

## Special points of interest:



Original contribution to Transactional Analysis about game moves. See Vol. 1, No. 10 of the The Encounterer.

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## The Game of "Schlemiel" continued

*"In 'Schlemiel' (making messes and then apologizing) the payoff, the purpose of the game, is to obtain the forgiveness which is forced by the apology; the spilling and cigarette burns are only steps leading up to this, but each such trespass yields its own pleasures. The enjoyment derived from the spilling does not make spilling the game. The apology is the critical stimulus that leads to the denouement. Otherwise the spilling would simply be a destructive procedure, a delinquency perhaps enjoyable."*

On page 63 of "Games People Play" Eric Berne classifies the game

**Clinical type:** obsessive-compulsive

**Zonal:** anal

**Instinctual:** sadistic

On page 75 Berne writes: "Present experience indicates that the PAYOFF in "Alcoholic" (as is characteristic of games in general) comes from the aspect to which most investigators play the least attention. In the analysis of this game, drinking itself is merely an incidental pleasure having added advantages, the procedure leading up to the real culmination, which is the hangover. It is the same in the game of **Schlemiel** (\* #1) the mess-making, which attracts the most attention, is merely a pleasure-giving

way for White to lead up to the crux, which is obtaining forgiveness from Black.

For the Alcoholic the hangover is not as much the physical pain as the psychological torment. The two favorite pastimes of drinking people are "Martini" (how many drinks the were mixed) and "Morning After" (Let me tell you about MY hangover).

"Martini" is played, for the most part, by social drinkers; many alcoholics prefer a hard round of psychological "Morning After", and organizations such as AA offer him an unlimited opportunity for this.

Whenever one patient visited his psychiatrist after a binge, he would call himself all sorts of names; the psychiatrist said nothing. Later, recounting these visits in a therapy group, White said in smug satisfaction that it was the psychiatrist who had called him all these names. The main conversational interest of many alcoholics in the therapeutic situation is not their drinking, which they apparently mention mostly in deference to their persecutors, but their subsequent suffering. The transactional object of the drinking, aside from the personal pleasures it brings, is to set a situation where the Child can be severely scolded not only by the internal Parent but by any parental figures

in the environment who are interested enough to oblige. Hence the therapy of this game should be concentrated not on the drinking but on the morning after, the self-indulgence in self-castigation. There is a type of heavy drinker, however, who does not have hangovers, and such people do not belong in the present category.

There is also a game "Dry Alcoholic", in which White goes through the process of financial or social degradation without a bottle, making the same sequence of moves and requiring the same supporting cast. Here again, the morning after is the crux of the matter. Indeed, it is the similarity between "Dry Alcoholic" and regular "Alcoholic" which emphasizes that both are games; for example, the procedure for getting discharged from a job is the same in both. "Addict" is similar to "Alcoholic", but more sinister, more dramatic, more sensational and faster. In our society, at least, it (\* #2) leans more heavily on the readily available Persecutor, with Patsies and Rescuers being few and far between and the Connection playing a much more central role.

Notes in blue: by FHE Jr., MD

\* #1: The "Schlemiel" game and "Alcoholic" game have a lot in common. In **Schlemiel**, the player destroys

the physical property of the fellow player; in **Alcoholic**, "it" destroys the faith, hope, great expectations and belief in himself of the principal other player. Both delight in messing-up another person. **Schlemiel** symbolically defecates on the other person; **Alcoholic** throws-up all over the other person.

\* #2: "it" meaning? From what I told him [Berne] about the "**Addict**" game in the Seminars, my guess is the "it" is the Addict and his game. Then this sentence makes sense and is also clinically correct.

On pg 84 Berne offers an "antithesis" for the game of schlemiel, "anti-schlemiel."

On pages 114-116 Berne writes: *THESIS. The term "schlemiel" does not refer to the hero of Chamisso's novel who was a man without a shadow, but to a popular Yiddish word allied to the German and Dutch words for cunning. The Schlemiel's victim, who is something like the "Good-Natured Fellow" of Paul de Kock, is colloquially called the Schlemazl. The moves in a typical game of "Schlemiel" are as follows:*

*1W. White spills a highball on the hostess's evening gown. (\* #3)*

*1B. Black (the host) responds initially with rage, but he senses (often only vaguely) that if he shows it, White wins. Black therefore pulls himself together, and this gives him the illusion he wins.*

*2W. White says: "I'm sorry."*

*2B. Black mutters or cries forgiveness, strengthening his illusion that he wins. (\* #3)*

*3W. White then proceeds to inflict other damages on Black's property. He breaks things, spills things and*

*makes messes of various kinds. After the cigarette burn in the tablecloth, the chair leg through the lace curtain and the gravy on the rug, White's Child is exhilarated because he has enjoyed himself in carrying out these procedures, for all of which he has been forgiven, while Black has made a gratifying display of suffering self-control (\* #3). Thus both of them profit from an unfortunate situation, and Black is not necessarily anxious to terminate the friendship.*

*As in most games, White, who makes the first move (\* #4), wins either way. If Black shows anger, White can feel justified in returning the resentment. If Black restrains himself, White can go on enjoying his opportunities. The real payoff in this game, however, is not the pleasure of destructiveness, which is merely an added bonus for White, but the fact that he obtains forgiveness. \* This leads directly into the antithesis.*

*\* The examples given for this and the next game (YDYB) follow those given previously by the author in TRANSAC-TIONAL ANALYSIS.*

\* #3: Actually in defining the moves of his games, EB has shortened the sequence and also, here, shows how the same game is repetitively played in the same social setting. Spilling the highball is the "con" or 3rd move in the first completed game with the "I'm sorry (to have 'Schlemieled', messed on, you)", as the "gimmick" move, the artful stratagem. The opposite player, "Blacks" in this example, will have played through **WAHM**, with its sequence of being noticed while pretending to not notice, turning to acknowledge, turning away, to come to their gimmick of **WAHM** (internal rage at being "had", "I hope it doesn't show") and then, here, dismissing (GRD) Schlemiel, while Schlemiel for payoff

leaves the immediate vicinity (GAF), perhaps gloating, but certainly experiencing himself differently, i.e. the critical (internal, personal) element of payoff.

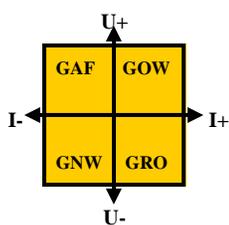
EB's antithesis "You can.....just don't say your sorry" is directed at preventing the playing of the gimmick, i.e. splitting move #3 off from move #4 of the game AND thus denying payoff to Schlemiel.

\* #4: Actually here it is the 3rd, the "con", move. The "hook" and "angle" moves are the very subtle earlier moves, only White and Black for sure remember. Invariably, it takes a minimum of four transactional exchanges before Payoff occurs.

*ANTITHESIS. Anti-"Schlemiel" is played by not offering the demanded absolution. After White says "I'm sorry", Black, instead of muttering "It's okay", says "Tonight you can embarrass my wife, ruin the furniture and wreck the rug, but please don't say 'I'm sorry.'" Here Black switches from being forgiving Parent to being an objective Adult who takes the full responsibility for having invited White in the first place.*

*The intensity of White's game will be revealed by his reaction, which may be quite explosive. One who plays anti-"Schlemiel" runs the risk of immediate reprisals or, at any rate, of making an enemy.*

*Children play "Schlemiel" in an abortive form in which they are not always sure of forgiveness but at least have the pleasure of making messes; as they learn to comport themselves socially, however, they may take advantage of their increasing sophistication to obtain the forgiveness which is the chief goal of the game as played in polite, grownup circles. (\* #5)*



**Thesis:** *I can be destructive and still get forgiveness.*

**Aim:** *Absolution.*

**Roles:** *Aggressor, Victim (Colloquially, Schlemiel and Schlemazl)*

**Dynamics:** *Anal aggression.*

**Examples:** *(1) Messily destructive children. (2) Clumsy guest.*

**Social Paradigm:** *Adult-Adult.*

*Adult: "Since I am polite, you have to be polite, too."*

*Adult: "That's fine. I forgive you."*

**Psychological Paradigm:**

*Child-Parent.*

*Child: "You have to forgive things which appear accidental."*

*Parent: "You are right. I have to show you what good manners are."*

**Moves:** *(1) Provocation-resentment. (2) Apology-forgiveness.*

**Advantages:**

*(1) Internal Psychological--pleasure of messing.*

*(2) External Psychological - avoids punishment.*

*(3) Internal Social — **Schlemiel***

*(4) External Social -- **Schlemiel***

*(5) Biological--provocative and gentle stroking.*

*(6) Existential -- I am blameless.*

\* #5: Once a child has learned the conditions requiring the parentally mandated "I'm sorry", and begun to comply with the mandate then the opportunity presents itself to be both rebellious while appearing to be compliant AND be forgiven--by playing through the moves of this game.

\* Garry lived on the edge of the desert, commuting to his practice of architecture. His dog, roaming the prairie found and bested a skunk, to

then proudly bring its remains home. Overcoming some of his own aversion to the odor he and his pet-guard dog were able to still continue their daily playful petting. Garry bathed and changed his clothes for work daily. Arriving at work the first day after his dog's conquest, colleagues told him he needed a bath (they noted he had made a mess). Garry "Oh yeah! My dog found a skunk and brought it home! (I'm sorry. You'll have to forgive me)." And they did, with mutual laughs, a GOW payoff to this particular game, kidding him after that, still, for a few more days.

On page 145 Berne writes: "*Some schools of social work seem to be primarily academies for the training of professional ITHY (I'm Only Trying To Help) players, and it is not easy for their graduates to desist from playing it. An example which may help to illustrate some of the foregoing points will be found in the description of the complementary (\* #6) game "Indigence."*

*ITHY and its variants are easy to find in everyday life. It is played by family friends and relatives (eg, "I Can Get It For You Wholesale"), and by adults who do community work with children. It is a favorite among parents, and the complementary game played by the offspring is usually "Look What You Made Me Do." Socially is may be a variant of "Schlemiel" in which the damage is done while being helpful rather than impulsively (\* #7); here the client is represented by a victim who may be playing "Why Does This Always Happen To Me?" or one of its variants.*



\* #6: I was the first to introduce the concept and term of "complementary game" in the seminars, ca 1960. Up to that point games had been discussed as the transactions of one person.

This occurred when I first presented a couple I was treating, describing in seminar the pair of games they played. To that point AND still "Why Don't You...Yes But" is talked of in the seminar as a single game although in this text EB is clearly aware of it being two separate games played within a paired matrix.

#7: "Helpful" to cover the impulsive damage?

On page 145-6 Berne writes:

*"Antithesis. [for I'm Only Trying To Help You] There are several devices available for the professional to handle an invitation to play this game, and his selection will depend on the state of the relationship between himself and the patient, particularly on the attitude of the patient's Child.*

*1. The classical psychoanalytic antithesis is the most thoroughgoing and the most difficult for the patient to tolerate. The invitation is completely ignored (\* #8). The patient tries harder and harder. Eventually he falls into a state of despair, manifested by anger or depression, which is the characteristic sign that a game has been frustrated. This may lead to a useful confrontation.*

\* #8: "Ignored" is precise; i.e. as defined in the OK Corral, patient playing this game ends with a GNW, gets-nowhere-with the psychoanalyst.

*2. A more gentle (but not prim) confrontation may be attempted on the first invitation. The therapist states that he is the patient's therapist not his manager.*

*3. An even more gentle procedure is to introduce the patient into a therapy group, and let the other patients handle it.*

*4. With an acutely disturbed patient it may be necessary to play along during the initial phase. These patients should be treated by a psychiatrist, who being a*

*medical man, can prescribe both medications and some of the hygienic measures which are still valuable, even in this day of tran-*

*quilizers, in the treatment of such people. If the physician prescribes a hygienic regimen, which may include baths, exercise, rest periods, and regular meals along with medication, the patient (1) carries out the regimen and feels better (2) carries out the regimen scrupulously and complains that it does not help (3) mentions casu-*

*ally that he forgot to carry out the instructions or that he had abandoned the regimen because it was not doing any good. In the second and case it is then up to the psychiatrist to decide whether the patient is amenable to game analysis at that point, or whether some other form of treatment is indicated to prepare him for later psychotherapy. The relationship between the adequacy of the*

*regimen and the patient's tendency to play games with it should be carefully evaluated by the psychiatrist before he decides how to proceed next.*



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*"Mastery of the universe is proportional to the symbols man has by which to represent his universe."*

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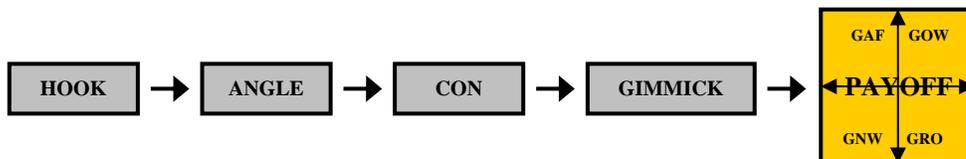
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A game is defined as a recurring set of transactions with ulterior transactions, concealed motivation, a gimmick, and a payoff. Eric Berne, M.D. used a particular variation of the duplex transactional diagram to represent the ulterior aspects of a game. Berne added the concept of switch in 1966 and introduced "The Game Formula."  $Con + Gimmick = Response > Switch > Payoff$ . The "Ernst Game Diagram" as described by Franklin H. Ernst Jr., M.D. in his paper "The Game Diagram" shows the phenomena of the variableness of a game and number of variations without contradicting "Berne's Game Formula." The Game Diagram" has five moves: Move #1-Hook, Move #2-Angle, Move #3-Con, Move #4-Gimmick, Move #5-Payoff. Diagrammatically it looks like this:



For the patient, on the other hand, the antithesis is, "Don't tell me what to do to help myself, I'll tell you what to do to help me." If the therapist is known to be a **Schlemiel**, the correct antithesis for the patient to use is, "Don't help me, help him." But serious players of "I'm Only Trying To Help You" are generally lacking in a sense of humor. Antithetical moves on the part of a patient are usually unfavorably received, and may result in the therapist's lifelong enmity. In everyday life such moves should not be initiated unless one is prepared to carry them through ruthlessly and take the consequences. For example, spurning a relative who "Can Get It For You Wholesale" may cause serious domestic complications.

On page 157-8 Berne writes:

"*Thesis: In its milder form, the thesis of "Stupid" is, "I laugh with you at my own clumsiness and stupidity." (\* #9) Seriously disturbed people, however, may play it in a sullen way which says, "I am stupid,*

*that's the way I am, so do me something." (\* #10) Both forms are played from the depressive position. "Stupid" must be distinguished from "Schlemiel", where the position is more aggressive, and the clumsiness is a bid for forgiveness. It must also be distinguished from "Clown", which is not a game but a pastime which reinforces the position "I am cute and harmless." The critical transaction in "Stupid" is for White to make Black call him stupid or respond as though he were stupid. (\* #11) Hence White acts like a Schlemiel but does not ask for forgiveness; in fact forgiveness makes him uneasy, because it threatens his position. Or he reacts clownishly, but with no implication that he is kidding; he wants his behavior taken seriously, as evidence of real stupidity. There is considerable external gain, since the less White learns, the more effectively he can play. Hence at school he need not study, and at work he need not go out of his way to learn anything that might lead to advance-*

*ment. He has known from an early age that everyone will be satisfied with him as long as he is stupid, despite any expression to the contrary. People are surprised when in time of stress, if he decides to come through, it turns out he is not stupid at all--any more than the "stupid" younger son in the fairy tale.*

\* #9: This is another example of how a game can and is played with varying degrees of intensity AND to anyone of the four corners of the OK Corral. Here in "Stupid's milder form" it is played introjective style to a GOW payoff.

\* #10: Do Me Something (DMSD) is in fact another and separate game with its own and differing set of game moves.

\* #11: e.g. over-explain something in excessive (confusing?) detail.

