

Running Head : Games People Play

**Eric Berne`s `Games People Play` understanding what really goes on  
during our basic social interactions**

[ Customer's Name ]

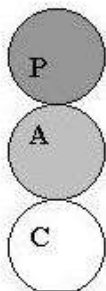
[ Other information ]

## Eric Berne`s `Games People Play: A Reaction Paper

Eric Berne's "Games People Play" is one of the best books that profoundly touched and left a mark in me in my quest for answers in the psychotherapy milieu. The book has been quite successful when it was published in 1961 and sold more than five million copies. (Berne, 1964)

It is the intention of this paper to discuss the major key points of the book and how it is relevant in the current individual behavior in a society. This paper also covers my personal perspectives regarding the theory of the author.

Just what makes this book tick is due to the author's ability to successfully express his idea about the psychological stages of a person. He developed a theory about human personality and interactions that is simple yet it deeply reaches the core of the person's emotions, behavior, thoughts, and outlook. This theory is what the author introduced as transactional analysis. A Transactional Analysis is a method of interpreting social interactions. It is based on the conviction that a human personality can be easily understood in a behavioral and social context i.e. how man exhibits different behaviors and "transacts" with another human being (Steiner, 1974).



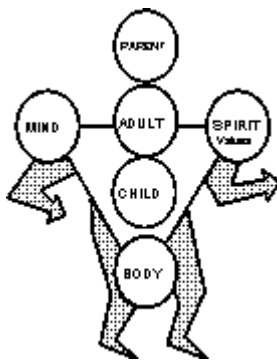
Eric Berne developed the idea on ego states which he termed the "snowman" model or PAC, as shown in Figure 1. The illustration is adopted from the Vanda Attila's article on

Europe's Journal of Psychology.

Figure 1 . *The ego state model or the "snowman" model or PAC model if Dr. Ernie Berne.*

The author's main idea is that people's personalities have three distinct egos or states - child, adult and parent. People interact or transact with each other based on these roles they play in certain situation. These ego states are based on the following principles : (i) each individual was once a child; (ii) each person with satisfactory normal brain functions is potentially capable of adequate reality testing; and (iii) every individual who survives into adult life has had either functioning parents or someone in loco parentis (Berne, 1961, pp. 35-36).

Figure 2 is adopted from Dr. Darrel Farren's book Positive Strength:



Personal Psychology to illustrate Berne's concept. An individual may relate or transact to another individual based on any of these ego-states. Berne believes that if one is fully aware of these stages and is able to express the adult stage and contain the child and parental stages

Figure 2 . *The ego state model or the "snowman" model showing the three egos of man.*

depending on the certain situation, the communication between and

among individuals would be a lot better.

The child ego represents the characteristic when we were children like for example, dependent, poignant, amiable, naïve/innocent, playful and so on. The adult ego is our matured, rational and objective part of our personality while the parent represents our parental (or their substitutes) tendencies and attitudes that controls, counsels and dominates.

The theory hypothesized that many negative behaviors can be traced to switching or confusion of these ego-states. The book discusses the

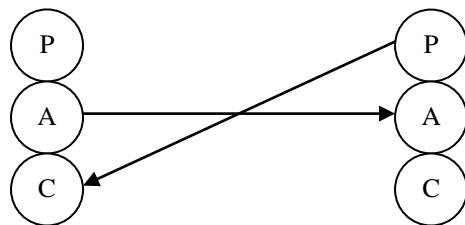
methods, rituals, and pastimes in social behavior, in view of this transactional analysis. To give a brief example, an office manager or boss who is not satisfied with the output of his workers will use the parent ego-state or parental role and often results into forced obedience, grumpiness, or other child-like reactions from his workers.

The author highlighted the different modes of transactions. Two persons having a normal conversation goes through what Berne calls “complementary transactions” that



Figure 3. *The complementary transaction illustration.*

takes place when two individuals are transacting on the same frequency or similar ego state as shown in figure 3.



Conflict may happen if the interaction is of different levels which the author termed as crossed transaction (see figure 4).

Figure 4. *The crossed transaction.*

Transactional Analysis is a theory of communications and interpersonal interaction. Sometimes the communications between two people have a hidden message, meaning, and agenda. The result of this hidden message is a game. The purpose of the game is to get a need met, without asking directly for what we need or want. People learn how to play these games to get our needs met as children, and they worked then. Now, as adults, they are the source of problems in our every-day relationships with ourselves and

those around us, because things get much more complicated as our age progresses.

Transactional Analysis help people to understand, explain and change their behavior and have better relationships with others. Through these ideas, people begin to get understand ourselves and how we interact, as well as others.

The book provides a series of games that show how different people interact or react to certain situations through a foreseeable series of "transactions". Berne uses casual phrases in describing the games where the presumed champions of the games are those who returns to the adult ego-state first.

The author's theory is based on the idea that these so-called games give a means to an end which enable men to interact socially with others and find belongingness which is an essential part of man's survival. These games are the following: 'See What You Made Me Do' ; 'Ain't It Awful'; and 'I'm Only Trying To Help You'. (Berne, 1964)

However, this is not to say that each one reading this book would resolve all his problems, although the concept can definitely make one more logical, radical and objective for those who are capable of profound understanding.

The book basically previews the roles performed by everybody in relating or interacting with each other. This role play is named a game and each game is analysed based on the psychological benefits derived to the individual by playing it. The payoffs decide why people become what they become. As an example, allow me to quote some lines from the book to

illustrate some of Berne's point. . He claims that each one changes from one ego states to another, playing games, attaining and enjoying the payoff which are all acted out unconsciously. One of the games he describes is, "Why Don't You. . .Yes, But." The following lines illustrate how it might take place.

Hyacinth: My husband never builds anything right.

Camellia: Why doesn't he take a course in carpentry?

Hyacinth: **Yes, but** he doesn't have time.

Rosita: Why don't you buy him some good tools?

Hyacinth: **Yes, but** he doesn't know how to use them.

Holly: Why don't you hire a carpenter?

Hyacinth: **Yes, but** that would cost too much.

Iris: Why don't you just accept what he does?

Hyacinth: **Yes, but** the whole thing might fall down.

(Berne, 1961, p. 104)

The wife projects two roles in the game. She is basically coming out of as a hurt child state and is setting up her friends to be a good parent to her. In this scenario, Hyacinth shifts from one character to another. This is a bit disappointing for those who want to extend assistance as it cannot connect with the similar frequency or adult ego state.

The author's ideas maybe outmoded but with some exceptions these are still relevant and applicable in today's pattern of behavior. Although I find some of Berne's analyses and ideas contrasting my personal viewpoint, I still find this book fascinating that gave me new perspectives on things that I find puzzling.

This book is also a must read for parents who wish to properly rear their children with better understanding of character development. This subject is only a theory in psychology, it is an old theory and there are a whole lot of other theories, but the knowledge of this can usher each towards a long way.

Bener's book is something that reaches out deeply into the heart of all relationships. It is useful in shaping human relationship as it is so simple yet provides profound impact. It is somehow designed for one to interact rationally, positively and optimally. The concept helps to address certain perspective and attitude towards life, a humanistic principle that promotes an individual's liberty and psychological wellness.

If everyone can attain this level of understanding and developed the ability to transact rationally with others, then certainly the world would become a better place to live in.

### References

Berne E. (1961). *Transactional analysis in psychotherapy: A systematic individual and social psychiatry*. New York: Grove Press.

Berne, Eric (1964). *Games People Play – The Basic Hand Book of Transactional Analysis*. New York: Ballantine Books

Steiner, C. (1974). *Scripts people live: Transactional analysis of lifescrpts*. New York: Bantam Books.

Vandra Attila (2006). Transactional Analysis seen by a critical parent eye: Crossed transactions, reality or graphic illusion? Parallel communication. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, August 13, 2006  
retrieved from  
[http://www.ejop.org/archives/2006/08/ta\\_seen\\_by\\_a\\_cr.html](http://www.ejop.org/archives/2006/08/ta_seen_by_a_cr.html) on  
October 21, 2007.