

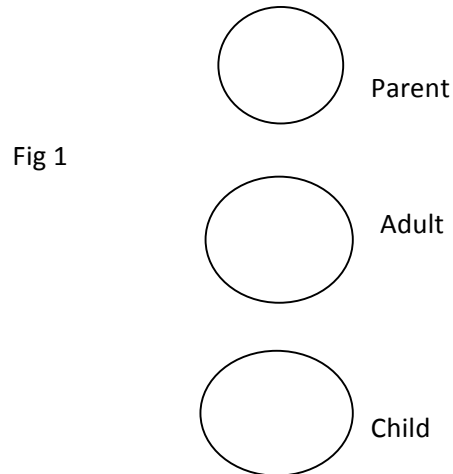
## An Examination of Parental Alienation through Transactional Analysis

In 1964 Psychiatrist Eric Berne wrote "Games People Play" to introduce his theory of Transactional Analysis about the dynamics of human relationships.

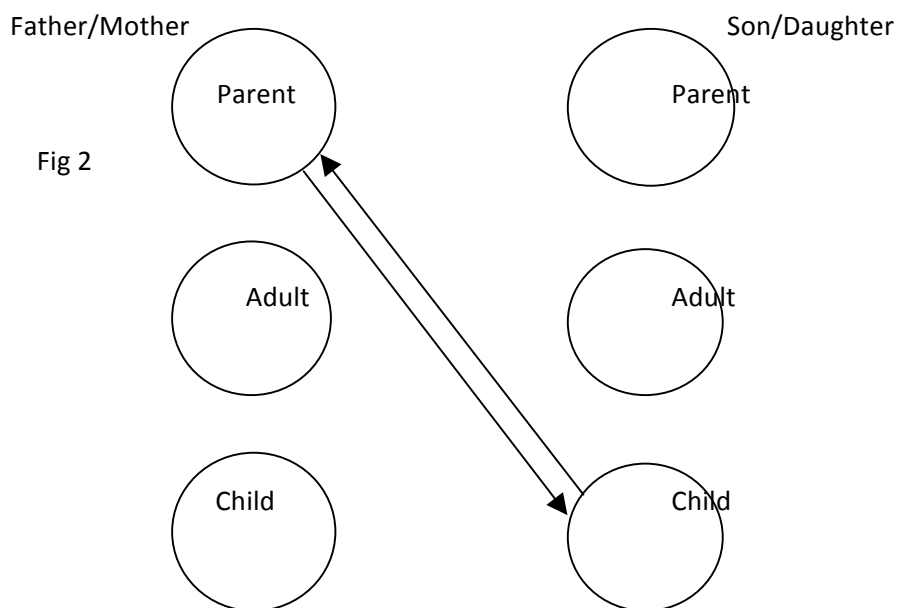
I am not trained in psychology but I was fascinated by its potential to illustrate how the normal pathways of communication between a father/mother and son/daughter relationship can often be reversed in cases of parental alienation, causing harm to both.

Transactional analysis tells us we all communicate from 1 of our 3 ego states.

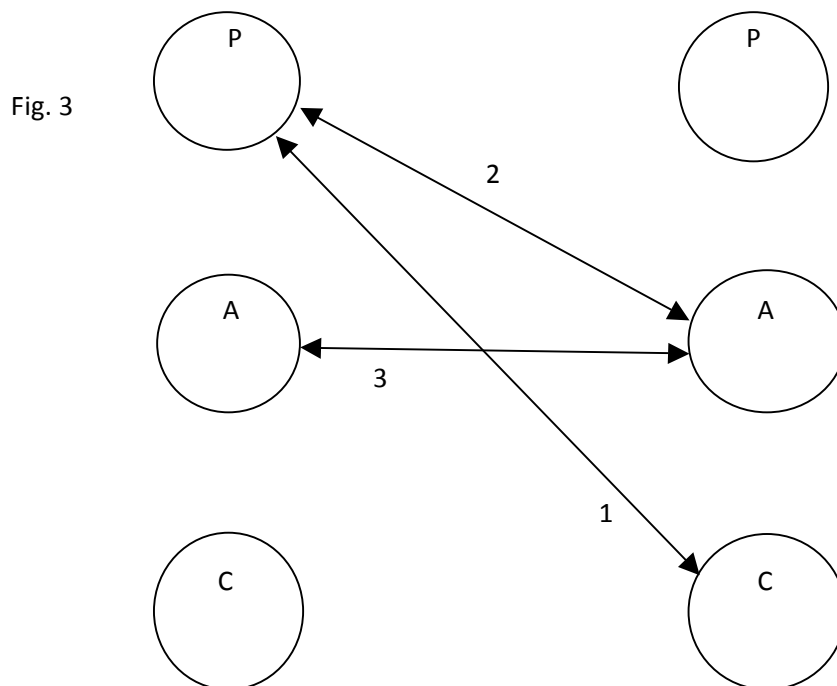
These are:



In Fig 2 we can schematically draw the transactional pathways that exist between 2 people; in this example between a father or mother on the left and their son or daughter on the right. The parent speaks from their parental role and Parent ego state to their offspring, who replies from their child role and Child ego state. This pattern is biologically, neurologically and socially driven.



As the infant grows to maturity we can expect the main transactions to follow the general paths from 1 through 2 to eventually 3 – as in Fig. 3



However, in cases of PA, the Alienating Parent (AP) allows the alienated child (AC) to ostensibly make their own decisions on such important parental matters as amount of contact with the other (target) parent (TP). By empowering the child in this way, the AP validates in the child's mind that they have been granted an adult role which raises their main ego state of communication from child to adult and undermines the TP's role as a Parent.

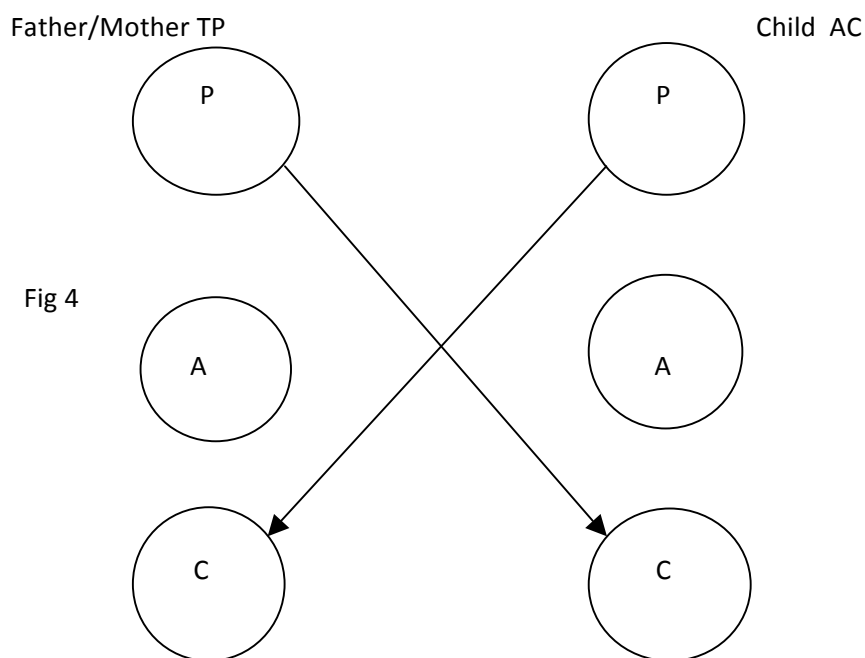
Critical thinking and emotional intelligence are not fully developed until humans are well into their twenties, so before their late teens children are not equipped for making important decisions of the magnitude of contact frequency etc with another loving parent. They will therefore look for guidance, examples and approval from the influential parent figure in their life ie. the AP.

So the child cannot make decisions from a mature Adult Role - Adult Ego State so will mirror the subtle wishes of the AP to gain approval and thereby elevate themselves to the role/ Ego state of equal parent when dealing with the TP.

If the TP does not validate their step up the role ladder, they will be drawn even more to the parent that does validate their emerging thirst for apparent independence but because they are not ready they will rely heavily on the AP and can enter into an unhealthy state of enmeshment. The outcome provides an environment ripe for alienation to take hold and the power combination of AP and AC can demand the TP be excluded in transactional communication from parent or adult role.

The child ego state is the state that craves contact and intimacy and having been ejected from all decision making the TP may find him or herself being talked down to by their own child and held at ransom.

This situation has now enabled the healthy normal equilibrium of transactional activity between parent and offspring to become untenable as TP and AC. See Fig 4.



The outcome of this dysfunctional transaction between parent and child will result in intense feelings of betrayal, loss and grief to the TP and dangerously suppressed feelings of guilt and grief to the AC.

At some point, especially as ACs move further into adulthood, many TPs will move to “draw a line in the sand” for various reasons including refusal to tolerate ongoing disrespect of their role and will insist that transactional communication be parent/adult to adult or none at all.

Various circumstances such as emotional maturity, time apart from AP, exposure to TP, milestone life events, new partners, births or deaths and other random trigger points may assist the AC to become receptive to the TP or to actively seek them out.

Parental alienation distorts the very framework of communication between parent and child and is nothing less than child abuse.

Steve Barnwell

With thanks to Eric Berne