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Projective identification - A rebuttal

### Introduction

This paper looks at boundaries in relationships in game behaviour. In the theory of projective identification boundaries merge considerably between the two game players. One party projects their psychological material onto the other who not only 'agrees' to the projection but identifies with it and takes it on as their own material. The boundaries are merged quite considerably. This paper does a rebuttal to the concept of projective identification and in the process demonstrates a model for game playing where there are clear boundaries in relationships, there is no need for the merging of boundaries.

### Pairing in game playing

The problem is very real. For a game to proceed you need at least two people to cooperate. They need to have two life scripts that interconnect in the right way. In the formula G the two people must have a Con and a Gimmick that fit properly for each other or a game will not proceed.

The connection must be made when both people don't even know they looking for each other. Games by their very nature are unconscious. For a game to proceed there must be a psychological pairing between two people done in a completely unconscious way. Unlike dating websites one cannot put out an advertisement for a fellow game player.

For example the games of Kick me and NIGYSOB often complement each other. The Kick me player often has the life position of I-U+ and the NIGYSOB player has the life position of I+U-. These two people have to find each other by an unconscious process. If two Kick me players should cross paths then no games will proceed and indeed if two NIGYSOB players meet that will not be a correct pairing either.

How can one explain how this is done? It would seem like quite a difficult pairing to make. It is difficult enough for two people to find each other and to enter into a romantic relationship and this can be consciously done, actively involving Adult ego state decision making.

However this seemingly difficult task of unconscious pairing in games is achieved with surprising regularity and by each and every one of us. We all play games, some of us do so often, which means we all find others who fit for our games and we fit for their games. We all unconsciously find those people who we play games with, those people who are right for our life scripts and we can further our life scripts along by playing the corresponding games. How this pairing is achieved is a perplexing question indeed.

### Projective identification

In recent times in the Transactional Analysis literature one answer to this question is provided by the concept of projective identification. This has received much discussion over quite a period of time, such as Heath and Oates (2015), Woods (1996), Massey (1996) and Little (2012).

In projective identification the initiator or the projector projects onto the other person the unwanted part of self. They then act in such a way that the recipient of the projection will

identify with the projected part and act it out in the relationship with the other. The recipient experiences himself or herself as that projected part. This is of course all done at an unconscious or unlanguage level, out of the awareness of both parties. If successfully done then a game or enactment can proceed between the two people. Indeed Heath and Oates (2015) see projective identification as, "...comparable to the first part of Berne's game formula: Con + Gimmick = Response." (p. 98).

Projective identification is saying the two parties must have the right psychological material for a game to occur. They both must be psychologically compatible in this way. Berne's formula G says the same with the Con and the Gimmick in Formula G, Berne, (1972) "Since an ulterior transaction means that the agent pretends to be doing one thing while he is really doing something else, all games involve a con. But a con only works if there is a weakness it can hook into, a handle or "gimmick" to get hold of in the respondent, such as fear, greed, sentimentality, or irritability. After the "mark" is hooked, the player pulls some sort of switch in order to get his payoff." (p.23)

Trial and error in game player pairing

Eric Berne (1972) was a proponent of Occam's Razor which states that the simplest explanation for some phenomenon is more likely to be accurate than more complicated explanations. Following this guideline one can seek a more simple explanation for how two people manage the unconscious pairing required for a game to proceed.

This pairing could be done by the process of projective identification or it may just be the process of random trial and error. In this explanation many people are sampled over a long period of time to find the person who holds the correct matching psychological material for a game.

In childhood the weakness in people is formed, in adolescence they are beginning to establish the psychologically important people in life and this continues throughout adulthood. Many, many others are auditioned by each of us and a few pass the audition. They then become our social group who become the basis of our game playing group.

When two people meet the auditioning begins. Their intuition from the A1 or Little Professor ego state is unconsciously assessing the other for the compatible weak spot. Various game like transactions are tried out between the two and if they fit then a game pairing has been made. There is no need for projection and there is no need for introjection because the potential projected part is already in the other party. They do not need to identify with it because it's already there and has been since it was developed in childhood. As Little (2012) says of projective identification, "One person disowns his feelings and manipulatively induces the other into experiencing them" (p.261). The random trial and error explanation for game pairing suggests there is no need to disown any feelings or manipulate the other into experiencing them because they are already there in the other. The other formed them in childhood as he or she was creating the building blocks of their life script which Berne (1972) says happens by the time the child is six years old.

People can increase their chances of game pairing again by other intuitive means. People who have the weakness of being a rescuer in games will intuitively be attracted to professions like a psychotherapist, nurse or social worker because they know in those professions one is more likely to come across people who have the weakness of being a victim and thus the game pairing is more like to occur. Likewise those with the weakness

of being a victim will tend to gravitate towards those professions where rescuers are more likely to be found.

### Conclusion

This paper provides a rebuttal to the concept of projective identification as an explanation of how game pairing occurs. Using the idea of Occam's Razor one can find a much simpler explanation for how game pairing occurs. Two people meet and intuitively assess each other for the right weaknesses in other's psyche. If it is found then they can move to testing each other out with game like transactions. If it is not found then game pairing does not occur in that instance. Over one's life she or he are auditing many others for game pairing simply by trial and error. This affords a much less complex and to my mind plausible explanation, for how game pairing can occur.

### References

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