



The Mirror Exercise and the Restructuring of the Parent-Child Relational Unit

Adrienne Lee

To cite this article: Adrienne Lee (2018) The Mirror Exercise and the Restructuring of the Parent-Child Relational Unit, Transactional Analysis Journal, 48:4, 379-390, DOI: [10.1080/03621537.2018.1505117](https://doi.org/10.1080/03621537.2018.1505117)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03621537.2018.1505117>



Published online: 08 Oct 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1091



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)



ARTICLE



The Mirror Exercise and the Restructuring of the Parent-Child Relational Unit

Adrienne Lee

ABSTRACT

This article presents the mirror exercise as a method of updating, restructuring, and enlivening Parent-Child relational units. The exercise method is presented with a commentary and case illustration. The author puts the process in the context of Parent ego state introjection theory and treatment and the self-reparenting work of Muriel James as well as integrating Adult ego state theory. She emphasizes the importance of relationship as a therapeutic method, not specifically between the therapist and the client but as an intrapsychic experience of internal relating. The role and significance of the observing self or metaperspective in monitoring the experience and enabling Adult integration are also explored.

KEYWORDS

Parent ego state; Child ego state; Parent-Child relational unit; mirror exercise; introjection; restructuring; integration; integrating Adult; observing self; metasef

In his last work published before his death, Berne (1970) wrote that ego states are for transactional analysis (TA) the “foundation stones and its mark. Whatever deals with ego states is transactional analysis, and whatever overlooks them is not” (p. 243). It is clear from Berne’s writing and from the many articles on the Parent ego state in the TA literature that the Parent is significant in transactional analysis theory, and the restructuring of the Parent is a highly effective method of TA psychotherapy. Tudor (2003) noted that “a survey of articles published in the *Transactional Analysis Journal* over four decades (1962–1999) reveals 18 on the Adult ego state, compared with 70 on the Parent and 27 on the Child” (p. 201). This may certainly reflect on the innovative significance of Berne’s concept of the Parent ego state, and several more articles have been developed since Tudor’s survey.

Berne’s (1961) statement that “the ultimate aim of TA is structured readjustment and reintegration” (p. 224) is the inspiration for much of the development of transactional analysis theory and practice and, indeed, for this article. The mirror exercise is presented here to show how it relates to the new shape of TA theory as it has developed. The exercise is a means by which structured readjustment and reintegration can be facilitated. The relationship experienced in the exercise is usually profoundly moving and intimate and stimulates both conscious and unconscious needs and yearnings. Although this exercise is specifically relevant for TA psychotherapy, it has potential applications in the other fields of TA. It is a powerful process for therapeutic change

CONTACT Adrienne Lee ✉ adrienne@theberne.com 📍 The Berne Institute, 29 Derby Road, Kegworth DE74 2EN, United Kingdom

and treatment and is only recommended for use with clients who have a basically integrated personality structure.

Review of Parent Ego State Theory and Treatment

Many authors have contributed to the understanding of Parent ego state theory and suggested different ways in which the Parent ego state may be treated. In "Self Reparenting," James (1974) wrote about decontaminating the Adult ego state from intrusive Parental introjects and selecting a new Parent by the Adult ego state on the basis of perceived past deficits and current needs.

McNeel (1976) outlined using a two-chair interview technique with the Parent as a means of obtaining a response from the Child in the internalized Parent, a technique to be used when the client has reached an impasse by maintaining a Victim position. Often the client can move through an impasse easily once the person recognizes that he or she is dealing with a scared Child rather than a tyrannical Parent. "The person begins to have a visceral appreciation for the experience of his mother or father" (p. 67).

Mellor and Andrewartha (1980) expanded this technique further to include re-parenting techniques during Parent interviews to "help people make changes in their Parent ego states which support redecisions they need to make or have already made" (p. 197). They used a procedure similar to the spot-reparenting that Osnes (1974) developed.

Dashiell's (1978) Parent resolution process went even further to do "therapy with the Parent ego state and with the psychic presences incorporated there," suggesting that "the Parent ego state can be opened and made available to new information, permissions, and resolutions" (p. 289). She described *infusion* and *defusion* processes for minimum and maximum resolution of the Parent.

Erskine (2003), who has skillfully done treatment of Parent ego states for many years, has asserted that

in the process of treating a Parent ego state, the conflict with that significant person is claimed, experienced, and dealt with (albeit in fantasy, since the real parent is not actually present). The result is that the client regains the self that was lost in the process of avoiding the external conflict by internalising it instead. (p. 106)

The Parent Ego State and Introjection

In defining the Parent ego state (extereopsyche), Berne gave credit to the preceding works of Trigant Burrow ("internalized social images," 1949), Paul Federn ("ego states," 1953), and Edoardo Weiss ("psychic presence," 1950). Berne (1961) claimed that the introjected parents became a state of the ego, which he defined as "a set of feelings, attitudes and behavior patterns which resemble those of a parental figure" (p. 75). Erskine (2003) argued that from his own clinical experience and Berne's (1961) examples and descriptions in *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*, this definition needs clarification:

It is apparent that Parent ego states are an actual historical internalization of the personality of one's own parents or other significant parental figures, as *perceived* by

the child at the time of introjection. ... The actual content and intrapsychic function of the Parent ego state vary in relation to the developmental age when the introjection occurred. (Erskine, 2003, p. 89)

So, we may have many Parent ego states that are not integrated into our Adult, and we can potentially introject more when there is a significant need to make another person a part of the self. Introjection may be seen as an unconscious process whereby identification with the other is a defense against losing our attachment to him or her.

Introjection allows a person to avoid the painful feelings associated with the loss of a person, place, or event by creating within herself or himself an image of the lost object. The unconscious fantasies maintain the association with the lost object and prevent the individual from working through the painful emotions connected to the loss. (Brown, 1977, p. 5)

Despite all the therapeutic change and development a person may invest in to build Adult autonomy and integration, this “borrowed” personality may, particularly under stress, continue to be actively experienced phenomenologically and influence the person intrapsychically (Erskine, 2003). This suggests that introjection is self-limiting and not therapeutic, although introjection clearly serves a significant and necessary function in child and adult development. As Berne (1961) wrote, “The function of the Parent is to conserve energy and diminish anxiety by making certain decisions ‘automatic’ and relatively unshakable” (p. 76). The conservation of energy and reduction of anxiety are significant factors in enabling us to function in our daily lives.

Working through the “painful emotions connected to the loss” (Brown, 1977, p. 5) of significant others is necessary to enable an integrating Adult process (Tudor, 2003), and this may take a long, intense therapeutic process. Updating, and potentially restructuring, the content of the Parent as well as the reciprocal Child response to the presence of a new influencing Parent is a psychotherapeutic tool that has a phenomenological impact. It provides stability for the client under stress while the integration process is evolving. “Providing new parenting and rechilding experiences enables the integrated Adult ego state to draw on these positive experiences under stress and so achieve greater stability” (Clarkson & Fish, 1988, p. 59).

In the mirror exercise, the phenomenological and therapeutic impact is due largely to the significance and felt experience of the deep relationship between Parent and Child. It can, I think, become a significant stage in the longer-term integration process.

Berne (1961) also wrote, “The Parent can function either as an active ego state or as an influence” (p. 42). I am proposing in this article to show how a simple exercise can put new content and resources into the active Parent ego state and continually affect the Child ego state so that both can remain potently active as a relational unit. The exercise encourages this content to be continuously updated and also to be reintegrated into the Adult. The ultimate aim in psychotherapy, I think, is the integration of the archaic experience in Parent and Child into an enlivened sense of self that is manifested in a core inner vitality and in vitality in relationships with others and the environment. This is a long and often intense process.

Restructuring the Parent

I agree with Erskine's (2003) declaration that "in-depth, reintegrating psychotherapy of Parent ego states is Transactional Analysis' most significant contribution to the profession of psychotherapy" (p. 106). In my own practice and teaching, I have used many versions of Dashiell's (1978) parent resolution process, McNeel's (1976) Parent interview, and Mellor and Andrewartha's (1980) work on reparenting the Parent in support of redecisions. These have all been effective and profound treatment methods. However, I have been concerned about the ways in which the restructuring of the Parent experienced in therapy is held, and possibly fixated, in the psyche. Instead, I wish to encourage ways in which the client can be empowered to continue to develop and reintegrate new structure in their ongoing lives—not just in the therapy sessions with a potent therapist who may work with the intrapsychic Parent as though the Parent ego state is another "client" in the therapy room.

We are thus presented with a theoretical and therapeutic dilemma. If we take the TA theoretical view that the Parent ego states are fixated archaic psychic presences ("Parent and child [sic] ego states are non-integrated fixations of unresolved previous experiences," Erskine, 2003, p. 87), then we may speculate on how the active structure may be changed or updated and whether this is a distinct change in the Parent-Child relational unit or Adult integration. I think it is both because the integrating process is continuous and not a complete or finished state. I understand that today some people prefer to use either one of two ego state models, that is, a three ego state model of Parent, Adult, and Child dynamically active or a one ego state model involving an integrating Adult wherein Parent and Child ego states are considered archaic and pathological (p. 87). I believe the mirror exercise acts primarily in the here and now to access and update archaic material in the Parent and Child for integration into the Adult. In this way, I do not see the two models as mutually exclusive.

Some of the methods of treating the Parent ego state may create new structure that may potentially also become fixated. If we take the integrating Adult (Erskine, 2003; Tudor, 2003) view of ego state structure, then the task of the therapist is to enable fixated Parent (and Child) ego states to be unfixated and integrated into the Adult. The mirror exercise is presented as a means to interrupt the old fixated Parent/Child relational units and enable a new relational unit to be incorporated in such a way that it can be continuously updated to provide significant intrapsychic support while the integration process is developing.

Our healthy psychic development is an ongoing process, and each new experience seeks continuous readjustment and reintegration. So, the challenge for the TA psychotherapist is to facilitate a restructuring that can be continuously updated and account for the dynamic relationship between intrapsychic Parent and Child. Neuroscience has now shown how the brain retains its plasticity and can make new neural pathways throughout our lives (Siegel, 1999, 2007). This supports the idea that new experiences can create new ego state structures. The experiential visualization exercise provides an opportunity for the client to create a new experience of self and to develop new neural pathways that support autonomy and well-being.

Relational Units

Little (2006) and Joines (2016) have invited a new approach to understanding ego state structure in what they call *Parent-Child ego state relational units*. They have argued that we do not cathect a single ego state but an entire ego state structure: “The parent requires the Child’s adaptation in order to support him or her, and the Child adapts in order to obtain what he or she needs from the parent to survive” (Joines, 2016, p. 44). The mirror exercise facilitates the creation of a new Parent-Child relational unit as well as stimulating the presence and vitality of the Adult ego state in the metaposition of the observer of the process.

Little (2006) reminded us that it is important in therapy to respect the child’s bond of loyalty to his or her parent, no matter how abusive that parent was. “Loyalty to an intolerable Child-Parent relational unit may be, in part, an attempt to avoid falling into ... the black hole of nothingness, meaninglessness and relationshiplessness” (p. 10). It is possible that there will be a pull to protect the parent if the Parent ego state is challenged or treated disrespectfully, and any attempt to support change in that Parent-Child relationship brings the client and the therapist up against this bond of loyalty. The old Parent-Child unit is maintained as a defense against the loss of self and the loss of meaning. The mirror exercise does not require clients to bring their archaic Parent-Child relationship into the room. The client’s present Adult that engages in the dialogue with the client’s archaic Child is often held in the mind as a new parent figure and may therefore be experienced as a new Parent in the Parent-Child ego state relational unit. Moreover, the new imagined and phenomenologically experienced relationship in the dialogue affects the Child part of the relational unit so that it, too, is potentially changed in tandem with the Parent. For both the Parent and Child parts of the relational unit, the experience of attachment is usually profoundly moving and enlivening.

The Mirror Exercise and Contactful Dialogue

In 1972 I (Lee, 1996, 2003) developed an exercise called the *mirror exercise*, which involves a new here-and-now dialogue by means of a guided fantasy between a cathected archaic Child ego state and the Adult ego state of the person. Since then, I have had many opportunities to refine it and research its effectiveness. Most people who do the exercise report its continuous effect over time as they consciously, and sometimes unconsciously, replay it and evoke the experience of vitality and contact in the new Parent-Child relational unit that was formed. The aim is for the individual’s present Adult to be integrated as the new Parent in the relational Parent-Child unit. The new Parent is not actually introjected because it is already part of the self, but the phenomenological experience is similar to that of introjection. It is as though the client is able to experience the new, contactful empathic Parent as though it were a new parent figure who had genuine contact with the archaic Child, not just a here-and-now Adult add-on. Hence, the felt experience is that of a new Parent-Child relationship that is syntonic and experienced as part of the self.

The exercise invites a past ego state from childhood into the present and enables a contactful dialogue with the person’s Adult. The archaic Child who may have been

limited, shamed, and possibly abused in the past can, in the present, be in interpersonal contact with a new grown-up parental figure who is attuned and responsive to the child in a new healthy attachment. The exercise can thus potentially repair relationship deficits in the archaic Child. "I believe that it is intrapsychic attachment and contact that repairs, builds and strengthens the sense of Self" (Lee, 2003, p. 75). The exercise has the capacity to disconnect the archaic, fixated relational unit based on the old introjection of mother or father and to reconnect the relational unit with the here-and-now Adult of the person in place of the old Parent.

The power in the exercise lies in the fact that this new configuration or structure is achieved through contact and attachment, a vital developmental and relational need. The contact and attachment is moreover between parts of the client's own self. The exercise enables this attachment to be both "interpersonal", in the externalised dialogue and meeting, as well as intrapsychic, when the two parts are integrated. (p. 75)

The effectiveness of a relational psychotherapy (Hargaden & Sills, 2002) in its use of authentic relating in the here-and-now therapeutic relationship is encouraged in the dramatized relationship in the mirror exercise. The therapist's task is to use his or her presence to facilitate the presence and use of the client's own Adult in the contactful relationship with the person's Child. The transference process wherein "emotions and parts of the self are externalized into the therapeutic relationship" (Little, 2006, p. 11) is not activated because the needed or longed for relationship is provided in the self of the client. It is usual when developing trust in a therapeutic relationship for the client to experience some resistance, perhaps based on fear of disappointment, rejection, stimulation of primal wounds (Lee, 2008), or repetition of an old developmental failure. He or she thus remains loyal to the old Parent-Child relational unit. However, in the mirror exercise, the transference and enactment risks are bypassed because the client knows that the new Parent formed from his or her own Adult will never abandon him or her. It will always be there.

The Observing Self

The mirror exercise invites the person in his or her Adult to create a stage or frame in which the grown-up of today can meet the child from the past in the present. In the exercise, the person is invited to use an imaginary full-length mirror as the frame. This serves both to put a boundary around the experience and to provide a narrative perspective for an observing or metasef who is the one who looks in the mirror.

The process of the exercise invites clients to create an imagined, contactful relationship between their archaic Child and a grown-up self (who is often perceived as a new Parent) and simultaneously be outside the mirror like a disinterested observer or cofacilitator. This observing self takes on a metaperspective and is effectively in the position of an author who can create new ego states or new narratives even while the client is simultaneously being the characters in the dialogue. I sometimes refer to this observing self as the *higher self* because it often holds a spiritual perspective and positive intention that is outside the person's script. The perspective of the observing self is necessary for the final integration of the experience because it facilitates the making of meaning from the experience. As stated earlier, the exercise is only intended for

use with clients who have a basically integrated personality structure. Clients who have a tendency to dissociate may have difficulty maintaining both the different perspectives and the Adult holding of the experience.

The mirror exercise is a guided fantasy that needs to be led by the therapist at a rate that gives clients enough time to complete the transactions. Clients usually speak their responses out loud so the therapist can monitor the process. However, some responses may be experienced internally, so the therapist needs to watch for body language clues to indicate when transactions are completed and, if necessary, ask the client to confirm this. Although some flexibility can be appropriate in this guided fantasy, I recommend that all the processes be completed, especially the final integration and physical merging of the archaic Child image and the grown-up one. The reason for each part of the process is explained in the commentary shown in [Figure 1](#).

The experience of contact between the grown-up and the child image is observed by the metasef that looks in the mirror. This displacement acts as a positive dissociation that permits the Adult to monitor and make meaning of the experience. The client's phenomenological experience is usually of having a new Child ego state, a child who has been deeply understood and responded to by the grown-up in a way that no other person possibly could. This new Child ego state is now capable of being introduced at different ages and can continue to meet the grown-up of the present. If the latter is seen and experienced as a permission-giving parent figure, then the process begun in the exercise can continue. In fact, it may be experienced as a self-reparenting process. Clients may also report a phenomenological change in their Parent ego state that now has the resources of the present. The grown-up in the exercise is usually integrated as a new Parent ego state for the client, and the little one is integrated as a new Child ego state that has a new experience of real contact and being understood. Thus, a new relational Parent-Child unit is created.

The merging of the two self-images at the end of the exercise is a symbolic and often visceral integration of the separate parts of the self. The integrating process requires dissolving the separate ego entities into one coherent, unified sense of self. The visual or kinesthetic merging of images in the process is a means of encouraging a deeper level of integration. The separate parts of the self, or ego states, are not left separated. If the client is unable to successfully merge the parts, then the therapist can introduce direct instructions to enable the coming together of the images. Sometimes this adaptation to merging is a learning-about-integration process that becomes easier when the exercise is repeated.

The experience of the grown-up self in the exercise is often intense as clients realize their genuine care and love for the little child. In some cases, this loving connection is not experienced, which may be an indicator for ending the exercise or introducing some additional questions for the grown-up in order to facilitate the empathic, compassionate connection. These might include the following: "What does your grown-up know about how vulnerable little children are and how much they suffer?" "What does your grown-up know about how resilient children are and their capacity to survive even the most terrible experiences?" "What kind of support and attention does this child need?"

The Mirror Exercise	Commentary
Imagine that in front of you is a full length mirror	The use of the mirror becomes a distinct frame or boundary to put around the experience. This becomes a time frame and a facility for an observing ego perspective.
Into that mirror put a reflection of yourself as a seven or eight year old child. (another age may be used if relevant)	The client may need to be told to use a photograph in order to access the visual memory. The use of reflection in the mirror is important. The client sees herself/himself reflected as a child in the mirror and is simultaneously the observer.
What does that little girl/boy look like? What is s/he wearing? Hair style? Expression on her/his face? How is s/he standing? What is s/he doing with hands? Carrying anything? etc.	The use of the third person singular and the present tense of the verb invites a distance that enables time distortion, and puts the archaic Child ego state behaviorally into the 'present' without the feelings that are attached to the past childhood experience. The specificity of the visual detail is important to anchor the child in the present.
Next to the image of the little girl/boy, bring the reflection of the grown-up you are today, so that the two are side by side.	Now the here-and-now adult is included in the reflection—this frees both ego states from time-bound restrictions to exist simultaneously in the 'time-free' mirror frame. However the self as observer is still present outside the mirror.
Now let the two turn and look at each other. What does the big one think of the little one? What does the little one think of the big one?	Both parts of self are dramatized in the same time frame. The client is invited to move rapidly from one to the other and from internal experience to external awareness. The client is also outside the mirror and in the therapy room doing the exercise. A higher, or meta self, outside the old ego states and the Script, is elicited.
What does the little one say to the big one? What does the big one say to the little one?	Contactful, authentic dialogue is encouraged. The therapist can facilitate this dialogue if there is a need for empathic attunement. Usually this is not necessary as both 'parts' are one but they may need help articulating the experience.
What does the little one want the big one to know? What does the big one want the little one to know?	The secrets can be told. The wisdom can be shared. This is an opportunity to intimately and honestly reveal the child's truth and also allow the future grown-up 'security' and resources to be given to the Child ego state. Sometimes the positive resource is with the Child, who can enliven the grown-up who has lost contact with the source of their energy and vitality.
What has the little one got too much of? What has the little one got too little of? What has the big one got too much of? What has the big one got too little of?	These questions are directed to the meta self and invite a critical distance, at a stage where the affect may be too intense and potentially break the trance. There is a presupposition that the intensities of the qualities noted can be increased or decreased.
What does the little one want from the big one? What does the big one want from the little one?	The presupposition here is that each has positive resources that the other can use. The awareness is both at the meta level as well as in the grown-up and the child.
What do they need to say to each other?	This can go on as long as necessary to complete the dialogue.
Let each talk and let the other listen and show that they have heard.	The therapist can facilitate to ensure that this dialogue is contactful, open and attuned.
Do they make any physical contact with each other?	If this hasn't already been experienced, then the question will invite some contact. It may be important to wait long enough for intimacy to be established before inviting the physical contact.
Is there some gift that the big one wants the little one to have? Is there some gift that the little one wants the big one to have?	The gift exchange allows opportunity for the unconscious mind to provide a symbol for the new attachment. The gift can later be realized and decoded to anchor the experience.
Now, when you are ready, find a way of enabling the two to merge together.....and when you have done this OPEN YOUR EYES.....and come back out of the mirror to the here-and-now in this room.	The merging of the two selves is vitally important for the integration and restructuring process. If the client has difficulty doing this then the therapist can suggest how this may be done, e.g. "Let the big one open his/her arms and take in the little one to his/her heart, now merge the two."

Figure 1. The Mirror Exercise (Lee, 2003, pp. 78–80. © Worth Publishing)

Case Illustration

Mandy suffered from neglect as a child and as an adult continued to feel a lack of self-worth despite her successful career, home, and marriage. She felt insecure and constantly threatened by internal Parental criticism, believing that she would never be good enough and would be abandoned if she was not. In the mirror, she used an image of her 7-year-old self as she remembered her from a photograph. She described

the little girl in her school dress, with dirty socks and old shoes and untidy hair. She clutched the side of her skirt, and although she was half smiling for the camera, her smile soon faded and her eyes dropped.

When Mandy brings her present grown-up self into the mirror and lets the grown-up and the child look at each other, she is aware of her grown-up's sadness and the little girl's fear. Because she is simultaneously the grown-up and the child, she can experience both perspectives and feelings and knows what the child needs. She tenderly crouches down beside the little one and puts her arm around her. Grown-up Mandy feels great compassion for the little girl because she knows the pain and abandonment little Mandy experienced. The little one is confused but trusts the grown-up and already experiences some safety in the contact and genuine care from the grown-up.

Grown-up Mandy tells the little one that she knows how terrible life is for her now and how awful it is for her not to feel loved. She reassures the girl and wants her to know that she will survive, is important, and will be OK. The little girl begins to cry and clings to the grown-up, who gently holds her and strokes her hair. The little one asks the grown-up if she would stay with her and read her a story. The grown-up can promise what no one else can: that she will never abandon her. Grown-up Mandy experiences the depth of commitment to her child self and knows the significance of this promise. The little one's response to this is intense; she feels great joy and relief as well as fear and sadness. The grown-up stays present with her little one, who has too much fear and too little hope, just as the grown-up has too much responsibility and too little enjoyment.

In the mirror, the grown-up reads *The Ugly Duckling* (Andersen, 1843/1999) story to the child and tells the little one that she is a "swan," a beautiful swan, and that one day she will have friends and family who love her and a house of her own and that she will go to college and be successful. The little one is amazed and genuinely smiling. In the dialogue, the child talks about her fears and how she believes she will be hated and left alone. The grown-up is able to tell her unequivocally (because she already knows the future, of course) that what the little one fears will not really hurt her and that her fantasies will not come true. She tells the child honestly and kindly what is true and what is not. The child experiences the genuine contact and lets herself trust her grown-up self to be with her and care for her. The grown-up's gift to the little girl is *The Ugly Duckling* book. Inside is written, "Dearest Mandy, you are a swan! I will always be with you." The little one's gift to the grown-up is a pencil. They were able to merge easily as the grown-up took the little one into her.

This client was able to find the resources from her own experience as a mother to give her child the appropriate parenting, which was very different from what she had received from her actual mother. In the mirror exercise, the here-and-now adult Mandy was experienced as a positive parenting figure and was incorporated and stimulated in the same active way that a Parent ego state is experienced. One could describe this as creating a new Parent ego state from her grown-up self and creating a new Child ego state that experienced attuned contact and new permissions instead of old injunctions. However, the experience of the client is that it is not a new Parent or a new Child but a new Parent/Child relationship. It is the relationship that is

important and that is held in the new revitalizing structure. The Adult, or metaself, has observed the merging in the mirror and thus has the experience of both being in the new relationship that is then internalized as well as being an observer who can monitor it.

In some cases, the therapist, together with the client's observing self, needs to coach the grown-up or the child to ensure a therapeutic outcome. The client is both the author of the new narrative and simultaneously the characters in the dialogue. He or she needs to be highly invested in healthy development and processes of change and committed to his or her growth and well-being. This may determine when it is most beneficial to use the exercise in therapy. The client just described continued the contact and dialogue with her child and often found herself revisiting the mirror in her imagination to reinforce the contactful new Parent-Child ego state unit and update it in different developmental stages of her childhood and adolescence. She was also curious about the pencil that the child Mandy had first given her. "What did you do with it?" I asked. She then confessed that she had taken it as permission to draw and had joined an art class that was now a source of great enjoyment. It would seem that in the new relationship formed between the grown-up and the child new permissions and resources can be given both ways. Mandy reported that her old, criticizing Parent had diminished—almost disappeared—and that she felt more self-assured and content.

Conclusion

What is important in the mirror exercise is that the therapist, who is initially the facilitator, soon becomes redundant as the new relational unit is formed. The client's own grown-up self is empowered and can usually continue the internal processing and integration of new experience without the therapist's help. Evidence from many case studies seems to show that for most clients, a new ego state structure of Parent and Child has been created. In James's (1974) self-reparenting technique, the Adult is used to cognitively analyze the deficits of old parenting and consciously offer new permissions. The mirror exercise takes this self-reparenting process further by providing not only cognitive recognition or analysis but a felt relationship that repairs the deficits. The gift exchange in the exercise is particularly important because it invites an unconscious process that can be explored. The gifts are sometimes explicit but often have a symbolic resonance that deepens and enlivens the process.

For clients who have not experienced a secure attachment, this exercise has a profound impact. The presence and continuation of the new relationship is capable of being restimulated frequently and is not confined to the therapy room. The invitation to authenticity and open, transparent relating in the exercise can also provide an experience of intimacy.

This process of creating an intensely experienced new internal relationship can be experienced phenomenologically and described coherently as a relational unit, but what is most impactful in the case research is that it is the stimulation of the Adult self as author of the relational unit that is most powerful and therapeutic. In the mirror exercise, a metaperspective is stimulated in the integrating Adult that makes

meaning out of the experience and can potentially alter the narratives we construct about our childhood and facilitate the transformation of our script.

Disclosure Statement

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes on Contributor

Adrienne Lee, BA, PGCE, Teaching and Supervising Transactional Analyst (psychotherapy), is a psychotherapist registered with the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) and also a Master Practitioner in Neuro-Linguistic Programming. She has been a mother, a university teacher, and a psychotherapist for more than 40 years and was one of the first people in the United Kingdom to practice transactional analysis. She is a founder member and past chair of the United Kingdom Institute of Transactional Analysis (ITA). She has been running training programs in TA since 1975, and together with Ian Stewart, she founded and is now director of The Berne Institute in Nottingham, United Kingdom. Adrienne has been a board member of the European Association for Transactional Analysis (EATA), on the EATA Professional and Training Standards Committee, and was one of EATA's representatives on the board of the European Association of Psychotherapy (EAP) and on the European Commission of Certification (COC). Adrienne is an EATA Past President (July 2004–July 2007) and was awarded the EATA Gold Medal in 2010 and the ITAA Muriel James Living Principles Award in 2017. She can be contacted at The Berne Institute, 29 Derby Road, Kegworth DE74 2EN, United Kingdom; email: adrienne@theberne.com.

References

- Andersen, H. C. (1999). *The ugly duckling*. New York, NY: Morrow Junior Books. (Original work published 1843 in Dutch)
- Berne, E. (1961). *Transactional analysis in psychotherapy: A systematic individual and social psychiatry*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Berne, E. (1970). *Sex in human loving*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Brown, M. (1977). *Psychodiagnosis in brief*. Ann Arbor, MI: Huron Valley Institute.
- Burrow, T. (1949). *The neurosis of man*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Clarkson, P., & Fish, S. (1988). Rechilding: Creating a new past in the present as a support for the future. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 18, 51–59. doi:10.1177/036215378801800109
- Dashiell, S. R. (1978). The parent resolution process. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 8, 289–294. doi:10.1177/036215377800800403
- Erskine, R. (2003). Introjection, psychic presence and parent ego states: Considerations for psychotherapy. In C. Sills & H. Hargaden (Eds.), *Ego states* (Vol. 1 of Key concepts in transactional analysis: Contemporary views) (pp. 83–108). London: Worth Publishing.
- Federn, P. (1953). *Ego psychology and the psychoses*. London: Image Publishers.
- Hargaden, H., & Sills, C. (2002). *Transactional analysis: A relational perspective*. Hove, England: Brunner-Routledge.

- James, M. (1974). Self reparenting: Theory and process. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 4(3), 32–39. doi:[10.1177/036215377400400307](https://doi.org/10.1177/036215377400400307)
- Joines, V. (2016). Understanding second-order structure and functioning: Ego state structures, relational units, and the divided psyche. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 46, 39–49. doi:[10.1177/0362153715616651](https://doi.org/10.1177/0362153715616651)
- Lee, A. (1996, Summer). The mirror exercise and the reconfiguration of ego states. *ITA News*, No. 45, 47–50.
- Lee, A. (2003). The mirror exercise: Creating new ego states now: A constructivist approach. In C. Sills & H. Hargaden (Eds.), *Ego states* (Vol.1 of Key concepts in transactional analysis: Contemporary views) (pp. 73–82). London: Worth Publishing.
- Lee, A. (2008). The power is in the process. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 38, 36–42. doi:[10.1177/036215370803800106](https://doi.org/10.1177/036215370803800106)
- Little, R. (2006). Ego state relational units and resistance to change. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 36, 7–19. doi:[10.1177/036215370603600103](https://doi.org/10.1177/036215370603600103)
- McNeel, J. (1976). The parent interview. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 6, 61–68.
- Mellor, K., & Andrewartha, G. (1980). Reparenting the parent in support of redeisions. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 10, 197–203. doi:[10.1177/036215378001000304](https://doi.org/10.1177/036215378001000304)
- Osnes, R. (1974). Spot reparenting. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 4(3), 40–46. doi:[1177/036215377400400308](https://doi.org/10.1177/036215377400400308)
- Siegel, D. J. (1999). *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Siegel, D. J. (2007). *The mindful brain: Reflections and attunement in the cultivation of well-being*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Tudor, K. (2003). The neopsyche: The integrating adult ego state. In C. Sills & H. Hargaden (Eds.), *Ego states* (Vol. 1 of Key concepts in transactional analysis: Contemporary views) (pp. 83–108). London: Worth Publishing.
- Weiss, E. (1950). *Principles of psychodynamics*. New York, NY: Grune & Stratton.