Reply to William F. Cornell: "Ego states in the social realm: reflections on the work of Pio Scilligo in the context of Berne’s original concepts"

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We are pleased to read Bill Cornell’s article that responds to our invitation to comment on some basic concepts of Social-Cognitive Transactional Analysis (SCTA) with particular reference to works by Scilligo (2011) and De Luca and Tosi (2011) published on the Transactional Analysis Journal. In fact, we feel encouraged to continue our theoretical interchanges and establishing a dialogue characterized by mutual respect and engagement in the development of the theoretical and scientific basis of transactional analysis.

In his article, Cornell offers stimulating reflections that are consistent with the theoretical framework of social-cognitive transactional analysis. With specific reference to Berne’s transactional analysis, Cornell highlights some of the similarities and differences between TA and SCTA, which, in part, both relate to and amplify the suggestions of De Luca and Tosi (2011). We are especially happy about the positive opinion he expressed on the new features introduced by Scilligo and his collaborators to the SCTA model. Cornell clearly respects and understands the expansion of the central core of transactional analysis in the theories and research carried out by Scilligo and his colleagues. SCTA seeks to develop Berne’s social psychiatry within the context of up-to-date research in the social-cognitive field. Scilligo
(2009, p.32) wrote that the basic theoretical tenets of transactional analysis, seen as a social psychiatry and a sister theory to relational psychoanalysis, remain stable in social-cognitive transactional analysis, even though Freud’s basic views require some revision.

The *Transactional Analysis Journal* has, for years, supported the publication of articles by international authors, including many from Italy. We remember with pleasure the theme issue on “The Importance of the Unconscious for Transactional Analysis Today,” coedited by Cornell and Tosi in 2008, which contained several articles derived from the 7th Conference of the Italian Society for Transactional Analysis (Società Italiana di Aanalisi Transazionale). Scilligo’s (2011) article on transference, which was mentioned by Cornell in his article, was presented for the first time at that conference. It suggested some of his radical ideas on how transference is a ubiquitous phenomenon.

We appreciate Cornell’s reference to one of the latest Scilligo’s (2011) articles, in which the theory of transference is viewed in light of research in social-cognitive psychology. That research affirms the idea of psychotherapy as a relationship in which patient and therapist affect each other both implicitly and explicitly and together co-construct their relationship. Elsewhere, some interesting research results have suggested the effects of the therapist’s personal integration on the therapeutic alliance (De Luca, 2004; Scilligo & De Luca, 1997). For example, only therapists who have an ego state profile with high scores in free and protective ego states and low scores in critical and rebellious ego states relate to their patients without negative transference processes affecting the development of a therapeutic alliance during various stages of therapy. We use the term *transference* for the therapist as well as the patient in line with Scilligo’s social-cognitive view, wherein transference is a social-cognitive process that influences everyday life. Transference consists of mental representations of significant others that act as schema or protocols that can be activated and applied to interpret other persons, especially when one feels a
similarity between someone new and a significant other (Andersen & Berk, 1998). Transference includes representations of the significant other in the past, the self as experienced in that relationship, and any relevant relationship pattern between the two (Scilligo, 2011). We feel that adding this view of transference to the social-cognitive model of ego states well mirrors the great dynamism of the therapeutic relationship and its utility as a tool for change.

We cannot but accept Cornell’s invitation to disseminate in English examples of clinical work based on SCTA because doing so will demonstrate the usefulness of the model for research as well as its influence on therapists’ and counselors’ directions, strategies, and conceptualizations. Translations and publications are underway that will be useful for exploring these areas.

Cornell observes that Scilligo stressed the therapeutic relevance of the functional model. In a sense this is true, but we must remember that the concepts of schema and prototype allow us to organize the concept of ego state as a process and, therefore, ultimately, as a function. The theory of ego states is not complete if in trying to explain its formation and origin we do not take into account the three evolutionary dimensions of existence, survival, reproduction, and the developmental dimension together with the theory of attachment. Relevant complements of SCTA are the so-called copy processes with which Lorna Benjamin (2003), a researcher and author of the interpersonal approach, summarized the main interpersonal dynamics that SCTA uses to explain the formation of certain configurations of the ego states.

In discussing ego states and the Self, Cornell suggests a connection between the integrated Adult, and the Integrated Self. A few theoretical clarifications might be useful in this regard. We can find a connection between the concept of integrated or integrating Adult and what in SCTA is called the well-being system. This system corresponds to a network of ego states, in particular, the activation of the Free Adult, Free Child, Protective Child, and Protective Adult, with a
moderate presence of Free Parent and Protective Parent. This is then a dynamic system characterized by loving affiliation and balanced interdependence.

Regarding the self model it is essential also to understand the difference between Self ego states and the Integrated Self. The latter is an abstract concept that defines a superordinate system that organizes and contains all the potential ego states. In Scilligo’s terms, the Self superschema or Integrated Self, which contains all the self-schema (i.e., all the ego states), can be defined as a lasting unconscious organizer of different aspects of oneself. It is composed of configurations and structures of meaning that concern the self in its conscious and unconscious complexity, including its way of being and relating to others. In the SCTA model of ego states, the *Self surface* refers to relatively stable modes of relating to oneself. As explained in the De Luca and Tosi (2011) and Scilligo (2011) articles, it is important to remember that relational ego states (represented on the Initiator and Responder surfaces) and the Self ego states are different mental representations. The developmental dimension defines the features of the Child, Adult, and Parent both in Self ego states and in Relational ego states. It is true that, as Cornell says, in the definition of the Integrated Self, Scilligo (2009) wanted to highlight the agency feature as a Self emerging in action rather than as an observed object. However, if the Self is capable of self-reflection, its acting and being can be objectivized as snapshots of descriptions of conscious transitional declarative and procedural structures and as an ordinated and superordinated series of interpretations of interactive processes. Thus, the various selves shown by a person are only partial representations of the Integrated Self, which represents a noninfinite group of potentials that continually emerge in experience and evolution within a specific individuality and a view to the future that keeps account of physical, personal, cultural, and social boundaries (Scilligo, 2009). It is possible to see the logic of the passages of Relational and Self ego states by means of the self-reflective capacity of the Free Adult and the Protective Adult,
keeping in mind, however, that there are three levels of experience: explicit processes, implicit unconscious processes, and preverbal processes of which a person is aware only through symptoms (Scilligo, 2009).

We hope our comments here provide another step forward in the dialogue between transactional analysis and social-cognitive transactional analysis.