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Editorial Section

Editor's Note

The world today is acutely aware of the necessity of mental and emotional wellness. Our lives have been everted in every area – health, careers, finances, relationships. Each one of us is dealing with what is likely to be a long-lasting impact on humankind. What is the future of an infant, born in these times, going to be like? After Gen X, Y, Z, is this a new Gen C? – a COVID family with COVID Healthcare, COVID Education, COVID Travel, COVID Holidays and COVID Careers?

Do we really stop to think now and reprioritize what matters most? How do I want to live today? How do I want to rear my kids? How do I want to be in my professional life? How do I keep safe and yet be of value to my family, friends, colleagues, clients, community, country, planet? The questions keep arising...the answers, not yet!

Presently, governments, corporations, institutions, families, individuals and likewise mental health professionals have been compelled to rethink fundamentals and find alternative approaches to our being and doing. Even in spinning out this journal, this team has had to adapt to virtual and telephonic dialogues, as opposed to preferred meet-ups and sit-downs of the past.

While we forge ahead, what will remain is the individual's story. The humane story. Each of us will have one or more to share - of difficulties, or gratitude. Of innovation, or loss. Of learning, or fear. Of service, or connection. For every story, there will be listeners, co-travelers, supporters, maybe opposers.

Yet, every story will involve being human - the polarities of strength or frailty; reliance or isolation; empathy or anger; collaboration or independence...

As we each make renewed meaning of our existence, life goals and connections which count, I ponder if genetic, social or capitalistic boundaries serve to unite or divide? Do we have the freedom to choose to be simply human and accept each other just so?

Transactional Analysis (TA) is an ethical and scientific system of understanding human behaviour and communication, with tools to effect positive change. Practitioners of this method work in varied fields of counselling, psychotherapy, organisations and education. To borrow from one of our contributors, ‘...freedom is the journey of self-realization of our inherent divinity, achieved through awareness, action and responsibility, towards inner and external growth’. This is the at the heart of Transactional Analysis and its practice.

In the present circumstances, it is the need of the hour that every parent, spouse/partner and every professional, be it a teacher, pastor, programmer or mental health practitioner, is keenly aware of their own inner and outer reality. It is with this awareness that we may choose to live from a place of conviction and purpose, being OK with ourselves and others.

In keeping with this spirit, we bring to you this edition of the South Asian Journal of Transactional Analysis (SAJTA). Readers will find the theme of living to our best human potential, in the articles presented here.

The SAJTA is a bi-annual psychology journal, hosted by the South Asian Association of Transactional Analysts (SAATA). It captures views, theories and concepts shared by practitioners in the mental wellness space. This is our 9th issue, having decided not to publish in January of this year. The SAJTA is shared with the intention to provide information not just with members from the Transactional Analysis fraternity, but also with anyone interested to expand their understanding of mental wellness ideas and practices.

While the January Volume of SAJTA runs with a theme, the July edition is an ‘Open Theme’ one, allowing for more diversity and reach. To encourage authors and allow for greater versatility of articles, we have opted to keep the next two issues with an ‘Open Theme’.

To encourage a writing mindset, the SAJTA team is offering Writing Workshops over the course of this year. Look out for information pertaining to this and invest in yourself, to upskill your written abilities.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue, which comprises works shared by eight authors. It is the largest contribution by authors to SAJTA this far and we hope, sets a good precedent for future issues. We acknowledge the efforts and interest of all those who engaged with the SAJTA team for this publication, especially first-time authors.

Here is a brief about each article presented in this journal:

1) One aspect of script which may not get attended to enough, is the positive memories of our past and strengths of our personality. *Charusmitha Rao* has taken up the mantle to analyse this. She has created and shared here, a tool which allows one to capture this positive script. Sharing her experience of using it with her own training group, she looks at the potential uses and benefits of this tool.

2) Using the relational approach, our next author *Sarmishta Mani*, shares her experience of working through impasses with clients. In her case examples, she explains how understanding her own process becomes a source of information towards her clients. By examining facets of the therapeutic relationship and their relating, the author becomes aware of unintegrated aspects of hers and clients’ past experiences, helping to clarify and resolve such impasses.

3) An exploration by our next author *Yashodhara Lal*, allows her to ‘play’ with Jaoui’s permission wheel and share with our readers, her own discoveries in its course. Mulling over how one internalizes permissions, through her own candid process of writing this article, she proceeds to experiment with applying the permission wheel in diverse forms and usages. Yashodhara concludes with some reflective questions for herself and the reader.

4) Set in the Organisational context, *Gunjan Zutshi and Deepak Dhananjaya*, authors and colleagues, elucidate the need for and process of contracting, specific to cross functional teams. This is explained through various professional and personal examples and scenarios and elaborated through a case study. They emphasize the significance of the psychological contract, to deliver effective business results and also to build authentic relationships at the workplace.

5) *Rosemary Kurian*, our next author, makes a similar appeal through her discourse on liminality during this pandemic. She explains stress factors as a natural result and encourages readers to find their unique resilience / physis. Using Fanita English’s theory of motivators, Rosemary invites us to restore our balance and shares her hopes of each of us working towards and embracing harmony.

6) This article takes a look at conflicts in couples and how a therapist may use the interlocking racket systems tool to diagnose and intervene. *Kala Subramanian* has highlighted one such case, vividly describing individual client histories and depicting their conflict diagrammatically. She then goes on to share her strategies to work with this couple, to help them break their unhelpful patterns of interacting.

7) Inviting you to ponder with her philosophically, *P K Saru* shares her vision of reaching our life goals, by drawing parallels between Transactional Analysis theories of autonomy and physis and teachings from Indian scriptures of Vedanta, as narrated through the Bhagavad Gita. She delves into understanding what freedom, awareness, action and responsibility really mean and how these paths converge to one truth - being truly human.

8) Last but not least, is a contribution by a Non-Transactional Analysis author. *Mahesh Natarajan* writes passionately about the existence of non-affirmative systems and practices in India. As a queer affirmative counsellor himself, he expounds the injustice of such norms and invokes practitioners to question their own methods and attitudes and to be more woke and ethically vocal. Mahesh aspires for safer spaces for the little LGBTQIA+ tribes.

We hope that these pieces of work inspire you to think and write too. We look forward to hearing your views, ideas, questions or feedback. You could write to any author and / or us, at journal@saata.org.

Nisha Rao

Managing Editor, SAJTA

Guidelines from the Editorial Board

From our experience in editing the SAJTA this far, we have put together some guidelines for contributors to future editions of the journal:

Scientific Writing Guidelines:

- Write scientifically on topics - original thoughts, research, application in professional or personal context, reviews, experiences, opinions - which can be explained primarily using Transactional Analysis concepts.
- Double-check Transactional Analysis terminologies and their definitions, e.g. names of games, components of script, drivers, injunctions etc. Transactional Analysis full form, not TA, to be used. All terminologies to be in small case, e.g. script not Script.
- Quote the original authors of any concepts / ideas used. Reference accordingly.
- The article should not be published anywhere before, including in SAATA Diploma or Advanced Diploma exams. We are open to answers modified into a journal article.
- Select a strong title, which crisply explains what the article conveys.
- Begin with an abstract / introduction, which describes what readers can expect.
- Convey the main content (methods, data, evidence, results, links), using appropriate sentences, paragraphs and apt headings / sub-headings.
- Use diagrammatic representations where appropriate, labelling figures and tables.
- Include a conclusion, references and a 100-150 word biography of yourself at the end.

General Writing Guidelines:

- Total word count should be less than 2000 words.
- Submit the article in word format.
- Follow APA style of formatting, references, citations and bibliography (<http://www.apastyle.org/>).
- Use formal language. Avoid the use of casual phrases, expressions and slangs, unless quoting verbatim.
- Use British English and do a ‘Spelling and Grammar’ check before you submit.
- Keep sentences short and precise. Where there are multiple ideas, construct them as two or more sentences.
- Use simple and easy-to-understand words. Remember that your audience may not be Transactional Analysis literate or even use English as their first language.
- Review the paper for redundancy, where the same idea is expressed multiple times.
- Provide English translations to any vernacular quotation that are made in the article.
- As part of our learning, we have decided to only accept single part articles that align to the theme of the issue. Multi-part series will only be considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on the relevance and timeliness of the topic.

We hope this is useful, as you all contemplate contributing to the journal.

For queries, feedback and suggestions, write to us at journal@saata.org.

Theme for January 2021 Issue

“Open Theme”

Deadline for submissions: **October 15th 2020**

Email : journal@saata.org

Please follow the [guidelines](#) before you submit.

Editorial Board

Volume 6, Number 2, July 2020

Aruna Gopakumar	Co-Editor
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A Wholesome View Into Scripts: Positive Memories Discovery Tool

Charusmitha Rao

Abstract

“The goal of therapy or other forms of Transactional Analysis support is not to become “script free”. It is about becoming more autonomous.... discovering and developing the resources and positive aspects of one’s script” - William Cornell, Into TA

Positive memories can act as powerful personal resources for psychological growth and well-being. This paper proposes a set of questions as a tool that therapists and counsellors could use with their clients to discover, explore and strengthen these resources. These questions could draw attention to memories clients may have discounted, changing their view of the past. It can help them recognize the areas in life where they are script free and understand what aspects of their early experiences contributed to that.

As with all tools, these questions too must be used with sensitivity by the therapist and must fit into an overall treatment plan. Examples of where they could use it include inviting memories to challenge some script beliefs, helping clients to then explore what allows them to function despite the script, building internal credit bank balance (Dhananjaya, 2016) or helping them understand their own discounting in the process of meaning making.

Positive Memories as a Tool for Healing

During the last one year as a student of TA, I have had the opportunity to experience the process of therapy as an observer, therapist and a client. I am awed by the potency it has on the healing process. Both as part of group processes and personal therapy sessions, I experienced the capacity it has to help clients to access emotions experienced during early childhood such as fear,

shame, sadness, anger in such overpowering intensity and how that becomes the starting point for awareness and hence change.

As part of one such group process in the Transactional Analysis class, my fellow trainee used a set of questions to help me uncover some of my script decisions. This was eye-opening for me as I recognized what was limiting for me.

As part of the same process, one of the questions he asked was, “When you were punished as a child, what was mild and what was severe?” My response was “I was not punished as a child. I always remember my parents sitting me down and explaining things to me when I did anything wrong.”. And as I said it, I felt immediate gratitude for my parents and got in touch with the positive impact my parents had on who I am today. The process showed me both what held me back in life and also what allowed me to move through life and thrive. It also made me think about the power of positive memories in one’s life.

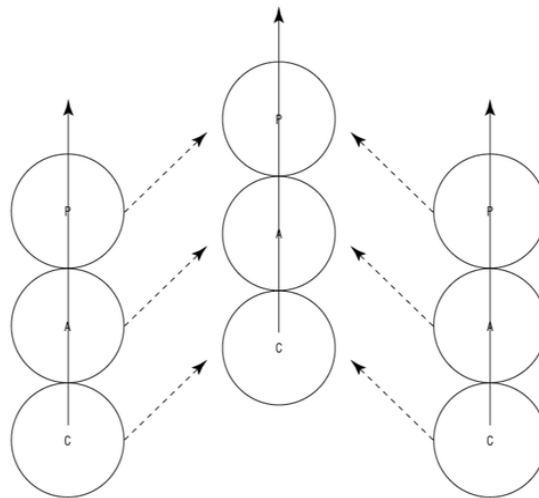
The positive assumptions that people are OK, everyone can think and thus they can decide to change if they wish to are fundamental to TA.

To support my view point about the script as functional, normal and necessary, and to emphasize the need to look at the positive aspects of script and recognize aspects of life which are script free, I quote a few authors below:

“We believe that we are all programmed, that much of the programming is positive and that we do well by hanging on to those positives....By attending almost exclusively to the destructive elements of scripts, transactional analysts have suggested that the negative influences are stronger than the positives and somehow outweigh them”- Paul McCormick & Ellen F. Pulleyblank, 1979

“Each driver has a strong positive component - enthusiasm, speed, amiability, endurance, excellence” - Petruska Clarkson (1992)

For me, the point of applying Transactional Analysis is to help clients to move from a deterministic script....I have developed an autonomy matrix (Figure 1) .. this presents an interpretation based on the notion that parents/caregivers generally want to support their children to reach their potential, however much the parents/caregivers may be limited by their own scripts” - Julie Hay (Hay, 1997, 2012).*



***Figure 1: Autonomy Matrix (Hay, 2012)**

“A script is valuable as an organizing support structure..(and) contributes to the articulation, actualization and evolution of our innate potential” - Fanita English, Jan 1988.

Borrowing from these ideas in Transactional Analysis and its linkage to positive psychology (Rosemary Napper, 2009) I started to think about how drawing attention to possibly the non-dominant positive parts of the client’s early experiences which they have discounted, may help in the healing process. Inviting attention to positive parental messages, their

reinforcements and the resulting strengths of the person may become enduring resources for change.

An Alternative Approach: Positive Memories Discovery Tool

This tool is designed to access positive memories to uncover aspects which have built resilience, developed creative abilities and shaped a person as a functional potent adult today. The questions that led me to this were: Will recognizing positives in one's life help in strengthening the Adult? Will that be of support to the wounded Child? Can it make change easier?

With this curiosity, I started putting together a set of questions framed to explore the positives in one's life which can make one savor parts of the past and integrate it to the present to form the foundation on which to build a new life.

After several discussions with my trainer and referring to multiple perspectives, here is the 35-question toolkit that I have built.

This tool is an outcome of my personal experience as a Transactional Analysis student and is to be read as a student's perspective to exploring positive memories and the permissions embedded in them.

Important Considerations While Designing the Toolkit:

My idea is NOT to discount or minimize the pain of the past. One of the goals of therapy is to uncover what was painful in our childhood and what limiting beliefs or decisions from there we are carrying into the present. My goal is to deepen awareness of positive beliefs and decisions that we made as a result of what was empowering in our childhood. It is also to look at what strengths (Linley, 2007) and permissions (Stewart, 1966) from that we carry into our present

which can be used as a tool for creating hope in the process of change which is considered an important aspect of therapy. *“Reviews of many psychological approaches have continuously emphasized the importance of hope in the process of change” - Rosemary Napper, 2009*

Caveat: It is possible that the person may not have positive memories and may plunge further into despair when asked these. I see this too as a useful outcome in helping the client and the therapist understand the intensity of the pain of the client. The therapist must then use the therapy space to explore this pain sensitively. Clients who are scared of painful feelings may maximize the positive memories and minimize the limiting aspects of their script. The therapist must pay careful attention to non-verbals and use these questions in an informed manner. The therapist must also pay attention to see if the questions trigger the internal Parent ego state and the possible adaptations from the Child.

M/F/C = Mother / Father / Caregiver

1. What is your favourite memory from childhood? Why is it your favourite?
2. Did you hear any positive stories about anything that happened during or soon after your birth?
3. What feelings, thoughts and attitudes were you allowed to freely express in your childhood?
4. Do you remember any soothing smells or scents and sights from your childhood home?
5. Complete this sentence - I felt happiest as a child when . . .
6. What memories do you have of your M/F/C showing affection physically? What other forms of expression of love do you remember?

7. What was your experience of being loved as a little child?
8. Share some of the dreams and fantasies that you had as a little child that were valuable / memorable for you. Any funny ones?
9. When you were upset or scared, how did your parents comfort you?
10. How did your parents show their trust in you?
11. What did you like about how your M/F/C introduced you to others OR share about you with others?
12. What is your earliest memory of being proud of yourself? Who was around?
13. Have you been inspired by your M/F/C? How?
14. What memories do you have of having fun with your M/F/C?
15. What do you remember about your playtime?
16. What was your favorite game to play? What was your most beloved toy? What did it look like? What feelings come to mind when you think of that toy?
17. What was your favourite space at home? What would you do in that space?
18. Talk about your positive memories in early school. Which is your favourite?
19. What memories from teenage stand out for you as pleasant and affirming your OKness?
20. What are your memories of holidays?
21. What are your memories of family re-unions?
22. Was your birthday celebrated? How was it celebrated? What's your favourite memory about it? What else was celebrated?

23. Which other parental figure/relative had a significant positive influence on you in your childhood? How? Whom did you admire as a little child? (E.g.: Grandparents / Cousins / Neighbours / Friends / Teachers)
 24. Did you ever have any pets as a child? What positive memory do you have of it?
 25. Talk about some of the intimate friendships you had as a little child. Who was your best friend while growing up? How did you and your best friend become friends? How did this relationship have a positive impact on you?
 26. Who is a person you trusted the most? What makes the person trustworthy?
 27. What dreams / hope did/does your M/F/C have for you?
 28. Do you have a memory of your parent's standing up for you?
 29. When you were a little child, what did you imagine was the best thing that could happen to you?
 30. What positive memory do you have of being vulnerable?
 31. If you wrote an autobiography, what would it be called? Why? What would the cover page look like?
- (Inspired by Richard Erskine's article on Facilitating Memory and modified)
32. What was your bedtime routine when you were little? Who tucked you in and what did you talk about?
 33. When you were little and wanted someone to play with you on the floor, what would your M/F/C do?
 34. Who was there to talk to you about your concerns or joys when you returned from school (or before school)

35. What did you enjoy about the nature of conversations with your family during dinner?

Findings from the Experiment with the Positive Memories Discovery Tool:

I used this tool on a class of 12 Transactional Analysis trainees at the end of their first year of learning TA. Here are some initial findings from this experiment.

Caveat: The tool was used as a standalone exercise on Transactional Analysis trainees who were at the end of their 1st year of training. This group already had a level of comfort and familiarity with each other. They shared responses to these questions in small peer groups. The responses to the overall experience of the process were then collected in the form of a survey.

Summary:

- 80% of them described their experiences by saying that it provided them with a 1. Hope 2. Closure 3. Balanced view and 4. Acted as a tool for accessing positive memories
- 100% of them used positive words to describe the experience - words like healing, secure, fulfilling, energizing, joyful, revealing, positive, happy, grateful, loved, cared for, gratitude, respect and acknowledgement were used. They also said that they felt renewed acceptance and empathy for the choices their parents made in their context
- One person felt that the questions triggered 'sadness' and another person said, 'It did not trigger anything new for me'.

Quoting Verbatims from Fellow Trainees who Experienced the Tool:

Note: These are the verbatims from the survey. I have not had further conversations to assess if these are Adult responses. However, the responses indicate to me the potential in these questions to make an impact on clients.

- “I realized all the ways that I had positive permissions which have played a significant impact on my life”.
- “Thank you so much... I never got in touch with so many of my qualities as I did today. I’m creative, helpful, a good listener, simplifier, sensitive, caring, giving, grateful. I’m comfortable with silence and I have love for music and poetry. I never knew I had picked up so many strengths from my parents”.
- “I realized all the ways that I had positive permissions which have played a significant impact on my life. For example, my love for food - experimentation in eating and cooking; the way my aunt encouraged my creativity by letting me explore it the way I wanted to, etc.”.
- “It helped me remember some energizing experiences and permissions which I had forgotten”.
- “I found it rather difficult to think of positives. But whatever I could think of made me feel grateful. Those were little things I had forgotten, overlooked or sort of ignored”.
- “This experience impacted my life position. It made me feel “I’m OK” despite my script. People like me who are holding on to “I’m not OK” can use this questionnaire for the healing process”.
- “I felt that I was really loved, cared for and enabled to be independent and to succeed”.
- “I felt joy in getting in touch with some positive memories”.

What Next?

- 1) **Experiments:** This tool holds promise and the results from the tests I conducted using this tool with the Transactional Analysis trainees in my class with the support of my trainer has piqued my curiosity to try it with more groups. I'm also keen to use it with certified Transactional Analysis professionals who have revisited their scripts several times to observe what it triggers for them.
- 2) **Research:** This tool and its impact haven't been researched yet. I invite practicing therapists and counselors to use them in their work and share feedback on how they used it and the impact it had. Here are some possible ways one could use it:
 - a. As part of the healing process to uncover powerful positive memories from childhood.
 - b. As a group therapy process to exchange responses to these questions in pairs and share in larger groups.
 - c. As a silent reflection exercise to uncover discounted parts of life.
 - d. To uncover permissions that clients have received which can be used in conjunction with questionnaires for script analysis.
 - e. As an alternate treatment plan that focuses on health rather than pathology (Cox, 2000) based on the readiness of the client.
- 3) **Workshop:** Use this tool to design a workshop on exploring positive memories, strengths and narratives around permissions.

Conclusion: I'm a Half a Princess

“The positives constitute the foundation on which to build the new life, which does not have to be entirely new” - Paul McCormick & Ellen F. Pulleyblank, 1979

1) Will recognizing positives in one’s life help in strengthening the Adult? 2) Will that be of support to the wounded Child? 3) Can it make change easier? These intriguing questions that got me started on the journey have led to explore possibilities. I believe enabling positive memory recapture holds potential to support the healing process, facilitate change and strengthen the Adult. I also feel hopeful that it can nudge the client to look at aspects of life which are script free and discover what early experiences contributed to it while also looking at the negative commands in childhood that have contributed to script patterns. Being a 'loser' in one dimension / few dimensions does NOT make one a 'loser' as a whole. There’s a 'winner' and a 'loser' co-existing within all of us.

To conclude, I’m echoing a fellow trainee’s endearing feedback - “This experience made me realize that I’m not fully a frog. I will work on my half a frog while I will also rejoice that am half a princess”.

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About the Author

Charusmitha Rao is a creative Talent and OD professional, CTA trainee, certified ACC coach from ICF and a certified practitioner in several psychometric instruments like DISC, TEIQ, Lominger Leadership Architect, Voices 360 etc. She is working as a Talent Development leader in a leading MNC and has keen interest in applying Transactional Analysis to organizational and leadership development.

Charu was recognized as Top40Under40 HR Leaders in India, a recognition from Jombay for top 40 HR gamechangers in India in 2018. She is also a co-founder of a creative pursuit called Coolture which aims at making culture cool. She can be contacted at: charusmitha.rao@gmail.com.

Impasse Clarification: A Relational Approach

Sarmishta Mani

Abstract

An impasse is described as the point where two or more opposing forces meet (Goulding and Goulding, 1979, p. 16). With the assimilation of a relational approach into Transactional Analysis, impasse in the relationship between the therapist and client has become a rich source for exploring and transforming the interpersonal and intrapsychic processes of the client. The author shares her understanding about working with relational impasse.

A Brief Look at How I got There

In describing their work the Gouldings showed us how the intrapsychic resolution of an impasse leads to a redecision in the Child ego state (1979). Mellor suggested that impasse clarification would “unmake the self-limiting decisions made earlier in life” (1980, p. 205). When I began my practice of Transactional Analysis psychotherapy my emphasis was on the intrapsychic resolution of the client’s internal conflict. However, in the course of working with some clients I encountered challenges that left me feeling inadequate and doubting my capacity to be effective. Training made me aware that some of these challenges may be because of relational impasses between the client and me. I grew to recognise that my distress was a valuable source of information about my client’s internal world and how our therapeutic relationship interacted with it, even as it revealed unintegrated aspects of my own experience.

The application of a relational lens to therapeutic engagement is backed by research on attachment, early infant studies and neuroscience. These findings highlighted the impact of consistently attuned relationships on the development of an infant and the consequences of a lack of them from repeated misattunement or non-attunement. From this emerged a recognition that

the therapeutic relationship too could be a source of recreating early relational dynamics and therefore a medium to explore and integrate what was unresolved for the client (Stuthridge, 2010). Further below I illustrate how working with the therapeutic relationship impacted the client's journey towards integration.

As Transactional Analysis assimilated subsequent approaches that invoked the relational realm of the therapeutic interaction, an emphasis on the exploration of the unconscious developed. To Cornell & Landaiche "the very nature of close contact between any two or more human beings is bound to affect us at levels that operate outside of consciousness and that inform our most fundamental patterns of relating" (2006, p. 197).

My experience of such relating with the client helps me understand Little's statement that "the therapist's presence mobilises and activates the dependent self, with all its longing and fears" (2011, p. 28).

I am reminded of a client who kept saying that there was something he was longing for, in spite of our repeated explorations into his intrapsychic processes to understand what that might be. As the therapeutic relationship developed over several months, I came to understand through our experience of transformative transference (fig. 1) and countertransference that we had recreated a dynamic of omnipotence and hope for wish fulfilment (Hargaden and Sills, 2002). I realised that I had become a receptacle for the hope he had projected into me that I would transform his life for him, as he waited for the time I would take all his problems away. Following subsequent discussions on the possibilities and limitations we as human beings navigated, the client's capacity for self-agency began to develop steadily.

This experience, among others, was a stimulus to study the relational realms of interaction and the engagement of the unconscious.

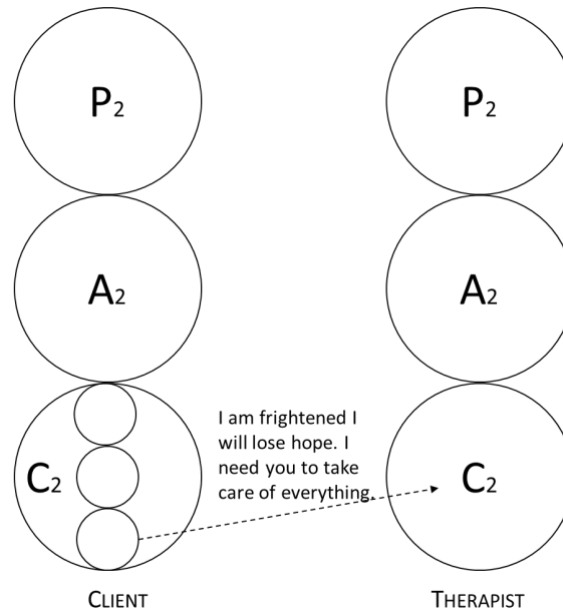


Figure 1: Transformational transference (R) (Hargaden & Sills, 2002)

Relational Impasse: An Interpersonal Route to Intrapsychic Resolution

In continuation of sharing my understanding, from an initial engagement with the external world of the client, as a transference relationship develops, the focus shifts towards the interaction within the therapeutic dyad. Following this development could be experiences in which “a breakdown in the therapeutic process” occurs (Cornell & Landaiche, 2006, p.197). This is what I believe Little calls the impasse between the repeated relationship and the needed relationship (2011). I understand the repeated relationship as the one that perpetuates the dysfunctional processes of relating from the past and the needed relationship as the one that facilitates the process of integration in the present. I demonstrate my understanding of working towards impasse clarification in an interpersonal context now.

Sheila: “You, my Therapist will Disregard my Dignity”

When we began our sessions, Sheila was doubtful if she could be helped. Interacting with her, I sensed a lot of anxiety, helplessness and confusion behind a tough demeanour. From her

history I learnt that Sheila's mother would dismiss any of Sheila's needs that didn't match her idea of what Sheila needed and ridiculed her as being incapable of making 'correct' choices. If Sheila were to ever insist, her mother would condemn her for her ingratitude, accusing her of being undeserving. Her father would occasionally protest against the treatment, but would go quiet when he was 'put in place' by her mother.

When the Client's World Diffuses Into the Therapeutic Setting

In our sessions she would consistently maintain that moving to another city and starting life afresh without her parents was her only hope to find freedom. When I asked her what this freedom meant to her she described it as a place where no one had any demands on her; in effect a place without any other. In this phase my focus remained on supporting her to experience the needed relationship in which she felt safe and valued, to relax and connect to me. I responded to her felt meaning (fig. 2) (Hargaden and Sills, 2002), provided consistent empathic listening and offered extra sessions when her anxiety increased. After her initial resistance, as she became involved in the process of discovering herself she seemed more engaged in therapy.

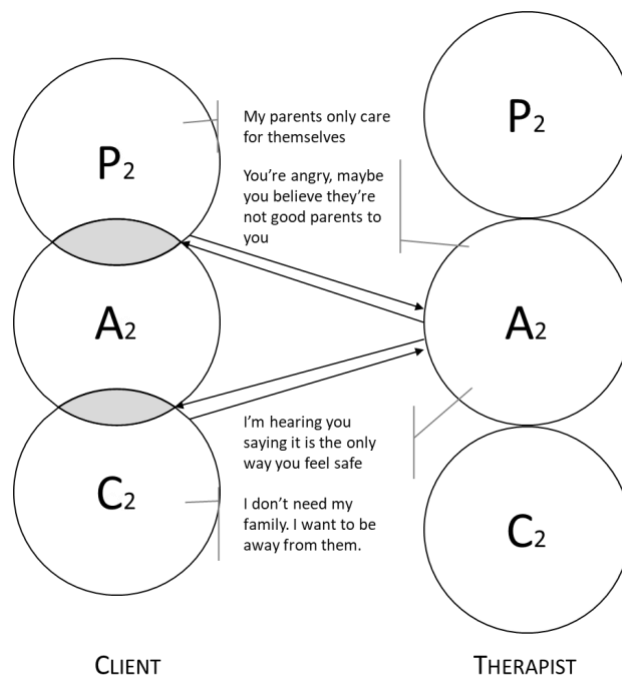


Figure 2: Responding to the client's felt meaning (Sheila) (Hargaden & Sills, 2002)

The Therapist Seeks to Join the Client's World

In exploring her world with her, I became aware that I experienced considerable anxiety. I constantly felt she could 'slip away' from me anytime. I sensed that she held me at a distance. She would let me know that she saw herself as self-sufficient and that she was mostly doing her own work in therapy. I wondered if she would ever experience trust and closeness towards me.

"The conflict will slowly emerge in the transference and if the therapist works within the transference rather than with the transference, then the conflict will gradually become manifest in the therapeutic dyad. When this occurs, the conflict between the repeated relationship and the needed relationship can be addressed and the two aspects integrated" (fig. 3) (Little, 2011, p. 23).

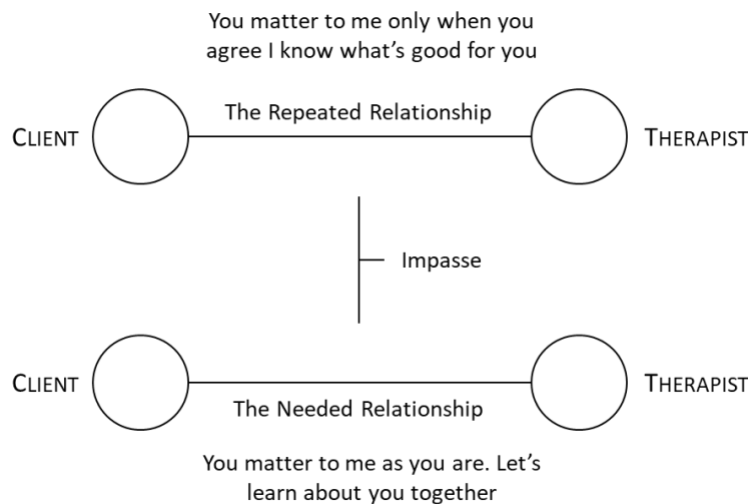


Figure 3: Repeated Relationship and Needed Relationship (Sheila) (Little, 2011)

You Matter as Long as We Agree I Know What's Best For You

Over time, recreating a dynamic from the past, I seemed to focus on keeping Sheila motivated to remain in therapy and I became the mother who was doing everything in Sheila's

‘best interests’. I believed if Sheila changed the concreteness in her thinking to become more flexible, she would be happy. My idea for Sheila seemed more important to me than her experiences of the world (and me). I carried a latent feeling of exasperation that there was always a reason why she couldn’t be happy. I was also put off by her stubbornness to establish what I saw as a rigid boundary between us. I began to grow indifferent to her distress, just like her mother preserved her needs over Sheila’s. The enactment in the repeated relationship was playing out and I was not yet fully conscious of it (Stuthridge and Sills, 2016).

You Matter as You Are. Let’s Get to Know You Together

As the needed relationship developed alongside, I started to value her need to get away from everyone, no longer questioning it, but ‘echoing’ her steadfastness (Hargaden & Sills, 2002). I began to get a sense of who she was over and above her painful relationship dynamics. In this process I encountered a precocious girl who knew very early she did not like her mother’s dismissal of her and others. She learned quickly not to be like her mother and coped by detaching herself. I began to share my appreciation of her, stroking her for her resilience and sense of fairness. She started sharing with me her relationship with her brother’s children and would engage in exploring my ideas of her experiences. I sensed a tension between her need to protect herself from me and her developing capacity to relax in my presence.

Towards Integration

Little describes the therapeutically required relationship as one that supports the therapist’s investment in both the needed and repeated relationships, so both could be tolerated for integration (2011). I found my anxiety began to reduce as our interactions deepened. I was also baffled, sometimes turned off, by her ‘inability’ to be happy.

The following happened in a session which helped me experience what her unconscious communication to me about her distress was (Novellino, 1990).

Sheila shared with some desperation that she really believed she should go away. I sensed an immense longing in her voice for a safe world. She said she didn't know what was stopping her, even though that was the only way she would be happy.

“The use of interpretations with the repeated relationship offers a new interpersonal experience” writes Little, citing Stern (2011, p. 33).

I mentioned that I got a sense of her anticipation for something to happen to become happy. Reflecting on how her experience of being far from happiness reminded me of my experience of being far from her, I wondered aloud about the consequences if she showed me she was happy. Sheila blurted out that she was afraid I would take away her dignity if she did. With that she started sobbing, recounting the dread that accompanied her in every interpersonal experience. I cried quietly listening to her as she sat crying before me, aware that what we just shared had impacted both of us. For, when the client's Child speaks to the therapist, the therapist and client “can forge the links between language and the unconscious” (Hargaden & Sills, 2002, p. 81).

A Relational Breakthrough

Sheila and I had recreated a repeating experience of her relationships in which she believed I had the power to take her dignity away from her. I too had participated in perpetuating her dread by looking down upon her ways of protecting herself from me and overlooking what she lost in the process of saving her dignity. Yet, I had also wondered about the internal world of this person whose distance from me I allowed to impact me, thereby providing a significant relational need that was missed in Sheila's experience (Erskine, Moursund and Trautman, 2014).

Working within the transference-countertransference dyad, I reflected on what it meant for Sheila to be in my presence, how I had used/misused my power over her, how she had adapted to having to put up with me etc. Our ongoing engagement with the interpersonal relationship has influenced her intrapsychic experience of herself in the relationship.

Sheila and I have continued to develop this therapeutic relationship and today, a year after the above exchange, Sheila acknowledges my presence in her journey. Recently we were exploring how being stuck at home with her mother during the lockdown was for her. After sharing about her stressful situation, she expressed her relief that she had the consistent therapeutic space to come back to every week, even if we could only manage it online currently. She also wanted to know when we would meet in person again.

As we journey on, we will encounter further opportunities for recycling impasse clarification, working through which the process of separation from (me) her therapist would strengthen.

Conclusion

I find the relational way of working through an impasse immensely satisfying. I find it deepens the quality of relating between the therapist and client, thus providing opportunities for the emergence and integration of further hidden aspects of the unconscious, as they impact and are impacted by various facets of our relating.

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A New Spin On The Permission Wheel

Yashodhara Lal

Abstract

The permission wheel, developed in the 1980s by Gysa Jaoui, is a visual representation of the various limits and permissions in a person's life. This article seeks to explore the tool, its potency and the possibilities for its customization and usage.

Laurie Hawke's 2007 article contains a simple, lucid description of the permission wheel, brought alive by the case study of Marie. In our training group, we recently had the opportunity to examine and practice creating the permission wheel. This article uses insights generated in the process and those from a few experiments that I conducted with my clients.

The Basic Framework

Permissions, a key part of the therapeutic process in Transactional Analysis, are described by Berne (1972) as 'Parental license for autonomous behaviour'. Berne also states 'true permissions are merely permits, like a fishing license.' Hence - there is no *compulsion* to use permissions; but there is *freedom* to do so.

A key aspect of Jaoui's wheel is that a permission is not seen as binary i.e. 'you either have it or you don't' - but exists in degrees, e.g. a high or low permission to be joyful. A quick way of understanding this tool is to look at the permission wheel Hawkes used for her client Marie, figure 1.

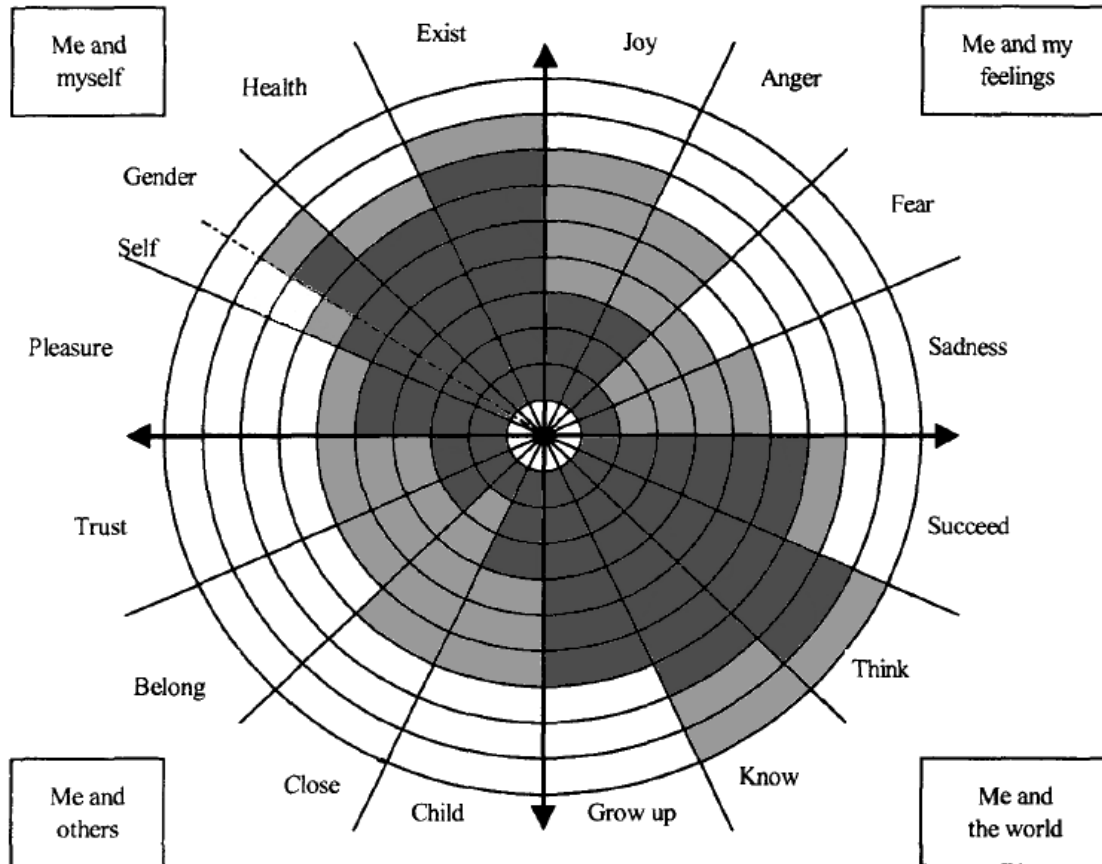


Figure 1: Marie's permission wheel
 (Laurie Hawkes, 2007, *Transactional Analysis Journal* 37:3, Pg. 213).

There are four quadrants in the wheel representing permissions to self in the areas of feelings, the world, myself and others. Ten concentric circles represent degrees of freedom (each 10%), filled in based on the therapist's understanding of the client. We, thus, are able to get a 'map' that represents the client's overall permission spaces i.e. their script enclosure (Hawkes, 2007).

The darker areas in figure 1 were Marie's original pre-therapy permissions and the lighter areas show an expanded space over a period of therapy. Hawkes highlighted that a major benefit of the tool is being able to monitor progress over time.

In our training group, we each drafted our individual permission wheels and also worked in pairs to help deepen insights around each other's wheels; we used empathetic listening and open

ended questioning to discover correlations and patterns in our emerging wheels – for example, high permission to be a child correlating with high permission for joy in one case; and in another, low permission to grow up corresponding with low permission to make decisions.

We concluded that the intuitiveness and visual nature of this tool makes it a very interesting framework for discussion and co-creation; and that in a therapeutic setting, the awareness created can enthuse the Child in the client - so that the Adult may contract for changes that emerge, with the support and co-operation from the Child.

The Playpen

Hawkes likened the script-enclosure to a playpen, ‘*close to the playpen described by Gouldings in their 1976 article on injunctions*’ (Gouldings, 1976). This seems apt, because the degrees of freedom across different areas form a metaphorical ground within which we are safe and comfortable.

A question that arises: even if clients work with their therapist to increase permission in an area, does that mean that they will actually step into the new ground? Or is it possible they may avoid it, preferring to hover in familiar parts? What would allow a client to really *take in* a permission?

For this to happen, the client needs to believe that the increased permission is good for them *and* must feel safe in trying out behaviours prohibited earlier. This is where the therapist’s potency and the protection offered are important (Crossman, 1966); and both must be powerful enough for the client to go ahead and disobey their Parental injunction. Exploring new territory will require **practice** by the client– until this unfamiliar new ground becomes familiar and the client is able to experience something along the lines of ‘Hey! It really is OK to venture out here.’

Who's in Charge of This Permission Business, Anyway?

Since I was enthusiastic about the idea of the permission wheel, my trainer asked if I would write an article on the topic for SAJTA – despite the fact I had been in training only for two months. The permission to think and to succeed were implied in that ask; but despite being a seasoned writer, I still felt a sense of uncertainty as to how to approach my first article on Transactional Analysis.

I called my trainer to ask somewhat breathlessly whether I could use personal examples and a non-academic voice, both natural components of my writing style – in other words, I was looking for the permission to be myself.

My trainer, recognizing an anxious Child looking for validation, spoke from her Nurturing Parent, assuring me that it would be okay to write the article as naturally as possible and we would have the editorial team's inputs to review. I appreciated her assurances; however, I found myself still unable to get started until *I* decided it would be okay – and more than that, my Child got excited and decided that it might even be fun.

As with injunctions, the Child ego state is key in permissions; permissions may be given by Parent figures, but they have no power unless they are taken in by the Child.

I realized my trainer was excited about my writing this article –her Child ego state was involved in this process as well. Thus, her asking me to write a SAJTA article can be seen as a permission transaction (Berne, 1972), depicted below in figure 2.

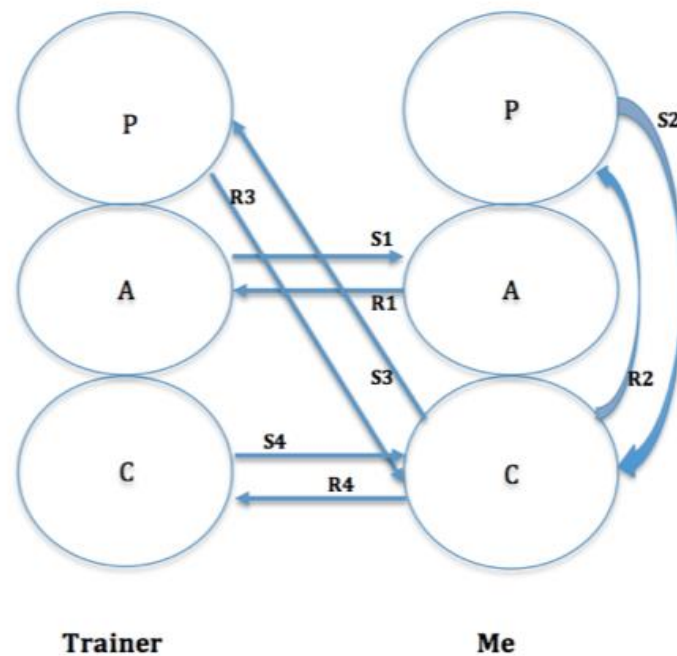


Figure 2: The permission transaction

Adult-Adult –

S1 (Trainer - Me): Would you like to write this article?

R1 (Me - Trainer): Yes, I think it would be a good exercise, actually.

Intra-psychic (For me)

S2 (My Parent - my Child): You really think you can do this?

R2 (My Child - my Parent): You're right, I probably can't.

Parent-Child

S3 (Me - Trainer): Would it really be alright for me to write this as me?

R3 (Trainer - Me): Of course, don't worry about it.

Child-Child –

S4 (Trainer - Me): It'll be fun!

R4 (Me - Trainer): You know, I think it will!

The last two transactions with my trainer involving my Child receiving her parental permission and being infected by her Child enthusiasm led to the following intra-psychic conversation, where I accepted the permission completely–

(My Child – my Parent): My trainer thinks it's going to be fine and in fact, we're going to have some fun with this.

(My Parent – my Child): Alright, you sound like you know what you're doing. Go ahead and give it a shot.

And so, I got down to writing.

Thus, we see that in a permission transaction, all ego states tend to be involved; but ultimately they need to be **granted to; accepted by** and then **explored and acted upon** by the Child.

We Have Permission to Modify the Permission Wheel!

The four quadrants in Gysa Jaoui's original permission wheel are highly relevant; however, our training group saw the opportunity to also add different areas into the wheel–e.g. romantic relationships, creative pursuits. Any modifications are completely in line with the creator's original intent for the tool – she shared it generously and encouraged creativity in its use.

1. Enhancing the List of Permissions

Our group brainstormed other possible permissions, listed below. In my experience, the Wheel became unwieldy and complex if too many items were added; practitioners will need to experiment and find their own balance between granularity and overcomplication. A non-exhaustive list of options to consider are in the following table:

<u>Me & My Feelings</u>	<u>Me & Myself</u>	<u>Me & Others</u>	<u>Me & The World</u>
- To feel all feelings	- To be beautiful	- To be loved	- To be important
- To make meaning of the world	- To make mistakes / be human	- To forgive	- To be different
- To feel wonder	- To relax	- To love	- To be rich
- To dream	- To be sexual	- To express self	- To learn
- To feel excitement	- To be okay	- To refuse	- To grow
	- To approve of myself	- To be independent	- To make an impact
	- To deal with my problems	- To ask for help	- To lead
	- To be silly		- To stand out
	- To just be		- To be ordinary
	- To be naughty		- To win
	- To be creative		- To decide
	- To be intuitive		- To change one's mind
	- To trust in myself		- To be innovative

Figure 3: Possible permissions to include in the wheel

Coming up with this list was a liberating exercise; in fact, as I used it with my clients, their involvement and excitement grew as they added to the list for themselves.

What other permissions might be there? The possibilities are endless; it depends on our clients and their context and our own creativity and awareness about what permissions might help them the most.

2. Mixing and Matching Two Wheels

As an experiment, I decided to work with one of my clients, Raman (name changed) to overlay a permission wheel on another tool, the coaching wheel (adaptation of the original life

wheel created by Paul J Meyer in the 1960s) wherein different life areas are plotted and marked for the client's satisfaction levels, as a means to decide priorities and actions (see figure 4)¹



Figure 4: The coaching wheel template
<https://www.coachingwithnlp.co/coaching-wheel/>

Clients often take the lead in deciding and naming their specific areas of interest. In Raman's case, one was 'trading', as he works in the financial markets and was concerned about his lack of progress here.

We decided to explore permissions related to success in this space. To his surprise, he realized that while he had high permission in some relevant areas i.e. to compete, to win and to be ambitious; he had very low permissions in others, such as to take risks and to feel abundant; and he had a sudden insight that these low permissions were compromising his performance at

an unconscious level. He was still operating under past influences from a middle-class upbringing where he had often heard ‘money is always scarce’ and ‘we are not like those rich people’ and even ‘people like us do not take risks’. Clearing these blocks was crucial to his success. This moment of insight occurred due to the interplay between two tools. What other combinations might be possible? We can experiment and see.

3. Wheels Within Wheels

Our training group suggested that each life area can actually have a wheel within itself and I realized this to be especially true through the case of Raman. Within trading, for example, there were already several requirements for success - ambition, competitive spirit, ability to take risks, comfort with money, etc. We can help our clients achieve progress through breaking down key life areas and working towards permissions there.

One context relevant to children and young adults pertains to the skills required to thrive in the 21st century, which include four competencies - critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication (World Economic Forum, 2016) We can conceptualize a modified version of the permission wheel to see the degree to which relevant permissions exist for each of these skills to develop - whether in educational, home or organizational contexts.

In figure 5, a sample wheel has been included. In this version of the wheel, as a simplification, I have used only three circles representing low, medium, high permissions.

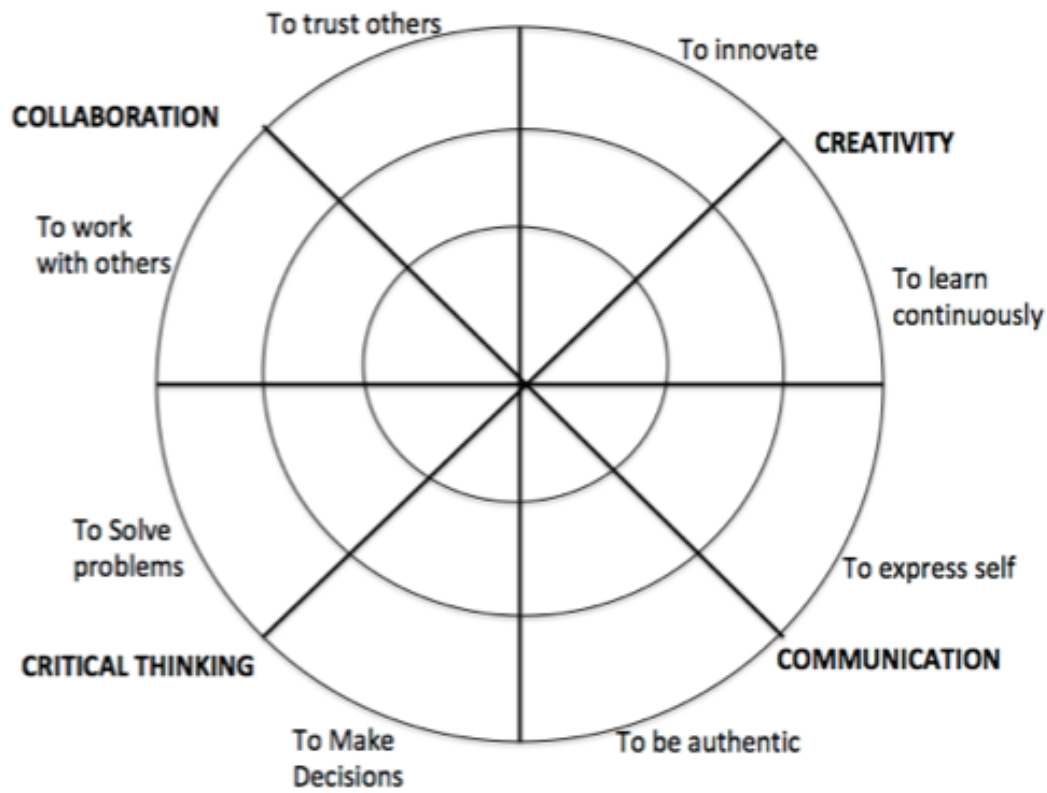


Figure 5: Sample permission wheel adapted to 21st century key competencies

It is similarly possible to conceptualize various other wheels, depending on the context - and what we can identify as the most relevant permissions in that context.

4. The Interplay in the Playpen

I felt some dissonance as I looked at the first draft of my own permission wheel. I had high permission for anger, modelled for me by my father, who had occasional flashes of anger and would cool down almost immediately afterward. My husband looked at my permission wheel and questioned if I indeed could have such a high permission for anger - given how upset I got with myself after my every outburst.

This made me wonder: if we did have permission for something, why would we feel not-okay about it? I then realized that I had very low permission in another area which I had included

my wheel -‘Be human’. This meant that even if I had anger modelled as acceptable behaviour and exercised my license to get angry – my internal Parent would follow up with crushing criticism. I had to work therefore not just on using my anger permission more selectively, but also to enhance my permission to be human and to forgive myself for the occasional lapse.

Moreover, I realized I could also use my permission to grow and learn to evolve the way in which I choose to express my anger. I’d had outbursts modelled when I was younger – but now with my Adult awareness, I could explore and discover for myself different and healthier ways to express my anger. This implies that we can not only work towards increasing our permissions, but also choose to change the nature and quality of how they manifest.

It also appears that high permission in one area can result in our using this license at the expense of developing other permissions in other areas. In our group, we heard examples of where anger permission is high, fear/sadness terrains lie unexplored. In Raman’s exploration, we found that his high permission for independence/space also had resulted in lack of exploration and hence low permission in ‘intimacy/closeness’; this realization intrigued him and he became determined to explore the terrain further.

5. A New Concept: Super-Permissions

The most significant implication that arose for me in reflecting upon the permission wheel was this: some permissions seem to be ‘**super-permissions**’ - without them, the potency of other permissions may be lost. Some of these super-permissions could be: ‘**permission to feel all feelings**’; ‘**permission to be Ok / human / make Mistakes**’, ‘**permission to be my (whole) self**’ and ‘**permission to change and evolve**’. Work in these areas could increase the effectiveness and sustainability of permission work in all other areas; conversely, if these remain low, no amount of work on increasing other permissions may bring about lasting positive

change. While Allen & Allen have explored hierarchies / ordering in permissions (1972, addendum 1998) – this idea of ‘super-permissions’ merits further development.

Is it Possible to go Beyond Permissions?

Overall, the permission wheel is a valuable tool with strong therapeutic possibilities - and plenty of room for creative exploration and co-creation with clients.

I do find the playpen / enclosure analogy apt and yet, something about it bothers me. Playpens, fences, boundaries seem necessary and give us the freedom and comfort of operating in our safety zone- but to me, they still signify limits.

I find myself wondering whether a point can be reached in our individual processes of growth, where we no longer need permissions at all. Could there be a possibility of living without boundaries? What super-permission might it take to enable us to jump out of the play pen and explore freely outside?

I do wonder about this. But then, I’ve always had high permission to wonder.

Acknowledgements

1 I would like to thank my trainer, Aruna Gopakumar for her considerable inputs for this writing, as well as to my training group for their support.

2 Thanks also to Laurie Hawkes who responded with kind encouragement to a request to reproduce Marie’s wheel.

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Contracting: A Way to Build Alignment and Collaboration in Cross Functional Teams

Gunjan Zutshi & Deepak Dhananjaya

Eric Berne, the founder of Transactional Analysis defined contracts as a “bilateral agreement towards a well-defined course of action” (Berne, 1966). He derived the concept from the legal world and adapted it to psychotherapy. Berne used contracting as a method of working with clients so that both therapist and client were aligned during treatment and had clarity of what they expected to happen.

Since then, theorists from different Transactional Analysis fields (psychotherapy, organisation, counselling and education) have used this contractual method to work with their clients. In this paper, we focus on the application of the concept of contracts in organisations, especially with cross-functional teams (CFT) and how contracts can be used to build alignment and collaboration for team effectiveness.

What is a Cross Functional Team (CFT)

A Cross Functional Team is a self-sufficient team that has the skill set required to deliver a complete functional outcome. For example, to deliver a web commerce project, a cross functional team would have members who are skilled with front-end, back-end, testing and UX. A CFT can come together for a short duration project or can work together over the long term, but always with the intent of achieving something that couldn't have been done by individual teams working on their own. Hence, the need for alignment and collaboration is very high for CFTs, especially when they have to quickly turn around things. Contracting provides a way of working that can enhance the effectiveness of CFTs.

Types of contracts:

Berne (1966) defined three types of contracts:

1. **Administrative** – Administrative contract spells out arrangements agreed regarding practical considerations in the working engagement. These include the meeting time, venue, duration, agenda, who should attend, etc. and clarity about these aspects will ensure smooth progress and completion of tasks.

When administrative contracts are not clarified or adhered to, it can lead to logistical errors, missed meetings and timelines, communication gaps, etc.

2. **Professional** – Professional contract relates to the aim of the work to be done together. It clarifies the purpose, primary task, roles and responsibilities and what skills/competence each member brings to the CFT. What will the team do, why is it being done, who will do what, why someone is included, what is the desired outcome, who are relevant stakeholders and what is their role, etc. are all elements of a professional contract. For example, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each member (considering their professional expertise) ensures there is no overlap.

When professional contracts are not clarified, it can lead to confusion about the purpose of the team, role confusion, lack of clear assessment of competencies of team members, process break downs and people feeling either over or underutilized.

3. **Psychological** – Psychological contract is the more challenging part of contracting. This refers to the underlying dynamics between team members, which is covert and not articulated. There are unspoken feelings, assumptions, expectations, desires and motives that exist when people come together to work in CFTs and these give rise to unconscious dynamics at psychological levels.

For example, if a team member keeps missing the deadline of their task (a professional contract not fulfilled at the conscious level), then it might be an indication that something else is at play at the psychological level. Maybe they are acting on some form of disappointment (with a team member/ manager/ personal life) that is not addressed and articulated, resulting in missed deadlines. In fact, not addressing the issue at the psychological level can threaten the very existence of a CFT.

When the psychological level contracting is not addressed, there is a feeling of mistrust, disappointment, dissatisfaction and a sense that the team is conflict ridden. The objectives or tasks of the CFT are not achieved and even if achieved, it leaves the members feeling drained and de-energized.

Psychological contracts help establish mutual trust and respect between people whereby they can share disappointments and disagreements with each other directly.

For example, while both of us (authors) were working on another project, one of us kept delaying reviewing the project despite reminders from the other. It led to feelings of irritation and disappointment. Upon clarifying, we became aware that the person who had to review was quite swamped with other work and was finding it very difficult to say that reviewing that project was not their priority just then. The fear that they might seem uninterested or like they are not giving enough priority to the other person/task, made it difficult for them to directly communicate the difficulty in completing the task.

During the conversation, we established a psychological contract that “*if we do not want/are unable to do a task, we can directly tell each other instead of keeping the other person waiting and not doing it.*” This contract helped us set expectations and pave the

way for direct and open communication, thus improving our long-term ability to work with each other.

Need for Contracts in CFTs

Some areas where we see teams facing challenges because some aspect of either administrative, professional, or psychological contract has not been addressed are as follows:

- Lack of clarity of task, roles and responsibilities, processes, timelines etc
- Un-clarified assumptions
- Unstated expectations
- Lack of alignment or agreement on task
- Competing / differing priorities

Here are some contracting questions that can be used to clarify and bring alignment for different types of contracts in CFTs.

- **Administrative Contracts:**
 - What time do we meet?
 - Where do we meet?
 - What frequency and how long are these meetings?
 - Who will send the meeting invite?
 - Who will book the meeting room?
 - When and how will we communicate the handovers if there are any?
- **Professional Contracts:**
 - What are the objectives/ purpose/ expected outcomes of this CFT?
 - How are we going to work together?
 - Who will do what? What is each one's role in this CFT?

- What skill sets do I bring to this team?
- **Psychological Contracts:**
 - What is my /our motivation to be part of CFT?
 - What are my /our apprehensions about being part of this CFT?
 - How do we deal with interpersonal issues?
 - What will make me/us lose interest in being part of this CFT?
 - What will I/we do to be involved in the CFT?
 - Do I feel that I am a trusted member of this CFT?
 - How will decisions be made when there is disagreement?
 - How will we handle conflict?
 - How will we support each other? How will we ask for support from each other?
 - How will we share disappointments / disagreements / expectations with each other?
 - What actions of behaviors of mine can sabotage this task and how can i prevent/ avoid that?"

Contracting is a Process

Contracts are not written in stone. We can re-contract depending on the context. When people feel a loss of alignment or experience stuckness, it may be an indication that some aspect of administrative, professional, or psychological contract has not been addressed and needs attention. The more we establish and clarify contracts, the more there is trust, alignment and collaboration is within the team.

Case Study

This case is of a software development CFT consisting of a UX designer, front-end and back-end developers, an automation engineer and its task was to develop one of the product features of a project management tool.

Despite clarifying different levels of contracts at the start of CFTs' work, tensions started building between UX designers and frontend developers after a while. Conflicts began to emerge and would take longer to resolve or needed escalation. This started impacting timelines for the delivery.

Upon speaking to the teams separately, we realized that both teams had built some assumptions about each other that was causing these conflicts:

- The front-end team felt that the design team did not respect their inputs. They felt excluded in the process. This impacted their interaction with design team members.
- Design team members felt that the frontend team often dismisses their designs using technical blockages as a reason. They felt that frontend team under-valued their work.

These unsaid and underlying feelings of not being respected or valued enough were making it difficult for the teams to collaborate, thus, impacting their delivery. This was an indication that the psychological contract needed to be worked with. .

To work through this, a contracting workshop was organized where both the teams were asked to reflect upon the following:

- *What does front-end team think and feel when UX team disagrees with them and vice versa?*

The answers to this question surprised both the teams because they were not intending to disrespect each other. Also, because these dynamics had some legacy, the assumptions were stronger. So, they were asked to agree on a psychological contract as follows:

- *How will they share disappointments with each other and express what they were thinking and feeling?*

Both teams agreed that they will meet every week for 30 minutes – where the focus will be to share the disappointments, unspoken thoughts and feelings and anything that was uncomfortable or challenging.

After a few weeks, the communication between the frontend team and the design team started being more open and direct. The weekly meetings started paving the way to build trust and openness within the team.

The Three-Cornered Contract (English, 1975)

Contracts can be between two or more stakeholders. In CFTs, there are at least three parties involved in a contract - the individual team member, their manager and the CFT. Below is an example of a three-cornered contract.

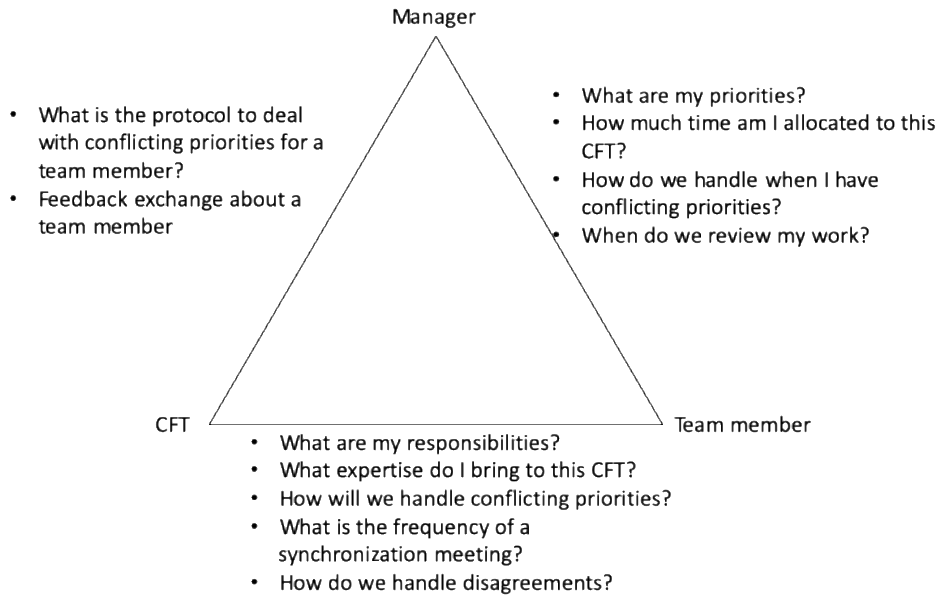


Figure 1: Three cornered contract in a CFT

For three-member CFT, a sample diagram of three-cornered contracts is represented below:

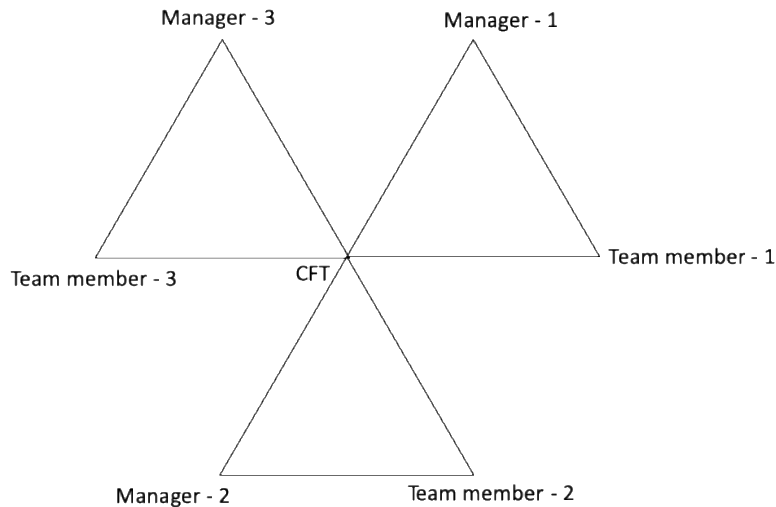


Figure 2: Three cornered contracts for multiple people in the CFT

Multi Party Contracts (Hay, 2007)

However, very often there are more than three parties who are relevant stakeholders and impact how effectively a CFT can function thus requiring multi cornered contracts.

In a CFT we were coaching, there were constant arguments and dissatisfaction around conflicting priorities as some of the CFT members were working on multiple projects. This was leading to tensions amongst team members, the project manager (managing the project) and the product manager (responsible for product specifications and client interface).

We realized that a big missing piece of the contracting puzzle was contracting with the account manager who has the visibility of people's availability and project pipeline. One of the ways we got the group working was by establishing the missing contracts among these stakeholders as shown in figure 3. The conversations focused on all levels of contracts between these parties with specific focus on handling conflicts in work priority.

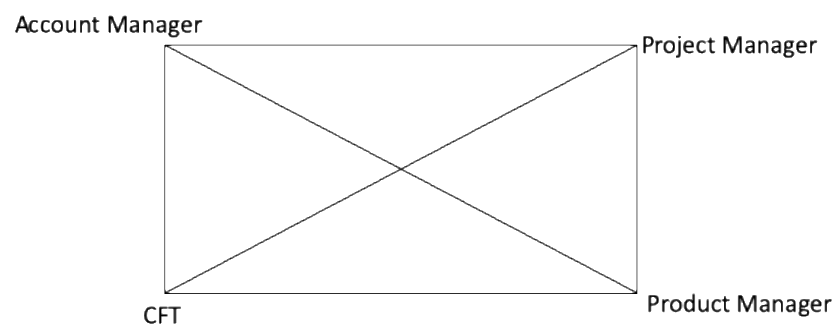


Figure 3: Multi party contracts

Psychological Distance

An important element in the psychological contract is what has been called psychological distance (Micholt, 1985). This is the perceived distance in terms of relationship, that exists between the parties.

In well-functioning contracts, all parties feel that relationships are evenly balanced. Difficulties arise when parties involved feel that the relationships are unevenly balanced and some are closer or farther than others. In a CFT, following can be three ways in which relationship balance is experienced:

a. Individual Allied with Manager



Figure 4: Individual member allied to his/her manager

When this happens, the individual's allegiance lies with their own functional teams / managers. Goals of CFT become subservient to needs of own team, resulting in either not allotting enough time or not giving enough attention to the role and task as a CFT member. It could also mean representing own function/team's point of view to the detriment of CFTs requirements. Other members of CFT may feel frustrated and when things don't go as planned, CFT and its functioning can be blamed.

b. Individual Allied with CFT

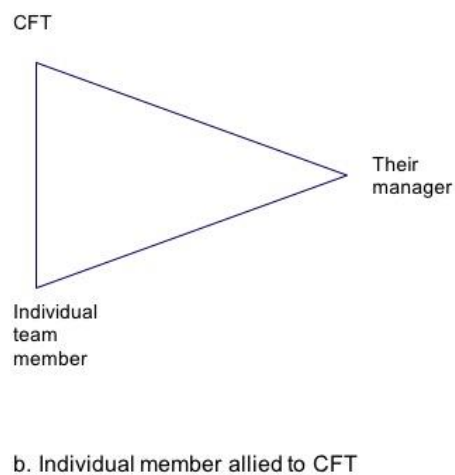
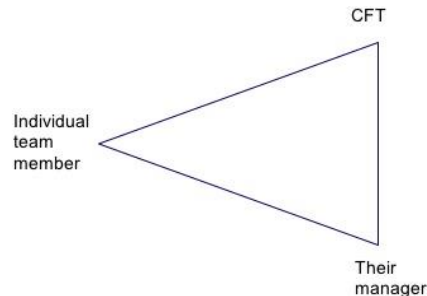


Figure 5: Individual member allied to CFT

When this happens, the individual may feel frustrated because they do not get the support they require from their own function/team to deliver the CFT goals. They may not

get the required resources and may have to stretch to do their work in CFT. They may feel that their manager does not understand the priorities of CFT, they may experience misalignment and a sense of helplessness. When things don't go well, blame can be laid at the manager's door.

c. Manager Allied with CFT



c. Manager allied with CFT

Figure 6: Manager allied with CFT

While this may not be as frequent, when this happens, it can feel alienating for the individual. They may feel that neither the manager, nor the CFT understands their constraints or point of view and they are tasked to deliver targets that are unrealistic. When things don't go as planned, the individual may be blamed for it.

Conclusion

Contracting is an ongoing process. Psychological contracts can be hard work and need persistent effort. However, when done well, contracting can help develop trust, collaboration and alignment in cross functional teams which makes them effective in delivering business results.

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Beyond Liminality – Resilience and Harmony

The pandemic and us

Rosemary Kurian

“Forces beyond your control can take away everything you possess except one thing, your freedom to choose how you will respond to the situation.” *Victor Frankl, 1962*

Abstract

This paper explores our experience of the current pandemic through the lens of Transactional Analysis and examines how this new experience of uncertainty, fear, anxiety, stress and change impacts us. It showcases thoughts and questions that have arisen in groups which I am facilitating, as part of my offering support and information during these times.

As we move from how life used to be to a new future, it explores our capacity to be resilient through the concept of imaginal cells (Barrow, 2016) and using Fanita English’s idea of motivators for caring for self (2008). It also suggests the idea of incorporating the ‘other’ in our pursuit of personal growth and transformation, using the OK kraal (Salters, 2006), thus, moving us towards harmony.

Keywords: pandemic, liminality, resilience, physis, imaginal cells, motivators, harmony

Liminality

The entire human race is experiencing change and uncertainty. Most of this is on account of the virus and how life as we knew it has changed. We are not yet sure how the future is going to be. We are going through a space of in-betweenness, experiencing disruption, disorientation

and dislocation. We are going through a phase where we have left behind ‘what was’ and are not sure ‘what’s next’.

Liminality is that space where we have left behind what was familiar and not sure what lies ahead. This can be an uncomfortable phase to go through. We each have gone through this multiple times in varying intensities in our daily lives. For instance, it could have been that change of job, place, role, etc.

Giles Barrow explains “liminality involves a disconcerting process, an upturning of sorts in an individual’s frame of reference. The entire point of the liminal is that it disturbs and by implication unsettles, perhaps scares or even terrifies. Liminality means “threshold” and refers to the midpoint between two points of certainty” (2020).

A metaphor to explain this would be the metamorphosis of a caterpillar. The remarkable transformation of the caterpillar to a butterfly does not happen without it going through a tremendously disintegrating process of change. It splits opens its skin and sheds its former body. The stage of being inside the cocoon, losing its sense of who it was, experiencing darkness and ambiguity and not knowing if this is the end or what the future holds, This is very similar to our experience of going through a change.

Globally, isolation, being quarantined, experiencing the existential threat of the virus itself and the loss of freedom and control are components of our new reality. We may be going through a liminal space of disorientation and confusion, both individually and collectively, while we are steering our way through this experience.

As uncomfortable as this could be for many of us, it is important to acknowledge the distress we experience in this liminal space. Movement towards change begins with accepting this distress, adapting to the ‘new’, while caring for self and others.

The Present Liminal Experience and Stress

COVID-19 has changed our lives, the way we relate, how we work, relax, etc. As the entire world is battling the virus, each of us is battling the change and the discomfort it brings as we make sense of this new reality.

According to research on stress carried out by Sonia Lupien, “people are going to produce a biological stress response when exposed to a situation involving any of these four characteristics: novelty, unpredictability, threat and sense of low control” (2012. p.9).

Novelty: A pandemic of this magnitude is new for all of us. We have read about times like this, but going through something of this scale, together, is new. We do not have reference points or guidelines to follow, neither as individuals nor as nations. Each one of us is in the process of making sense of this new crisis: the disease, the lack of a vaccine or cure, the isolation, the lockdown, etc.

Unpredictability: Human beings love consistency. There is a sense of safety in knowing. We like what we are used to, healthy or not. Berne talks about our structure hunger and how we have six ways to structure our time – ‘withdrawal, rituals, pastimes, activities, games, intimacy’ (1964). Our routines and interactions with others were the result of how we unconsciously used avenues to satisfy our hungers for stimulus, recognition and structure. However, this has taken a major hit in the last few months due to the unpredictability of the situation we are in and the apparent lack of options to choose from to satisfy our hungers.

Threat to Ego: Apart from the very real existential threat from the virus, we also are experiencing a threat to our sense of competence both personally and professionally. As nations are challenged with economic slowdowns, people are facing threat to life and livelihood.

Sense of Low Control: As we stepped into various degrees of worldwide lockdown, we have lost control over how we lived our lives, not knowing how long till we get back to our jobs, our routine, our morning walks, our sense of wellbeing. This sense of low control on how we can structure our days, months, careers, lives, etc is deeply unsettling.

Any change we undergo also has these same characteristics: novelty, unpredictability, threat to ego and a sense of low control. Very often, this change is disconcerting as we experience grief over what we have lost and fear of what's in store in the future. With this pandemic, we may be experiencing all the above four factors in varying intensities and therefore, stress is a normal response.

Oxford dictionary defines *trauma* as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. A liminal experience of this magnitude does have the potential to express itself as trauma.

Physis is the "force of nature, which eternally strives to make things grow and to make growing things more perfect" (Berne, 1968). However, as one goes through traumatic events such as this, we could lose touch with this orientation to grow.

The liminal process might be understood as an episode in which physis loses direction. It is a time when the individual is likely to sense a loss in the capacity to thrive, even though it is a necessary episode by which growth occurs (Barrow, 2016).

Towards Growth

Resilience

Resilience implies flexibility, a tensile strength that can bend and change while maintaining potency and vigour (Newton, 2007).

Resilience is that capacity that allows one to stand strong as the storm rages and rebuild after it passes. The word resilience originates from the Latin word *resiliō* meaning “to spring back”. It is that capacity inherent in us that helps the physis within us spring back to its original direction – towards growth.

Imaginal Cells

Going back to our metaphor of the caterpillar, “present from the very beginning of the process, the imaginal cells present a fascinating illustration of agents of change. Within the gloom, the imaginal cells that have been the source of such resistance and inertia are revealed as the blueprint for the constituent elements of the butterfly. From the earliest stages of metamorphosis, these cells ‘held’ the form that was not possible to envisage at the beginning” (Barrow, 2016, p. 14).

For the caterpillar, from being earthbound to being able to fly is a huge transformation and to know that the capacity (the imaginal cells) was always present is a parallel that is valuable to use for us in the current times. Our lives as we know it is history, this space of in-betweenness is traumatic, but the possibility of a future that we cannot even begin to imagine is real. To walk towards that future, re-orient ourselves and rise, one can access our inherent capacity of being resilient – a quality that remains dormant in us till we need it like the imaginal cells in the caterpillar.

Reinstating our physis during moments like this, can be facilitated by paying attention to our psychic energy that is distributed among three motivating forces (survival, expressive and quiescence), that are active from birth to death to promote our growth, development and

interaction with our environment, including script formation and implementation (English, 2003). These motivators can offer the flexibility, tensile strength and options that we might need to restore and reorient our physis as we undergo trauma.

Fanita English suggests that resilience following trauma can occur when these three unconscious internal drives or motivators take turns or rotate in affecting our attitudes, feelings, thoughts and behaviours through our ego states (2008). Our own "vital impetus" operates for the same unconscious purposes as those of other animals, namely (1) personal survival, (2) survival of the species and (3) escape from daily pressures (e.g., by sleep) (English,2017).

Below are each of the three motivators, along with some questions to reflect upon, that invite thinking, awareness and a healthy and balanced flow in each of them:

Survival Motivator

Survival motivator operates for the survival of the individual. Typical attributes of the survival motivator will encourage a person to make survival decisions like eating healthy, exercising, keeping indoors, maintaining social distance during this time. The aspect of personal survival in this motivator also contributes to us paying attention to our feelings, stroke needs, requests, transactions, communications, wishes and efforts for affection, admiration, power and control (of self or others) (English, 2008) and therefore, this motivator is that driving force that promotes not just our survival but enables us to thrive. During this pandemic, one could be cautious about health and safety using the survival motivator lest attributes of fear, anxiety, horror, pain and defensiveness take over, preventing healthy functioning.

Questions to Increase the Energy in this Motivator:

- a. What/ who supports you?

- b. How are you offering care for yourself - physical and emotional?
- c. How are you initiating conversations and connections with others?

Expressive Motivator

The expressive motivator operates for the survival of the species. This motivator supports sexual procreation and parental tendencies to produce and care for children. Typical attributes include curiosity, interest in exploration, playfulness, excitement, enthusiasm, optimism, courage, etc. Mankind has seen such spectacular growth as a result of the attributes of this drive- imagination and the craving for self-expression. In being driven by the expressive motivator, one could look for creative ways of rediscovering their work and career but could also decide to engage in harmful behaviours losing structure and routine and satisfying only stimulus hunger. The number of cases of domestic violence and child abuse has gone up during the lock down.

Questions to Increase the Energy in this Motivator:

- a. What was fun when you were a little child?
- b. What creative and healthy options can you think of that offers possibility of excitement and curiosity?
- c. What's on your plate now and how can you problem solve?
- d. What good is emerging from this experience of being in this pandemic?
- e. While keeping safe, what can you offer others (family, community, environment)?

Quiescence Motivator

This motivator relates us to the cosmos and encourages us to let go of the daily pressures and direct our efforts to meditate, contemplate, relax, sleep, etc. Letting go is especially crucial during this time. Meditation, rest and contemplating are ways to remain

present centred and grounded. However, the quiescence motivator can also drive us to unhealthily withdraw and not act.

Questions to Increase the Energy in this Motivator:

- a. What gifts of peace would you like to offer yourself?
- b. How would you like to connect with nature and the environment?

Each of these motivators has unique attributes that are neither good or bad, however, these can be manifested in our behaviours both positively and negatively.

Another facet of these motivators is that each of us has a preferred motivator where we most often function from which makes us uniquely different from the other. Smooth movement or rotation among the influence of our motivators must occur much of the time, even if we prefer one or another motivator because that is the only way that emotional balance is maintained with a sense of feeling OK and the consequent ability to make rational decisions from the Adult ego state (English, 2008).

Threat and danger are a reality in our experience in the current times. This can bring on the exclusive dominance of the survival motivator, creating a clog in the natural flow of energy among the drives. Fanita English suggests stimulating the expressive drive to discover a sense of meaning and hope. This can unclog and restore the flow.

Above All - Harmony

Another dimension in our metaphor of the caterpillar, is the fact that as the caterpillar disintegrates and the imaginal cells take over to facilitate transformation, the old caterpillar cells experience this as a threat and start attacking the imaginal cells. This is how our old belief systems will respond as we are presented with new options, information, ideas and possibilities during our liminal spaces.

Kim Polmon, in her book, *Imaginal Cells: Visions of Transformation*, uses this metaphor to demonstrate how threats like these could be an invitation to each of us to rise as imaginal cells and lead the world towards transformation. She says the caterpillar cells fighting against the imaginal cells represent the old way of doing things, greed, linear economy, rampant self-righteousness, etc. that resist the new way, of a more inclusive and responsible way of doing things. The frequency the imaginal cells emit represents, for us, the golden rule (treat others and the planet as you wish to be treated), a universal principle that if sung together, the world would be a better place (2017).

As we re-establish the flow within, we will facilitate this flow outside. Resilience is a better word for OK power (Newton, 2007).

Diane Salters writes, “the imperatives of our now global economy (with all its problems) and our growing world consciousness (with all its opportunities) makes it essential that we fully embrace the concept of equality and oneness - in humanity and in value, along with our differences (2006).

The OK Kraal (Groups)

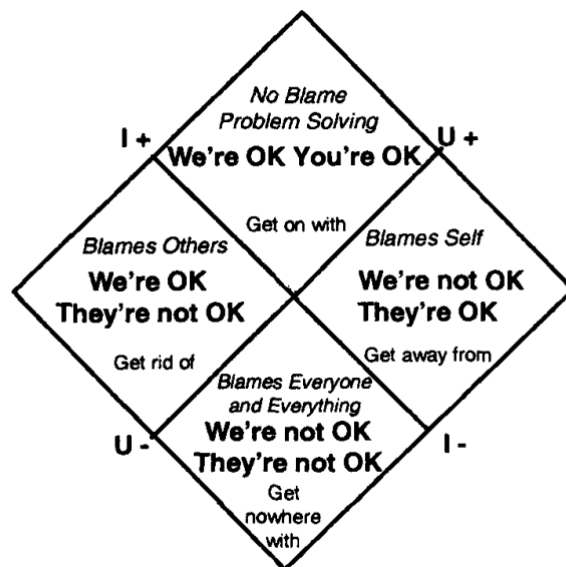


Figure 1, The OK Kraal (Groups), Salters, 2006

Perhaps, we can each be ‘imaginal cells’ that lead transformation, starting from our homes, workplaces, communities, nations, to our environment. This can be achieved when we translate our OK power beyond “I” and “you” to include “we” (the groups we belong to) and “they” (the groups we consider different). To accept you and I, we and they, to know that differences and disagreements are ever present and to go past these to embrace ‘us’ creates harmony. In singing, harmony is not about doing away with or creating new notes but combining the seven notes to create music. Therefore, harmony is about moving beyond differences and blaming to collectively focus on problem solving, healing and growth.

Conclusion

Could acknowledging the discomfort as one goes through a liminal phase help accept and adapt to the change? Perhaps, working our way through the very factors causing stress will help nudge ourselves out of stuckness and be resilient? Can fluid movement in us and how we access our motivators be practiced? Can we learn and practice harmony and embrace ‘Us’? These are the questions that the author is exploring with the groups she is working with.

This pandemic is a traumatic experience. Each of us will have this experience etched into our personal stories. However, we will learn. We will grow. We will change. And that is how human beings have evolved. This pandemic also has connected all of us with this shared experience. It is that common thread that now weaves together the stories of whole of the humanity. It is not about my story or yours. It is now OUR story and how we will transform together. Sing together.

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De-Escalating Conflicts in Couples using Interlocking Racket Systems

Kala Balasubramanian

Summary

This article aims to articulate how I use the concept of interlocking racket systems (Holtby, 1979) with my couple clients. Application of the same is illustrated by the use of a case example. Techniques and interventions focused on de-escalating spiralling conflicts between couples are explained.

Client names and scenarios have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Introduction

In my experience of working with couples, during courtship, couples tend to show their best versions to each other and build an ideal image about the other in their minds. Many couples come together with an expectation of “happily ever after” without understanding the effort needed to build that every day. Once they start living together, or get married, slowly they find themselves in a reality that is very different from the ideal image in their minds.

When couples come into therapy one of the common challenges that they face is about very frequent conflicts or conflicts that escalate and become very intense. They are unable to resolve the conflict in its entirety, or in the process of resolving the conflict, they end up causing even more hurt and pain to each other. They are unable to resolve this by themselves and feel stuck in that space and end up repeating the same cycle again and again, with high levels of emotional reactivity. When a conflict escalates in a couple, each iteration between the two partners spirals out. In each escalating iteration the words/actions are stronger and emotions increase in intensity. When such patterns are established over time, the partners’ emotional reactions are high even at a small hint of disagreement. At this stage couples are majorly

engaged in 2nd degree games with no permanent or irremediable damage arises, but which players would conceal from public (Berne, 1964).

Background

Mona and Akshay (client names have been changed to maintain confidentiality) had a love marriage after 2 years of courtship. Their problems started right after their marriage. They came into therapy 5 years into their marriage, emotionally disconnected, with frequent and escalating conflicts, sexual dissatisfaction and questioning their own choice of partner. They were so stuck in their entrenched pattern of conflicts that they both felt that there is no other way of relating. Both would react to each other in specific ways that brings about an experience for each that would reinforce their own script beliefs, i.e., their racket systems.

The racket system is defined as a self-reinforcing, distorted system of feelings, thoughts and actions maintained by script-bound individuals. The racket system has three interrelated and interdependent components: the script beliefs and feelings, the rackety displays and the reinforcing memories (Erskine & Zalcman, 1979).

Childhood Experiences and Early Decisions

Inquiry about their childhood revealed that Mona comes from a family where she was the Middle child with an elder sister and a younger brother. The brother was born when she was 2 years old. The elder sister had the attention of her father and the younger brother had the mother's attention being a sickly child. Mona's early decision that "I am unwanted and alone" was reinforced when she felt rejected and couldn't make good friends at school. Her way of coping with her loneliness was to throw tantrums which would get her parental attention. She would also retreat into her inner world, day dream or focus on studies which she excelled in, for which she received strokes from her teachers and parents. Parents would fight a lot and openly

display anger to each other which made her afraid. She was scolded and asked to put on a smile by her mother whenever she would be sad or fearful.

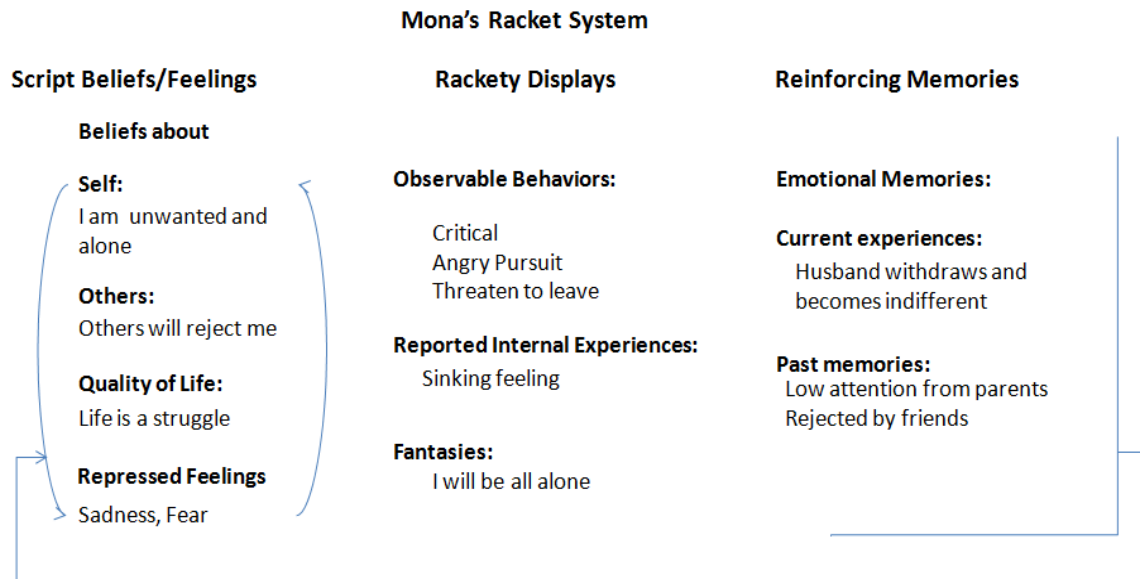


Figure 1: Mona's racket system

Akshay was the youngest of four siblings. He was born very late to his parents when his mother was 45 and it was an accidental pregnancy. During the pregnancy and when he was born, his parents experienced much shame about having a child at a later age. During his early childhood when his mother couldn't focus on him, she would become very critical of him. His early decision was "I am not good enough". His elder sister would intervene, take care of him and he was very close to her. Whenever he was in trouble he would become sad, cry, sulk, withdraw, become quiet and would get attention from his sister or dad and would get some respite from his mother's criticism. Soon his elder sister got married and passed away during child birth, which was traumatic for young Akshay. The early decision was "If I get close, I will lose them". He also coped by focusing on his studies and excelling in it. He didn't make any close friends at school. He was stroked for being academically strong and reprimanded severely

if he didn't perform well. Expressing any anger, fear or self-doubt was discouraged by his mother. Despite being very good in academics and career, he felt like an imposter.

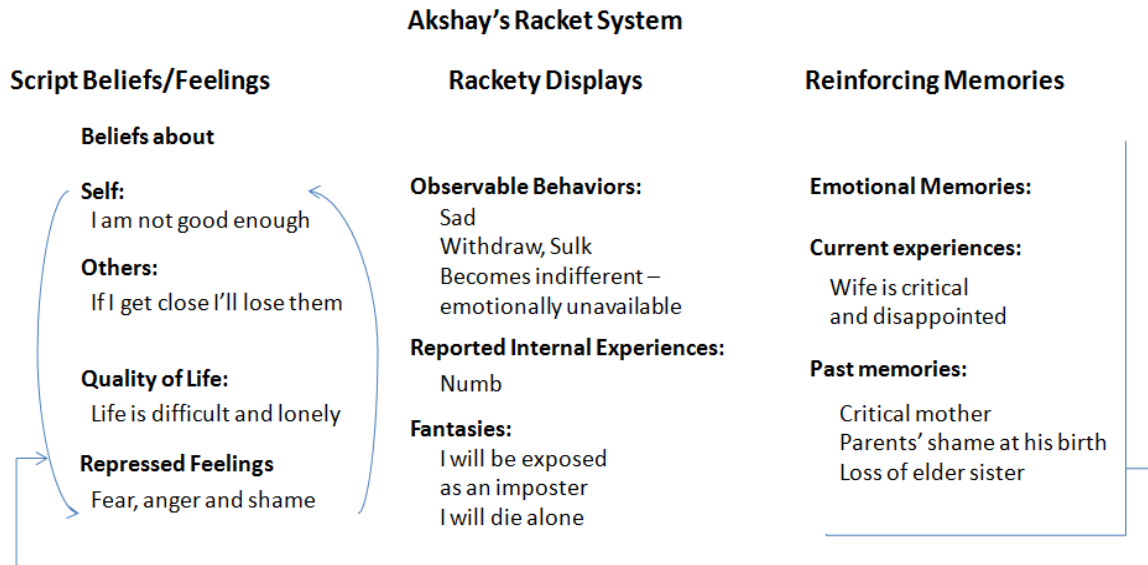


Figure 2: Akshay's racket system

When they both met and fell in love, they both experienced acceptance that was so intoxicating and their academic / career focus became the common theme on which they connected powerfully. It is important to also notice how they unconsciously chose each other to further their scripts.

In order to maintain rackets, a supporting cast is necessary. Spouses or lovers are partially picked for this purpose. Since each individual has his or her own racket system there needs to be some kind of complementary interlocking. What seems to consistently occur is that the racket display of one serves as the reinforcing experience of the other (Holtby, 1979).

Interlocking Racket Systems Further the Scripts

Once they were married and started living together, everyday stress brought up their script beliefs and their racket systems interlocked with each other, providing them experiences that reinforced their script beliefs. The interlocking script system helps us understand how each

family member supports and helps others to carry out day to day, their own script beliefs. It describes both interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics of dysfunctional families or groups. (Erskine and Moursund, 1988).

When Mona wanted closeness and affection and didn't get reciprocation from Akshay, she would get angry and become critical. And that would result in Akshay withdrawing and becoming indifferent, which would reinforce her belief that she is unwanted. She would escalate the situation, threaten to leave and break the marriage. She expressed anger which was her racket feeling (Stewart, 1989) whereas her repressed feelings were sadness and fear.

When she was critical of him, his script belief got reinforced that he is not good enough. And when she threatened to leave that would further his belief that getting close to someone has a risk of loss. He would become sad, sulk, withdraw and behave indifferently towards her, reinforcing her belief that she is unwanted. Sadness was his racket feeling and his repressed feelings were fear, shame and anger.

I invited them also to see the correlation between their current experiences in the relationship with their early childhood experiences by asking them "What / Whom does this remind you of in your childhood?"

Mona was able to relate that when Akshay wouldn't reciprocate closeness and affection she felt the same way as in her childhood when she didn't get attention from her parents and was left feeling rejected. Akshay was able to see the connection that when Mona was critical of him, it felt like his mom being critical of him in his childhood and he would feel inadequate.

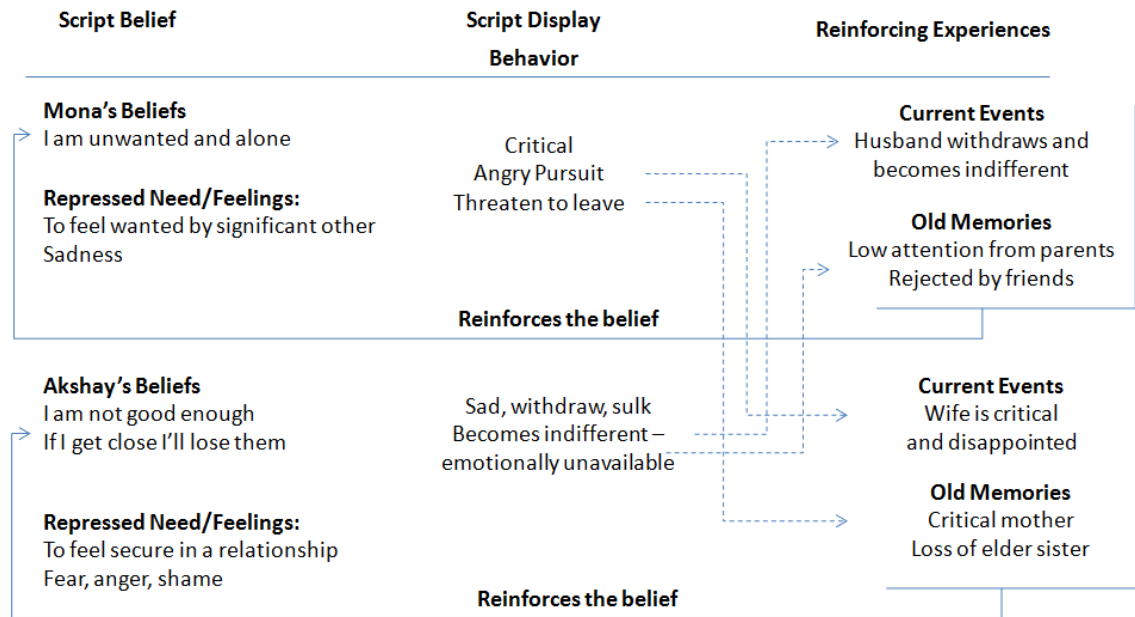


Figure 3 Interlocking racket systems

Breaking the Interlocking Racket Systems

I introduced the interlocking racket systems to the couple and built it together collaboratively. Once they gained awareness as to how their systems are interlocked I invited them to choose any point to intervene and arrive at their options. This led to a contract from both partners to interrupt their cyclic escalating spiral of conflict. I validated their feelings and repressed needs with empathetic attunement. But it was important that they find that understanding and empathy from their partner. This is how we progressed.

Therapist: Now that you have understood your interlocking racket systems, what has come into your awareness?

Mona: I had always thought that by getting angry and critical with him, I am telling him that he is hurting me. But now I see that my anger and criticism makes him feel inadequate and withdraw even more from me.

Akshay: And I thought by withdrawing, I am avoiding conflicts. By not being openly affectionate I thought I was avoiding the pain if I lose her. I just become sad that nothing that I do pleases her. But internally I am always afraid of being not good enough for her.

Therapist: Now you are aware of what your repressed needs and feelings are, you can make a change at any point in the interlocking racket system. What do you think are your options?

Mona: When I approach him and he is not responsive, instead of getting angry (my racket), I will express sadness and my need for closeness with him. I do want to be close to him, I need him.

(Mona expresses her repressed feelings instead of rackety behaviour)

Akshay: When I hear that she needs me, it makes me feel good. I will spend quality time with her. I want to feel secure with her. I want her to acknowledge that I am good enough for her. She is very important for me and I want to be with her too. When she is not critical I can be more open with her.

(Akshay responds with empathy and expresses his repressed need)

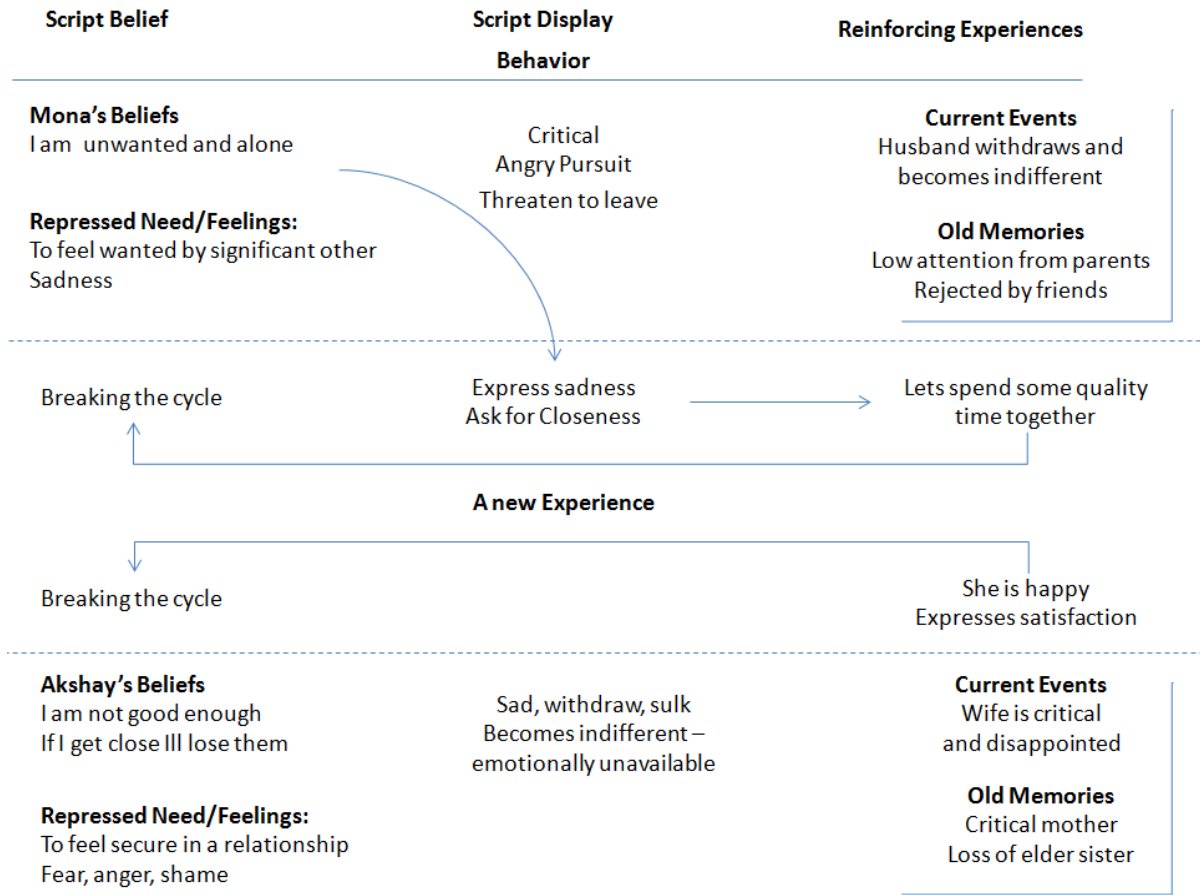


Figure 4 Breaking the cycle

Mona made a choice to express her repressed emotion, sadness and her repressed need of feeling wanted by her partner instead of rackety display. This interrupted their interlocking racket system, enabling Akshay to respond with empathy and affection. Akshay offers closeness when he hears that Mona values his time and company. This creates a new experience for the both of them causing a break in their cycle and break in furthering their script beliefs.

It is not usually this straight forward for the couple to arrive at an understanding and contract for change. It involves each partner taking responsibility for their own emotions and behaviours; and developing an understanding and empathy for how it furthers their partner's script. Many a times one partner might take responsibility and other may not yet be ready. One partner may be empathetic and the other may not be. It is important for the therapist to provide

the couple adequate holding and empathy. As a therapist I both teach and model empathy for the couple. I need to stay with both partners, till both are ready for a change. I also may need to facilitate negotiation between the couple as to what they are ready for and what they are not. When one partner is able to express their repressed needs and real feelings and the other partner is ready to listen and empathize, that is the pathway to breaking the interlocking racket systems.

Sometimes old hurts and pain might be too deep for one partner to effect a change in couple therapy. If the client requires individual therapy, I would evaluate the need to provide support and referrals to the client. Care also needs to be taken to decide when and how to resume couple therapy which might need coordination with the individual therapist.

The new experiences need to go hand in hand with changes in the client's script beliefs and resolution of racket feelings. But the significant maintaining, reinforcing experiences that were furthering their scripts had been interrupted allowing the script beliefs to be updated. Breaking the cycle of the interlocking racket system allows the conflict to be de-escalated and provides the couple appropriate entry points to disrupt their repetitive negative interaction cycles.

Conclusion

In summary, interlocking racket systems is a powerful way to showcase to the couple how both contribute to their spiralling conflicts and instil a sense of understanding of real unmet needs in the couple. Reframing the rackety displays as underlying unmet needs helps the partners de-escalate and express empathy for each other. The new experiences interrupt the interlocked racket systems and provide opportunities for deeper work. Couples also get a sense of agency, to know that they can make a change in situations that they assumed as unchangeable earlier and enhances their capacity for intimacy.

Teaching relevant Transactional Analysis concepts to clients appropriately helps them understand both interpersonal and intrapsychic dynamics, helping them make sense of what is confusing and unclear to them, enabling them to move forward in an aware manner.

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Truth is One, Paths are Many

Reaching our Life's Goals: Comparative Perspectives from the Bhagavad Gita and Transactional Analysis

P K Saru

Abstract

Both Eric Berne and old Indian sages and philosophers are talking one and the same truth at different levels and from different perspectives - "*Ekam aath vipra baudha vadanth*" i.e. 'Truth is one, paths are many'.

This article aims to explain attainment of life goals through the concepts of autonomy (Berne, 1964) and physis (Berne, 1968) taken from Transactional Analysis, as compared with teachings from the Bhagavad Gita (Ranganathananda, 2000). The author asks and answers the below questions using this approach:

- What do freedom, awareness, action and responsibility mean?
- Is autonomy freedom? If so, freedom for what purpose?

Different Perspectives; Common Goals

The goal of Transactional Analysis is autonomy or freedom. Eric Berne did not define 'autonomy', but defined the 'capacities of autonomy' which are released by an autonomous person. These are:

- Awareness
- Spontaneity
- Intimacy

Later theories added the capacity of 'responsibility'. (Bonds-White & van Beekum, 1995)

Let us go through what these aspects of autonomy mean.

1. Awareness: It is the ability to be alive to all the senses or the stimuli within and outside us. That is, the internal and external environments are the realities. So I know what is happening within me and outside and I am in the 'here and now'.

2. Spontaneity: Spontaneity is the conscious exercise of choice over responses, from any one of the ego states. It means liberation from past influences and anxiety of the future. Again, I'm very much in the 'here and now'.

3. Intimacy: It is the ability to unconditionally accept or give love. In simple words, it is a game-free, candid relationship.

4. Responsibility: This is to exercise one's response based on a moral choice - based on either a set of values or sets of universally, culturally or socially shared values. This means our actions are influenced by a wider context.

When these four capacities and their inherent exercising occur, the person is said to be autonomous or said to act autonomously in response to each stimulus.

How does this aware, integrated individual, who is stable under stress or in its absence, compare with the model of a fully evolved, self-realized individual? This is depicted in the Bhagavad Gita (also referred to as the Gita), which in my opinion is one of the foremost philosophic teachings of India.

The Gita is a discourse between Arjuna and his guide and charioteer, Sri Krishna, covering aspects of spirituality, ethical dilemmas and philosophical issues. It deals with men and women at work, unlike other spiritual books which treat men and women in prayer, meditation, worship or some ritual ceremony.

The Gita's philosophy emphasises the power of appropriate action, also referred to as 'responsibility' and condemns running away from the 'here and now' reality. It emphasises

facing reality with awareness; choosing a path of action with detachment and seeing the divinity in all human beings as the qualities of a self-realized person. These are closely attuned with what Berne talks of in the capacities of an autonomous person.

Both, Transactional Analysis and the Gita's philosophy, emphasize the human beings' inner drive to health and growth. Berne talks about **physis** - one's nature coming from the deepest biological roots of the human being and striving towards the greatest realization of good. He says "All human beings are basically OK; and are princes and princesses". The Gita talks about the innate divinity in all human beings. According to the Gita, all human beings are potentially divine and have an innate OKness or splendour, which is called "*atman*".

Another aspect of the Gita's self-realization is 'fearlessness'. It is through fearlessness that one can develop spirituality. According to the Gita, that fearlessness comes from inner strength and inner anchoring. That is what is referred to as "*samathwa bhava*" or 'balance in feeling, thinking and action'. This in Transactional Analysis, is what Berne describes as the secure energy in our script (Berne, 1961), which allows us to bounce back even after adversity.

What is Freedom According to the Gita?

The whole focus of Gita is on the training of the human mind for holistic human development, by handling the world around and the world within, in a masterly way. **This is the Gita's experience of freedom to the highest level of development and is called "*mukthi*".**

Such a development is referred to as "*stitha pragnya*". "*Stitha*" means 'steady', "*pragnya*" means 'wisdom or knowledge'. So freedom, from the Gita's perspective, is handling one's psychophysical energy - developing it and expanding it, in order to bring out the best of oneself. This is self-realization.

The Four Paths to Self-Realization or "Atma Gnana"

According to the Gita's Philosophy, there are four ways of attaining **self-realization**. Individuals can choose any of these paths; and each path includes realization of divinity in self and others through awareness and action with responsibility.

<i>Karma Yoga</i>	-	Activities and Actions
<i>Bhakti Yoga</i>	-	Prayer or Contemplation
<i>Gnana Yoga</i>	-	Knowledge or Enquiry
<i>Raja Yoga</i>	-	Concentration or Discipline.

What is Awareness According to the Gita?

Sri Krishna gives a beautiful exposition of the dimensions of awareness - they are "*parak*" and "*pratyak*". These are two great dimensions, which describe one's reality of context. At no point of time are we devoid of context.

Parak means 'what is out there' – that which our senses can reveal - what we can see here, touch, smell and taste in the 'outside reality'.

Pratyak means 'inward' - and that is the reality within.

Transactional Analysis refers to this as frame of reference (Schiff & Schiff, 1975).

The Gita also emphasises the compatibility of human beings in the context of nature.

"*Prakrithi*" or nature itself has two dimensions:

"*Apara*" meaning 'ordinary'.

"*Para*" which means 'higher dimension'.

For human beings also, there are two realities - the contextual reality and the inner spiritual reality. Wherever we are and whatever we do, one has to be aware of these two realities - being in touch with our external environment and our internal splendour "*atman*".

What is Action According to the Gita?

Action is a capacity of the self-realized person. This is not action for action's sake, but action of a detached nature, in which the results are not the criteria.

"*Nishkama karma*" is a very unique perspective of action or responsibility, which the Indian philosophy contributes. It says "Your right is to work only, but never to the fruits thereof. Do not be motivated by the fruits of actions nor let your attachment be towards inaction. To work alone, you have the right." "*Karmanyeva adhikaraste - ma phalesu kadacana*".

The Gita says, "your responsibility is to action, not to its fruit". Don't work always looking at the fruit or "*phala*" that is going to come out of it. How can we work without looking for fruits? If we don't get the fruits of our actions, we may ask "Why should we work at all"? This is what constitutes the whole development of the subject of "*atma gnana*" or self-realization, of the practical Vedanta explained through the Gita.

What is Responsibility According to the Gita?

When Jesus was asked what is the teaching in the commandment, he said two things "Thou shall love thy God with all thy heart, soul and mind" and "Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself".

According to the Gita, you are your neighbour; we are one. There is only one infinite self, pulsating in me, in you and in all the world. This is called 'yoga of non-attachment'.

We live in an ordered society because there is a government. It rightfully takes taxes from us and we pay. Similarly, we have many other obligations. When we understand these, our dimension of responsibility expands. When I feel spiritual oneness with the other, whatever work I do, the fruits of it are not for me alone, but for all. A stage will come when there will be nothing of the "I" left. Everything will be "WE".

So the Gita says, don't run after the fruits and don't remain inactive.

How Can One be Responsible?

The answer - by raising our consciousness levels. All actions come from a particular colour of consciousness. A criminal has one action, his consciousness level is in a particular state. A very generous man also has actions which come from another consciousness level. So, **responsibility means being accountable to our own selves and thereby raising our consciousness.**

The biggest teaching in Gita by Sri Krishna is "Do work, but the consciousness level must be of a stable and steady nature." That is called "buddhi yoga". That state is the best source, from which all actions emanate. "*Buddhi*" is a great word in Vedanta - it is 'the faculty of reason, judgment, discrimination'.

Where there is no "*buddhi*", we live and work from a lower level of life, motivated by fruits for one self. Compared to that, all thoughts and actions from the level of "*buddhi*" will seek the welfare of others along with that of one self. The "*buddhi*" in us is nearest to the "*atman*" or "*brahman*" which is our core divine self.

Human journey of evolution is compared in the Vedanta, to a journey of fulfilment as explained by the metaphor of Sri Krishna as the charioteer. It depicts one's life journey in which

the self is 'the master of chariot', body is the chariot, sense organs are the horses, mind is the rein and the "*buddhi*" is the controller and director, setting the pace.

"*Buddhi*" has fore sight and far sight. If we work with "*buddhi*", it can become not only a means for our worldly welfare, but also a school for our own inner development. Gandhi echoed this when he said "It is not only the end that matters, but also the means".

Just as Physis denotes transcending one's abilities, the Gita calls on one's higher moral code of being i.e. **spirituality**.

Spirituality is Defined in Gita as 'Efficiency in Work'.

It is a combination of productive efficiency (freedom or autonomy and action) with spiritual efficiency within (awareness and responsibility). All types of actions and work change the world for good; and sometimes for bad. That is one result of work and is the emphasis of work in modern civilization. But the Gita emphasizes other aspects too.

- Has the work done any good to our mind?
- Has it made us better, purer and broader?
- Has it made us realize our true nature?

If this is done, then efficiency gets a second dimension - one gets richer and fulfilled from within. Such a person is referred to as "*stitha pragnya*"; balanced outwardly and inwardly - one of steady wisdom. Freedom with responsibility is towards this goal.

Spiritual freedom is the journey of self-realization of our inherent divinity, achieved through awareness, action and responsibility, towards inner and external growth.

Conclusion

Transactional Analysis and the Bhagavad Gita are two diverse approaches, which deal with the same goals. Both talk about autonomy, which is freedom governed by one's integrity. Both look at responsibility at different levels. And both share how to increase one's wisdom along with knowledge, to bring out our innate OKness and divinity (physis/"*atman*"). Truth is one, paths are many!

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Little Tribes; Large Rainbow People

Mahesh Natarajan

Let me start with a disclaimer: I am not a Transactional Analyst and beyond the 101 of the Transactional Analysis body of knowledge, I am not an expert in the Transactional Analysis system by any means. So, if you read this article from Transactional Analysis lenses, please know that you might see a perspective which might not be what I intended. The perspective you use as a reader will be your truth and it might be quite different from what I set out to say.

Different truths can and do exist in the world we live in. It is only when there is an assertion of one truth as the only correct truth and other truths as being wrong, when there is a belief that they should not exist and they should be punished or destroyed, that we end up becoming oppressors. We agree to disagree on so many aspects in life and continue to coexist. There is much of that in religion, food habits and yes, even in psychology and philosophy.

Even the statement that we could “agree to disagree”, while sounding quite reasonable, is not really so. The spread of misinformation and biased, fake news and hate in the name of this “agree to disagree” principle and the guise of equality of opinions is a cause of much pain. How reasonable is it when, for example, an anti-vaxxer really claim that theirs is a different truth and should be allowed equal dignity, space on stage and that people of science are being monstrous, evil dictators when they deride productions such as Plandemic, as propaganda? (Wilson, 2020).

Or when people who believe that their God intended humanity to be strictly in the binary of man and woman and sexuality as a single monolith of heterosexuality, demand complete freedom of expression to stand on pulpits, be it on a soapbox in a street corner, or a TV debate

show or a place of worship and denounce others as degenerates and curse them as hell-bound abominations?

The systems we create purportedly to understand the world, affects our world-view and become systems enforced on others, often affecting those falling outside these systems. The ‘agree to disagree’ principle doesn’t work, because there is a slippery slope from agreeing to disagreeing, to thousands dying in concentration camps along with all the other ‘undesirables’ in Nazi times (Plant, 1988).

Between the polite façade of “agree to disagree” on one end of the spectrum and mass murder on the other end of the spectrum, we have governments ignoring HIV (Shilts, 2007), till after it killed hundreds of thousands of gay people and became a general public health issue. The queer community has further suffered “conversion” therapies, “cure the gay” boot-camps, ostracism and homelessness, the lack of rights to legally be partners or parents, no rights to healthcare, discrimination at workplaces, marketplaces and every other place including the therapist’s space where the queer person is often pathologized and their existence and experience treated as an anomaly and a disorder, if not a disease.

For decades, psychotherapy was not a friend of diversity, especially regarding gender and sexuality. Sexual orientation, preferences and practices were looked at from the lens of an assumed ‘normal’ person and what didn’t fit were termed deviations, perversions and fetishes. These were then attributed to everything from adverse early childhood experiences, to dysfunctional parents and caregivers and the idea of the perfect family unit of a cis-gendered male-female pair not conforming to the gender norms and other such causes which when once ‘diagnosed’ could then be presumably help heal the person.

Hardly any therapeutic model treated gender and sexuality diversity with anything close to an affirmative lens and it is only the labour of queer people themselves within and outside these systems of therapy that has led to some degree of affirmative therapy. Even then, it is often a continuing emotional labour, like those of religious people trying to find within their texts some interpretation that allows them their dignity, if not affirmation. Transactional Analysis in specific as well, was quite non-affirmative in its first few decades of existence and it is the efforts of queer scholars (Hubbard, 2019) within the framework, that is enabling the discussion to move to diversity and inclusion from an assumed normality based psychopathology.

Even now, we meet psychotherapists from different schools of learning who don't quite understand this diversity, or worse, feel they understand it and still see it as a disorder - as evidenced by the number of people who still offer "conversion therapies" and other psychological tools and techniques meant to force heterosexism (Kulkarni, 2019).

The Trauma of Non-Affirmative Therapy:

One of my earliest experiences with psychotherapy was reaching out to a fairly well-established counsellor through my then-employer's Employee Assistance Program services, to talk about my relationship conflicts. I had barely said hello, shaken hands and introduced myself and the issue I was looking to address, when I saw the frozen look on the therapist's face, the none-too-obvious wiping on their garment of the hand that shook mine and then the words, "I don't know how *you people* live, but let me just look at this as a conflict and see". We spent the next forty minutes trying to help me logically consider my social-emotional conflicts, with barely any eye-contact whatsoever and a coldness that left me wanting to just run away from there and no, there was no handshake when I left.

Though this was close to twenty years ago, I remember the awful feeling that it left in me and I often wonder if the therapist disposed off the glass I drank from and wiped down the surfaces I touched with a disinfectant. The humiliation of the experience aside, the therapy left me feeling worse than before. It left me convinced that there was very little possible for a person like me, even though I had all the privileges of caste, community, class, education, gender and employment. I was absolutely sure that I cannot have much better in terms of relationships and, was so terrified of not finding anyone better and being alone, that I stayed in an abusive relationship for a few years after that. When that relationship ended as it inevitably had to, I was still so convinced of the non-viability of my existence, that I tried to kill myself, erase myself and it was years before I could really undo the impact of that experience and live as me again.

Studies show that the queer community has these experiences across all healthcare service providers, especially from mental health service providers including psychiatrists, psychotherapists, psychiatric social workers, counsellors and the rest. Community research has recorded stories of passive hurt and damage, active abuse including horrific sexual abuse, flagrant breaches of confidentiality, actively putting the client at risk with a hateful family and so much more.

The risk of non-affirmative practice is enormous. It is not enough to simply be neutral or even curious or friendly or accepting. The client is not the learning ground for the therapist to understand how gender and sexuality work, or where the therapist experiments with their own frameworks for understanding diversity and the social-cultural landscape within which queer lives are lived.

The Trauma of Non-Affirmative Political-Legal Systems:

The non-affirmative mental health practice that we largely see in India sits in the larger social-legal scheme of things which is vehemently non-affirmative.

When the Indian Supreme Court passed its landmark NALSA judgment in 2014, while welcoming its wide-reaching implications, members of the community had objections to it and even more so when the egregious transgender persons (Protection of Rights) Act was passed in 2019. For people who are not from these communities, it might have seemed odd that people are protesting against something good being attempted for them and may even think of persons from these communities as ungrateful or entitled.

To understand the situation, we need to understand the objections first. They were primarily on these grounds:

- How and who decided an ordinal system of ranking genders that places cis-men as first, cis-women as second and trans* people as third gender?
- How can a group of people determine someone's gender and does this examination and declaration of gender apply to people of all genders, or why does self-declaration as cis-gender not need certifying, but declaring as trans* require certifying?
- Why are intersex identities conflated with gender identities and why are gender identities so strongly linked to certain body characteristics?
- Why is violence against people under this Act treated differently from violence against others?
- Why is the family of origin, which is often the seat of violence against the person, given primary importance instead of self-made families?

- Why are traditional occupations (such as collecting alms for blessings, service in places of worship, service in bathhouses etc.), vilified, without provisions for safe education and safe employment?
- Why is there no mention of property rights, marriage rights, healthcare rights, adoption rights and all other such rights?

Even though the Act claims to be a protection of rights, it sits very much squarely in an oppressive system and at best is trying to be grudgingly accommodative of people it doesn't seem to want to get to know at all. So, how come the parliament passed an Act against which the community has so many complaints?

If we take a step back and think about it, we can see that the reasons are two-fold: One, the Act was defined by people who did not belong to these communities and did not consult the community widely and two, more specifically, the Act is specifically written by largely patriarchal males, looking into the community with their pre-coded lenses of morality and normality.

It starts with the conviction that people hold about gender being binary and sexuality being one singular thing. Like much of mental health theory, politics and law are also products of our recorded history and knowledge which does not see the diversity of the human species. It does not see that sex and sexual characteristics are different from gender, that sexuality is different from both of those and that gender expression does not predict sexuality and in not seeing such diversity, is further codifying the oppression that the community experiences in society into legal systems, which then further perpetuates the societal discrimination.

Living under such oppressive systems of law, without much recourse to justice systems, legal systems or healthcare systems, the queer communities are little tribes, with the large rainbow people in these tribes constantly trying to find safe spaces.

The Trauma of Non-Affirmative Familial-Social Systems:

In a world where the political, legal and healthcare systems are stacked against gender and sexuality minorities, living in their families of origin and working in spaces that are far from friendly and very often discriminatory, translates into ongoing stress and anxiety. Worries about being discovered, not being accepted, of oppressive prejudice and active discrimination are all too real and ongoing.

Within the communities that we all live in, some forms of gender and sexuality differences can just not be hidden at all. People who cannot or will not pretend to be cis-gendered and heterosexual, face these risks everywhere they go. Within familial and social systems, even if one was trying hard to stick within the accepted binaries, there is quite a bit of pain:

- A sense of being “less than” and a “disappointment” that often leads to rejection, neglect and abandonment
- Abuse and bullying that emerges from these spaces of feeling unprotected
- Discrimination and limited access to nutrition, affection, education, social spaces
- Denial of welfare including healthcare

People belonging to gender and sexuality minorities are constantly having to face and answer questions that others never get asked: How did you become this way? Have you tried being something else? Are you not praying to be normal? Have you consulted this or the other person? Is it hormonal?

Facing ongoing ignorance, if not discrimination, leads to an ongoing unconscious erosion of self-worth. Often, ignorance breeds hate and there is violence.

For anyone living with this degree of non-affirming circumstances, if there is not sufficient affirming and capable support systems, staying in these dangerous circumstances can and often do cause mental health issues. It is documented evidence that people in the gender and sexuality minorities can and do suffer disproportionately as far as their mental health goes, when we see it with the context of such oppression (Narain, 2016). This is true for LGBT(QIA+) people as also for other oppressed people, including Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi communities, people with disabilities etc.,

How Does One Become Queer-Affirmative?

The emphasis in this article is on the trauma that the queer community faces in society, their family and in the mental health community and to specifically highlight the need for affirmative support for the community. Being affirmative practitioners requires the practitioner to specifically learn the following:

- Gender and sexuality diversity, including the nuances of sex, gender, gender expression, sexuality, lifestyles, culture, understand how labels work and what they mean, personal identities, community spaces, social / legal perspectives etc.
- Impact of heterosexism as the prevalent narrative and that while systems of marriage and family are constructed around heterosexual ideals, they are not particularly aspirational in and of themselves and that they are often tools of exclusion
- Systems of privilege and oppression that operate in our schools, social spaces, legal spaces, work spaces etc., how exclusion happens at various levels and the impact of such practices on the mental health and wellbeing of queer people

- History of queer communities, including exposure to traditional queer identities which may be far from westernized labels of LGBT(QIA+), traditional occupations, mores and norms of communities
- Struggles for visibility and relevance, including in popular culture, historical figures, stories and mythology

In short, learning to be queer affirmative is about a deep understanding and sensitivity to the community's particular contexts. This labour must necessarily be the therapist's own through training programs, participating in queer community events, reading and watching queer books and movies, staying in open social spaces and most importantly, questioning one's own biases and prejudices to unlearn all that one has learned from being steeped in a heterosexist system.

Many therapists who might have a queer friend or two may be tempted to see themselves as quite queer friendly, but might not have done the work needed to really establish themselves as affirmative practitioners. Being affirmative in one's practice requires one to be mindful of the language we use (pronouns, for example), the structures and constructs we use (partners, instead of spouse, for example), the contextual understanding (made families, rather than filial ones, for example), maintaining a queer affirmative space (displays of pride flags, for example) and developing a resource bank (knowledge of queer support groups, safe spaces, etc.).

Being queer affirmative practitioners does not really require us to change our theoretical leanings or training, but it certainly calls on us to work on holding a certain aware lens to our work.

For some time now, counsellors and mental health professionals in general have been calling themselves out when they have learned enough to be queer affirmative. We would see this on websites, office spaces, LinkedIn and other spaces. That certainly helps people looking

for queer affirmative therapists. I would have certainly been more comfortable if I had been able to search for one using these markers all those years ago and saved myself a lot of heartache.

What Can You do if You Don't See Yourself Being Queer-Affirmative?

Even in 2020, with all the last 40 years or so of queer visibility and activism, there is still a lot of resistance to learning about queer lives and history and being queer affirmative. The death by suicide of Anjana, a queer person, in 2020 after attempts at forced heterosexism by psychologists in Coimbatore and Kozhikode in India, shows that the dangers of psychology applied thus by unscrupulous practitioners is fatally dangerous. (Cris, 2020).

Many practitioners still have in their own personal lives, affiliations that deny queer existence, condemn such lives and rarely go beyond "Hate the sin, not the sinner," stance, that makes a grudging, non-accepting space for queer people. This stance asks for space in the name of personal choice, their freedom of association, rights to free speech and what not. For years, people have argued that religious and other freedoms are valid reasons to deny affirmative spaces in mental health and other places. Practitioners who did not want to engage with the queer community were told that should a client disclose to them anything about their gender or sexuality that wasn't against the therapist's personal beliefs, that they should gently refer out the client. The direction from supervisors and trainers has traditionally been to disengage.

My experience and that of hundreds of others' show this is not enough. The humiliation and hurt in one therapist's session can cause significant damage. We should not have to take that risk at all.

Can Therapists Who Still Choose Not to be Queer-Affirmative Please Out Themselves?

The queer community on its part is trying to take care of itself - more and more queer people are training to be mental health professionals themselves, more queer experts are offering

training programs on being queer-affirmative, more intersections of caste-ability-class-gender etc., are being explored and lists of safe spaces and not-safe spaces abound within the community.

Therapists who have worked towards becoming queer affirmative are calling themselves out as such and offering these safe spaces for the community. Queer people are beginning to be more aware of what dangers lurk in the therapy space and are beginning to look for affirmative spaces.

However, is this really enough? Can we really still afford the fig-leaf of “agree to disagree?” Should the queer affirmative therapist still be the exception and have to call themselves out, marking spaces safe? If there are any therapists who for whatever reason are choosing to not be queer-affirmative, should we not require ethically that they tell the world about their non-affirmative stance? What would the world look like if we demanded that such people display their non-affirmative stance to the world?

In that world, maybe all our little tribes can unite and live finally as one large rainbow nation.

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