of stating this is to say that one of the messages occurs at a psychological level, while the other takes place at a social level. The psychological aspect of the transaction is conveyed subtly, and is often picked up via non-verbal clues. It is by far the stronger of the two messages and dominates the social message which is conveyed verbally. Ulterior transactions are frequently contained in exchanges between people who wish to become more intimate and are wary of stating their intentions openly. However, they are also common in many other situations. Figure 7.8 illustrates this. The following is an example.

PATIENT:	My back is less painful, although it does tend to play up when I'm sitting at my desk.
	(Adult to Adult)
DOCTOR:	Certain situations make it worse for you.
	(Adult to Adult)

On the surface this is a straightforward transaction between two people who are discussing a medical condition. At a psychological level, however, the transaction is likely to be more complex, with a subtle testing of responses taking place on both sides. Depending on voice tone, body language and other non-verbal clues, the ulterior message may be as follows:

PATIENT:	I'm not ready to go back to work and I need your help. (Child to Parent)
DOCTOR:	I'll take care of you and give you extra time. (Parent to Child)

EXERCISE

Ulterior transactions

Working individually, identify any ulterior transactions you have experienced either at work or at home. Illustrate these in diagram form and discuss the way they work with other members of the training group. Are there some transactions which are common to a number of people in the group?
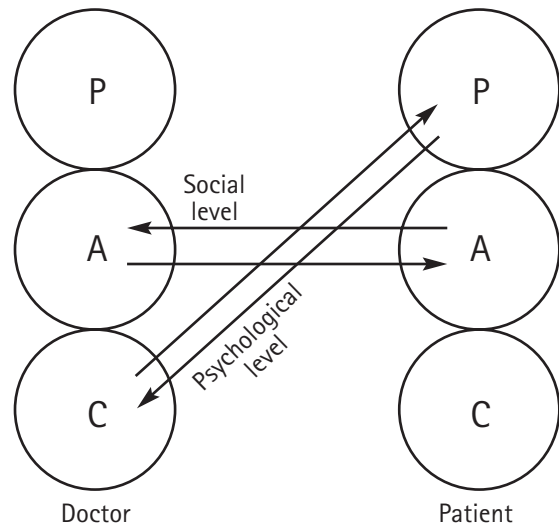

Figure 7.8 Ulterior transaction

Game analysis

Berne (1964) defines the psychological games which people play as follows:

- they are extensions of ulterior transactions
- they progress to an expected and definite outcome
- superficially, they appear to be straightforward transactions
- what is said is not what is felt
- all games have some common elements, including a hidden agenda and a negative payoff.

Berne also makes a useful distinction between an 'operation' – a simple transaction or transactions set in motion for a specific purpose – and a game – a dishonest 'manoeuvre' (Berne, 1964). If someone asks for help and gets it, for example, then that is an operation. If, on the other hand, the person who gives the help is adversely affected in doing so, then that is a game. The following is an example of a game.

CASE STUDY Mr Phillips

Mr Phillips was a thirty-six-year-old man who had been out of work for several years. He had a number of minor health problems which meant that he had visited his doctor on many occasions. However, his GP had some difficulty in persuading Mr Phillips that he had no serious health problems, an assessment which was confirmed by the many diagnostic

CASE STUDY continued

procedures which had been carried out. Mr Phillips had also visited several alternative practitioners, all of whom he described as 'hopeless' and incapable of giving him the help he needed. At a later date he requested counselling and during his first sessions informed his counsellor that no one had been able to help him so far. The counsellor observed that Mr Phillips smiled as he described all the failed attempts to understand and assist him. Nevertheless, she worked with him over a period of ten weeks, and during that time was able to help him identify the game he was playing over and over again, and the payoff he received on each occasion.

COMMENTARY We can see that Mr Phillips was receiving a great deal of attention as a result of his repeated visits to helpers. Gaining attention in this way was a continuation of the strategy he had employed as a small child. However, the kind of attention this client received effectively prevented him from achieving any real intimacy in relation to other people. In transactional analysis terms, games are designed to confirm and support the original decisions which people make in early life about the best way to relate to others. As far as Mr Phillips was concerned, real intimacy was fraught with danger. This was a lesson he had learned in childhood, at the hands of neglectful and often abusive parents. In response to these early events, he had devised his own method of gaining the 'strokes' or recognition he desperately needed. As a result, he was also able to experience the familiar, and what Berne (1972) referred to as 'racket', feelings of hurt and satisfaction associated with his own special game. The fact that he was sabotaging his own best interests did not occur to him. In the chapters dealing with psychodynamic approaches to counselling, we noted that Freud (and other Freudian theorists) believed that people frequently repeat early patterns of behaviour in an unconscious and repetitive way. This idea is taken up by Berne and is integral to his theory of games and life scripts.

Scripts

The theory of life scripts has a central place in transactional analysis. Berne (1961) defines a script as a 'preconscious life plan' to which people construct their activities, lives and relationships. According to this theory, fundamental decisions about an individual's entire lifespan are formu‑lated at a very early age. Scripts are based on parental conditioning and influence, and they come under two headings or categories, 'winning' and 'losing' (Berne, 1972). These script types are closely associated with another transactional analysis concept – the OK positions. The

OK positions represent a variety of convictions which people adopt and adhere to from childhood through life. There are four basic OK positions from which games and scripts originate. They are as follows:

- I'm OK − You're OK
- I'm OK − You're not OK
- I'm not OK − You're OK
- I'm not OK − You're not OK.

What the positions mean

The first position is the most positive one, and is based on the conviction that every person has worth and value. An infant who is loved and cared for is likely to imbibe feelings of goodness which, if the quality of care continues, will last a lifetime. Feelings of goodness about 'self' are then translated into feelings of goodness about other people too. Once again it is possible to detect echoes of psychodynamic theory, in particular object relations theory, in Berne's ideas. Unfortunately, problems tend to arise in later childhood when the parents and others become more critical and demanding. When this happens the I'm OK − You're OK position of an earlier era may be questioned, and the original conviction of worth may then be lost.

Some fortunate people retain the I'm OK − You're OK position throughout life, but the majority of others probably fall into the depressive I'm not OK − You're OK group. This is because so much learning has to be done in childhood and so many obstacles have to be overcome. Negative feedback is often given by parents and in extreme cases they may even be abusive or neglectful.

When this last situation occurs, some children respond by adopting the I'm not OK − You're not OK 'futility' position. Another group of people, those who are arrogant and distrustful of others, will slot into the I'm OK − You're not OK 'paranoid' position. An important point to make in relation to OK positions is that it is possible for all of us to move from one to the other at different stages of life depending on changing circumstances. However, a fundamental I'm OK − You're OK position which is established in childhood is never totally obscured, even in the most adverse conditions of life.

Focus on counselling

Achieving the I'm OK − You're OK position often requires a conscious decision (and some effort) in adult life. People who do achieve it tend to respect themselves and all those other people with whom they are in contact. In his writing Berne makes it quite clear that personal change cannot simply be effected by external circumstances, but must come from within the individual.

An important objective in counselling is to help clients identify and use their own resources so that therapeutic change becomes

EXERCISE

Life positions

Working either individually or as a group, look at the four life positions listed below and identify any situations in your own life when you experienced each of them. What were the circumstances in each case and how did you resolve any difficulties you had?

- I'm OK – You're OK
- I'm OK – You're not OK
- I'm not OK – You're OK
- I'm not OK – You're not OK

possible. In transactional analysis people are viewed in a positive way and a basic principle of the approach is that people can be helped to locate their innate (though often neglected) coping abilities. Clients are encouraged to make new decisions about their lives, and alternative ways of behaving are explored in therapy. The OK positions which were adopted in early childhood can be challenged and changed, and negative life scripts can be re-constructed to become more positive.

Earlier in this chapter we noted that transactional analysis is frequently conducted in groups. The group is, in fact, the ideal medium for clients who wish to become more aware about their personal life scripts and how they originated. Understanding must always precede change, and in transactional analysis groupwork clients receive feedback from other participants. This practice is of considerable help in increasing self-knowledge for individual clients. The following is a summary of objectives in transactional analysis therapy:

- that clients should become more autonomous and 'script free'
- that clients work towards the I'm OK – You're OK life position
- that clients learn to state their needs and views clearly without game playing
- that clients take responsibility for their own feelings.

Contracts and goals

In transactional analysis, client and counsellor establish a specific contract which must be agreed by both. We have noted that other models of counselling use contracts as well, but these tend to be less detailed than those favoured by the transactional approach. All administrative and business aspects of the counsellor/client relationship are included in a transactional analysis contract, but a much wider agreement on the goals of therapy, and the way these will be achieved, is included too. Goals, which are always stated in positive terms, are also revised and updated when necessary. This means that attention is directed towards a wide view of personal development and away from a superficial problem solving approach. However, this does not imply that therapy should always be lengthy. Clients state the specific beliefs and behaviours they wish to change and both client and counsellor work towards these objectives. This joint approach does serve to strengthen the equality of

the relationship, and encourages the clients to experience themselves as active participants in their own therapy.

The relationship

The relationship itself is based on the concept of equality between the two people involved and all information, including any notes taken, is shared openly. Clients in transactional analysis counselling are helped to achieve emotional and intellectual insight, but the primary focus of therapy is certainly cognitive. This refers to the understanding which we have already mentioned, as a necessary component in the progress towards autonomy and script-free independence. However, creativity and flexibility are further attributes which transactional analysis counsellors need to have.

Clients are also encouraged to become more aware of all aspects of everyday life, and to live with spontaneity in the present. Spontaneous living in the here and now implies freedom from outdated scripts, as well as an ability to choose appropriate responses in personal and social situations. The ability to form relationships without resorting to games or subterfuge is another desired outcome in counselling. Communication between client and counsellor should be clear, and this clarity is facilitated when clients are familiar with the theoretical framework of transactional analysis and its terminology. Clients are encouraged to learn about transactional analysis and to attend courses if possible. When therapy is taking place in a group context, its aims and objectives are discussed so that all participants are clear about purpose and progress.

Permission

In the transactional analysis model of counselling, the concept of 'permissions' has an important place although, as Stewart (1996) points out, some transactional analysis counsellors now tend to de-emphasise this. The word 'permission' refers to the counsellor's role in encouraging clients to abandon unhealthy or destructive behaviours in favour of more positive and life affirming action. Giving permission may take the form of simply telling clients that they need not continue with certain types of behaviour which stem from childhood beliefs still operating at an unconscious level. Many of these beliefs have been passed on from parents and become absorbed into the client's own Parent ego state. The rationale underlining the concept of permission is that it is possible for the counsellor or therapist to switch off the parental recording which is responsible for the client's problems. However, there is another much more important reason for helping clients become free of negative parental messages. Clients need to learn to trust their own judgement before they can experience true autonomy and freedom from outdated scripts. The following case study highlights the therapeutic effects of permission in counselling.

CASE STUDY Shelly

Shelly was a middle-aged client whose mother had died two years before she started counselling. She was now living alone, and complained of an inability to enjoy herself which she described in the following way:

I make plans to go out with Freda [her best friend] and I'm really looking forward to it. Then when I get to the cinema or the restaurant, a black cloud seems to descend on me and something inside me says that I should not enjoy myself. After that I start to feel guilty that I am out on the town, when so many other people can't afford to socialise in that way. I think something bad will happen to me if I enjoy myself.

COMMENTARY The counsellor who helped this client agreed and established a specific contract with her. Background details about Shelly's lifestyle and general health were also discussed, and after this a treatment contract was devised. Shelly stated what it was she wished to achieve through counselling, and later on goals were agreed between client and counsellor. The treatment contract was outlined in positive terms and Shelly stated that she wished to become more confident about going out. She also wished to be free of the guilt feelings which had plagued her for so long. Her parents had been very religious, and the idea that enjoyment was sinful was accepted in the family when Shelly was a child. These strong messages were stored, therefore, in her Parent ego state, and she was unable to dislodge them without someone to encourage her. The counsellor told Shelly that she need not feel guilty on the next social outing. In order to reinforce this permission she asked Shelly to picture their present conversation each time pangs of guilt assailed her. This worked very well for the client who then learned to give herself permission when she needed it. Eventually, even this conscious self-permission was no longer necessary, as Shelly started to feel more independent and free to think for herself.

EXERCISE

Inherited beliefs
Working in groups of three to four, identify any strongly held beliefs (either positive or negative) that you have inherited from your families of origin. Discuss how these beliefs affect you now, and identify any that you now consider to be outdated.

Potency and protection

Offering permission to clients, in the way just described, can only be done when the other important conditions of potency and protection are also present. The word 'potency' refers to the counsellor's strength or conviction, which must be felt by the client if parental injunctions and outdated rules are to be challenged. In other words, the counsellor must, as Berne describes it, feel sufficiently potent to deal with the client's 'Parent'. Furthermore, the client's 'Child' must be convinced that the counsellor is potent enough to give 'protection' against parental anger (Berne, 1972). Protection can often take the form of assurance from the counsellor that she is available if the client should need her. This highlights an aspect of transactional analysis which sets it apart from many other models, for although there is an emphasis on client/counsellor equality, there is also a recognition that clients frequently need strong support and protection at certain stages of therapy. This means that counsellors need to be aware of their own strength and protective position within the relationship, as well as the need to be directive when necessary. The client is there to receive help, and the counsellor is there to give it. However, clients are not encouraged to become dependent in transactional analysis therapy, and the emphasis throughout is on helping the client to get well and become more autonomous.

Transference

We have considered the concept of transference in the chapters dealing with psychodynamic approaches to counselling, and it is discussed in Chapter 10 alongside other important issues in counselling. Individual approaches to therapy have their own views about transference, but all are aware of its existence or potential existence in the counselling relationship. Transactional analysis is no exception, and indeed Berne (1972) believed that it was a common cause of many problems, both inside and outside therapy. In the context of transactional analysis, the most effective way of illustrating transference (and counter-transference) is in diagram form. When clients transfer to counsellors feelings and attitudes stemming from childhood, then the counsellor is cast in the role of a parent figure. The following diagram, Figure 7.9, is an example.
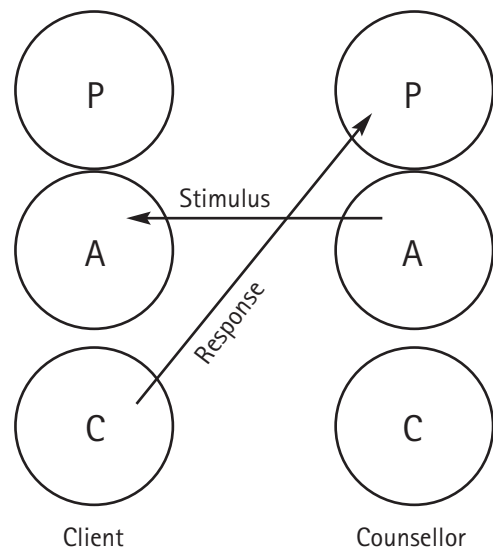

Figure 7.9 Transference (crossed transaction)

The conversation taking place between counsellor and client was as follows:

COUNSELLOR: Last week we talked about the changes you wanted to make …
(Adult to Adult)
CLIENT: I'm going to need a lot of help to get started.
(Child to Parent)

Transference dependence on the counsellor is something which is certainly not encouraged in transactional analysis, and the equality of the relationship tends to work against its continuing development in any case.
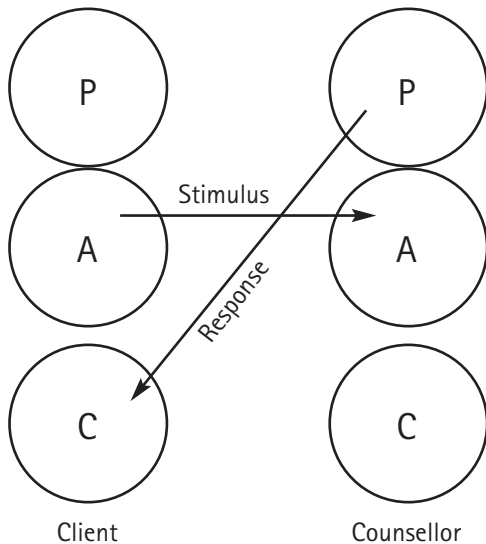
Countertransference

Countertransference can also be illustrated in diagram form. Figure 7.10 shows the counsellor's Parent response to a statement the client has made.

The conversation during this exchange was as follows:

CLIENT: I want to refer to one point in the contract we discussed last week.
(Adult to Adult)
COUNSELLOR: Is there something that worries you … something I can help you with?
(Parent to Child)

Figure 7.10 Countertransference

EXERCISE

Transference/ countertransference
Using the ego state model described in this chapter, illustrate in diagram form any examples of transference or countertransference you can identify from personal experience of helping, or being helped.

Early and more recent developments in transactional analysis

Transactional analysis continues to grow in popularity, both as communications models and as a model of therapy. In the psychotherapeutic

context, new ideas are constantly emerging. Perhaps one of the most interesting of these is the way in which Gestalt techniques are incorporated into transactional analysis by some counsellors and therapists. This approach is illustrated clearly by James and Jongeward in their book *Born to Win* (1971). Here Gestalt experiments and exercises are incorporated into the theory of transactional analysis, with the underlying assumption that both methods are concerned with what is happening at the present moment. The 'redecision school', founded by the Gouldings, also integrates the theory and practice of transactional analysis with Gestalt therapy (Goulding and Goulding, 1979). Counsellors from a variety of theoretical backgrounds also use aspects of transactional analysis in their work with clients, although it should be pointed out that they need proper training in order to do this. Other important developments of the model are listed below.

The Cathexis school

The Cathexis school of transactional analysis differs from Berne's original model in several ways. The word 'Cathexis' is derived from psychoanalysis and refers to the mental or psychic energy which a person invests in another person, idea or object. In the Cathexis model of transactional analysis, which was developed by J. L. Schiff (1975), the Parent ego state develops constantly throughout the life span. If the Parent ego state is not fixed as Schiff suggests, then it follows that a reparenting relationship with a counsellor or psychotherapist is possible. The Cathexis model was designed to help disturbed clients in residential care, using the concept of 'reparenting' in order to repair the original dysfunctional relationship with an actual parent.

Egograms

The egogram is a diagram or graph designed by Dusay (1977) to indicate the relative importance of each ego state within an individual's personality. This is based on the premise that we all have different amounts of psychic energy invested in the three ego states. It is possible to chart your own egogram by drawing a graph of your feelings over a period of time, indicating the ego states operating as feelings and behaviour change.

Personality adaptations

Stewart (1996) refers to the work of Ware (1983), and the concept of personality developments. Ware's ideas extend the theory of script formation and indicate the ways in which children decide on the best possible means of surviving and getting what they need. These methods of responding are called 'adaptations', and Ware identified six of these. Stewart describes these ideas in his book *Developing Transactional Analysis Counselling*, along with other interesting extensions of the model.

Clients who benefit from this approach

Transactional analysis is a model of counselling which has potential benefit for most clients. Its strength lies in its accessibility as a communications skills model, and it is especially helpful to those clients who have relationship problems (whether at home or in the workplace). In either of these two situations, clients can be helped through the use of the structural and descriptive diagrams of personality in order to identify the source of their difficulties in communicating effectively with others. Transactional analysis can also encourage clients to abandon outdated ways of relating to others through game playing. The unpleasant feelings like anger, hurt, fear and guilt which are associated with games, and referred to as 'rackets' by Berne (1972), are highlighted in therapy too. When such feelings are identified in this way, clients are then able to make the changes necessary to become more open and spontaneous in relation to other people.

The concept of scripts is useful too since it serves to illuminate the early events and formative influence which tend to govern the course of our lives and behaviour. Clients who experience a compulsion to repeat certain patterns of behaviour, for example, can learn a great deal through transactional analysis, and those clients who are simply interested in personal growth can also benefit from it. The approach has many applications to everyday life, and since it is often conducted in groups it has special relevance for clients who experience problems in relation to groups. The group approach tends to make therapy cheaper for clients as well, and because transactional analysis training is well established and thorough, with an emphasis on professionalism and accreditation, clients are likely to get quality service from the counsellors who help them.

Some limitations

At the beginning of this chapter we noted that the specialised terminology of transactional analysis is both its strength and its weakness. The language of the approach is attractive to many people, but there are others for whom it is too simplistic or even irritating. In addition to this, there are clients whose cultural background might not fit so easily into the paradigm of scripts described by Berne and others. Cultural considerations aside, the language of transactional analysis may also seem contrived and inhibiting to certain clients. The cognitive emphasis in transactional analysis may also limit it for some clients who place more value on the expression of emotion (although the integration of Gestalt with the model is an effective method of obtaining a balance). An important point to make here is that practitioners of transactional analysis should, ideally, have a thorough knowledge of Freudian and psychodynamic theory if their work is to avoid the kind of superficiality for which it is sometimes criticised.

Clients who receive transactional analysis counselling may also respond to its instant appeal, resulting in a superficial understanding of themselves and others. There are some situations, including crisis counselling, for which the approach is probably not suitable, initially at least. Specific problems like sexual abuse, eating disorders, serious depression and childhood trauma may also require a different, more affective, emphasis.

Summary

In this chapter we looked at transactional analysis and considered its application to therapeutic counselling. The first part of the chapter dealt with some aspects of the specialised terminology used in the approach, and its groupwork format was also discussed. A brief history of Eric Berne was provided, and his ego state model was described in some detail. The four major areas of transactional analysis (structural, trans-actional, game and script) were outlined. The four basic OK positions were also described, and the way in which games and scripts originate from these was discussed. We looked at the objectives in transactional analysis counselling, the importance of contracts and goals and at the therapeutic relationship between client and counsellor. Transference and counter–transference were shown in diagram form, and the dialogue was included to illustrate these concepts. Early and more recent develop-ments in transactional analysis were outlined, along with some discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of the approach in relation to clients.

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Transactional analysis: key concepts

■ ego states: PARENT, ADULT, CHILD

■ structural analysis

■ transactions: complementary, crossed and ulterior

■ game analysis

■ scripts

■ the OK positions

■ permission

■ potency and protection

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Resources

Websites

www.itaa–net.org
The International Transactional Analysis Association

www.ita.org.uk
The Institute of Transactional Analysis. Gives details of education and training for Transactional Analysis.

www.claudesteiner.com
Information about Claude Steiner, Eric Berne and other TA theorists.

www.ericberne.com
This is the official website of Eric Berne. It includes a detailed description and history of Transactional Analysis.

www.ta–tutor.com
General information (educational) about Transactional Analysis.

www.eatanews.org
The European Association of Transactional Analysis.

www.usataa.org
The United States of America TA Association.

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Answers (from page 190)

  1 Adult
  2 Adapted Child
  3 Free Child (Negative)
  4 Controlling Parent
  5 Nurturing Parent
  6 Controlling Parent
  7 Free Child (Positive)
  8 Adult
  9 Controlling Parent
 10 Adult