

Being a Transactional Analyst – by Dave Spenceley TSTA
An integrative approach + New theory on Impasses and Transference
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New Theory on Impasse and Transference

Dave Spenceley Teaching and Supervising Transactional Analyst

Impasse theory: The Gouldings and then Ken Mellor described how the impasse is a “stuck” place caused by a conflict between competing needs and demands of the Parent and Child ego states. I do not intend to go into detail regarding impasse or ego state theory here it is covered well in TA literature.

A new theory of impasses:

Parent – Parent & Child– Child Impasses

- I believe that in addition to the Child – Parent impasse as described by the Gouldings and Mellor there are also impasses between competing needs / demands of different Parent ego states and different Child ego states.
- Impasses can be between any two ego states of a person.

Examples: Parent – Parent impasse:

A client with a fearful mother and demanding father experiences an internal dilemma when faced with a decision... they have the internal demanding Parent introject competing with their fearful Parent introject. This impasse will take place at each of the 3 levels...

1st degree impasse: the client can here the mother and father introjected voices in their head... the resolution is to make an Adult decision based on external reality checking.

The second degree impasse will be reflected in a P1(mother) > P1 (father) conflict. It is not at this point appropriate to differentiate these two aspects as P1+ or P1-... in reality either side might be experienced as either positive or negative. The client will experience this as a struggle between competing aspect of themselves... they will have a sense of a magical grandiose – often catastrophic outcome. This will be expressed in the language of a very young child and will also be experienced in physical / somatic feelings.

The third degree level P0 (mother) > P0 (father) will be experienced none verbally, and so can only be understood and made meaning of through unconscious expressions of transference, body experiences and dreams... A further assumption I make is that these are keys to change.

P0 experiences are the echoes of the very early and preverbal experiences of the infant. We know through the observations of the infant and from the work of people such as Alun Schore that this period of an infant life is laying the foundations for all that follows... so when working at this level we are working with the client and the goal is a renewing the foundations of the clients life... an undertaking which will take loving care, time and energy from all involved.

3 Types of Transference: Expressions of an Impasse

A simple definition of transference is experiencing the present as if it is an external expression of an internal impasse.

There are 3 types of transference... All are an unconscious process and are expressions of different kinds of impasses. The goal of the transference invitation is for the client to resolve their impasse.

- 1) **Be another:** In this process the client invites the therapist to be a key figure from their past... the therapist may be idealised or demonised... which ever the goal of therapy is to create a healthy new

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outcome for the client. (Often described as complimentary transferences) I understand this is normally an expression of a first degree impasse.

- 2) **Be like me:** In this the client unconsciously invites the therapist to experience themselves as the client experiences him / herself. In this way the client can experience being understood and identified with. (described as concordant transferences) I understand this is normally an expression of a second degree impasse.
- 3) **Be me:** In this the client projects themselves (and their impasse) into the therapist and invites the therapist to resolve their impasse. The client induces in the therapist an impasse which corresponds to their own state which they are unable to experience for themselves... the therapist allows this process to take place and resolves (metabolizes) the impasse, and survives... the client then re-internalizes the metabolized experience ... the therapist transforms the experience by containing and making meaning of the impasse. (described as transformative transferences.) I understand this is an expression of a third degree impasse.

There are a number of detailed explanations of transference in TA literature starting with Berne's statement that the most common form of transference is the Parent - Child transaction.

By defining ego states he created a way of understanding transference.

In exploring TA's understanding of transference I would urge all readers to read and study Transactional Analysis – A relational perspective” by Charlotte Sills and Helena Hargedon as well as David Manns wonderful book: “Psychotherapy an erotic relationship” (see the YTC book shop to buy them from Amazon.) The classic Carlo Moiso article - Ego States and transference TAJ July 1983 is an essential article for all TA trainees to understand.

Bollas: A contemporary British psychoanalyst describing transference and the therapists responses stated that by cultivating a freely aroused emotional sensibility the analyst welcomes news from within himself that is reported through his own intuitions, feelings, passing images and fantasies... in order to find the patient we must look for him within ourselves

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