

## Developing a two person psychology. A model for therapeutic change.

Tony White  
Thursday, 10 May 2007

### INTRODUCTION

It is interesting to watch how psychotherapies develop. Psychotherapy has as its main goal change in people's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. So psychotherapists have noticed over the years how that comes about. For example they have noticed that if someone goes into a hypnotic state that can result in subsequent psychological change. So they refine the process of hypnosis and get better at controlling and manipulating it, to the advantage of the client. This has happened in numerous ways over the years. Other examples are two chair work, free association, providing a client with unconditional positive regard, setting Adult contracts, giving positive and negative strokes and so on endlessly.

In each instance someone has noticed that the 'thing' affects people psychologically and then they refine 'it' and so evolves a new psychotherapeutic technique.

Of course another way in which people change and transform is when they enter into a relationship with another person. When we do that we are psychologically altered, sometimes profoundly and sometimes there is minimal change. In recent times there has been the development of a new psychotherapy within the Transactional Analysis tradition that is known as Relational Transactional Analysis. One of the principle references for this is Hargaden and Sills (2002).

### RELATIONAL TA

This paper presents "my take" on this. How I understand this relational approach to psychotherapy and how I see it used from my framework. From Hargaden and Sills' (2002) perspective Relational TA is a system of psychotherapy whose main goal is the deconfusion of the Child ego state. So it focuses more on the pre-verbal issues that are largely unconscious. Using the ego states one could see Relational TA fitting in, like in Diagram 1 below.

The Relational model focuses on the transference or therapeutic relationship for two reasons

1. Overwhelming research showing the centrality of the therapeutic relationship to cure.
2. It is proposed that deconfusion of the Child ego state can only occur in the transference therapeutic relationship. The unconscious developmental issues (C1) can only be dealt with in the safe bond of the relationship.

Relational TA rests on the fact that most of what happens (communication) between two people is out of awareness, (unconscious). The exploration and

understanding of this is done through the intersubjective realm (the transference relationship). See diagram 2 below.

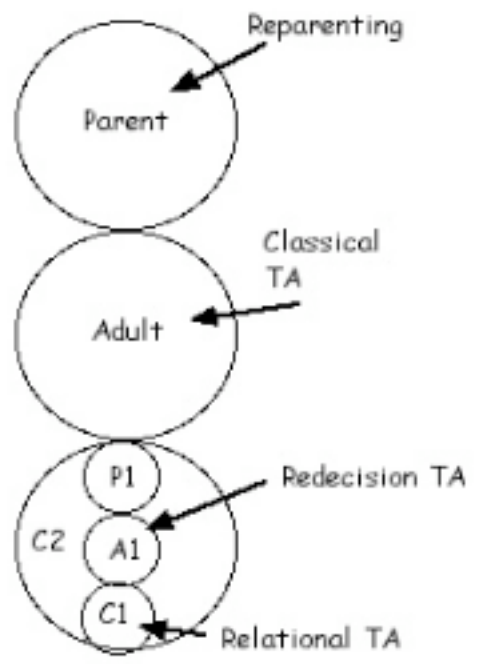


Diagram 1

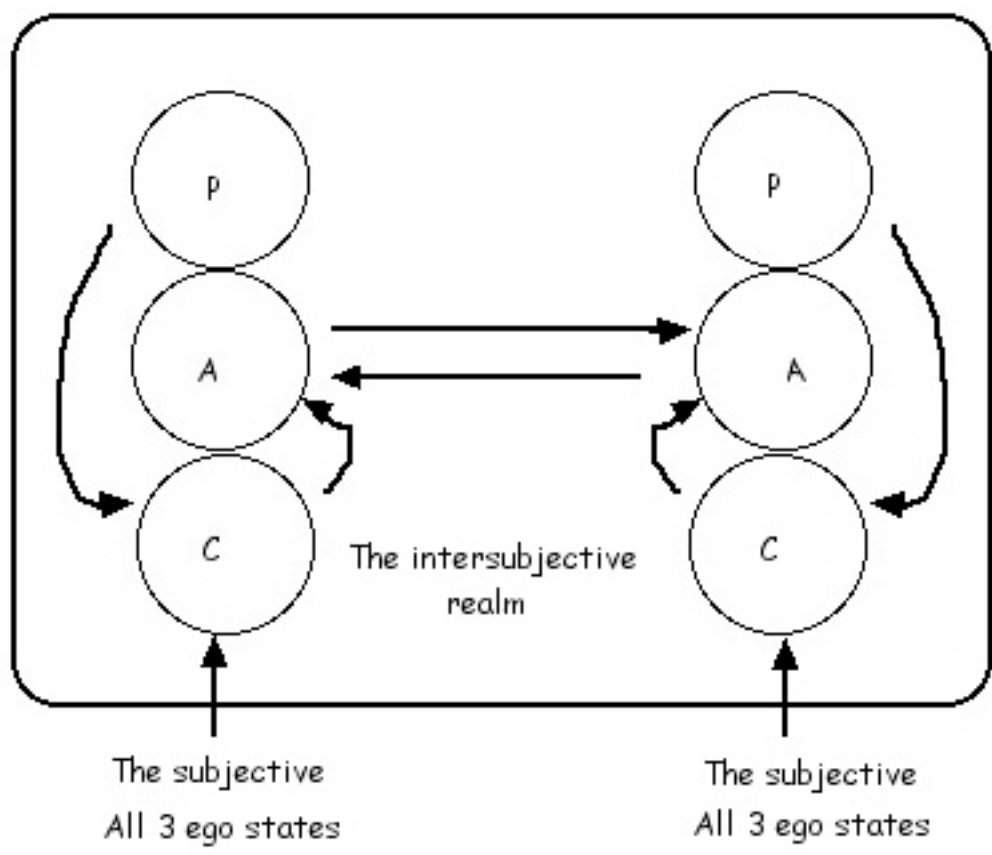


Diagram 2

Diagram 2 shows how one can understand the subjective which involves a persons 3 ego states and how they communicate with each other. This internal communication is shown by the transactional vectors that occur between the persons own ego states. When these two 'subjectives' interact then you have the intersubjective realm. That 'space' where the transference relationship occurs.

Hargaden and Sills(2002) state that in their view the 'typical client profile' is changing. In Eric Berne's time the common client was an inhibited, rule bound person who needed a "solvent" type of therapy to loosen the script. In this day the typical client does not need a solvent but a glue. They need a way of integrating and building a sense of self. Hargaden and Sills(2002) acknowledge that their client base seemed to have a disturbance of self (borderline, narcissistic and schizoid for example). This has brought them to a focus on the deconfusion of the Child ego state.

I don't agree that the typical client profile has changed significantly. I do agree that there are a significant number of people who would benefit more from a therapy that provided a glue rather than a solvent. Good examples of such clients are those with a disturbance of the self such as the borderline, narcissistic and schizoid personalities. It would seem that these clients need a glue because they are dissociated from the world and particularly in relationship with others. There is a disconnection or distance between them and the world. A relational therapy is well suited for such a person.

#### WORKING "WITH" THE TRANSFERENCE OR BEING "IN" IT

Hargaden and Fenton(2005) state, "It has been commonly observed that no psychic change will occur in the client unless the therapist, too, is changed emotionally in some way"(P182).

Historically therapists have worked "with" the transference. With the relational approach the therapist does not work with the transference but is actually involved "in" the transference. A subtle but potent differentiation that certainly merits further thought. For instance what does it mean to say that a person (client & therapist) is changed or transformed in a relationship.

One could say that every human contact is transforming. If I ask another person, "What is the time?", and they respond "It is 2 am", then I am transformed. I will be psychologically different than if I had not made that simple parallel transaction as shown in diagram 3. Every transaction and stroke will transform me in some way no matter how small. Indeed one could present this as a new way of defining transactions.

In Woollams & Brown(1978), one finds a definition of transactions as, "...an

exchange of strokes between two persons, consisting of a stimulus and a response between two ego states"(P65).

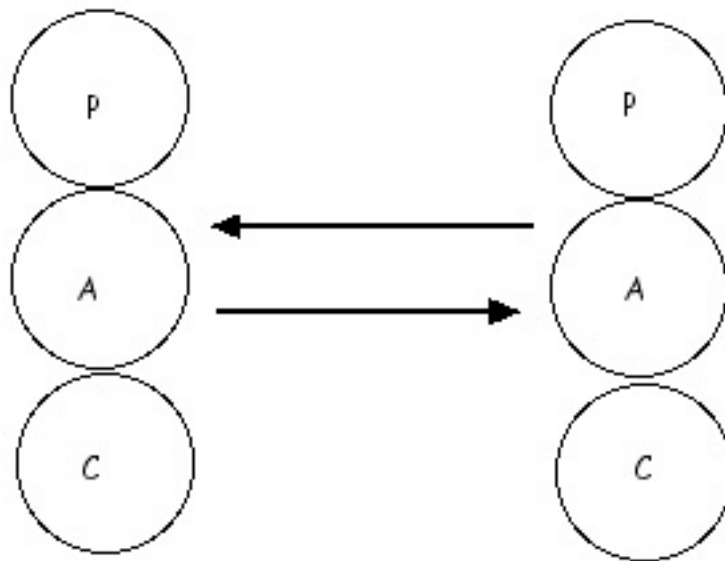


Diagram 3

Diagram 3 shows two people transacting. One on the left with the three ego states and one on the right with the three ego states. The definition just cited looks at what happens in the gap in-between the two stacks of circles. Which transactional vectors are going where. If one is looking at being transformed by being 'relational', one is not looking at what happens in that gap but by looking at what is happening inside/internally the three ego states on the right and inside/internally the three ego states on the left. So from this perspective one can redefine a transaction as:

A transaction has occurred when at least one of the two people involved in the transaction is internally transformed within their own ego three states. If there is no such transformation, no matter how small, in either party, then a transaction has not occurred. No stroke has been exchanged unless internal transformation occurs. So in this way you are not looking at the transactional vectors between the two parties but the transactional vectors between the persons own internal ego states. Thus indicating some internal transformation is occurring.

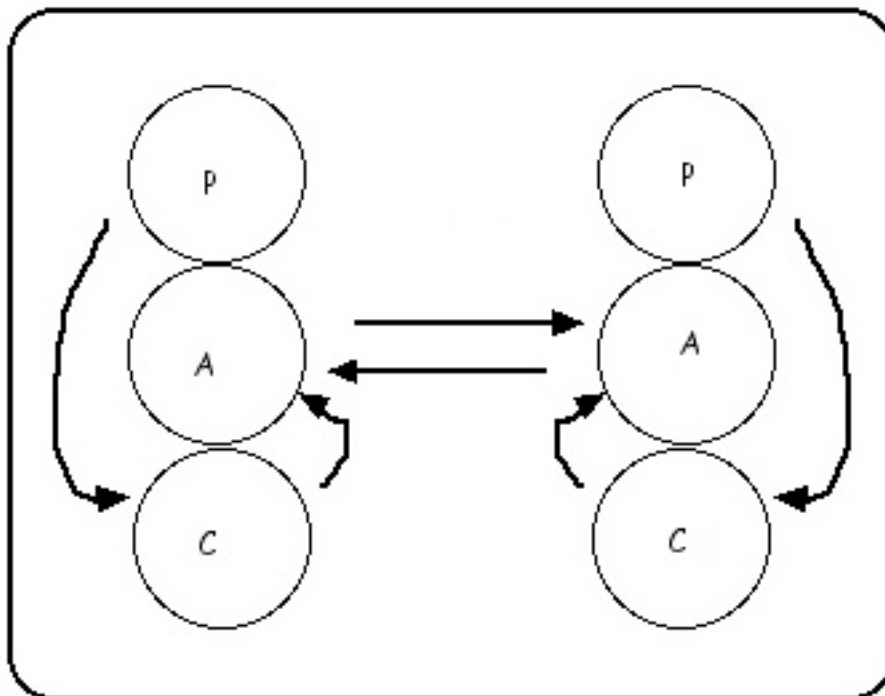
#### ONE AND TWO PERSON PSYCHOLOGY

On the Relational TA forum Helena Hargaden(2006) talks about a "one and two person psychology", which I find quite interesting phraseology. In a one person psychology it is the therapist who does something to the client to make them better. In the two person psychology she states:

"whereas a two person psychology involves the therapist, at some level, and at some point, being changed by the experience."

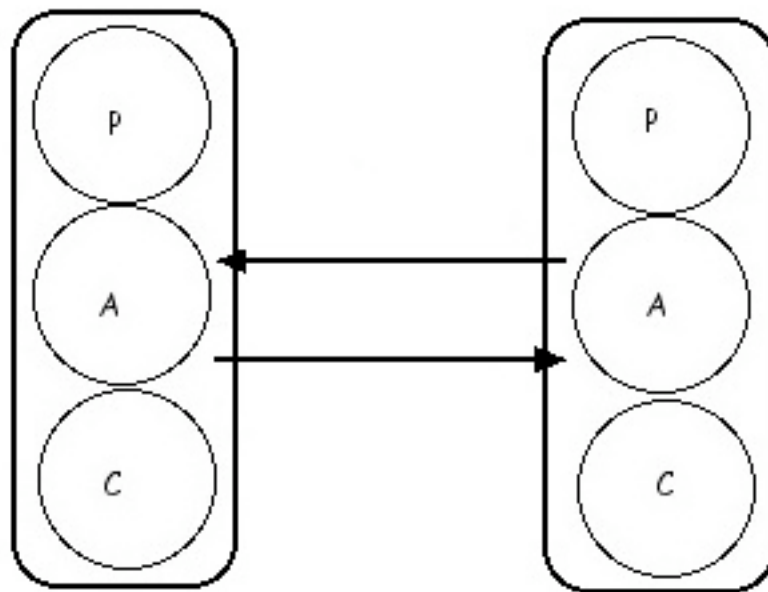
This two person psychology is the relational perspective and involves the client and therapist both being transformed by the counselling. This I find an interesting idea.

So following on logically this is why I like the phraseology of one person and two person psychology. In understanding communication in such a relational way the basic psychological unit ceases to be one person (three ego states), and becomes two person (six ego states with the internal transactional vectors indicating the internal transformations), encased in a skin like Berne sometimes drew with the three ego states. So it is within that skin that the change process takes place. See diagram 4.



Two person psychology  
Diagram 4

When Eric Berne drew the ego states would put a skin around them like in diagram 5 and this can be seen to highlight the one person psychology. In the two person psychology diagram there is not a skin around three ego states but around six. So in the one person psychology you have two separate individuals who function largely independently of each other.



A one person psychology

Diagram 5

This is ultimate form of individualism, as each person has a skin around themselves. As Diagram 5 shows they can interact with each other but in the main they are psychologically singular units.

With a two person psychology there is much less emphasis on individualism and thus we have two people encased in one skin as in diagram 4. They are not in the main psychologically singular units but psychologically interactive units. This means there is less individualism and people's current states of mind are much more the result of the interactions with the states of mind of those who they are communicating with.

This leads us onto the idea of co-creation. To understand what co-creation is you have to work with the two person psychology. In the way co-creation is being used here, a person's understanding of themselves and what is going on in the here and now is the result of two people not one. Both parties co-create the reality. My understanding of transactions between myself and another person is dependent on my Adult perceptions plus all the unconscious non-verbal communications that occur between the two of us. See Diagram 6. We are both continually effected and transformed by this tsunami of out of awareness communication.

So the understanding of reality is created by two people. It then logically seems that with co-creation you cannot breakdown the unit of the two person psychology into smaller units. To do so would destroy the concept of co-creation. This means that Diagram 4 is the smallest or most basic ego state and

transactional diagram you can have. You cannot subdivide it any further. In order to understand the communication you have to look at the two people's transformations and the intersubjective space. All these are of course constantly changing and a new reality is constantly being co-created. To subdivide it further would be to destroy the understanding of the co-creation.

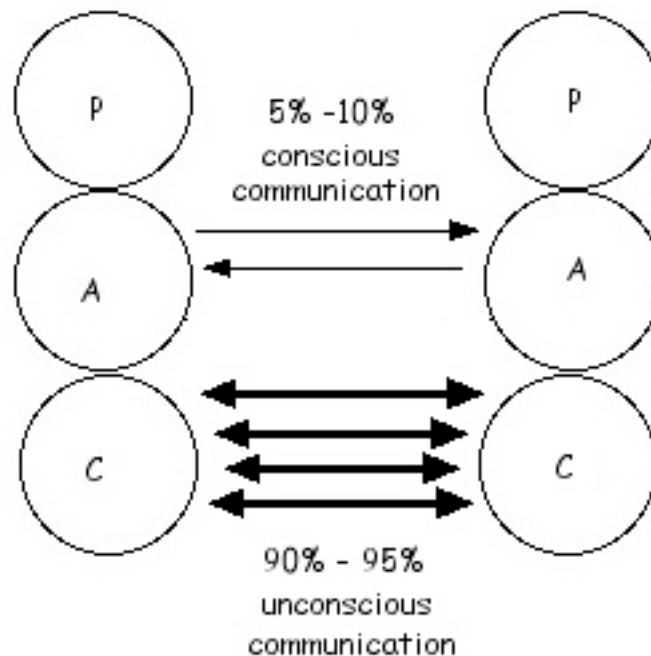


Diagram 6

#### UNDERSTANDING THE OUT OF AWARENESS TRANSACTIONS

Most research puts the out of awareness communication at about 90% to 95% of the total communication going on. For instance one piece of research by McKay, Davis & Fanning (1983) reports that 7% of a message is conveyed by verbal means and the other 93% is communicated by non-verbal means. The vast majority of that non-verbal communication is out of awareness.

It is usually the out of awareness non-verbal communication that is the most important in human communication. With ulterior transactions we have the social level transaction (in awareness) and the out of awareness psychological level transactions. The third rule of communication states; "The outcome of the transactions will be determined on the psychological level rather than on the social level".

#### FURTHER RESEARCH

So one can see how important it is to begin to understand some of the unconscious or out of awareness transactions, particularly in the therapeutic relationship. The therapist must begin to understand these transactions and begin to understand the transformations that are occurring in himself. Once done then he will develop an better understanding of Diagram 4, the two person

psychology. One will develop a much more sensitive understanding of the communication going on and the transformations that are occurring in the client and the therapist. Thus we have the next task - to evolve a systematic way of teaching how this can be done.

This will include answering such questions as:

How much transformation is there in the therapeutic process?

How is the therapist's transformation different from the client's transformation?

How does the therapist develop a hypersensitivity to their own transformations and non-verbal communications?

Using this relational approach to work with other problems besides the deconfusion of the Child ego state?

## REFERENCES

Hargaden, H. 2006.

Comment on Relational TA forum.

relationalta@topica.com

Hargaden, H. and Fenton, B.

"An analysis of non-verbal transactions drawing on theories of intersubjectivity". *Transactional Analysis Journal*. 2005, 35, 173 - 186.

Hargaden, H. and Sills, C.

2002. *Transactional Analysis. A relational Perspective*. Brunner-Routledge: East Sussex.

McKay, M., Davis, M. & Fanning, P. 1983. *The Communication Book*. New-Harbinger Publications: Oakland.

Woollams, S and Brown, M.

1978. *Transactional Analysis*. Huron Valley Institute Press: Michigan.