

P-A-C Model in Marriage

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Background

A married couple was enjoying candle-lit dinner on the eve of their 10th wedding anniversary. The wife was particularly excited about her present; a diamond set. "I feel to be on the moon", she said and then burst out laughing and covered her face with her hands. "What's so funny" ?, asked the husband. "Mrs. Nawaz, oh dear she would be jealous like anything", she said and her excitement gave way to seriousness when they started talking about the evils of showing off wealth and materialism. And when she almost ordered him not to smoke during dinner, he thought with a little bit of amusement, "Doesn't she sometimes sound and act like my mother?" Why and how the wife changed from one state to the other so quickly ? What triggered it off?

Eric Berne, one of the pioneers in the field of Transactional Analysis (TA), recognized the existence of three real people residing simultaneously in each one of us. He termed these real people or states as Parent, Adult and Child¹ (P-A-C). Changes from one state to another are apparent in our manner, appearance, words, and gestures. Continual observation has supported the assumption that these three states exist in all people. It is as if in each person there is the same little person he was when he was three years old. There are also within him his own parents. These are recordings in the brain of actual experiences of internal and external events, the most significant of which happened during the first five years of life. The third state different from the other two is that of Adult, the Mr. Logical of all of us. It is of importance to note that these three states are not roles but psychological realities. All of us are in one of these three states at all the times. If we are telling our spouses to have the dinner ready at 9 PM each day, we are in Parent state or mode, But on the other hand, if we are having a healthy debate on problems of working women, we are in the Adult mode and if are partying with them in a group of friends and having a hilarious time, we are in our Child mode. The important point to remember is that each state is produced by the playback of the recorded data of events in the past, involving real people, real time, real places, real decisions, and real feelings. Marriage is the most complicated of all human relationships. Few alliances can produce such extremes of emotion or can so quickly travel from professions of utmost bliss to that cold, terminal legal write-off, mental cruelty. Contrary to the common senses the average marriage contract is made by the Child, which understands love as something you feel and not something you do, and which sees happiness as something you pursue rather a by-product of working towards happiness of someone other than your own self. Now that we have developed a language, we will use this language to analyze a transaction involving communication between people. The transaction consists of a stimulus by one person and a response by another, which in turn becomes a new stimulus for the other person to respond to. The purpose is to discover which part of each person - Parent, Adult or Child - is originating each stimulus and response. One can diagnose the various states by using certain physical and verbal clues:

¹ Throughout this article the words Parent, Adult and Child are not to be taken in their literal sense; that is why they are mentioned with capital letters and indicate a particular state or mode which is independent of the age group of the individual involved. Similarly they are not to be taken as concepts like Superego, Ego, and Id - but are real phenomenological realities..

Parent Clues

Physical: furrowed brow, pursed lips, finger pointing, head wagging, foot tapping, hands on hips, arms folded across the chest, sighing, patting another on the head etc.

Verbal: I am going to put a stop to this once and for all; Now always remember; Never do this; How many times have I told you ?; If I were you etc.

Adult Clues

Physical: while listening there will be continual movement - of the face, eyes, and the body, generally the Adult face is straightforward but not expressionless

Verbal: The basic vocabulary of Adult consists of why, what, where, when, who, and how. There are certain other words and phrases like: how much, in what way, comparative, true, false, probable, possible, unknown, objective, I think, I see, it is in my opinion, etc.

Child Clues

Physical: tears, the quivering lip, pouting, temper tantrums, high pitched and whining voice, rolling eyes, shrugging shoulders, downcast eyes, teasing, delight, laughter, nail biting, nose thumbing, giggling etc.

Verbal: I wish, I want, I don't know, I don't care, I guess, when I grow up, bigger, biggest, better, best etc.

While reading these clues you must be making mental connections between them and your and others behavior. You must have noticed (this phrase in itself is a Parent clue!) that you or others say and exhibit many of these during the whole day. As an individual it is important to observe the predominant or the commonly said or exhibited clues of your spouse. Once you have done that, you have diagnosed the predominant behavioral mode of your spouse. But from day to day interactions point of view, it is critical to observe the situational or on the spur of the moment clues as well. Now that you can make a reasonable guess about the overall and spur of the moment behavioral mode of your spouse, we proceed further by looking at various transactions:

STIMULUS Husband (Adult): Please pass the butter.

RESPONSE Wife (Adult): There you are.

Or consider this transaction:

STIMULUS Wife (Parent): Is he fired ? How dare they do such a thing to our boy ?

RESPONSE Husband (Parent): There, there, honey. It is a sign of changing times. Nobody appreciates good people any longer.

In both of these transaction there is no problem in terms of communication, therefore they are labeled as Complimentary Transactions. As managers we strive for these types of transactions. Now, consider these examples:

STIMULUS Husband (Adult): Pass the potatoes, dear.

RESPONSE Wife (Parent): And you call *me* fat. Or:

STIMULUS Wife (Adult): Dear, where is my handbag ?

RESPONSE Husband (Parent): Where you left it!

You will notice that not much of a communication has occurred or is possible under these transactions which are Non complimentary or Crossed Transactions.

As an individual spouse it is also useful to consider the significant behavioral patterns associated with each mode:

Mode	Significant Behavior
Parent	authority, autocracy, aggression, showing an air of being the boss around
Adult	logical, analytical, objective, to the point, assertive, approachable yet seems far away
Child	playful, innovative, creative, risk taker, inquisitive, witty, sometimes shy, timid, resentful, passive, blaming

Conclusion

P-A-C Model and TA are about personal change. You cannot tell your spouse not to bother you because you are in Adult mode and don't feel like sharing a joke with her. You have to look into her mode and interact accordingly. Marriage as we said earlier is a complicated relationship but far more than that it is exciting and can be even sacred and everlasting if both the parties know and give due regard to the multidimensional structure of human mind.