

Games

Objectives

- To understand and critically evaluate games theory.
- To discuss and understand games in the process of relating and relationships.
- To critically evaluate the theoretical concept of games and game analysis in clinical practice.

Article List & Reference Source

- Choy A (1990) The Winners Triangle. TAJ 20 (1)
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Definition

A game is defined as an

“Ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome”. (*Berne 1964 Games people play*).

Descriptively a game is a recurring set of transactions... with a concealed motivation or gimmick.

Bilateral Nature. Each person plays their own version, the version played compliments the version played by the other person.

Why Play Psychological Games?

A game is a behavioural sequence which involves an orderly series of transactions with a beginning and an end that involves a **snare or gimmick**.

Tend to involve a theme of love/care/power.

A process of doing something with a **concealed motive** (ulterior).

A game is **dishonest** and occurs outside of Adult awareness.



A **failed attempt** at intimacy (closeness) which starts from the need for strokes with a negative payoff. The motivation for the game comes from the payoff.

Games do not become explicit until the participants **switch** the way they are behaving.

Games result in feeling **confused, misunderstood** and **blaming** the other person.

Generate many **intense strokes** – these may be negative but feel better than being ignored

The outcome **reinforces our beliefs** about ourselves , others and the world i.e. our life position

Serve as an **avoidance** of dealing with something in our current situation

Provide an opportunity to **repeat a sequence from the past** which was developed for **protection** and guards against dealing with the psychological pain in the present. Games allow us to carry on thinking and feeling in our customary ways.

A game becomes a **substitute way** of getting one's needs met for **stimulation and recognition**.

The **last act** of script involves either a **miracle or a catastrophe**

Games and their relationship with other TA key concepts



Intimacy

The most favoured forms of stimuli are those provided by physical intimacy.



Some forms of intimacy (especially if intense) are psychologically impossible for most people.

If you can imagine a time when you experience being in relationship and engaged in pleasant stroking for a period of time and then you became aware of an emotional climate which was tense, hostile, sad or otherwise unpleasant. This would indicate a game.

Formula G

- Berne discovered that every game goes through a series of 6 stages which he named Formula G (Game Formula)
- Con + Gimmick = Response → Switch → Cross up → Payoff
- Con The Psychological trick to hook another person into playing a game. Involves a discount or non-verbal ulterior message.
- Gimmick Scripty weak spot / vulnerability – that hooks you in to the con. Place where person is open to being conned into a game
- Response Series of transactions.
 - » Social level may appear Adult. On a psychological level they repeat the con/gimmick that initiated the game.
- Switch One player switches position/role in the game
- Cross-up Confusion as roles change
- Payoff Racket feeling. Both players re-experience familiar scripty feelings . The payoff reinforces script belief.

Formula G

*just an
Example*

- **Con – Wife** - Let me help you with your accounts. (Rescuer and discounts husband doesn't need / has the ability to do his accounts)
- **Gimmick Husband** – script belief I'm useless so welcomes help
- **Response** – Series of transactions in which wife helps husband.
- **Switch** – *Helpful wife suddenly realises she is being exploited, turns nasty and starts persecuting her husband.*
 - *Wife started as Rescuer, shifts to Persecutor*
 - *Husband started as a Victim , seeking a Rescuer, is now a Victim with a Persecutor.*
- **Crossup** – both are left confused about what has just happened.
- **Payoff – Wife** – Anger - I'm always taken advantage of.
- **Payoff – husband** – Hurt, feels bullied (again!)

Formula G

just an
Example

- **Con** – **Jeff** – Lets go out, I fancy some good food and some good wine.
- **Gimmick** – **Pete** Likes to be the life and soul of a party (and a good drink)
- **Response** – Series of transactions throughout the night about food / life etc.
- **Switch** – on the way home **Jeff** who has been clocking the amount **Pete** drank starts persecuting him for drinking too much.
- **Crossup** – **Pete** (defensive) in a drunken rage retaliates and becomes the Persecutor – “every time we are having a nice night you always do this! You always ruin the night! (might lead to domestic violence)
- **Payoff** – **Jeff** – hurt and upset – goes to bed in a mood and avoids intimacy (don’t be close / sexual)
- **Payoff** – **Pete** – justifies not going to bed and drinking more, to drown his sorrows (don’t exist)

English 1976

- Suggests not all games consist of a switch and should be referred to as 'racketeering' where two game roles are used to collect familiar strokes by complimentary transactions from those roles.
 - E.g. some partners use racketeering as a basis for their relationship – one is the Rescuer, from an inadequate Parent mode, while the other either content or discontent plays the Victim role in AC

Positive Payoff

- + Payoff added by James - Feel taken care off or care for self.

Degree of Games

- Berne suggested that like burns there are 3 degrees of games.

1st Degree Game

- Commonly played in ordinary day to day interactions.
- Can take place in just a few transactions and is signalled by a moment of surprise, a moment of discomfort or a vague sense of “oh I didn’t mean for that to happen”
 - *Therapist, friend, sibling who plays a brief game of Why don’t you...Yes but, and met with a sigh or comment, Yes I’ve tried that!*
- Relatively harmless – they hurt to some extent but they don’t usually cause damage.
- A socially acceptable game within the players circle.
- Open to sharing the outcome at a social level
 - Late for work
 - Minor debt
 - Comfortable to talk about in supervision

2nd Degree Game

- Carries more intense feelings and causes enough pain to ensure definite confirmation of script beliefs
- Berne – 2nd degree games are those that we would prefer not to play in public. They are Serious enough for it to be an unacceptable topic of conversation in social circle.
- There is no permanent irremediable damage, but they are more serious than 1st degree.
- They might result in the breakdown of a relationship
 - Speeding
 - Bailiffs coming to the house
 - Affair
 - Family disagreement / breakdown of relationship
 - Therapist flirtatious interactions with a client – doesn't take to supervision
 - Client – niece

3rd Degree Game

- Is the most serious / harmful
- Can literally be lethal, involve at least tissue damage & sometimes death.
- Played for keeps with great intensity and ends in an irreversible situation such as a prison sentence, divorce, suicide or even murder
 - Courtroom, morgue or surgery.
- Domestic Abuse: familiar drama triangle positions. Switch – abused partner retaliates and kills abuser.

Drama triangle

- Karpman suggests that whenever people play games they are stepping into one of the 3 scripty roles.
- Illustrates the bilateral nature of a game and mutual responsibility
- At least 2, possibly 3 roles are taken up and exchanged
- Demonstrates how people switch roles in a game.
- Persecutor and Rescuer need a Victim – both come from (I+U-).
- The Victim comes from a one down position either (I- U+ or I- U-)
- The Victim may focus their energy on switching roles with the Persecutor or Rescuer.
- Switching roles causes excitement (novels / films etc.)
- Also called the Racket or Game Triangle to emphasise the discounting aspects of the three positions



Characteristics

- **Persecutor.** (I'm Okay, You're Not Okay) It is your fault! Blames, criticizes, keeps Victim oppressed, rigid, authoritative and sets unnecessary limits. Negative Critical Parent.
- **Victim.** (I'm Okay, You're Not Okay) Victimized, oppressed, helpless, hopeless, powerless, shamed. Looks for a rescuer. Blocks self/does not make decisions.
- **Rescuer.** (I'm Not Okay, You're Okay or I'm Not Okay, You're Not Okay) Let me help you. Rescues when they don't really want to. Keeps the Victim dependent. Gives permission to fail, expects to fail in rescue attempts.

How to step off the drama triangle

- The Winners Triangle

Persecutor. (Assertive)

- Move to clear structure. Own their power, rather than be afraid of it or use it covertly

Victim. (Vulnerable)

- Move to problem solving. Own their vulnerability and take responsibility for self. Recognize one's power and use it appropriately

Rescuer. (Carer)

- Move to clear nurturing. Take responsibility for self, connect with their power and acknowledge their vulnerability.

Classification

- Classification is based on several factors:
- **Number of players**
 - 2 handed games – frigid
 - 3 handed games – lets you and him fight
 - 5 handed games – alcoholic
 - Several handed games WDYYB
- **Currency used:** Words (Psychiatry), Money (Debtor), Body Parts (Polysurgery).
- **Clinical types.**
 - Hysterical (Rapo)
 - Obsessive Compulsive (Schlemiel)
 - Paranoid (Why does this have to happen to me)
 - Depressive (There I go again)
- **Zonal**
 - Oral fixation – Alcoholic
 - Anal fixation – Schlemiel
 - Phallic fixation – Lets you and him fight
- **Instinctual**
 - Masochistic – If it weren't for you
 - Sadistic - Schlemiel
 - Fetishistic – Frigid
- **Psychodynamic**
 - Counterphobic (If it weren't for you)
 - Projective (PTA)
 - Introjective (Psychiatry)

Some Familiar Games

- **Life Games**

- Alcoholic
- Kick Me
- NIYGSOB
- SWYMMD
- WDTAHTM?
- Debtor

- **Marital Games**

- Corner
- Courtroom
- Frigid
- Harried
- IWFY
- Look how hard I have tried

- **Party Games**

- Ain't it awful
- Blemish
- Schlemiel
- Why don't you yes but

- **Sexual Games**

- Lets you and him fight (LYAHF)
- Rapo
- Uproar

- **Underworld Games**

- Cops and robbers
- Lets pull a fast one on Joey

- **Consulting Room Games**

- I'm only trying to help you
- Psychiatry
- Stupid
- Wooden Leg

- **Good Games**

- Busman's holiday
- Happy to help
- Homely sage
- They'll be glad they knew me

A few ways to work with Games in Clinical Practice

- Share game theory and the purpose they serve.
 - What games are being played?
 - What role do they play at the beginning and end?
 - To what degree do they play? And how do they reinforce their script?
- Cross the immediate transaction.
- Emergence of the game in the therapy room.
- Bring the psychological message to the client's awareness.
- Expose the intended payoff before it is reached.
- Confront the discount
- Refuse the payoff (therapist)
- Give the client permission to refuse the payoff
- Ask the client to change body positions to one incompatible with the discount and/or payoff.
- Help the client to satisfy the underlying Free Child need or want.



Stamps

- Related to the payoff of a game, is the concept of stamps.
- Berne: We collect racket feelings like emotional trading stamps. If we experience a racket feeling and store it up and use it later we are saving a stamp.
 - The name of the racket feeling will be on the stamp, i.e. resentment, anger, hurt, helpless, harassed.
- Saving up stamps allows us to move towards our script payoff.
 - Cash in for small payoffs or saved up for a large payoffs
- Creating situations which produce the stamp of choice is the racket.
- Brown Stamps = Negative Stamps
- Gold Stamps = Positive Stamps