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SAJTA

SOUTH ASIAN JOURNAL OF TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

ESTD IN 2015 BY SAATA

VOLUME 12, NUMBER 1, JAN 2026

TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

saata | THE SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION OF TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSTS

OFFICIAL E-JOURNAL OF THE SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION OF TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSTS

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EDITOR'S NOTE

CELEBRATING A DECADE: PEOPLE, PASSION AND PROGRESS

Sir Ken Robinson (2013) "We have to recognize that human flourishing is not a mechanical process; it's an organic process. And you cannot predict the outcome of human development. All you can do, like a farmer, is create the conditions under which they will begin to flourish."

Looking back at SAJTA's evolution over the last 10 years and its impact, we believe our work has been primarily about creating the conditions for SAATA to flourish as a professional body. SAJTA has become the fertile ground for Transactional Analysis practitioners of this region to show up, be seen and heard. Over time, SAJTA has become an ethical and reflective space for cultural contextualization, one that holds and amplifies South Asian voices within TA literature.

We had the opportunity to celebrate SAJTA's ten-year anniversary at the SAATA conference 2025 in Chennai. Here we unveiled the first SAJTA logo (which you see on the cover) and celebrated our publication team and authors with badges to identify them. Attendees applauded the authors in the plenary, and we placed a standee with the names of every author who has contributed to SAJTA to show our appreciation.

SAJTA's ten-year journey is less a simple growth story and more a narrative of a metamorphosis, stretching, shape-shifting and evolving with time. This journey has been shaped by rigorous standards, thoughtful and sometimes difficult decisions. It has been shaped by the quiet, consistent commitment of editors, authors, and reviewers who

showed up with courage. It has also been carried by curious readers and generous well-wishers who believed in the value of this work.

As we have evolved, so has our writing, voices have grown bolder, theory has deepened and become more culturally attuned. Formats have expanded; we now publish book reviews and keynote speeches, and this is our first issue with the new format of caselets. We have connected with the community through dynamic workshops, inviting members to meet the writers within themselves.

Those of us who have volunteered with SAJTA have had the privilege of an insider's view, and it is a story we are grateful to share. At its heart, SAJTA is a story of collaboration. Over the years, we have witnessed an extraordinary community of volunteers step into roles as editors and reviewers, often bringing far more than what the role description asked of them. We dedicate this 10th anniversary issue to all the editors and reviewers who have come before us, on whose shoulders we stand today, friendships forged, deep dedications shared. SAJTA is, above all, its people and their passions.

As a peer-reviewed e-journal focusing on TA theory and allied fields, SAJTA continues to invite practitioners to articulate their learnings, applications, and innovations in theory and practice, with a particular emphasis on cultural contextualization in our region. True to this, despite being an open issue, our 10th

anniversary edition is loud and bold in its voice, showing up unapologetically as practitioners from South Asia. And in doing so, we flourish.

As we step into the next decade, we do so with attentiveness to the shifting landscapes shaped by AI. We are embracing new technologies with caution, curiosity, and care. The impact of AI in publishing is just beginning but it promises to be significant. On one hand, for South Asian authors it has the potential to support dismantling language-based barriers to access and expression. On the other hand, irresponsible use threatens to dilute original thinking and introduce significant risks, including factual errors, logical incoherence, legal and ethical liabilities, etc. To hold these dualities, SAJTA has adopted a model of regulated transparency regarding the use of AI in writing. Thus, this issue marks another milestone for SAJTA, our first with an AI disclosure form signed by authors, reflecting our commitment to staying abreast with change while remaining grounded in ethics, responsibility, and the integrity of the author's voice.

We honor those who came before us and warmly welcome those who will carry the flame forward. Enjoy this special release as we celebrate a decade past and embrace the horizon ahead. Join us and be a part of SAJTA's unfolding story.

Nikita Bandale and Rosemary Kurian,

Co-Managing Editors,

SAJTA

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PEOPLE OF SAJTA

(2015 - 2025)

Aruna Gopakumar
Chithra Vijay
Deepak Dhananjaya
Karthik Kamal Balasubramaniam
Nisha Rao
Ragini Rao
Ritika Gupta
Sarmishta Mani
Shrutkirti Singh
Shobana Jayaraman
Siddharth Shah
Smita Chimmanda Potty
Vaaruni Sundar

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NOTE FROM THE FIRST MANAGING EDITOR

In 2015, during a SAATA event, a conversation over lunch on the limited availability of literature exploring the applications of the Transactional Analysis framework in the Indian context gave rise to the idea of what was then called the SAATA Journal – now known as SAJTA.

With no prior experience in publishing or managing a journal, I took on the role of Managing Editor. I was joined by Smita Chimmanda Potty, whose proficiency in language, editing, and writing strengthened the editorial team. We worked under the leadership of Ragini Rao, then Vice President – Research and Development.

From the very beginning, we relied on the guidance of Suriyaprakash C, who supported us through every aspect of the journal's creation – from conceptualizing the name and format to reviewing submissions and engaging with authors. The publication of the first issue was an exhilarating moment for the entire team – a transition from idea to reality.

As I write this note for the 10th-year issue, it brings immense satisfaction to see how the journal has evolved – in its processes, the strength of its team, the quality of its reviews and editing, and the professionalism that defines each publication. SAJTA has been shaped under the leadership of three Managing Editors – me, Nisha Rao, and

Rosemary Kurian – each contributing distinct perspectives and building upon a shared vision of developing a robust, peer-reviewed journal that reflects both academic integrity and community values.

A journal, however, derives its vitality from its readership. While successive editorial teams have focused on strengthening scientific rigor, professional standards, and editorial quality, it is now time to direct equal attention to the community it represents – SAATA. One of the ongoing challenges has been a decline in the number of article submissions. I believe this is closely linked to author motivation, which in turn is influenced by readership engagement.

If we examine the question, "Why is readership low?" – the possible explanations may include the relevance of topics or the perceived quality of content. Yet, in my view, a significant factor lies in the limited use of journal articles within our training and supervision processes. When the journal is not integrated into our learning ecosystem, readership tends to depend solely on individual motivation. Conversely, embedding the journal within training practices would create opportunities to assess whether the content being produced is truly relevant and valuable to our professional community.

I therefore invite trainers and supervisors to actively engage with the content of SAJTA and incorporate it into their training work. When an author's ideas are cited in training discussions, examinations, or other publications, it not only acknowledges their

contribution but also affirms that their work has significance and resonance within the wider field.

With that spirit, I extend a warm welcome to Nikita Bandale and Laxmi Sivaram, as they assume the role of Co-Managing Editors – to bring their leadership, clarity, and commitment to furthering the vision of SAJTA, for SAATA and for the global Transactional Analysis community.

Deepak Dhananjaya,

First Managing Editor,

SAJTA

EXPERT PANEL

C. Suriyaprakash, TSTA(O)

Susan George, TSTA (P)

We acknowledge and thank the Expert Panel for their valuable contribution to the authors' work and for upholding SAJTA's commitment to reflective, high-quality Transactional Analysis literature.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Welcome to the January 2026 issue of SAJTA. As the biannual, peer-reviewed journal of the South Asian Association of Transactional Analysts (SAATA), SAJTA offers a welcoming space for practitioners from diverse fields to share their perspectives, emerging theories, practice-based insights, and research. We value thoughtful academic and scholarly dialogue and seek to nurture the exchange of ideas and knowledge among professionals working in Transactional Analysis (TA) and allied fields.

SAJTA is supported by an exceptional team of dedicated and passionate reviewers and editors. Writing is a journey, and collaborating with our editors makes this process particularly fulfilling. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the editorial board for their unwavering dedication and hard work in bringing this exceptional edition to life.

We are thrilled to introduce two new members to our team. **Radhika Iyer and Ramya Navin** join us as co-editors. Radhika is a psychotherapist, supervisor and trainer based in Bengaluru, with an M.A. in Applied Psychology from TISS-BALM. She is trained in Transactional Analysis, works from a trauma-informed, queer-affirmative and integrative lens with experience across educational and clinical settings. Ramya Navin is a psychotherapist based out of Bengaluru, with a Masters in Applied Psychology (Counseling Psychology) from Mumbai University. She is trained in Transactional

Analysis, NLP, Gestalt, REBT, and CBT. Welcome Radhika and Ramya, your depth of experience and diverse perspectives will enrich our work.

We are deeply grateful to Rosemary Kurian who will close her term as the managing editor with this issue after many years of stellar and dedicated years of service. In her time at SAJTA's helm, she helped streamline the editorial process, introduced creative ventures to engage the community, introduced SAJTA's AI use and disclosure policy amongst other contributions.

We extend our sincere gratitude and best wishes to Gunjan Zutshi and Asha Raghavan as they conclude their tenure as editors. Gunjan will be remembered for her attuned presence and incisive thinking, and Asha for her vibrant energy and innovative ideas. They will both be deeply missed.

This issue of SAJTA brings together a compelling collection of articles that explore diverse dimensions of Transactional Analysis (TA) and allied fields, showcasing their application across personal, cultural, and therapeutic spaces. These pieces highlight the depth and adaptability of TA while integrating perspectives from related disciplines, offering readers rich insights into both theoretical understandings and practical implementations.

ABOUT THE ARTICLES

Running Away – From What? Towards What? by Gunjan Zutshi is our very first caselet. It explores the layered dynamics of avoidance through multiple levels of parallel process. The vignette brings to light a shared avoidance of deeper, more uncomfortable relational truths. It also examines the hierarchical splits therapists may face when navigating different theoretical approaches and invites therapists to approach their work with curiosity and a willingness to meet the unknown with a possibility of learning.

Games Indian Families Play: Examining Cultural Scripts and Familial Roles in Indian Society by Asha Raghavan reflects on how the TA theory of Games can translate to the Indian context. The article invites therapists to reflect on their practice with greater cultural attunement.

The Currency of Connection: Transactional Analysis and Strokes by Eric James presents strokes and authenticity as strategic tools for facilitators and L&D professionals. The article illustrates the importance of intentional design in sustained organizational performance.

The Impact of Socio-Economic Conditions on the Mental Well-being of New Mothers by N Hema Sreedharan examines how socio-economic conditions shape the emotional well-being of new mothers after childbirth, focusing on lower-income,

middle-class, and upper-middle-class groups Indian context. This paper highlights the need to pay attention to maternal mental health and support.

Developmental Transactional Analysis: Transactional for Growth by Piyush Dixit and Eric James offers TA practitioners a guide to Developmental TA (DTA) for enhancing work in the fields of Education, Counselling, and Organizations. The article explores DTA's philosophical basis and illustrates its practical utility as a framework for enhancing developmental work.

The Spiral of Becoming: From Scripted Selves to the Self-Authored Feminine by Priya Veeraraghavan explores how cultural inheritance shapes the feminine psyche in India through Social Scripts and Relational Inscriptions. Grounded in clinical and cinematic illustrations, the paper maps a path toward a Self-Authored Feminine defined by inner clarity.

Emotional Resilience in the Workplace: The Emotion-Response Matrix by Raguraman K emphasizes the importance of emotional resilience in the workplace. The article introduces the Emotion-Response Matrix as a practical tool for navigating workplace challenges and fostering healthier coping strategies.

Radical Self-Care as Daily Alignment by Sailaja Manacha is adapted from a keynote address delivered at the SAATA conference in September 2025. The article reflects on redefining self-care fundamentally. It looks at self-care as continuous alignment with

one's values rather than occasional acts, inviting readers to reflect on self-care in their lives.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue and would love to hear your views, ideas, questions, or feedback. You could write to any author at their mentioned email addresses and / or us at journal@saata.org

EDITORIAL BOARD

THEME FOR SEPTEMBER 2026 ISSUE

"Open Issue"

(No Specific Theme)

Deadline for submissions to September 2026 issue: **May 31st, 2026**

SAJTA accepts submissions throughout the year and reviews manuscripts on an ongoing basis.

Email: journal@saata.org

Please follow the Guidelines for Writing for SAJTA and the SAJTA AI Disclosure Policy before you submit.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF CASELETS

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RUNNING AWAY - FROM WHAT? TOWARDS WHAT?

GUNJAN ZUTSHI

THE CASE

In a recent supervision, the therapist brought the case of a client who was choosing withdrawal as a strategy for coping and wanted to be engaged in other ways. They were constantly feeling angry and wanted to run away from everything and the fantasy was that in running away there would be relief.

The therapist's question to explore in supervision was “The client shows up very angry in sessions so how to deal with presentation of anger when it shows up in therapy.”

This formulation of supervision issue caught my attention because the therapist is an experienced therapist who knows how to work with anger in therapy. So, I wondered what the therapist was really asking in bringing this up for supervision.

What emerged in exploration was the parallel process (Sarnat, 2015) between the therapist and the client; in focusing on anger instead of what was underneath that anger, the therapist was also running away from something that was perhaps more difficult to bring to awareness.

The therapist was focusing on the client’s anger and trying to do something about it instead of helping them get in touch with what they are trying to run away from. This made us wonder – what’s so oppressive and unbearable in the client’s internal world

(and the external world), that they feel the only way out is to run away? Run away where? From what? Towards what?

All that exploration is not possible if the focus is on fixing the anger. Then we cannot understand the inner relational world of the client. The relational question is not what's wrong with the client and how to fix it. It is to understand what's going wrong for the client in their relational matrix (Mitchell, 1988), including with the therapist in the here and now, and through that exploration, help the client make meaning of what's happening. In this case, helping the client get in touch with what is difficult and unbearable that they are trying to run away from. And what was perhaps oppressive and unbearable for the therapist in the sessions that they needed to run away from. In this case, the therapist's own difficulty when faced with anger in their relationships and their need to quickly fix it.

This helped the supervisee see beyond the anger and opened up the possibility of deeper explorations with the client. And this requires the therapist to be in a place of not knowing, curiosity and exploration with the client instead of being the expert who knows how to help the client fix their anger. This stance of not knowing can evoke anxiety in the therapist leading to their own ways of coping and their relational conflicts.

Upon further exploration, the parallel process in the supervision between me and the supervisee emerged; about what they were running away from in supervision or

trying to fix through supervision. They were coming to me for supervision to deepen their learning of the relational framework and to integrate that into their practice. However, very often, the supervision questions or case formulations were about what to do, about techniques.

I shared my curiosity and asked what it means for them to bring questions around techniques and what-to-dos to supervision, which mostly they know how to deal with. This helped the supervisee get in touch with what they were running away from in our supervisions and why. While consciously they were coming to learn about the relational approach, the unconscious fear was that if they let go of their known ways of working, they would stop being a good therapist (whatever their definition of a good therapist was). It was the fear of losing their potency as a therapist in learning and adopting a different way of working, that was keeping them away from fully engaging with the relational approach. Unconsciously, the supervisee had split into being the old style of therapist (known, comfortable, therapist as expert) vs adopting the new style (the unknown, uncomfortable, the therapist stance of not knowing), the new being scary and hence holding on to the old, even when consciously trying to learn the new. Like the client holding on to the old fantasy of running away as being the only thing that could provide safety and relief. The supervisee wanted (unconsciously of course) for the supervision to fix something in their practice.

It led to further exploration of how they felt about working relationally. And this is something I am becoming more aware of in my supervisions and interactions with practitioners within the community. We seem to have placed a certain premium on the relational approach. Instead of seeing it as another therapeutic approach, we seem to have put it on a pedestal as something to "idolize" and aspire towards (P1+). And hence the pressure to work in a certain way. To acknowledge that one may not aspire to work relationally seems to be difficult. Some further data I have is from a different supervision where the supervisee felt relieved when they could say in supervision that they really like working with the classical approach and that they don't have to work relationally. Till then, they were struggling to fit their work into the relational framework, trying to force fit and it wasn't working.

This pressure to work in a certain way causes further splits within the therapist. The Try Hard of A1+ of working with what is seen as the idolized approach and activation of A1-, the shame and/or guilt, when one encounters that either one does not want to work like that or may not yet be competent to work with that approach, which can cause immense anxiety. In the case above, the supervisee bringing "how to" questions for supervision was a way for them to hold on to the known ways of working, lest they get in touch with the shame and discomfort of not knowing or being seen as not competent.

Unless this conflict can be worked through, the danger is that therapists can stay split and that does not augur well for therapists or the clients. It stops therapists from bringing their full selves into therapy and then there is no permission for the clients to be able to do that either. It also perpetuates false hierarchies where difference in approach is converted into superiority or inferiority to other approaches, and the pressure to be on the side of what is seen as superior approach.

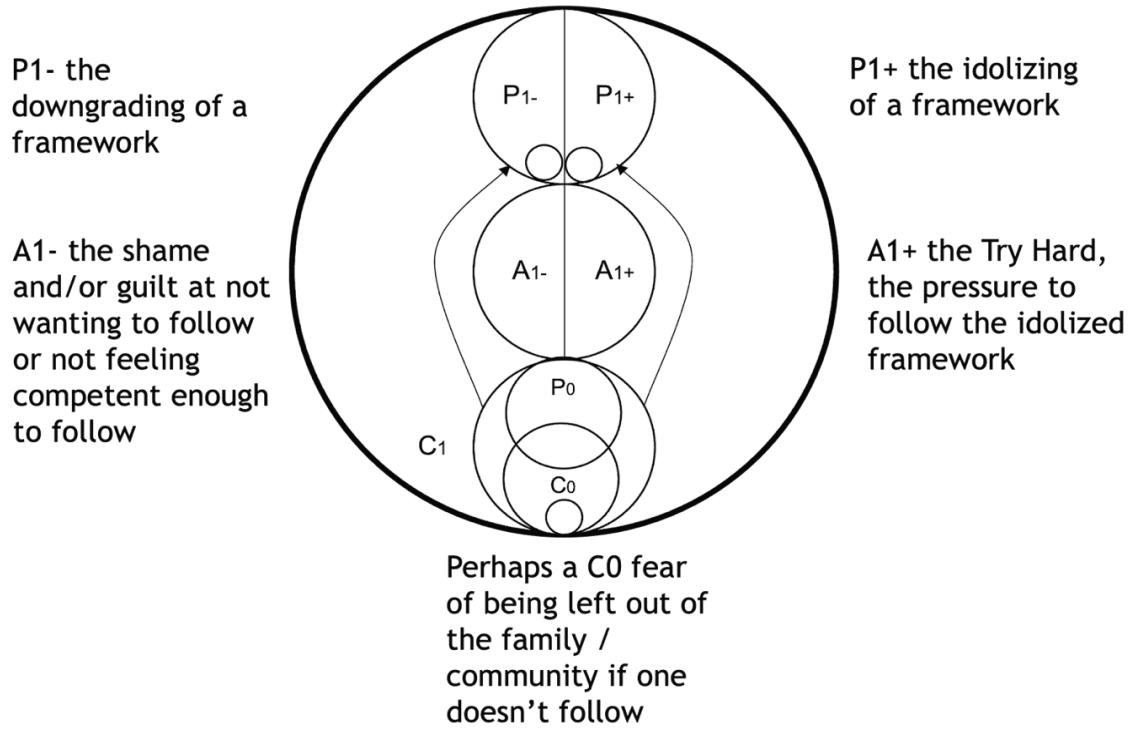

Figure 1. The Therapist's Conflict (Based on Model of Development of Self, Hargaden & Sills, 2002)

KEY INSIGHTS

A few reflections that emerged for me from this experience:

- What we project on the frameworks – the hierarchy in mind about different schools/ approaches and how we can put one above the other instead of seeing them as different approaches with their limitations and potential.
- The experience of shame and the consequent need to quickly "fix" the deficit, either within us, the practitioners, or for our clients.
- The fear of letting go of certainty and known ways of working and how that can interfere with one's curiosity for the unknown and the possibility of new learning.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it seems that the running towards or away from something, without pausing to enquire into the nature of this running, can actually keep us stuck instead. It can keep our inner worlds quite split, not allowing for possibility of integration – of ourselves, our clients or the frameworks!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gunjan Zutshi, PTSTA-P is a psychotherapist, supervisor and trainer and deeply involved in working with individuals for personal transformation. Her practice is informed by radical-relational perspectives, and she combines her experience in behavioral science and system psychodynamics to understand and work with individuals and groups in their specific socio-cultural-political contexts. She is a Bihar School of Yoga practitioner and works to integrate the ancient wisdom of yoga in her practice. She is also a coach and co-founder of AgileSattva Consulting LLP, an organization development and change consulting firm. She lives in Bangalore and her e mail is zutshig@gmail.com

ARTICLES

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GAMES INDIAN FAMILIES PLAY: EXAMINING CULTURAL SCRIPTS AND FAMILIAL ROLES IN INDIAN SOCIETY

ASHA RAGHAVAN

ABSTRACT

India's diverse cultural and family structures strongly influence how individuals internalize cultural norms, roles and expectations. This reflective article uses the framework of Transactional Analysis (TA) to examine how cultural influences shape the Cultural Parent of Indians and how they contribute to script patterns and interpersonal Games. The article also focuses on the importance of culturally attuned TA practice and offers suggestions to help therapists better understand and address culturally nuanced issues presented by the client.

Keywords: Games, Cultural Parent, Indian Context, Familial Roles, Harmony, Autonomy, Gender, Image, Self-Sacrifice, Cultural Sensitivity

INTRODUCTION

My practice as a therapist working with clients from across India threw up challenges in understanding the deep-rooted traditions and complex family structures that shape the psychological development of individuals. I realized that the client's internal world is shaped not only through personal experiences but also by collective expectations, ritualistic practices and intergenerational narratives embedded in family

life. The Parent ego state not only encompasses introjected beliefs, rules and messages but is colored intensely with cultural norms leading to a profound influence on the Cultural Parent (Drego, 1983). It thereby impacts how individuals perceive themselves, engage in relationships and navigate personal spaces within the family system. Situating the concept of Games against this cultural landscape emphasized the need as a therapist to be culturally sensitive and acutely aware of how culture shapes our psychological processes.

The TA method of seeing personality through Parent, Adult and Child can also be applied in the study of a culture as we look at the Parent, Adult and Child of the culture (Berne, 1963). When a group of people form a community, they share Parental values, Adult procedures and Child emotions which Berne (1963) names Etiquette, Technicality and Character respectively. Examining the Ego states of a culture as described by Drego (1983), the scheme of contents in brief are:

- Etiquette: Culturally inherited beliefs, ideologies, moral codes, values, rules about aspects like life, death, gender, wealth, etc., social hierarchies and customs, rituals and prejudices
- Technicalities: Culturally inherited knowledge, skills, planning and organization

- Character: Culturally inherited ways of experiencing and acting out love, hatred, needs, drives, etc.

Situating the concept of TA Games and Cultural Parent within the Indian context brings into focus the framework of beliefs and expectations that shape how a person might play Games, especially within a familial setup.

Berne (1964) defines a game as, "an ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome". These are covert transactions with a hidden psychological pay off. Games are typically played to reinforce a limiting life script and avoid intimacy.

Berne's original analysis of games was embedded in a western socio-cultural context; the content and triggers of games were shaped by the historical narratives and collective beliefs of the western culture. India's unique socio-historical fabric, marked by collectivism, patriarchy, religious traditions and shifting modern identities gives rise to a distinct version of psychological games that are played out within families and social settings (Murugesan, 2025; Bhatnagar, 2024).

The etiquette of the Indian Cultural Parent highlights the culturally inherited beliefs, moral codes practiced within families, social hierarchy, expectations of the ideal man or woman, ideologies and values linked to religious beliefs (Drego, 1983). This article hopes to:

- Understand some common cultural dimensions of the Indian familial context
- Link cultural dimensions to game selection and role enactment
- Propose culturally attuned therapeutic strategies that preserve relational harmony and support individual autonomy

THE INDIAN CULTURAL CONTEXT

India as a country is collectivist in nature much like other Asian countries. The western world on one hand is attuned to individualism which emphasizes personal autonomy, individual's rights and self-reliance. Collectivism, on the other hand, focuses on values such as loyalty to the group, shared identity and the group over the self (Kokila, 2018; Murugesan, 2025). Within such a context, personal choices may not take centerstage, and group identity and social approval could far outweigh personal choices.

Indian families often revolve around a central patriarchal figure, and in certain communities even a matriarchal figure who lays the ground rules in how the family members conduct themselves (Bhatnagar, 2024). Conforming to these pre-set expectations could be vital to how one is seen by the group. In addition, one's position in the group may be decided by one's level of conformity to the unwritten code of behavior. An individual's need to assert or speak their mind may fuel conflict as they may be seen as disrespectful, arrogant or traitorous. Hierarchies such as class disparity,

caste oppression, patriarchy, gender discrimination, etc., are ingrained in Indian socio-cultural and economic frameworks (Mitra, 2025). With changing times, urbanization and globalization have aided the rapid change to the pluralistic nature of its culture (Paonam, 2025).

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS AND POTENTIAL GAMES PLAYED

Against the backdrop of the Etiquette of Indian culture, some of the cultural dimensions this article dives into are:

- Harmony versus autonomy
- Public image versus private image
- Self-sacrifice deemed as a virtue
- Gender norms

A cultural environment based on these values enshrined across generations of families is instrumental in shaping one's ego state development, life scripts and the types of games that are played out in Indian families.

India is home to several languages; in choosing the Hindi equivalents for the names of games discussed here, it is my hope that it would make it more relatable for readers who understand and relate to the Hindi language and offer an easy comparison against the pre-established framework of games.

Here the article outlines common cultural dimensions along with potential games played in the Indian context.

1. Harmony versus Autonomy

Harmony and Autonomy represent the radical tension between collective well-being and individual self-governance. For a predominantly collectivist culture such as that of India, harmony within the family and community is considered a higher virtue and supersedes the autonomy of the individual (Panda & Gupta, 2004). The identification of an individual is usually marked by the family, ancestry or caste he belongs to. There exists a hierarchical social order in every family and harmony is associated with respect, obedience and sacrifice, in favor of the elders in this social pyramid. Any assertion of one's personal space or choices may be seen as disruptive, shameful and disrespectful, rather than necessary for the individual's personal growth and authenticity.

Autonomy in its simplest form of expressing independent thought may be seen as selfish, immature or rebellious. One might suppress their personal desires and defer major life decisions in favor of family approval. Direct communication might then be avoided to maintain peace, for confrontation would lead to conflict.

Given the tension between harmony and autonomy, it can be difficult to make one's own decisions or hold an opinion for oneself. One might feel bound within the

constraints of social expectations, an inability to set boundaries, say no to a situation, or choose to leave dysfunctional situations.

- Game in the Indian Context – *Papa ko kaun samajhaye?* (Who will explain this to father?) Consider the example of a young family member wanting to live on their own and break away from the joint family.
- The setup that characterizes the game – The young male member of the family is seeking to assert his autonomy by moving away from the joint family to set up a nuclear family unit. He believes that it is a need that can never be met.
- The psychological motivation for the player – The individual refrains from challenging the patriarchal authority to meet his need, believing that he is asking for the impossible. He, thus, unconsciously reinforces the belief that he is a victim within this set up.
- Payoff – He feels vindicated in his beliefs that he will never be able to experience the joy of living independently and that his family can never offer constructive help, reinforcing his underlying life script and his negative feelings.

Looking at it from the lens of Hindi language, the name of the game would be – *Papa ko kaun samajhaye?* (who will explain it to father?) The game played reflects the

inner conflict of wanting change, an option to operate out of the Adult ego state. However, framing 'family harmony' as this immovable obstacle serves to avoid direct confrontation and preserve peace while shirking responsibility for one's own inaction. Emotionally, this makes the person internalize the guilt for wanting something different from the family's expectation, often leading to an outward compliance to the family and inner rebellion, causing anxiety and depression due to constant suppression of the self (Sathyapal & Deb, 2025). Self-silencing or a loss of voice which means generating inhibition in the form of self-expression, especially anger and prioritizing others' needs, has been linked to depression, particularly in women (Sharma et. al, 2025)

2. Public Image versus Private Image

Indian culture places emphasis on how a family unit is perceived within the larger social fabric. The public image holds significant weight, and it is important how a family is seen by extended family, neighbors and the larger community. It is associated with honor, reputation and family standing. 'Maintaining face' is essential and an individual is expected to conform to ideals of respectability, decency and obedience, especially in social roles. Authentic feelings, needs and even behavior in personal spaces are concealed to preserve reputation.

This duality gives rise to a public-private split where an individual will live out different realities to suit the one who is watching. Women are often seen to be

complying with the image of the dutiful daughter-in-law, the doting wife while internally feeling voiceless or repressed. Sexuality and identity are yet other areas of an image split where LGBTQ+ individuals may comply outwardly and lead heterosexual lives to avoid family shame and social stigma.

- Game in the Indian Context – *Main Bechara Hoon* (Poor Me)
- Consider the example of the oldest male child in the family – constrained by financial responsibilities, taking on the responsibility for the education and marriage of his siblings as per social and family role expectations.
- The setup that characterizes the game – The oldest sibling seeks to convince himself that he is doing his duty even though he feels helpless, unrecognized and oppressed. He sees no way out of this situation thrust upon him by the societal roles. He feels like a victim of his circumstances.
- The psychological motivation of the player – The male sibling seeks to gain sympathy and strokes for the role he has taken on and expects appreciation and obligation from his siblings.
- Payoff – This could confirm the individual's script – a sense that their needs are not important, that they do not have a choice nor voice. This results in emotional dissonance, a consistent tension between true feelings and

external behaviors. The individual may experience a sense of alienation and feel unseen or unheard within their own family.

It is a reinforcement of self-justification and an adopted stance of blamelessness. It allows for the avoidance of risk and anxiety in acknowledging his true feelings.

3. Self-sacrifice as a virtue

A virtue idealized in Indian culture and considered as the highest moral quality – self-sacrifice – typically plays out in family relationships. Especially for a woman, this belief is grounded in religious and historical narratives and furthered by mythological figures like Sita and Savitri. Rituals and traditions around festivals like Karvachauth and Varamahalakshmi Vratham further this narrative of placing one's personal needs as secondary to family and community. There is a sense of respect for those who repeatedly give up their needs. It is no longer an Adult choice when the result achieved is moral superiority, assuaging of guilt or avoidance of direct confrontation.

- Game in the Indian Context – *Tyaagmoorthi* (Self-Sacrifice) Consider the case of middle-aged parents who have struggled financially and otherwise, foregoing personal comforts to raise their children as this is considered selfless duty. However, when children later move abroad and visits are rare, the parents feel neglected and forgotten.

- The setup that characterizes the game – As a parent, one believes they have fulfilled their children's needs, sacrificing their own wants and needs.
- The psychological motivation – The individual will command respect from society and be recognized as a good parent. There is an expectation that their child will care for them in turn when they age.
- Payoff – The payoff is a sense of pity for oneself, victimization and moral high ground in fulfilling filial responsibilities.

This game endorses the script belief that if one sacrifices enough, one will get appreciation and if they don't get appreciation, then they are justified in feeling wronged. The player believes that he must ensure everyone else is OK before he can take care of himself. However, deep within is a sense of resentment at being forgotten and neglected.

4. Gender Norms

Indian families place a high premium on the male child – son preference (Mitra, 2014). Male children are considered carriers of the family lineage and cultural rituals. This has been established through various studies (Arnold et al, 1998; Mitra, 2014; Clark, 2000). A son is considered as an investment for the old age of the parents: they inherit property, perform ancestral rites and continue the family name while daughters

are seen as a temporary part of the natal family. A value such as this reinforces gendered scripts that have become deeply embedded narratives.

The narrative for men centers around being the provider, protector and authority figure, and is defined by a deep avoidance of vulnerability and emotional dependence. The common belief is that 'men don't cry' and fear is seen as a sign of weakness when it comes to men.

In India, the script for women often emphasizes values such as obedience, modesty and nurturing. Women are expected to prioritize family above self and personal aspirations. Evidence of this is found in proverbs, idioms and movie plotlines which portrays the good woman as the sacrificial figure.

- Game in the Indian Context – *Tumne mujhe majboor kiya* (Look What You Made Me Do)
- Consider the situation of a woman who is unable to fulfil the dowry demands as expected by her husband's family and is ill-treated in the husband's home. The husband at the behest of his family may physically abuse his wife.
- The setup that characterizes the game – The man uses the situation of his wife not bringing the demanded dowry to ill-treat her in order to maintain his image as the controlling male in the relationship.

- The psychological motivation – The player seeks to avoid personal responsibility for ill-treating his wife. He uses the external factor of the dowry as a reason for domestic abuse.
- Payoff – This justifies his controlling behavior as a persecutor. He vindicates his action of abusing her by shifting the blame onto his wife reiterating that she caused it to happen and absolves himself of guilt for the abuse. An appropriate Hindi equivalent for this game would be – *Tumne mujhe majboor kiya* (Look What You Made Me Do).

Patriarchy affords men the privilege of stepping into the persecutor mode, justifying their response of anger or punishment while claiming victimhood at the same time. Historical and social reinforcements of patriarchal beliefs perpetuate the legitimacy of male control.

When gender-based values get reinforced in individuals, they start to believe their worth can be validated only when they fulfil their gender roles. Needs of vulnerability, joy, belonging and independence recede into the background as gender expectations and roles take precedence.

REINTERPRETING GAMES

The form of games is universal. However, its language, content and reinforcement are shaped by cultural values, social structures and historical narrative. An outcome of

such game playing is reflected in the script messages in India which encourage role rigidity. Autonomy is sacrificed for harmony or the inherited script of self-sacrifice conflicts with emerging autonomy. The cost of this is borne at the psychological level where unexpressed needs, resentment and suppressed individuality become deeply embedded in interpersonal dynamics.

As therapists we are acutely aware of the hesitation of clients to seek therapy lest it ruins the family name.

The younger generation today are more exposed to global values and are exploring personal fulfilment and autonomy. Fast-paced technological development and social media have challenged the very fabric of Indian society. It is interesting to note how the changing scripts of the youth are in turn challenging the collective socio-cultural script as well. Perhaps trapped within this lay many unexplored questions around family dynamics, expectations, tentative script redecisions at a collective level and the possibility of examining new life positions.

REFLECTIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

As therapists, our challenges lie in helping clients navigate the conflict between inherited collective cultural scripts and emerging personal scripts. Some ideas to reflect on:

Language Adaptation of TA concepts

Therapists would need to adapt TA terminology to culturally familiar language in the process of psychoeducation during client sessions - a *Tyagmoorti* might resonate more with the Hindi-speaking population than a *Martyr* game. Likewise, tailoring TA concepts to regional language fosters cultural and contextual alignment.

Cultural Sensitivity

It is imperative that therapists are aware of subtle cultural nuances that exist in different communities across various states of India. It is important to honor the client's cultural identity when addressing limiting scripts. Reflecting on the origins of our cultural scripts and the psychological motivations and purposes behind the Cultural Parent beliefs, helps empower our clients to make choices with awareness.

Contextualizing TA in India

TA is a framework born in the western culture. Adapting, modifying and expanding it to the Indian context is vital for it to be effective. For instance, in India games have socially approved facades and it is the therapist's role to gently expose the hidden payoff without shaming the client for deep seated cultural beliefs.

Balancing between Autonomy and Harmony

Therapists could explore with the client how to navigate cultural expectations while cultivating their personal voice. The therapeutic focus is on increasing the client's

self-awareness and self-expression in a way that feels personally congruent within the cultural context.

Therapists' Self-Awareness

It is important for the therapist to be aware of their own cultural scripts and the potential collusion with the client's games especially if both the therapist and client share similar conditioning.

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

The Cultural Parent system in India is not limited to familial relations but extends far beyond to social hierarchies, caste definitions, business interactions, religion and politics. The dimensions explored here barely touch upon some of the many nuances that constitute our diverse culture and hopefully sets the tone for exploring the many layered aspects of the complex and diverse cultures that India encompasses.

CONCLUSION

Games, as you can see, are a rich tool for understanding Indian relational life. Navigating the fine line between respecting tradition and supporting authentic autonomy is not an easy process and requires the therapist to look at it with a dual lens – one that acknowledges the client's lived cultural beliefs and experiences and one that empowers individuals to renegotiate their life scripts without severing relational bonds.

There is scope for developing culturally attuned TA frameworks, if as a therapist one can integrate sociological insight with transactional awareness. A honed sense of cultural sensitivity could facilitate transition for clients from games rooted in collective conformity to life scripts rooted in conscious choice, mutual respect and psychological freedom.

AI Disclosure: The author affirms that AI was used only for editorial assistance and that all content presented is original and takes full responsibility for the work.

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THE CURRENCY OF CONNECTION: TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS AND STROKES

ERIC JAMES

ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to introduce facilitators, leaders, and L&D professionals to intentional design and authentic facilitation techniques. The article discusses how strokes can transform soft skills like recognition, appreciation and trust into a strategic intervention for intentional design. This intentional design allows for sustained organizational performance and personal authenticity.

Key Words: *Strokes, Stroke Deficit, Facilitator Vulnerability, Authenticity, Intentional Design, Psychological Safety, Drama Triangle, Winner's Triangle, Cultural Parent, Life Positions*

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever walked out of a workshop feeling energized, truly seen, and ready to make a change? Or perhaps, as a leader or facilitator, you've wondered how to create that magic, that palpable shift in a room?

In the dynamic and often complex world of organizational development, the success of any transformative initiative hinges not just on the content delivered, but profoundly on its intentional design and the authentic facilitation which brings it to life.

The Problem: Recognition, the TA concept of strokes, is often undervalued as a *soft skill*, leading to a measurable stroke deficit and organizational costs, including reduced psychological safety and high attrition.

The Solution (The Facilitator's Role): The key to bridging this deficit is the facilitator's authenticity and vulnerability. Drawing on Papaux's Circle of Interconnectedness (2016), the article demonstrates that a facilitator's willingness to share their humanity (moving from an “Not OK" stance to an "OK-OK" stance) is not merely a style preference but a critical design decision. This act of personal courage models the desired behavior and serves as a powerful unconditional positive stroke to the group.

Intentional Design and Impact: The article showcases how TA principles are used as architectural frameworks for learning. By making the purposeful exchange of strokes a primary intentional design consideration (e.g., the Bragging Activity, a structured offering of positive strokes to the self that legitimizes recognition), the design effectively shifts the participants internal state from a fearful, reactive Child to a collaborative, learning Adult. This strategic use of connection moves recognition from a soft concept to a practiced, strategic capability that drives sustained organizational growth.

STROKE REALITIES IN ORGANISATIONS

A stroke is a unit of recognition or any act acknowledging another person's presence. Strokes are essential for our psychological survival and well-being. Without them, "we literally shrivel up'" (Berne, 1964, p.15), leading to a state of stroke deficit (or stroke starvation) – feeling invisible at work. Strokes come in various forms, each with a different psychological impact:

- Positive Strokes: These affirm a person's worth or actions.
- Negative Strokes: These acknowledge a person's negative behavior/shortcomings or challenge a person's inherent worth.

A balance (between positive strokes and conditional negative strokes) is critical for fostering psychological safety and a culture of continuous growth (Edmondson, 2018). Some of the problems that stand in the way are discussed below:

1. The Strategic Cost of the Soft Skill Bias

Strokes are often dismissed as a *soft skill*, leading to a complex corporate bias that undermines organizational health and performance. This bias ignores the hard, measurable costs of neglecting connection:

Consequence of 'no strokes' in an organisation	Impact on people	Impact on business
Erosion of trust and morale	Employees feel unseen and constantly judged	Lowers quality of work
Reduced productivity & innovation (Napper & Newton, 2014)	People won't work harder or take risks	Financials get impacted, leading to stagnation in business (Krausz, 1986)
Higher attrition and talent lo (Hay, 2009)	Lack of appreciation is a major reason good people quit	High recruitment and training costs (Mountain, 2004)
Weakened psychological safety(Edmondson, 2018)	People are too afraid to speak up or admit mistakes	Inability to adapt and learn (Edmondson, 1999)

Table 1. The Metrics Trap

2. The Cultural Barrier (The Unconscious Scripts)

The undervaluation of strokes is often rooted in deep, unconscious organizational and cultural norms:

- The cultural parent (Drego, 1983): cultural beliefs (etiquettes – for instance, the strong emphasis on humility in some Indian contexts) are internalized into our parent ego state. This can cause managers to withhold positive praise (technicalities), fearing employees will become 'arrogant' or 'complacent' (etiquette) perpetuating the employee dissatisfaction (character).
- A systemic stroke deficit arises from all three unhealthy life positions (Ernst, 1971), not just critical leadership. Leaders in the "I'm ok, you're not ok" quadrant withhold praise due to arrogance, viewing staff as

incompetent. Those in “I’m not ok, you’re ok” fail to give recognition due to personal insecurity, doubting the value of their own feedback. Finally, the “I’m not ok, you’re not ok” stance creates a deficit through cynicism, viewing any exchange of strokes as futile. Thus, organizational starvation is fueled equally by superiority, self-doubt, and hopelessness.

3. The Problem in the Room: When Facilitators Ignore Their Own Scripts

When a facilitator steps into a training room, they don't leave their scripts at the door. If they operate from a similar stroke deficit (Berne, 1964) pattern that restricts recognition, they could replicate the exact cultural problems they are trying to solve:

- Facilitator Not-OKness

  For example, replicating the “I'm Not OK” environment: If the facilitator strives for an image of perfection (Be Perfect - Kahler, 1975), a rigid Critical Parent, they are implicitly modeling the belief that vulnerability and imperfection are unacceptable. This can trigger the participants' Child Ego State, leading them to feel judged, become defensive, or revert to superficial, guarded interactions (Berne, 1961).

  The Workshop Impact: Participants are unwilling to take genuine risks, admit to skill gaps, or share deep personal insights, rendering experiential activities ineffective.

- Creating Crossed Transactions

  For instance; a facilitator operating from a need to prove competence may unconsciously engage in Controlling Parent transactions (giving constant, unsolicited directives or correcting). This is especially damaging if participants attempt to interact from an Adult Ego State; the transaction becomes crossed, causing immediate rupture in the relational flow (Steiner, 1971).

  The Workshop Impact: The group quickly senses a lack of genuine Adult-to-Adult partnership, engagement drops, and the facilitator is treated as a remote authority figure rather than a human partner.

- Stalling Transfer of Learning

  The facilitator who withholds genuine, positive strokes out of unconscious restraint stemming from the Cultural Parent (Drego,1983) fails to model the very culture they are promoting. If recognition is scarce in the workshop, participants conclude the content is merely theoretical and not a genuine personal capability.

  The Workshop Impact: The training fails to create a lasting mindset shift, and the learning remains intellectual, failing to transfer into sustained, authentic behavioral change back in the workplace.

AUTHENTICITY AS A FACILITATOR'S CORE DESIGN PRINCIPLE

The solution to this deficit requires facilitators and leaders to first model the change they wish to see. A facilitator's personal authenticity is not separate from their professional competence; it is integral to it.

THE CRITICAL INTERRELATIONSHIP: WEAVING IN PAPAUX'S INTERCONNECTEDNESS

The statement that a facilitator's personal authenticity is integral to their professional competence is profoundly supported by Evelyne Papaux's (2015) concept of the circle of interconnectedness (Figure 1). This model describes a dynamic, relational process where deep, authentic connection, the very thing a facilitator seeks to cultivate, can only be achieved when the facilitator is willing to be fully present and vulnerable.

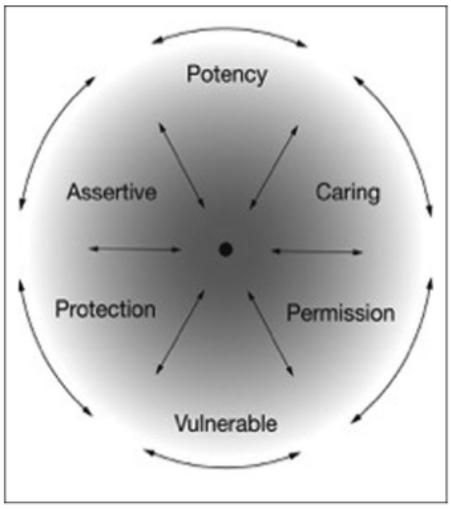

Figure 1. Circle of Interconnectedness (Papaux, 2015)

This critical interrelationship is vital because:

1. Shifting from Roles to Persons: Authenticity allows the facilitator to step out of the rigid professional role and operate from an integrating Adult Ego State (Summers & Tudor, 2000), blended with appropriate emotion. This shift moves the interaction beyond potentially crossed Parent-Child transactions and toward the authentic Adult-to-Adult partnership necessary for problem-solving and collaboration (Ernst, 1971).
2. Modeling the Stroking Culture: The facilitator's willingness to be authentic and share their human need for recognition gives participants permission to do the same, effectively seeding the new positive stroking culture within the learning environment.
3. Vulnerability Creates Safety: The facilitator's authentic expression of vulnerability (a self-disclosing stroke) is what models and establishes psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018). Papaux (2016) argues that this vulnerability is the initial key to unlocking the circle of interconnectedness, moving the interaction from a professional contract to a genuine human-to-human connection.

Vignette: Stepping into Critical Interrelationship

My own experience, designing and delivering a 'Power of Strokes' workshop after a significant hiatus, confirmed that a facilitator's personal growth and authenticity are integral to professional competence.

Initially, returning to a large TA workshop triggered self-doubt, leading to immobilization and denial (Hay, 1996). I questioned my capability of adopting an "I am Not OK, You are OK" life position (Ernst, 1981) relative to my co-facilitator. Consequently, I operated seemingly from Adult Ego State at the social level but at the psychological level predominantly from my Child Ego State (Berne, 1961), seeking guidance and validation.

This internal state significantly influenced my interactions with my co-facilitator. Our collaborative planning, initially Adult-to-Adult (social level), quickly became an ulterior Parent-Child transaction (psychological level) when I experienced her statements such as, "Do start preparing." and "Let me review this." as directives. I felt overlooked (Child Ego State) while I craved partnership (Adult Ego State). This lack of reciprocal strokes perpetuated my feeling of being "Not OK."

The breakthrough came with vulnerability. I consciously shared my insecurities with my co-facilitator: my break from facilitation and my nervousness about the large,

unfamiliar audience. My choice to be Vulnerable, rooted in my Adult ego state, was a powerful stroke (Choy, 1990) – an invitation for authentic connection, demonstrating a willingness to ask for positive strokes.

To my relief, my co-facilitator reciprocated, revealing her own similar fears. This shared vulnerability created a profound circle of interconnectedness (Papaux, 2016). The shift pulled us out of the unconscious Drama Triangle (Karpman, 1968) – where I was the Victim and into the Winner's Triangle (Choy, 1990). This authentic exchange moved us both to an "I am OK, You are OK" life position (Ernst, 1971). This personal shift was crucial for me to facilitate a workshop on recognition; I first had to model its power. A facilitator's professional skill is tied to their own personal growth.

With this insight firmly established, the planning process shifted from merely developing content to meticulously crafting an experience where connection was not accidental, but intentional.

DESIGNING FOR CONNECTION: CULTIVATING A STROKING CULTURE IN WORKSHOPS

This personal shift profoundly impacted the subsequent design, transforming the workshop into a space where authentic connection and the exchange of strokes could flourish. The design became a deliberate act of creating psychological safety and modeling desired behaviors.

1. The Foundation for Safety: Intentional Contracting

To create a safe and effective learning environment, we implemented clear contracting at multiple levels particularly focusing on the following:

- Three-Cornered Contracting (English, 1975): We established clear Adult-to-Adult agreements between the Facilitator and HR leaders to align on intentions, ensuring the organizational goals did not conflict with participant needs.
- Psychological Contracting: With participants, we used the "Broken Window Activity" (Wilson & Kelling, 1982) - a co-creation exercise where participants defined undesirable behaviors (e.g., late arrivals) and formulated ground rules. By having them articulate the ground rules, they took ownership. This collaborative boundary setting created a safe container where ownership, vulnerability and genuine interaction could emerge.

2. Strategic Application of TA Principles in Activity Design

The program activities were structured not as mere exercises, but as experiences designed to introduce, explore, and practice strokes.

Application (Vignette)	TA Principle Applied (Why it Works)	Behavioral Change Unlocked
Personal Storytelling (Facilitators share deep stories of pivotal strokes)	**Modeling Vulnerability & Stroking:** Humanizes the process and builds trust	**Emotional Connection and Initial Trust**
Small Group Sharing (Participants share significant stroke stories in intimate groups)	**Experiential Grounding**affirms recognition hunger and builds bonds	**Empathy and Interconnectedness**
"Bragging" Activity (Participants self-affirm while being cheered)	**Confronting Cultural Parent (Drego,1983):** Challenges societal injunctions that restrict positive strokes	**Empowerment** –Identifies and challenges deeply ingrained limiting beliefs about self-affirmation
Asking for Strokes (Small group activity where participants explicitly ask others for recognition)	**Autonomy:** Addresses the **Child Ego State's or Parental Contamination** reluctance to ask for needs; crucial for taking responsibility	**Courage and Skill** to proactively seek recognition
Gratitude Exercise (Facilitated practice of expressing genuine gratitude)	**Mindset Shift:** Cultivates the habit of actively seeking and acknowledging positive contributions by the particpants	**Internalization** of positive stroking habits

Table 2. Intentional Design: Mapping Learning Vignettes to Transactional Analysis Principles and Consequent Changes

3. The Power of Modeling: Two Facilitation Vignettes

Vignette 1: Modeling Vulnerability Leading to Deep Connection

For instance, in a recent leadership workshop, I intentionally modeled vulnerability by sharing a personal narrative of receiving a negative conditional stroke. I shared with the participants about the criticism I received for submitting a report late and my subsequent intrapsychic process of moving from Child defensive shame to an Adult request for repair. This stroke functioned as a catalyst for immediate psychological safety, granting the group implicit permission to bypass superficial pastimes and move toward intimacy (Berne, 1961). The resulting experiential grounding was profound;

previously quiet groups became animated, sharing pivotal career moments where unconditional positive strokes had prevented attrition. Ultimately, this authentic emotional connection transformed abstract concepts into tangible tools for autonomy (Berne, 1966), enabling participants to internalize the ability to proactively ask for strokes not as soft theory, but as a strategic capability for professional survival.

This example illustrates the application of the Circle of Interconnectedness and the shift from the Drama Triangle to the Winner's Triangle through authentic facilitation.

Vignette 2: Withholding Vulnerability leading Superficial Compliance

Conversely, in an earlier intervention involving a senior client group, I adopted a professional mask, to maintain a facade of competence. By sanitizing examples and withholding personal vulnerability, I inadvertently modeled the Cultural Parent injunction - Don't show weakness, establishing an emotional distance that relegated participants to Not-OK positions (Ernst, 1971). This lack of psychological safety caused the subsequent work to stagnate at the level of pastimes characterized by stroke deficit (Berne, 1964) and a retreat into technical compliance. When I responded to this inertia with Controlling Parent directives, the opportunity for experiential grounding was lost; participants achieved only an intellectual grasp of the material without emotional buy-in, resulting in a low transfer of learning where outcomes were limited to abstract policy planning rather than sustained behavioral change.

These examples demonstrate the choice to be authentic and intentionally use the idea of strokes as not merely a style preference, but as a design decision that can determine the strategic outcome of the intervention.

The facilitator's vulnerability is the simplest and most powerful way to align a professional workshop with the humanistic principle of respect for the person.

It says: "*I come in not just as a facilitator, but as a fellow human being.*"

This act of authentic connection immediately helps the participants to switch their internal state from a fearful, reactive Child to a collaborative, learning Adult, making deep transformation possible.

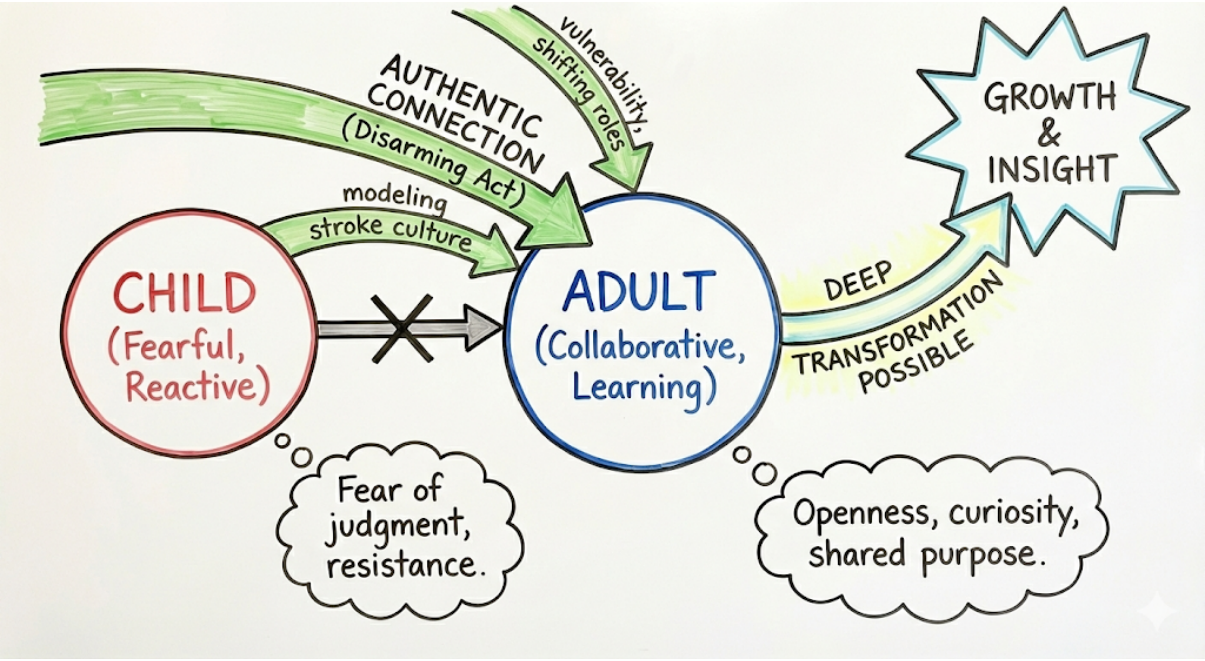

Figure 2. The Psychological Shift Facilitated by Vulnerability

CONCLUSION: THE HARD TRUTH ABOUT SOFT SKILL

The health of an organization depends on the health of its connections. Stroke is the vital currency of connection. When recognition fails, organizations suffer a hard cost: talent leaves and trust erodes. The key is to model change by moving with vulnerability from positions of "Not Okness" to an authentic "I'm OK, You are OK" stance, where leaders can create psychological safety.

AI Disclosure: The author affirms that AI was used only for editorial assistance and that all content presented is original and takes full responsibility for the work.

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THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ON THE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF NEW MOTHERS

N HEMA SREEDHARAN

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines how socio-economic conditions shape the emotional well-being of new mothers after childbirth, focusing on lower-income, middle-class, and upper-middle-class groups. Although the forms of support and expectations differ across these groups, mothers share a common emotional experience described as maternal post-natal invisibility. After childbirth, women are largely valued for what they do, for example, caring for the baby, managing household responsibilities, or maintaining an ideal body, while their emotions, struggles, and personal experiences receive little attention.

Lower-income mothers often feel pressure to return to work quickly and remain resilient. Middle-class mothers are expected to follow family traditions and social norms, while upper-middle-class mothers face pressure to recover fast and perform motherhood perfectly. Across all groups, appreciation is conditional and tied to performance, which discourages emotional expression and leaves mothers feeling unseen. The study concludes that post-natal invisibility is rooted in social and cultural expectations rather than individual weakness, highlighting the need for greater emotional recognition of mothers as individuals, not only as caregivers.

Keywords: *Post-natal Invisibility, Maternal Mental Health, Socio-economic, New Mothers, Transactional Analysis, Drivers, Injunctions, Cultural Parent, Strokes*

INTRODUCTION

While motherhood is often celebrated as a joyful journey, lived experiences of new mothers in India reveal a striking paradox: abundant support during pregnancy is often replaced by a sudden sense of invisibility after childbirth. In my work as a Transactional Analysis (TA) therapist, as well as through my involvement with a women's charitable organization supporting underprivileged women, I have had the opportunity to engage with women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This engagement initially inspired me to study the mental well-being of women across lower-income, middle-class, and upper-middle-class groups during the pregnancy phase.

What I encountered, however, shifted the direction of my inquiry. During pregnancy, women across these groups often described receiving abundant support from their partners, in-laws, parents, and extended families. Pregnancy was seen as a collective event, marked by attention, care, and shared responsibility. Yet, the picture after childbirth was strikingly different. Many women reported a sudden decline in attention and care once the baby arrived. Their own needs seemed to recede into the background, replaced by a singular focus on the child. Several mothers expressed feeling

as though their role was reduced to that of a *vehicle for childbirth*, questioning whether the care and concern they received during pregnancy had been directed toward them as individuals or solely for the well-being of the unborn.

The shift in maternal identity varied by socio-economic status, culture, and family dynamics across all classes, yet postnatal invisibility was a constant. Based in urban India, the research explores how class and culture intersect to influence postnatal experiences and the resulting psychological health of new mothers.

TA offers a powerful lens to examine how Cultural Parent messages, strokes, injunctions, and drivers shape the mental well-being of mothers. TA, developed by Eric Berne, is a psychological model for understanding human behavior and communication. Drivers are visible behaviors or messages that people follow to get strokes (recognition) offering a conditional OK-ness e.g., *Be Strong, Be Perfect*. Injunctions are powerful, unconscious *Don't* messages received in early childhood (e.g., *Don't Feel*, *Don't Slow Down*) from parents or parental figures. The interplay between these drivers and injunctions forms an individual's life script. A life script formulated in childhood, based on a person's interpretations of early experiences and parental injunctions, which unconsciously directs a person's behavior in major aspects of life.

The purpose of this paper is to:

1. To investigate the socio-economic influences on the mental well-being of new mothers in India across different categories based on their income, such as lower income, middle-class, and upper-middle-class income.

2. To analyze these experiences through the framework of Transactional Analysis, with a specific focus on Cultural Parent messages, ego states, strokes, injunctions, and drivers.

3. To identify patterns, if any, that emerged across all the categories that appeared similar and yet different.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Despite growing institutional deliveries, postnatal follow-up for mothers remains inconsistent, leaving a gap at precisely the stage when mental-health needs peak (Patel et al., 2023).

Socio-economic position plays a major role. Lower-income mothers disproportionately experience financial strain, food insecurity, and inadequate housing, often without access to social entitlements or maternity leave (Choudhary et al., 2024). By contrast, middle- and upper-middle-class mothers may access private healthcare and domestic help, but face social pressures related to appearance and respectability (Patel et al., 2023). The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, which extended paid leave to 26 weeks, primarily benefits formal-sector employees while excluding the vast

majority of informal-sector mothers (Ghosh & Arokiasamy, 2020). National surveys confirm persistent wealth and urban-rural gradients in access to maternal services (International Institute for Population Sciences [IIPS] & ICF, 2021).

However, economic resources alone cannot account for maternal experiences. Qualitative studies in India show that while pregnancy brings heightened care and attention, this often shifts almost exclusively to the infant after birth (Nair et al., 2021). Kinship networks, particularly mothers-in-law, offer indispensable practical support but simultaneously impose prescriptive norms around feeding, confinement, and caregiving (Kaul, 2019). This paradox sustains infant well-being while invalidating the mother, rendering her visible only as a caregiver but invisible as a person (Upadhyay et al., 2017). Many clinicians in India note that mothers describe being valued during pregnancy but reduced to a *vehicle for birth* afterwards (Kaul, 2019).

TA offers a powerful lens for understanding these dynamics. Drego (1983) articulated the concept of the Cultural Parent, situating maternal experience within shared societal norms and prohibitions that legitimize women's devaluation. Boulton (1983) showed how parental injunctions such as *Don't Feel* or *Don't Be Important* may appear protective but erode autonomy. Costello (1976) highlighted how these injunctions consolidate into enduring life scripts, frequently evident among Indian mothers in the expectations of sacrifice and modesty. McNeel (2010) extended this

analysis by emphasizing the injunctive power of cultural messages and the potential for therapeutic redecision to challenge them.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Although awareness of postpartum depression and related conditions has increased, postnatal mental health in India has not been given adequate priority in both policy and practice. Cultural and prescriptive family roles also exert a powerful influence on the new mothers. Transactional Analysis (TA), with its constructs of Cultural Parent messages, injunctions, drivers, and strokes, offers a unique lens to capture these layered influences. That is by bridging interpersonal transactions with intrapsychic processes. On an interpersonal level, the framework captures the exchange of strokes, where social and familial recognition is often made conditional upon the mother meeting specific cultural standards. These societal expectations are then internalized as intrapsychic, where injunctions and drivers dictate the mother's internal dialogue. By analyzing these constructs, the study reveals how the Cultural Parent functions as both an external social force and an intrapsychic, shaping maternal self-worth across different class intersections. This study is an attempt to use TA constructs to understand the postnatal experiences of lower-income, middle-class, and upper-middle-class mothers by addressing the maternal mental well-being within the intersections of class and culture.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design, using in-depth, semi-structured interviews to investigate the postnatal experiences of mothers across socio-economic urban groups in India.

This study gathered data from 66 new mothers, including 5 who were second-time mothers. The methodology combined structured questioning covering specific details like demographics, beliefs, traditions, and the type of support both during and after pregnancy, with a more in-depth, qualitative therapeutic enquiry. This study employs a qualitative research design, using in-depth, semi-structured interviews (questionnaire in the appendix) to investigate the postnatal experiences of mothers across socio-economic urban groups in India.

Sampling

Participants were selected to represent three socio-economic categories: lower-income, middle-class, and upper-middle-class households. Classification into these groups based on self-reported household income, occupation, education and access to resources, such as healthcare, and domestic help. Recruitment was facilitated through women's networks, community organizations, and referrals from maternal health practitioners. Eligible participants were mothers residing in urban India who had given

birth within the previous fifteen months and who consented to share their experiences. Sampling was designed to capture variation within each socio-economic group while enabling comparison across groups.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in the participants' preferred language (English, Hindi, or Kannada). Interviews were held either in person or via secure online platforms, depending on participant preference and accessibility. Informed verbal consent was obtained before each interview, and participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the process.

Demographic Breakdown

- Lower Class: Participants in this group were in the age group of 20-23 years with a maximum education level of 7th grade. Their self-income is less than two and a half lakhs per annum, and they work as house-helps or daily wage workers.
- Middle Class: Participants in this group were between 21 and 30 years old. They are well-educated, with all being graduates and some holding master's degrees. Their family income ranges from two lakhs to ten lakhs per annum (Family income is used as the primary financial source to

determine sampling due to the high rate of non-employment among the women.)

- Upper-Middle Class: This group comprised women between 33 and 39 years, highly educated with degrees such as B.E., postgraduate, and MBA. Their self-income is above five lakhs per annum. They work in professions such as IT, HR professionals and entrepreneurs.

Divergent Demographics

The study's class and income profiles (lower, middle and higher income) strengthen its validity. This segmentation is designed to explore the intersection of class and cultural expectations. Income variance is likely to yield differences in access to resources (domestic help, healthcare), a core study variable. This comparison makes it more likely that differences in Cultural Parent messages are linked to each group's unique socio-economic script.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interview data was analyzed using a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method that involves systematically identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning across a dataset by dividing the data into codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial coding was performed by reading the text line by line and identifying

recurring themes. At this stage, the focus was on observing these themes rather than interpreting them. As the analysis deepened, it was increasingly viewed through the lens of the Cultural Parent, along with patterns of strokes, drivers, and injunctions. Finally, a socio-economic lens was applied to compare experiences across income groups and family contexts to examine how material resources and forms of support differed. This exploratory approach moved from literal descriptions toward a deep psychological understanding of the mothers' internal and social realities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study reveals that while the tangible experiences of mothers in India differ significantly across socio-economic classes, their underlying emotional struggles are linked by a common thread: maternal post-natal invisibility. This core phenomenon appears to be shaped by class-specific Cultural Parent messages, which, through a system of injunctions and conditional strokes, make a mother feel seen only when she conforms to a rigid set of expectations.

Class-Specific Findings

Lower income mothers

For lower-income mothers, the Cultural Parent is defined by the narrative of survival and resilience. Their post-natal mental well-being is heavily influenced by the economic need to return to work immediately. Common messages such as *"Getting back*

to work will help your body recover faster" reinforced the belief that the labor of work itself is therapeutic.

The cultural message they internalize is *Be Strong* which functions as a powerful driver to disregard physical and emotional pain. For instance, a participant recalled her mother returning to work within days of childbirth, a story celebrated within the family as a symbol of resilience. This narrative, however, suppresses emotional expressions. In practice, most women in this group returned to either daily labor or domestic chores within a few days, driven by fear of wage loss and the risk of reprimand from both family members and employers. These messages are internalized as the *Please Others* driver. The technicality of this cultural message was clear: the sooner a woman resumed work, the more she was seen as strong and responsible.

The dominant drivers across this group were *Please Others* and *Be Strong*. Behind this compliance, many women described sadness and frustration at not being able to rest or spend time with their newborns. Emotional expression was discouraged, quote *"When I cry, my family starts shouting,"*, reinforcing the injunction, *Don't Feel*. While another recalled being told, *"Don't act like only you have given birth." Don't complain* and *Don't be Important*, silenced their need for care or comfort. A clear message that their needs were secondary to their role as a provider.

Lower-income mothers face stroke deprivation, with recognition tied only to productivity. Domestic workers experienced profound invisibility as employers focused solely on the infant, ignoring the mother's health post-birth. Economic necessity to immediately resume work became the primary driver shaping their restrictive Cultural Parent narrative.

Middle Income Mothers

Among middle-income mothers, the Cultural Parent operated on two simultaneous fronts. On one side, traditional, required obedience to elders and the upholding of family traditions; on the other, urban ideals demanded slimness and presentability before husbands, peers, and others. These dual expectations placed mothers under pressure and confusion.

Families, often including extended relatives, offered a steady stream of advice, framed as care, but this left mothers overwhelmed, caught between gratitude for the attention and fear of the consequences of non-compliance. For example, mothers were often given calorie-rich foods, such as ghee-laden dishes, accompanied by the Cultural Parent message: *"This is good for both mother and child."* Many participants recalled the same time, being scolded by doctors for gaining too much weight. This left them confused about whom to listen to. The contradiction was sharp, while the family emphasized nourishment, society also expected mothers to quickly regain slimness and

meet ideals of attractiveness. This constant surveillance reinforces the driver, *Please Others*, and the *Be Perfect*. On the Technicalities (Drego,1996) of the Cultural Parent, she obeys instructions so that "*nothing untoward happens to the baby*." At the emotional level, this carried both fear of consequences and the frustration of not being able to do things her way.

The family's guidance often comes with powerful injunctions. Few of them recalled wanting to rest while her baby slept, but their elders admonished them*, "In our time, we did all the work and still looked after the child."* (*Don't Rest*). Forcing them to suppress their needs and wants. Messages like *"We have been following these rituals for generations, we know it will work*", or "*We have more experience*" One participant shared that she did not want a particular ceremony and explained her reasons. In response, family members dismissed her views with remarks such as, *"Children these days use the internet and think they know everything."* Giving the injunctions *Don't think* and *Don't Question* and positioning the mother as someone who must obey rather than reflect.

In terms of strokes, recognition flowed primarily toward the family members who were *"taking care"* of the mother rather than to the mother herself. One participant noted how visitors would compliment her mother-in-law for *"looking after the new mother so well,"* while no one acknowledged her exhaustion or the effort involved in nursing the baby.

The socioeconomic conditions of middle-class mothers had stability and access to both traditional extended family structures and modern urban ideals. The Cultural Parent operated on a foundation of dual expectations and constant surveillance.

Upper middle-income mothers

For upper-middle-class mothers, the Cultural Parent is shaped by a globalized *supermom* ideal. Despite having access to domestic help, nannies, and financial comfort, these women report feeling constantly anxious and drained. Recognition came not only for childcare but for projecting an image of effortless success, like slim, stylish, competent, and professionally active.

Mothers shared that they felt pressure to join postnatal fitness classes within weeks of delivery, follow diets, or document *happy moments* on social media to show they were doing well. Comments like, *"You must bounce back quickly and look as good as before,"* or *"Don't let motherhood slow down your career,"* were common. One mother described taking work calls while breastfeeding; another spoke of planning her baby's photoshoot while still recovering.

The dominant drivers are Be Strong, Hurry Up and Be Perfect. They are expected to immediately bounce back to their pre-pregnancy bodies, document perfect moments on social media, and seamlessly integrate work with motherhood. The Technicalities of this Cultural Parent message showed up in strict diets, fitness

routines, constant use of online resources and parenting books, reliance on nannies or house help, and carefully balancing work-from-home jobs. This efficient, planned way of managing motherhood created a sense of being in control but left little room for emotional rest or self-care. Many mothers shared feelings constantly tired, anxious, or emotionally drained, even though they had material comfort and support. Some also spoke of unacknowledged grief at not being able to meet everyone's expectations. One participant expressed, "With all these resources, I still feel guilty for struggling. Everyone expects me to just get it done without complaint, but I don't feel seen or understood."

Family pressures added to this conflict; in-laws often advised taking a career break since money was not an issue, while parents emphasized continuing a career as proof of education and progress. The injunctions they face are subtly different, such as *Don't Slow Down* and *Don't Relax*. When it came to strokes, upper-middle-class mothers often received recognition, but many felt hesitant to fully accept it. Appreciation often came with *strings attached*; more meant more expectations, more pressure, and the fear of disappointing others.

The socioeconomic conditions of upper-middle-class mothers, characterized by financial comfort, access to global ideals, and domestic support, the Cultural Parent were defined by the globalized *supermom* narrative.

Convergence Across Group

Across all income groups, whether living in slums, apartments, or gated communities, mothers shared one common feeling: they were emotionally unseen or had maternal post-natal invisibility. While mothers are highly visible as caregivers, cultural bearers, and ritual participants, they are profoundly invisible as emotional beings with their own needs. Regardless of income, the mothers in this study were seen only through the lens of what they could do for others, be it physical labor, social compliance, or the achievement of an ideal image.

Divergence Across Groups

Across class groups, the Cultural Parent conveyed different messages about what makes a *good mother* shaping how strokes were given.

- Lower-income mothers: The Cultural Parent emphasized survival and resilience. Operating on the *Be Strong* driver. This societal script, often stemming from generations of poverty and physical labor, sends a powerful injunction of *Don't Rest*. The mother is given positive conditional strokes *("you're so resilient")* only when she embodies this strength and returns to work quickly. Her worth is tied to her physical productivity, and any expression of pain or exhaustion is met with a lack of recognition, reinforcing the stroke deprivation of her Child ego state.

- Middle-class mothers: The Cultural Parent is a dual-natured entity operating on a *Please Others* driver. This is reinforced by the injunctions *Don't Think* and *Don't Question* which demand obedience to traditional family norms. These mothers are taught to seek approval from elders and society by conforming to a specific, respectable image. They receive conditional strokes for upholding rituals and traditions but are given negative or no strokes for expressing personal needs or differing opinions. This system maintains their visibility as a compliant family member while rendering their authentic self and inner child's needs invisible.
- Upper-middle-class mothers: The Cultural Parent operates with a *Be Perfect* driver, layered with a sense of urgency, the *Hurry Up* driver. This script, influenced by both modern professional life and global *supermom* ideals, sends a clear injunction of *Don't Slow Down* and *Don't Make Mistakes*. Strokes are highly conditional and performance based. They are expected to project an image of effortless success, maintain a slim figure, juggle a career, and raise a perfect child. When she shows vulnerability or struggle, her Child ego state is not nurtured, and she is met with a lack of unconditional strokes, leading to emotional isolation and stroke deprivation, despite her material comforts.

Category	Lower-Income Mothers	Middle-Class Mothers	Upper Middle-Class Mothers
Cultural Parent Messages	Return to labour/domestic work within days, wage loss fears, labour seen as therapeutic, resilience stories celebrated	Obedience to elders, calorie-rich foods vs. medical advice, rituals enforced, and body image surveillance	Strict diets, fitness routines, early return to work, social media curation, reliance on nannies, and multitasking work and childcare
Injunctions	*Don't Feel ("When I cry, my family shouts"), Don't Complain, Don't Be Important*	*Don't Rest ("In our time we did all the work"), Don't Think, Don't Question ("Children these days think they know everything")*	*Don't Slow Down, Don't Relax, Don't Struggle (guilt if coping fails)*
Drivers	*Please Others, Be Strong*	*Please Others, Be Perfect*	*Be Perfect, Be Strong, Hurry Up*
Strokes & Visibility	Recognition only for productivity/resilience. Visibility through hard work, baby gets most strokes	Recognition flows to in-laws/husband for *care.* Mother's visibility is only through compliance and perfectionism	Strokes are conditional, often for appearance /competence, praise redirected to husband or baby. Visibility tied to perfectionist performance, emotional needs unseen

Table 1. Glance at Data Across Groups

SUMMARY/FINDINGS

Traditional post-natal practices such as confinement, special diets, and ritual baths were originally intended to support maternal recovery, rest, and breastfeeding. However, many of these practices have shifted from care to control, prioritizing ritual correctness over the mother's emotional well-being. Postnatal invisibility differs from general social neglect because it follows a period of intense attention during pregnancy, creating a paradoxical form of neglect. While new mothers are highly visible in their caregiving roles, managing lactation, sleep deprivation, and physical recovery, they remain emotionally unseen. Unlike workplace invisibility, postnatal invisibility represents the structural and emotional erasure of the self during a time of physiological depletion. Across income groups, mothers experience stroke deprivation; they receive practical

support yet feel emotionally isolated. Their authentic self, the Child ego state, remains unacknowledged, while their Parent role is praised and silenced by injunctions such as "Don't complain." Boulton (1983) demonstrated how parental injunctions such as "Don't feel" or "Don't be important" may appear protective but erode autonomy. How, then, can we create conditions that restore and sustain a new mother's autonomy?

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study highlight that maternal post-natal invisibility is not just an individual struggle, but a structural and cultural phenomenon perpetuated by the cultural parent. In each class group, this cultural parent communicates different ideals, functioning as powerful injunctions or drivers (don't *be a child, don't relax, be perfect*). These are reinforced by conditional strokes that make mothers feel visible only when they comply.

Therapeutic Implications

For therapists, the findings underscore the importance of helping mothers identify and challenge the Cultural Parent voices they've internalized. The goal is to help them recognize that their struggles aren't personal failings but the outcome of inherited cultural messages. By using TA, therapists can guide mothers to distinguish these messages from their authentic needs, strengthening their Nurturing Parent and

Adult ego states. This process validates the inner Child's long-silenced needs for rest, affection, and unconditional strokes *("You are okay just as you are").* Involving partners and family in this work is also crucial to redistribute responsibility and foster emotional attunement, reducing the burden mothers carry alone.

Societal Implications

At a societal level, challenging the Cultural Parent becomes a collective task. Cultural narratives that glorify sacrifice, obedience, or perfection must be questioned and replaced with new scripts that affirm mothers' individuality and emotions. For instance, traditional practices like postnatal confinement can be reinterpreted, shifting from rigid ritual correctness toward genuine support for maternal recovery. Workplaces need to create structures that normalize shared caregiving. The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, which largely supports the formal sector, highlights a key question of how to extend similar entitlements to informal-sector mothers who face the greatest vulnerabilities. Ultimately, both therapeutic and social interventions require a shift in the economy of strokes. Mothers should not only be praised when they sacrifice, comply, or perform flawlessly, but also recognized unconditionally for their presence, emotions, and humanity.

FURTHER SCOPE OF RESEARCH

Future research could extend these findings by examining the impact of maternal invisibility on child development and long-term family functioning across diverse socio-cultural contexts. Similar studies involving rural women would offer valuable comparative insights. Longitudinal research exploring the role of the Cultural Parent in the development and course of postnatal depression would further deepen understanding of these dynamics over time.

CONCLUSION

This study addressed the central research question: how do socio-economic conditions shape the mental well-being of new mothers in urban India? Using Transactional Analysis, the research identified a universal phenomenon of maternal post-natal invisibility, where mothers are valued as caregivers but ignored as individuals. Findings reveal that society's Cultural Parent links a mother's worth to her actions, not for her being, making strokes conditional, contingent on *strength (low-income), obedience (middle-class), or perfection (upper-middle-class)*. All groups suffer from a lack of emotional recognition and the suppression of their authentic Child ego state.

The broader implications of this invisibility are significant for postnatal depression. When a mother's emotional distress is *silenced or discounted*, the risk of undiagnosed post-natal depression increases, as her struggle is hidden behind a mask

of cultural compliance. Furthermore, this environment impacts parenting. A mother whose own emotional needs are invisible may find it harder to remain emotionally present for her child.

AI Disclosure: The author affirms that AI was used only for editorial assistance and that all content presented is original and takes full responsibility for the work.

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also about helping people rediscover their inner strength. Hema can be reached at hemasreedharan@yahoo.com

APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE

I. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- *Participant Background: Age, marital status, education level, and current occupation.*
- *Economic Status: Individual and household income levels.*
- *Family Structure: Do you live in a nuclear or extended family setup?*
- *Pregnancy History: Number of previous pregnancies, complications (if any), and access to healthcare/information.*

II. BUILDING CONTACT

- *Please tell me a little about yourself.*
- *What does your typical day look like right now?*
- *How much help do you have available (e.g., nannies, family, or domestic help)?*

III. THE PREGNANCY EXPERIENCE

- *How would you describe your pregnancy?*
- *What kind of support or care did you receive, and from whom?*
- *During pregnancy, did you feel important and cared for as an individual?*

IV. THE POST-NATAL EXPERIENCE

- *How was your delivery experience, and how did your physical health change after the baby arrived?*
- *Did you receive the same level of support after the baby was born as you did during pregnancy?*
- *Did people ask how you were feeling? Who specifically asked, and who did not?*
- *How did things change for you personally after the birth?*
- *In the first few months, how did you feel most of the time?*

V. EMOTIONAL ASPECT

- *When you experienced feelings like exhaustion or sadness, what was the reaction when you expressed these to your partner or family?*
- *What happened when you showed signs of physical pain or tiredness? Were these needs acknowledged and supported, or were they dismissed?*
- *If you disagreed with an elder's advice regarding the baby (rituals, feeding, etc.), what were the social or emotional consequences of questioning those traditions? How did that experience affect you?*

VI. PARENTAL MESSAGES

- *Growing up, what did you hear and observe about the women in your family after they had babies?*
- *What specific expectations did people have of you as a new mother?*

- *What traditions or rules are you following right now (e.g., diet, confinement, social media, return to work or any other)?*
- *Do these practices feel like a meaningful choice that connects you to your heritage, or do they feel like requirements you follow simply to avoid judgment or family conflict?*

VII. STROKE ECONOMY

- *After childbirth, when did people praise or appreciate you?*
- *What were you mostly appreciated for (e.g., being a good mother, resilience, appearance)?*
- *Did anyone appreciate or criticize you when you were tired or emotionally drained?*
- *How about when you performed or did something?*
- *Can you think of instances when your needs were ignored in favor of the baby's or the family's needs? Can you share them?*

VIII. REFLECTION

- *What was the hardest part of this time for you?*
- *What kind of support would you want or wish for after childbirth?*
- *If people really wanted to understand new mothers, what is the most important thing they should acknowledge about your experience*

DEVELOPMENTAL TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS: TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS FOR GROWTH

PIYUSH DIXIT AND ERIC JAMES

ABSTRACT

This article offers a guide to Developmental Transactional Analysis (DTA) for Transactional Analysis practitioners, supporting both personal and professional growth in the fields of Education, Counselling, and Organization. It serves as an invitation to explore DTA, highlighting the philosophical basis of DTA and the practical ways its utility can enhance developmental work.

Key Words: *Autonomy, Strokes, Life Script, Contract, Physis, Growth, Resource-building, Developmental Transactional Analysis, Counseling, Education, Organization*

INTRODUCTION

DTA is characterized by a fundamental philosophical shift from a *deficit trap* (focusing on what's broken) to a *Physis Focus* (emphasizing inherent health and potential). Citing Julie Hay (2012), the article posits: "we are not broken: we are growing; we don't need fixing: we need fertilizer".

The core distinction between therapeutic work and DTA lies in purpose:

- Psychotherapy aims for script cure, resolving psychological pain through past exploration, transference, and script analysis (Clarkson, 1992; Erskine, 1980).

- DTA aims for health, growth, and autonomy within a present-day, future-focused context. It aligns with positive psychology by building on strengths and using here-and-now awareness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and practical tools like the Steps to Success (Hay, 2009), Autonomy Matrix (Stewart & Joines, 2002), etc.

DTA is presented in terms of three fields – counselling, education, and organization – with specific contract, stakeholders and primary goals. The effectiveness of DTA is explained through its focus on resource-building (e.g., emotional literacy, boundary-setting, stroke economy), which echoes Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001) by promoting positive emotional states necessary for sustained psychological growth. Through illustrative examples, the article demonstrates how DTA's emphasis on skill and capacity development provides an efficient, non-clinical route to behavioral change and autonomy, making TA's power accessible to leaders, coaches, counselors and educators.

SETTING THE STAGE

Let's start with an honest question for anyone dedicated to personal or professional development: Are you looking for a framework that drives tangible, sustainable growth without requiring clinical diagnosis and healing?

In the world of coaching (also in leadership, and learning & development), we often fall into what we call the *deficit trap*. *Soft skills* focus on interpersonal, behavioral, and emotional abilities that enable effective interaction with others and navigation of interpersonal dynamics, etc., distinct from technical *hard skills*. We believe that when we focus on soft skills the language almost instinctively turns to *fixing* what's broken. This perspective, while well-intentioned, often overlooks the immense, inherent potential already present in every person and focuses mainly on the problem to be solved instead of working with talent, waiting to be unleashed. But what if we shifted our lens entirely?

DTA is a fundamentally health-focused and growth-oriented approach that transfers the immense power of TA seen in therapy, into the hands of leaders, coaches, counselors and educators. The fundamental difference is not in the theory itself, but in how it is applied.

EXPLORING ORIGINS

Historically, psychotherapy was the original application of TA theory, with the other fields of specialization emerging as the theory's versatility was recognized. Table 3 outlines our interpretation of how DTA has evolved in parallel with other dominant psychological approaches in each decade, demonstrating the versatility of its core theory as new applications and focus areas emerged in response to prevailing psychological thought.

Era	Dominant Psychological Approach	Transactional Analysis Focus (School/Model)	Core Focus/Philosophy	Key Concepts/Tools
1960s (Origin)	Psychoanalysis/Clinical Focus (Focus on Illness & Dysfunction) (Berne,1960)	TA-Psychotherapy (Classical School)	Focus on Pathology & Script Cure	Ego States, Transactions, Games, Life Script
1970s-1980s	Cognitive & Behavioral Therapies (CBT, Learned Helplessness, Depression Models) (Beck, 1970)	Classical, Redecision, Cathexis TA (Expanding Applications)	Focus on Healing & Change (Deficit/Conflict Models). Application expanded beyond clinical setting	Injunctions, Redecision, Reparenting (methods varied by school)
1990s-Present	Positive Psychology (Optimism, Strengths, Well-being) (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) Cognitive Neuroscience: Gazzaniga, M. S., Ivry, R. B., & Mangun, G. R. (1998) Cultural Psychology (Bruner, 1990)	Relational TA (Hargaden & Sills, 2002), Co-creative TA (Summer & Tudor, 2000), Eco TA (Barrow & Marshal, 2020), Developmental TA (Hay,2012)	Focus on Well-being & Growth (Physis). People are not broken; they are growing. Change is achieved by building resources now	Physis, Autonomy Matrix, Steps to Success, Health & Development Contract

Table 1. Evolution of Developmental Transactional Analysis

The International Transactional Analysis Association (ITAA), founded in 1964, formalized the application of TA into four distinct fields. Julie Hay coined the term Developmental Transactional Analysis (DTA) in the mid-1990s, not as a new field of TA, but a specific *approach* applied within the non-psychotherapy fields. The DTA approach can be described in terms of its focus and primary goals as follows:

Field	Core Focus of TA Application	Primary Goal
Counselling	Building awareness, options, and resources for daily living. (James & Jongeward, 1971)	Enhance client strengths and identify/build their resources and skills relevant for problem management and personal development
Education	Applying TA to the learning process (pedagogical and andrologogical strategies, learner identity). (Olander, 1983)	Enhance learning effectiveness
Organization	Systemic contracts, organizational culture, and strategic goals.(Summers & Tuckett, 1987)	Improve organizational productivity and effectiveness by linking TA principles to performance

Table 2. Fields of Developmental Transactional Analysis Application

These distinctions are not strict boundaries but practical ways to ensure the contract – the ethical agreement for change – is relevant to the system the individual operates within and lies within the core competency of the practitioner.

FEATURES OF DEVELOPMENTAL TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

TA is a robust theory with applications across several fields. DTA focuses on functional improvement in the *here and now* without inviting the client to regress into Child. Elements in the table are borrowed from (Hay, 1995) and shows the potency of DTA:

Feature	Developmental TA (DTA)
Handling of the Past	**Here-and-Now:** We acknowledge and learn from the past but do not invite regression. The focus is on how the past impacts *current* performance and choices.
Handling of Transference	The facilitator operates primarily from their Integrating Adult (Summers and Tudor, 2000) and evokes the same in the client, while recognizing and leveraging the awareness of their counter-transference.
The Contract	**Functional Change:** Aiming to improve how the personality *functions* (building a stronger house on the existing foundation) aiming at social control and symptomatic relief (Berne,1961)
Tools (Examples)	**Steps to Success (Hay, 2009):** Based on the Discount Matrix (Mellor and Schiff, 1975), Julie Hay simplifies the levels of discount into a step-wise sequence, leading to *success*
	Competence Curve (Hay, 2009): Julie Hay's application of the model proposed by Levin-Landheer (1982), to what happens when someone goes through a change process as an adult
	BARS and PRO success (Hay, 2009): Julie Hay presents a simplified model for the Racket system (Erskine and Zalcman (1979) that demonstrates more clearly the circular and self-fulfilling prophecy of this racket system.

Table 3. Features of Developmental Transactional Analysis

PTA is essential when the core issue stems from deep-seated psychological pain or restrictive childhood decisions, where the trauma may have happened in very early childhood or sometimes in later developmental stages as well. DTA, on the other hand, aligns with Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) by deliberately centering on the human drive – *Physis* (Berne, 1968, p.89) – to move toward health and autonomy. We aren't asking *what went wrong?* We're asking *how do you want to grow?* DTA prioritizes working with strengths and potential, contrasting with a primary focus on the deficit mindset. While both approaches may acknowledge strengths or deficits as

part of a continuum, DTA deliberately and primarily centers its intervention on the individual's inherent capabilities and what they want to grow into, rather than dwelling on the problem to be solved.

THE PHYSIS-INFORMED DEVELOPMENT MODEL

To operationalize the shift from a deficit model to a growth model, we propose the Physis-Informed Development Model. This framework synthesizes Berne's concept of physis - the internal force of nature that eternally strives to make things grow (Berne, 1968) with contemporary frameworks like the Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001) and Positive Psychology.

While traditional clinical approaches often ask *what is broken?*, DTA asks, *where is the growth trying to go?* (unleashing Physis). The liminal process might be understood as an episode in which physis loses direction (Barrow et al, 2020; Kurian, 2021). It is a time when the individual is likely to sense a loss in the capacity to thrive, even though it is a necessary episode by which growth occurs (Barrow et al, 2020). We apply this lens through three inquiries; who are we developing, what are we developing and how are we developing?

Inquiry	The Physis Focus (Unleashing Physis)	Theoretical Outcome
WHO are we developing?	**Evolving Identity:** Focus on 'I+ U+' potential (Ernst, 1971). Viewing the person as a 'becoming' entity rather than a diagnosis	**Autonomy:** The release of awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy (Berne, 1964)
WHAT are we developing?	**Capacity Building:** Focus on expanding existing strengths and 'fertilizing' latent potential (Hay, 2012)	**Functional Fluency:** Effective use of energy (Temple, 2002)
HOW are we developing?	**Flow/Transformation:** Psychological safety that encourages risk, play, and 'scaffolding' for growth	**The Growth Zone:** Moving beyond the comfort zone into the learning zone without entering the panic zone (Vygotsky, 1978)

Table 4. The Physis-Informed Development Matrix

By anchoring the 'Who, What, and How' in Physis, the practitioner shifts from a mechanic fixing a machine to a gardener tending an ecosystem.

DTA IN ACTION: AN APPLICATION VIEW

To understand the versatility of DTA, we examine its application across fields. While the core concepts (ego states, strokes, scripts, etc.) remain constant, the *contract* and *intervention* shift to suit the context. The following are some examples of DTA in action:

1. Example One:

Sarah, a newly promoted Vice President who is technically brilliant but struggling to lead her former peers. She is exhibiting high stress and micromanaging behaviors.

- Who are we developing: A high-potential leader operating primarily from a *Be Perfect* Driver (Kahler, 1975) and an Adapted Child ego state. Sarah believes she must do it all to justify her promotion, leading to burnout and

a refusal to delegate. She is professionally competent but psychologically insecure in her new identity.

- What are we developing: The intervention aims to cultivate Autonomy – defined by Berne (1964) as the recovery of awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy. By applying the Functional Fluency model (Temple, 2002), we will shift Sarah from *Over Functioning* – (the ineffective Controlling Parent mode) to *Effective Leading* (the Structuring and Nurturing modes). The psychological goal is to replace her *Be Perfect* driver with the Allower (Permission): *You are good enough as you are, and it is safe to make mistakes* (Kahler, 1975).
- How are we developing:

  Driver Analysis: We use the Drivers Questionnaire to help Sarah recognize her *Be Perfect* compulsion

  The Contract: We establish a social contract for delegation and a psychological contract for safety – assuring her that delegating is not a sign of weakness.

  Stroking Profile: We invite her to restructure her Stroke Economy. Instead of only accepting strokes for working hard (*doing*), she learns to accept strokes for *being*

2. Example Two

Maya is a high-achieving student whose performance is limited to solitary tasks. In social or public settings, she *freezes* – a physiological response. She prefers to be invisible , a survival strategy designed to avoid the perceived critical educator.

- Who are we developing: A learner operating under the Injunctions *Don't be Important* or *Don't Show Off* (Goulding & Goulding, 1979). These scripts create a psychological barrier to visibility. Maya's internal dialogue prioritizes safety through anonymity, suppressing her Free Child ego state in favor of a compliant, adapted silence.
- What are we developing: The objective is to increase Maya's comfort zone of safety. By doing so, we shift her focus from self-protection and enable her to engage in the observational and reciprocal interactions necessary for learning. We aim to replace her restrictive script with the Permission: *It is safe to be seen and heard* (Goulding & Goulding, 1979).
- How are we developing:
- Permissions: The educator provides specific Permissions (protection) by validating small contributions, signaling that mistakes are part of learning, not grounds for punishment. (Crossman, 1966)

- Contracting for Safety: We create clear ground rules through contracting (Steiner, 1971) for co-creating a non-judgmental environment, facilitating a safe environment, enabling her Free Child to emerge.
- We apply the concept of Scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976) to the delivery of Strokes (Steiner, 1971). This is a phased intervention:

  Foundation: Consistent Unconditional Positive Strokes for her mere presence (*I'm glad you're here today, Maya*), which builds the baseline of safety.

  Construction: As she gains confidence, the educator provides Conditional Positive Strokes for small, specific verbal contributions (*That was a clear point you made*).

  Fading: As her self-efficacy increases, the external *scaffolding* of constant strokes is gradually reduced as she begins to gain internal satisfaction from peer interaction.

CONCLUSION: EXTENDING TA APPLICATIONS IN THE LARGER CONTEXT

DTA is the bridge that makes the immense power of TA accessible and memorable in all developmental contexts. It is important to remember that DTA stands firmly on the solid, proven theories of TA across its diverse schools – it simply shifts the *application* from pathology to growth and thriving.

If your role/interest involves nurturing human growth, as a leader, counsellor, educator, faculty member, principal, a coach, or an L&D professional, DTA offers a practical, powerful, and ethical framework for commitment to growth, not just problem-solving.

AI Disclosure: The author affirms that AI was used only for editorial assistance and that all content presented is original and takes full responsibility for the work.

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THE SPIRAL OF BECOMING: FROM SCRIPTED SELVES TO THE SELF-AUTHORED FEMININE

RELATIONAL IDENTITY, CULTURAL CONDITIONING AND THERAPEUTIC IMPLICATIONS IN INDIA

PRIYA VEERARAGHAVAN

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how culturally inherited roles shape the feminine psyche in India. It introduces two concepts, *Social Scripts and Relational Inscriptions*, to explain how these roles are internalized and enacted. Grounded in clinical vignettes and regional Indian films, the paper illustrates how such patterns emerge in therapy and begin to shift. It also explores the *Self Authored Feminine*, a path shaped by inner clarity rather than cultural compliance. Although the focus is on cisgender women, the framework may resonate across identities. The paper offers a cultural lens on autonomy that honors both personal agency and relational belonging.

Keywords: *Social Scripts, Relational Inscriptions, Self-authorship, Cultural Parent, Cultural Shadow, Feminine Psyche, Deselfing, Self Authored Feminine*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary India presents a paradox: growing visibility and autonomy for women coexist with enduring expectations of self-sacrifice, emotional labour, and moral conformity. Despite outward shifts in gender discourse, many inner worlds remain shaped by inherited roles.

Social Scripts emotionally charged identity roles, and *Relational Inscriptions*, unspoken culturally shaped and emotionally encoded cultural expectations that sustain them help understand how relational identities are formed, maintained, and sometimes re-authored.

Popular Indian films serve as reflective entry points for these patterns, especially for clients unfamiliar with psychological language. As Dermer and Hutchings (2000) note, films can offer emotionally and culturally resonant metaphors that support therapeutic insight. Composite clinical vignettes illustrate how these roles surface in therapy, how they are reinforced, and how therapeutic work can open space for redefinition and agency.

These patterns are not universal but are culturally specific. Future exploration may extend this lens to encompass queer, non-binary, and intersectional experiences. I focus on the feminine psyche here because, beneath the surface of progress, many women remain bound by inherited roles.

Alongside these recurring patterns, I also explore the *Self-Authored Feminine*, a developmental arc that is not shaped by adaptation but by an early leaning toward inner clarity. This parallel path is introduced as a counterpoint to scripting, and as a reminder of what becomes possible when culture is met with authorship rather than compliance.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Transactional Analysis (TA), first developed by Eric Berne (1961), offers a rich framework for understanding how identity roles are transmitted, internalized, and reinforced through early experience and relational environments (Berne,1961).

1. The Cultural Parent and the Cultural Shadow

Drego (1983) extended Berne's (1972) life script theory through the *Cultural Parent*, a cluster of internalized norms around etiquette, skill, and character, prescribing how a woman should behave and who she must become. Complementing this, the *Cultural Shadow* (Drego, 1996) reflects the emotional pull of these norms, often experienced as guilt or fear when deviating from them.

Together, they show how cultural identity is shaped not only by what is taught, but by what is felt. This foundation sets the stage for understanding *Social Scripts* and *Relational Inscriptions*, the recurring roles women perform, and the social-emotional terms that sustain them.

2. Social Scripts and Relational Inscriptions

Building on this foundation, I introduce the term *Social Scripts* to describe emotionally internalized identity roles shaped by relational and cultural experience. These roles, such as the silent giver or self-sacrificing mother, are not consciously chosen. They are absorbed through early emotional cues, moral messaging, and social

reinforcement. Over time, they become default identities that feel non-negotiable, tied to the need for love, acceptance, and being seen as worthy.

To explain how these roles are sustained over time, I introduce *Relational Inscriptions*, unspoken culturally shaped, socially reinforced, and emotionally encoded understandings that govern what is permissible, desirable, or expected of women in order to maintain relational acceptance experienced through love, approval, belonging, or worthiness. These inscriptions are not upheld through explicit instruction, but through emotional cues such as gestures, silences, praise, or withdrawal that signal what one must do to remain "good," accepted, or valued. Over time, such expectations may be internalized as rules, for example: "A woman must not speak back," "A mother's love means sacrifice," or "Ambition should be tempered with humility."

The layered impact of these internalized expectations is what Jack (1991) terms deselfing, which refers to a gradual erosion of voice, desire, and agency in order to survive emotionally. This is not only psychological but deeply cultural, shaped by implicit ideals of femininity, love, and worthiness.

These four constructs form a layered map of how identity is shaped, conditioned, and potentially re-authored. Table 1 summarizes their distinctions.

Concept	Definition	Primary Focus	Distinction in This Paper
Cultural Parent	Internalised social and familial messages that prescribe ideal behaviours, values, and roles.	What must be upheld	Draws from Drego's TA framework that is used to understand inherited cultural norms and moral ideals shaping gender expectations.
Cultural Shadow	The part of the Child ego state (P1) that internalises the emotional impact of the Cultural Parent, often felt as a visceral pull toward conformity.	What is emotionally reinforced	Based on Drego's model, this explains how women may feel compelled to conform even when they intellectually reject imposed roles.
Social Scripts	Emotionally internalised identity roles shaped by relational and cultural experiences, often moralised and habitual.	What is performed	A new term introduced in this paper that refers to recurring culturally sanctioned roles (e.g., giver, mother, pleaser) seen in therapy and mirrored in film narratives.
Relational Inscriptions	Unspoken, culturally shaped, socially reinforced, and emotionally encoded understandings that govern what one must do to secure love, belonging, or approval.	What sustains the performance	A new term introduced in this paper that reveals the emotional and relational pressures (e.g., guilt, fear, pride) that keeps women aligned with Social Scripts.

Table 1. Foundational Concepts in the Shaping of Feminine Scripts

3. From Inheritance to Identity: The Interplay of Scripts, Inscriptions, and Shadow

Recognizing *Social Scripts* becomes vital as they are often cloaked in culturally admired traits like modesty, duty, or sacrifice. Without making these roles visible, therapy risks individualizing what is, in fact, a culturally reinforced survival pattern.

It begins with the internalization of messages from the *Cultural Parent*, which define idealized behaviors and roles. These are reinforced through *Relational Inscriptions*, the unspoken understandings that subtly govern belonging, approval, and acceptance. Over time, this conditioning embeds itself in the *Cultural Shadow*, where even the thought of breaking these expectations can evoke guilt, fear, or shame.

Together, these layers shape Social Scripts that are not freely chosen but enacted as conditions for love and safety.

Therapeutic movement begins with naming these dynamics, recognizing the *Cultural Shadow*, bringing Relational Inscriptions into awareness, and gently disrupting the performances that once ensured survival. This movement is rarely linear, it unfolds as a spiral, an ongoing turning inward and outward through recognition, resistance, and return to a self no longer defined by scripted roles. Figure 1 visualizes this unfolding path toward greater relational authenticity and self-authorship.

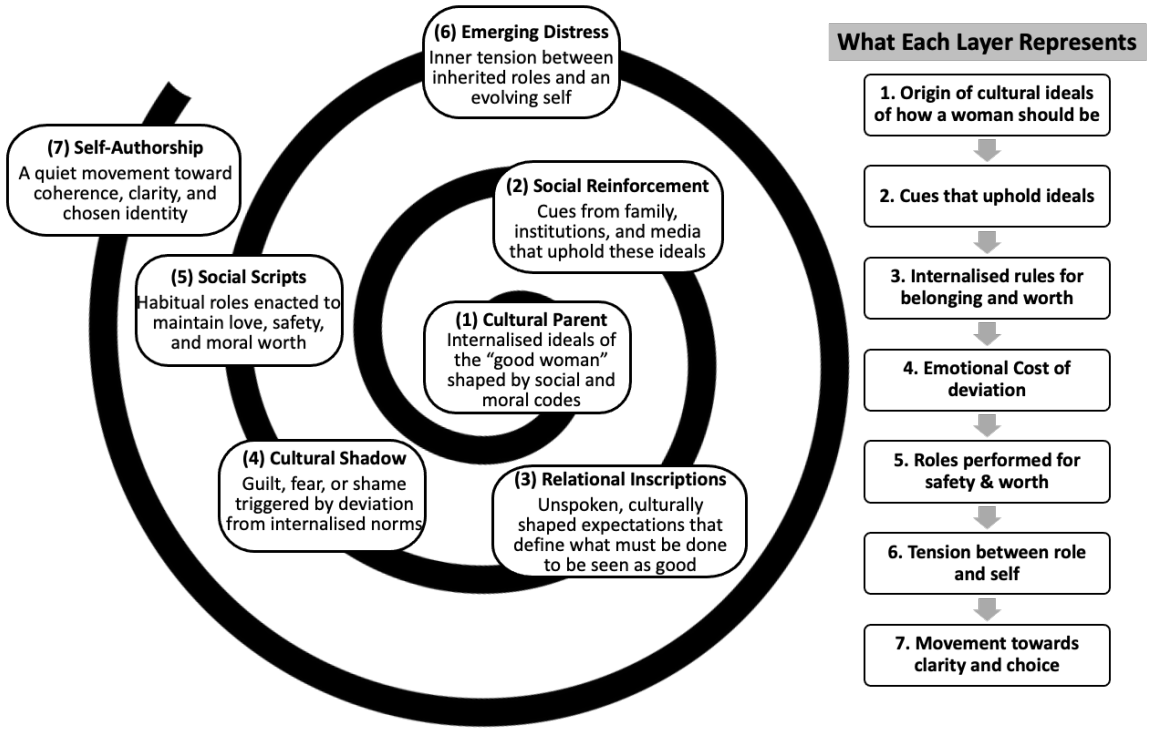

Figure 1. Social Scripts Spiral: From Cultural Inheritance to Self-Authorship

From a radical-relational TA perspective, culturally scripted roles are not merely personal. They reflect how social power and moral expectations shape identity through everyday norms and interactions (Minikin, 2018). Therapy becomes a space to make these influences visible and loosen their hold, making re-authoring both a therapeutic and liberating act.

4. Self-Authorship

As a counterpoint to Social Scripts and Relational Inscriptions, I introduce the concept of *Self-Authorship*, a developmental trajectory in which identity is shaped by inner clarity and not through compliance or adaptation. Unlike culturally scripted roles internalized through emotional pressure or relational expectation, this arc emerges through early permissions, affirming relationships, or quiet refusals that protect authenticity.

This is not rebellion, but resonance with one's values, voice, and truth. Those who follow this arc often inhabit roles with coherence. While their choices may still challenge norms, they are made *from* the self rather than *against* the culture.

Self-Authorship is offered here as a conceptual frame, drawn from therapeutic work and cultural reflection, to describe how identity can take shape through clarity, coherence, and relational integrity.

CASE ILLUSTRATIONS AND FILM NARRATIVES

The conceptual frames introduced earlier, particularly *Social Scripts* and *Relational Inscriptions*, offer a lens to understand how culturally shaped identity roles are not only internalized but continually enacted across relationships, spaces, and time. These patterns are sustained by expectations, family legacies, and reinforced by the emotional atmospheres of everyday life.

Drawing from these foundations, I present eight recurring feminine scripts, distilled from clinical encounters and grounded in identity roles commonly seen in therapeutic work with women. They are not exhaustive typologies, but patterned expressions of the feminine psyche in Indian cultural context.

Each script is paired with a regional Indian film that closely mirrors themes of identity, sacrifice, longing, and resistance. They serve as familiar terrain from which clients and therapists can begin unfamiliar conversations.

What follows is a dialogue between therapy, culture, and the inner lives of women. The clinical vignettes are composite, anonymized examples that illustrate how these roles surface in therapy, how their emotional cost is often carried silently, and how therapeutic work can open space for reflection and redefinition through recovering authorship within it rather than rejecting the culture that shapes it.

1. The Giving Feminine

Ghar ki Annapurna (घर की अन्नपूर्णा) - *The Benevolent Giver of the Household*

This script is centered on women who feel responsible for everyone's emotional and physical wellbeing. They become the invisible backbone of the home, organizing, supporting, and anticipating, yet often feel invisible and drained by the constancy of their care. Over time, this giving becomes a condition for being needed, loved, or even noticed.

- Film Reference: *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021, Malayalam)

  A newly married woman's daily life dissolves into relentless kitchen routines and unacknowledged labour. As she begins to resist these expectations, the film reveals how silence, service, and self-erasure are scripted into femininity as virtue.

- Client Vignette:

  A woman in her 30s came to therapy describing herself as the "anchor" of the family, but emotionally depleted. "I'm always the one who shows up, holds space, anticipates needs," she said. "But I don't know who would notice if I stopped."

- Therapeutic Work:

  In therapy, we explored how care had become a condition for love. Over

time, she began to name her exhaustion without guilt. She reflected, *"Maybe being loved doesn't always mean I have to prove that I deserve it."* Our work involved helping her differentiate giving from pleasing, and gently practicing the act of saying no.

2. The Bound Feminine

Kul ki Maryada (कुल की मर्यादा) - *Upholder of Family Dignity*

This script reflects the pressure to endure in silence for the sake of family honor. Speaking up feels dangerous, as if voicing pain might undo legacy, lineage, or belonging.

- Film Reference: *Thappad* (2020, Hindi)

  Amrita's seemingly secure life shatters with a single slap from her husband. Her refusal to dismiss it as trivial challenges the deep cultural normalization of female endurance.

- Client Vignette:

  A client rationalized years of subtle put-downs and dismissals. "But he has never hit me. And everyone says marriage has its rough patches," she said. What kept her stuck was a quiet voice inherited from her mother: *"Don't ruin the family's name."*

- Therapeutic Work:

  In therapy, her anger found room without fear. She said, "I'm done

justifying his behavior." We examined how dignity had become synonymous with endurance. Gradually, she began to see boundaries not as betrayal, but as preservation of herself.

3. The Erased Feminine

Tyagmyee Mata (त्यागमयी माता) - *The Sacrificing Mother*

This script centers around mothers who give up parts of themselves, dreams, desires, even identity, in the name of love. Their role becomes so large that their personal needs quietly disappear. They love deeply but often forget themselves in the process.

- **Film Reference**: *Tribhanga* (2021, Hindi)

  Spanning three generations, the film explores how motherhood can wound, redeem, and redefine. It reveals the ambivalence of women raised to sacrifice, and the longing to be more than just needed.

- **Client Vignette**:

  A woman in her 40s had put off her PhD for two decades. "I wanted it, but the children needed me. And now, wanting it feels selfish."

- **Therapeutic Work**:

  We returned to a question she had never dared to ask: *Does love always require disappearance?* As she spoke of her children, she recognized that

they admired women who stood tall, not just those who stepped aside. One day she said, surprised by her own words: *"Maybe being a good mother isn't about becoming less of myself. Maybe it's about letting them see all of me."* Therapy became a place to reclaim what had been set aside.

4. The Forbidden Feminine

Besharam Aurat (बेशरम औरत) - *The Shameless/Cheap Woman*

This script captures the shame placed on female desire, be it for pleasure, attention, expression, or ambition. Wanting is framed as vulgar, so they learn to hide it. Many women shrink their joy to avoid being judged as *too much.*

- Film Reference: *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016, Hindi)

  Four women navigate conservative life while secretly pursuing desire, sexual, emotional, and financial. The film lays bare how longing is censored, while conformity to expected roles is rewarded.

- Client Vignette:

  A young woman shared how much she loved dressing up adorning lipstick, jewelry, soft fabrics, but shrank when complimented. "I want to be desired and loved," she said, "but I don't want to be seen as cheap." She had learned early: *Be seen but not wanted. Be graceful, never*

bold. She often felt she was performing restraint, careful not to be *too much*.

- Therapeutic Work:

  We worked to untangle the shame wrapped around her wanting. Over time, she began to reclaim her Free Child as an authentic part of herself: *This, too, is me.* With time, she no longer felt the need to apologize for her joy.

5. The Forgotten Feminine

Ghar ki Deewar (घर की दीवार) - The Wall of the House

This script reflects the quiet erasure of women who remain ever-present but unseen. They are the backdrop of the household, constant, dependable, taken for granted. Over time, their thoughts, feelings, and desires recede until they begin to lose a felt sense of self.

- Film Reference: *English Vinglish* (2012, Hindi)

  Shashi, a homemaker belittled for her lack of English skills, finds validation and confidence in a language class abroad. Her journey from invisibility to self-respect is understated but deeply transformative, echoing the lives of countless women whose inner voices were silenced.

- Client Vignette:

  A woman in her 50s said quietly, "I've raised my children, supported my husband, cared for my aging parents... and somewhere along the way, I lost myself." Her voice broke, shaped more by quiet bewilderment than anger.

- Therapeutic Work:

  Therapy gave her space to grieve what had long been overlooked. As we reconnected with her interests, she said, "I used to write, but I stopped when no one cared." Her work became about reclaiming authorship, not just of writing, but of her own life.

6. The Condemned Feminine

Badnaam Aurat (बदनाम औरत) - The Dishonored Woman

This script reflects the weight of shame women often carry for surviving abuse, abandonment, or rejection. Society labels such women as tainted, even when they've done nothing wrong. What lingers is not the event itself, but the pain from the stigma attached to it.

- Film Reference: *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022, Hindi)

  Based on a true story, the film follows Ganga, sold into prostitution, who

becomes a powerful advocate for sex workers. She reclaims visibility but is never freed from society's moral disdain.

- Client Vignette:

  A survivor of abuse hesitated to date again. "I feel like I don't deserve someone kind," she said. The shame lived in her body long after the violence had ended.

- Therapeutic Work:

  We traced how her silence had become a stand-in for shame. She said, "It feels like I did something wrong just by surviving." Therapy offered her a new script that supported reclaiming her worth without needing to explain or defend herself.

7. The Diminished Feminine

Zyada Uddne Lagi (ज़्यादा उड़ने लगी) - Flying Too High

This script can be seen in women who succeed but dim their light so others don't feel uncomfortable. They internalize the belief that pride is arrogance, and visibility must be softened with humility.

- Film Reference: *36 Vayadhinile* (2015, Tamil)

  Vasanthi rediscovers her forgotten brilliance and steps into her

professional identity, while remaining careful not to seem too assertive or ambitious.

- Client Vignette:

  A 39-year-old IT professional, upon being promoted, hesitated to share the news with her husband. "I don't want him to think I'm full of myself," she said. Her happiness already weighed down by guilt.

- Therapeutic Work:

  We unpacked her relational inscription: "Achieve quietly. Stay likeable." As she tested new scripts, speaking clearly, accepting praise, she said, "Maybe I can be proud of myself without feeling guilty or ashamed." In giving herself permission to be seen, she also learned to celebrate her success without apology.

8. The Domineering Feminine

Badtameez Aurat (बदतमीज़ औरत)- The impudent Woman

This script centers on women who are clear, strong, and assertive. Instead of being respected, they are labelled as rude, difficult, or arrogant. They are often asked to soften themselves just to be accepted.

- Film Reference: *Sherni* (2021, Hindi)

  Vidya Vincent, a forest officer, asserts her authority without fanfare. Her

quiet competence unsettles a male-dominated system. She does not rebel, but she also refuses to shrink, and her presence begins to unsettle the system.

- Client Vignette:

  A corporate leader in her late 30s shared how she was praised in public but criticized behind closed doors. “I’m told I’m too ambitious. That I intimidate people.” She wasn’t harsh or blunt, but she didn’t always bother to soften herself just to be liked. Lately, though, she had started second-guessing her tone, wondering if she came across as “too much” and even rehearsing how to come across as less “intense.”

- Therapeutic Work:

  Our work focused on separating strength from shame. She spoke of being called *badtameez* in childhood whenever she asserted herself. We explored the inscription: *Lead but stay agreeable.* Over time, she started to re-own the clarity and confidence that had been coded as arrogance. She said, “I’m not taking up too much space. I’m just finally taking up mine.”

MAPPING THE MOVEMENT TOWARD CHANGE

The eight social scripts explored above reflect how relational inscriptions shape not only self-expression, but also identity and emotional life. Therapy offers a space where these scripts can be named, understood, and gradually re-authored.

Social Script	Relational Inscription	Decontamination	Permission / Emerging Self-Authorship
The Giving Feminine	Your worth lies in how much you give.	Realising that love does not need to be earned through sacrifice.	You can receive care without proving you're needed.
The Bound Feminine	Silence is strength, and endurance is dignity.	Recognising that dignity can be held through setting limits, not just silent endurance.	You can set boundaries and still be respected and loved.
The Erased Feminine	A mother's love means putting herself last.	Seeing that attending to your own needs is also an act of love.	You are allowed to want and still be a good enough mother.
The Forbidden Feminine	You may be beautiful, but you must not express desire.	Naming longing as part of being fully alive, not something to hide.	You can want without feeling ashamed.
The Forgotten Feminine	A good woman stays in the background.	Realising that invisibility is not the price of loyalty or care.	Your needs, voice, and presence matter.
The Condemned Feminine	If something happens to you, it must be your fault.	Separating your story from the stigma others place on it.	You are not defined by what happened to you.
The Diminished Feminine	If you shine too brightly, you'll make others uncomfortable.	Allowing success to be seen without apology and recognising that visibility does not have to mean arrogance.	You can shine without needing to hide.
The Domineering Feminine	Assertiveness equates to arrogance.	Embracing clarity, ambition, and strength is an expression of authenticity rather than a threat.	You can take up space without apology.

Table 2. Summary of Social Scripts, Relational Inscriptions, Decontaminations, and Permissions

Note. These permissions are illustrative, not prescriptive. They mark a possible entry point, particularly in work with social scripts and relational inscriptions, but therapeutic depth and

direction vary with each client. A broader range of interventions may become necessary as therapy deepens and evolves.

The table above consolidates the therapeutic arc across these narratives, summarizing the Relational Inscriptions at work, the decontaminations that supported clarity, and the permissions that enabled new ways of being. This mapping sets the stage for the distinct but parallel path: the *Self-Authored Feminine*, explored in the next section.

THE SELF-AUTHORED FEMININE

While the earlier sections explored roles internalized through relational inscriptions, there also exists a parallel arc of identity, what I have termed Self-Authorship. This is not simply the opposite of being scripted, nor a product of rebellion. It is a distinct developmental trajectory shaped by early permissions, emotional clarity, or relational contexts that made authorship possible.

In this paper, I describe its expression as the Self-Authored Feminine, a way of being in which feminine identity is lived with coherence rather than compliance. Women who embody this arc often do not arrive in therapy with questions of approval or adaptation. They do not perform virtue; they inhabit clarity. Their choices may challenge norms, but they are not made *against* the culture, they are made *from* the self.

Sometimes this trajectory emerges because someone, a teacher, parent, peer offered quiet permission to think differently or to resist moralized approval. In other

cases, it is shaped by necessity: a refusal to conform when conformity would mean self-erasure. What distinguishes this arc is not defiance, but an alignment to one's own voice, truth and inner authorship.

The Self-Authored Feminine is not limited to those who were never scripted, it is also a therapeutic possibility. For many, this arc begins in conflict and not clarity. Therapy becomes a space where relational inscriptions are made visible, and the movement toward coherence and self-definition can slowly take shape.

Although women on this path may not present with the same distress as those shaped by restrictive scripts, their presence stretches the therapeutic imagination. They remind us that culture and autonomy are not always in conflict, sometimes, they coexist.

CULTURAL NARRATIVES OF SELF-AUTHORED FEMININE

In *Shakuntala Devi* (2020), the protagonist claims intellect, ambition, and motherhood on her own terms, refusing to apologize for brilliance or non-conformity. In *Queen* (2014), a young woman embarks on a solo honeymoon after a broken engagement, discovering her voice through quiet acts of freedom and self-trust. In *Piku* (2015), the protagonist lives an arc of everyday authorship, navigating work, caregiving, and singlehood through quiet clarity about what matters to her and not through rebellion or conformity.

These stories reflect authorship that is neither accidental nor aggressive; it is intentional, slow-growing, and quietly revolutionary.

Such figures remind us that feminine identity is not always something to reclaim. Sometimes, it is something consciously protected, held safe from being overwritten by social scripts. In therapy, even when clients don't explicitly identify as self-authored, the therapist's ability to hold this possibility can offer a vital mirror: a glimpse of life shaped by self-definition and not by adaptation alone.

These women do not just reject the expected, they reimagine what is possible.

THERAPEUTIC IMPLICATIONS

Therapy offers a space where inherited roles can be made visible, questioned, and re-authored. For many women, naming a script becomes more than insight. It creates a break in a long-held pattern. Articulating distress tied to cultural belonging often feels like betrayal. Therapy must hold this paradox: the longing to belong, and the longing to breathe.

Therapeutic work involves helping clients locate their distress not just within the personal, but within relational and cultural patterns. This shift allows for a reframing from "What's wrong with me?" to "What am I carrying, and for whom?" The scripts themselves may remain partly intact, but clients begin to hold them with more awareness and choice.

Importantly, clients need not discard inherited roles entirely. Many values like loyalty, care, modesty, and endurance may still resonate. Therapy supports them to reclaim agency within these roles: softening their grip, choosing what to hold, which to release, and how to live with greater flexibility and truth.

This process is rarely dramatic. It unfolds slowly, relationally, and often with ambivalence. Some clients may return to familiar roles but hold them with less rigidity; others may step away. One client, Meera, continued to care for her aging in-laws, a role she had long associated with duty and silent endurance. But over time, she began to voice her boundaries, request support, and attend to her own needs without guilt. She didn't drop the role but reclaimed it on her terms. In either case, therapy becomes a ground for ethical reimagining, a liminal space where women can re-enter their stories differently.

The therapeutic arc, then, is not only about loosening scripts, it includes creating space for the emergence of the Self-Authored Feminine. This is not an ideal, but a possible stance of clarity, coherence, and quiet self-definition.

In essence, it is not always about rupture or resistance. Sometimes, it is about returning on their own terms, with quiet authorship.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This paper focuses on the experiences of cisgender women socialized within heteronormative, largely urban Indian cultural settings. While the scripts discussed may resonate widely, they do not capture the full complexity of identity in India where caste, class, religion, region, and generation intersect in distinct ways. The lens offered here also does not account for the evolving realities of queer, trans, and non-binary individuals, whose lives are shaped by different complexities. Though *Relational Inscriptions* and *Self-Authorship* may offer points of resonance, their inclusive, context-specific applications require further exploration.

Future inquiry could explore how the movement toward Self-Authorship unfolds in therapy, and what relational conditions support or inhibit its emergence across diverse sociocultural contexts.

While popular films offer accessible entry points for therapeutic dialogue, the examples used in this paper are illustrative rather than exhaustive. They serve as cultural mirrors, not definitive representations.

Future directions may include deeper engagement with authorship in collectivist cultures and comparative studies across gendered experiences. The intersection of scripts with systems of power particularly in rural, marginalized, or intergenerational settings remains a critical area for reflection and research.

CONCLUSION

The social scripts explored in this paper are not abstract categories. They live in tone, gesture, silence, and expectation, in what is spoken, and in what is withheld. For many women, these roles have shaped not only how they are seen, but how they see themselves. Therapy, then, becomes not just a space for alleviating distress, but a space for recovering authorship.

When I speak of the *Self-Authored Feminine*, I am not advocating a rejection of cultural identity, but a reshaping of how one's relationship to it. It is the movement from being cast into roles to choosing how and whether to inhabit them. This process is rarely linear. The pull of old patterns can be strong. But in therapy, what was once unconscious embodiment becomes open to reflection, imagination, and choice.

The work of re-authoring scripts begins in the psyche but is never separate from the social world. The roles women inherit are not merely personal, they carry the weight of systemic control, cultural obligation, and relational survival. Therapy, then, becomes not only a space for individual healing, but a place to shed these inherited burdens. This paper offers a cultural lens on autonomy, one that does not oppose tradition or relationship, but makes room for agency within them. It affirms that autonomy need not mean detachment; it can emerge through clarity, coherence, and the quiet redefinition

of inherited roles. The invitation, then, is not to step outside culture, but to step more fully into self, aware of the scripts, but no longer bound by them.

AI Disclosure: The author affirms that AI was used only for editorial assistance and that all content presented is original and takes full responsibility for the work.

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EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE IN THE WORKPLACE: THE EMOTION-RESPONSE MATRIX

RAGURAMAN K

ABSTRACT

Emotional resilience is crucial for mental and physical health, lowering the risk of depression and anxiety by giving individuals healthier coping tools to handle life's challenges. This article examines the concept of emotional resilience in the workplace, exploring the connections and patterns between authentic and inauthentic emotions. The article introduces the Emotion-Response Matrix and options for working with emotions.

Keywords: *Authentic Emotions, Inauthentic Emotions, Emotional resilience, Emotional numbness, Emotional suppression, emotional intimidation.*

INTRODUCTION

My introduction to resilience came when I encountered grief and a mix of complex emotions following a personal accident. During this time, I used to feel irritation, anger, anxiety, and fear. Navigating these emotionally charged situations in my own way, I experienced numbness, suppression, and at times, blamed others. It was only when I sought support that I began to recognize and process these patterns more consciously.

These experiences prompted deep reflection and led me to explore the nature of emotions and the concept of resilience. I began to view my own emotional responses through a more compassionate and curious lens, and I carried this perspective into my work with organizations. I found myself observing how employees in organizations coped with grief, burnout, and emotional strain. Their varied responses, some adaptive, others avoidant, further stimulated my interest in understanding emotional resilience.

This journey of self-awareness and observation has shaped my commitment to fostering emotional literacy and resilience, both in myself and in the systems, I engage with.

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

Emotional resilience is the ability to adapt to stressful situations, and cope with life's ups and downs (University of Warwick, 2022) Resilience does not eliminate stress or erase life's difficulties, but allows us to tackle or accept problems, live through adversity and move on with life.

For example: C, a team leader in customer service, was criticized by a senior manager for underperformance. The experience initially left her feeling angry, upset, and helpless. Recognizing the emotional impact, she sought support from trusted peers, who helped her regain composure and gain perspective on the organizational culture.

Rather than reacting defensively, C requested a private meeting to understand the concerns raised. She acknowledged her role in the situation and reaffirmed her commitment to contributing positively to the team. She then encouraged her team to focus on improvement, fostering a constructive and forward-looking environment.

Within a month, her calm, reflective approach and renewed leadership led to visible progress. C's ability to regulate her emotions, take responsibility, and support her team exemplified emotional resilience. Her openness in receiving feedback allowed the senior manager to shift to the OK-OK quadrant as well. She continues to reflect on her experience and is actively exploring ways to influence the system more effectively and sustainably

This case illustrates how emotional resilience is vital when navigating personal and professional upheaval. Adaptability depends on mindset, support systems, and coping strategies. Psychological research demonstrates that the resources and skills associated with resilience can be cultivated and practiced (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018).

IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

Emotional resilience is crucial for mental and physical health, lowering the risk of depression and anxiety by giving individuals healthier coping tools to handle life's challenges. Studies (Godman, 2025) suggest that resilient people may even live longer,

because effective stress management curtails inflammation and high cortisol, lessening the physiological damage of chronic tension. Instead of reacting impulsively to triggers, resilient individuals are able to pause, reflect, and respond with a calm, balanced mindset, enabling them to bounce back stronger after setbacks. They are able to reject unconstructive criticism, embrace growth opportunities, and prefer positive feedback over negative "strokes." Negative strokes are any act of recognition that is experienced as painful or uncomfortable (Stewart & Joines, 1987). Regardless of the workplace, the importance of emotional resilience stays the same: it rests on human connections and relationships, fostering optimism and empowerment.

EMOTION-RESPONSE MATRIX

Emotions can be categorized as authentic or inauthentic and how we process them affects emotional resilience. Authentic emotions like fear, anger, joy, sadness, etc., are appropriate and expressing them helps us connect with others and acknowledge our emotions. In contrast, inauthentic emotions are learned responses that replace authentic emotions with socially acceptable or habitual ones. Over time, relying on inauthentic emotions can suppress genuine emotions, weakening emotional resilience and causing internal conflict.

The relationship between emotions and responses can be broken down into four key categories:

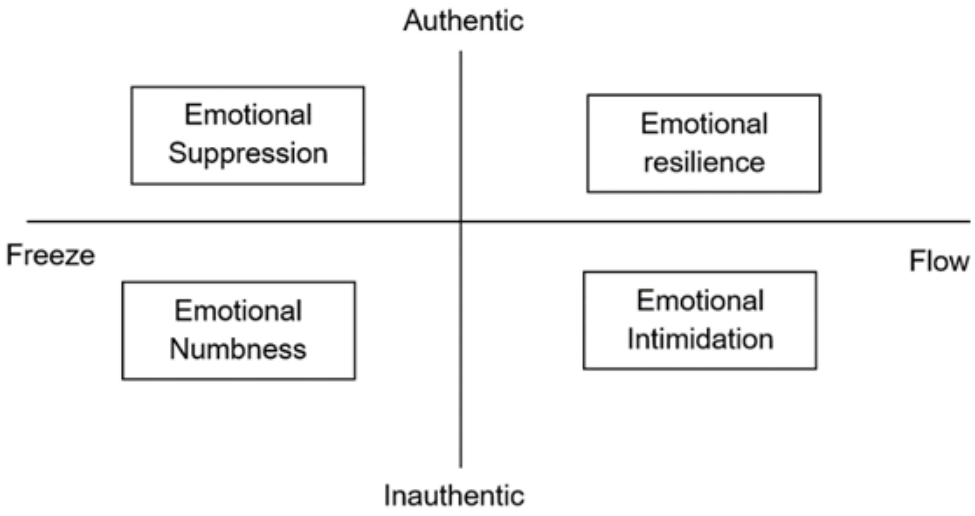

Figure 1. Emotion - Response Matrix

This matrix helps to understand how people/ employees react or respond to their emotions that they experience.

1. Inauthentic Emotions and Freeze - Emotional numbness

In high-stress situations, people may become emotionally numb or disconnected from their feelings. They might act like robots – unable to recognize their own emotions or empathize with others. This emotional shutdown can strain relationships, reduce team effectiveness, and, over time, lead to burnout and depression. In such states, individuals may appear disengaged or unmotivated.

Take the example of Y who missed a critical deadline at work. However, instead of acknowledging his emotions, he became passive, withdrew, and took no action. By unconsciously masking his fear and sadness, he slipped into emotional numbness. This

response not only affected his confidence but also weakened his ability to collaborate with his team. According to Schiff (1975), this is a form of Discounting at the existence level – failing to recognize and validate one's own emotional experience. Schiff described discounting as the process by which a person fails to acknowledge the significance of some aspect of reality that is relevant to solving a problem.

Options to Navigate this Quadrant

People experiencing emotional numbness can learn to become aware of their emotions and use them to solve problems that result in emotional well-being . Emotional wellbeing is the ability to notice the emotions, managing it to build healthy relationships. People in this quadrant need to experience permission and protection to be themselves and to connect with their emotions. They could benefit from professional help to build their emotional wellbeing. Permission refers to the therapist's (or authority figure's) verbal and non-verbal messages that challenge early script beliefs and allow the client to behave, feel, or think differently than they were previously allowed to (Crossman, 1966). Protection refers to the support and safety the therapist provides while the client experiments with new behaviors or feelings that were previously forbidden by their script.

In the above example, Y recognized his fear, gathered relevant information and explored available options, enabling him to respond effectively to the threat and restore a sense of safety.

2. Authentic Emotions and Freeze - Emotional suppression

People in this quadrant discount the importance of expressing their emotions. They believe that expressing emotions won't be helpful at the workplace to get the required results. They are likely to experience physical discomfort, feel pressured, struggle to connect with others and communicate their needs.

Some people are aware of how they are feeling but lack courage or space to express it, so they suffer silently. K, a mother, felt hurt and angry when her boss forced overtime, keeping her from her child. Fearful of seeming unreliable, she stayed quiet, leading to burnout and resentment.

Options to Navigate this Quadrant

People in this quadrant need to acknowledge their emotions. They need to find ways to voice their emotions and step into the healthy quadrant; access authentic emotions and flow state, moving towards emotional resilience.

During a coaching session, K was supported by a facilitator to recognize the importance of expressing her needs. With guidance, she initiated a conversation with

her superior, sharing how extended work hours were impacting her child and family. This open dialogue helped her manager understand her situation, leading to an agreement that allowed her to work from home.

The facilitator gave recommendations to the organization for maintaining the timing, boundaries and employee's emotional well-being.

3. Inauthentic Emotions and Flow - Emotional Intimidation

People operating in this quadrant may at times function from feelings such as frustration or anger. There can be a tendency to seek influence over others' emotions and behaviors, using emotional expression in ways that shape how others respond. In certain situations, this may appear as attempts to manipulate outcomes, and in more extreme instances, as belittling or demeaning behavior. Such individuals might be perceived by others as manipulative, particularly when their actions evoke anxiety, guilt, or fear.

G often criticizes employees and sometimes abuses them, projecting his emotions onto the team. He says he's dissatisfied with performance and expects obedience, yet refuses to own his emotions, blaming the staff, telling them, "This is your problem; you're not doing it right,". When results are good, he claims credit; when they're not, he shirks responsibility and points fingers.

Options to Navigate this Quadrant

One possible starting point involves developing greater awareness of one's authentic emotional experiences and gradually learning to express them more directly, rather than avoiding or displacing them onto others. Attending to self-care and seeking appropriate emotional support may help in settling underlying frustration and reducing emotional intensity. Gaining a clearer understanding of one's own roles, responsibilities, and expectations of others can also support more grounded interactions. In addition, learning to invite and tolerate feedback may assist in recognizing interpersonal patterns, setting healthier boundaries, and communicating needs and limits in a more assertive and respectful manner.

4. Authentic Emotions and Flow - Emotional resilience

People feeling their authentic emotions are in a flow state. They are aware of their emotions and use them effectively to get their solutions. They use their emotions to adapt to the situation which helps to build relationships and to work as a team. This results in being focused, maintaining healthy relationships with other employees, completing the tasks effectively and increasing productivity with better quality. They are experienced as thrivers.

Options to Navigate this Quadrant

A person who openly acknowledges and communicates emotions can resolve issues and build stronger relationships. R receives harsh feedback and feels authentic anger, seeing it as unfair. Instead of suppressing or exploding, he pauses, reflects, and later asks for a calm discussion, stating, “I felt hurt because I wasn’t understood after working hard.” He fosters mutual understanding, strengthens trust with his boss, and demonstrates how authentic emotional expression enables healthy conflict resolution.

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE TRANSFORMS THE WORKPLACE DYNAMICS

Emotional resilience in the workplace fosters a culture of trust, employee well-being, encourages collaboration and teamwork. Resilient employees handle conflicts maturely, fostering healthy resolution and teamwork. This creates a positive atmosphere where employees feel valued and supported.

Resilience establishes psychological safety, critical for high-performing teams. Employees feel secure expressing ideas, admitting mistakes, and taking risks without fear of judgment, boosting innovation and collaboration. Resilient employees stay focused and solution-oriented under pressure, directly boosting productivity.

Organizations with resilient teams experience lower absenteeism and burnout. Happy, resilient workers show up consistently, bringing their best selves and strengthening team relationships.

I SERENE

I coin the phrase 'I Serene' to describe the self's capacity to evolve and flourish through various phases of emotional confinement, ultimately emerging with emotional resilience. I envision the I Serene as a spiral with concentric circles; each circle representing a route to emotional resilience. The spiral circles start at 'I', leading into Sensitivity, Expressing Needs, Resourceful, Empathy, Newness and Equanimity.

In this context, sensitivity refers to emotional sensitivity – the capacity to perceive, acknowledge, and respond appropriately to one's own emotions and those of others. Expressing needs is a conscious choice that individuals manifest to connect and strive. Resourceful refers to having the ability to find resources, internal and external. It reflects creativity, adaptability, and initiative in using available resources effectively.

Once individuals become resourceful, empathy enables them to influence relationships through attuned, respectful, and constructive engagement. Newness refers to the capacity to remain present in the here and now, engaging with fresh thoughts, emotions, and perceptions toward oneself, others, and the system.

Equanimity is the ability to remain balanced during stressful situations within an organization, while engaging in mutual influence with the team. It reflects the capacity to navigate challenges and to flow in a state of detached attachment. Chopra (1994) describes "detached attachment" as the ability to remain committed to your intentions while letting go of rigid expectations about outcomes.

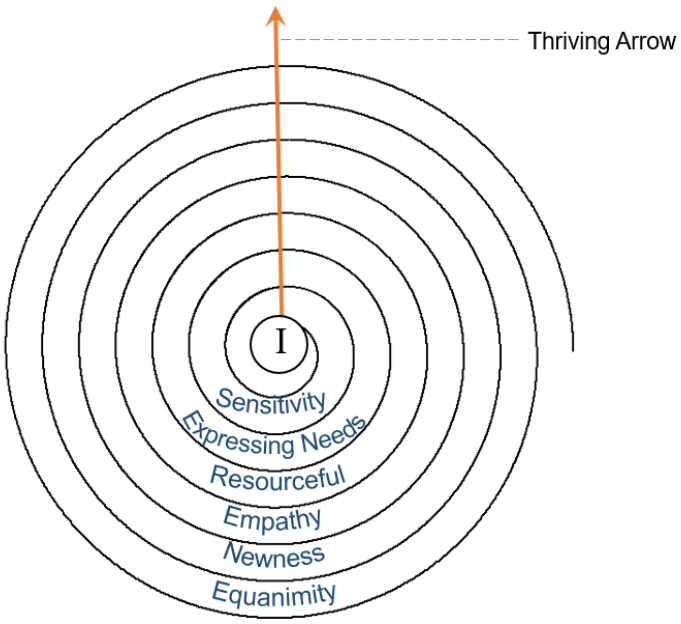

Figure 2. "I Serene"

Cultivating serenity fosters emotional sensitivity, enabling us to express our needs effectively. By tapping into our strengths and maintaining balance, we become more resourceful. Embracing fresh perspectives and thinking allows us to broaden our understanding and nurture empathy in our relationships. This fosters emotional growth and flourishing across all areas of life – a process I envision as the "Thriving Arrow".

CONCLUSION

"I Serene" is a mindset that helps individuals face challenges with clarity and composure. Emotional resilience fuels this mindset, enabling people to manage stress, adapt to change, and respond to conflict with authenticity and strength. By recognizing genuine emotions and using the Emotion-Response Matrix, resilience can be consciously developed and sustained.

It is important to note that organizations and their culture contribute significantly to the individual's experience of emotional resilience. This article, however, focuses on the options an individual has to foster and develop their emotional resilience while not discounting the systemic changes that the organizations might require to make. Resilient employees don't just endure - they grow, inspire, and lead.

AI Disclosure: The author affirms that AI was used only for editorial assistance and that all content presented is original and takes full responsibility for the work.

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Radical Self-Care: Living To Live

SAILAJA MANACHA

ADAPTATION NOTE

This article is adapted from a keynote address presented at the SAATA conference in September 2025. It has been adapted for publication to extend a live, community-based reflection on radical self-care into a form that can be revisited, reflected upon, and engaged with by a wider readership.

Keywords: *Radical Self-Care, Physis, Care Circle, Self-Compassion, Resilience, Thriving, Community*

INTRODUCTION

This reflection emerges from a conversation I was invited to hold with SAATA colleagues. In thinking about what might be most meaningful to explore together, I spoke with a few peers, and we found ourselves returning to the theme of self-care.

In high-achieving environments, it is easy to get caught up in constant doing, endless striving, and quiet self-doubt. We all hold challenges in our lives, some small and some big. As Transactional Analysis practitioners, our learning is to keep working on ourselves, healing our back story, and rising beyond the limiting aspects of our script.

For many of us, this means working on personal change goals, problem-solving for our challenges, and alongside all this, working hard and making plans for our dreams

and ambitions. Given all this, an important question arises: when do we work on the 'thriving' aspect of ourselves and our lives?

Self-care fits into this story of thriving. It is a piece in the larger puzzle of flourishing, a word coined by Martin Seligman (2011). Self-care is about nourishment for body, mind, and soul that supports this flourishing. At its core, it is about living to live.

In this article, I share my understanding of radical self-care, not as a checklist of practices, but as a way of fundamentally changing how we take care of ourselves and how we live our lives.

SELF-CARE, RESILIENCE, AND PHYSIS

Self-care is at the heart of resilience. It is also at the heart of Physis (Berne, 1968). In Transactional Analysis, Physis refers to the life force that moves us toward growth. I see self-care as the practice that energizes this Physis process.

Our resilience is made up of three interrelated elements. The first is our adaptive skills, how we think, act, and behave in the face of challenges. The second is our resources, the internal and external support we can call upon to serve us. The third is our ongoing practices for wellbeing and growth, practices that help us develop good thinking and living so that our choices are aligned with what matters.

Self-care has a profound impact on how we function and show up in our lives and work. It enhances resilience, allowing us to handle setbacks with grace and regain focus quickly. It sharpens decision-making by supporting cognitive abilities such as concentration and problem-solving, especially when sleep and rest are prioritized. Self-care practices can cultivate emotional intelligence, supporting our ability to understand and respond to our own emotions and those of others. They help maintain optimal energy levels, reduce stress, and enhance creativity through engagement with nature, hobbies, and artistic pursuits. They also strengthen our capacity for conflict resolution by supporting self-awareness and equipping us with patience and empathy.

Self-care also helps us resist hustle culture. We live in systems that reward overwork, constant productivity, and being in the grind. Through self-care, we learn to value rest, joy, and peace.

At the same time, my common sense tells me that we are spending more time, energy, and perhaps even money on self-care than ever before, and still rates of burnout continue to rise. Who would know this better than therapists and coaches? This paradox invites us to rethink self-care in a more radical way.

One meaning of the word radical is to fundamentally change the nature of something. When we think of self-care, common images that come to mind include bubble baths, scented candles, cozy evenings with friends, time for hobbies, vacations,

meditation, exercise, and breaks in the calendar. These can be nourishing and valuable. Yet radical self-care, as I understand it, is not about one-off actions or occasional relief.

Radical self-care is about fundamentally changing the way we take care of ourselves and our lives.

LEARNING RADICAL SELF-CARE THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCE

I was not always good at self-care. I come from a family that deeply valued work, superlative performance, and using every minute of one's life effectively. My grandfather often told us, "If you have nothing else to do, at least shake your leg /*Makale Kaal Aatu* (Kodava)." These messages were strongly embedded in my Parent ego state and reinforced by my mother.

As a result, I was historically poor at self-care. It always felt like something other people needed. When it came to me, it never felt important. I learned otherwise through lived experience.

In 2010, we enrolled my younger daughter, who was five and a half years old at the time, in a neurological development program. She was a child with special needs and delayed milestones. Although she had some language abilities, her overall cognitive functioning was slow.

The program required us to homeschool her and work for nearly twelve hours a day on different activities designed to rebuild neural pathways. Our home was

transformed to support this work. We crept and crawled on the floor for two kilometers a day. We ran five kilometers daily. We used an oxygen cylinder with a mask for breathing exercises about fifty times a day. We did drills at a monkey bar gym multiple times daily. We performed specific movements on a massage table we built ourselves to support left and right brain integration. Alongside this, we followed an anti-inflammatory diet and engaged in learning related to reading, mathematics, and general knowledge.

We sustained this work for two years. A child who struggled with attention and grasping began to read, write, and do arithmetic, and she returned to regular school by the age of eight.

This was hard work for her. At the same time, my own mind and body were collapsing. Each night, my body ached from exhaustion, and my mind felt numb from the relentlessness of planning and execution.

The few of us at home were not enough to carry this. They say it takes a village to raise a child. That village was a community of family, friends, neighbors, and house help. They supplied food, created rosters to support the program, took me out for evenings and dinners so I could rest, cared for my older child, and supported our travel to the United States twice a year to deepen our learning. When I look back, I do not know how we did it. I believe we were touched by grace.

During this time, I stepped away from therapeutic and corporate work. I pulled back from running a wellness center and temporarily shut down another organization. I had to learn how to attend to my mind and body, relearn attitudes of self-compassion and self-love, choose what was important, and seek help from many people.

Self-care, for me, came to mean pausing, noticing, choosing differently, and leading myself from alignment rather than urgency.

These experiences, and others that followed, shaped my understanding of radical self-care.

RADICAL SELF-CARE AS DAILY ALIGNMENT

Radical self-care is about engaging in constant care as we live each day. It is not a one-off action or a small amount of time carved out in a calendar. Radical self-care means that every choice we make and every move we make becomes an act of self-care. This is what makes it radical.

I hold three ideas of radical self-care that are actively part of my life.

1. Living in alignment with what we deeply care about

The first idea is staying connected to what we deeply care about. This is a question I walk with every day: What do I deeply care about?

Many of us have only a vague understanding of what drives us. We are busy saying yes, filling our calendars, and losing sight of why we are doing what we are doing. Connecting with our values requires intentional stopping, thinking, and at times, the support of others.

Questions that guide this reflection include:

What really matters to me in life?

What produces energy, meaning, and satisfaction for me?

What brings me alive in life?

What energizes and satisfies me at work?

What gifts and strengths do I have and am I using them at work?

Am I doing what I love to do and does it help me earn and live a good life?

What is the future I wish for myself, and are my actions leading me there?

Our time and energy are finite, both in a day and in this world. We cannot do everything or be everywhere.

Identifying our top domains of care helps us choose consciously. Domains may include family, career, social relationships, finances, spiritual life, social issues, community life, learning and growth, home, and health. For 2025, my own domains are health, career, family, and learning. The order of these priorities changes over time.

When we are clear about what we care about, we say no to what does not align. We stop wasting time and energy on activities and relationships that do not matter right now. We use these priorities as a compass for our decisions. Even when situations are hard, we know we are contributing to a good life. Being aligned with what we care about is radical self-care.

2. Practicing self-compassion

The second idea of radical self-care is practicing self-compassion. Self-compassion is about treating ourselves with the same kindness, respect, patience, and compassion with which we treat others.

The inner critic's voice tells us how little we know, how poorly we speak, and how unimpressive we look. It brings back old memories of being corrected, judged, and told that what we did was not good enough. Some of us, like me, grew up in environments that expected too much. I often felt I would never match up.

We speak beratingly to ourselves in the hope that this will trigger a more hardworking or better self. Instead, it makes us feel low, erodes confidence, fuels comparison, and pushes us into overachievement.

I have learned that self-compassion is a superpower. It fuels resilience, reduces stress, and boosts creativity.

Rather than responding with shame, we can acknowledge that we did the best we could with the information available to us at the time. We can acknowledge disappointment, notice fear or sadness, and offer ourselves grace and patience as we figure out next steps. We can step into our nurturing self, our enabler.

I learned this most powerfully from my daughter. After being shamed by a teacher in college, she grounded herself in compassion and reminded herself of her enoughness. The ring she wears, engraved with the words "I am enough," anchors her in such moments. My daughters and I now share these rings as reminders of our worth.

Self-compassion also involves focusing on our strengths and reminding ourselves of what we are good at. Remembering who we are gives power to our spine, our voice, and how we show up. Saying no, in this context, is not because we don't have capacity, rather we know this is not the best way to use our strengths. And that's an act of self-compassion.

All forms of affirmations and permissions are acts of self-compassion as they put us on a path of self-love. Here are a few that I offer:

I will acknowledge what I need.

I will take small steps and learn.

What I think and feel is important.

I have strengths and gifts I can use.

Relaxing, is caring for myself.

I will ask for support when I need it.

I will be seen and heard.

As I walk, the path will appear for me.

I can build a network of care and support.

I will say what I need to say.

An invitation to inculcate self-compassion:

Given the personal goals you are working with or other challenges in your life, pick an affirmation that suits you and make a note of it for your use.

The affirmation I choose is ____and the way it can help me is____.

3. Creating a Personal Care Circle

The third idea of radical self-care is setting up a personal care circle. A care circle is a place of warmth, protection, holding, and support. It does not magically appear. Building this for ourselves is therefore an act of radical self-care.

In my work as a therapist, I am privy to many forms of disintegration at individual, family, and societal levels. There is an increased sense of fragmentation and isolation, particularly in urban life. Families often feel challenged in their capacity to care for one another. People are living at a frenetic pace, and there has been an increase in mental

health diagnoses among young people. Families are also experiencing strain through divorce, separation, and intergenerational conflict.

My work as a leadership coach gives me insight into leaders' health challenges and performance-related stress. Employees are experiencing burnout. Leaders are searching for ways to increase engagement and sustain passion. Entrepreneurs worry about taking the next leap, while investors place intense pressures on results and impact.

In these circumstances, the need to design and nurture a personal care circle becomes essential.

A care circle may include friends, family, professional mentors, a therapist or supervisor, personal growth groups that are therapeutic, learning-oriented, or spiritual in nature, and a professional network or tribe. These individuals and groups provide stability, connection, growth, learning, and a sense of balance. They help us stay healthy and regulated.

My own care circle includes each of these. Some of the people who are part of my care circle are members of this very community. I speak to them and receive from them on a regular basis.

I have experienced the holding power of this circle during significant professional challenges. One such instance was delivering a keynote at the World Transactional

Analysis Conference in Montpelier. Speaking to an august audience of senior colleagues, trainers, examiners, and supervisors, and holding the pressure of an extended keynote, made me nervous. It was my care circle that held me, stimulated me, served as a sounding board, generated ideas, and became co-creators of that conference experience.

There have been other times of professional challenge as a TA trainer and leadership coach, particularly when I have stepped into unfamiliar areas or created events I had never done before. During these times, the different parts of my care circle extended their attention in invaluable ways. I felt held. I felt served.

This circle is to be designed, grown, and nurtured. There is give and take within the circle. This interconnectedness feeds our mind, body, and spirit.

Belonging is a basic human need. When we feel a sense of belonging, we are deeply and radically taking care of ourselves. Belonging increases both our courage and our wholeheartedness. When we are interconnected and serve one another, we also serve ourselves and take care of ourselves powerfully.

This is also why many of us come to TA events and keep coming back. Our TA community is one such care circle. We receive from this community, and we give to it through service and volunteering. In doing so, we ensure our own growth and help preserve a space that supports our thriving.

Community service, then, is also self-care.

When we give back to where we receive, we see radical self-care in action. By giving to each part of our care circle, we dig a deep well that we can continue to drink from for the rest of our life..

By making time and space for deep connection and interconnectedness, we love ourselves radically and regularly.

To reflect on: Have you felt that by doing for your community you are also in a deep way caring for yourself?

CONCLUSION

When we live and embody radical self-care in these ways, we engage in constant self-care. We no longer need breaks from life. Every choice we make becomes meaningful and satisfying, and we restore joy and fulfillment in our lives.

I want to close by returning to the way this keynote ended, through a song by Bryan Hoover, offered as a collective moment of connection:

'If ever there was a time to sing together,

Now is the time, now is the time

Come and sing with me,

sing in harmony.

Healing spirit come to me.

Let us find a way to each other.'

By making time and space for connection and interconnectedness, we care for ourselves deeply and regularly. With radical self-care, we will be living and breathing self-care in everything that we do. We will be growing, learning, and thriving. We will be living to live well.

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GUIDELINES FOR WRITING FOR SAJTA

The *South Asian Journal of Transactional Analysis* welcomes contributions from all fields of practice – counselling, education, psychotherapy and organization. No field or practice or theoretical frame of reference will be privileged in the evaluation of manuscripts submitted for review and publication. All theoretical perspectives within Transactional Analysis, not limited to quantitative and qualitative research, case studies, literature surveys, book reviews, caselets, adapted keynote speeches and reflective essays, are welcome.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS FOR AUTHORS

Only original material – not previously published in English and not under review by another English-language publication – is eligible for consideration and inclusion in the *SAJTA*. As an exception, any paper previously published in a language other than English will be considered if translated into English prior to submission.

If you are an author considering a submission to the *SAJTA*, the first step is to determine that your paper is well written in terms of content, structure and style. The second step is to prepare your manuscript according to the following technical requirements and then to submit it as a Word document via e-mail to the *SAJTA* Managing Editor at journal@saata.org.

SAJTA accepts submissions throughout the year and reviews manuscripts on an ongoing basis. SAJTA publishes two issues a year: the first on the 1st of March and the second on the 1st of September. The deadline for submission for these issues is the 30th of November and 31st of May respectively.

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

- Manuscripts must be submitted in Word format with a target length of 2,500 words, allowing for a flexibility range of ±500 words (i.e., between 2,000 and 3,000 words). This word count excludes bibliographic references, keywords, and the author biography. Authors are advised to adhere strictly to this word limit, as any additions or deletions during the revision process may significantly impact the final word count. For research articles, specific word count requirements may be adjusted in accordance with the scope and nature of the submission and will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- Your manuscript is free of any information that would identify you as its author. Do NOT mention the names of your trainers, mentors, supervisors, etc.
- Follow APA style of formatting, references, citations and bibliography (http://www.apastyle.org/).

- Use formal language. Avoid using casual phrases, expressions and slang, unless quoting verbatim.
- Use American English and do a ‘Spelling and Grammar’ check before you submit.
- Keep sentences short and precise. Where there are multiple ideas, construct them as two or more sentences.
- Use simple and easy-to-understand words. Remember that your audience may not be Transactional Analysis literate or even use English as their first language.
- Review the paper for redundancy, where the same idea is expressed multiple times.
- Provide English translations to any vernacular quotations that are made in the article.
- As part of our learning, we have decided to only accept single part articles that align to the theme of the issue. Multi-part series will only be considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on the relevance and timeliness of the topic.

Scientific Writing Guidelines

- Write scientifically on topics – original thoughts, research, application in professional or personal context, reviews, experiences, opinions – which can be explained primarily using Transactional Analysis concepts.
- Double-check Transactional Analysis terminologies and their definitions, e.g., names of games, components of script, drivers, injunctions etc.
- Quote the original authors of any concepts / ideas used. Reference accordingly.
- The article should not be published anywhere before, including in SAATA Diploma or Advanced Diploma exams. We are open to answers modified into a journal article.
- Select a strong title, which crisply explains what the article conveys.
- Begin with an abstract / introduction, which describes what readers can expect.
- Convey the main content / discussion (methods, data, evidence, results, links), using appropriate sentences, paragraphs and apt headings / sub-headings.
- Use diagrammatic representations where appropriate, labelling figures and tables.

- Include a conclusion and list of references at the end.

REVIEW PROCESS

Once you have met the above submission requirements and timelines, you will receive a 'receipt of your submission' mail in a week. Over the next 3-4 weeks, your manuscript will be anonymously reviewed by at least two of *SAJTA's* co-editors, who will assess basic readability (i.e., professionally written English, clarity and novelty of the ideas presented, relevance for the transactional analysis community and its contributions to the evolution of transactional analysis theory, principles, and practice) as below.

EVALUATION/REVIEW CRITERIA

- How is the paper relevant to organizational, educational, counselling, or psychotherapy applications?
- Is there an adequate review of the relevant literature - Transactional Analysis as well as the literature of other related fields, such as cognitive research, neuroscience studies, organizational behavior and consultation, mother/infant research, systems theory, educational theory and practice, psychoanalytic perspectives, ethics, anthropology, social/political literature, etc.?

- The editors and reviewers also consider whether the author's writing is professional and clear:

  Is the title both engaging and reflective of the paper's content?

  Is the abstract accurate, concise, quickly comprehensible and informative?

  Does the overall structure of the paper help to represent the author's ideas and facilitate the reader's understanding?

  Does the text include sub-headings that help organize the material for readers?

  Is the author's writing style easy to read and lively? Is it professional, for example, taking care to avoid use of the male pronoun when referring to people in general?

  If the paper includes figures, tables, or other graphic images, are they necessary, easily understood, and integrated well into the main text and with the ideas of the paper?

  Does the author end the article with a conclusion (rather than a summary), one that engages the reader in thinking about further questions the article might raise, how others might build on or further develop the ideas presented, creative uses of the material, etc.?

The editors and reviewers also check to see that the paper has been prepared with care, especially regarding proper grammar, correct (American English) spelling, and an absence of typographical errors.

- Are quotations and publications referenced correctly in the main text of the paper, giving author name, year of publication, and page number(s)?
- Is there any plagiarism of ideas or concepts which have not been appropriately referenced?
- Does the author preserve anonymity by referring to her or his previous publications in the third person, for example, "Smith (2001) has argued..." instead of "In an earlier paper, I (Smith, 2001) argued..."?

Acceptance of Manuscript and Publishing

Around 4 weeks after your submission, you will be notified if your manuscript has been accepted for publishing and if additional modifications are needed. If not accepted, reasons will be shared. A Co-Editor from the *SAJTA* editorial team is assigned to work with each author over the next 3-4 weeks. They will collaborate closely - to challenge ideas or thinking, question the logic or rationale or make suggestions. The work will go through a few iterations before both Author and Reviewer agree to submit it to the managing editor. The managing editor will make the final decision regarding the

publication of the work. Some minor changes might occur as part of the final editorial process, prior to publication.

Once ready for publishing, you will be required to submit an electronically signed *AI Disclosure and Author Consent Form* allowing exclusive publication rights to SAJTA and a short 150-200-word biography of yourself, with email ID for readers to correspond with you.

We hope this is useful, as you contemplate contributing to the journal.

For queries, feedback and suggestions, write to us at *journal@saata.org*

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS - THE CURIOUS CASE OF CASELETS

SAJTA is excited to introduce The Curious Case of Caselets – a dedicated space for practitioners to share concise, insightful case studies from their practice. This initiative welcomes brief yet powerful narratives that capture real-life practice encounters, innovative interventions, or reflections on working with a client, a model, or a tool.

WHAT IS A CASELET?

A caselet is a short, focused case study (800–1500 words) that provides a glimpse into a particular aspect of practice from any field of application in TA and allied fields. It is not a full research paper but rather a bite-sized, practice-oriented reflection on:

- A new model or approach or a unique way of applying an existing model
- A client session that provided a breakthrough, challenge, or learning
- A tool or method (e.g., contracting, chair work, dream work, termination, or use of creative mediums like colors, music, or movement, sharing best practices, etc.)
- An exploration of cultural or systemic influences in practice

- Reflections on ethical dilemmas, supervision, or personal growth as a practitioner

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

1. Word Count: 800–1500 words

   Structure:

   Title (Concise and engaging)

   Context/Background (Briefly introduce the setting and key aspects)

   The Case (Present the client interaction, model, or tool in action)

   Key Insights & Reflections (What did you learn? What questions remain?)

   Conclusion (Summarize key takeaways for practitioners)

2. Confidentiality: All identifying details of clients must be altered or anonymized

3. References: APA format

4. Format: Submissions should be in Word format (DOCX), 12-point font, double-spaced in line with APA

5. Review Process: Submissions will undergo SAJTA editorial review for clarity, relevance, and ethical considerations

WHO CAN CONTRIBUTE?

- Practicing therapists, counsellors
- Educators and organizational practitioners using Transactional Analysis (TA) and allied approaches
- Supervisors and trainers

WHY SUBMIT?

- Share your insights with a diverse and engaged community
- Contribute to a growing repository of practical, real-world experiences in TA
- Contextualize TA theory and practice through the lens of culture and systems
- Inspire and learn from fellow practitioners

We look forward to your unique contributions. Please send your submissions or queries to journal@saata.org

ETHICAL USE AND DISCLOSURE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE GUIDELINES

The South Asian Journal of Transactional Analysis (SAJTA) is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and originality. The emergence of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools presents new opportunities and challenges for scholarly work. These guidelines establish a framework for the transparent and accountable use of AI in manuscripts submitted to SAJTA. The core principle is that authors retain full responsibility for all content in their submissions, including any portion developed with AI assistance. This principle is fundamental because AI tools lack moral agency and legal accountability. They cannot be held responsible for the accuracy, originality, or ethical integrity of the work. Only human authors can ensure the work meets scholarly standards, verify all outputs, and be held accountable to the readers and the community.

SAJTA's policy hinges on a critical distinction between prohibited "AI-Generated" content and permitted "AI-Assisted" work. SAJTA prohibits the submission of AI-generated content. Submission of AI-generated content is considered academic misconduct. This ensures AI enhances, rather than replaces, the author's intellectual contribution.

	AI-Generated Content	AI-Assisted Writing
Description	Where AI creates the substantive intellectual output – The author's role is limited to minor editing or prompting.	The author creates the substantive intellectual output and uses AI as a tool to refine, improve, or streamline their own work.
Author's Role	Passive curator or editor of AI-created material.	Active creator, thinker, and writer who uses AI for support.
Examples	Submitting text from an AI prompt as a manuscript section.	Using AI to improve the clarity and flow of fully drafted paragraphs.
	Using AI to perform core data analysis or interpretation without human intellectual leadership	Using AI to brainstorm initial ideas to critically evaluate and develop.
	Generating an article's core argument or discussion points via AI.	Using AI to check grammar or format references.
		Using AI to summarize one's own notes or transcripts.
		Using AI to find or verify references.
SAJTA's Policy	Strictly prohibited – Submission of AI generated content is considered academic misconduct.	Permitted, but with mandatory disclosure. The author must transparently report all AI assistance in the consent and AI disclosure form.

Table 1. Differentiating AI-Generated and AI-Assisted Content

ETHICAL AI USAGE

1. Author Accountability and Responsibility: The author owns every word and idea in the submission. Here are a few guidelines for the author to keep in mind:

   Pause and reflect; use AI tools mindfully

   Attend to the ethical values of respect, empowerment, commitment to the relationship, responsibility and protection. Read further about them here:

https://itaaworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/12-5-14-Revised-Ethics_0.pdf

2. Verify All Content: Authors must thoroughly review and fact-check any AI-assisted content before submission. AI outputs can be plausible but incorrect. The Authors Guild (2025) warns that "you cannot trust the accuracy of any factual information provided by generative AI". Every reference, data point, and factual claim in the paper must be verified against original sources. Likewise, authors must be alert to potential biases in AI output (gender, racial, or cultural biases); authors should not let AI-assisted language perpetuate stereotypes.
3. Respect for Intellectual Property: Be mindful that AI models are often trained on copyrighted materials. If AI paraphrases or quotes a source, check for inadvertent copyright infringement. Any text that closely resembles a known source must be properly cited or reworked. In general, AI output must be treated as any literature: if it's not the author's original idea or phrasing, attribution must be provided.
4. Enforcement and Compliance Review Process: SAJTA editors and reviewers will enforce these policies. Manuscripts may be screened with AI-detection software or plagiarism checks. If undisclosed AI use is discovered, the

paper may be returned for clarification or rejected. As Hosseini et al.(2025) note, banning AI is not effective – instead SAJTA opts for regulated transparency. Authors who fail to disclose significant AI assistance risk being found in violation of publication ethics.

ETHICAL DISCLOSURE AND DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS:

1. Manuscript Disclosure: Authors must include a statement in the cover email during manuscript submission specifying any AI assistance. This statement should mention the tool name, developer (e.g. OpenAI's ChatGPT) version used, and the nature of its use. For example: "The authors (I) have used ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-4) to help refine the initial outline of the literature review. All AI-assisted text was subsequently verified and approved by me."
2. Content of Disclosure: The Author Consent and AI Disclosure form must clearly state which AI tool(s) were used and for what purpose (e.g. "used to check grammar", "used to summarize coding transcripts").
3. Location of Disclosure: If AI was used for data analysis, figure generation, or any other aspects of the research methodology, it should be detailed in the Methods section as one would describe other analytical tools. The author must take full responsibility for the accuracy of the analysis and

must ensure that any interpretations made on the analysis are their own. SAJTA will add a footnote stating, "The author presents their original ideas in this article and acknowledges the use of AI-assistance in the refinement of this article, as disclosed to SAJTA."

CONSEQUENCES

Breaches of the AI policy (e.g. fraudulent presentation of AI content) can lead to rejection of the submission, and if discovered post-publication, may result in retraction or correction. Authors should treat AI disclosure like any other ethical requirement (similar to conflict of interest or funding disclosures).

SAJTA will review these guidelines regularly to adapt to the evolving technological landscape. Authors are expected to comply with the latest version published on the SAJTA website.

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