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INTRODUCE YOUR MARRIAGE
TO TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

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A TA PRIMER

By Leonard Campos and Paul McCormick

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The International Transactional
Analysis Association (ITAA)
1772 Vallejo Street
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The ITAA is an international organization devoted to the advancement of transactional analysis (TA) as a science and profession in the public interest.

A world-wide membership is comprised of professionals and non-professionals from a variety of specialties. The ITAA is responsible for setting professional standards for training and for the ethical practice of TA.

It provides an annual directory of membership and affiliated study groups, seminars, and institutes. It publishes the quarterly *Transactional Analysis Journal*, to inform the membership of current studies, issues, and actions of the organization. ITAA holds two annual conferences to exchange scientific findings, and review social and professional issues.

You may become a regular member of the ITAA after completing a TA introductory course (TA 101) that meets the established teaching standards (instruction by a Teaching Member or under the supervision of a Teaching Member).

PREFACE

This primer covers the basic principles of transactional analysis (TA), primarily as they apply in the marriage contract. Our objective is to introduce TA as a useful method both for your personal growth, and for the improvement of your marriage contract. Revolutionary changes in the relationships between women and men, challenges to the institution of marriage, and greater freedom in sexual behavior call for an updated view of the relationship between spouses.

Some persons want marriage at any price. Some fear it as a threat to their independence. Others expect too much of it, and set themselves up for a big let down. One in three marriages ends in divorce or separation. Sometimes divorce is a rational solution for two people who do not get along. Sometimes it is a tragic mistake. Whether you are single, happily married, about to marry, about to divorce, or already divorced, you may find this primer useful in clarifying your view of marriage.

We believe we have written an easy-to-read primer for clients of marriage-and-family counselors and therapists. TA provides a simple vocabulary for a common language between mates, and between clients and their counselors, that can be used not only in marriage counseling but also in premarital and divorce counseling.

We acknowledge our indebtedness to the late Eric Berne, M.D., the originator of transactional analysis, and to our friends and colleagues of the International TA Association (ITAA), too numerous to mention here. Our special thanks go to Robert L. Goulding, M.D., and Mary Goulding, M.S.W., directors of the Western Institute for Group and Family Therapy, for their continuing consultation and inspiration.

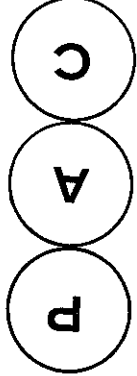
This primer may be read in conjunction with the primer for individuals, *Introduce Yourself to Transactional Analysis*. A list of suggested readings, available from Transactional Pubs, is provided on the last page for readers who want to learn more about TA, or who want to begin TA treatment.

We have chosen to alternate the gender of pronouns and some nouns in order not to follow the convention of assuming that the reader is always male. The words *parent*, *adult*, and *child*, when not capitalized, refer to persons. When capitalized, *Parent*, *Adult*, and *Child* refer to ego states.

WHAT YOU ARE AS A PERSON,
MARRIED OR UNMARRIED

Whether married or unmarried, you have three parts that make you a whole person: a Parent (P), an Adult (A), and a Child (C). These are known technically as ego states, your three different ways of behaving and feeling. Diagram I represents the three parts of you.

DIAGRAM I



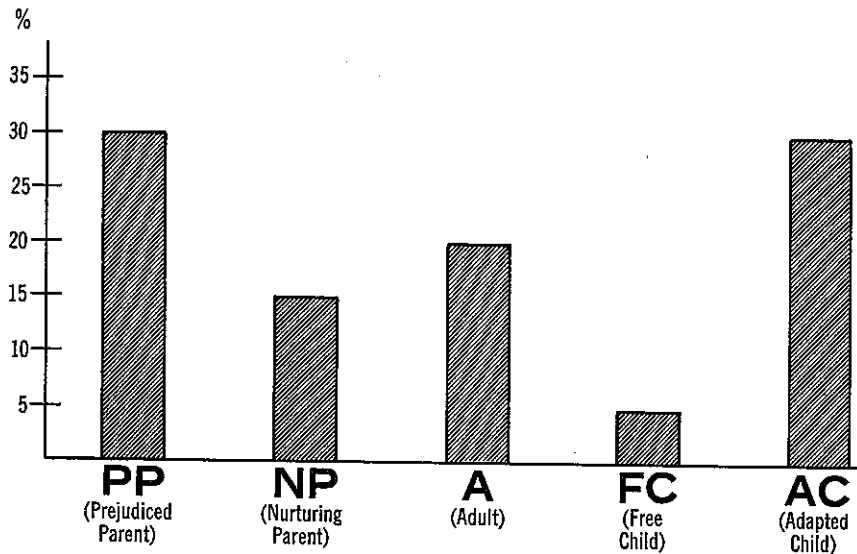
The Parent in you acts in the same ways your mother or father, or whoever raised you, did. Your Parent can be supportive of you and others (your Nurturing Parent), or critical (your Prejudiced Parent), or both. Your Adult is the rational part of you, the part that prefers to make decisions based on facts rather than on feelings or prejudices. Your Child is the part of you that acts and feels as you did when you were little. Your Child can be "natural"; i.e., act on his own, free of the influence of your internal Parent (your Free Child); or he can be "adapted," either to please or defy your internal Parent (your Adapted Child).

A simple way of showing how active your different ego states are is illustrated in Diagram II.

Diagram II gives the ego-state profile of a person with a very active Prejudiced Parent and Adapted Child; a moderately active Adult; a low Nurturing Parent; and very little Free Child. The diagram is called a *Dusay Egogram*, a simple but graphic way of showing how you expend

DIAGRAM II

A DUSAY EGOGRAM



your energy. Figure that you and your spouse each have five ways to invest the 100 percent of your energy. Once you and he know how to identify your Adult, Prejudiced Parent, Nurturing Parent, Free Child, and Adapted Child you can draw each other's, and your own, egogram, compare results, and see how closely you agree on your picture of one another.

Each of your ego states has his own ways of feeling and behaving, and each is vital for you: your Parent for nurturing yourself and others; your Adult for staying in touch with reality; your Child for having fun, and being creative.

Whatever you do, you have three sets of reasons, Parent, Adult, and Child. They may agree, or they may disagree. When you decide to marry, your Child may say, "Wow! He's the *only* one for me." Your Parent may say (inside your head), "Marry your own kind." Your Adult may say, "I'm now ready to take on the responsibility."

Parents commonly talk about marriage as it *ought* to be. Your Parent may say things like: "At your age, you ought to be married," or "A marriage without children is no marriage at all."

Your Child looks at marriage as he wishes it to be. Perhaps having found your dream of the "perfect" mate (Sleeping Beauty, or Prince Charming), you imagine living happily ever after. After the honeymoon your Child may feel cheated, or tricked, because your marriage is not the eternal bliss your fantasy promised. You may then say, from your Child, "I'd be happy if it weren't for her. If she *really* loved me, she would not act that way."

Your Adult is more likely to view marriage realistically. With your Adult you'll know you can usually adapt to each other's differences, by understanding and replacing Child demands and Parent intolerance with more reasonable responses. When in your Adult, you say things like:

"Let's figure out how we can get along better."

"Here is how we've acted. Here is how we can change."

"This is what I can do as my part."

When faced with a tough decision, you will want to use more than your Adult, if your decision is to last. Remember, your three parts make you a whole person. Your most enduring decisions, probably, are those you make with Adult awareness, Parental encouragement, and Child enthusiasm. That is not always easy to do, especially if the three parts of you are in conflict. For example, a wife considering separation from her husband may hold this conference in her head:

Parent: "You should be grateful for what you have. Don't complain."

Child: "But I'm caged in. I guess I'm just not in love anymore."

Adult: "I have choices. What are the advantages, and the disadvantages, of our staying together?"

Without your Adult being fully aware of what you are doing, you can undermine a good marriage with your Parent and Child. You are better off knowing clearly what you are doing with all three parts of you. One of the purposes of TA is to get all three parts of you in harmony.

A fifteen-year-old girl, after eloping with a much older man, said to her angry father: "I knew the chance I was taking. I shouldn't have done it. But I felt like some fun." See if you agree that she probably made each of these three statements from a different ego state.

You can tell which part of you is most active at any given moment. You have four ways of checking:

1. Look at your actions, which include your posture, the way you walk, your voice, the words you use. The following words are usually Parent: *ridiculous, childish, filthy*. These are usually Adult: *suitable, childlike, inaccurate*. These are Child: *wow, nope, groovy, yecch*.

2. Watch how you get along with others, especially your spouse. Seeing how another responds to you is a good way to check which state you are in. If you are overly compliant, the other may turn on his Parent. If you are nagging Parent, your partner may react from his resentful Child. If you are full of fun, your natural Child may arouse the other's fun-loving Child. When it's time for business, and you act business-like, your spouse will probably be Adult toward you.

3. Think back to your childhood. Remember how you expressed yourself. Watch how you act with your spouse, and you will notice how similar to your parents, or to your little-kid self you sometimes are.

4. Check your feelings, how you are experiencing yourself. You can feel the part of you that is active. Many husbands and wives are unaware of their inappropriate Parent, Adult, or Child responses, assuming they are almost always being "sensible." You can be afraid of your spouse, or feel superior to him, or resentful of him, without your Adult even considering the possibility.

By knowing which state you are in, you may become more honest with yourself, and with your mate.

One job of your Adult is to help meet your own, and your spouse's, Child needs without getting hurt or into trouble. Your Parent's job is to treat the Child in you, and in your partner, with care. The Child is the most sensitive and probably the most important part in you. You cannot, without serious risk, ignore the Child in each other, or in yourself. Your Child is the one who most enjoys, loves, fears, and needs. He is the most fun, but also the most vulnerable, the most open to hurt.

This booklet may help you to look inside yourself and your marriage. You can hear what you are telling yourself. Here is an example of a conversation inside a young woman's head:

Child: "I want to be a big success, not just as a wife and a mother, but as a woman."

Parent: "Well, I should hope so. But remember, young lady, marriage is a career in itself. A woman shouldn't compete with her husband. Your place is in the home."

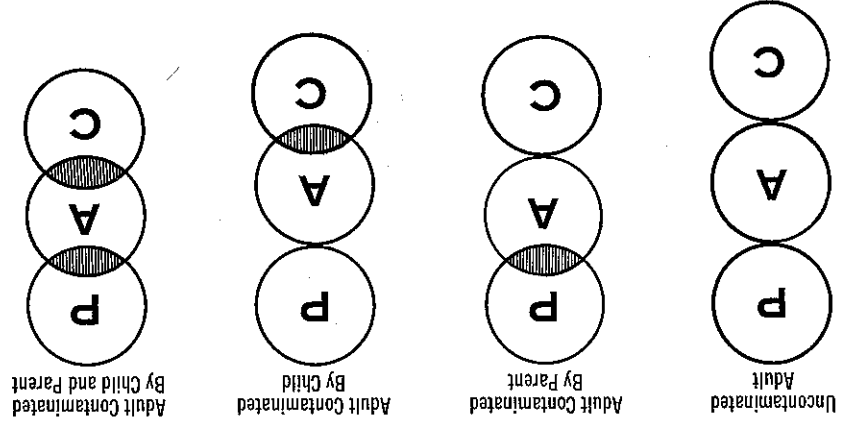
With these mixed up messages the young lady may never firmly decide what success is for her until her Adult unscrambles the facts from the prejudices.

You can ask yourself these questions. What kind of Parent am I to myself? More encouraging than critical? More loving than preachy? If your mother and father criticized more than encouraged you, the Parent in you may be more faultfinding than helpful.

Do I run my life from my Adult, so that I can have plenty of Child fun without hurting myself or others? Does my Parent really treat my Child with love? If your mother and father were not comfortable showing their love for you, or for each other, then the Parent in you may not be nurturing enough.

A common problem that can lead to trouble for you, single or married, is **contamination** of your Adult by your Parent, or Child, or both. (See Diagram III.)

DIAGRAM III



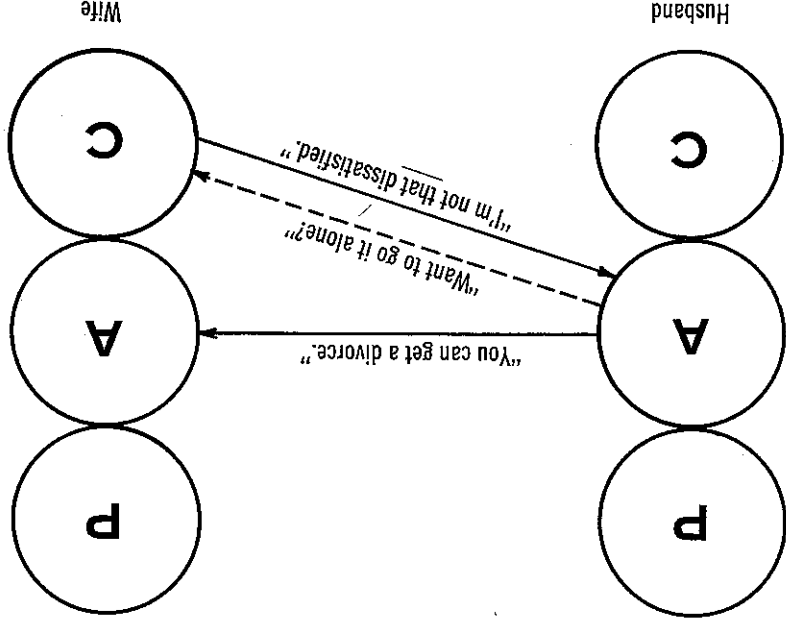
When the Adult part of you accepts blindly a Parent belief, such as, "A marriage without children is no marriage at all," the Adult is said to be contaminated by a Parent prejudice. Your Adult may accept what your mother said without looking at the facts.

Your Child can also contaminate your Adult. For example, you may say with sincerity that your spouse always sides with the children against you, when that is not a fact. (The *always* can't be right.) Child contamination

break down and switch to a wrangle about whether the wife is bossy. The transaction was **crossed**. Not all crossed transactions result in unpleasant breaks in communication (some are witty), but many do. Most marital conflicts begin with such crosses. If a person's Adult is contaminated by his Parent or Child, his messages to another will sometimes be inappropriate, and result in "misunderstandings." The Child in the husband above may have chosen to hear his wife's Adult as if it were his own internal, domineering Parent.

Another kind of transaction is called **ulterior**, one that has a covert or hidden message in it. For example, in Diagram VI a husband is talking

DIAGRAM VI

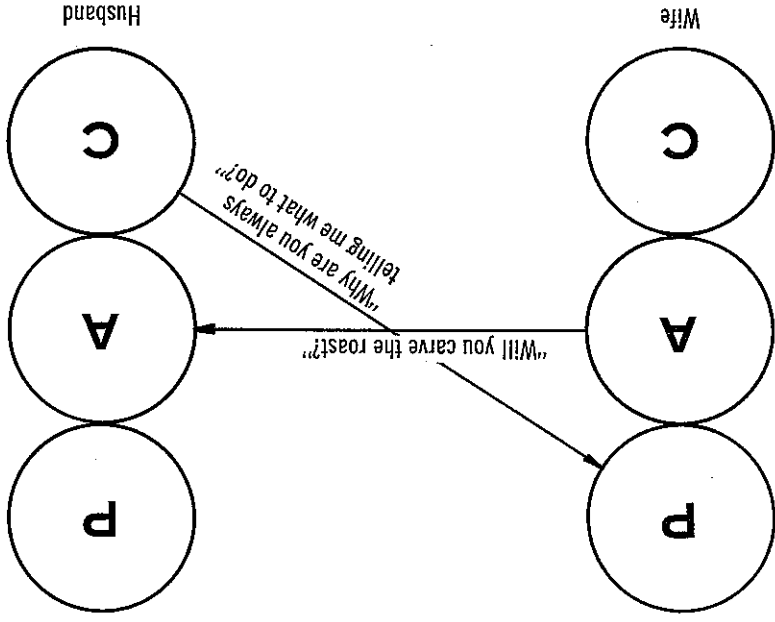


to his wife, who is upset with his behavior. The husband says straight-forwardly, "If you are dissatisfied, you can get a divorce." What he says is fact, but he is talking not only to the Adult of the wife, he is also sending a secret message to her Child. She, from her frightened Child, answers to herself, "Oh, oh. Then I'd be all alone." Aloud she says, "I'm

These are examples of simple *complementary* transactions. The lines of communication are parallel. They do not cross. Suppose a husband says to his wife, "What time is dinner?" (Adult of husband.) She says, "Six thirty" (Adult of wife.) This is a simple, **uncrossed** transaction, Adult to Adult. A couple talking to one another can switch from one ego state to another easily, with no break in the conversation, and with all the transactions remaining uncrossed. One partner may customarily be Child and the other Parent, or vice versa, with or without an unspoken agreement to switch parts under certain conditions. A husband may say, "I feel rotten for goofing at work today" (Child of husband); and his wife says, "You poor baby. Let me fix you a drink" (Parent of wife.) When sick, the husband may act mostly from his Child. When his wife is sick, he may or may not be willing to become a nurturing Parent. If the lines of communication cross, the couple may have a problem.

Diagram V shows a simple transaction, but the lines cross. The wife asks, in an undemanding way, "Will you carve the roast?" (Adult to Adult.) Her husband, instead of answering from his Adult, "Yes," or "No," says angrily from his Child, "Why are you always telling me what to do?" The communication about carving the roast may immediately

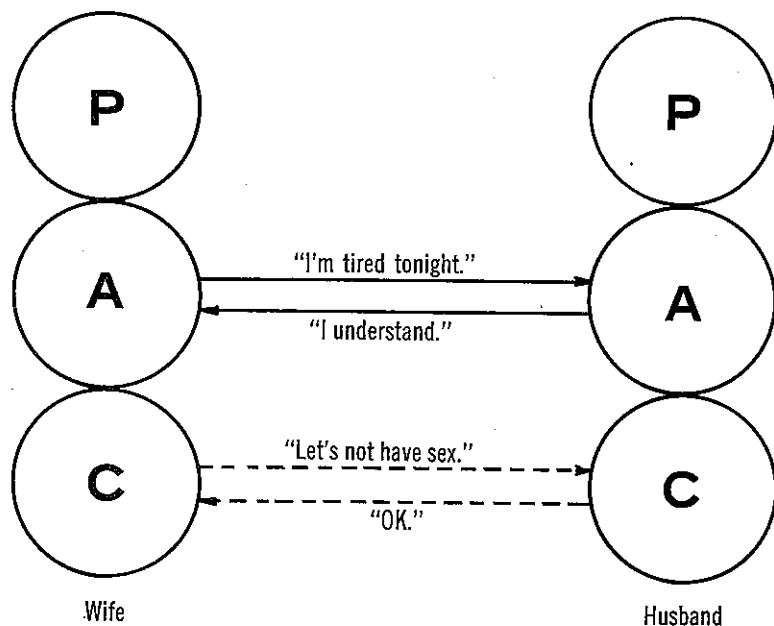
DIAGRAM V



not *that* dissatisfied." The husband, from his Adult, directed a factual remark to the Adult of the wife, knowing she would probably allow her Child to be hooked by his unspoken message, "You want to go it alone?" He wanted, let's say, to close the matter quickly and keep his wife clinging to him.

The husband in Diagram VI worked an angle from his Adult. His ulterior transaction was **angular**. Diagram VII shows another kind, called **duplex**, in which two ego states in both persons are active. For example,

DIAGRAM VII



a wife may say to her husband, from her Adult to his Adult, "I'm awfully tired tonight." He answers from his Adult to her Adult, "I understand." Someone overhearing this conversation might hear it as a simple exchange of information, and miss the Child-to-Child secret exchange, which may be (only the two of them know for sure), "Let's not have sex tonight."

A transactional exchange that includes an agreement, overt or covert, is called a **contract**. You make several kinds of contracts when you marry:

1. An *explicit* (spoken) agreement, usually Adult-to-Adult; e.g., you both say, "I do."
2. A *tacit* (implied) agreement, usually Parent-to-Child and vice versa; e.g., "If I'm sick, you take care of me. If you're sick, I'll take care of you."
3. A *secret*, ulterior (unspoken) agreement, usually Child-to-Child; e.g., "We won't get *too* close, because it's scary."

The behavior that follows a duplex transaction depends more on the secret message than on the spoken message. What's really going on in an ulterior transaction may have nothing to do with what's said aloud. In a Child-to-Child hassle over who's "right," the Child of one spouse, feeling unappreciated, may be looking for recognition; the other, feeling put down, may be asking for approval. In a Parent-to-Parent quarrel over a budget, the disagreement may disguise a covert power struggle in which each partner is fighting for control of the relationship.

A couple complaining to a marriage counselor may say:

Husband: "She always puts me down!"

Wife: "I do not! He's always criticizing me!"

What might be happening here at the under-the-surface, Child-to-Child level? One possibility is that the husband, in his Child, feels uncared for, and is trying to say to his wife: "Please care about me"; the Child in the wife, feeling unloved, may be indirectly asking: "Please like me." The most important part of your marriage contract may be the secret, Child-to-Child agreement between you.

See if you can analyze the following transactions:

Husband: "Where do you want to eat tonight?"

Wife: "It doesn't matter to me."

Husband: "Let's eat at Alice's Restaurant."

Wife: "We always go where you want to go!"

What do you think they were doing here? What do the lines in the transactions probably look like? There are several possibilities. Are your communications usually uncrossed, or are they crossed? If they are inappropriately crossed, your communications will break down.

A couple may want a loving relationship, but repeatedly lock themselves in combat. A troubled marriage usually has too much covert communication, most of it outside of Adult awareness. One effective way to handle your differences is to negotiate them openly from your Adult. With TA, you can examine your contracts, spoken and unspoken, and change them if you want to.

Important words: **transaction, uncrossed, crossed, angular, duplex; relationship diagram; marital contracts.**

GETTING YOUR STROKES IN MARRIAGE

An important responsibility for your Adult is to see that you give and receive **strokes**. You need to stroke and be stroked whether you are old, young, single or married. A stroke is a physical caress, a word of recognition, an insult, or a slap on the face. It is a stimulus from another, some form of recognition, positive or negative. In TA, there is a saying that your spinal cord will shrivel up if you are not stroked. A child would rather be slapped than completely ignored. Infants who are not physically handled fail to develop properly and may even die from lack of stimulation. One way to be sure to get strokes is to give them.

As you grow up you receive much less physical stroking than you had when you were little. You still need and want physical stroking, but you learn to accept more and more non-physical (verbal and non-verbal) strokes. Your marriage provides countless opportunities for getting and giving strokes, physical and symbolic. A good question to ask yourself about your marriage is, "What kind of strokes do we get from, and give, one another?"

Positive strokes include messages that you are OK. They help you, as good food does, to feel nourished. A nod of appreciation, a warm "Hi," a sincere compliment are positive strokes. **Negative** strokes imply that you are not OK. You are negatively stroking someone when you scowl at him, call him stupid or boring, or belittle him. Negative strokes are sometimes called **discounts**. A discount is a message that reads, "You (your needs, feelings, interests) don't count."

Strokes are also either **conditional** or **unconditional**. When you stroke your wife simply because you love her, not to get her to do something for you, your stroke is unconditional. Stroking for performance is conditional stroking; e.g., "I like you when you cook a good dinner." Stroking for being (just for existing) is unconditional. You need positive strokes of both kinds. But if you are given strokes only for doing, and not for being who you are, you may soon resent having always to perform for strokes. You may react in a negative way, perhaps with anger. Conditional strokes can be satisfying, but you may prefer to be told by your partner that you are OK just for being you.

Check your marriage for discounts. A wife says to her husband in a straightforward way, "I'll tell you what I feel about that. I feel angry."

The husband can discount her by saying things like "You shouldn't feel that way," or "That's your problem." A discount questions another's right to be herself. Have you ever been surprised by your spouse's complaint, "You never listen to me?" You can learn to spot your marital discounting and become a more sensitive listener to your partner's expressions of feelings. When he says and obviously means, "I feel hurt when you do that," what can you say to let him know that his reaction *does* count? You can look at your usual Parent, Adult, and Child responses when someone is straight about his emotions.

Discounts are ways to turn yourselves off from one another and to stop yourselves from being intimate. They can serve as excuses for getting your strokes by *withdrawing*, mentally and emotionally, if not physically. Some couples, because of self-doubts, are uncomfortable with intimacy and fill time in other ways to get strokes. You have several ways of doing so.

You can fill your time with *rituals*. You probably entered marriage ritually, with a wedding ceremony. A ritual is a fixed way of behaving towards others, a transaction or set of transactions almost everybody uses. Your wedding ceremony was a fixed way of sanctioning your marital contract. Your greeting, parting, congratulatory, and apology rituals are more frequent examples. The conventional transactions in these social rituals are a set way of exchanging "word strokes." In greeting your spouse in the evening, you may say something like "Hi, how was your day?" She may say, "OK, how about you?" You may say, "Not bad." If you don't return strokes you will be considered unfriendly, or rude.

You can fill your time with others by *activities*, which are usually called "work." Activity is primarily for the purpose of getting something done rather than for socializing but it is another way of getting strokes. Mowing the lawn with your son, cooking dinner with your husband, working on a club committee, are ways of getting strokes without getting too close. People avoid closeness, but still get their strokes, by staying "busy" with one another.

You can also *pastime* with others. Pastimes are conventional transactions, usually pleasantly exchanged strokes, by which you get to know people or learn something. Rap sessions, gossiping, and cocktail partying are pastimes. Some pastimes are "Man Talk," like "Who Won" (sports) and "General Motors" (cars); others are "Women Talk" like "Wardrobe," "Kitchen," or "PTA." "Ain't It Awful" is common to both sexes. When pastimes serve an ulterior purpose they become games (discussed in Chapter Five). Married couples usually have favorite pastime topics, which may slowly change over the years as both spouses tire of the same