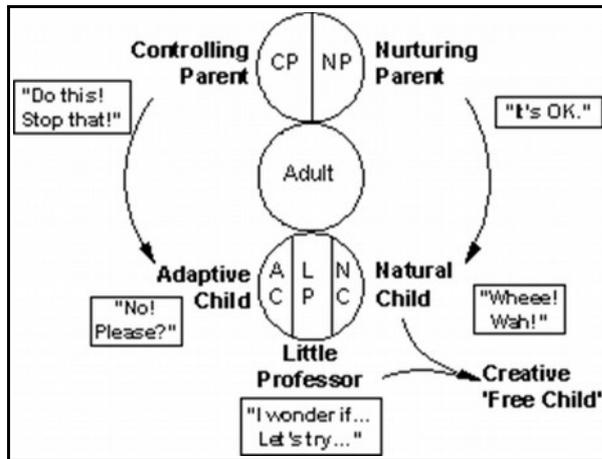


Transactional Analysis—a brief overview

TA is a method for studying interactions between individuals. It was designed in the 1950s by Dr Eric Berne, a psychiatrist trained in psychoanalysis and the author of *Games People Play*. One of TA's basic principles is that when people experience difficulties in their present life, referred to as dysfunctions, these derive from decisions that may have served them well in early childhood but have now become self-limiting or destructive. TA is a growth model of therapy. It enables the person who made those decisions to revise ('re-decide') them by working with the emotional brain, intuition and feelings on which they were originally based.

TA is well-known for its concept of 'ego-states': coherent systems of thought and feeling that are manifested by corresponding patterns of behaviour. A basic ego-states model is illustrated below. It is important to note that child ego-states vary at different ages.



The Parent in us is what we internalised from the personalities of our parents and other significant authority figures. The Nurturing Parent in us is caring and concerned, offers a safe haven and unconditional love to calm the Child's troubles. The Controlling (or Critical) Parent tries to make the Child do as the Parent wants him or her to do, sometimes with negative intent, and also transfers values or beliefs to help the Child live in society.

The Adult in us is the 'grown-up' rational person, who talks reasonably and assertively, neither trying to control nor reacting aggressively towards others. The Natural Child is largely unselfconscious, likes playing and is open and vulnerable. The Little Professor is the curious and exploring Child who is always trying out new things, and together with the Natural Child makes up the Free Child. The Adaptive Child reacts to the world around, either changing to fit in or rebelling against surrounding forces.

TA also contains concepts such as life scripts, life positions, games and strokes; injunctions and counter-injunctions (Goulding, 1976); drivers (Kahler, 1975) and the drama triangle (Karpman, 1968), which are all useful tools. The attachment theory of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth is also used in therapy when dealing with the childhood of the client.

TA has now moved into Relational TA, where the emphasis is on the relationship 'co-created' between therapist and client. It looks at ways in which this therapeutic relationship is often a re-enactment of the client's relationships with significant other people. This is often the space where important unconscious material is brought to conscious awareness.

The main aim of the therapy is to achieve autonomy, a capacity for intimate relationships with other people and for being 'script-free', so that one is making deliberate choices in life, rather than simply following an unconscious plan without any self-awareness.

If you would like to know more about TA, please feel free to contact me by emailing esmee.chengapen@gmail.com. I am currently studying for an MSc in Transactional Analysis Psychotherapy at the Metanoia Institute in London.

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