

COWPOKE SECTION

The Rainbow Specs

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Abstract

Connections are made between the colors of the rainbow and descriptions of ego states, using the metaphor of a pair of spectacles that change color depending on which ego state the wearer is experiencing: Yellow specs are preferred for seeing what is happening, green specs for working things out, orange specs give permission to go ahead with new ideas, and when used well, red specs offer a playful way of solving life's problems. The parable of Bruce tells how the Rainbow Specs were discovered, and use of the specs is illustrated through several examples.

Walking past an airport bookstall, I noticed a book cover showing a clownish figure with six hats (De Bono, 1988). I bought it and proceeded to board my plane. A woman seated across from me soon took out her book and replaced her sunglasses with reading glasses. Looking out the window, I noticed a lovely rainbow, and after a bit I began reading the book I had purchased. I let my thoughts float with the clouds, a little bumpy now and then, but delightfully creative under a bright blue sky. De Bono (1988) wrote that clear thinking can be learned, proposing the metaphor of colored hats for different types of thinking. I thought, "Colored hats and ego states." I remembered that color has strong psychological implications, and I recalled a young woman who was unable to study for her final examinations. Although she disliked the color yellow, when she accepted a suggestion that she make herself like yellow, she studied with zest and success (Lüscher, 1969). The ideas melded together: colors, thinking caps, and decision

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making with ego states (Summerton, 1988). Flowing through the sky as the blue merged to indigo and then violet, I remembered the colors of the rainbow—violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, and red, and I relaxed into fantasy.

After the flight I was struck with the idea that associating ego states with colors might be a more enjoyable way of remembering them than TA terms. On the basis of Berne's (1972) diagram of the descriptive qualities of ego states (p. 13), I constructed Table 1, including Drego's (1979) subdivision of the Adult ego state into photographic and combining sections which "distinguish two main qualities of the Adult ego state: (a) Photographic Adult, with the use of perception, memory, codification and breaking down of data; [and] (b) Combining Adult with the use of analogy, hypothesis, reasoned intuition and exploitation of new possibilities" (p. 26). This complete set of ego state descriptions numbered seven, the number of colors in the rainbow.

The Rainbow Specs: A Parable

It was Bruce's first board meeting. He was thrilled to be the youngest, newest board member of Transactional Galactics. As he entered the empty board room, he was especially pleased to see his name printed in large letters on one of the chairs. True, the chair had been built for a larger bottom than his, but he liked the loose, roomy fit; it allowed for expansion.

Relaxing into his chair, Bruce noticed that in front of his and every place around the table there was a pair of spectacles. As he put his on he was surprised at their yellow tint; when he took them off the tint turned reddish. Bruce was puzzled and curious. He put the spectacles on again, noticing for the second time the yellow tint, but this time also the way they

made his vision strangely clear. He pondered whether he had ever before heard of such color changes in glasses, remembering how photochromatic glasses darken in sunlight; as he did, the tint in the spectacles became green. He removed the glasses and the world and the glasses looked normal. Thinking hard, he put the spectacles back on and found that they gave him clear, green vision. He chuckled, the glasses turned red, and he took them off.

Being of scientific bent, Bruce began writing down what he had discovered, noticing again that his vision seemed clearer with the glasses on and that they turned green as he reflected that he had not had any trouble with his eyes. Suddenly there were noises in the corridor. As Bruce felt nervous his glasses turned violet. He recognized the voice of Mary A., the chief executive, talking to some of the other directors. Feeling slightly upset and irritated that they were not entering, Bruce noticed that the glasses changed from violet to indigo and back to violet as he hoped he had not done anything wrong by entering the boardroom before the others. His specs turned blue as he thought he better make sure that everything was in order, and his heart missed a beat and his glasses turned violet as the door opened. The specs were on the table as the chief executive entered the room.

Mary explained that the meeting had been postponed and again left the room. Bruce put on his specs again, only to find that they had become orange. He wrote, "When I get excited, my specs turn red." As he wrote his specs turned yellow, and he added to his notes, "When I observe and notice things my specs turn yellow." He continued thinking only to notice that the color changed to green and then back to yellow as he recorded, "When I think about and compare things, the specs have a green color." As he chuckled with excitement, his specs turned red and he added to his notes, "My specs turn red when I have fun." As other directors began entering the room, the specs turned violet and he wrote, "When I'm cautious and on my best behavior, the specs turn violet." Although he had taken off the specs, he thought that they were green as he tried to remember his experience of blue. He remembered that the specs had changed from violet to indigo when he had felt irritated and a bit rebellious, so he wrote, "Indigo when I

feel rebellious." Blue was stubbornly not coming to him, though he remembered orange when he had responded to Mary's courtesy in apologizing for the meeting's late start. He wrote, "Orange: Looking after," and, "Blue: Where's the Blue?" Then the specs were green as he thought, "I've almost got all seven colors of the rainbow in my specs!"

The door opened and Mary marched to her chair, put on her specs, and welcomed Bruce as the newest member of the board. Bruce noticed that Mary's eyes looked orange and then red as she laughed and said, "This calls for a celebration and (eyes turning blue), we shall have one after the meeting." Then Bruce realized that it was not Mary's eyes that were changing color, it was the specs. Mary went on, "Bruce is a marketing specialist," and the orange specs smiled benignly on Bruce. The specs turned blue as she continued, "We look forward to having Bruce help us protect our products from imitations." Bruce looked back bluely and said, "Protection of our products will be a top priority for me," and he thought to himself, "Got it. Blue is for protection, for defining barriers and limits."

The board meeting moved along and its end was near when Mary said, "I have special news about our latest product, the audiovisual, psychochromatic decision-making device that looks like a pair of spectacles. There is a pair on the table in front of each of you, and I remind you of the secrecy oath you have sworn." Board members tried them on as Mary continued, "Details of this invention have yet to be popularized. I rely on Bruce to develop the publicity campaign to sell these specs to executives, housewives, and other important persons. Bruce, when will you be ready to tell us about this product?"

His spectacles turned yellow to green to violet to red to green at such speed they seemed almost colorless as Bruce replied, "I've done some preliminary research and can comment now if you'd like." Red in her specs, Mary said, "Yes, go ahead (turning orange), Bruce." The secretary of the board, with his specs yellow, recorded Bruce's comments. Bruce first drew the diagram given in Figure 1. Then he said, "First, the specs appear colorless unless worn. Second, when worn they have the following connections: red for fun, frolic, frustration; orange for support, permissions; yellow for

recording, reporting; green for thinking, calculating, comparing data; blue for protecting, safeguarding, doubting; indigo for resisting, rebelling; and violet for complying, surviving. In all, the glasses show the seven colors of the rainbow. Third, it seems possible to link the colors of the rainbow to Berne's descriptive diagram of ego states" (Berne, 1972, p. 13).

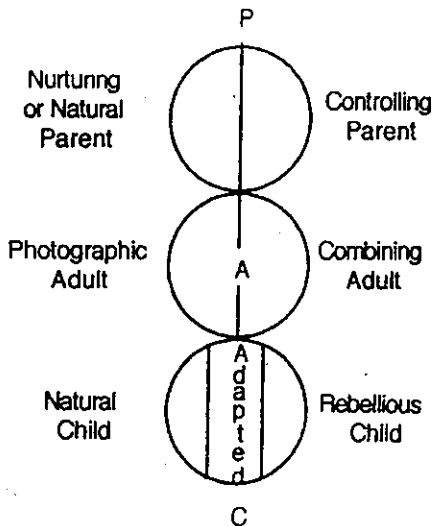


Figure 1.

Descriptive Aspects of Personality (Berne, 1972, p. 13) plus Photographic and Combining Adult (Drego, 1979, p. 26)

Bruce proceeded, "The Parent ego state was described by Berne (1972) as nurturing and controlling; Nurturing Parent connects with orange, and Controlling Parent with blue. The Child is natural, rebellious, and adapted; the Natural or Free Child connects with red, the Rebellious Child with indigo, and the Adapted Child with violet. Berne's Adult ego state was divided by Drego (1979, p. 26) into photographic and combining; the Photographic Adult connects with yellow, and the Combining Adult connects with green." Bruce concluded, "Just as when the colors of the rainbow merge the sky becomes clear, so these spectacles are clear when I am scanning through all colors at once, before choosing the color I want.

"This reminds me of what Berne (1961, p. 236) wrote about a bull's-eye transaction, when all ego states are alert. Just as a person has the power to use any ego state, he or she has the

power to use any behavior appropriate to any ego state, and to THINK COLOR as a way to do this—that is, to use the colors of these spectacles for transacting.

"Table 1 shows the connections between the colors of the rainbow and Berne's (1972) descriptive analysis of ego states (including Drego's [1979] additions), Lüscher's (1969) scientific use of color, and De Bono's (1988) popular use of color. Colloquially, red is connected with "seeing red" and with being "red in the face," which is preferable to "black in the face," having a "blanched look," a "tinge of green around the gills," "feeling blue," or "collecting brown stamps." Psychologically color can also be used to promote lateral thinking. Structurally the rainbow specs offer a relaxing way of moving between ego states. Transactionally they offer a way to use color for problem identification."

Mary interjected, "Bruce, please say more about the Photographic and Combining Adult ego states." Bruce replied, "Drego's (1979, p. 26) descriptions are based on Berne's (1961, p. 77) comparison of the Adult ego state to a computer. Drego suggested that just as a computer must have data entered and an appropriate program installed in order to process the data, so a person's Adult must have data recorded or photographed in the mind so that it can then be combined and compared with what was already there."

The chief executive's specs flashed red for puzzlement, blue for doubt, and finally green as she recognized truth in what Bruce was saying. She asked him to describe how the spectacles might be useful. Bruce replied, "When transacting, each person can move between ego states and not feel trapped in one. The person decides which color to use to communicate with another, using colors as metaphors for different behaviors. The specs are psychochromatic because the wearer controls the color. They are audiovisual because their color changes as the person talks and listens to others.

A member of the board asked Bruce to say more about these processes. Bruce responded, "For example, listening to you I see yellow. This means I hear you from your point of view. If I were seeing blue as I listened, I would be hearing doubts in my own mind rather than your point of view, or if I were impatient for coffee, I'd be seeing red and not being present

Table 1
Comparison of Rainbow Colors to Ego State Descriptions and Other Sources

Rainbow Colors	Ego State Descriptions	Lüscher	De Bono
Red	Natural Child	Vital	Emotional
Orange	Nurturing Parent		
Yellow	Photographic Adult	Light	Speculative
Green	Combining Adult	Elastic	Creative
Blue	Controlling Parent	Calm	Controlled
Indigo	Rebellious Child		
Violet	Adapted Child	Bonding	
White			Factual
Black		Negating	Rejecting

to you." Bruce stopped to check on whether the board member was following his explanation. With violet glasses, he indicated he was. Bruce replied, "I see you have your violet specs on. Because I was asking for information I expected to see yellow specs. Seeing violet, I switch to green and reflect that probably you're saying what you think I want to hear." The board member laughed and said, "I've got the point. When listening to what another is saying, I use Photographic Adult, which connects with yellow; when being polite I use Adapted Child, which connects with violet. I understand."

Bruce summarized, "I can use each color to provide the different ingredients that make up an effective decision: yellow for data gathering, green for feasibility studies and analysis, red for brainstorming and creating, violet looking for traps, blue for questioning and doubting, indigo for rejecting rubbish, orange for creative encouragement of ideas, data, and discoveries. Because the seven colors of the rainbow can be linked through the descriptions of ego states, I suggest we call these glasses Rainbow Specs because they make the richness of a person available for use." Some board members nodded their heads wisely, but Bruce saw from the violet color of their specs that they did not really understand. One doubting direc-

tor had blue specs, the woman from finance had yellow, the man from administration had green, and Mary had a benign, rosy tint as her specs played a sonata in orange and red. Finally she said, "Well done, Bruce. Rainbow Specs it is!" Specs around the table flashed red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet and then back again as board members applauded. Then Mary said with an orange look, "Put on your red specs and let's celebrate!"

Examples

Tom, nine years old, related, "At school my teacher is mostly in Controlling Parent and I'm bored, but I have to behave so I'm in my Adapted Child, although I'd like to be in my Rebellious Child." After hearing about the rainbow specs Tom said, "My teacher mostly uses blue specs, and I would like to use my indigo specs, but it's too dangerous and I'd get into trouble, so I use my violet specs instead." When asked what specs he would like the teacher to use he replied, "Sometimes I'd like the teacher to use red, but mostly I'd like her to use yellow and green specs." At the next session he reported, "While I was using my indigo specs, I suddenly realized that I could use some other color besides violet, so I tried orange and gave the teacher strokes for the good work she was trying to do. Then she used

orange specs and became a better teacher, shifting to yellow as she explained our lesson. I found it easy to shift to yellow to listen to her, and I could learn the lesson more easily. I found using colors was much more fun than using big words like Controlling Parent and Rebellious Child, and the teacher didn't know what I was doing."

Joe, age 16, had trouble with his mathematics teacher. He put on his green specs as the teacher explained a problem, only to find that the teacher had contradicted himself. Joe, shifting from green specs to indigo, asked, "How can that be?" The teacher went into blue and scolded Joe for asking irrelevant questions. Joe changed to violet specs, apologized for seeming to be rude, and then shifted to yellow and explained what he had heard. The teacher put on his specs, listened to Joe's comment, then shifted to orange specs and encouraged Joe to continue asking questions. Joe reported that he used the code "yellow specs" to shift energy from Child to Adult ego state; yellow specs was his button to Adult-Adult communication.

The following weekend Joe attended a TA 101 course and learned to use the rainbow specs to break his games. At a subsequent session Joe reported that he had put some milk on the stove to heat, had forgotten it when his mother called him to do something, and the milk had boiled over, charring the pan. "Father put on his blue specs and scolded me. I put on my violet specs and the locked transactions continued. Eventually I went to clean up the mess, and my mother came in and gave me a mischievous smile. My first reaction was to rebel because she seemed happy when I was being scolded. I automatically put on my yellow specs and then green and thought about the incident, remembering similar incidents between mother and father. Father and I had been locked into "Kick Me" and "NIGYSOB" games. I invited kicks through my carelessness, that is, by my not using yellow or green specs. Father gets hooked and "NIGYSOBs" me, and I end up with a payoff of feeling bad, angry, and rebellious. When my mother smiled at me I put on my yellow specs and realized that she collects her strokes from playing "Kick Me" with father who "NIGYSOBs" her. I also understood that this is the origin of my "Kick Me": I learned it from her. I have the option

to wear my yellow and green specs to avoid my con, that is, carelessness, forgetfulness, and behaviors like that."

Jenny disliked ego state analysis and had difficulty shifting energy from one ego state to another until she learned about the rainbow specs and painted herself large cardboard ego state cut-outs of the different colors. Soon after, she was at her impasse about getting up in the morning. Usually she ended up with a headache and bad feelings whether she stayed in bed or forced herself to get up. This time she ended up feeling good by analyzing her journey through the colors. She discovered that her blue specs yelled, "Get out of bed"; another voice in her, which she recognized as indigo, said "I don't want to get up." She leaned out of bed and picked up her orange ego state card; running her fingers along the edge she said to herself, "It's cold and you don't have to get up." Then she got support from her other colors: from her yellow specs she said to herself, "There's nothing specific to do"; from red, "It's cozy in bed"; from green, "When you force yourself to get up when you don't want to, you are nasty to everyone for the rest of the day." Jenny stayed in bed, enjoyed it immensely, and was full of energy when she got up. Later while painting rainbows, she was surprised to discover that she had merged blue, indigo, and violet and had them dominate the top of her rainbow in place of red and orange. She also made the yellow line thin and insignificant. She was interested to find that blue, indigo, and violet—which represented Controlling Parent, Rebellious Child, and Adapted Child, respectively—were all together, as were orange and red representing Nurturing Parent and Free Child. At the following group session, Jenny reported that when painting herself with her parents she had colored her mother yellow, her father blue and orange, and herself red. Through the colors Jenny began feeling parts of her ego states that had been suppressed. The words "orange specs" now connected her to ways of feeling and thinking that she wanted to use more often in order to complete her therapeutic contracts by removing contaminations and dislodging unwanted Parent messages. For example, she would shift energy away from negative Rebellious Child by saying, "Away indigo."

Mary, a department head at a junior college,

initially found using colors in place of regular TA terminology a bit contrived. However, she decided that practicing a new behavior could be a way to change ego states. At work she had been using mostly her blue, violet, and indigo specs with other staff members. She related an incident when the other staff had moved from their usual place to a new one for their morning coffee break. She went after them, blue specs sparkling, wanting to know what they meant by changing the place and not informing her. The teachers began defending themselves, counterattacking, or making excuses. Mary realized she was using her blue specs and immediately changed to red ones and began to complain. To her amazement, the group became sympathetic, apologetic, welcoming, and including. She said later that the idea of using colors to identify what ego state she was in had hooked her Child, and once her Child was hooked and the red specs firmly in place, she began having fun, which led to quite a different response from the staff.

Advantages of Using the Rainbow Specs

(1) Discovering that they could use colors to help them shift ego states was an "aha" experience for the people described in the examples. It reinforced their belief that they had options in situations in which they had previously felt locked into fixed behaviors.

(2) The colors of the specs are not ego states but rather metaphors for talking about ego states and identifying them by using behavioral and phenomenological validations (Drego, 1986, p. 31).

(3) Using the idea of the spectacles instead of the names for the ego states sidesteps defense and denial systems.

(4) Children find it easier to identify ego states using colors.

(5) Color also indicates that each ego state has an attitude connected with it; the color gives the attitudes a certain value for the person so that in different circumstances one color is preferable to another because the attitude it represents is preferable to another attitude.

(6) Using the word "specs" with each ego state and each ego state description in the functional model suggests an attitude of perceiving reality. This counters the misconception that perception is always from the Adult ego state or that thought is confined to the Adult (Drego, 1981, p. 128).

(7) The rainbow specs are a useful way of implementing Berne's behavioral validation of ego states. Using this process, the Child ego state is used to intuitively identify which ego state is in operation at a given moment without the Parental sting of "You're always analyzing yourself." In deciding to change from one color of specs to another, a person is helped not only to shift energy, but also to coordinate the shift of energy with a specific way of perceiving and communicating which is associated with each color. The color change does not simply mean an energy shift; changing ways of perceiving means changing ways of communicating.

(8) Berne's (1972, pp. 139-147) use of color was related to the feelings that are collected as payoffs in games and what he called trading stamps. The use of color in the rainbow specs does not replace Berne's use of color for trading stamps, which remains colloquially as useful as ever.

(9) The idea of the rainbow specs helps clients avoid treating ego states as conceptualizations (Summerton, 1986, p. 53) or as roles that can be adopted or rejected. Because the colors are analogies for descriptive aspects of ego states, changing from one color to another, and with varying intensities, is an analogy for redistribution of cathexis.

(10) Each ego state is a reality of the self, and the rainbow specs are a playful way to access the richness of that reality.

Conclusion

Colors promote creativity and enjoyment in both therapeutic and organizational settings. Colors as used in the rainbow specs also offer alternatives for dealing with awkward situations and people: "Take off your blue specs for a while and put on your yellow specs" is an alternative to "Get out of your Critical Parent and cathect your Adult"; or, "Instead of indigo specs, how about trying your red specs," can be used in place of "Give your Rebellious Child a break for a while and jump into your Free Child." Moving from blue to orange is more intuitive than moving from Controlling Parent to Nurturing Parent.

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