

# Personality Adaptations

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## INTRODUCTION

Having recently completed teaching the TA 202 module on Personality Adaptations I felt compelled to write this to raise some concerns about this whole area in the Transactional Analysis literature.

This theory of personality adaptations seems to have begun with an article by Paul Ware titled "Personality Adaptations" in the TAJ in 1983, Ware(1983). The concept has been followed up by many since that time 21 years ago. The names of the adaptations are widely used in the transactional analysis literature and in workshops and so forth. Perhaps the most well known follow up on this theory is by Joines and Stewart who most recently put out a book on the topic, Joines & Stewart(2002) titled, Personality Adaptations. These two acknowledge the Ware 1983 article as one of the main originators of this model.

There is a concern that there was been an unquestioning and unequivocal acceptance of the Ware theory. Hence we have one of the functions of this article.

## ORIGINS

This article by Ware(1983), whilst interesting is hardly a corner stone piece of research. Firstly it should be noted that Mr Ware appears to have no qualifications in transactional analysis and does not even seem to have been a member of ITAA.

This article is based on 6 personality types, those being:

Histrionic

Obsessive-compulsive

Paranoid

Schizoid

Passive-aggressive

Antisocial

He proceeds to explain each of these in transactional analysis terms and how they can be treated from the TA framework. At no time does Mr Ware explain why and how he came up with this 6 part classification system of personality. Where did these terms come from? Did he coin them or has he taken them and modified them from somewhere else? In this article I can find no explanation of this at all. In fairness to Mr Ware this is more a failing of the editorial board and its process than his own error. The editor should have required him to explain how he came up

with these terms. However they remain unexplained.

The only explanation I can find is by Joines and Stewart(2002) who state: "Paul Ware originally observed the six adaptations as he treated adolescents in an in-patient treatment programme"(P4). So at least we finally know what data was used for his research but still we do not know why he choose the six adaptations that he did.

## HOW MANY PERSONALITY ADAPTATIONS ARE THERE?

In reality there are 6.2 billion personality adaptations (the current human population of earth). Everyone has a personality (at least I am yet to meet someone who does not have one) and every personality is unique. However to have a classification system of this many is obviously meaningless. There have been many ways of categorising personality over the years, two being the Ware 6 fold classification system and the DSM-IV which has a 10 fold system. The DSM system is listed below:

Histrionic

Obsessive-compulsive

Paranoid

Schizoid

Antisocial

Schizotypal

Borderline

Narcissistic

Avoidant

Dependent

(Note I have not included the category: Personality Disorder Not Otherwise Specified)

How many is the right number depends on your opinion and the goals of the classification system. I have mentioned the DSM system as it is probably the most widely used diagnostic system currently in use at least in the western world. In addition both Ware and Joines and Stewart endeavour to divorce themselves from it.

## TO DSM, OR NOT TO DSM

In his statement of the 6 personality types Ware(1983) states, "Other types listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III(1980) do not seem to be clear personality adaptations"(P12). Then again there is no explanation by Ware of why or how. Fortunately Joines and Stewart(2002) do endeavour to explain why at some depth with an entire chapter of their book.

Personality Disorders (PDs) is one personality classification system used in

the DSM. The other that they use is - Personality Traits (PTs). "Personality traits are enduring patterns of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and oneself that are exhibited in a wide range of social and personal contexts", (P630). They go onto to say that it is only when these traits become inflexible and maladaptive do they become a personality disorder. Both traits and disorders can be noted on Axis II. So the DSM-IV have two systems of diagnosing personality - personality disorders and personality traits. From what I have seen both Ware and Joines and Stewart completely ignore the idea of personality traits in the DSM system.

In discussing PDs Joines and Stewart state, "The different types of personality disorders correspond to the traditional names that Paul Ware(1983) gave to the six personality adaptations,..."(P107). Let's get this the right way around. The DSM-III was first put out in February 1980. So it was the Ware personality types that correspond to the DSM-III traditional names. This is another example of how Ware's theory has become rarefied. Freud used the category of hysteric in the late 1800's. Is it going to be claimed that Freud's theory corresponds to Ware's.

One of the reasons Joines and Stewart have 6 types and not the 10 PDs or PTs of the DSM is because they claim four of them represent combinations of the 6 already existing. For instance they say the narcissistic PD is a combination of the the paranoid and antisocial adaptations. This is a circular argument. If one was to take out the schizoid category of Ware's 6 fold system then all those schizoid people would have to fit somewhere in the remaining 5. What are they going to be? Some combination of the remaining 5. They have to be as everyone has to fit somewhere and that will most likely be some form of combination of the remaining 5.

Interestingly Joines and Stewart discuss the narcissist and borderline in chapter 18 of their book to demonstrate why they refuse to add them to the other 6 of the Ware system.

Some of the reasons for this are as follows. On pages 228 & 229 Joines and Stewart argue that the Ware 6 personalities are healthy in that they are the best option that the person had to adapting to life as a child and then in adulthood. They then argue that the narcissist and the borderline are much more damaged people and thus they are not adaptive styles as the other 6 are.

In my view this is simply incorrect. I have met many an antisocial and a schizoid who are far more maladaptive than a narcissist or borderline might be. Some of them (antisocial and schizoid) can battle to cope with the very basics of day to day life and live very damaged lives. Some narcissists can be quite successful. Anyone who gravitates to a position where there is intense focus on them is likely to have some narcissistic qualities. Some of these people will be diagnosed as narcissistic personality adaptations. People like Mandela, Napoleon, Princess Diana,

Ghandi, Michael Jackson, Bob Geldorf could all fit into such a category. Of course I am not saying that they are as I know very little about these individuals. My point is that some of the people of this ilk will have a narcissist personality adaptation and function very successfully in life.

Joines and Stewart state that the narcissist or borderline structures cannot be meaningfully mapped on the Assessing Matrix. This is a circular argument. It seems that Joines and Stewart developed the concept of the Assessing Matrix based on the Ware 6 personality adaptations. To take an outside construct from the DSM like the borderline personality and put in on the Assessing Matrix then it is quite likely not to fit like the 6 other adaptations do. This however is likely to be more of a reflection of a shortcoming in the theory of the Assessing Matrix than a 'fault' of the borderline personality.

## RELEVANCE

In my view a big problem for Joines & Stewart is that they do not include personality adaptations like the borderline and the narcissistic. These are very widely used and referred to throughout the world and if they want to stay relevant they are going to have to include them at some point. The mental health field on a world scale uses these terms widely and it seems reasonable that Transactional Analysis must embrace them in some form. Indeed it would seem to be incumbent on WPATA to require the teachers of the module on personality adaptations to include them in some form. Indeed I would add one more and that is the dependent personality adaptation which is included in the DSM system and not in the Ware system. Those who do couples counselling, in particular in the area of domestic violence then an understanding of the concept of the dependent personality is imperative.

## CONCLUSION

In my opinion the Transactional Analysis literature needs to have a system which categorises personality adaptations that includes the commonly used personalities not included in the Ware 6 personality system. Namely the narcissist, the borderline and dependent personalities

The DSM system seems a good place to start and in Appendix A below I have included an ego state analysis of those ten personality adaptations.

## REFERENCES.

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## APPENDIX A

# Personality Adaptations: Ego state features

In the DSM-IV the personality traits and disorders are generally grouped into three categories

1. Appearance of being odd or eccentric = Schizotypal, Schizoid, Paranoid.
2. Appearance of being dramatic, emotional or erratic = Histrionic, Narcissistic, Antisocial, Borderline.
3. Appearance of being anxious or fearful = Avoidant, Dependent, Obsessive/compulsive.

## GROUP 1

### Schizoid

Survival decision

The world is scary so withdraw from it (people) and don't show any of your feelings

### Ego states

Commonly high in Conforming Child ego state as 'rocking the boat' will attract attention and make people focus on them which is scary. The "withdrawn Child ego state" best describes them. They have little desire for social interaction. Often good thinkers and so they can be high in Adult ego state. The quiet achiever is a common style for them and thus they make good employees. Low Free Child ego state as that involves the expression of feelings and can also attract attention. So they can give the appearance of being cold or aloof.

They in particular find it difficult to express anger (and assertion which is a derivative of anger). So Rebellious Child ego state is not often used. This can make them appear indecisive and not clear in their goals. Daydreaming is often present as is a lack of social skills.

## Schizotypal

Survival decision

The world is scary so withdraw from it (people) and don't think clearly by being a bit crazy

Ego states

Like schizoid but with very low Adult ego state. Because of this they will tend to struggle through life in work and in family. They will seem a bit odd and eccentric and thus they can often never get married or form relationships of any great depth many end up living alone. Also there will be little Parent ego state so they spend a good deal of their time in the Child ego state. This can make them good artists or musicians if they have that talent. They view the world differently to most of us but can also be tortured individuals. Vincent Van Gogh could have been of this type with his ear cutting feats. In this society they often they end up on pensions in low cost housing or even on the streets. Or they may manage to keep a solitary usually low paid job. Excessive alcohol and drug use is quite a possibility. They don't often end up in private practice type counselling, but can end up in the care of some form of helping agency.

## Paranoid

Survival decision

The world is hostile so don't trust anyone and deal with people by being angry and attacking

Ego states

Commonly high in Critical Parent and Controlling Parent ego states as they try to adopt the controlling and superior position in relationships and will tend to see others as less than. Often good thinkers and so a high Adult ego state, indeed in therapy they will often see the therapist as less than until the therapist can prove to the client that they are of equal or superior status in their thinking. Problems having fun and with feelings so little Free Child ego state which is also often a focus of treatment, they need to 'lighten up' which involves trusting again.

Paranoids with out good interpersonal skills can be very difficult people indeed, because they think they are right and unless you agree with their thinking which can be delusional, then you are seen as the enemy as well. "If you are not with me you are against me" is the thinking, as well as being hypersensitive to rejection, jealous and they will tend to sexualise transactions. Most are men and thus there can be homophobic feelings. These people can get stuck in middle management because they will gravitate to positions of authority but lack the skills to get on with people or

function in a system/organisation and thus not move higher up the corporate ladder. Those with good interpersonal skills can do very well in business and politics as they are very good at assessing the motives of others and are prepared for the worst. Their hypersensitivity is used to their own advantage as is their ability to think well. This personality is more common in men.

## GROUP 2

### Antisocial

Survival decision

You can't trust anyone & life's unfair so take advantage of people and do what you like

### Ego states

Uncontrolled Free Child predominates as the Parent ego state is non-existent or very flexible to suit the Free Child want at the time. As a result they will be exploitative of other rights and property. Stealing, promiscuity, affairs, drug use, lying, criminality, authority problems and so forth result from the unrestrained Free Child. If the Adult ego state is low they will rapidly end up in trouble with the law or in prison. If they have a good Adult ego state they can avoid detection of their 'crimes' for long periods if not ever. Hence they can go very well in politics and commerce. If you marry one you are in for a rough time.

The "silver tongue" or con man is of this type of personality. They can be very personable and make you feel special and con you into giving them what they want or they can be more crude and just take what they want, violently if they meet resistance. The Child ego state feels that life has cheated him or ripped him off so it now owes him a living. They may have been abandoned as children or smothered by mother and often with a distant highly critical father.

Very little Conforming Child ego state (they may appear conforming when it suits their need) and hence experience very little guilt and remorse so they are free to exploit others with no internal controls like feelings of guilt.

As the Free Child is so high they can be very intuitive and able to assess others motives and personality quickly and accurately. In this way they can make good psychotherapists and you do find them as they also love power. They crave dependency and to trust another person but avoid it at all costs. This personality is much more common in men. Adolescents often show traits of this personality as a normal part of development.

## Borderline

Survival decision

Relationships & life are very unreliable so frantically do anything to keep people around

### Ego states

Very much a Child ego state personality. A dissatisfied and confused person. So confused Child ego state is common. The Free Child is weak as the individual has little sense of who they are (identity). They find it very hard to answer the question: "Who am I?". Their answer often is, "I am part of you".

The frantic Child ego state of the person leads to unstable, unpredictable and intense relationships, mood and behaviour. Parent ego state is used little and the Adult is often weak but is not necessarily so. This personality is more common in women.

## Histrionic

Survival decision

I must be the centre of attention so I will be dramatic, flirtatious and highly emotional

### Ego states

Like the Borderline this is a very Child ego state personality type. The Child is very dramatic, reactive and intense and thus the relationships are usually not easy going. Initially it seems that they are having Free Child reactions to situations but the reactions are exaggerated and overly-dramatic so that it is more correctly diagnosed as being Adapted Child ego state. Adult and Parent are often minimal and thus they tend to be quite symbiotic and require someone else's Parent and Adult ego states to function in life. They often sexualise transactions and play the game of Rapo and thus often have poor boundaries which shows up the lack of Adult and Parent ego states. Thinking and feeling often do not go together. They also somatize feelings which also shows the strong Child ego state responses to the environment. This personality is more common in women.

## Narcissistic

Survival decision

I have always been told that I am very important and the best so I will behave and feel like that

### Ego states

Like the Anti-social personality the Free Child predominates and hence there are characteristics like self-importance, self-involvement, preoccupation with oneself and one's abilities. Thus they can be exploitative of others as the Parent

ego state is minimal or flexible, and do not feel guilt much. If they have low Adult ego state they will struggle in life as people will quickly see through them and tire of their self involvement. With a good Adult ego state they can be very successful in many walks of life. Often they can be seen as charismatic and charming and thus people will do things that allow the narcissist to further his or her own goals in work life and personal life.

When people talk about the big 'egos' in politicians, models, actors and musicians that is probably layman's language that is describing narcissistic traits. Powerful leaders know what the right way to go is with a organisation, country, army, family and so forth. How do they know that? Because they have a great belief in self and their decision making ability. They just know that they are right. This can also be their downfall as they tend not to listen to others advice unless it concurs with their own beliefs. (Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler?) So Conforming Child ego state does not get much of a look in. Parent ego state can be readily used as a way to express ones point of view and needs. They have no trouble with asking for what they want and can use Critical and Controlling Parent ego state to do so.

Adolescents often show traits of this personality as a normal part of development.

### GROUP 3

#### Avoidant

Survival decision

Life is scary and rejecting so I will withdraw and feel worthless

#### Ego states

Like the schizoid but yearn for social interaction and acceptance and often there is a self hatred. So there is a withdrawn Child ego state that craves to be accepted but is hypersensitive to rejection and often feels shame and humiliation. There is little Parent ego state except perhaps for a strong internal Critical Parent ego state. Adult is variable. Free Child is very small. This personality is more common in women

#### Dependent

Survival decision

I can't cope with life and am worthless so I will cling to others and do what they tell me

#### Ego states

This individual obviously has trouble with Parent and Adult ego states as they are seeking to form a symbiosis and stay in the Child ego state. With little Adult then

they cannot run their life. Manage their finances, pay bills, organise work and personal life. If that continues then sooner or later some one (or some organisation) has to come along and do it for them, and thus adopt at least the Adult ego state position. Parent ego state is also likely to be used little as they will avoid having views about things as they just want to fit in and not make too many waves that may result in them being expelled or abandoned from the person or organisation they are dependent on. For instance in DV the woman may discount her own needs and views about being beaten so that the husband will not leave. This also explains why restraining orders are not much use with this type of personality. This personality is more common in women and these people often experience considerable discomfort when left by themselves for any length of time.

So Conforming Child ego state predominates although the Adult can be used in the service of keeping the other party around, Rebellious Child ego state would be avoided as that can displease others. Free Child will tend to not be expressed as there is not the time nor the motivation.

### Obsessive/compulsive

Survival decision

I have to feel in control of life and myself so I will be orderly and perfectionistic

#### Ego states

This person spends a good deal of time in scared Child ego state where phobias and compulsions of various descriptions predominate. If Adult and Parent are poor then they can be quite symbiotic. If those ego states function well then the person can also be a control freak. The O/C can control by the Parent and/or Child ego state.

The obsessions and compulsions can significantly impair ones everyday life, such as with cleanliness. This means that those others also living in the house have their lives effected as well. The O/C can thus 'make' others do the right thing (e.g. be clean) with Controlling Parent if the Parent ego state is strong. Or they can control from the Child ego state by being terrified of things (e.g. lack of cleanliness) and others will respond from their Rescuing Parent ego state.

Often Adult ego state is well functioning and they use it to be perfectionistic and in the service of refining the obsessions and compulsions. Although decision making can be poor because the Adult can think of all the possible permutations and consequences of every option and thus can't make a decision in the end. They get bogged down in too much information.

The Conforming Child ego state can also be high as they can be reliable, responsible, hardworking, dutiful, always punctual and so on. In this way they can make good employees as long as they do not waste too much time and energy with their obsessions and perfectionism.