

Transactional Analysis Therapy

Dr. Eric Berne

Key Concepts

Transactional analysis is a humanistic, existential, dynamic theory of personality and a therapeutic modality whose practitioners believe humans are born in an "OK" state, that each person is unique, and that people ultimately are responsible for their own behavior and destinies.

Applications to this Approach

Transactional analysis attacks maladaptive behavior by examining ego states, uncovering parental driver and injunction messages, detecting games and rackets, rewriting scripts, and redistributing energy distribution between ego states. It is an equitable therapy that involves the client as a full and contributing partner through the therapeutic contrast. Typically, in order for clients to enter therapy they must be in touch with their own pain enough to feel a need or desire to change. This awareness of their own unhappiness or discomfort drives the motivation necessary to work toward change.

Techniques of Therapy

Although TA has a variety of divergent international camps as far as its theory and practice are concerned, many TA theorists believe that TA will continue to integrate techniques from other therapeutic approaches into its constantly evolving frameworks. From that standpoint, while it still adheres to its analytic roots, in use of cognitive, behavioral, Gestalt, and rational-emotive and bioenergetic techniques make it much more eclectic than it was early in its development.

Contributions of this approach

One of the strengths of TA is its emphasis on the therapeutic contract to guide the direction of the therapeutic process. Since therapist and client work together in achieving the goals of the contract, they function more as partners than as "doctor and patient," thus lessening the power differential existing in some other therapeutic approaches. A second strength of TA is that clients can easily understand and apply its concepts in analyzing their own interpersonal behavior. A third contribution of TA is its recognition that people's early decisions influence their current behavior.

Limitations of this approach

Transactional analysis theory has developed far more rapidly and with more complexity than empirical research on the validity of its components. While the report a great deal of research conducted on the theoretical constructs of TA, it is difficult to judge how bias-free the research is, since there are few data available other than that presented in the TA association journal. Another limitation of TA applies more to possible misuses of the approach rather than to TA itself. It is quite possible that some therapist could incorporate only the jargon and the analytical cognitive components of TA into their therapeutic approach. Therapists who do this place too much emphasis on "analyzing" and not enough emphasis on changing behavior or on the affective or relationship aspects of the therapeutic process.