

# The Politics of Theory

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## Abstract

**Identifies factors affecting a theoretician, viz., active membership in a professional organization, ongoing changes in the professional society in general, ongoing changes in the individual's personal life, and the unfolding needs of the theory itself. Each of these areas is considered as it relates to a theorist in transactional analysis, and specific aspects relevant to each are discussed. Ten "schools" of TA are listed, and the development of selected elements of one school, Social Level TA, are described. Briefly reviews personal contributions, e.g., options, the Intimacy Loser's Loop, the Intimacy Scale, the Compassion Triangle, and the Kid Grid.**

## The ITAA—A Dream or a Drain?

The International Transactional Analysis Association is an involving organization of between five and ten thousand members, with probably a tighter cohesive influence on its members than any other psychotherapy organization. Virtually all major theoreticians in TA have been intimately involved in time consuming contributions to the structure and maintenance of the ITAA. With all its attractions for the Parent, Adult, and Child of its dues paying members, it should be more of an advantage for theorists than a disadvantage. But the reactions to that vary, from "much, much more of a help than a hassle" to "no effect at all" to "any contact with the ITAA makes them stronger and you weaker." Even so, the possible advantages are numerous. There is ready access to print, speaking, ongoing education, friends and feedback through formal and informal structures.

The *Transactional Analysis Journal*

provides quick publication and author-held copyrights within months of submission. Critique is available by editorial board reviews sent to the author, and by letters to the editor in subsequent journals. There is encouragement for submission informally through personal contacts with the editor, and formally through a general call for papers for special feature issues yearly. Active gathering of unsubmitted ideas through outreach programs in the mid-1970's when I was editor-in-chief included sending teams of reporters to abstract key papers at the summer conferences, and the setting up of state-of-the-art programs to collect viewpoints on timely issues at the winter congress. These notes were written up in a section on abstracts in the back of the TAJ along with abstracts of papers that had good ideas but were not accepted for full length publication. Other advantages the ITAA offers its writers through the TAJ is the wide distribution of the Journal to all members, and beyond the ITAA to other subscribers, libraries, and agencies.

The *Annual Eric Berne Memorial Scientific Award* is an ITAA-sponsored incentive award for significant original theory in transactional analysis. Awarded yearly since 1971, it honors the theorist with a \$400 prize and an inscribed plaque, as well as a recognition speech at the summer conference banquet and a writeup in the next script newsletter and the January Journal. As our most publicized award, it puts emphasis on the development of new TA theory as our highest priority. It carries fringe benefits of increasing personal strokes and further workshop offers. The voting is done by the voting membership from a ballot of five nominees. These nominees also receive strokes and recognition by being nominated.

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The *training standards committee* and board examination process affords a high professional character to the organization, and structures the acceptance of widely used ideas. All schools of thought in TA are preserved by our training tradition of mandatory eclecticism. The varied theoretical base this provides gives depth to the scope of future TA theoreticians and enriches their subsequent work. Cooperation, not competition, between institutes is protected by this structure in the ITAA. High level ongoing education is an important side benefit advanced members receive from regular participation on the examining boards.

Four major *scientific conferences* a year on TA plus numerous local TA conferences yearly provides an audience and wide recognition for one's work as well as ample opportunity for reexamination and refining one's ideas through feedback with friends and workshop participants. There is stimulation for new thinking at major conferences which usually last four days, giving participants ample opportunity to meet informally with friends and mentors, and sit in on other presentations for additional ongoing educational benefits. Further workshop offers and referrals arise at these conferences. The conferences attract 500-1,000 participants and bring new people and thinking into TA circles thus deterring isolation and provincialism, and making TA more familiar and acceptable to non-TA professionals.

The *training institute and seminar system* is indirectly connected to the ITAA structure. The *training institutes* are locally operated for the purpose of preparing trainees for the ITAA written and oral exams for advanced certification. The ITAA maintains notification and record keeping

functions. The training institutes are in competition for the available trainees and need to keep improving their programs, to the advantage of all. The *seminar* historically is independent of training functions and originally served a research function for the ITAA. Eric Berne began the Tuesday night seminar in 1958 to advance transactional analysis theory. Twenty-two years later it still meets weekly under the name of Eric Berne Seminar of San Francisco. The vitality of the seminar is preserved by electing a new set of officers each year and avoiding the perennial guru-dictator system that has hurt other seminars (or caused them to fold). The format requires that each presenter ask a crisp question on unsolved theory, a legacy from Berne, to keep the Adult engaged in rigorous thinking. And there is still a party or “field trip” to a local pub for the Kid after each meeting. And also for the Kid, the first fifteen minutes of the meeting is informal and spontaneous for “bright ideas” and the last five minutes are for strokes for the speaker. A three month program of speakers is mailed out quarterly to a San Francisco mailing list. The first meeting of the month is for clinical cases only, the other weeks are open to a more general audience. The attendance range is 20-30 weekly. The programs are varied to attract the newcomers as well as the old-timers each week. A Bulletin of the Eric Berne Seminar with short articles of bright ideas in the format of the original Transactional Analysis Bulletin is published quarterly.

The *workshop circuit* provides additional experiences. Most institutes in the United States and abroad bring in workshop leaders several times yearly for the enrichment of the trainees and teachers. The leaders get exposure and

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recognition as well as stimulation for their ideas in an intensive weekend experience that goes beyond the exposure they get in briefer presentations at conferences. Much of the stimulation and refinement of TA theory occurs in the preparation for and feedback from these workshops. Lasting personal contacts are usually made with the sponsors to the eventual personal and professional benefit of both parties. The high level of stroking in the workshop setting gives a script permission to continue research.

The ITAA *bookstore* promotes the authors books and pamphlets on TA by advertising in the TAJ, script newsletter, mailouts, and operating a book room at most TA conferences. TransPubs had in the past been available as a publisher of TA books. The high visibility and publicity given to TA books through this ITAA resource is encouraging to authors.

*Friendships* should be mentioned as an important benefit of ITAA membership, not only for the personal growth and life style of the member, but also for the close proximity gained with enthusiastic, dedicated, and stimulating thinkers. Historically, renaissance and other inspired movements fed on the growing energy and synergy of independent thinkers brought together by common interests, where an achievement by one inspires a greater achievement in another. Often TA still has the same creative zeal as it did in the beginning and the new work produced is just as exciting.

So these are some of the advantages of a close organization. The comparisons and competition with peers. The need to answer to critics. Learning from others' mistakes. The exposure to other good therapists and mentors. Easy recognition. Having friends *praise* you behind your back. The sense of a team effort. But a close "family" can have its

disadvantages too. There are the hassles, exclusions, rejections, bizarre rumors, blackballing, oversights, nasty letters, and other negatives that are inevitable in such close company. Overstroking can lead to laxness or smugness, or a shift of interest to areas of incompetence as in Peter's Principle. One can get overinvolved with routine and detail and the answering of stacks of unsolicited mail. Once making it in the ITAA, one may not reach out to make it elsewhere.

But the big danger of any organization is if the disagreements get organized politically. In the academic world, a university department can be controlled by the behaviorists, the Rogerians, the psycho-analysts, or whatever, and a TA grad student would have to go elsewhere or at least not mention TA overtly. But in the ITAA should the same situation occur between schools or institutes, there's nowhere to go. The following could happen in the ITAA, using the hypothetical story of "institute X" and its theoretical orientation of "X-scripting:" Institute X gets a president elected who then appoints a friend to head the nominating committee to control future elections; appoints a friend to head training standards to control what is taught as well as who teaches; appoints a friend to head up the Journal to control what's printed; appoints a friend to coordinate conferences and control what's spoken; and appoints a friend to head the grievance and ethics committee to control the complaints. Within years, "X-scripting" could be the major TA sub-school and the rival "Z-scripting" theory but a memory. Other unprotected possibilities for organizing power in the ITAA are in regional disputes (U.S. vs. non-U.S.) and in professionalism disputes (make the ITAA a shrinking organization of elite professionals for the Parent, vs. an expanding organization of fun members for the Child).

Of course, political manipulation is a danger in any organization, and is possible by strategy far subtler than the politically uninitiated would suspect. Economic pressures to get available trainees or personal prestige to achieve

theoretical dominance may be motivations. But the question lies in whether someone wants power bad enough or has a messianic delusion (always a problem in history) that their school is the “right” one and the opposition school is “vermin” (to use Hitler’s term). The same illusion of the superiority of one school and the dangerousness of another shows up outside TA in professional organizations, university departments, and in governmental agencies controlling jobs and grant monies. In the ITAA this discrimination could show - up in a lack of representation on committees, PTM and pre-conference workshops, and nomination on ballots. Currently, the new member’s rights committee headed by this author is writing an ITAA members bill of rights to protect our freedom of thought and representation. This model could be used by other professional organizations, but its application in university and governmental settings is doubtful.

### Liberal Changes in the 70’s

In 1965 Eric Berne moved from downtown San Francisco to 165 Collins Street, barely a mile from the city’s Haight-Ashbury neighborhood that was soon to explode with the hippie flower child renaissance movement. Berne contributed to this anti-establishment movement with his separation of Adult from Parent in his 116 week best seller book *Games People Play*. And he, his TA work, and his TA movement would in turn be influenced by the social openness that was to follow.

The seventies produced great creative changes socially as well as in the psychotherapy community. There was freedom to create and experiment with new therapies and new formats. The inward-conservative psychoanalysis of the fifties gave way to the inward-liberal gestalt and the outward-conservative transactional analysis of the sixties. These improved and advanced into outward-liberal therapies of the seventies. The inward therapies went deeper in and more “far out” at the same time. Psychoanalysis didn’t go back far enough in the fifties so primal scream

went farther back in the sixties; rebirthing went even farther back in the seventies, and in the eighties we see past life regression going even farther back. The inward focus on the body with experimental hallucinogens in the sixties evolved into the physical therapies of bioenergetics, rolfing, massage, and a life style emphasis on nutrition, jogging, and transcendental meditation in the seventies. These are leading into a healing, holistic, and humanistic psychic-spiritual transformation for the eighties. And TA, that great eclectic amoeba, never dies as it incorporates each new movement and adds structure, protection, and stroking to each.

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The therapies influenced a culture that was already turning away from an “other” orientation and promoted a narcissism that led to the naming of the seventies as the “me” generation. The Esalen hot tub encounters evolved into pleasure palaces in Marin County. Cults and liberation groups were springing up all over. Women’s liberation gave out permissions and assertiveness training gave the “here’s how.” EST focused on personal responsibility and psychological-mindedness as a thing to have. The media seized each new movement and amplified its effect for an audience eager for the new directions of cultural change. The inward turning had a paradoxical conservative effect politically when the recession began. And TA shifted inward too, and the most popular schools became the self-oriented redecision and reparenting schools. The social relationship group therapy of Berne faded into the background, although its focus had quietly shifted from game analysis to intimacy training. This liberal redirection into intimacy of the San Francisco school, the Sacramento action analysis school, the radical therapy

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school, and the miniscript school had largely gone unnoticed because the seventies had people looking inward to the self. The rapid creativity also created the layman's assumption of rapid obsolescence, and social relationship TA was thought to be “orthodox” to the other TA schools. And, in turn, TA was thought to be obsolete in many psychological circles due to the *four layman's assumptions* that:

- 1) “it was a fad and it had its time.”
- 2) “it was a stepping stone and newer things have come along.”
- 3) “it's not relevant to our times” and
- 4) “I haven't heard much about it, therefore its fading.”

Each new TA school tends to assume that about earlier TA schools, each new psychotherapy tends to assume that about the earlier psychotherapy schools, and unfortunately publishers tend to assume that too and advise TA authors not to mention TA in their TA books. This trend is countered by the openness of the seventies and TA has a widespread popular acceptance now that could only be hoped for in the sixties.

### Personal Changes

A theory is inevitably changed by the personal changes in the theoreticians themselves. Some creators produce only in a creative environment, others create independently of the environment. In some, friends, marriage, children, and therapy stimulate great changes in their personalities. These changes in turn influence the focus and direction of their work. Many friends in the San Francisco seminars “worked on” Eric to help him warm up and grow, even though he said “TA is like a (three scoop) ice cream cone. If it gets too warm, it melts.” Many TA theoreticians create a large support group around them to help inspire creativity, as did Eric Berne. In Northern California the Sacramento (action analysis), Oakland (reparenting), San Francisco (social level), and Watsonville (redecision) areas work as separate teams and have produced nine of the eleven scientific award winners.

Competitive relationships also inspire creativity. Berne prodded a competitive triangle in San Francisco of Dusay-Karpman-Steiner similar to the Northern California triangle he got into with Goulding-Harris-Kupfer. Berne attracted scripted winners and gave them the extra permission and “here's how” needed. The teaching was not as much in the ideas and methods of TA, but in the principles influencing him as a role model: 1) observing is fun, 2) crispness is fun, 3) solving is fun, 4) teaching is fun, 5) writing is fun, 6) responsibility is fun, 7) moving right along is fun, 8) order is fun, 9) uniqueness is fun, and 10) life is fun. Injunctions came in the form of “Don't say anything you can't diagram” and the implied “Don't say anything that's ever been said before.”

### The Evolution of Theory

The history of a theory reads like an adventure story. Each problem solved uncovers new problems to be solved. As Sigmund Freud said:

“I am not really a man of science, not an observer, not an experimenter, and not a thinker. I am nothing but by temperament a *conquistador* — an adventurer. . . with the curiosity, the boldness, and the tenacity that belongs to that type of being.”

Eric Berne had that type of single-minded pursuit Freud talked about. It shows up in TA by looking back on 10 years of a person's work and seeing that one by one, problem after problem was attacked and solved, with a great number of ideas to show for it. TA has Bob and Mary Goulding, Taibi Kahler, myself, Larry Mart, Jacqui Schiff, Claude Steiner and others as dedicated scientists who have never slacked off, pursuing the theory problems as actively today as the day they started. And there are others who “finished” their work, or who had one good idea and quit while they were ahead, or who don't have a ten year record yet to evaluate, or may just be “in between” theories and not just resting on their laurels.

From the starting point of Berne's basic works, TA has ten "schools" that have fanned out, many incorporating TA with a dominant psychotherapy or philosophy of our times. Presented generally in the order of emergence:

1) Social Level TA (Karpman, Dusay) advances Berne's work on relationships.

2) Reparenting (Schiffs, Mellor, Levin) combines TA with psychoanalytic regression work.

3) Redecision (Gouldings) combines TA with gestalt techniques.

4) Radical Therapy (Steiner) combines TA with New Age political assertiveness.

5) Aeskalepion (Groder) combines TA with synanon attack games in prison settings.

6) Action Analysis (Mart, Palmer) takes TA out of the chair into Free Child stand-up exercises ("rhythms").

7) Miniscript (Kahier) focuses TA on the second by second script reinforcing behavior of drivers.

8) Bodyscripting (Cassius) combines TA scripting and body armoring.

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9) Psychological Level TA (Lankton, Brown) combines TA and Neurolinguistic Programming to use ulterior options.

10) Holistic (James) takes TA into humanistic evolution directions.

There are many other directions in TA and many other theoreticians to mention who are not actively identified with a school ("school" is a misnomer because it suggests divisiveness, whereas in TA many areas are investigated simultaneously and the knowledge is pooled and used eclectically). As written in my "Bias Box" editorial in April 1975 (Karpman, 1975 (2)) the *clinical* success of any school depends on four factors: 1) Resolution: the degree to which it stays creative and solves new problems, 2) Adaptability: the readiness to incorporate ideas from beyond its system, 3) Relevancy: the compatibility with the changing times, and 4) Purgings: the extent to which it

rids itself of its growth inhibiting traditions. But the popular success of any school may depend on additional factors such as personalities, publicity, proselytizing, and politics, as in Figure 1 for 1981:

	Aggressive Institute	Popular Book	ITAA Political Involvement	
<b>Redecision</b>	+	+	+	<b>= 3 points</b>
<b>Reparenting</b>	+	+	0	<b>= 2 points</b>
<b>Radical therapy</b>	0	+	0	<b>= 1 point</b>
<b>Action analysis</b>	0	0	0	<b>= 0 points</b>

The number of points reflects current popularity, not the excellence of the therapy. For one, this author personally feels that the action analysis concept is one of the most creative breakthroughs in TA history, yet largely unknown outside of Sacramento.

### Development of Social Transactions TA in the 70's

As an example of how a theory dictates its own new direction, I'll trace the historical development of my own work with Social Level TA (also called Social Transactions TA, or the San Francisco school, or Berneian TA, or the Social Relationship school). The popular name "Social Level TA" unfortunately connotes a reference to the overt and covert levels of communication, which is an error. It actually includes all of Berne's work on people-to-people social transactions, and the new work since then. But "Psychological Level TA" of Lankton and Brown does refer to the split levels and the special uses of psychological level transactions for therapeutic purposes by the therapist. I see Social Level TA as having three distinct historical phases: 1) social control TA, 2) social options TA, 3) social intimacy TA.

In the early days of TA, Berne was using the new TA system to *analyze* the structure of a personality, the structure

of transactions, games, and relationships, and the structure of scripts. My first popular idea in TA was the “tombstone” for script analysis, then later the drama triangle for game analysis. But my patients quickly asked for “how to’s” in handling games and there weren’t many available, other than an occasional antithesis written up in *Games People Play*. So I had to solve that problem and I came up with a positive use of crossed transactions called “options” and an options therapy that required training and development of all five ego states, and the practice in the group of when, where, and how to use each one (Karpman, 1971). Homework practice became an important part of therapy. The requirement that each patient learn to use each ego state effectively led to the concept of the “personality pinwheel,” a variety of relationship diagram wherein the five ego states are drawn on two discs on stalks facing each other, and checks and X’s are written beside each ego state to illustrate which ones are mobilized and useful in a given relationship and which are not (Karpman, 1980). The options work also extended to “inside options” of how to switch ego states in your head to turn off disagreeable internal dialogue.

In 1971, from the social options use of TA to make better transactions with people, the next problem to solve was how to make better relationships using TA. In looking at my patients to see what they were doing to keep me away and keep my words from being effective, I discovered that there were but just four blocks used to keep me and others at a distance: The Condensing, Abrupt, Secretive, and Evasive behavioral attitudes. They all seemed to be linked, so I put the four initials on a circle and called it the Intimacy Losers Loop (Figure 2), because they appeared in people who chronically were losers in the quest for a lasting intimate relationship, and the blocks kept them from being able to talk through the problems inevitable in a relationship (Karpman, 1975 (1) and Karpman, 1979 (ib)).

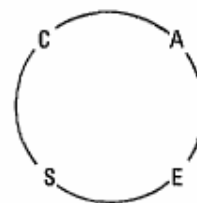


Figure 2  
Intimacy Losers Loop

Then I focused on communication stages and developed the three rules of openness for couples 1) bring it up, 2) talk it up, 3) wrap it up (Karpman, 1979 (3)). These focussed on separate skills to be worked on in therapy. Then I saw that intimacy was not only gained through the removal of transactional blocks, but also was strongly influenced by a range of intimate and non-intimate topics. These topics I put on a scale ranging from zero to one hundred percent intimacy and I called that “The Intimacy Scale.” At twenty percent there was Silence; up to forty percent there was Things, Objects, Places; up to sixty percent the topics were People, Ideas; up to eighty percent were Me, You histories, and at one hundred percent there was Us talk about the relationship (Figure 3).

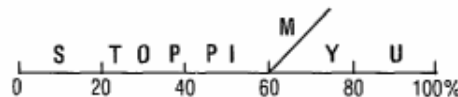


Figure 3  
The Intimacy Scale (1975)

In 1976, from ego state work designed to help a person shift from a Critical Parent outlook to a Nurturing Parent outlook, I came upon a new use of the drama triangle which I called the compassion triangle. A Persecutor can be seen in a more favorable light if one looks for the Rescuer and Victim motivations behind his action. This understanding and compassion during games speeds up a return to intimacy in the relationship. This also helps to avoid initial hooks arising from the Victim and Rescuer corners too. Another use of the compassion triangle for being more tolerant of game players is to see that behind every Persecutor there is 10% of OK aggression, behind every Rescuer

role there is 10% OK caring, and behind every Victim role there is 10% OK needs (Figure 4).

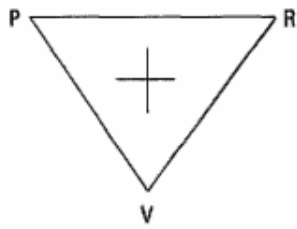


Figure 4  
The Compassion Triangle

In a search for alternate ways to eliminate communication stumbling blocks, I came upon six “fightmakers” that were sure to turn a discussion into a fight, and these six were easy to eliminate once they were discussed by a fighting twosome. The six hooks are: 1) hundred percentiles, 2) mind-reading, 3) excitability, 4) labels, 5) threats, and 6) subjects—too many. I put these together under an easy to remember mnemonic, H. Melts, and wrote it up in our local *Bulletin of the Eric Berne Seminar*, (Karpman, 1979 (4)). In the previous issue (Karpman, 1979 (3)) I wrote up the Five Trust Contracts for Couples. These promote deep intimacy by agreement between each of their five ego states: Critical Parent: the no-collapse contract; Nurturing Parent: the protection contract; Adult: the openness contract; Free Child: the pleasuring contract; and Adapted Child: the flexibility contract. In the earlier bulletin (Karpman, 1979 (1a)), there is an intimacy formula (Formula I) and a pastime formula (Formula P) which summarizes my work of the past ten years but is too lengthy to capsulize here. Other work in the past ten years related to intimacy includes intuition reading on the friendliness of a stranger at first glance called “the Kid Grid.” The four fast readings are for Turn-on (you like their looks), Come-on (they want to meet you), Openness (they can talk openly without struggle), and Depth (there’s more beneath the surface that would continue to interest you). Each quarter reading is scored a plus or a zero, as in Figure 5.

T - 0	C - 0	O	D
+	0	+	+

Figure 5  
The Kid Grid

The Kid Grid is one of ten intuition readings in a workshop I’ve done frequently for the past three years called “Close Encounters of the First Kind,” which is part of a four part intimacy and openness two-day weekend workshop for singles and couples. This format is a reflection of the times and the changing needs of the consumer for deep experiential involvement during workshops. My workshops in the early 70’s were much less experiential and featured TA theory and ideas with a demonstration group on Social Level TA and game analysis.

I’ve presented here a few of the ideas uncovered in the past dozen years of changing the use of TA concepts from Berne’s social control TA, to social options TA, to social intimacy TA. The new directions for TA writers in the eighties may be dictated by the needs of our patients, by the needs of the theory, by personal needs for answers, or by influences from other TA theoreticians, the changing times, and changes in the psychotherapy professions and growth movement.

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