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How to connect our understanding of personality development and Berne's concept of ego states with my concept of Motivators.

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For some time I've been puzzling about the connection between personality, as developed since childhood, including my concept of Type I ("Undersure", who prefers to operate from Child,) and Type II ("Oversure", who prefers to operate from Parent,) with my concept of the Three Motivators.

I can explain the interaction theoretically, and I know I use all these concepts when I myself work with someone, because I intuitively focus on priorities, but how to teach and show others the way in which these seemingly different approaches fit together in treatment or counseling?

My present view is that the difference in emphasis ties in to the Nature/Nurture debate. Now it is clear to me that Motivators are related to our Genetic endowment, and therefore operate below the surface of consciousness, (though their influence on thoughts, feelings and behavior can be detected by knowing their attributes and manifestations,) while preferences and movement among ego states and choices of character Type are determined by childhood and life experiences.

Furthermore it is valid to acknowledge that the Adult ego state is an ever-developing over-arching ego state (probably working from the frontal lobe, a relatively new evolutionary acquisition) and can be called on to use qualities of innate intelligence and acquired knowledge to identify and choose where and when to focus among the various outer and inner stimuli, emotions and influences which a total person constantly experiences.

Here, then, is a case example of a quick intervention which occurred spontaneously last month between Cher and myself as we sat in the "hot tub" at the pool after a Sunday water aerobics class. There was no treatment contract, but I guess the dialogue was affected by a recent casual friendship between Cher and myself, her knowing that I am a transactional analyst, and my own preoccupation with whether it is possible to use knowledge about personality Type and Motivators for quick counseling.

Case example of a Type II ("Oversure") employee with another Type II "Oversure" Supervisor, and how different Motivators are activated.

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"I'm having such a terrible time with my supervisor," said Cher, an attractive young woman of 25, who works in an employment service. "I'd quit, if it weren't that nowadays jobs like mine aren't easy to find. I work hard, and our clients like me - I am more productive than my colleagues, yet this supervisor - Ellen - keeps after me, pushing me to get every little detail about our clients into our computer data base, when actually it's my relationship with our clients that matters, and that I remember important issues about them. Only yesterday, Ellen went after me about some irrelevant little details about a Mr. Smith that she couldn't find in the computer. Why didn't you ask me, I said; I could have told you, if that's what you wanted to know! And of course it's totally unnecessary information that we have no use for!"

I could see that Cher was seething with frustration, and first off I sympathized with her plight. Then I became curious about what was really going on between Cher and Ellen in relation to their respective roles in the company. (Yes, my own Expressive drive got me into counseling without a contract, but so be it!)

When the company was reorganized, Cher told me, Ellen, who had been with the company for 20 years in the training department, was transferred to fill the vacancy of supervisor in Cher's department. Cher had been there for 3 years, but was considered too "junior" to be given that job, which would have involved supervising older colleagues. Yet, said Cher, the department was running quite well during the interim of 8 months when there was no supervisor and she herself carried some of the responsibilities..

"Could it be that Ellen feels threatened by you?" I asked.

"Oh no, I don't like to think that way, and I don't give her cause for it," she responded.

"It's human to feel threatened by someone who may be more competent," I said.

"Oh, she has no reason for it; actually I trained with her about entering data base into computers early on when she was in the other department, and we got along well. It's just that now she makes me feel so

incompetent! I keep my nose to the grindstone, I do try to enter everything I can into the data base, but I don't always have the time to do so immediately, the priority should be in dealing with clients! Now I've given up, I just follow routines. But she doesn't even appreciate that, and I'm getting to hate my job."

"Tell me more about her," I said.

"Oh, she talks from both sides of her mouth. Actually she's the one who suggested I apply for worker's compensation when I hurt my shoulder, and she encourages me to take time off to get regular treatment, but I do it during my lunch break, to prove to her that I'm conscientious. I just don't know what to make of her, she blows hot and cold."

Clearly we were dealing with two secretly competing Type II persons, but Cher was suffering from being in a junior situational role with Ellen.

How could Cher improve her transactions with Ellen, while maintaining integrity and her self-respect, which was becoming severely damaged? Perhaps if Cher could support Ellen's Rescuing Parent and thereby reduce the pressure of Ellen's Critical Parent? However Cher's sense of competence and her need for self-determination also needed support.

It seemed to me that first Cher's Adult needed to understand compassionately how Ellen's needs for control might feel threatened by Cher's very competence with clients (rather than with computers), without Cher's feeling victimized or overly righteous and vengeful. In this particular situation Cher's own sense of worth and self-control were being threatened. Clearly, her own inner Parent also attacked her for being "bad" by secretly competing with Ellen (the supervisor/mother figure) and for having (forbidden) angry and/or hopeless feelings, and she blocked awareness of the impact she might have on Ellen.

Cher was now operating primarily with her Survival Motivator (fear of losing her job), sensing pressure by Expressive to quit in anger. So, instead, she was 'putting her nose to the grindstone', trying to suffocate her Expressive drive, which only got her to feel worse. Whereas, before, she had been using Expressive well in her work with clients, now work was becoming a survival chore. All she could do at present was to increasingly combine Quiescence with Survival and become passive to avoid exploding at Ellen.

“Would you like us to examine together what it is, perhaps, that makes Ellen tick?” I suggested. There was a flash of curiosity in Cher’s eyes, although she pursed her lips and said:

“Well, not that it will do any good, I can’t change her, but go ahead!” (Cher’s Expressive Motivator was peeking through her Child, but with her Type II personality she wasn’t going to concede that Ellen was worth giving much thought to.) Nevertheless, I proceeded, and could see that Cher was becoming increasingly interested.

Briefly, I summarized that, for reasons probably related to her childhood, someone like Ellen feels threatened when she does not feel in complete control - of herself, of her job, and of those working for her. This may have led Ellen to become more perfectionistic than appropriate. (Of course some of this analysis partially applies to Cher, also, but I avoided making that point, especially since in Cher’s case rather than become perfectionistic she has better abilities to relate to others, and more creativity through her Expressive drive). So, I continued, apparently Ellen overuses her critical Parent by wanting detailed computer records from Cher to compensate for the fact that Cher is obviously more comfortable with clients and with remembering more facts about them than she, (Ellen) can be. But, I emphasized, essentially Ellen seems starved for strokes.

“Well, knowing this all still doesn’t change what’s going on between us,” said Cher.

“Oh, but it can,” I suggested. “Did you thank Ellen for her idea, about your getting workmen’s compensation, or show appreciation for her helpfulness about your shoulder?”

“Of course I did, but I’m not going to kow-tow to her, as some of the others in the department do, telling her how great she is! It sickens me.”

“That’s not what I suggest. It’s important for you to be honest and not offer phony thanks. But these are instances where she was genuinely helpful. Rather than operating with her Persecuting Parent, there she used her Rescuing Parent. Yes, she has the kind of personality that requires a lot of thanks and acknowledgement to sustain her against her inner insecurities. And, granted, it’s not your job to try to change her, nor can you. But meanwhile you do need ways to get along with her. I bet you only halfheartedly acknowledged her suggestion to you about applying for workmen’s compensation because of your annoyance at her for “bossing”

you about the computer. And in a way, you're showing off to her that you don't ever need her help by refusing to take the time off to which you are entitled, to demonstrate what a hard worker you are. How about becoming more creative in your relationship with her?

For instance, when her help is truly useful, how about genuinely offering her the appreciation her Parent craves for, and doing so emphatically?

And when she is being critical, see if you can let some of it roll off your back, for instance imagine a cartoon that illustrates what's going on between you? Can you use some curiosity about various possible (practical and impractical) uses for the data you are adding in your computer? (After all you told me that you enjoyed learning some computer science way back; it doesn't have to compete with your skills with people).

Do take the time off she offers you, and thank her profusely for her it. It can't hurt you, for it is you who choose when to thank and when not, and do so when you honestly feel you did get useful help.

Remember that no-one can make you feel bad unless you allow them to connect with your own Parent in attacking you.

Instead, see how much you can enjoy your competence, and the feedback from your clients, which is life-affirming!"

Cher looked thoughtful. She wasn't going to concede anything to me, and I rather liked that. Good! She was holding on to her own ability to evaluate.

However, a month later, when we met again at the swimming pool, she mentioned casually that things were going much better at work, and that she was again feeling useful and gaining pleasure with her activity, even though the general employment situation has worsened in the States. Then, jokingly she said:

"Now, do you think I should thank you for this? Well, ok, yes, thanks! you did do me a big favor!"

And with that, she swam off.