

## TA Games

Eric Berne, the great euhemerus of Transactional Analysis and originator of social game theory, observed that most people would not be able to tolerate continuous intimacy. Therefore, rituals, activities, pastimes, games, and even withdrawal serve a useful social purpose, at times. It is the addictive compulsion to rely upon the drama triangle of social games, due to an underdeveloped or damaged capacity for intimacy, which threatens the quality of our personal relationships, and it is the awareness of the existence of a choice that defines autonomy.

The following section contains brief descriptive monographs of some of the more harmful of the common social game paradigms. Theoretically, all games may be played in forms which range from first to third degree in severity, and roles may be switched back and forth around the drama triangle, but usually, there are recognized forms which predominate. It is these familiar forms which I have attempted to describe here. Information in greater depth may be found throughout the literature of Transactional Analysis, including the late Dr. Berne's best-selling work, *Games People Play*(1) from which these monographs were adapted with very little change.

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### Addict / Alcoholic

Roles: Victim (addict), Persecutor (usually spouse), Rescuer (often family member of same sex), Patsy (enabler), Connection (supplier)  
Pastimes: Are martini (how much I used) and morning after (look what you made me do). Many addicts find unlimited access to these pastimes in organizations such as AA.

The game is played from the Victim role as "see how bad I've been; see if you can stop me." The purpose is self-punishment and the garnering of negative (persecution) strokes and positive ones of forgiveness, and the vindication of an "I'm not OK" existential position. The game often becomes elaborated into a self-destructive life script, especially if the parents were also chemically dependent.

Programs designed to "arrest" the symptoms, rather than cure the underlying cause, such as 12-step groups, merely allow the addict to continue to play the game from the Rescuer position, instead of as a Victim. Cases have been reported of chapters of AA, the members of which returned to drinking when they ran out of new alcoholics to rescue, that being the only

way in which they could continue to play the game.(2) Effective antithesis and cure can be achieved through psychotherapeutic script analysis, redecision, and relearning.

Many other games follow directly from the addict game such as, NIGYSOB, Wooden Leg, Corner, IFWY, SWYMD, Cops & Robbers, etc.

### Now I've Got You - You Son of a Bitch - (NIGYSOB)

Purpose: Justification for persecutor to vent repressed rage.

Roles: Primarily: Persecutor (P), Victim (V)

NIGYSOB vindicates the "ya just can't trust nobody, nowadays" paranoia and a he's (you're, she's, they're) not-OK existential position (usually secondary). P believes in the social (Adult-Adult) level and is usually unaware of the ulterior level in which P's Parent is saying to V's Child "I've been watching you, hoping you'd slip up. You did so, now I've got you . . ." P often sets V up for a predictable fall in order to further the vicious cycle of anger/aggression/anger and to relieve internal psychic pressure from a repressed not-OK Child.

This game can be immensely destructive. Second degree can lead to litigation and prison, third degree to injury or homicide. Play can move in several directions. The relationship between P and V may end, with each moving into new games (Poor Me, SWYMD, etc.) as Victims for a well-intentioned Rescuer. If P and V continue in a love/hate relationship, then additional rounds may ensue, with P collecting righteousness and triumph stamps and V masochistically collecting humiliation. Alternately, retaliation by V can lead into a game of Uproar, or V may proceed, with hurt feelings, into other victim games such as: Kick Me, Poor Me, There I Go Again, or Wooden Leg.

Tendency is entrenched in NIGYSOB players and successful antithesis usually requires therapeutic intervention, aimed at insight, release of repressed rage, and deconfusion of the Child.

### Courtroom

Theme Everyone (so and so, the family, some "expert", etc.) agrees that I am right and you are wrong.

Purpose: Use of third-party "muscle" to gain unfair advantage and strong-arm another into submission.

Roles Persecutor/Plaintiff (P), Victim/Defendant (V), Rescuer/Judge or Outside "expert" Opinion (R).

Classic dirty pool game in families. Also, this game has been found to be so common in marriage counselling that some therapeutic relationships seem actually to "consist of a perpetual game of Courtroom, and nothing is ever accomplished, since the game is never broken up."

The basic premise is that P always seeks out the opinion of others (R), in order to gang up, psychologically, upon V. P says to R, "she says that I . . . but let me tell you what really happened . . . I'm sure you can see that it is only reasonable that I . . . don't you agree?" And then to V, "see I told you that you were wrong!" In fact, it is not even necessary for R to be present. P may make a habit out of trotting out the supposed opinions of one or more third parties to add weight to his/her side of the disagreement in order to terrorize V into backing off in the face of "overwhelming odds." Berne says that P's position is basically dishonest, knowing that her position is wrong, but hoping to hoodwink a sly victory by bringing in psychological artillery in the form of "everyone agrees with me that . . ." Further difficulties arise in family Courtroom from the fact that most people tend to associate with persons of similar scripting, most notably their parents, from whom their scripts originated, and to whose advantage it is to support P's cause, no matter how unjust, since cherished illusions which they have in common are threatened by doing otherwise.

Payoffs (P) false righteousness and vindication of a not-OK position.

(V) frustration, anger, and resentment

(R) satisfaction of a helping driver or playing They'll Be Glad They Knew Me.

Antithesis - settling differences on their own merits, while forbidding the use of outside opinion. In therapy, by disallowing the use of the third person subject in sentences.

### Blemish

Theme Fault finding.

Purpose To keep everyone, including oneself, looking in the other direction.

Roles Victim (V), Persecutor (P) (often switching to Rescuer).

Blemish is commonly played from the Persecutor (P) by persons who have adopted a secondary existential stance of arrogance (I'm better) in order to compensate for a depressive (I'm not-OK) primary position. By constantly pointing the finger at the shortcomings, real or imagined, of others, she avoids the spotlight and having to examine her own feelings of inadequacy. This person rarely ever gives straight complements or genuine praise. There always follows the conditional modifier: "That is really quite nice, except . . ." Blemish players never feel comfortable around someone until they locate a chink in their armour, some convenient handle for fault finding. There is often a role switch, with P shifting to Rescuer mode - "I hope you don't mind honest criticism . . . I'm only trying to help you . . ." P may be so socially inept that a round of Blemish is, sadly, the only type of opening line she knows. She may show great ingenuity in the inventing of a blemish in order to follow it up with, "but that's OK, even I do that myself sometimes . . . let me show you how I deal with it . . .," attempting to initiate a twisted form of closeness.

Chronic Blemish players are universally annoying to almost anyone without a strong uncompensated inferiority/ masochism streak. Consequently, their

circle of friends is often severely limited, and relationships are generally seriously dysfunctional, mutually parasitic, power paradigms.

Payoffs - include the vindication of arrogance, keeping the conscience blind, and avoiding the effort to improve, since it is "they" who have the problems, not I.

Antithesis - these people will come under professional scrutiny during relationship therapy. Confrontation with the chronic fault finding and conditional praise is a start. Efforts should be aimed at helping the person discover/disclose the nature of the barrier to intimacy and of the not-OK in the Child.

### Why Don't You . . . Yes, but . . . - (WDYB)

Theme (R) I'll make you grateful for my help / (V) go ahead and try.

Purpose Capturing the centre of attention and vindication of a "They don't know any more than I do" premise, thereby assuaging the Child's feelings of not-OK'ness.

Roles Victim (V), Rescuers (R)

WDYB is the original game archetype, the first game uncovered and studied by Berne. V sets up the game by presenting a problem and, ostensibly, looking for Adult solutions. Covertly, he is coming on from his Child as inadequate, and hooking the Parent in his advisors (Rescuers). Every suggestion that an R offers V is then rejected with, "yes, but . . .," until no one wants to play anymore. V, of course, doesn't want the advice, only the attention, and if it goes on long enough for the switch and the cross up to occur, R may switch to P, attacking V for his indecisiveness, or for the game itself.

Payoffs - mainly the garnering of recognition/sympathy strokes. There may be a certain sly satisfaction at making everyone jump through his psychological hoops.

Antithesis - the inverse of this game, as seen from R's point of view, is Called I'm Only Trying to Help You (ITHY), a common Rescue game. The stopper for WDYB lies in the refusal by R to begin ITHY. Rather than offering pointless advice, R should throw the ball back to V, asking what V will do about his problem. The first, "yes, but" should be met with a crossed transaction, something like: "that's unfortunate," followed by silence.

### Let's You and Them Fight - (LYTe ofF)

Theme Let's you and them fight.

Purpose Covert indirect aggression by stirring up trouble for the Victim.

Roles Covert Prosecutor (P), Rescuer/Proxy Persecutor (R), Victim (V).

LYTe ofF is a witchy, "guerilla warfare" type game which is initiated by P, either from spite, jealousy, or as a revenge for a real or imagined wrong by V. Uncomfortable with a frontal assault, P may plant nasty, gossipy suggestions

about V in the mind of some patsy (R), hoping to rouse within him anger/indignation sufficient that he will prosecute P's case in absentia.

Payoffs - sly triumph or revenge and the vindication of "they're not-ok" regarding anyone foolish enough to be conned into playing.

Antithesis - is in the refusal by R to be a patsy, checking out the validity of gossip before acting.

### Uproar

Theme "Hot potato" with accusations and other not-OK messages.

Purpose To avoid intimacy by creating a negatively charged atmosphere from the venting of anger and frustration. Also, the projecting of unacceptable feelings of inadequacy onto others.

Roles Persecutor (P) and Victim (V) alternate roles back and forth.

Uproar is a common domestic squabble game in which accusations of guilt, blame, or disparaging attributions are tossed, to and fro, between two people, like a hot potato. The players are often intimates, or at least family, and usually know all of each other's "buttons", which will incite an argument when pressed. Play is usually intense, with rapid role switches, from Persecutor to Victim, as each lashes out at the other with escalating vehemence saying something like: "oh yeah, well your mother . . .!", or some such thing. Subconscious pressure from feelings of guilt or shame which were unacceptable, and therefore repressed, may be vented in this setting by projecting them onto the other.

Payoffs - anger and frustration stamps are cashed in for an aggressive display, followed by the acquisition of more stamps in a self-sustaining cyclic fashion. Players avoid intimacy which is uncomfortable, for one reason or another at this time, by attacking one another.

Antithesis - relationship counselling/therapy aimed at P-A-C awareness training and script resolution.

### Rapo

Theme The kiss off.

Purpose Sexual teasing.

Roles Persecutor (P), Victim (V).

Social Rapo is a sadistic, mean-spirited game, which is, unfortunately, extremely common, and about which much has been written. It is essentially a power play, in format, and may vary from an exceedingly subtle abstract psychological motif, all the way to brutal and viciously physical 3rd degree forms which may end in homicide.

P sets V up by coming on flirtatious or overtly sexual. Usually before the consummation of the act, P rejects V and proceeds to enjoy V's discomfort. A well-matched partner is often found in masochistic Kick me players. Rapo

may be played by either or both sexes. Female-initiated hetro Rapo often proceeds from penis envy. Further gratification may be obtained if P is able to enjoin a third party, often the legal system, into a game of Let's You and Them Fight, with a bogus cry of sexual assault or harassment. Male hetro Rapo is often exploitive in nature, with such variations as Casting Couch, Under the Desk, etc. Homosexual forms have been described.

Payoffs - the sundry payoffs of social Rapo include the collection of righteous indignation stamps, gratification in the affirmation of attractiveness/seductiveness, the triumph of the con (or of revenge) and the vindication of a "they (often the entire opposite sex) are not-OK" position.

Antithesis - this insidious game can be thwarted by persons able to discriminate between genuine expressions of feeling versus the come on of a game, but most of us can probably remember being suckered in once or twice, I'm sure. P needs intensive psychotherapy to uncover and resolve the psychosexual basis of the need to play.

### Cops & Robbers

Theme I'm slick. Catch me if you can.

Purpose Thrills from illicit activity.

Roles Victim/Crook (V), Persecutor/Cop/Judge (P), Rescuer/Lawyer (R).

C&R is the thrill game of crime, ranging from jaywalking to income tax cheating, theft, confidence scams, drug dealing, and even murder. The gamey aspect is that one sets himself up as a potential victim by stepping outside of the rules, playing a sort of hide-and-seek with power and authority. There are, of course, many variations, Including: Let's Pull a Fast One on Joey (FOOJY), Sting, and also, Shylock and Badger, which are set up and confidence scams. If P catches V, R may intervene before retribution is exacted, and a game of criminal Courtroom ensues, which may free V for further rounds of C&R.

Payoffs - true C&R players play, not so much for the gains of the crime, but rather, for the thrill of the chase, of the con, of the sting, of outwitting or putting one over on the system by getting away with a prohibited act. Play may also seek to vindicate a secondary stance of arrogance, which compensates for a not-OK Child.

Antithesis - criminal antisocial behaviour results from personality dysfunction and can, therefore, be cured by script analysis and resolution through transactional psychotherapy. Rehabilitation can and will work if we reform the correctional system so that the proper tools are brought to bear.

The final five games presented here have the common purpose of attempting to evade personal responsibility by presenting evidence of blamelessness, by blaming another, or by tricking that other into self-blame.

See What You Made Me Do- (SWYMD)

Theme: What I did is your fault. I am blameless.

Purpose: Projection of responsibility / assigning blame / instilling guilt

Primary Roles: Persecutor (P), Victim (V)

This game is played by persons who cannot face personal responsibility. Intimacy is avoided by instilling V with guilt and shame or by precipitating anger or withdrawal in those that won't accept blame. Often there is a clear set up involved. P assigns or gets V to volunteer for a mission that P believes is doomed to failure, and for which failure, P wishes to avoid responsibility. When the inevitable occurs, persecutions of "see what you've done now," "you got me into this," "I told you so," etc., follow.

Payoffs: (P) righteous indignation, covert triumph (I'm OK - You're Not).

(V) shame, guilt, frustration (I'm Not OK - You Are).

This game may be used to acquire psychological power over others and the dominance/submission cycle may continue indefinitely with properly paired players. P may consolidate power over V by quickly moving into a Rescuer game such as, I'm Only Trying to Help.

Antithesis - is by simple refusal of V to play until P tires of shaking a tree from which no fruit falls. The required assertiveness may be difficult for V to muster as P may be very adept at the use of verbal legerdemain, inspiring guilt and creating a convincing appearance that V is actually to blame.

#### If It Weren't for You - (IFWY)

Theme: What I have not done, is your fault.

Purpose: Projecting unacceptable culpability for one's shortcomings onto another.

Roles: Persecutor (P), Victim (V)

IFWY is based upon a covert relationship contract of which the participants may not be consciously aware. P has accumulated guilt and anxiety for not having addressed certain issues requiring self-improvement, and unconsciously selects a partner (V) and relationship what will place demands upon P's time and energy, and possibly, restrictions on P's freedom. Dishonestly, P may view this as preventing her attainment of personal growth or gratification of some sort. In moments of anger and frustration, P projects the guilt upon V, saying, "if it weren't for you, I could be (have) . . ."

When P is pastiming with friends of kindred spirit and similar scripting, the theme is often, "if it weren't for him (her, them) . . .," vindicating a position of "all men (women, parents, etc.) are tyrants (shrews, castrating bitches, etc.). Ostensibly, V's Parent says, "you're needed here" and P's Child responds, "IFWY . . .," but covertly, the game is Child-Child, with V's saying, "I'm afraid of desertion" and P's, responding, "I'm afraid of challenges so I'll stay, but I'll blame it on you so neither one of us has to face the awful truth."

Payoffs - is reassurance stroking and denial of responsibilities and/or inadequacies.

Antithesis - V refuses to play the restrictive role which exposes P's underlying insecurities about facing the challenge.

### Look How Hard I've Tried - (LOW HIT)

Theme: What I have not done, is not my fault.

Purpose: Release from responsibility.

Roles: Mainly Victim (V)

In this game, V puts up a "smoke screen" effort, which may be accompanied by an elaborate song and dance, but his Child covertly sabotages his efforts in a way that makes it look as if he gave it his best shot, and for reasons outside of his control, it did not work. He may also seek to demonstrate that no further effort can reasonably be expected of him, but that he should be accorded respect or sympathy for his valiant attempts.

In *Games People Play*, Berne gives an example of a crooked spouse who makes an insincere effort at participation in relationship counselling in hopes of appearing blameless in divorce court. In another example, a businessman who works up an ulcer to brandish like a purple heart medal, saying, "look how hard I've tried."

Payoffs - sympathy and respect strokes. Dodging blame and letting oneself off of the responsibility hook.

Antithesis - therapeutic strategy aimed at the Child to uncover the reason for the avoidance and at Adult rededication to attempt more honest communication, including direct requests for stroking.

### Wooden Leg

Theme: What I do, is not my fault (can't you see I have a wooden leg?).

Purpose: Getting away with irresponsibility.

Roles: Mainly Victim (V).

Wooden leg is a simple construct in which V cultivates a handicap, real or imagined, and proceeds to play it for all it's worth, and then some, getting away with murder, so to speak, and fending off responsibility; saying, "what can you expect of me?" In intensive play, V may shift to P, attempting to instil guilt in anyone with the callous audacity not to recognize and show proper respect for the limitations imposed by such a handicap. This game plays well off of the Addict/Alcoholic game. It is also seen in criminal court as the "I'm not guilty by reason of insanity" plea.

Payoffs - provides a front to cover malingering and a tool with which to browbeat others out of sympathy strokes.

Antithesis - the covert level must be exposed by blowing the whistle on the bogus handicaps or by refusing to allow real ones to be pawned off as a catch all excuse for non-participation in life. The response to the "what can

you expect from me?" line is "I don't expect anything from you. What do you expect of yourself?"

### Corner

Theme: What I am going to do, will be your fault (because you said it, not me).

Purpose: Getting one's way through cheap shot manipulation.

Roles: Victim (V), Persecutor (P)

In this simple game among intimates, P tricks V into ordering or suggesting something which is to P's advantage, but which V would normally oppose. P and V know each other well, and have well-established rules of communication. They both know what buttons to press to elicit typical responses in the other. P sets up a typical exchange then, dishonestly, backs out at some crucial moment, taking something V says literally when they both know very well that this is against the rules.

P may, for example, want to get out alone with the boys tonight but knows V will oppose the direct request route. He may then suggest that he and V go out together. When V accepts, he then "innocently" slips in a remark about V's hair, weight, choice of clothes, etc., which is designed to infuriate V, and who then says something like, "Well, if that's the way you feel, why don't you just go out by yourself!", and V is Cornered. P says, "Well, I think I'll just do that. Goodbye!" and leaves in a huff, grinning to himself, rather than sweet talking V out of the hurt feelings, which they both know is what is really expected.

Payoffs - include sly triumph for P and a sense of superiority of having out manoeuvred V. V collects resentment stamps for being conned.

Antithesis -V may confront and expose the ulterior level of the game, or, better yet, eat a little crow by saying something like: "I'm sorry. I take that back. Let's go out together," and P is now the one cornered.

1. Berne, Eric MD, Games People Play - (New York: Grove Press, 1964).
2. Berne, Eric MD, Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957, P.191)