

GAMES PEOPLE PLAY: The Basic Handbook of Transactional Analysis

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Overview

This book discusses the silly little games that people play between each other in social situations. For example, a couple may play a game during a divorce in which one party aims to show that they are the victim here, and the other party is at fault. Or an alcoholic may play a game where they rebel against those attempting to help them. The book discusses the theory behind games, what advantages people believe they get subconsciously by playing, common games to look out for, and how to rise above playing them.

"The most gratifying forms of social contact, whether or not they are embedded in a matrix of activity, are games & intimacy."

Introduction

Humans have an innate desire for physical contact. A baby who does not receive sufficient stimuli will spend the rest of their life wrestling with a lasting desire for infantile intimacy (i.e. stroking or pats). Over time, they will develop their own methods for fulfilling the need through social "strokes". We structure our social time with pastimes and games to simulate this intimacy.

Chapter 1. Structural Analysis

In any given moment, each participant in a social interaction will don 1 of 3 possible "ego states":

- **Parent:** A caretaking / authoritative parental figure, based on how the participant's parents act.
- **Child:** The still-active mental state of one's early childhood, offering spontaneity.
- **Adult:** A mature way of handling life, directed towards reality and autonomy.

Chapter 2. Transactional Analysis

When people are involved in a social encounter, a certain chain of events will inevitably happen: first, one

person will acknowledge the other's presence (known as a stimulus), and then the other person will say or do something (known as a response). The interaction itself is less important than determining which ego state (parent, child, adult) enacted the stimulus & response.

The most complementary transactions occur between Adult-Adult (an interaction of equals) and Child-Parent (the interaction of one authority figure and one subordinate), as these constitute a healthy relationship, and communication proceeds smoothly. Ulterior transactions are more complex and involve multiple ego states interacting with one another. These often serve as the basis for games. Breaks in communication occur when the stimulus is Adult-Adult, but the response is Child-Parent, switching from roles of equality to roles of relative power and weakness.

Chapter 3. Procedures & Rituals

Procedures & rituals are simple forms of social activity.

- **Procedures:** "Simple, complementary transactions directed toward manipulating reality."
- **Rituals:** "Simple complementary transactions programmed by external social forces."

Rituals can be either formal or informal, with the formality of a ritual determined either by a parent or by long-standing tradition (e.g. the Roman Catholic Mass). Informal rituals are cultural pleasantries we partake in, often without realizing we are performing a ritual at all. The classic American handshake and greeting of "How are you?" is one example. These tend to give us social "strokes" which provide the infantile intimacy we crave. As acquaintances become friends, the number of strokes people feel they owe each other increases, leading to deeper communication and bonding.

Chapter 4. Pastimes

A pastime is "a series of semi-ritualistic, simple, complementary transactions...whose primary object is