INNOVATIONS IN TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS: THEORY AND PRACTICE

ROUTLEDGE

Radical-Relational Perspectives in Transactional Analysis Psychotherapy

Oppression, Alienation, Reclamation

Karen Shireen Minikin

With Contributions from Farah Cottier, Deepak Dhananjaya and Dharmacharini Jayakara

RADICAL-RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVES IN TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS PSYCHOTHERAPY

Radical-Relational Perspectives in Transactional Analysis Psychotherapy assesses various forms of oppression in current, historical and personal perspectives and considers the impact this has on the development and sustenance of the psyche.

Within this book, Minikin reformulates the ideas of Radical Psychiatry for the contemporary community, and honours both the historical legacy of including the social and political in transactional analysis and offers a critique of Eurocentrism in traditional relational perspectives. Through personal and clinical illustrations, Minikin encourages those in the TA community to move topics such as diversity from the margins to the centre when working with patients, and to integrate the political with traditional relational perspectives.

The consequences of becoming marginalized through alienation speaks across multiple disciplines in social sciences, making this a must-read for counsellors, psychotherapists and other applied psychologists who want to think more deeply about social responsibility within their work.

Karen Shireen Minikin is a Transactional Analysis psychotherapist and supervisor in private practice in West Somerset, UK. She is a Course Director for Psychotherapy at the Iron Mill College in Exeter She is also a co-editor for the Transactional Analysis Journal and the journal, Psychotherapy and Politics International.

INNOVATIONS IN TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Theory and Practice

Series Editor: William F. Cornell

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Karen Shireen Minikin

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Part I

ALIENATION

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WHY RELATIONAL? WHY RADICAL?

I came into training as a counsellor having had some help with a relationship breakdown that I was struggling to understand and come to terms with. Finding it helpful, I felt hungry to better understand my closest relationships. I never did intend to become a professional, but having found the training enlightening, the placement work satisfying, I felt compelled to learn more and I continued to train as a psychotherapist. Looking back to that personal relationship, nearly 30 years ago, that experience and the subsequent separation had enacted a level of relational trauma and loss that I simply couldn't find words for. Drawing from Transactional Analysis (TA), we might think that it had reached my script protocol[1]. It had captured the deepest transferences I might have been left with following early infant relationships with my parents and possibly it touched something beyond that too. The loss affected me profoundly, physically and emotionally; it was a psychic breakdown. In terms of practicalities, a year of counselling helped me return to work and build some resources, and four years of Transactional Analysis psychotherapy helped me to restore some self-confidence and start a new relationship. Fifteen years of group and individual analysis helped me connect with the meaning of the loss and a capacity to feel more at home in my body. These therapies have been of lifelong importance, and I have needed them alongside a growing feeling of connectedness and concern about the wider world.

Having described the personal draw to enter the world of psychotherapy, I move on now to account for my interest in social, historical, and political contexts. I explain how and why I was drawn to exploring these domains in my work as a psychotherapist. Finally, I write about the connections these have within my field of psychotherapy: Transactional Analysis.

Social and Political Context

From early adolescence, I have been socially and politically engaged. In clinical practice, I have felt the pull to account for the contextual social history of clients and their family members. Whilst psychotherapy pays attention to how social and relational events have influenced the mind, there

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has tended to be a greater focus on the mother/infant dyad with less attention paid to the context, the holding environment, and the normative narratives that hold our mothers and the socio-political climate that we are born into. When Keith Tudor introduced me to the ideas from Radical Psychiatry in 2002, the alienation formula spoke to me in a profound way. The original training I undertook did not treat alienation as a central focus in clinical work. However, I continued to go back and forth with the ideas, as a student and after receiving my qualification. Radical psychiatry and the ideas therein were a link back to my political involvement as a teenager in the 1970s and unbeknown to me at the time, were also a link to my father. Alongside my emerging interest in radical psychiatry, I continued in personal analytical psychotherapy and took on professional roles in the TA community. These roles and my personal work were challenging and helped me learn and develop as a woman and as a practitioner. The political choices made in the UK and the USA since 2015 have also affected me, highlighting my commitment to anti-oppressive stands and my compulsion (at times) to examine power dynamics. For those unfamiliar with this theory, the alienation formula is a way of describing the key social and psychological difficulties that people have. Steiner et al. (1975, p. 12) honoured Hogie Wyckoff for her work with this formula:

Oppression + Deception = Alienation

The idea that alienation is at the root of all social and psychological distress is a profound and simple idea that I test out frequently. I have yet to experience a case where the premise cannot be applied. With clients, alienation can offer an anchor for how I contemplate our struggles. Oppression can speak to the scripting process which is often an adaptation to the power base in families and societies. Deception describes the confusion that has been set up in our minds, as we relinquish emotional states and the behaviours accompanying them to maintain key relationships. As we need to survive within a social system, we forego some of our sensitivities, integrity, and, at times, dignity in the world we occupy. Deception and oppression are useful ways of thinking about scripting, object relations, and intersubjective processes between people as well as our wider systemic dynamics.

When Steiner et al. were developing their ideas about alienation, they summarised that alienation was a culmination of two processes: "oppression" + "deception". To my mind, this is a relational experience and the assertion that alienation is at the core of all social and psychological distress is a radical statement. It is radical because to accept it means we have to pursue a journey of deconstructing our premise and therefore our approach in social and psychological disciplines. It is relational in that it signifies a relationship, an encounter, and a subjective response. The alienation formula means that there

needs to be an oppressor and an oppressed, a "doer and a done to" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 2017). Transactional Analysis has taken on some of this dynamic in the analysis of the scripting process. Traditionally, the Child has been seen as the victim to the persecution or neglect of the parents, which formulates in a series of oppressive adaptations such as drivers[2], injunctions[3], and script decisions. What has often been missing in this analysis is any reference to the socio-economic and political context of the family. However, classical Transactional Analysis did implicitly understand that there is a more powerful person with a more vulnerable one and this creates opportunity for oppression in the scripting process. This interpersonal reality has parallels with the wider global perspective and that is why I will move between history, context, and personal dynamics in this book. Having explained how the significance of radical and relational has applied to me personally, I now turn to the paradigm for the psychotherapy I do: Transactional Analysis. The history and the philosophy of this body of theory is also relevant and what follows adds to how and why a radical relational approach matters to me.

Claude Steiner and the Early Days of Transactional Analysis

Claude Steiner studied and worked with Eric Berne. He was part of a key professional group that helped Berne formulate his new theory of 'Transactional Analysis', initially for psychotherapy from the 1950s and through the 1960s. These must have been exciting and creative times for this team as a new body of theory evolved. I imagine those that were involved with the regular Tuesday night social psychiatry seminars developed strong personal and professional bonds. Perhaps there was something of the feelings and moods of this group that founded the sort of culture that has evolved in the Transactional Analysis community. It has always been an interpersonal theory taught and executed with an emphasis on meaningful relations that have created professional and personal bonds. In the last decade of his life, Steiner (2008) wrote:

> What is it about Berne's transactional analysis that so attracts people? Is it the simplicity of its concepts? His rebelliousness? The zany, provocative nature of Eric's language? The second- and third-generation writings of Harris, James, Steiner, Dusay, Karpman, English, the Gouldings, and Stewart and Joines? Is it the enthusiasm and methods of its many teachers or the missionary zeal of its trainers? Is it the elaborations of relational, psychoanalytic, and integrative transactional analysis? Is it the opportunity it offers to become a therapist and make a living? Or is it the friendly, cooperative, open-minded attitude of the people in the movement?
>
> (p. 214)

Transactional Analysis was formed in the United States after Berne, following 15 years of training, was refused admission to the San Francisco Psychoanalytical Institute. The rejection seemed to inspire a rebellious, though productive response. Since then, Transactional Analysis has developed into a body of writing that offers clarity concerning the complexity of human relations and answers about how to alleviate social and psychological pain. As Steiner (2008) stated, it has at times attracted 'missionary zeal' amongst trainers. So, it has grown, spread, and enjoyed much success since its formation in California. There are now Transactional Analysis establishments and practitioners across four professional fields (counselling, psychotherapy, educational, and organisational) in all continents. Given this diversity, the range of how Transactional Analysis is thought about, used, and developed has grown. However, what is common to all Transactional Analysis trainings is a subscribing to the three philosophical premises that were established and continue on decades afterwards. These warrant some review given that we are more than 70 years on. So, I consider both the virtues and difficulties that I have witnessed and encountered. I take a political and radical lens considering both overt and covert power dynamics at structural and interpersonal levels.

Eric Berne was seen as a maverick by his psychoanalytical colleagues. He was radical in his methodology, inclined to humanistic values, and possibly had socialist sympathies. If he did, expression of such views may have been quashed during President Eisenhower's reign when the fear of socialism was at one of its heights. Berne was somebody who evoked and provoked systemic change. In particular, his way of working, such as his open communication and contracting (Berne, 1972), challenged the balance of power in medical institutions and was an expression of egalitarianism and respect for the humanity of people. For me, personally, Berne has been an enigmatic character, hard to get to know—hearing about him through the eyes of others, as well as his writing. He was a man who, like the rest of us, embodied his history, culture, and era. I am part of his legacy—a fourth generation Transactional Analyst. I endeavour to continue his radical beginnings.

From these roots, Transactional Analysis has developed a diverse body of theories with breadth and depth of its four applications in terms of theory and methodology. The goal of all these applications is autonomy; comprising of awareness, spontaneity, and capacity for intimacy (Berne, 1964). It is important to briefly explain that autonomy alone is a Western concept privileging the experience and agency of the individual and minimising the significance of the group, society, and the context. By clarifying what Berne meant by autonomy, that is awareness, spontaneity, and capacity for intimacy, (Berne, 1964, pp. 158–161) we see his support for consciousness generally and a valuing of expression and satisfying interpersonal relationships. Underpinning this goal of autonomy are the philosophical premises of Transactional Analysis.

Three Philosophical Premises

Everyone who has encountered Transactional Analysis in a formal capacity will know the three philosophical principles: "I'm OK/you're OK", people can think, and people can change. Traditionally, Transactional Analysis theory, like the era it was born into, was upbeat and optimistic. With a goal of autonomy and a belief in treating each other with mutual respect, we have worked hard to taboo games (see Berne, 1964; or 'acting out' defensively—my definition) and enactments (eruptions of a traumatic nature; see Novak, 2015). In Jungian psychology, our efforts to behave well could be interpreted as a defence against the shadow. This may be changing in some forms of contemporary Transactional Analysis which has sought a different inquiry into psychological states. Many integrative, co-creative, and relational practitioners (see Cornell & Bonds-White, 2001; Erskine, 1993; Hargaden & Sills, 2002; Little, 2013; Summers & Tudor, 2000, 2015) have been interested in the need to make space for symbolic and nonverbal communications—even if they seem primitive and unformulated (Stern, 2011). Some developments in the professional and academic canon have struggled to permeate the culture in the international Transactional Analysis community. This means developments within the wider international community have developed but have not always linked up and been debated fully enough so that at least there could be understanding even if disagreement continued. I imagine this is true of all professions and all communities; that we struggle with competition, rivalry, and conflict, becoming more invested in our own positions than in striving to understand the other. In this light, as a parallel to our current social and political global climate, I take the opportunity to review the three philosophical premises in Transactional Analysis which are meant to drive what we do and how we do it.

"I'm OK/You're OK": Macro and micro perspectives

"I'm OK/You're OK" is a simple and catchy statement that became the title of a best-selling self-help book (Harris, 1967) shortly after Berne's death. This first premise has been a champion in Transactional Analysis and probably the most quoted inside and outside of our community. The sense and spirit of this premise is to promote holding respect for ourselves and respect for the other. The message speaks to the interpersonal roots of Transactional Analysis and its promotion of 'healthy' Adult functioning. By this, it is meant the achievement of autonomy has been acquired and that people are relating from one Adult ego state to another, which places enormous pressure on people to be conscious of themselves. This seems important; yet, I place 'healthy' in quotation marks because I think, above all, this is the premise that people feel most pulled to adapt to. In other words, "I'm OK/You're OK" has at times been used as dogma, losing the

depth of its intention, and igniting politeness in our community rather than genuine congruent relatedness.

It is possible that the conflict with the psychoanalytical body that evoked the formation of Transactional Analysis has rumbled on through the decades. "I'm OK/You're OK" is always difficult when we feel our core values and beliefs are being challenged. Whilst Berne and English came from psychoanalytical roots, some of their contemporaries (i.e., Claude Steiner, Steve Karpman, and John [Jack] Dusay) leaned towards a quest for emotional literacy and respectful behaviour. Over the years, these and other writers encouraged Transactional Analysis to take more of a cognitive behavioural direction—a direction that has since been challenged by new and, at times, conflicting perspectives.

As with many theories that start with creative thinking and a capacity to push and extend the boundaries of thought, they become introjects in the minds of students and subsequent generations of practitioners. In my era, I have seen some honourable striving for understanding, empathy, and collaboration at times of difficulty and conflict. With that has come an orientation to seek to understand the other and heal ruptures. I have also witnessed as student, teacher, and participator in our community, an adaptation to this introjected, yet not quite metabolised premise. This, to my mind, has been an expression of racket feelings (English, 1971) and behaviours (Erskine & Zalcman, 1979), or the false self as described by Winnicott (1960); my interpretation being that anxiety and aggression are covered over by expressions of warmth and friendship. As with many modalities, a professional community has developed in Transactional Analysis. We have our regional, national, and international cultures. These are all relationally bound with a generic norm that has developed from our philosophical principles. "I'm OK/You're OK" becomes problematic at times of conflict, envy, rivalry, and competition. These feelings are different from straightforward anger that is more accessible to our conscious minds. In relations within our communities, nationally and internationally, I have witnessed an evasion of aggression and a desire to heal sometimes before the root of the problem has really been grasped. This has led to temporary relief of anxiety whilst toxic processes stay underground rumbling away till the next time. In these scenarios, I propose that "I'm OK/You're OK" becomes a rule rather than a premise that is genuinely strived for. Hence, the simple, straightforward language in Transactional Analysis can be misleading at times. In other words, to experience this premise at depth makes demands on people to process, labour, and honour self-interest whilst searching and pushing ourselves to understand the other (or 'those others'). A philosophical premise that becomes a 'rule' runs the risk of becoming an oppressive misuse of a good idea.

Transactional Analysis is grounded in the interpersonal, yet Berne used his ideas in radical ways to challenge the medical institution. Other Transactional Analysts have also turned to social psychiatry roots to bring

in the relevance of context, society, and politics. Hence, accounting for 'we-ness' as well as the 'I' has been an important component in Transactional Analysis and Berne's extension to "we're OK/they're OK (or not OK)" has been picked up extensively by Tudor (2016).

To emphasise the complexity and depth of I am OK/you're Ok, we can consider the protests that took place around the world after the death of George Floyd. Whilst well-meaning people may agree this is a death that should not have happened ('I' psychology), his death is an example of transgenerational trauma and the persistence of the hate that accompanies 'othering'. The protests and various responses to them speak to how challenging it is to live collectively by egalitarian principles because we are in a world that is not equal. For those with privilege in societies, all the time systematic oppression is sustained and functioning, there can be little incentive to labour with their minds long enough or hard enough to metabolise the collective traumas that continue through the generations. This is perhaps a reflection that those with more power in society are the groups that get to define 'OK-ness'—which then is bestowed upon or withheld from certain groups or behaviours. This is a socio-political perspective about power dynamics which has some differences to our liberal humanistic philosophy. Hence, "I'm OK/You're OK/They're OK" is honourable, simple, and potentially meaningful as an ideological premise. It is one that most well-meaning people would agree to. Living it in a congruent and meaningful way is a deep-set challenge—personally, socially, politically, and internationally.

People can think

The premise that people can think came about in part from Berne's commitment to promoting the health of psychiatric patients. He understood his patients as adults who had their own minds but were afflicted by the ways in which they felt compelled to cope in the world. Writing people off with a psychiatric diagnosis and committing them to a lifetime of medication was something that Berne opposed, and he used radical practice to challenge the hospital where he worked. Whilst this premise has been used to promote the resources and sanity in people, it is also the premise that, currently, most interests me.

Claude Steiner picked up on this premise and explored it more deeply when he started a personal and professional relationship with Hogie Wyckoff, an economics and politics student. Together with others, they formulated their thinking about the systemic influence of capitalism and the impact that has on the minds of the people. They named and developed their thinking about the psychological condition of alienation, as described by Karl Marx (1967).