



## Untangling the Family Tree: Using the Transgenerational Script Questionnaire in the Psychotherapy of Transgenerational Trauma

Gloria Noriega Gayol

To cite this article: Gloria Noriega Gayol (2019) Untangling the Family Tree: Using the Transgenerational Script Questionnaire in the Psychotherapy of Transgenerational Trauma, Transactional Analysis Journal, 49:4, 279-291, DOI: [10.1080/03621537.2019.1650235](https://doi.org/10.1080/03621537.2019.1650235)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03621537.2019.1650235>



Published online: 05 Sep 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 179



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



ARTICLE



# Untangling the Family Tree: Using the Transgenerational Script Questionnaire in the Psychotherapy of Transgenerational Trauma

Gloria Noriega Gayol

## ABSTRACT

The Transgenerational Script Questionnaire (TSQ) is presented as a helpful tool to reveal the transgenerational script in a family tree. The TSQ may be applied in individual or group psychotherapy and used for treatment planning. Transgenerational trauma, intrapsychically introjected through original nonverbal and verbal transactions between the Child and Parent ego states of family members, is usually present in the client's internal dialogues. When clients are not aware of the voices in their head, these can be projected through ulterior transactions, psychological games, transference psychodynamics, and projective identification in their current relationships, leading to the reenactment of trauma through further generations. Becoming aware of this sequence may give individuals the opportunity to understand and disentangle their family tree. These ideas are illustrated with a case example.

## KEYWORDS

Transgenerational Script Questionnaire (TSQ); transgenerational scripts; mechanisms of script transmission; ulterior transactions; psychological games; transference psychodynamics; projective identification; internal dialogues; transgenerational family systems; unconscious relational patterns

I asked the leaf whether it was frightened because it was autumn and the other leaves were falling. The leaf told me, "No. During the whole spring and summer I was completely alive. I worked hard to help nourish the tree, and now much of me is in the tree. I am not limited by this form. I am also the whole tree."

(Thich Nhat Hanh, 1991 p. 117)

Human beings are like trees: Both have roots, trunk, branches, and leaves and are connected to a family system and to Mother Earth by our roots. In the autumn, the leaves fall and become the soil that nourishes the roots of the tree for the next spring. When our ancestors die, they also become the soil that nourishes the roots of our family tree. This is a common energy field that remains in the tree or family through future generations

For some years, I have been using the Transgenerational Script Questionnaire (TSQ) in my workshops on transgenerational scripts. Recently, I have also been using the TSQ with clients in individual psychotherapy. This has been useful for many people from different cultures, becoming a practical tool for developing consciousness and starting work on their internal and external family systems.

Transgenerational scripts are unconscious systemic patterns that people repeat in families, groups, and organizations through beliefs, emotions, and behaviors that re-

create the history and life events experienced by their ancestors. Transgenerational scripts may be sane or toxic. In the former, themes of belonging, acceptance, development, productivity, success, love, and equity are repeated, among other things; in the latter, themes of overadaptation, dependency, codependency, abandonment, rejection, danger, abuse, violence, illegitimacy, infidelity, betrayal, isolation, serious illness, premature death, suicide, homicide, and incarceration, among others, abound. A treatment plan for working with transgenerational issues in psychotherapy requires awareness of both types of scripts in order to reinforce the first and change the second through an empathic relationship with the client and using various techniques designed to facilitate integration into the client's Adult ego state.

## Case History

Carlos came to therapy because he wanted to separate from his lover/partner Mara. He was feeling desperate, anxious, and depressed because he had failed in his decisions. He was tired of the way their relationship had developed over the years. He did not like the way she was treating him anymore and felt abused by her. Carlos worked hard, earned a good salary, but was always worried about money.

Several times, after a hard discussion with Mara, Carlos impulsively left the house and went to a hotel. After a couple of days, he would call her, they would talk, write "agreements" between them, and Carlos would return home. When I asked him why he did not stick to his first decision, he answered, "I really can't stand being alone."

As he talked, I noticed how he looked at the ceiling or the floor instead of at me, thereby avoiding direct contact. His face expressed a good deal of tension and lack of energy. Carlos is a tall man, overweight, and showed a kind attitude to me. He said, "I used to be a healthy man. Now I'm suffering from several health problems because I gained a lot of weight, have high blood pressure, and don't sleep well." He was having obsessive thoughts about his relationship with Mara and was also worried about his job. Carlos was appreciated at work by his boss, but he worked excessively.

Eight years ago, Carlos left his wife and teenage daughter to live with Mara, a widow with four children. At that time, Mara was loving with him, and in his words, "I felt loved by a woman for the first time in my life." Both agreed to certain arrangements as a couple, including living at Mara's house, raising her children together, and a financial agreement to run a new business together.

Over time, Carlos found that Mara was not really interested in "their business" and discounted their financial planning. Instead, she was developing other "personal projects" (handicrafts) that were not generating income. As a result, Carlos was paying all the expenses for Mara and her children. He was also disappointed because Mara was not loving to him anymore and always found excuses for not having sex.

Carlos was still married. His wife and daughter resented him, but neither he nor his wife had taken the initiative to divorce. He continued paying all their expenses as well because his wife did not work, and his daughter, who was now 24, had a degree but remained unemployed. He said, "I know that a fair divorce would be the solution, but I feel guilty and ashamed to talk with my wife."

At age 12, Carlos decided to rescue his father, whose job at the railroads left him with bleeding hands and severely damaged health. From then on, Carlos's focus in life was to liberate his father from that job, and in so doing, he became the financial provider for the family.

As a child, Carlos had a distant relationship with his mother, whom he feared; he said that she was "a very hard woman." As an adolescent, he felt insecure in his relationships with women and did not have friends.

At that time, a paternal uncle named John advised him not to interact with girls in order to avoid being distracted from his studies and job. This led Carlos to repress his longings for love. It is worth mentioning that Uncle John was an important parental figure for Carlos because, as Carlos said, "He was the only one in the family who gave me advice and was interested in my welfare."

As a young adult, Carlos lived a "platonic," fantasy relationship with a girl because he was afraid of being rejected if he talked to her about his feelings. For more than a year, he watched her at a distance until he saw her kissing a boyfriend. After that, Carlos decided to get married, even though he did not love his future wife. When I asked him why he did that, he said, "Because that is something that people have to do."

After 3 months in therapy, I told Carlos about self-reparenting, a powerful method created by Muriel James (1974, 1981) in which clients learn how to use their Adult ego state to develop a new Parent ego state for themselves by means of certain exercises. In that session, I introduced Carlos to a guided fantasy with the purpose of creating a new internal dialogue between a new Parent, who listened and responded to the needs of his Child at a specific moment in his life. When we finished, he told me, "I have not loved myself, that's why I've been so afraid of being alone." From then on, he felt safer and began to plan a conscious decision. Carlos took his time, rented an apartment, talked with Mara calmly, and left the house, willing to learn to live alone. However, after a week he began to feel lonely and afraid to return to the same situation. Therefore, I invited Carlos to attend a 4-day transgenerational scripts workshop that I had scheduled in Mexico.

## The Transgenerational Script Questionnaire

The Transgenerational Script Questionnaire (TSQ) is a useful, practical tool for understanding a transgenerational family script. It serves as a starting point for both clients and psychotherapists. The answers to the TSQ help clients to consciously reflect on their history, help psychotherapists to create treatment plans, and help both to become aware of unconscious relational patterns (Noriega, 2010).

In the workshop, Carlos answered the Transgenerational Script Questionnaire (Table 1) as well as participated in several exercises and the group process. He enjoyed being with the people in the group, shared some of his feelings, and heard about the feelings of others. He felt accepted by the group and had fun.

After personal introductions followed by a contract for the workshop, I invited participants to answer the TSQ and then share their insights in groups of two. That

**Table 1.** Transgenerational Script Questionnaire as Answered by Carlos.

|   |  |  |           |                     |
|---|--|--|-----------|---------------------|
| Client: Carlos  |  | Age: 48  | Sex: Male | Date: 9 August 2017 |
| <b>Describe below, using nouns and adjectives, your perception of what you know or imagine about the personality and the relationships of the following people. Do it by following the numbers.</b> |  |  |           |                     |
| <b>1. My grandfather from my father's side was ...</b>  | <b>3. Relationship between my grandparents from my father's side ...</b>   | <b>2. My grandmother from my father's side was ...</b>   |           |                     |
| Drunk, irresponsible, cheerful, aggressive with my grandmother  | Very bad, they ended up in the same house but each one on their side (link between them only for the children)   | Submissive, almost without speaking. She gave my dad to her sisters-in-law when my dad was 8 years old. She used to hold her anger and showed a constant bad mood. |           |                     |
| <b>4. Relationship between my father and his father ...</b>   | <b>6. Relationship between my father with his siblings ...</b>   | <b>5. Relationship between my father and his mother ...</b>  |           |                     |
| Respectful, but my dad in disagreement with him. My dad rescued him many times from economic crises and debts.  | Good to date, but with restrictions to express affection to each other   | Very superficial, never showed love to each other  |           |                     |
| <b>7. My grandfather from my mother's side was ...</b>  | <b>9. Relationship between my grandparents from my mother's side was ...</b>   | <b>8. My grandmother from my mother's side was ...</b>   |           |                     |
| Very aggressive when drinking. Extremely bad temper. He died very young because of liver problems.  | Extremely difficult, extreme aggression  | Very hard with her husband and daughters, irresponsible, manipulative. She lived 102 years.  |           |                     |
| <b>10. Relationship between my mother with her father ...</b>   | <b>12. Relationship between my mother with her siblings ...</b>  | <b>11. Relationship between my mother and her mother ...</b>   |           |                     |
| Respectful, but my mom in disagreement with his actions   | Good, very supportive among them because they lost their father at an early age  | Respectful, had more conversations, but with reserved affection  |           |                     |
| <b>13. My father ...</b>  | <b>15. Relationship between my parents or step-parents ...</b>   | <b>14. My mother ...</b>   |           |                     |
| Very quiet, hardworking, provider, suffered abandonment at an early age but is very objective and strong. It is hard for him to show love.  | Respectful and enduring problems so as not to hurt their children  | A very hard woman, with very strict principles to educate her children, now very sick and extreme blackmailer  |           |                     |
| <b>16. My relationship with my father or stepfather ...</b>   | <b>18. Relationship with my siblings or step-siblings ...</b>  | <b>17. My relationship with my mother ...</b>  |           |                     |
| Very good, but with difficulty showing affection. A great bond and love between us<br>Uncle John advised me how to be successful as a man.  | Good with my four siblings, but very limited with one brother. Extremely respectful, without showing affection   | Good, that's all. Since past times both disagree with our ways of being and acting. Now she is an extreme blackmailer with her illness                             |           |                     |
| <b>19. My significant partners ...</b>  | <b>21. My relationship with my significant partners ...</b>  | <b>20. Relationship with myself ...</b>  |           |                     |
| Aggressive, authoritarian, she comes from a matriarchy, frequent fights and reconciliations between us. I recently finished the relationship with her.  | Both have been bad. I chose the first one because I had to make a life. I got involved with the second from the rescuer part of myself and had many years of problems and disappointments. | Disoriented, suffering all the time, I do not find a path of peace, fear of making decisions, tired, muted, age crisis   |           |                     |
| <b>22. My son/s ...</b>   | <b>24. Relationship between my children ...</b>  | <b>23. My daughter/s ...</b>   |           |                     |
|   |  | She is far from me, she respects me and loves me, but seeks me only for money  |           |                     |
| <b>25. Relationship with my son/s ...</b>   |  | <b>26. Relationship with my daughter/s ...</b>   |           |                     |
|   |  | Good, that's all. We only talk about work and meet once a month.   |           |                     |

*(continued)*

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| 27. Relationship between my son/s and his partners ... |   | 28. Relationship between my daughter/s and her partners ...<br>I don't know if she has a partner.      |
| 29. What my grandchildren are repeating ...            | 30. What is being repeated in my family ...<br>Lack of love, loneliness, depression | 31. What I am repeating ...<br>Lack of self-esteem, fear, doubts to make decisions, constant suffering |

Note: answer from 22 to 29 only if you have children (At this moment Carlos did not have grandchildren.)

helped them to develop confidence and learn from the observations and feedback of the other.

I described this workshops in more detail elsewhere (Noriega Gayol, 2016, p. 119).

In his TSQ, Carlos wrote that his paternal grandmother gave his father, at age 8, to an aunt (question 2), and he thought that might be the origin of his constant fear of abandonment, something he “inherited” from his father. Carlos also discovered that with Mara he was following a couple script similar to that of his parents and grandparents (questions 3, 9, 21), that is, being involved with a tough, authoritarian, manipulative woman like those in his family tree (questions 8, 14, 17).

The hardest thing for Carlos to accept was that Mara had been exploiting him financially. She had changed completely from how she was when they met, but he still fantasized that she would someday be that woman he had loved and whom he had believed loved him. In fact, he was repeating the “platonic” relationship he had before getting married.

After the workshop, I was intrigued by Carlos’s use of the word “respectful” several times in his TSQ to describe the relationships among his family members, including his siblings. When I asked him in an individual session what that meant to him, he described the behavior he was referring to. It became clear to both of us that, in fact, they were avoiding expressing their thoughts sincerely as a way to prevent disrespectful confrontations. Carlos did not know how to establish a sincere, respectful dialogue with people, instead using a “Please me” driver (Kahler, 1974) taken from a counter-script message from his family. However, in the workshop, during the last couple of days, he gave himself the chance to practice eye contact with other people, talk sincerely, and ask for what he wanted, without feeling rejected if others refused to do something for him.

With Mara, at the beginning of their relationship, his fantasy was they had an authentic and sincere relationship because she was open in talking about her feelings. But later, when he tried to keep that kind of “sincere” relationship, he became entangled in arguments, from a Victim position, until he could no longer contain his anger. It was better to run away. Carlos had been living a typical self-destructive, loveless script (Steiner, 1974).

The Mechanisms of Script Transmission and the TSQ

Based on previous research (Noriega, Ramos, Medina Mora, & Villa, 2008), I proposed four mechanisms of script transmission that run through families by means of unconscious communication: (1) ulterior transactions, (2) psychological games,

(3) transference psychodynamics, and (4) projective identification. These mechanisms may be used for diagnosis and treatment in psychotherapy (Noriega, 2010).

My interest in this topic started several years ago after reading Eric Berne's (1972/1974) book *What Do You Say After You Say Hello?* Of special interest were his chapters about transmission of scripts. A few years later, while doing my own research, I attended a year-long seminar about psychoanalysis and genealogy based on the theory of Jacques Lacan and taught by Dr. Néstor Braunstein at the UNAM University in Mexico City. As part of this journey, I developed my theory about mechanisms of script transmission and the use of the TSQ, which I have been teaching over the past few years at workshops in various countries.

In the following section, I describe each of the four mechanisms and include examples from the history of Carlos's family, correlating them with the numbers of his answers on the TSQ (see Table 1).

## Ulterior Transactions

Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors keep alive the relationships we once had with our parents and types of relationships that our parents had with their parents, our grandparents. These may be sane or toxic and are introjected into the individual's internal system and passed down through the external family system.

Ulterior transactions occur at two levels simultaneously: the social and the psychological (Berne, 1966). Berne's third rule of communication states, "The behavioral outcome of an ulterior transaction is determined at the psychological and not at the social level" (p. 225).

Through ulterior transactions, the nonverbal script messages from the Child ego state of the parents and grandparents may be unconsciously introjected into the Parent ego states of their descendants (as  $C_3$  or the Child ego state in the Parent). As Berne (1961) said, this involves "the relics of the infant who once actually existed, in a struggle with the relics of the parents who once actually existed" (p. 66). The ulterior transactions used in a family system may be introjected into the internal dialogues of one or more family members. I call this "introjected transactions" (Noriega Gayol, 2016, p. 122). This type of transaction—because of its double messages—is usually manipulative because the psychological level hides a message from the sender. In transgenerational scripts, the hidden messages are unconscious for both parties but are generally aimed at manipulating a descendant to fulfill the needs of an ancestor. "In everyday life ... parents give messages to their children that parallel other significant situations from their own experience and history. ... These hidden messages usually appear in the children's adult lives as repetitive behaviors or relationship patterns" (Noriega, 2004, p. 316). As Berne (1961) wrote, "Operationally, a script is a complex set of transactions, by nature recurrent, but not necessarily recurring, since a complete performance may require a whole lifetime" (p. 116). Through their responses to the TSQ, people may become aware of recurring transactions in their lives that were also recurring in the lives of their ancestors.

The answer to #20 in the TSQ, "Relationship with myself," is aimed at showing the client the voices in his or her head. Carlos's answer was: "Disoriented, suffering all the

time, I don't find a path of peace, fear of making decisions, tired, muted, age crisis." From Carlos's history, shown in his answers to TSQ questions 1, 4, 13, and 16, it seems that his paternal grandfather and his father unconsciously manipulated their sons to Rescue their parents when the sons were still children. Later, Carlos kept repeating this script in his relationship with Mara, her children, and other people. The reversal of roles in the family of origin produces codependent scripts in which the person takes care of the needs of other people, discounting his or her own needs (Noriega Gayol, 2013).

In the workshop, after sharing the answers just described in a small group and receiving feedback from a few people, Carlos recognized that he was showing a suffering attitude most of the time as an "invitation," in a nonverbal way, for others to Rescue him from his suffering. He also manipulated himself through nonconscious internal dialogues into avoiding enjoying life and being unable to surpass his ancestors. Carlos realized that this description of himself was based in manipulating other people by suffering as a way to obtain the attention and the love he needed. He was confused about the difference between love and being Rescued, because to Rescue his father was the only way he found to show his love and to be close to his father (TSQ questions 13, 16). He also discovered that his statement about an "age crisis" corresponded to his hardworking father in #13 because his father died at the age of 49, almost the same age Carlos was at that moment! In fact, most of the men in his family died young.

In recent years, I have been researching ulterior transactions in the internal and external family systems. The extensive work from Schwartz (1995) about different "parts" in the personality, presented as internal family systems, inspired me to apply a similar approach based on transactional analysis ego state theory as a way to work with transgenerational family scripts. These voices in our head may have specific identities from our ancestors and can manifest differently in individuals who are neurotic, personality disordered, or psychotic. I consider Carlos to be neurotic.

By paying careful attention to one's own thoughts, people may find some identities from the past life experiences of their ancestors and the relationships among them. This awareness is useful for differentiating between either a loyal adaptation to the family of origin (as in Carlos's case) or an oppositional adaptation to parental figures (or other significant people), which was the case with Mara (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973) and, of course, is a part of the script (which was the case with Mara). Because of the unconscious origin of these voices, the identities and relationships among them may also show up in dreams. It is important to note, however, that clinicians should not force individuals to face these issues because their defense mechanisms need to be respected, even if they manifest as psychological games, transference and countertransference psychodynamics, or projective identification.

## Psychological Games

Berne (1964) defined a game as

an ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome. Descriptively it is a recurring set of transactions, often repetitious,



superficially plausible, with a concealed motivation; or more colloquially, a series of moves with a snare, or “gimmick.” (p. 48)

Psychological games contain a hidden message, an unconscious wish to understand or give meaning to an unresolved issue from the past, even when the intention of the social transaction appears as something different (Noriega, 2004, p. 317).

Traditionally, games were described by Berne (1964) with various names and as played by two or more people. Karpman (1968), in the drama triangle, described the interchanges of the roles of Rescuer, Victim, and Persecutor among the participants in a game. However, games are repetitive reenactments of previously unsolved issues, either in the person's life or coming from the life history of ancestors. They are experienced phenomenologically by acting out over and over again unsolved issues from the past. Thus, repetition occurs when an individual unconsciously seeks resolution of an unresolved issue from the past or a traumatic situation.

For example, every time Carlos decided to separate from Mara and her children and leave to live alone, he could not stand more than a week without feeling intolerable anxiety and a sense of abandonment. Therefore, he felt repentant, discounting the reasons that led him to make the decision to separate. Then he would betray himself by calling Mara, and after a few days, he was living again in the same situation with her.

Carlos believed that his intolerable feelings were because he loved Mara. However, I think they arose because he did not know how to be with himself and was unconsciously expecting to be Rescued by Mara to cover his childhood needs for the love and attention he did not receive from his mother. In the TSQ (question 14), Carlos described his mother as “a very hard woman, with very strict principles to educate her children, now very sick and [an] extreme blackmailer.” On the other hand, Carlos described in question 17 the relationship with his mother as “Good, that's all. Since past times both disagree with their own ways of being and acting. Now she is an extreme blackmailer with her illness.” Mara's excuse for not having sex with Carlos was that she had been diagnosed with fibromyalgia, but the disease did not prevent her from having friends and being warm with other people.

Therefore, through psychological games, Carlos was repeating the couple difficulties of his ancestors from at least four generations, and now he had begun to see that his daughter and Mara's children apparently were also presenting difficulties in establishing couple relationships (questions 3, 9, 15, 21, 28). (Carlos had not adopted Mara's children but was paying all their expenses and was emotionally involved with them as if they were his own children.)

At the end of a game, the payoff reinforces the script beliefs and racket feelings of the family script. However, when clients become aware through an empathic relationship with a therapist or an empathic group process, these games may be dismantled and turned into an opportunity for the client to understand their hidden meaning through the person's knowledge of his or her family history. Frequently, I also use the script system (Erskine, 2015, p. 115) as a tool to become aware of the reinforcing sequence of a transgenerational script by means of adding these into the “reinforcing experiences,” that is, the emotional experiences from a client's parents and grandparents.

## Transference Psychodynamics

Berne (1961) affirmed that “scripts belong to the realm of transference phenomena, that is, they are derivatives, or more precisely, adaptations, of infantile reactions and experiences” (p. 116). Later, Moiso (1985) wrote,

A study of these resistances led to the development of what we call the Psychodynamic TA Approach. In this approach the therapist, accepting a pseudo-symbiotic transferential relationship, carefully analyzes with the patient those ulterior messages that appear to be aimed at him (transference transactions) to unveil the exact nature of the transference relationship and the content of the projected Parental structure. (p. 196)

One day I received a message from Carlos saying that he had to travel due to his work and that he would call me back for another appointment. I called him immediately and asked him to come in before he left. When we met, it became clear to both of us that he was trying to do the same thing with me that he had done in other relationships: to leave impulsively without any explanation. He honestly told me that he was angry because I had told him that I was going to travel for a couple of weeks, which made him feel abandoned by me. This was an important session for Carlos because he became aware of how he used to manipulate people to Rescue him instead of learning how to talk sincerely about his feelings and to make conscious decisions. From that session on, he started mourning his fantasies that people would change to fulfill his needs. About Mara he said, “For the first time, I’m feeling disconnected from her. I realized that I don’t really love her anymore, that I have been emotionally dependent on her as my father was on me [question 16] and my alcoholic grandparent was on my father [question 4].” Both boys had longed for the love from their mothers (questions 2, 14). He also discovered that unconsciously he had learned how to manipulate people from his mother’s side (questions 8, 14, 15). After that session, he made a contract with himself “to treat myself well by means of unconditional acceptance and empathy and to love myself.” He also made a plan to reorganize his life.

## Projective Identification

*Projective identification* is a term introduced by Melanie Klein (1975/1994) to designate a mechanism based on fantasies in which the subject introduces his or her own person (his or her self), in whole or in part, inside the object to damage, possess, and control it (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1968/1987, p. 189). In this way, a person projects into another his or her unpleasant and unacceptable feelings, provoking in the other the experience of those feelings. Consequently, the former can blame or undervalue the latter.

Ogden (1992) described this process as

the pressure on an infant to behave in a manner congruent with the mother’s pathology, and the ever-present threat that if the infant fails to comply, he would cease to exist for the mother. This threat is the muscle behind the demand for compliance: “If you are not what I needed you to be, you don’t exist for me.” (p. 16)

This mechanism unconsciously influenced Carlos's reaction when he impulsively cancelled his therapy with me out of his anger and fear of being abandoned because I was going to travel. These feelings were passed on to Carlos transgenerationally by means of projective identification, like racket feelings in a script system (Erskine, 2015), from at least two previous generations (as far as we know from Carlos's answers to the TSQ). Several times he did a similar thing with Mara, impulsively leaving the house moved by his anger when he felt unable to control her behavior.

Ogden (1992) extended previous definitions in writing, "Projective identification is a psychological process that is at once a type of defense, a mode of communication, a primitive form of object relations, and a pathway for psychological change" (p. 21). He went on to write, "Projective identification represents an aspect of transference" (p. 69).

Projective identification is thus a way to transmit racket feelings (English, 1971) in a family system. For Carlos, it was significant to become aware that he had introjected the suffering feelings projected by the men in his family. He understood that he was sacrificing himself by means of working excessively, getting sick, and Rescuing people in economic crisis as a way to give and receive the love he needed. This may be observed in Carlos's TSQ answers about the relationship between his father and his grandfather (question 4) and Carlos's relationship with his own father (question 16).

The four mechanisms of script transmission just described are interrelated and linked. Their unconscious manifestations in the internal and external family system of a client may be observed through the answers to the TSQ.

## Conclusions

The case of Carlos is an example of a transgenerational family system. His TSQ shows a transgenerational trauma of abuse, abandonment, and suffering carried out through an inversion of roles in his family of origin. An inversion of roles means that a son or daughter takes the place of one or another parent and the parent moves to a child position, giving rise to a script of codependence in which the client takes care of the needs of others without taking into account his or her own needs (Noriega Gayol, 2013).

As described in this article, Carlos was the scapegoat in his family system. His paternal grandfather, at age 8, was given to an aunt and ended up as an alcoholic. Carlos's father began working as a child on the railroad tracks and took responsibility for financially supporting his mother and siblings. In the third generation, Carlos decided to liberate his father from that hard work by Rescuing his father and thus becoming the economic provider of his family and also for Mara's family. From that moment, Carlos devoted himself to study and work, submissively adapting to the advice of his paternal Uncle John (question 16) without taking into account his needs to feel loved by a woman and, at the same time, interrupting his own affective development.

In Carlos's story one can also observe another traumatic situation for him that influenced his couple relationships. Moved by his frustration after seeing the girl of his dreams with a boyfriend, Carlos decided to marry a woman he did not love but who would be accepted by his family. When he met Mara, he also idealized her, although

he ended up realizing that he was allowing himself to be abused and manipulated by her, someone who was similar to the description of the women in his family tree (questions 8, 14, 17). Unfortunately, in the fourth generation, Carlos's daughter may be repeating the family script because she felt abandoned by her father and became a manipulative and unproductive woman.

A transgenerational trauma is usually an "episcript" (English, 1969) in which a hamartic or destructive script is passed on from one generation to the next. English compared an episcript to a "hot potato game" in which one person is sacrificed to avoid the sacrifice of others. In Carlos's case, he decided to suffer by working hard and not enjoying his own life in order to magically rescue his father, which was similar to what his father did with Carlos's grandfather (questions 1, 4, 13, 16). In this way, Carlos unconsciously continued developing a suffering family script based on becoming the Rescuer of other people, that is, sacrificing himself for the well-being of others (which at the end meant Mara and her children).

Shützenberger (1998), a leader in transgenerational psychotherapy, described the hidden links in the family tree from several perspectives. After explaining the fundamental ideas and concepts of Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) about "invisible loyalties," Shützenberger wrote, "Somewhere, obligations are the superego in us, or if we use Eric Berne's terminology, they are the Parent—mother or father—in us" (p. 29). I prefer to use the second- and third-order structural ego state model to describe this as the Child in the Parent ego state from previous generations.

Returning to Carlos, 6 months had passed since the workshop described earlier. Carlos continued to live alone and came to individual sessions weekly. He had learned to be responsible for himself instead of blaming other people and wanting them to change. He was feeling excited about buying new furniture for his apartment and clothes for himself. He visited a nutritionist, lost weight, and was learning to cook for himself. He was also going to a gym where he had made a few friends. Carlos continued visiting his parents every week, becoming aware of the overadaptation and symbiotic relationships among his family members. He started saving money to travel and buy an apartment. Carlos decided not to be in a couple relationship at that time because he wanted first to divorce his wife and see if he could recover a relationship with his daughter. Carlos was beginning to feel happy when going to a movie or restaurant alone. He was aware of his suffering internal dialogue but able to move from there to feeling proud of his achievements. For Carlos, this all represented a breakthrough in his becoming aware of the cumulative trauma (Lourie, 1996) in his transgenerational script. He still needs the protection and support of psychotherapy, and we continue working on integrating his various ego states in an integrating Adult (Tudor, 2003).

I believe that the most important relationship we have is our relationship with ourselves because through our internal dialogues we keep repeating the beliefs and feelings of past generations or recent experiences until we become aware of those internal dialogues. In the Mexican culture, people remember and honor their ancestors on the Day of the Dead, 2 November. This loving tradition was highlighted recently in the Disney movie *Coco* (Anderson & Unkrich, 2017). We keep a memory of respect, honor, and acceptance of our family members, even if our ancestors did something with

which we do not agree. This is possible when we understand that they, despite having lived in difficult situations, did the best they could with what they had. In this way, we can free our ancestors to rest in peace, without rejecting or competing with them, while we grant ourselves permission to develop beyond them.

## Disclosure Statement

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Notes on Contributor

**Gloria Noriega Gayol**, PhD, is a Certified Transactional Analyst and a Teaching and Supervising Transactional Analyst in psychotherapy. She is the director of Instituto Mexicano de Análisis Transaccional (IMAT) in Mexico City. Gloria is a past president of the ITAA and the 2008 Eric Berne Memorial Award winner for her research on mechanisms of script transmission and codependency as a contribution to the theory and practice of transactional analysis (Noriega, 2009). She can be reached at Agrarismo 21, Colonia Escandon, Mexico City, CP 11800, Mexico; email: [gnoriega@imat.com.mx](mailto:gnoriega@imat.com.mx). The author expresses her appreciation and gratefulness to Dr. Antonella Fornaro for her detailed reading and feedback on the Transgenerational Script Questionnaire before it was presented in this article and to TAJ coeditor Jo Stuthridge for her wise feedback and detailed observations on the text. Readers who want a copy of the TSQ format, please contact Dr. Noriega Gayol by email.

## References

- Anderson, D. K. (Producer), & Unkrich, L. (Director). (2017). *Coco* [Motion picture]. United States: Pixar.
- Berne, E. (1961). *Transactional analysis in psychotherapy: A systematic individual and social psychiatry*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Berne, E. (1964). *Games people play: The psychology of human relationships*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Berne, E. (1966). *Principles of group treatment*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Berne, E. (1974). *¿Qué dice usted después de decir hola? La psicología del destino humano* [What do you say after you say hello? The psychology of human destiny]. Barcelona: Grijalbo. (Original work published 1972)
- Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., & Spark, G. M. (1973). *Invisible loyalties*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- English, F. (1969). Episcrit and the "hot potato" game. *Transactional Analysis Bulletin*, 8(32), 77–82.
- English, F. (1971). The substitution factor: Rackets and real feelings. Part 1. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 1(4), 27–32. doi:[10.1177/036215377100100408](https://doi.org/10.1177/036215377100100408)
- Erskine, R. G. (2015). The script system: An unconscious organization of experience. In R. G. Erskine (Ed.), *Relational patterns, therapeutic presence: Concepts and practice of integrative psychotherapy*. London: Karnac Books.

- James, M. (1974). Self reparenting: Theory and process. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 4(3), 32–39. doi:[10.1177/036215377400400307](https://doi.org/10.1177/036215377400400307)
- James, M. (1981). *Breaking free: Self-reparenting for a new life*. Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley.
- Kahler, T. (with Capers, H.). (1974). The miniscript. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 4(1), 26–42. doi:[10.1177/036215377400400110](https://doi.org/10.1177/036215377400400110)
- Karpman, S. B. (1968). Fairy tales and script drama analysis. *Transactional Analysis Bulletin*, 7(26), 39–53.
- Klein, M. (1994). *Envidia y gratitud* [Envy and gratitude]. Barcelona: Paidós. (Original work published 1975)
- Laplanche, J., & Pontalis, J. B. (1987). *Diccionario de psicoanálisis* [Dictionary of psychoanalysis] (F. Cervantes Gimeno, Trans.). Barcelona: Ed. Labor. (Original work published 1968 in French)
- Lourie, J. B. (1996). Cumulative trauma: The nonproblem problem. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 26, 276–283. doi:[10.1177/036215379602600402](https://doi.org/10.1177/036215379602600402)
- Moiso, C. (1985). Ego states and transference. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 15, 194–201. doi:[10.1177/036215378501500302](https://doi.org/10.1177/036215378501500302)
- Noriega, G. (2004). Codependence: A transgenerational script. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 34, 312–322. doi:[10.1177/036215378501500302](https://doi.org/10.1177/036215378501500302)
- Noriega, G. (2009). On receiving the 2008 Eric Berne memorial award for mechanisms of transgenerational script transmission. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 39, 8–13. doi:[10.1177/036215370903900102](https://doi.org/10.1177/036215370903900102)
- Noriega, G. (2010). Transgenerational scripts: The unknown knowledge. In R. G. Erskine (Ed.), *Life scripts: A transactional analysis of unconscious relational patterns* (pp. 269–290). London: Karnac Books.
- Noriega Gayol, G. (2013). *El guión de la codependencia en relaciones de pareja: Diagnóstico y tratamiento*. [The codependence script in couple relationships: Diagnosis and treatment]. Mexico City: Manual Moderno.
- Noriega Gayol, G. (2016). Changing transgenerational scripts. In R. G. Erskine (Ed.), *Transactional analysis in contemporary psychotherapy* (pp. 119–137). London: Karnac Books.
- Noriega, G., Ramos, L., Medina Mora, M. E., Villa, R. A. (2008). Prevalence of codependence in young women seeking primary health care and associated risk factors. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 28(2), 199–210. doi:[10.1037/0002-9432.78.2199](https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.78.2199)
- Ogden, T. H. (1992). *Projective identification and psychotherapeutic technique*. London: Karnac Books.
- Schützenberger, A. A. (1998). *The ancestor syndrome: Transgenerational psychotherapy and hidden links in the family tree* (A. Trager, Trans.). London: Routledge.
- Schwartz, R. C. (1995). *Internal family systems therapy*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Steiner, C. (1974). *Scripts people live: Transactional analysis of life scripts*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Thich, N. H. (1991). *Peace is every step: The path of mindfulness in everyday life*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Tudor, K. (2003). The neopsyche: The integrating adult ego state. In C. Sills & H. Hargaden (Eds.), *Ego states* (Key concepts in transactional analysis: Contemporary views) (pp. 83–108). London: Worth Publishing.