

## THE TWO EGO STATE MODEL



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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the structural distinctions made in contemporary ego state theory. Freud consciously avoided placing boundaries between the superego, ego and id, whilst Berne openly attacked the problem of concretely delineating the three psychic subsystems. As this paper unfolds it will become apparent that descriptively Berne achieved success, yet structurally he had major problems.

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### INTRODUCTION

As the two ego state model relates to the structure of ego states rather than their function, it is necessary to begin with a statement by Berne as to what he saw as the structure of ego states. For example, Berne (1961) states—"A Parental ego state is a set of feelings, attitudes, and behaviour patterns which resemble those of a parental figure. ...The Adult ego state is characterized by an autonomous set of feelings, attitudes, and behaviour patterns which are adapted to the current reality. ...The Child ego state is a set of feelings, attitudes, and behaviour patterns which are relics of the individual's own childhood" (1961, p. 66-69). Berne holds to such a definition of the structure of ego state throughout his writings (for instance, Berne [1964, p. 23-24] and Berne [1972, p. 11-12]). In addition, it is fortunate that other subsequent writers have also followed this primary definition of ego states (for example, Hohmuth & Gormly, 1982; James & Jongeward, 1971; Joines, 1976; Woollams & Brown, 1978).

A second and closer look at these definitions results in a most interesting finding when one considers structural analysis. This analysis of ego state structure as noted by Woollams and Brown (1978) "deals with each ego state's developmental history and innate capacity of expression—in other words the content of the ego state" (p. 7). What is the developmental history and content of the three ego states, as defined above? The Parent ego state's content and history is explained by the imitations and identifications made by the youngster. The Child ego state's history and content is explained by early childhood experiences where the relics of childhood have survived into later life. However, where does the Adult ego state come from; where does it get its content? The Adult is defined as an autonomous set of feelings, attitudes and behaviour patterns that are adapted to current reality. That seems to be true, but how did they get there? Berne states the developmental history of the Parent and Child, but not the Adult. This happens consistently through the references cited above.

### THE ADULT'S DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

With Berne's definition of the structure of ego states clarified, one can begin to answer those questions asked in the previous paragraph. Namely, what is the developmental history and content of the Adult? As will become apparent later, the two ego state model incorporates the Adult within the boundaries of the Parent ego state. As a result of this it may seem that the Adult is annihilated. This is definitely not the case; instead the Adult is relocated. It would be most foolish to deny that humans can function as computers, or data gatherers and processors. Obviously they can; however the question is how do they get this ability? It could be an archaic relic from childhood, an internalized parental pattern, or some thing completely different. The answer is in fact the second option.

When a child attends school and acquires information, this involves the incorporation of the teacher's instructions. Later on in high school when he or she has more knowledge, he or she may even critically evaluate what he or she is being taught, yet he or she can only do this if he or she has previously incorporated or learnt how to critically evaluate. The acquisition of language and basic mathematical principles also involves the incorporation of Parent ego state tapes. The most obvious example is the rote learning of multiplication tables and the alphabet. Bruner (1964) agrees with this, stating that all the techniques of data processing are passed down from generation to generation, in each culture. Each child incorporates data processing methodology from his parents or teachers.

Further support for the author's contention that the Adult is a collection of internalized parental patterns comes from an examination of the literature on the Adult ego state. Consider the following two examples. First, the Adult ego state is often described as being a computer; this metaphor illustrates the notion at hand. Computers are programmed by computer programmers. A computer's computational ability is entirely dependent on the computer programmer's logic. (In this case the 'computer' is defined as that part of the whole system which the computer user communicates with: most commonly the keyboard and visual display unit.) The computer will only process data according to instructions from the 'tapes' or 'disks', to which it is connected. It is these tapes that contain the computer programmer's logic (that is, his or her opinions, assumptions and beliefs on correct data processing).

Second, in the original Steiner and Berne (1961) script matrix, the Adult to Adult message is called the program. Steiner (1971) states, "The manner in which the parent of the same sex demonstrates how the injunction should be obeyed is called the program" (p. 46). The youngster gets his or her program by watching how his or her parents do things, and then copying that. Obviously this is an imitative process, or in TA terms a tape internalizing process. So as far as script formation goes, it is suggested that accepting a program is the same as internalizing a parental tape. This of course is the same as how the Parent ego state is formed.

### THE TWO EGO STATE MODEL

The geometric representation of the two ego state model as compared to the three ego state model is presented in **Figure 1**.

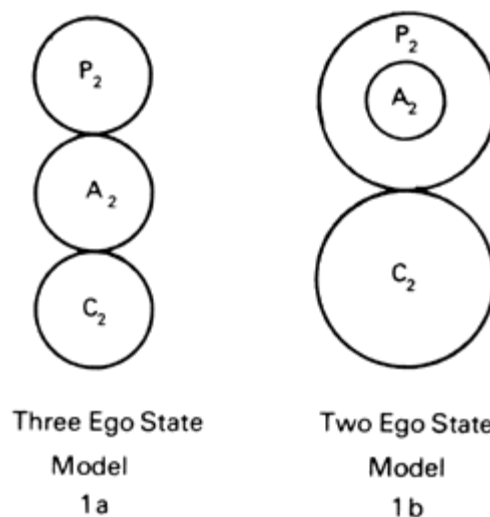
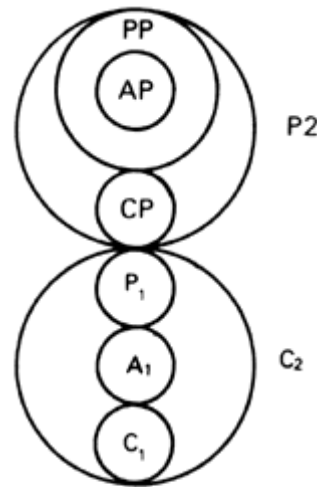


Figure 1

As it is the author's idea that the Adult ego state is a collection of parental tapes just like the Parent ego state, then the Adult needs to be subsumed under the Parent. It would have been

possible to not include the  $A_2$  circle inside the  $P_2$  circle as shown in **Figure 1b**. It is however included for two reasons. Firstly, the Adult ego state is of such importance in human functioning that it merits recognition. Secondly, some theoretical continuity is maintained with the original three ego state Bernian model.

Logically, then the second order structure of the two ego state model is as shown in **Figure 2**.

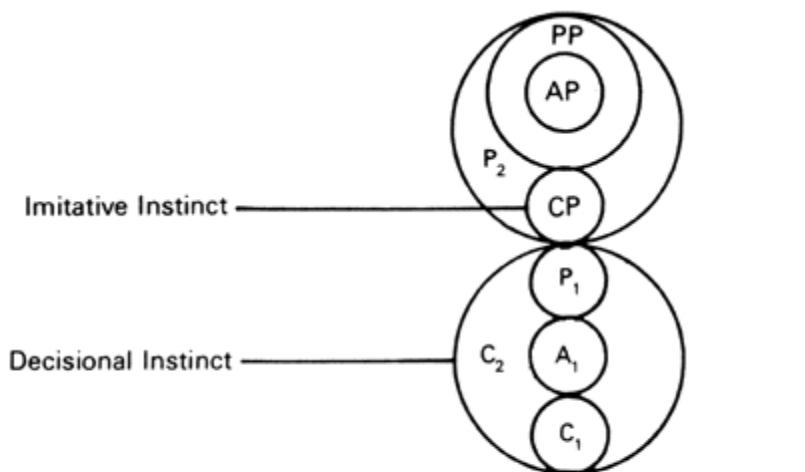


Second Order Structure

Figure 2.

### WHY A TWO EGO STATE MODEL?

The two ego state model implies that personality develops in two ways, each one representing an instinctual impulse in the youngster. Originally the infant is born with certain genetic predispositions in its personality. After birth the environment takes over and determines how fulfilled these genetic predispositions will become. The environment works on the youngster in two ways. First the child will make decisions in response to its interaction with others and secondly it will imitate those others. The two ego state model thus implies that each human has an imitative instinct, and a decision making instinct. **Figure 3** indicates where these reside in the personality structure.



Locales of the Instincts which Determine Personality Formation.

Figure 3

From such a diagram it is obvious that this model would view autonomy not as being a script free state, but rather the state of being in possession of a winner's script. That is, as a youngster, the autonomous individual still incorporates Parent tapes and makes early decisions. These are, however, autonomy-producing decisions and internalizations. Such a position follows the line of the Woollams and Brown (1978) permission matrix.

It is important to note that imitation is instinctual. One does not decide to imitate others, it happens as a natural matter of course. An everyday example of this is the acquisition of accent. Whilst in a new country one does not decide to start speaking like others, he or she just copies automatically. Support for this position abounds in the literature, for example Ginsburg and Opper (1969:39-40), Mussen, Conger and Kagan (1974, p. 142), Sanger and Kelly (1986, p. 23-24).

While Goulding and Goulding (1979) have most eloquently demonstrated the role of early decisions in personality formation, the role of imitation has to a certain extent been relegated to the back stalls. The two ego state model endeavours to push imitation back to its rightful place. It is highlighting the point that parental tape internalization occurs from birth is instinctual and plays just as much a role in script formation as decision making.

In addition to this, the two ego state model solves a pre-existing problem with Berne's three ego state theory. Berne's model suggests that the Child ego state forms first and is followed later by the Adult and Parent ego states. However, imitation, identification and therefore parental tape internalization, occurs from day one. As a result, in the three ego state model the Child ego state must become a repository of parental tapes because in the first few years of life there is no Parent or Adult, (Berne, 1977; McCormick, 1977). If one accepts that the Child is a repository of parental tapes then a major redefinition of the Child ego state must take place. The definition of Child in the introduction is no longer valid, instead it would have to be altered to something like: "The Child ego state is a set of feelings, attitudes and behaviour patterns which are relics of the individual's own childhood and which resemble those of a parental figure".

If accepted, one would now have parental tapes in both the Child and Parent ego states. One would then be forced to qualify the differences and also redefine the Parent ego state to some extent. The two ego state model solves all this complexity by stating that decisions reside in the  $C_2$ , imitations reside in the  $P_2$  and both develop from day one. Logically then, the  $P_2$  is as primal, archaic and potent as the  $C_2$ . All these are contended in the two ego state model.

In retrospect, one begins to see that the two ego state model has more differences from the three ego state model than simply moving one circle. This highlighting and emphasis on imitation has many clinical consequences. Patients (in the author's view) will instinctively imitate the therapist. Indeed the potency of a therapist could be defined as the potential of a therapist to be imitated. The more potent a therapist, the more impact there will be on the patient's Parent ego state via the imitative instinct, irrespective of the decisions made.

This point brings us to the question of script formation. The two ego state model, in highlighting the factor imitation, necessitates the development of a script matrix which gives it just service. Such a script matrix is best presented in two parts: the decisional based messages and the imitative based messages, that is scripting occurs in two discrete distinct ways (see **Figure 4**).

Unfortunately, most script questionnaires confuse both of these. There are however some exceptions. The 'Bad day at black rock' technique outlined by McNeel (1980) is good at eliciting only decisional based script messages. On the other hand the parent interview also developed by McNeel (1976) is excellent for showing the imitative based script messages. Note here however that the two ego state model would contend that the parent interview elicited  $P_2$  imitated information rather than  $P_1$  decisional information. Therapy thus proceeds with the therapist deciding if the client's problem is imitative, decisional or both. If it is imitative one does re-imitation; if it is decisional one does re-decision, and if it is both one does both.

The other "use" of the two ego state model is the implications that it has on the philosophy and practice of science. A conclusion from the two ego state model is that the great majority of present-day scientific practice is invalid. Every time the null versus the alternative hypothesis dichotomy

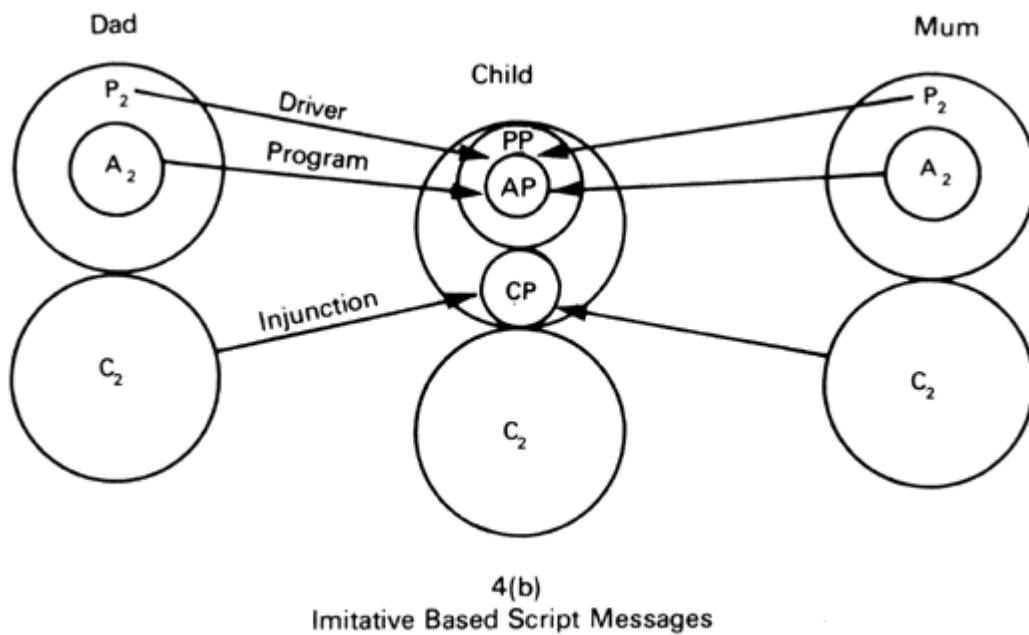
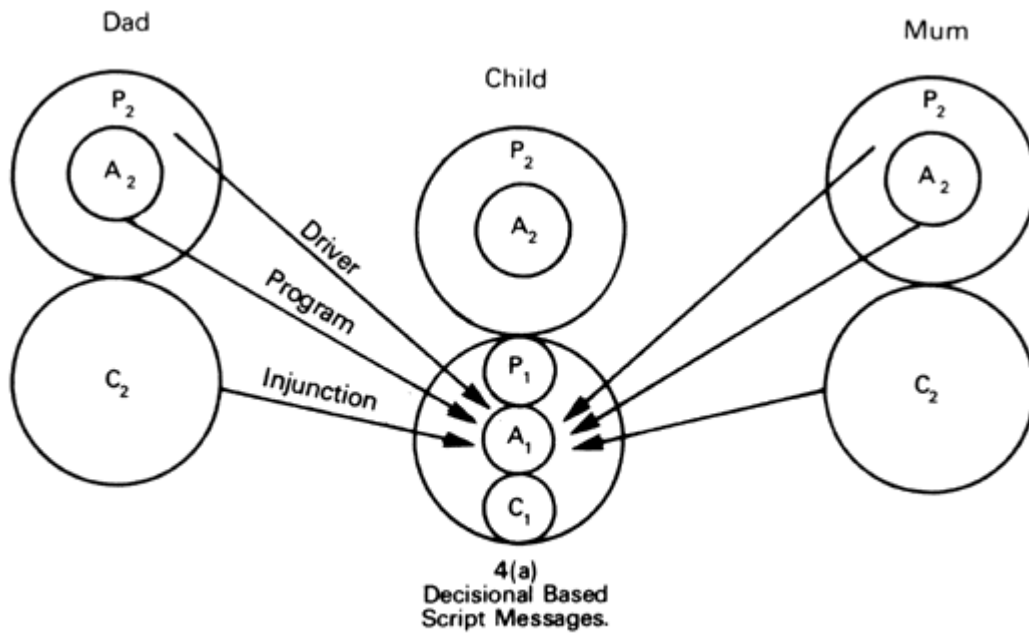


Figure 4

is used, the two ego state model would object. This is important to elucidate here, as the great majority of contemporary scientific journals rest on the assumption that scientific proof and disproof are valid concepts and goals. As this paper uses the methodology suggested by the two ego state model, then it does not seek to disprove the three ego state model, or prove the two ego state model. The null versus alternative hypothesis is not a valid concept according to the conclusions of the two ego state model. The writer of this paper has presented his understanding of the Adult ego state that is based on his internalized tapes of what is appropriate data gathering and processing. Any dissension validates the idea that data processing and gathering is opinionated. Neither is correct nor incorrect. Instead the two ego state model would say, "...let's isolate the differing data gathering and processing tapes and see what those varying tapes give us". That is what the two ego state model concludes the process of science "should" be.

The model at hand is also a tautological model. Whilst it states that seeking proof or disproof is not valid, it accepts at the same point in time that it can be valid, if one uses different internalized tapes for information processing. As a consequence the model at hand provides a solution to the paradox of knowledge, a notion which current philosophers of science are endeavouring to solve (see Tymoczko, 1985). How this is done involves quite a complex philosophical discussion, and hence will not be explained here. One can find this discussion in White (1985).

Despite this rather esoteric discussion the two ego state model provides one other very important factor. It provides the ultimate permission to question. Its positioning of the Adult ego state highlights the point that even the most widely held contemporary theories are based on opinions. That scientific facts are opinion. The three ego state model makes it very easy to forget this, whilst the two ego state model constantly reminds us that theories are theories, and not "facts". Such reminding offers the permission to question those theories which have become "gospel".

### THE RELATION OF THE TWO EGO STATE MODEL TO FUNCTION

As was stated in the Introduction, the two ego state model refers to ego state structure only, and does not address function. When related to function, the two ego state model highlights and solves another problem inherent in the three ego state model. Berne's original ego state theory depicts that structurally there are three ego states and functionally there are three ego states (see Figure 5).

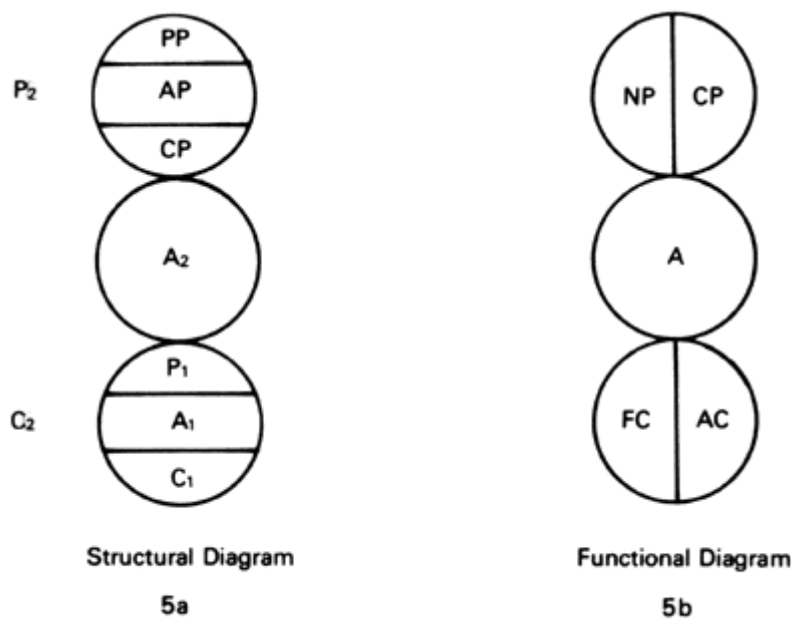


Figure 5

It is contended here that Berne (1961) made an error in the way he saw the two models relate. For instance consider the following—“The Child...is a set of feelings, attitudes, and behaviour patterns which are relics of the individual’s own childhood...The Child is exhibited in one of two forms. The *adapted* Child is manifested by behaviour which is inferentially under the dominance of the Parental influence...The *natural* Child is manifested by autonomous forms of behaviour such as rebelliousness or self-indulgence...A Parental ego state is a set of feelings, attitudes, and behaviour patterns which resemble those of a parental figure. The Parent is typically exhibited in one of two forms...*prejudicial*...and *nurturing*...The Adult ego state is characterized by an autonomous set of feelings, attitudes, and behaviour patterns which are adapted to the current reality...The criterion (of Adult competence) is not the accuracy of the judgements (because the data available may be unreliable)...but the quality of the data processing and the use made of the data available” (p. 66-69).

In each of these states he relates the structure to the function. That is

C2 is exhibited as the FC or AC  
A2 is exhibited as the A, and  
P2 is exhibited as the NP or CP.

Berne is consistent with this proposal throughout his writing (for example, see Berne, 1972:11-12). Subsequent writers have also followed this—Joines (1976); Goulding & Goulding (1979); Woollams & Brown (1978).

It is contended in this paper that such a proposal represents a misunderstanding of how the two models relate. Furthermore, this paper subscribes to the same understanding of structure and function as does Joines (1976). He maintains that structure and function refer to different aspects of reality. Combining them is like attempting to equate a “wheel” with “revolving”. More specifically, ‘structural’ refers to the component parts of the personality, while ‘functional’ or ‘descriptive’ refers to the way in which the personality is functioning at a given point in time” (p. 377).

In what would be considered as agreement with Berne’s idea, Joines (1976) states that usually, the P<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>1</sub> are all simultaneously involved in the display of Adapted Child behaviour and Free Child behaviour.

As an example of how the P<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>1</sub> are all involved in functional ego state display, consider the examples given by Joines (1976):

#### Example 1—Adapted Child Behaviour

P<sub>1</sub> may have stored an interpretation of mother’s behaviour which says, “Don’t be angry, be sad”.

A<sub>1</sub> works out how to do something so that he ends up feeling sad, so that mother pays attention.

C<sub>1</sub> says, “I need for mother to pay attention to me”.

#### Example 2—Free Child Behaviour

P<sub>1</sub> says that it is OK to have fun and enjoy.

A<sub>1</sub> figures out how to enjoy.

C<sub>1</sub> says, “I want to enjoy”.

Again it is stressed that *all three* of P<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>1</sub> are involved in each Free Child display and Adapted Child display.

The two ego state model agrees with the logic employed by Joines, yet his arguments do not go far enough. Logically then, it is contended that not only are the P<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>1</sub> all involved in each Free Child and Adapted Child display, instead the P<sub>2</sub>, A<sub>2</sub> and C<sub>2</sub> are all involved in the display of every functional ego state.

The two ego state model permits us to easily extend the Joines (1976) proposal to its logical conclusion. For example, let us again take the case of Adapted Child behaviour. Not only are the P<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>1</sub> involved in the display but also the P<sub>2</sub> and A<sub>2</sub>. That is, the imitations made by the individual are also involved.

In the previous Example 1, we saw how the P<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>1</sub> play a role in Adapted Child behaviour. Yet, what about the Adult (A<sub>2</sub>) and the Parent (P<sub>2</sub>) structural ego states? Surely they must play a role? Indeed, to function without the P<sub>2</sub> or A<sub>2</sub> being involved, would be indicative of localised

brain damage, where those parts of the brain that recorded imitations had been destroyed. With the two ego state model this point is further clarified (see **Figure 6**).

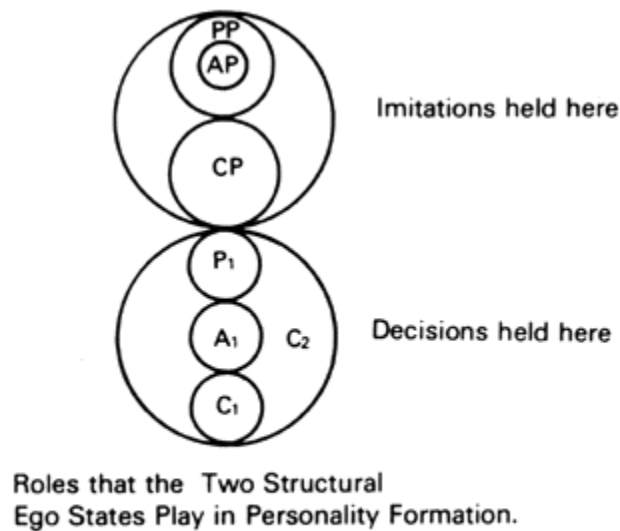


Figure 6

To say that the Adapted Child involves only  $P_1$ ,  $A_1$  and  $C_1$  is to say that the individual is not influenced at all by modelling or imitation. Such a state of affairs is very unlikely to be true. As demonstrated by White (1984), the evidence to suggest the major role of imitation in personality development is very strong. The  $C_2$  is only relevant to decisions, whilst in the  $P_2$  reside all the person's imitations, copying and modelling.

Therefore every piece of behaviour will be dependent on what imitations and decisions the individual has made. That is, every functional ego state display will involve the PP, AP, CP,  $P_1$ ,  $A_1$  and  $C_1$ .

For example, let us again take the Adapted Child behaviour:

$P_1$  contains the interpretation of mother's behaviour which says, "Don't be angry, be sad".

$A_1$  contains the ability to work out how to set up situations so he feels sad and gets mother's attention.

$C_1$  contains the feelings in response to the  $A_1$  decisions.

PP contains the statement, "People should feel sad"—imitated from outside.

AP contains the statement, "There are heaps of rotten things in the world, and it makes sense to feel sad about them"—imitated from outside.

CP contains the statement, "I want to feel sad"—imitated from outside.

The same situation applies for every functional ego state. The Free Child, Adapted Child, Adult, Critical Parent and Nurturing Parent are *all* a result of the interaction of *every* structural ego state, i.e. the PP, AP, CP,  $P_1$ ,  $A_1$  and  $C_1$ .

Before presenting some case examples, it is necessary to highlight the use of the word "contain" in the above example. For instance, it is crucial to understand that the  $P_1$  does not actually say,



“Don’t be angry, be sad”, or the CP does not actually say, “I want to feel sad”. Those structural ego states only contain those statements, they cannot say or do anything. What is actually said or done is the result of what is contained in every one of the structural ego states. Metaphorically, it is useful to think of these ego states as containers or buckets, which get filled up by statements or beliefs during childhood. The buckets cannot do anything except contain these statements. However, this does not demean structural analysis, as it is very important to understand how all these buckets fit together, how they get leaks, how they get filled up, and so on. In addition, current script theory would contend that the buckets become mostly filled up in the first decade of life via the decisions and imitations made. After that, the remainder of life experiences would be a “topping up” process of what already exists in the buckets. A major event in later life that significantly altered an individual’s script would be seen as a partial emptying of the buckets and then refilling them with new statements.

## EXAMPLES

In order to clarify how structure and function combine, consider the behaviour display of the Nurturing Parent ego state. The individual who is a very good nurturer may have the following ego state structure:

### Example of G

- PP contains: “Children should be cared for”—imitated from others.
- AP contains “Here’s how to nurture”—imitated from others.
- CP contains “Nurturing is fun”—imitated from others.
- P<sub>1</sub> contains The stored decisions, “It’s OK to be grown up and look after others”.
- A<sub>1</sub> contains The abilities to make decisions.
- C<sub>1</sub> contains: Those feelings in response to the A<sub>1</sub> decisions.

All these buckets contain consistent, syntonic messages with regards to Nurturing Parent functioning. As a result they all combine to provide G. with a set of decisions and imitations that permit effective functioning from that functional ego state.

### Example of K

Consider the case of K, who is G’s sister. Let us assume that K was subjected to one major traumatic episode that resulted in her making the decision, “Don’t grow up”. Yet she still had the healthy parental modelling that G received. K would have the following ego state structure:

- PP contains: “Children should be cared for”—imitated.
- AP contains “Here’s how to nurture”—imitated.
- CP contains “Nurturing is fun”—imitated.
- P<sub>1</sub> contains The decision, “Don’t grow up”.
- A<sub>1</sub> contains The abilities to make decisions.
- C<sub>1</sub> contains: Those feelings in response to the A<sub>1</sub> decision.

As a result, K’s nurturing behaviour will be less effective and more haphazard than G’s, because her imitations and decisions are dystonic. When she wants to display nurturing behaviour she has a conflict. Her imitations allow her to show competent nurturing behaviour whilst at the same time her decisions do not allow competent nurturing behaviour to be demonstrated. As a result, these two opposing factors combine and the final resultant Nurturing Parent behavioural display is one of reduced effectiveness compared to G.

These examples clearly demonstrate the relationship between the two ego state structural model and the three ego state functional model. To say that the NP or CP function *only* as a result of the P<sub>2</sub> is to be theoretically desultory. Surely the parental functions must be a result of the imitations acquired *plus* the early decisions made. In the same manner the FC and AC functions must be a result of both early decisions *and* the imitated material of the P<sub>2</sub>. The same applies for Adult ego state function. It is the result of both imitated tapes of the P<sub>2</sub> and early decisions of the C<sub>2</sub>.

## **SUMMARY**

This paper describes the two ego state model. Such a model is deemed necessary as the structural analysis of the Adult ego state in the three ego state model is most questionable. Up to date structural definitions of the Adult have highlighted what it does, rather than where it comes from, or how it gets its content. The two ego state model solves this problem. In addition it highlights the role of imitation in personality development; provides a new structure for the script matrix; and as an unexpected adjunct, it provides a solution to the paradox of knowledge.

Finally, this paper addresses some historical problems of the relation between structure and function. It takes the schema provided by Joines (1976) and extends it. This, it is contended, provides a far more theoretically sound explanation of how structure and function “fit” together.

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