

Special points of interest:



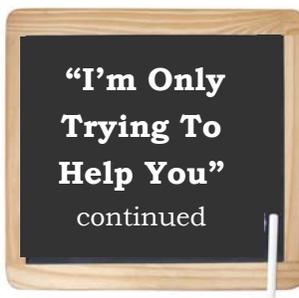
Original contribution to
Transactional Analysis about
Trying-To-Help.
See Vol. 1, No. 15
of the The Encounterer.

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"I'm Only Trying To Help You" continued

In his book Games People Play Dr. Berne writes about the game of "I'm Only Trying To Help You." The index lists this game in several places: pages 77, 84, 88, 89, 120-121, 143-147, 148-150, 155, 159, 160. I will continue with the games of "I'm Only Trying to Help You" and the Game of "Psychiatry." Continuing on page 155 of Games People Play.

Dr. Ernst's notes and comments are shown in blue.

"I'm Only Trying To Help You" and the Game of "Psychiatry."

Dr. Berne

Thesis. Psychiatry must be distinguished from "Psychiatry" as a game. There are many approaches that have value in treating psychiatric conditions. Any of these can be used in the game of "Psychiatry", which is based on the position "I am a healer", supported by a diploma: "It says here I am a healer." It will be noted that in any case this is a constructive, benevolent position, and that people who play "Psychiatry" can do a great deal of good, providing they are professionally trained.

It is likely, however, that there will be some gain in therapeutic results if therapeutic ardor is moderated. The antithesis was best expressed long ago by Ambrase Pare, who said in

effect: "I treat them, but God cures them." Every medical student learns about this dictum, along with others such as primum non nocere, and phrases such as vis medicatrix naturae. Nonmedical therapists, however, are not so likely to be exposed to these ancient cautions. The position "I am a healer because it says here that I am a healer" is likely to be an impairment, and may be replaced to advantage with something like: "I will apply what therapeutic procedures I have learned in the hope that they will be of some benefit." This avoids the possibility of games based on: "Since I am a healer, if you don't get better it's your fault," eg, "I'm Only Trying To Help You" or "Since you're a healer, I will get better for you" (eg, "Peasant"). All of this, of course, is known in principle to every conscientious therapist. Certainly every therapist who has ever presented a case at a reputable clinic has been made aware of it. Conversely, a good clinic may be defined as one which makes its therapists aware of these things.

On the other side, the game of "Psychiatry" is more apt to crop up with patients who have previously been treated by less competent therapists. A few patients, for example, carefully pick weak psychoana-

lysts, moving from one to another, demonstrating that they cannot be cured and meanwhile learning to play a sharper and sharper game of "Psychiatry"; eventually it becomes difficult for even a first-rate clinician to separate the wheat from the chaff. The duplex transaction on the patient's side is: Adult: I am coming to be cured." Child: "You will never cure me, but you will teach me to be a better neurotic (play a better game of "Psychiatry")."

"Mental Health" is played similarly; here the Adult statement is, "Everything will get better if I apply the principles of mental health which I have read and heard about." One patient learned to play "Psychiatry" from one therapist, "Mental Health" from another, and then as a result of still another effort began to play a pretty good game of "Transactional Analysis." When this was discussed frankly with her, she agreed to stop playing "Mental Health", but requested that she be allowed to continue to play "Psychiatry" because it made her feel comfortable. The transactional psychiatrist agreed. She continued, therefore, for several months to recite her dreams and her interpretations of them at weekly intervals. Finally, partly out of plain gratitude, perhaps, she decided that it might be interesting to find out what was really the matter

with her. She became seriously interested in transactional analysis, with good results.

A variant of "Psychiatry" is "Archaeology" (title by Dr Norman Reider of San Francisco), in which the patient takes the position that if she can only find out who had the button, so to speak, everything will suddenly be all right. This results in a continual rumination over childhood happenings. Sometimes the therapist may be beguiled into a game of "Critique", in which the patient describes her feelings in various situations and the therapist tells her what is wrong with them.

"Self-Expression", which is a common game in some therapy groups, is based on the dogma "Feelings are Good." A patient who uses vulgar expletives, for example, may be applauded or at least implicitly lauded. A sophisticated group, however, will soon spot this as a game.

Some members of therapy groups become quite adept at picking out games of "Psychiatry", and will soon let a new patient know if they think he is playing "Psychiatry" or "Transactional Analysis" instead of using group procedures to obtain legitimate insight. A woman who transferred from a Self-Expression group in one city to a more sophisticated group in another city told a story about an incestuous relationship in her childhood. Instead of the awe which she had come to expect whenever she told this oft-repeated tale (* #1), she was greeted with indifference, whereupon she became enraged (* #2). She was astonished to discover that the new group was more interested in her transactional anger than in her historical incest, and in irate tones she hurled

what apparently in her mind was the ultimate insult: she accused them of not being Freudian. Freud himself, of course, took psychoanalysis more seriously, and avoided making a game of it by saying that he himself was not a Freudian.

Recently unmasked is a new variant of "Psychiatry" called "Tell Me This", somewhat similar to the party pastime "Twenty Questions." White relates a dream or an incident, and the other members, often including the therapist, then attempt to interpret it by asking pertinent questions. As long as White answers the questions, each member continues his inquiries until he finds a question White cannot answer. Then Black sits back with a knowing look which says: "Aha! If you could answer that one, you would certainly get better, so I have done my part." (This is a distant relative of "Why Don't You, Yes But"). Some therapy groups are based almost entirely on this game, and may go on for years with only minimal change or progress. "Tell Me This" allows much latitude to White (the patient) who, for example, can play along with it by feeling ineffectual; or he can counter it by answering all questions offered, in which case the anger and dismay (* #3) of the other players soon become manifest, since he is throwing back at them, "I've answered all your questions and you haven't cured me, so what does that make you?"

"Tell Me This" is also played in schoolrooms, where the pupils know that the "right" answer to an open-ended question asked by a certain type of teacher is not to be found by processing factual data, but by guessing or outguessing which of several possible answers will make the teacher happy. A pedantic variant

occurs in teaching ancient Greek; the teacher always has the upper hand over the pupil, and can make him look stupid and prove it in print by pointing to some obscure feature of the text. This is also often played in teaching Hebrew. (* #4)

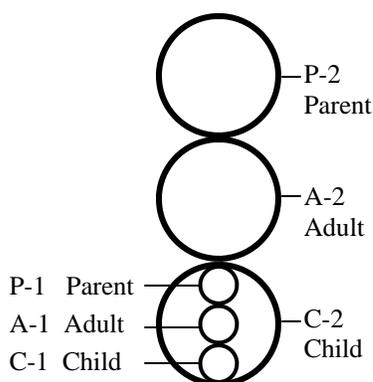
* #1: EB's skill with the oblique was considerable, eg here "tale" homonym is "tail".

* #2: This "anger" response, more recently would be understood as a "racket" or "emotional blackmail" and as such diagrammable in the lower half of the OK Corral as a specialized display of feeling aimed at controlling the others, and exacting her own demand for "worship" of her "historical" experience.

[See "Coercive Feelings" by FH Ernst, Jr, MD]

* #3: It probably would be better to change White for Black as names of the players here to keep it clear that "Now Tell Me This" is the initiating player. Within Berne's game naming program the player whose action is being described is "White."

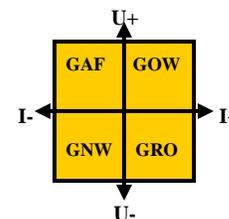
* #4: Therefore there is a class of games, or better a basic game woven around specialized sets of information, with a specialized form for each "specialty" of "knowledge." This basic game and its special forms are played between "teacher" and "students" or among "students" only. Certainly this game is played extensively by a certain type of law school professor.



“I’m Only Trying To Help You” and other Games.

The Game of “I’m Only Trying to Help You” is mentioned prominently with other games: the game of “Stupid” on page 159, the game of “Wooden Leg” on page 160, the game of “Alcoholic” on page 77, the game

of “Kick Me” on page 84, the game of “See What You Made Me Do” on page 88, the game of “Why Don’t You, Yes But” on page 120, and many other games.



Dr. Ernst has written about these games, too. [See “Who’s Listening”, and “Handbook of Listening.”]

“I’m Only Trying To Help You” and the Game of “Stupid.”

Dr. Berne, on page 159 of **Games People Play**.

“I’m Only Trying To Help You” and the Game of “Stupid.”

Thesis. In its milder form, the thesis of “Stupid” is, “I laugh with you at my own clumsiness and stupidity.” (* #5) 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.” (* #6) 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. (* #7) 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 advancement. 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.

* #5: 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.

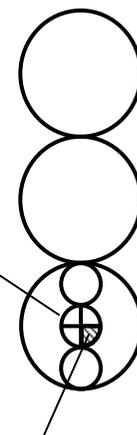
* #6: Do Me Something (DMSD) is in fact another and separate game with its own and differing set of game moves.

* #7: Eg over-explain something in excessive (confusing?) detail.

Antithesis. The antithesis of the milder form is simple. By not playing, by not laughing at the clumsiness or railing at the stupidity, the anti-“Stupid” player will make a friend for life. One of the subtleties is that this game is often played by cyclothymic or manic-depressive personalities. When such people are euphoric, it seems as though they really want their associates to join in their laugh-

ter at themselves. It is often hard not to, for they give the impression that they will resent an abstainer--which in a way they do, since he threatens their position and spoils the game. But when they are depressed, and their resentment against those who laughed with or at them comes into the open, the abstainer knows that he has acted correctly. He may be the only one the patient is willing to have in the room or talk to when he is withdrawn, and all the former “friends” who enjoyed the game are now treated as enemies. (* #8)

* #8 :This editor, FEJr, has gone at it differently with those players not playing a 3rd degree game. The game of “Stupid” has the standard set of four moves of all games from opening to gimmick playing prior to payoff. One effective procedure taught to and used by classroom teachers is to teach them the game algorithm, ie the qualities of the four moves in this game, ie 1) “Full Bright”, 2) “Half Bright”, 3) “Quarter Bright”, 4) “Lights Out.” After the teacher has gotten the class “in tow” and identified some of the “Stupid” players he then instructs the class on the moves, writing them on the blackboard. Moving in on the players games gradually as he is able teacher will then call the move name or move



The Professor is located in the grown up person’s Childself.

The young child’s decisive event and decision for a favored method of concluding personal social events is GRO, GNW, GAF, or GOW.



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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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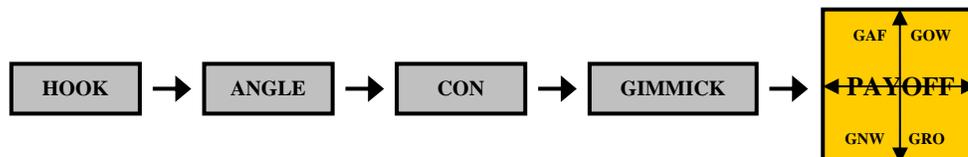
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A game is defined as a recurring set of transactions with ulterior transactions, concealed motivation, a gimmick, and a payoff. Eric Berne, M.D. used a particular variation of the duplex transactional diagram to represent the ulterior aspects of a 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:



number, sometimes getting the class members to participate. The goal is to start identifying the game at the first and second moves before the player becomes committed to playing his game through again.

It is no use telling White he is not really stupid. He may actually be of quite limited intelligence and be well aware of it, which is how the game got started in the first place. There may be special areas, however, in which he is superior; often psychological insight is one. It does no harm to show whatever respect is deserved for such aptitudes, but this is different from clumsy attempts at "reassurance." The latter may give him the bitter satisfaction of realizing the other people are even more stupid than he is, but this is small consolation. Such "reassurance" is certainly not the most intelligent therapeutic procedure; usually it is a move in a game of "I'm Only Trying To Help You."

The antithesis of "Stupid" is not to substitute another game, but simply to refrain from playing "Stupid." (* #9), (* #10)

The antithesis of the sullen form is a more complicated problem, because the sullen player is trying to provoke not laughter or derision but helplessness or exasperation (#11), which he is well equipped to handle in accordance with his challenge "So do me something." (* #12) Thus he wins either way. (* #13) If Black does nothing, it is because he feels helpless, and if he does something, it is because he is exasperated. Hence these people are prone to also play "Why Don't You--Yes But", from which they can get the same satisfactions in milder form. There is no easy solution in this case, nor is there likely to be one forthcoming until the psychodynamics of this game are more clearly understood.*

* #9: ITHY is one of the better known complementary games to "Stupid."

* #10: Antithesis for the opposite person is to refrain from playing into the game.

* #11: That is the "sullen Stupid player" aims for a GNW payoff to his game events; helplessness and exasperation in the opposite party are GNW payoff events. AND in game payoffs, one person's GNW is the other person's GNW also.

* #12: This book was written before Stupid and Do Me SOMETHING had been clearly separated as games, the latter frequently played by the "chronically mentally ill."

* #13: The hallmark of many childhood based games is "Either way I win." Player either gets what he wants or he gets what he expects ("There I knew it, just like I expected, I wasn't going to get it anyway.")