

Part 1 : Locate yourself in the socio political context & share your journey of learnings, insight, growth, challenges, Script through TA lens

Beginning of My Socio-Political Awareness

As I begin reflecting on my journey in the training group over the last 4.5 years, I recognise that I was not familiar or fluent with the idea of socio-political context. While I had some awareness of caste-based dynamics, I had not engaged with other socio-political influences in my life. Reflecting on this now, I understand that this may have been an unconscious defence mechanism, protecting me from the pain associated with my socio-political identities. At times, I may have engaged in a form of toxic positivity, as it felt more comfortable to remain unaware than to experience the intensity and rawness of these realities and their impact on me.

I am intense and can be deeply affected by social injustice, and I recognise that engaging with it can make it difficult for me to remain regulated in my day-to-day life. I often feel helpless when I encounter injustice, either towards myself or others, particularly when I have little control over the systemic forces involved. Having distanced myself from these experiences internally, I remained largely socio-politically unaware until midway through my training. I was not emotionally prepared to witness systemic oppression or hold the discomfort of being aware of it. This reflects my internal world at the beginning of the course, some of which I only recognised later in my training.

Locating Myself in a Socio-Political Context

Locating myself within a socio-political context became a learning process in itself. I identify as a cisgender woman and as queer. I grew up in a small town that is now expanding into a city. I hold two postgraduate qualifications, I am a businesswoman with over a decade and a half of experience, and a farmer for the last 8 years. I come from an upper-middle-class family and belong to a backward class, a dominant caste in my geographical location.

Privilege, Marginalisation and Shifting Identity

As I began to reflect on my identities, I started to recognise the privileges associated with my class and economic status. At the same time, I also noticed how other aspects of my identity shaped my experiences of marginalisation. For instance, being a young woman from a certain social background positioned me as a desirable prospective bride, which initially appeared as a privilege. However, I now understand this as a disguised privilege, as it was contingent on conforming to heteronormative expectations. As I grew older and chose to remain single, my position within this “desirability” shifted, and I experienced being moved away from the centre of the charmed circle.

The concepts of privilege and oppression were not initially part of my processing language. I

am only now beginning to understand and integrate these concepts into my frame of reference. This continues to be a learning curve as I develop the capacity to view my experiences through this lens.

Gender, Work and Internalised Patriarchy

My choice to remain in my hometown and pursue business instead of employment marked the beginning of my more evident encounters with oppression. I observed that my business competence, achievements and growth were often discounted within a patriarchal framework. My identity as a businesswoman was overshadowed by assumptions related to my gender and marital status, where business was seen as secondary or namesake rather than a legitimate identity.

At that time, I was unable to identify these experiences as forms of gendered oppression. Instead, I internalised them and aligned myself with the patriarchal narrative. I believed that stepping back from my identity as a businesswoman and allowing my father to be seen as the primary authority was a way of maintaining harmony and preserving family image. In retrospect, I recognise that this was my way of conforming to patriarchal norms under the guise of care, while it came at the cost of suppressing my own identity and mental health as a result.

Reflecting on this through the TA lens, I recognise how my responses were shaped by my script. The drivers “Be Strong” and “Please others” were active, pushing me to suppress my needs and manage internally, while the injunction “Don’t be important”, “Don’t Feel”, “Don’t be you” and “Don’t Be” influenced my tendency to minimise my identity as a businesswoman and give up my space.

Farming Context: Belonging, Identity and Power

Another significant experience of oppression emerged in my farming context. My mother inherited a farm, influenced by my grandmother from a young age, I had been drawn to farming. Initially, my interest was appreciated and encouraged when I engaged in the farm as a visitor. However, when I began to actively participate in managing the farm, the response shifted. I experienced resistance both as a woman and as someone perceived as an outsider of the rural community. My identity as an educated urban individual entering a traditional farming space created discomfort for others and reflected as a form of reverse discrimination. From a script perspective, these experiences activated the injunction “Don’t belong,” reinforcing my sense of being an outsider in the farming community. At the same time, the driver “Be Perfect” was triggered, leading me to overcompensate by trying to prove my competence through effort and learning.

Unlike my earlier experiences, I was able to engage with this situation using both Transactional Analysis and a socio-political lens. At times, I noticed myself moving into the life position “I’m OK, You’re not OK,” which reduced my ability to understand the perspectives of others. My experiences were shaped by an intersection of identities along with my intrapsychic patterns, making the environment emotionally challenging. Although I deeply valued farming, these experiences affected my sense of belonging and self-worth.

Through TA, particularly using the concept of the racket system, I began to understand my internal responses. I recognised that while I expressed anger, the underlying feeling was sadness related to not being recognised and feeling excluded despite my efforts. I had invested time in learning through farm visits, workshops and consultations, and the lack of acknowledgement felt like a discounting of my efforts.

At the same time, I became aware that my communication may have come across as challenging the authority and expertise of the farm manager. I recognised that I may have been discounting his experience, while he may have experienced my actions as threatening his position. This awareness helped me move out of a one-sided perspective. This is a space where I also became aware of the power position I am in, in relation to the manager. Power, as a concept, is something I am still trying to understand and reflect on.

Through therapy, small group processes, reflection and journaling, I was able to identify these patterns and differentiate between my racket and real feelings. This awareness was therapeutic in itself, allowing me to process my grief related to helplessness within systemic structures. It also helped me build language to express my sadness more authentically, rather than defaulting to anger.

Developing a socio-political lens enabled me to hold both my experience and that of the other. I began to recognise that my access to education, exposure to frameworks like TA and ability to reflect were privileges that others may not have had access to. This understanding allowed me to hold more empathy, accommodate different perspectives and communicate more consciously. It supported me in navigating these relational spaces with greater awareness, balance and sensitivity.

Queer Identity and the Journey Towards Authenticity

Another identity that forms a significant part of who I am is being queer. For a long time, I alienated this part of myself and became someone I could not recognise. I felt deeply uncomfortable in my own skin. It was during this phase that I came across this course and chose to join, with a desire to move towards authenticity.

When I began the training, I was uncomfortable and did not find the language or spaces to explore this part of my identity. I value authenticity, and it felt important to first be authentic with myself. My decision to join the group came from a need to break free from this

discomfort and begin acknowledging who I am. At the same time, I was afraid—afraid that once I saw my reality, it could not be unseen, and that becoming visible to myself would be overwhelming.

The training helped me understand systemic beliefs and the helplessness that surrounds them. It also helped me recognise that the only way through this helplessness is to acknowledge it, account for it and gradually build resources to own my identity, especially in spaces that feel safe and accepting. I understood that working towards systemic change is a long-term, collective process, and that my immediate work lay in engaging with my internal world—learning to stay with discomfort, rather than avoiding it. This was my first step towards authenticity.

Coming Out: A Transformative Experience

I value emotional safety and respect vulnerability. For the first two years, I allowed the idea of queerness to settle within me. However, the discomfort of not being open about this part of my identity within the group began to create increasing inner conflict. Since the training emphasised socio-political context, my inability to acknowledge this identity limited my participation. I realised that expressing my views without being open about my identity made my engagement feel partial and at times inauthentic, as the emotional layer of my experience remained unexpressed.

My contract with the group was to immerse myself in learning through sharing my lived experiences. I recognised that I was not fully honouring this contract. I also became aware that I was discounting the group's capacity to provide safety and hold space for my queerness. With this awareness, I made the decision to come out in the group.

I prepared myself by writing down what I wanted to say and rehearsing it several times. Initially, I considered sharing it in an online session, but something held me back. Eventually, I chose to speak in person, at the end of a residential. As I began to share, I noticed intense bodily sensations—I was crying, my body felt stiff, my head was pulsating and I felt waves of heat. In that moment, I re-experienced parts of my childhood where I felt rejected for being myself, where I had internalised injunctions such as “Don’t be you,” “Don’t belong,” “Don’t feel,” and “Don’t be important.” The experience was deeply cathartic.

From a Transactional Analysis perspective, I recognise how these injunctions have shaped my script, influencing my tendency to suppress emotions and remain invisible in certain spaces. Coming out in the group was a significant step in challenging these script patterns and moving towards greater authenticity and autonomy.

Ongoing Learning and Growth

I continue to find it challenging to speak about my queerness in some spaces. I see this as an ongoing process of working through my script, particularly the injunctions “Don’t feel” and “Don’t be you.” At the same time, I am also becoming aware of the complexity of socio-political positioning, including recognising moments where I may occupy positions of privilege or act from an oppressor role. Engaging with this awareness and using socio-political language in my reflections is still developing for me, and I see this as part of my continued learning and growth.

Part 2: Pick a work situation or a therapy client/community. Describe the work itself as a practitioner through the TA lens.

My area of work is in the fitness industry, focusing on strength training for women over the age of 35. My work as a practitioner is not just physical fitness; I work with clients towards lifestyle change and integration of exercise into daily life.

There are many injunctions and driver-based expectations in the fitness space—heavy routines, rigid structures, and yoga-based regulation approaches. I observe that the physical culture world is largely driven by fear-based messaging or rule-based critical frameworks.

My work is to break through these messages and bring clients into a state of OKness and awareness of their physical capacity and needs. I focus on understanding each person’s unique needs and invite them to operate from Adult awareness rather than in isolation of Parent-driven rules or Child-driven feelings. I meet them where they are and invite them to meet themselves as they are. “Showing up as you are” is the philosophy of my work.

I use relational frameworks, and I notice transference- countertransference as an important guide in my work, particularly when I feel an urge to push or structure more. This signals a shift towards a Parent ego state, and I consciously return to an Adult–Adult stance.

Ethics and Values

My work is guided by values of OKness, non-judgement, autonomy and respect for individual differences. I aim to create a space where clients can engage with their body without shame or pressure, which contrasts with the performance-driven culture of fitness spaces. Empathy is a value I hold closely, and I consciously strive to express and receive it. I experience a lack of empathy in gym spaces, especially in the area of women’s wellness, which is still evolving socially.

Ethically, I am mindful of non-maleficence by not pushing clients beyond their physical or emotional capacity. Over my experience with clients in the last one year I have become aware that approaching client autonomy with responsibility in contracting, particularly in situations where flexibility may lead to inconsistency is important. This requires ongoing reflection on maintaining boundaries while supporting clients' engagement in a meaningful way.

Presenting Problem

The presenting problem is informed by a hypothesis developed from client conversations, broader interactions with women, and secondary insights from social media. Strength training is often seen as masculine, and many women avoid it because it is perceived as “not feminine.”

Fitness itself is shaped by gender and body politics, creating a lack of OKness around strength training for women.

From a TA lens, a “Not OK” life position is assigned for women doing strength training. Many women fear bulking up, which reflects internalised beliefs about what women should or should not be as defined by the heteronormative norms.

There are also strong drivers present:

- Be Perfect
- Be Strong

These are reinforced in traditional gyms, creating pressure, shame and suffocation. Women often move into try-hard behaviour, leading to injury or complete disengagement.

The environment is often driven by fear, guilt, overwhelm and shame—“push through,” “sweat more,” “achieve targets”—which reinforces a sense of “not enough.”

TA Lens (Injunctions & Drivers)

Societal messaging around women and fitness reflects:

Injunctions:

- Don't belong
- Don't exist
- Don't make it
- Don't be well
- Don't be you
- Don't think

Driver:

- Please others (conforming to societal expectations of femininity)

Gym culture reinforces:

- Be Strong
- Be Perfect
- Try Hard

Intervention

As a wellness coach, I integrate psychology and TA into my practice.

My first intervention was through messaging in my media communication and by positioning myself not just as a fitness coach, but also bringing a psychological layer into my work. This invited clients to be more open.

Second, my sessions are co-created rather than instructor-driven. I begin with a one-on-one conversation to understand their needs, their relationship with fitness, and their expectations and comfort levels. From there, we design a flexible structure.

I include psychoeducation, body awareness and encourage clients to listen to their bodies. The structure is evolving rather than rigid.

For example:

- Repetitions are decided by the client
- This becomes a benchmark rather than a target
- I emphasise non-judgemental practice and empathetic communication

In the process, I actively intervene by slowing clients down, questioning driver-based urgency and offering permission to rest or reduce effort. This supports movement from Adapted Child or Critical Parent functioning towards Adult awareness.

Client Examples

The following examples illustrate how I work with clients using Transactional Analysis concepts to support movement towards Adult awareness.

Client 1: I will be sincere... it is mandatory for me given the age and the need to stay healthy

Nandhini: Ok, I understand, our work will focus on showing up rather than performance, and we will be working only at 50% of your capacity

Client 1: Oh 50% only? Yes, I will do more than that

Nandhini: No, this is enough... we need to account for nervous system regulation

Client 1: Oh ok, I get it...

In Client 1's case, the interaction reflected strong Parent ego state influence. She described exercise as "mandatory" and expressed a need to be "sincere," indicating *Be Perfect* and *Try Hard* drivers.

Her initial responses reflected Parent-driven pressure and driver-based functioning. My intervention reduced performance expectations and offered permission, enabling a shift towards Adult awareness. This reflects decontamination, where Parent-driven beliefs were reduced.

In contrast, another client 2 demonstrated greater Adult awareness. She said she has tried out many types of exercise routines, she has been to gyms, zumba, cross training etc and felt it was pushing her beyond her capacity and was taxing on her mentally. She expressed a preference for a sustainable and self-paced approach, reflecting awareness of earlier driver influences such as *Be Strong* and *Be Perfect*. This enabled an Adult–Adult working relationship focused on autonomy rather than performance.

In another example, a client described an internal conflict between body and mind:

Client 3: Body resists... mind keeps pushing...

Nandhini: What do you think will happen if you stop for a couple of months?

Client 3: I feel incomplete... energy goes down

Client 3: Am I doing this for health or just ticking the box? Has it become compulsive?

This reflects a conflict between Child (resistance) and Parent (pressure). My questioning facilitated reflection, leading to emerging Adult awareness. This indicates decontamination and deconfusion of the Child, as the client began to differentiate internal experiences and respond more consciously.

I diagnosed using structured questioning and observation of language patterns, focusing on ego states, drivers and script beliefs.

Client responses indicated internal conflicts:

- “I must do this because it is mandatory” → Parent ego state
- “Am I doing this for health or to feel OK?” → emerging Adult
- “I’ll do minimum reps to avoid pain” → Adapted Child
- “I want to be fit but cannot prioritise it” → internal conflict

This indicated contamination of the Adult ego state by both Parent beliefs and Child responses.

Observations

The push towards exercise often originates from Parent or Child ego states, with contamination and confusion.

There is limited adult awareness in planning or sustaining behaviour.

Common patterns include:

- Starting and stopping
- Inconsistency
- Overdoing → pain → quitting
- Work stress and home responsibilities
- Lack of time

Clients are aware that their body needs movement, but are unable to identify what is sustainable or appropriate.

They struggle with expectations that are hard to sustain and may not fit into their day-to-day life, limited body awareness, and the belief that “pushing more = improvement,” leading to frustration and disengagement and eventually lead to “Not enough”.

Movement Towards Adult Awareness and Autonomy

Across these three cases, different starting points are visible. Client 1’s case reflects movement from Parent-driven drivers towards Adult awareness. Client 2’s case illustrates an existing Adult orientation with reduced driver influence. Client 3’s case shows ongoing Parent–Child conflict with early stages of decontamination and deconfusion.

In another activity, where I invited participants to reflect on their exercise patterns using structured questions such as “What do you tell yourself when you skip?”, “What feels heavy about starting?”, and “What happens on low-energy days?”, consistent patterns of postponement, overwhelm and difficulty sustaining routines emerged. Statements such as “I will start tomorrow,” “I don’t feel like it,” and “I try but don’t complete” indicate Adapted Child avoidance alongside Parent ego state pressures expressed through “I must” and “I should” statements. .

The recurring cycle of starting, stopping and self-criticism suggests the presence of *Try Hard* and *Be Perfect* drivers, where effort is inconsistent and often linked to performance expectations. Expressions such as “I don’t know what to do” and reports of overwhelm indicate contamination of the Adult ego state, where present-moment decision-making is influenced by internalised expectations and emotional responses. Additionally, rationalisations such as “no time” or “too tired” reflect discounting, while repeated starting and stopping patterns indicate script-based behaviour.

Together, these examples demonstrate how my work involves identifying ego state dynamics, offering permissions, and creating conditions that support a shift towards Adult functioning. Through these interventions, clients begin to move towards autonomy. In this context, autonomy is reflected in clients’ increasing ability to listen to their body, make conscious choices and engage in movement in a sustainable, self-directed and non-scripted manner.

This work began spontaneously, and as a result there was no formal or intentional contracting in place. The application of a TA lens emerged later as the work evolved, although it has been an integral part of me as a coach.

I observe significant scope for more intentional and structured work in this area. As it involves a major lifestyle change, sustaining it requires psychological intervention rather than approaching it as a standalone habit.

There is growing awareness of strength training for women, particularly in the perimenopausal phase. However, there is limited integration of psychological and empathic perspectives within this space.

In the future, I would like to explore the Principles of Group Treatment, understand therapeutic operations in greater depth, and integrate empathic transactions more consciously into my process. I am deeply drawn to the connection between body and mind and have experienced its benefits in my own life.

With my lived experience and training in both areas, I see this as a meaningful and fulfilling direction to practise Transactional Analysis.