

## A USEFUL NEW GAME FORMULA

By Stephen B. Karpman, M.D.\*

Eric Berne created a universal game formula to apply to all games. Extending from the initial match-up through all the action to the residual payoff, it would apply to all games in *Games People Play* and beyond (Fig. 1).

**BERNE'S Formula G: C + G = R→S→X→P**

*Fig. 1*

The game player's Con would catch the attention of another person's weakness (Gimmick). The Response would be followed by the surprising Switch and a facial reaction, the Crossup (X). The Payoff followed.

Others have added to the formula. The Schiffs preceded the game with a D for Discount. At one time, I added an F after the Crossup for one's Forgetting of their own hook and their own responsibility in the game. Others have found the game formula to be a good theory but not useful in therapy. I usually only used it to show that a game could be stopped and repaired at each step in the formula.

In actual practice, the games people play didn't run their full course in therapy so that the game formula could be used. They were usually stopped early at the discount stage or when they got annoying to the group. And other material that came up in the game became more important. Additionally, misunderstandings and arguments seemed to come up more frequently than the classic games in Berne's tome. Over the past four months I worked out a new game formula that can more readily pick out the essential elements from a game as it is reported to the therapy group or as seen in the therapy group, as well as being easily remembered outside the group while a patient is in the midst of a game. The new game formula (or fight formula) has had many additions and subtractions over the months, but this seems to be the most workable form:

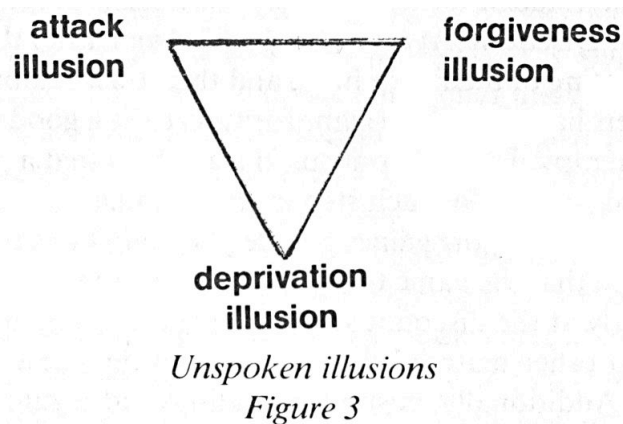
**Karpman's Formula G: AC + V = H + H - SV = P**

*Fig. 2*

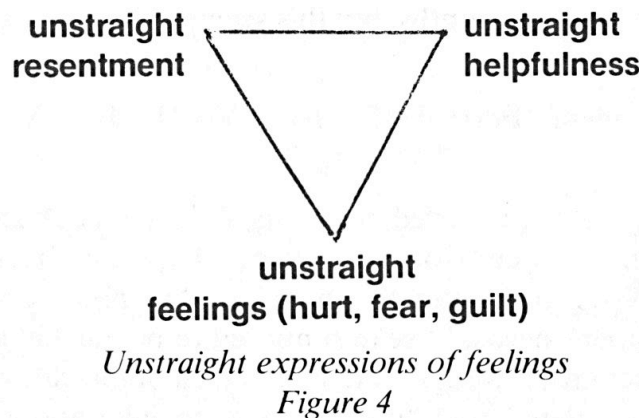
In the analysis of the reported game, one first goes back and uncovers the underlying Assumed Contract between the parties that received the Violation. Assumed Contracts can include "couples are supposed to meet each other's needs," "we're supposed to be quickly informed of company's actions," "we agreed that all our communications would be open and complete," and "it's been OK to joke about your Not-Okness." After the switch with the Violation, the parade of hooks is then exhibited. In therapy, a person lists and memorizes their usual Hooks (H<sub>1</sub>) that present a problem to others. Also, they list and memorize the Hooks from others (H<sub>2</sub>) that tend to hook them. Succeeding games are played with increasing Adult awareness and control.

The hooks can come from Parent, Adult, or Child; or be the Condescending, Abrupt, Secretive, or Evasive hooks of the intimacy Losers Loop; or be the "H. MELTS" six fightmakers (Karpman. B.E.B.S. 1:4 Dec. 1979), Hundred percentiles, Mindreading, Excitability, Labels, Threats, and Subjects(too many); or the Persecutor, Rescuer, Victim hooks of the drama triangle, etc. What's missing, or minus, in the fight are the Strokes for the other person's OKness and the Validation of the other person's point (-SV). The Payoff follows.

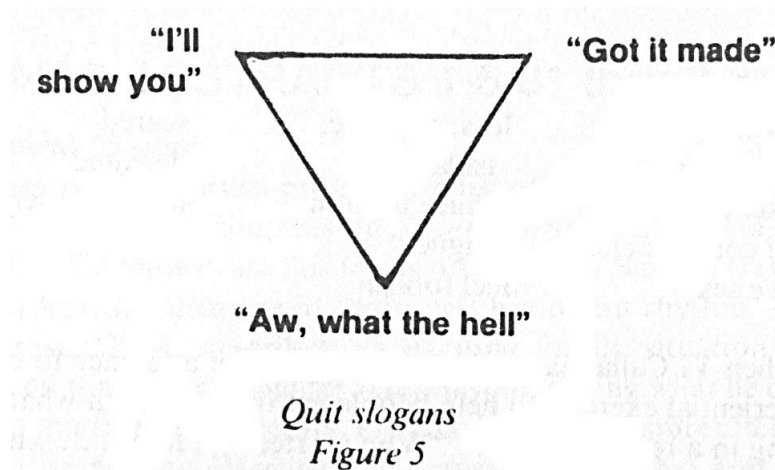
In simplifying the formula, I've used equal signs and omitted the arrows which made it confusing to remember. Also, I'd prefer that the formula read (-SVU) but that complicated it too much. The U represents the Unspoken Persecutor, Rescuer, and Victim Illusions, feelings, and quits (Fig. 3,4,5). By getting in touch with those feelings a fight can be aborted or at least a more thorough post-game wrap-up can be accomplished between fight players.



At the persecutor corner, the person believes there is more of an attack than there really is from the other person. At the victim corner, they magnify the amount of depriving they are suffering from the other. At the rescuer corner, they assume that the other person will be more forgiving of their fighting style than will actually be the case.



In Figure 4, the resentment, fears, hurts and guilts are unspoken and thereby expressed in indirect ways. The helpfulness that may be behind the actions may go totally unnoticed and unrewarded ("That's a heck of a way to be helpful").



In Figure 5 the three "quit slogans" (or "slip slogans" when treating alcoholics) shows the underlying giving up and throwing Adult control to the wind. Caution and caring are abandoned as the person doesn't care what happens to the relationship and the consequences of the fight. The persecutor wants rebellion or revenge, the victim can't go on, and the rescuer feels high that all will work out due to the power of magical thinking.

**Seminar Presentation.** This formula was presented at the Eric Berne Seminar of San Francisco on 3/3/81 with excellent feedback offered according to the assumed contract of the seminar. The group voted down the U in the formula as too confusing, validating my suspicions and helping me drop it. The comments included a note that the formula had two "V"s in it, each standing for a different word. Before I presented my formula that evening, I asked the group to write a formula of their own. On the blackboard I listed three columns to collect information: what happens before an argument erupts, during the fight, and after it's over. The audience contributed the following information, which can be used to write other formulas or add depth to existing formulas. The BEBS subscribers are invited to send in their own formulas or add to this list:

**Before Fight**

anticipated discount	provocation	fear of closeness
stamps collected	lack of stimulation	avoidance of issues
a rule is broken	need for one-upmanship	lack of time structuring
conflicting goals	unsatisfied need	lack of validation

**During Fight**

dump stamps	presenting evidence	exaggerating
discounting	hassling	attacking
competitiveness	redefining	silence
controlling	P/R/V switching	stubbornness
create excitement	demanding	deliberately frustrate

diffusing issues

defensiveness

**After Fight**

feel sorry, guilty

triumphant excitement

feel content, closer,

have sex

loss, distance, isolation

reduce tension

fatigue

feel foolish

scared

defeated

feel body sensations

Then Vi Callaghan volunteered from the audience to conduct an experiential exercise to help people get in touch with what they were doing in a recent fight..."Who started the fight ... what was the satisfaction you got out of it...what happened when you made your point and it didn't work...what was it that really hooked you ... how did you choose to get into the fight ... what was going on in your life that you needed the fight...what were you afraid would happen if you didn't get into the fight...what did you want from the other person that you didn't tell them ... what were the issues you were avoiding during the fight ...what points of yours was your partner discounting...what points of theirs were you discounting...what points did you exaggerate to make yourself look better and your partner look worse ... how would you stroke yourself for being a good persecutor, a good rescuer. a good victim...what did you want to get out of the fight...how did it turn out...did you get what you wanted out of it...what would you do differently next time?" Vi borrowed from the list on the board and improvised on her own and many of the suggestions were not jotted down verbatim. The group was moved and, reported many insights and decisions and stroked Vi for her spontaneity and caring. Several wished there was a tape of it they could have.

Then the seminar, with the new information that came out of the experiential work, created a new game formula based on a physiological model of tension and release:

**EBSSF's Formula G: BT + D → R & I & CM → P**

*Figure 6*

Or, Buildup of Tension plus Detonation leads to Release and Intimidation and Crazy Making and this leads to the Payoffs. This formula was discussed, then I presented mine, and the two formulas were compared.



**HOPE FOR THE FROGS**

\*This article was originally published as: Karpman, S. (1981). A useful new game formula. Bulletin of the Eric Berne Seminar. 3(1), 5-8. Reformatted for the website [www.KarpmanDramaTriangle.com](http://www.KarpmanDramaTriangle.com). Copyright © 1981 by Stephen B. Karpman, M.D. All rights reserved. Downloads free.