

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 "Ain't It Awful"

FH Ernst Jr., MD writes In Leaving Your Mark about the game of "Ain't It Awful." Dr. Ernst observed that some patients came to him to play "Ain't It Awful" about a spouse, either for the comforting received, or "explanations" of spouse behavior in order to make additional thrusts and jabs in the marriage as the payoff from therapy.

Those who resisted wall marking in his office (a prescription for getting well) predictably had a less favorable treatment prognosis.

From page 8 of Leaving Your Mark: "The individual who has marked during the group's meeting with the therapist present has less likelihood of difficulty or complication from the marking procedure, i.e., an "emotional backfire from marking." The probability is that the group itself has little to do with the lack of undesirable side effects. Instead, patients working in a group are selectively more capable of handling the marking experience than persons who decline group therapy for individual therapy alone. A person who joins a group probably is selectively more capable of "giving-himself-away." In game terminology, the group member is less likely to be playing his game as hard as the person refusing group treatment. He is less frequently betting his life (as compared to a smile or a burst

-into-tears payoff) in order to win his game.

Persons who have marked on the wall without particular hesitation have a more favorable treatment prognosis.

Those individuals who early (first 20 minutes) during their initial session chuckle, cluck, or indulgently comment about the walls in a Parental manner, e.g., "I see you have had some children in here" (in preference to describing their personal difficulties for the initial exposition) rather usually are slower moving in treatment if, in fact, any movement takes place at all. This indulgent Parental activity, as a rule, is indicative of the "I-am-nervous-for-no-reason-at-all" person. His childhood experiences and troubles of earlier life sloughed off by the grown-ups around him. He was discounted as a child. The exceptions to this poor prognostic sign are persons who first are indulgent almost immediately followed by conjunctival and facial coloring and then a return in their talking to the treater about the situation that brought them into treatment.

The question might be had as to the therapist, perhaps responsively, "Holding-a-grudge" against a person who is ridiculing what he, the therapist, is doing i.e. his wall marking.

This has been checked rather carefully by checking back through records prior to initiating wall marking. There [is] also the indulgent chuckle for an opener, [which is] was a poor prognostic sign.

This indulgence and ridiculing is similar to the general observation about the projecting, externalizing patient who comes to treatment to play "Ain't it Awful" about a spouse.

Payoff and Intensity (Degree) of a Game

From The Game Diagram by FH Ernst Jr., MD, pg 35. A first-degree game is one played through lightly, without an intensive or extensive buildup to the payoff. A first-degree game doesn't leave either player hard-up and aching at its conclusion. A few stamps may be issued and/or collected.

A second-degree game is played for a big payoff, but a payoff of a reversible quality. A third-degree game has reference to the maximized intensity of payoff which can be obtained. A hard game is often one which involves an irreversibility in the payoff as in third-degree "Ain't It Awful" with the Get-Rid-Of payoff of multiple surgeries or a physical assault on the other party.

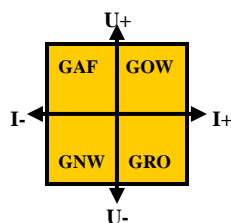
Payoffs can be sorted into being reversible or irreversible. The irreversible payoff is more akin to a chapter of the person's script; i.e. "The Final Curtain."

The hard games of the winner variety are infrequently thought of as games inasmuch as theorists of "people games" do not see these players in the psychotherapeutic setting. The payoffs for these latter players are health promoting and often provocative of Get-On-With style intimacy. Said differently, these players become "addicted" to securing their own mutually glowing moments of "I Am OK AND You Are OK, too. NOW!"

The most reliable pathway to an intimate moment is by proceeding from withdrawal to ritual to pastime to game ("the bridge to intimacy") to intimacy.

"Because there is so little opportunity for intimacy in daily life, and because some forms of intimacy, especially if intense, are psychologically impossible for most people, the bulk of time in serious social life is spent in playing games. Hence, games are both necessary and desirable. The only problem at issue is whether the games played by an individual offer the best yield for him. In this connection it should be remembered that the essential feature of a game is its culmination, or payoff."

(E. Berne)



Pastimes

In his book Games People Play Dr. Berne first introduces the game of "Ain't It Awful" at the end of the section on pastimes (page 47).

A pastime is not always easy to distinguish from an activity, and combinations frequently occur. Many commonplace pastimes, such as "General Motors", consist of what psychologists might call Multiple-Choice -- Sentence Completion exchanges.

A. "I like a Ford/Chevrolet/Plymouth better than a Ford/Chevrolet/Plymouth because....."

B. "Oh' Well, I'd rather have a Ford/Chevrolet/Plymouth than a Ford/Chevrolet/Plymouth because....."

It is apparent that there may actually be some useful information conveyed in such stereotypes.

A few other common pastimes may be mentioned. "Me Too" is often a variant of "Ain't It Awful." "Why Don't They" (do something about it) is a favorite among housewives who do not wish to be emancipated. "Then We'll" is a Child-Child pastime. "Let's Find" (something to do) is played by juvenile delinquents or mischievous grown-ups.

What's a Pastime ?

On page 18 of Games People Play Berne says: When one is a member of a social aggregation of two or more people, there are several options for structuring time. In order of complexity, these are: (1) Rituals (2) Pastimes (3) Games (4) Intimacy and (5) Activity...

On page 41 Berne says: *Pastimes occur in social and temporal matrices of varying degrees of complexity, and hence vary in complexity. However, if we use the transaction as the unit of social intercourse, we can dissect out of appropriate situations an entity which may be called a simple pastime. This may be defined as a series of semi-ritualistic, simple, complementary transactions arranged around a single field of material, whose primary object is to structure an interval of time. The beginning and end of the interval are typically signaled by procedures or rituals. The transactions are adaptively programmed so that each party will obtain the maximum gains or advantages during the interval. The better his adaptation, the more he will get out of it.*

In Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy

Berne writes on page 111: In transactional analysis, reliability or commitment is regarded as an inherent social quality of the Adult.

Commitment to a Game

In The Game Diagram Ernst writes on page 12: *The commitment to a game occurs when the game player plays his gimmick move. Move #4, the first time. The gimmick move of a game is the fourth quality (ulterior transaction) of a game move in each game. Before the gimmick move of a game has been played (the first time) the playing person has already played the hook move, the angle move and the con move each at least one time. The commitment to playing a game is different from the earlier moves of his particular game.*

*What happens at the first time Move #4 is played is that the **executive** in the player (the ego state that is in charge) **changes** from one ego state to another, for example from Adult to Child in the game of "Cool It."*

Move #4 is a gimmick (artful stratagem) in two ways: first, the stimulus that the person offers to the other person (responder) is a trick, and secondly the individual offering his next stimulus changes his ego state with a sleight-of-hand or artful stratagem in order to initiate the change of face he will wear at the time of achieving payoff.

It is in playing the Gimmick move of the particular game the first time that the person's Child captures the executive, takes over in the person. And there is nothing wrong with this.

The Child in a person wants recognition. The Child wants to keep it a secret how he is trying to get in charge, be the boss of the grownup; that he wants to be in charge.

On page 21 Ernst writes: *In the GIMMICK move, (see figure below) the Adult has relinquished his position of being in the executive. His Adult has been "seduced", "lured", and/or "tricked" by his own Child. AND the Child of the **other party** in the game has been seduced, lured and/or tricked into giving up the driver's seat of running his own "personality."* *The Child is now directing policy and is pro-programming the ongoing events as well as interpreting the meaning of incoming information. The Adult continues to retain possession of the "real Self." The Adult may be saying: "Yes, Sir, that's me. I am the one who is really in charge here." But the "real Self" here is rather more like a figure head, especially as the Child is now*

actually in the executive AND has another program. He (the person's Child) now wants to get to come out and play, really play, to get to be "really me", and have the "real Self" move over from the Adult and into his Child self, at least for awhile. For the Adult, this Gimmick situation is an unstable one; for the Child it is only a matter of time until he gets to be clearly in charge of the whole person, i.e. at Payoff time.

In **Games People Play** Berne writes on page 110: *Parties are for pastimes, and pastimes are for parties (including the period before a group meeting officially begins), but as acquaintanceship ripens, games begin to emerge.*

'Ain't It Awful' is one of those games.

Ain't It Awful

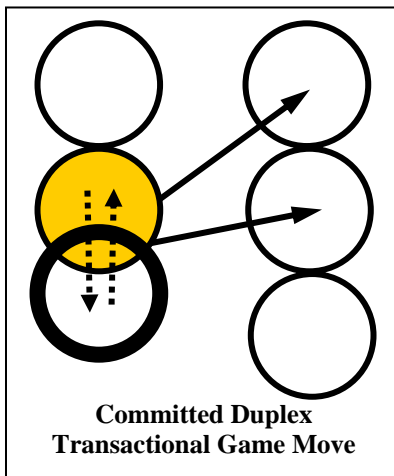
THESIS. This is played in four significant forms: Parental pastime, Adult pastime, Child pastime and game. In the pastimes there is no denouement or payoff, but much unworthy feeling.

1. **"Nowadays"** is the self-righteous, punitive or even vicious Parental pastime. Sociologically it is common among certain types of middle-aged women with small independent incomes. One such woman withdrew (* #1) from a therapy group when her opening move was greeted with silence instead of with the excited corroboration she was accustomed to in her social circle. In this more sophisticated group, accustomed to game analysis, there was a conspicuous lack of togetherness when White remarked: "Speaking of not trusting people, it's no wonder you can't trust anyone nowadays. I was looking through the desk of one of my roomers, and won't believe what I found."

She knew the answers to most of the current community problems: juvenile delinquency (parents too soft nowadays); divorce (wives without enough to do to keep them busy nowadays); crime (foreigners moving into white neighborhoods nowadays); and rising prices (businessmen too grasping nowadays). She made it clear that she herself was not soft with her delinquent son, nor with her delinquent tenants.

Notes in blue by FHE Jr., MD :
 * #1 This withdrawal WAS her game payoff to her gimmick of "Ain't It Awful". how the therapist and those people in that group dealt with her. Her payoff in that particular game was a GAF; probably a series of gradually intensifying games in which she had estimated how to pull off the "big one," ie her departure, and "They'll be sorry they..."

"Nowadays" is differentiated from idle gossip by its slogan "It's no wonder." The opening move may be the same ("They say that Flossie Murgatroyd"), but in **"Nowadays"** there is direction and closure; an "explanation" may be offered. Idle gossip merely rambles or trails off.



2. **"Broken Skin"** is the more benevolent Adult version, with the slogan "What a pity!" although the underlying motivations are equally morbid. **"Broken Skin"** deals with the flow of blood; it is essentially an informal clinical colloquium. Anyone is eligible to present a case, the more horrifying the better, and details are eagerly considered. Blows to the face, abdominal operations and difficult child-births are accepted topics. Here the differentiation from gossip (* #2) lies in the rivalry and surgical sophistication. Pathological anatomy, diagnosis, prognosis and comparative case studies are systematically pursued. A good prognosis is approved in idle gossip (* #3), but in **"Broken Skin"** a consistently hopeful outlook, unless obviously insincere, may invoke a secret meeting of the Credentials Committee because the player is non particeps criminis.

3. **"Water Cooler"** or **"Coffee Break"**, is the Child pastime, with the slogan "Look what they're doing to us now." This is an organization variant (* #3). It may be played after dark in the milder political or economic form called **"Bar Stool."** It is actually three-handed, the ace being held by the often shadowy figure called "They."

* #2 Gossip, idle and rambling without closure is technically a pastime.

* #3 AIA at CMF AM Coffee Break in the late 70s, early 70s was Child, vying among players who could design the most malicious, demoralizing view of current working conditions. I broke this up a couple of times with the procedure "Al, let me see your tongue." He showed it. "Ah! Brown! Just as I was afraid."

From his point of view it was a game in which he'd been "had" in WAHM and I'd played NIGYSOB. For me there was no dramatics, no payoff. He did feel differently after. In fact, there was a marked subsidence of AIA pastime aimed a working conditions, a slowing of the demoralization of clinical staff. Although my Adult had timed the remark carefully, from Al's point of view, it was my Parent rebuking him in his leadership of this small revolutionary activity.

Another time in the Susanville prison, after witnessing endless AIA remarks, comments by staff about patients after they'd been seen in clinic, and other administrative staff, I commented that this staff "was surgically speaking," contaminating the field of work" with this attitude.

Berne continues
 4. As a game, "Ain't It Awful" finds its most dramatic expression in polysurgery addicts, and their transactions illustrate its characteristics. These are doctor-shoppers, people who actively seek surgery even in the face of sound medical opposition. The experience itself, the hospitalization and surgery, brings its own advantages. The internal psychological advantage comes from having the body mutilated; the external psychological advantage lies in the avoidance of intimacies and responsibilities except complete surrender to the surgeon. The biological advantages are typified by nursing care. The internal social advantages come from the medical and nursing staff, and



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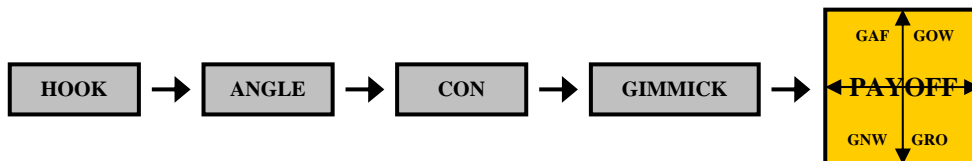
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"Mastery of the universe is proportional to the symbols man has by which to represent his universe."

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:



from other patients. After the patient's discharge the external social advantages are gained by provoking sympathy and awe. In its extreme form this game is played professionally by fraudulent or determined liability and malpractice claimants, who may earn a living by deliberately or opportunistically incurring disabilities. They then demand not only sympathy, as amateur players do, but indemnification. **"Ain't It Awful"** becomes a game, then, when the player overtly expresses distress, but is covertly gratified at the prospect of the satisfactions he can wring from his misfortune.

In general, people who suffer misfortunes may be divided into three classes.

1. Those in whom the suffering is advertent and unwanted. These may or not exploit the sympathy which is so readily offered to them. Some exploitation is natural enough, and may be treated with common courtesy.

2. Those in whom the suffering is inadvertent, but is gratefully received because of the opportunities for exploitation it offers. Here the game is an afterthought, a "secondary gain" in Freud's sense.

3. Those who seek suffering, like polysurgery addicts who go from one surgeon to another until they find one willing to operate. Here the game is the primary consideration.

* **AIA** has as its gimmick the deliverance, verbal or not, of "You're Awful" to see what the opposite member will do with it in the game sense of not knowing how it will "come out" until after its tried.

Equivalent epithetical gimmick lines delivered in dramatic manner are "Damn you!", "You Son of a Bitch!", "Fuck you!", "Stupid!", etc. Sometimes they are delivered with a semi-smile. They all tellingly impact the receiver about "How Awful You Are." **NIGYSOB**, in contrast, as a game is focused on the "GOTCHA" feature.

The drama of games is typified in the childhood "Hide and Seek", where the child hides at various times, including just before the family is due to go out to grandmother's and where punctuality is paramount. Child's hiding then may well provoke the wrath of the primary parent concerned in this instance more with pleasing grandmother, than how his cute and cuddly daughter is. It is not known to the "hiding" player how this is going to turn out prior to the "finding" after the "seeking" has concluded.

To be continued

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