

Power in Groups and Teams

In Berne's Structure and Dynamics of Groups and Organisations, (1966) he outlines amongst other observations and explorations of the human dynamic what he calls the private structure, or imago – the image we carry psychologically of any group to which we belong. Once in the group, how we “see” ourselves and others, where we “put” them in relation to ourselves and other members has connections to personal power. Do we see ourselves one up, or one down or equal to? And what leads us to those conclusions?

The first group we belong to is our family of origin. We do not elect to become a member of this group! Our experience here, and what we decided it meant, stays with us for the rest of our lives. In this paper I want to begin to explore the nature of power in relationships, how we give it away and what we can do about it. It is not meant to be a definitive exploration of the subject – too vast! – But may be the first of a series of explorative papers.

I have been heartened by the quietly persistent voices making themselves heard recently, drawing attention to wellness rather than pathology. Newton and Barrow, Napper, Hay, Levin, Clarkson and others have all emphasised a focus on the positive, developmental aspects of TA. The links between TA and the Positive Psychology movement have been made, and stand up to rigorous scrutiny. But on the basis that what we focus on grows and thrives, more needs to be said! More focus on personal power and *physis* - the developmental, growthful and glorious (!) ways in which TA can support a person to be their authentic selves needs to be encouraged.

As a management educator, organisational consultant and PTSTA, I sometimes feel that the vibrancy of TA as a personal ethos and framework gets lost in the pathologising. The focus often seems to be much more on analysing what went wrong rather than what will be helpful going forward. And yes, I know it is important to understand and unravel the history, but knowing that what we stroke is what we get – we need to give more attention to the positive opposites. How can we nourish our potency, hold on to it – push it before us?

So, to do a little bit of pathologisinghow do we give our power away? Or for others, how and why do we feel we have power over others? Where did that start and what is the process for continuing to do so?

Claude Steiner wrote in the TAJ in 1987 an article entitled “The Seven Sources of Power”. In this fascinating article, he says that power is almost universally and mistakenly seen as the capacity to control other people and that the seeds of power/powerlessness are sown in one up one down transactions in childhood. Children learn that power equals control and control equals power, and that control is the way to bring about change and be powerful in the world. This, he says, denigrates other forms of power, reducing human potential to a kind of “ladder of success”- some people above, some people below. This hierarchy of success has the potential to get out of control, and the chemistry between authoritarian and powerless people produces a polarisation: those in one down position collude with those in one up. Power is given away to those who gladly take it!

Steiner goes on to talk about seven sources of power: passion, transcendence, communication, control, love, grounding, and knowledge. These sources of power come from within and by focussing on these sources we can not only avoid giving our power away, but hold on it, keep it vibrant and radiating and well resourced.

Tongue and Wilson in 2004 updated this idea and developed a leadership model, called The Integrated Leader. In revisiting this model, my thoughts now are more about “okayness” - those one up one down transactions that Steiner refers to in childhood that lead us to make conclusions about ourselves and our place on that “ladder of success” to which he refers.



Chris Davidson has developed a model called 3D Okayness (I'm OK, You're OK, They're OK) and in a workshop with him recently I had the idea for this workshop and paper. Chris talked about giving out an energy as we go into a room and others picking up on that energy. Whether we are leading a group, or a member of that group, whether we walk into a training room, a restaurant or a shop, energetically, there will be "stuff" going on: what I generate will be having an effect on others, what they generate will if I let it, have an effect on me.

So what might this "stuff" be that can get in the way of our autonomy goal?

Referring back to Claude Steiner, he makes the point that the seeds of authoritarian/powerless scripts are sown in one up one down transactions in childhood. Decisions are made then and beliefs formed about ourselves in relation to others which can stay with us for the rest of our life and transference, in the form of projecting the face of someone significant to us from the past, onto the face of another in the present, keeps those beliefs alive. We then respond to the new person, as we behaved with the person from our past. Linking transference to power, once we are aware of both, we can resource ourselves potently, to enable us to radiate a positive energy.

Carlo Moiso (1985) describes two different types of transference.

- **P2 transference** – projection of material incorporated from external sources
- **P1 transference** – introjects from the infantile ego

He describes the transference relationship as a:

"Relationship in which the patient, in order to re-experience parent-child or primitive object relationships projects onto the therapist his own Parental Ego States (P2 or P1)".

Novellino (1984) wrote about **counter-transference** (where the person we are projecting onto picks up the transference, and reflects it back to us). We create our own reality!

Julie Hay (2007) cites Petruska Clarkson (1991) as identifying different types of transference and she has developed these ideas into a model of Transference Formats.

Project self		Project someone else	
Have a problem in relating	Competitive	Concordant	Appear to get on well together
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project elements of our own Child or Parent ego state onto the other person • then get into a competitive symbiosis about whose Child or Parent will take precedence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project elements of our own Child or Parent onto the other person • Then believe they are just like us – we are empathizing with each other 	
	Conflictual	Co-dependent	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project elements of a "third party" onto the other person • Then feel we must "fight" in a Parent-Child or Child-Parent interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project elements of a "third party" onto the other person • Then seek a Parent-Child or Child-Parent relationship 	



Developmental Transactional Analysis has many tools and concepts which strengthen our core, and make us psychologically strong. By putting our focus on these tools to develop personal power which becomes self re-enforcing and self-renewing we reduce stress levels (our own, as well as those we come into contact with), and we each individually become an affirming force, robust, vital and energetic.

So, being mindful of my needs and the needs of others, maintaining an I'm okay, You're okay position and *radiating* a positive energy that is potent, permission-giving and physis-allowing, avoiding game, transference and symbiosis invitations – now *that's* what I call powerful!

References

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