Transgenerational Script

(title changed in original)

Episcript

English (1969) presented an explanation of how script issues are passed down through the generations when she wrote of the episcript, or 'hot potato'. She defined episcript as "a secret plot based on the magic assumption that tragedy to the self can be avoided by passing it on to a sacrificial object, a victim or scapegoat." (p. 77). She goes on to comment on the many tales in the folklore of many countries that describe how a hero or heroine is cursed in early childhood because of the setting or circumstances of birth, how the curse takes many years to take effect, and how the hero or heroine avoids the fate when the unhelpful ending is somehow passed on to someone else. She also comments that this is seen by Catholics as the process whereby Jesus died to expiate the sins of others.

In a summary, English also wrote that "The Episcript is a condensed version of a person's script, including the tragic ending, which the individual tries to "pass on" to someone else, as he would pass on a potato too hot to handle. The recipient is someone the individual can influence through Child-Child transmission such as his offspring, spouse, patient, student, or co-member of a leaderless group." (p. 82). She provides examples, such as a father who stopped drinking to excess whilst his son was addicted to drugs but began drinking again when the son was cured of addiction; the therapist who as supervisor recognised that he was identifying candidates who might be committed to mental institutions and hence passing on the mother's message to the therapist when young that he should become institutionalised; and the mother who had 12 different therapists in eight years for her daughter before the final therapist recognised the pattern that the daughter was only brought for therapy when she was functioning well, and hence was not accepting from the mother the hot potato of feeling suicidal.

We can apply similar ideas to what happens in organisations and institutions. Managers may pass on their hot potatoes to their employees and teachers may do the same to students. Professionals may also do something similar, as when the practitioner mysteriously finds clients who

will have the same issues as the practitioner. It may be worth remembering the story that is told about Gandhi and the sugar – that having had a mother travel a very long way to bring her son to Gandhi so that Gandhi could stop the boy eating so much sugar, Gandhi told the mother to bring the boy back in three week's time. Having made the lengthy journey home and then back again, Gandhi's intervention was simply to tell the boy to stop eating sugar. When the mother protested about why it needed three weeks and two extra long journeys for this, Gandhi simply commented that three weeks earlier he had still been eating sugar himself.

Parent Interview

McNeel (1976) proposed the 'parent interview' to deal with a common dilemma that he had observed when therapists were using two-chair work (Perls 1969). What McNeel noticed was that clients tended to talk from Child ego state when on the chair that represented themselves and from Parent ego state when occupying the other chair. This might be a distinctly Critical Parent making overtly negative statements, or what McNeel referred to as a 'Plastic' Parent that sounded nurturing on the surface but with inappropriate affect. McNeel commented that therapists need to make interventions when this happens as otherwise the client remains in Adapted Child and continues to switch chairs but without any resolution.

McNeel noted that those therapists who were able to use the two-chair technique effectively used 'heighteners', which he described as interventions used to clarify the issues involved, such as identifying the broader pattern of what is going on. "For example, when a client says to a parental figure, "I don't know why you never loved me" (in a sad voice), the therapist could intervene with the "heightener," "Will you tell your father that you are going to stay sad for the next 20 years until he comes

back and loves you?"… When the client is invited to see his behaviour in a different light, he may switch to a Rebellious Child position and begin to place more energy in what it is he can do about his situation, rather than waiting for his father to come back." (p. 63).

McNeel goes on to suggest that we need to recognise when:

- the client is in a Victim position

- the client is waiting for someone else to change

- the client is unaware of how they are seeing themself in the world e.g. I am depressed rather than I feel depressed

- there is an unresolved psychological request underneath the overt practical request

- the comments from the 'other' chair are defence responses, protecting the Child ego state in the projection of the other person

If the above indicators are present, McNeel suggests that the therapist conduct an interview with the parent projection as if they were really there in person. The technique is based on the belief that the original parenting was not done with malice, and by having the client sit in the chair and answer the questions, the client begins to have a visceral appreciation for the experiences of the mother or father who has been placed in the chair. McNeel cautions that the technique should not be used if it is possible that the original parenting was being done by someone who was seriously disturbed.

McNeel does not provide much detail about what questions to ask during the Parent Interview, suggesting only that it may start with questions about the person's name, followed by questions to elicit their feelings and experiences in response to whatever the client has been

asking for during the two-chair work. The key is that the interview is conducted as if the person is really there, so the questions can be anything that the therapist would have wished to ask the real parent figure had they been available.

As with the material on the episcript/hot potato, we can also consider how we might use the technique of the parent interview within developmental TA work. We could do this with or without using the two-chair technique, which can be an appropriate intervention when we wish to enable the client to step into someone else's shoes. It can also be extended to include several chairs, or perhaps, more simply, be turned into the Conflict Resolution Model (Hay 2001) where the client puts down several pieces of paper containing the names of all parties involved and then follows a process whereby they stand on each piece of paper in turn, talking as if they were that person (or party, as this can work with entities such as a department, a class, or an abstraction such as 'customers' or 'management'). A Parent ego state interview might then be conducted with the client when they are in each of the different roles that they have identified as being significant; by treating them as if they really were that person, an hypnotic invitation is issued at the psychological level that helps them to get in touch with what they have already intuited about the other person but have not previously allowed into their consciousness.

Transgenerational Script

In 2008 Gloria Noriega Gayol was awarded the Eric Berne Memorial Award for her work on the mechanisms of transmission of transgenerational scripts. At that time, two of her articles were referenced; a 2004 article in the *Transactional Analysis Journal* and a 2002 article in Spanish in *Mental Health* published by the Institute of Psychiatry Ramon de la Fuente Muñiz in Mexico. (Noriega Gayol 2002, 2004)

The 2004 paper was an account of an epidemiological study based on TA and conducted in Mexico City with a sample of 830 women. It looked at codependence as a disorder in the area of interpersonal relationships and specifically in family situations in which one or more members were addicted to alcohol and/or other drugs. Noriega mentions how Berne (1972) wrote of scripts being transmitted from grandparents and parents to their children and James (1984) had presented additional comments on multigenerational family processes. Noriega explained that her interest in the subject came about because she had observed clients who were unconsciously re-enacting, in positive or negative ways, the life stories of one of their grandparents. She selected the concept of codependency for the study because it represented an example of women's scripts being transmitted and was also used to explain the multidimensional problems associated with life with an alcoholic.

Quoting from her own 2002 paper, Noriega defined codependence for the purposes of her study as "a relationship disorder, characterised by a strong dependency towards a problematic partner, shown by an emotional dissatisfaction and personal suffering, where the woman focuses her attention in taking care of her partner's and other people's needs while discounting her own. It is associated with a denial mechanism, and incomplete development of identity, emotional repression, and a rescuer orientation towards others. (Noriega, 2002, p. 120)" (p. 313).

She goes on to describe how the Codependence Instrument had been developed in the first phase of the study to produce a screening test of 30 items, for which factor analysis showed a high internal consistency. Further analysis during the second phase of the study showed that the following factors were associated with codependence: early

affective losses, such as death of or abandonment by the parent in childhood, neglect by parents, and/or chronic physical or mental illness of a close relative; being a first-born daughter; a family history of abuse; a family history of alcoholism in siblings, parents, and grandparents; a partner who abuses alcohol; a family history of abuse and an abusive partner; and cultural gender scripts subdivided as feminine – positive – and submissive – negative.

Noriega (2009) published the text of her acceptance speech when she was given the Eric Berne Memorial Award in 2008. In that, she added that her interest began in 1991 whilst attending a university seminar on psychoanalysis and genealogy, especially when she found that she was repeating the life story of her own grandmothers. She presents an adaptation from Berne (1972) of a 'family parade', commenting that "Script messages are transmitted by unconscious communication between the ego states of family members from one generation to the next. This process occurs from the P1 of mother or father to the P1 of the child. In this way, the transmission of script messages may run through several generations – going back to grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, and forwards to children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and beyond." (p. 9).

Writing that these hidden messages can be decoded by the client with the help of interpretations offered by the practitioner, she suggested four main mechanisms for understanding: ulterior transactions; psychological games; transference psychodynamics; and projective identification. She provides diagrams of ulterior transactions, the drama triangle, and transference psychodynamics adapted from Moiso (1985) and projective identification.

In 2010, Noriega (2010) applied her ideas about transgenerational script to organisations, and specifically to the ways in which Eric Berne's script may be affecting the development of transactional analysis organisations. Pointing out that the life experiences of the authors of the various personality theories are projected into their theories, she also wrote that organisations have life scripts which are based on the founder's personality. She proposed, therefore, that although it might sound harsh, she thought that transactional analysis might be following the isolation, arrogance and competition of Berne's script. She referred to the work of Fanita English (2007) and of Bill Cornell (2007) about Berne's reactions when he was rejected by the psychoanalytic group. She goes on to describe how transactional analysis was introduced originally into South America by Kertesz & Induni (1977) and became noted for simplification, which she feels contributed to the isolation from the international TA community of the associations that were then created in Latin America – and hence repeated the pattern. She also points out that the script may have begun with Freud, as there were many who were against Freudian orthodox psychoanalysis.

Noriega proposes a definition of an organisational script as "an unconscious life plan, based on a protocol, that is followed in an organisation and that influences the social, intellectual and material attitudes that regulate the work of the membership through the performance of their technical culture." (p. 199). She proposes that the main elements of the script for transactional analysis are:

- Protocol – the painful rejection of Berne by the Psychoanalytic Institute of San Francisco

- Early decision – 'I'll show you... ', 'I don't need you'

- Existential position - I'm OK, You're not OK

- Injunctions – Don't Be Close, Don't Belong

- Counter injunctions/Driver – Try Hard

- Psychological games – 'My theory is better than yours', 'Kick Me'

- Racket – Resentment

- Payoff – Rejection

She goes on to suggest that the mechanisms of transmission might be analysed through:

Ulterior transactions in which a transactional analyst explains to a potential client that TA is a theory of personality and human relationships but sends the ulterior level message of it being the best psychological theory.

Psychological games in which the practitioner begins as a rebellious Victim by reacting defensively about TA, and then becomes Persecutor by pointing out the problems with other approaches.

Transference psychodynamics which can occur in any relationships so that reactions to authority figures may be based on past experiences of ancestors. Noriega gives examples of how authors may discount feedback from reviewers, project a persecutor into the publisher and withdraw their paper, and of how TA exam candidates may decide to leave the TA community or to stay angry for many years when they have been deferred in an exam.

Projective identification, for which Noriega describes how practitioners may unconsciously project Berne's competitive feelings of resentment and rejection on to their students, even though the circumstances are now quite different.

She proposes that physis (Berne 1968) may "… allow us to break the old transactional

analysis negative script through the emergence of individual responsibility based on consciousness." (p. 203).

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