Part II:

# WORKING CONCEPTS

# CHAPTER FOUR: COOPERATION

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From the very beginning, cooperation has been central to the theory and practice of Radical Psychiatry. It is a simple idea, and a familiar one. Indeed, we have been accused more than once of being too simple, placing too much faith in something so obvious and naive.

In fact, the longer we work with the concept of cooperation, the more profound it appears, and the more radical. To cooperate is a means to an end, a mechanism for facilitating alliance and intimacy. In the ‘60s and ‘70s when we were formulating theory, alliances were politically relevant. The nation was in rebellion, against racism, against sexism, against war. Young people challenged old lifestyles, demanding more love, more ways to love, more freedom of speech and of sexuality. It was widely believed that the old left had failed to make a new world, and radicals in the ‘60s and ‘70s understood that they must find new ways to conduct their politics.

Influenced both by that need, and by the Women's Movement's formulation that the personal is political, we set to work to learn how to be together in groups that were both effective in the world and nourishing to their members. We ourselves were a case in point. We needed to find out how to be sweet to each other, to bolster our shared agendas, to avoid draining scarce energies and resources in competitive struggles. We created theory out of very practical and personal experience.

To call for cooperation was a visionary act. But it quickly evoked the realization that we did not really know how to cooperate. When people speak of cooperation in common usage, they often mean something very different from what we were after. “Cooperate!” parents command children. What they mean is, “Do what I want.” Too often, cooperation is an injunction by those with power to those without. We were after a means for peers to work together collectively, and we quickly discovered that everything we had so far been taught applied to a very different model — competition (see Chapter 6). We are taught how to fend for ourselves, how to get better grades, how to win the game, how to maneuver the outcome we desire — all perfectly reasonable behaviors where power is unequal. But among people with a commitment to equality, those competitive ways of acting are counterproductive. We realized we needed to invent ways of acting that were straight-forward and empowering.

So cooperation became a concept that was both visionary and practical. The call for cooperation was a stirring contribution in the ‘60s, very much in the spirit of the times. In the ‘70s, it took on a more provocative aspect, because so many people were turning inward, looking for personal growth and individual enlightenment (see Introduction). The politics of cooperation became increasingly radical. The ‘80s have turned the individual quest outward once again. Yuppies are the mythic heroes of the decade. “Strive for wealth” is the slogan, and “May the best man/woman win!” To talk “cooperation” today is to buck a current which runs deep with powerful economic force.

But for that reason, it is all the more important. Paradoxically, as Americans are pointed more and more urgently toward the race, so also do we hear more and more about community. Many people look to churches for a recommitment to values, in an effort to find commonality of purpose. If my own private well-being is the object of life, then what sustains me beyond myself? The quest for community has become a national objective, and religion is one of the few arenas with a language that even begins to articulate the need.

Here once again, people seek to remake the connections between internal life and the external. On some level, we

all know that life is richer than the American Dream. ("The American Dream is back!" promise the Cadillac ads.) We want to know who we are, the meaning of life, why we care about others and the world, how to break bonds of loneliness and connect with others. Radical Psychiatry is one of the few approaches that has consistently recognized the importance of community, as well as contributing practical aids to its creation.

## HOW TO BE COOPERATIVE

Cooperation, as we define it, rests on one basic assumption and the acceptance of three guidelines. These agreements constitute the minimum necessary understanding required for cooperative relationships.

### Equality

The basic assumption in cooperative situations is equality. When we say that everyone is equal, we mean, not that everyone is alike, that there are no individual differences, but that we strive towards equality of rights. No persons or group of persons, by virtue of any of their individual qualities, characteristics, achievements or possessions, are entitled to anything that anyone else within the group isn't equally entitled to as well. This concept of equality means

simply that people have equal rights to the benefits that accrue from the association. If there is food on the table, everyone has equal rights to eat it. If there is a financial benefit coming the community's way everyone has equal rights to share it. If an issue is debated and different people have different opinions, everyone has equal rights to have their opinions heard and to have their wishes realized. Neither the person who is oldest, nor the person who has the most money invested, nor the person who can talk fastest or most brilliantly, nor the person who is physically strongest, has rights in excess of anybody else's.

The group may have the option to afford certain revocable privileges to a particular member for some reason. For instance, a person who is sick may be given the right to be served first at the dinner table. Or an especially skilled person will be given privileges to use or operate an expensive machine until others can learn to do it as well. But the main thing that has to be remembered is that those special privileges are assigned by the group, and they are only temporary.

It is important to distinguish groupings in which this assumption is a possibility from those in which it is not. Where power is severely and institutionally unequal, despite the good intentions of the participants, cooperation is unlikely to succeed. A middle manager in a large American corporation, for instance, once set about to

collectivize the department over which she wielded power. She promised to share all decisions with her workers, to allow them to set the times they came and left, and so on. But when the employees asked that she also share the power to hire and fire people, and to set salaries, it was clear she herself had no power to do so, and the project halted. People can agree to give up power they have under surprisingly many circumstances. But we caution the reader to be sophisticated in an assessment about the chances of success, and to be very certain that a genuine agreement has been made.

Given a basic assumption of equality, we have found the following three guidelines to be extremely effective in implementing equal relationships between people. All of them are essentially prohibitions of certain behavior which is destructive to equality. The guidelines only imply what you must do, but they state outright what you cannot do if you want to preserve equal, cooperative relationships.

**1. No Power Plays:** Power plays are ways in which people attempt to get for themselves something which is not otherwise coming to them (see Chapter 1). More specifically, a power play is a maneuver; it can be crude like hitting, yelling, banging, throwing things around and making threats, or subtle such as sulking, gossiping, talking fast or interrupting, caucusing and lying. In either

case, it is designed to bring about a desired result against the wills of others. Often power plays are used in desperation or as a last resort after trying more cooperative measures. But whatever the provocation, power plays must be disallowed in order for cooperative relationships to continue. A person who is not getting what she wants has no other recourse in a cooperative situation than to continue to ask for it and to rely on a genuine negotiation. The use of a power play is never justified and should never be accepted in a cooperative situation.

**2. No Lies:** The concept of lies covers not only bold-faced untruths, but also lies of omission, the withdrawal or keeping back of information which is relevant to others. Included in lies of omission are all sorts of secrets. A secret can be a negative feeling (or even a positive feeling) about another person. Secrets and lies deprive others of vital information, and information is a source of power. For example, one lover hides from another that she is bored in his company; she is afraid to hurt his feelings, but if he doesn't know, how can he change? Many of us have experienced the fireworks when lovers keep sexual affairs with other people, or even flirtations, secret. The humiliation that occurs is a direct outgrowth of the ways in which power has been imbalanced by the secret. A desire or wish for something that is not expressed is also a secret and must be avoided. In short, everything that occurs in a

person's consciousness which has importance for others must not be kept secret.

As a consequence, people need to say how they feel about others, especially if the feelings are strong, whether positive or negative, and they must also “ask for 100% of what they want 100% of the time” (see Chapter 7). To what extent people should truthfully share their lives with others without omissions — their joys, their sexuality, their concerns, their fears and hatreds, their shameful secrets, their loves — is something that cannot be set down in a rule. Let us say, however, that to us the largest possible amount of truthfulness is desirable and that even though this is difficult for most people, true cooperative relationships are not really possible until complete truthfulness is included.

This guideline is a necessary complement to Guideline I (No Power Plays) since if one is not to use power plays to get what one wants, the only alternative is to ask for it and to say how one feels. On the other hand, the absence of power plays paves the way for a mutual agreement between people to be truthful. Very often people lie because they fear power plays in response; Guideline I creates safety in which Guideline II can be respected.

**3. No Rescues:** The third guideline for cooperation seeks to avoid the establishment of inequalities through another process, called Rescuing. Power plays establish inequalities because people are selfish and try to get what they want by grabbing it. Rescues operate in the opposite way. That is, they establish inequality in a situation by the process of giving unwisely. A Rescue is a situation in which a person is either doing more than her share of work, or doing something that he doesn't want to do. We discuss this concept more fully in Chapter 7.

By doing more than one's share, one is giving up equality voluntarily. While this may please the recipient or the beneficiary of that inequality (and maybe even the donor), it doesn't necessarily work to their advantage in the long run. Rescues implicitly insult the recipient, who grows resentful. Moreover, they exhaust the donor, who also begins to be angry. In addition, Rescues tend to proliferate. If A does more than his share for B, then B is liable to feel that she ought to do more than her share, also. In a group, C may then assume that doing more than her share for F, G and H is acceptable. A pattern of Rescues is established throughout the group which is likely eventually to result in major inequalities.

Some people argue that this policy of monitoring people's responsibilities is picayune, and that it interferes with the nurturing, loving feeling that one desires in relationships

and communities. In fact, when people are first learning the skills of cooperation, they do sometimes become involved in petty minutiae, but as they become more skillful, the issues become clearer, and the avoidance of Rescuing becomes easy and automatic. The important instances of people doing more than their share are not difficult to detect and rewarding to alter.

The second aspect of Rescues occurs when somebody is doing something she doesn't want to do. This behavior is associated with keeping secrets and lying. Many times people will do things that they really don't want to do out of a sense of obligation or duty, or because they are not capable of stating their preferences clearly. To do something that one does not want to do without stating that one doesn't want to do it, is a violation of the guideline about lies and should be avoided on that account. In a reasonably large group of people, there is likely to be someone willing to do any given task. When numbers are fewer, in couples, friendships or families, some tasks are often disagreeable to everyone. Nobody wants to take out the garbage. But if Sister does it without reporting her reluctance, she is likely to rebel at some point. Better that she state her distaste, learn that everyone else hates the job equally, and negotiate a generous reward in return for doing it anyway. Perhaps it can be shared around month by month. Perhaps in return for Sister's doing it, she can be relieved of washing dishes, a job she hates even more.

Perhaps somebody will just have heard of a wonderful new robot for taking out the garbage. Creative and equitable solutions can generally be found.

Several of these guidelines seem to encourage what, paradoxically, could be seen as very selfish behavior. For instance, we are recommending that people ask for everything they want all of the time and resist doing things they don't want to do. On the surface, anyone who behaved in that way would seem to be a self-centered bore. In fact, if that's all that a person did, he in all fairness could be called selfish. However, these expectations are imbedded in a set of others: the fact that I ask for everything I want all of the time does not mean that others will do it, since the injunctions against doing what one doesn't want to do, and not doing more than ones share, apply equally to everybody. If everyone asks openly for what they want, speaks honestly about their feelings, and negotiates compromises rather than power playing, these three guidelines balance each other out. They create a situation where the wishes and needs of people are expressed and negotiated in a fair and equitable way.

In many of the chapters that follow, we talk about a variety of situations in which cooperation can be productively established: problem-solving groups, friendships and couples, families with children, and so on.

Sticking to the guidelines of cooperation clears the way for the full exercise of people's powers. An atmosphere of equality where everyone is treated as a full, worthy human being and is given complete opportunities to express themselves as best they can without infringing upon other people's rights, is ideally suited to the development and growth of people's powers. Protected from the abuses of power that oppress us, we are then in a position to be fully loving, to develop our intuition, to communicate, to exercise our wisdom. Cooperation is fertile ground for the development of power in the world without taking advantage of others.

# CHAPTER FIVE:
# THE PIG PARENT

*Claude Steiner*

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Cooperation is both a political vision and a practical structure for working together. Most of us, however, have been carefully trained to operate in a hierarchic world. Not cooperation but power plays are rewarded and, indeed, required in many areas of our lives. Along the way, we become alienated from our own capacity to connect with others.

Radical Psychiatry conceives of alienation as a process affecting the heart as well as the hands. Not only is labor alienated, not only are individuals alienated from each other, but each of us is alienated from our own humanity.

These internal or psychological consequences of alienation are what we call *Internalized Oppression*. What links experience in the world with our hearts and minds is a body of ideas we learn and which then inform our view of ourselves and of the world. In the course of a lifetime, we encounter many ideas. But some of them are more significant than others, and they become incorporated into a value system that has psychological force. They forge a

set of rules that enjoin us to behave in certain ways in the world, and they accuse us of certain failings and flaws if we do not obey those rules.

Women in western industrialized societies, for instance, are taught to believe a particular conception of womanliness. Women, in this view, should be healers, emotionally sensitive beings who make peace. Good women ought to know how to maintain relationships, and that way should be to take care of the loved ones, meeting their emotional and physical needs. Notice the "shoulds" and "oughts" in this description. In the grammar of Internalized Oppression, they are the verbs. Notice also the implication for women who are angry and controversial, who wish to build edifices rather than make homes. Lying invisibly right beneath these rules is a list of attributes of women who fail in their duty: they are unwomanly, hard, insensitive, ball-breakers, unfeminine. Boiled down to their crudest denominator, these accusations are more elegant ways of conveying a set of basic attributions: crazy, lazy, stupid, sick, ugly and deserve to die.

It is in the form of these abusive accusations and restrictive injunctions that Internalized Oppression comes to have psychological force. We call these sorts of messages the Pig, and it is in this form that we apply the theory of Internalized Oppression in Radical Psychiatry.

The concept of the Pig has its historical roots in the Parent ego state as defined by Eric Berne. For a fuller understanding of ego states, consult Berne's paper “Ego States in Psychotherapy” (1957), his first presentation of the notion.

Ten years after Berne's introduction of the ego states, as I was trying to make sense out of the tragic aspects of alcoholic behavior, I began to discern that there were two kinds of parental behavior visible in some people: one type, which seemed to direct them to do socially acceptable behavior (“Don't talk with your mouth full,” “Don't drink too much” ), and another which seemed to attack, denigrate and defeat people (“You are a slob,” “You'll die a drunk.”) When I looked at these ego states in detail I concluded that these two Parent ego states were different entities.

They were both introjects of a real external human being as perceived, but they were introjected from different people or different parts of people and, perhaps more importantly, they were introjected at different times in the person's life. The abusive Parent ego states seemed to be adopted at a time in which the offspring's perceptions are

eidetic[1], synergic and holistic. As a consequence this Parent had a different quality than the introjects that occur later in life when the person's perceptions are of a quite different nature. The differences between the perceptions and thought of young children and grownups has been amply explored by psychologists, notably Werner and Piaget.

In any case, in early childhood, parents are perceived differently than they are later. If the parent is, at significant times, controlling, harsh, selfish, or unloving, these qualities will be predominantly perceived by the very young child. This intimate emotional behavior of the parent toward the child will be accepted, learned and adopted and will become an internal influence often heard as a controlling, harsh, selfish or unloving voice in the head.

Later in life the offspring will observe and perceive his parents in a different light. The same father who privately beats, cheats and lies to the child is also a public person who speaks of values such as fatherly love and truthfulness. These values will be accepted, and adopted

[1] *eidetic*: of or pertaining to an extraordinarily detailed and vivid recall of visual images (*The American Heritage Dictionary*).

by the offspring and will also become part of his Parent ego state.

One major difference which I have observed between the two Parents is that one is “civilized,” nurturing, benevolent and imbued with attitudes of love and understanding between human beings. Criticism and censure coming from that ego state is measured and temperate.

The other Parent is not bound by any such temperance or consideration. It seems to be barbaric, inconsiderate, and punitive. Its sanctions for disobedience are severe and it does not stop at causing physical harm as a way of enforcing injunctions. It is as if, in the two Parents within the person, one met two distinct periods of history, two trends of authority, two different modes of interpersonal relationships, one much more “civilized” than the other.

At the time in the late '60s when we were developing these concepts, we observed the forces of “law and order” bashing in the heads of young people who were struggling against the war in Viet Nam. We saw a similarity between the behavior of some policemen and the primitive cruel Parent which we named the “Pig Parent,” a label that stuck over the years. (It is important to note that we also saw peace officers who were benevolent, protective and kind.)

When the name “Pig” was chosen, it was chosen because it was topical, and it personified in one simple word a very important concept that we saw operating in our everyday lives. At the time I was lecturing around the country, and in my presentations I would tentatively and cautiously introduce the Pig Parent, with the assumption that only those who were politically active, anti-war activists from New York or Berkeley would understand and appreciate the label. But I found that not to be the case. Instead, the term and concept of the Pig Parent was acceptable to many across the country and we in Radical Psychiatry became more confident in its use. The Pig Parent, we explained to people, was a part of our personality which was entirely antagonistic to our OKness. Unless we follow restrictive, death-dealing injunctions which it wants to impose on us, it will call us bad, stupid, ugly, crazy, lazy or sick; it may even tell us we deserve to die. If we succumb, it will call us the same names anyway. Eric Berne had noticed, as had Freud and other students of human nature before him, that these crude, cruel, sadistic, destructive messages could literally be heard by people as human voices — “voices in the head,” as Berne dubbed them.

The Pig Parent has been met with mixed reception. In the practical arena of group psychotherapy, this concept has proven to be extremely viable and useful. My experience with a number of different new ideas that have been

developed in Radical Psychiatry over the last decade is that some have a strong initial appeal and get considerable use for a while, and then eventually fall away to become historical curiosities to be talked about on occasion. As an example, even the use of ego states and games enjoyed a relatively brief period of intense use and interest and eventually has somewhat fallen off. However, one of the ideas that has remained extremely useful and persists in our practice is the concept of the Pig Parent, which lately has come to be known simply as the Pig.

## PERSISTENT CONCEPT

Why is this concept so persistent? I believe it is because it reflects an extremely real and important aspect of human unhappiness. When we are unhappy, we can invariably point to negative words, sentences, images and thoughts about ourselves which intrude into our consciousness. These negative influences we call the Pig. Consistent with the belief that people are basically OK, we assume a priori that the Pig is external to us, an introject that is capable of being excluded from our lives. There is an apt analogy in Transactional Analysis that the Parent is like a tape recorder. The Pig Parent "tape" is like a cassette recording which feeds us negative misinformation and commands. Staying with the cassette metaphor, the Pig can be turned down, turned off, re-recorded, or ejected. The work of

Radical Psychiatry is very frequently concerned with detecting Pig messages, isolating them from the rest of consciousness, disowning them (recognizing their external sources), and struggling against them with the ultimate aim of getting rid of them.

Further, and more importantly, I believe that the concept of the Pig persists because it represents, in a very apt metaphor, the reality of why people suffer emotionally. The sources of “mental illness” have been pursued in many guises: chemical imbalances, genetic disease, childhood trauma, masturbation, sin, repressed screams, karma, and so on. Radical Psychiatry postulates that people's unhappiness is basically externally caused and has its source in external oppressive influences. These influences are taken in, adopted, introjected or internalized, to be sure, but they remain external in origin. They are foreign, alien influences which, like a splinter in the finger, can be removed and banished from the personality.

In short, the Pig concept persists because it works to explain people's unhappiness and because we have developed methods to get rid of it which result in substantial, visible and relatively prompt relief from most forms of emotional distress. It should be pointed out here that the Pig is the street name for the more academically

and theoretically correct concept of Internalized Oppression.

In using the Pig concept in our work we have found that we can isolate Pig statements from other nurturing Parental statements, and from Adult critical statements. We further found that by disallowing all Pig Parent behavior in groups, we established an atmosphere of trust and cooperation which was very helpful to people in getting rid of their own Pig. Eventually, over the years, we came to the conclusion that “Pigging” is a form of behavior which is totally counterproductive in humane, cooperative relationships and groups, and we militate against it in our everyday interactions and work, as well as in group therapy.

When I say that the Pig Parent is totally counterproductive, I say so with the understanding that it has a very definite and powerful function in human affairs — namely, coercion by force or threats of force through crude or subtle means. It is extremely effective in keeping us and others in line. Getting others to do our bidding against their will can be very profitable, especially if we can get them to internalize our wishes so that they obey without having to be coerced any longer.

A large portion of most people's lives is dominated by others, and that is accomplished with the Pig. We are

affected unfavorably by the Pig in two major ways: other people's Pigs oppress us and our own Pig oppresses us. More subtly, we are affected negatively by our own oppression of others and by others' oppression of yet others. These two latter forms of oppression can be beneficial, on the other hand, by improving our position of power, which eventually becomes taken for granted — internalized privilege, as Margo Adair calls it. That is why the rejection of the Pig in our lives is inevitably a political act. The Pig is the instrument of power abuse which makes exploitation of the powerless by the powerful possible.

## CRITICISMS OF THE CONCEPT

Objections to the concept of the Pig Parent have kept steady pace with its use. Some people feel that the word "pig" is in itself a manifestation of the kind of not-OK energy which we are trying to isolate with the term. "In your own words," these critics say, "you are pigging the part of the personality which you call the Pig, and it seems that this is a contradiction in terms."

Others feel that to make the critical aspect of the Parent all bad is wrong. These critics would argue that there are certain aspects of the Parent criticism which are useful and, in fact, essential. For instance, it is argued that children need the kind of input that the Pig Parent gives as

part of the necessary discipline of childrearing. It is argued further that to insult parents by calling them “Pigs” is cruel and unwise.

A third group of critics comes from outside the ranks of T.A. They want to dissociate the concepts of Radical Psychiatry from Transactional Analysis, and object to the term of Pig Parent because it is too much identified with egostates, preferring to call it “Internalized Oppression” .

I want to briefly respond to these three criticisms about the Pig.

**1. *The use of the word “Pig” is offensive.*** There is a certain validity to the objection that the use of the word “Pig” to portray an unwanted part of our personality is not ideal. First of all, there are some people who think that pigs are no different from any other animal and that they don't deserve to be singled out in this way. Some people even love pigs. “Why should we single out the pig to exemplify the worst part of our personality?” they ask. Even if we agree that wild and even domesticated pigs are, to a certain extent, disagreeable animals, it doesn't really justify our use of that particular animal in this particular way.

We have thought of calling the Pig the “enemy,” the “devil,” the “other” — and, in fact, any of those names

would be quite appropriate. But for some reason, we have not been able to find an alternative name which has had as much appeal as the Pig. To the extent that the use of the word is in itself offensive to some people, there is very little that can be said except that I, and others who use the term Pig, would be quite open to replacing it with a better word that is equally short and descriptive. In fact, we have a standing offer of a prize for a new word which adequately deals with the above objections. Certainly, the term is not meant to insult parents in any way, but it is true that in the absence of knowledge about Transactional Analysis this misunderstanding is almost inevitable.

**2. *The critical parent has positive aspects as well as negative aspects***. Given that we temporarily accept the term "Pig Parent" to describe the aspect of our personality which is involved in transmitting not-OK messages through the generations, it becomes a matter of very important philosophical distinction whether there is any value whatsoever to that part of us. It has been generally believed that children (and therapy clients) need to be punished, disciplined, and coerced by a power larger than theirs so they may grow up to be responsible, happy and well-functioning adults. This point has considerable currency in our culture, and there is no point in arguing for or against it except on the basis of evidence. For myself, having raised children in a manner which attempted with

considerable success to completely exclude the critical Parent, and having seen the success of this approach with my clients, co-workers and friends, there is convincing personal evidence. Obviously, this evidence might not be very convincing to one who believes strongly in an authority-based critical Parent approach to childrearing. Ultimately, then, the only basis for holding to the view that childrearing is best accomplished without any critical Parent input is a matter of personal preference which, for the moment, cannot be supported in any "scientific" way.

However, let me clarify what we are, in fact, saying when we claim that the best approach to childrearing, therapy or relationships would completely exclude any form of Pig Parent behavior. In order to do this, two types of critical statements need to be distinguished from each other. These are a) Controlling Criticism (Parent), and b) Constructive Criticism (Adult).

Controlling parental criticism is intended to impose the will of the person on the recipient. It comes in various forms, the most blatant of which is some sort of an intimidating insult, either crude or subtle, which linguistically has the form of an adjective. Statements like, "You are bad, stupid, ugly, crazy or sick," are intended to invalidate the experience and behavior of the other person. In effect, the statement is, "Because you are stupid, what you are doing is wrong and you should stop and change

what you are doing; because you are ugly, nobody will ever pay attention to you, and therefore you are wrong and should do as I say." The intent of the statement is to stop the person short and to bring them around to the parentally desired behavior.

More subtle adjectives can appear to be sensible and rational, but are, in effect, simple transformations of the same kind of statement. For instance, a therapist might say to a client, "One reason why you are not getting better is because you refuse to face reality." This statement is really a sophisticated way of saying, "The reason why you are not getting better is because you are crazy." A parent might say to his teenage son, "You have no respect for authority," which is merely another way of saying that he is "bad." Other adjectives like "irresponsible," "overly emotional," "sensitive," "passive," "aggressive," or "passive/aggressive" invalidate the person's view of the world and attempt to change it in a forcible way — that is, they are basically coercive in intent.

Another type of critical statement is an Adult statement coming from a rational, problem-solving faculty of the person making the statement. For instance, people of different experience and knowledge about any one subject are liable to come together and try to solve a problem. Sooner or later someone will think that he understands a process better than someone else. As an example, this type

of a situation often develops when a number of people are standing around a fireplace and someone is trying to build a fire. Getting a good, hot fire going is a rather complex skill, but many people don't realize that this is the case. So, let us imagine an inexperienced person trying to build a fire while someone else with a great deal of experience says, “You're doing that wrong.”

Now, even though I must admit this statement is not very well put, it doesn't necessarily reflect a Parent point of view. Properly expressed, that person would say, “I think that the way you are putting the paper and the wood in the fireplace is not likely to result in a good fire.” That statement could be called an Adult statement, even though it sounds parental. Let's say that it is intended as an attempt to convey information rather than to control the fire builder's behavior. Only when the speaker, knowingly or not, attempts to coerce or diminish the autonomy of the fire builder does the statement become a Pig Parent transaction. Of course, even a person with the correct information *could* be transacting from her Pig Parent; being factually right or wrong has nothing to do with the issue of control. The important thing to remember here is that Critical Parent statements are *an attempt to control*. The contention that we make is that critical coercive statements are not only unnecessary in human relationships, but are, in fact, harmful and will bring negative results, especially in childrearing.

This philosophical point of view follows from the basic assumptions of Radical Psychiatry, which hold that people have a tendency toward health and OKness, so that the ideal situation for growth is one which allows a person the freedom of choice and autonomy to follow their own internal choices, free from external control. Constructive criticism from the Adult widens the choices by adding information, while coercive criticism from the Parent narrows them.

**3.** The last objection to the Pig Parent is that *ego states are unnecessry to understanding human behavior*. People who want to use the Radical Psychiatry approach, but don't want to use ego states, are excluding from their thinking one of the most powerful and sensible contributions made to the understanding of human beings in recent years. Ego states and their manifestations as voices in people's heads are consensual realities. The attempt to deal with these realities exclusively through an abstraction like "Internalized Oppression" robs the approach of its potency. Internalized oppression is a seven-syllable expression which does, in fact, theoretically reflect some (though not all) of the same ideas portrayed by the Pig Parent concept. Unfortunately, it is also an abstract concept, which tends to intimidate people. It lacks emotional immediacy, and cannot be used to describe a

coercive transaction between people because it refers exclusively to the Internalized Oppression. How do you gracefully say, “I feel you are pigging me,” or, “I am having a Pig attack,” using Internalized Oppression as a concept? Referring to the Pig Parent exclusively as Internalized Oppression is very likely to cause the concept to fall away into misuse, leaving the whole area of the oppressive internalized voices completely unexplored. Still, despite the above rationale, we find that the term Pig Parent has, in our use, been shortened to simply the Pig. This evolution removes the concept from its theoretical T.A. roots, but makes it easier to comprehend and use for people who, while completely conscious of the Pig's activity in their lives, don't necessarily see what it has to do with parents. Therefore, Pig Parent is the correct theoretical concept, while Pig is the current everyday usage of the concept, and Internalized Oppression is a partial concept referring to an internal process but leaving out oppressive, Pig Parent activities between people.

## THE PIG

Having given the history and the basic objections to the concept of the Pig, let me now deal with the main topic of this paper — namely how to diagnose and dispose of that oppressive, internalized ego state which contributes to so much unhappiness among human beings.

The Pig is a reality in everyone's life. However, the extent to which this reality is perceived and understood by people varies greatly from person to person. The Pig can be, to one person's consciousness, simply a dark, evil, looming influence, settling over the mind like a suffocating blanket which, without warning, turns everything dismal, hopeless and gray. To another, the Pig is a nagging, insistent voice which continually speaks in her ear and will not leave her alone. To yet another, the Pig is a rational-sounding, sedate, moderate and occasional statement which undercuts every important effort in his life. The Pig can operate in the form of nightmares, daydreams, physical pain, or white-hot flashes of pain or dread.

No matter what particular form the Pig takes, it is essential to its survival and effectiveness that it not be challenged by the victim of its abuse. That is to say, the Pig operates and continues to operate because the person is willing to countenance it and to accept it as a valid part of the world.

An important step in the struggle against the Pig is the recognition that it is an arbitrary external set of messages which has been internalized and is now being listened to and followed as if it were, in fact, one's own best judgment. As long as it is listened to and followed, the Pig Parent has power over its victim. Therefore, it is essential in therapy that the following steps are consecutively taken:

**First**, the Pig Parent has to be located. Where is it? What form does it take? What are its specific statements? What feelings does it prey on — guilt? Shame? Fear? Low self-esteem?

**Second**, how can the person remove his own support from the Pig so that it loses its potency and returns to its original form: an external, oppressive influence which needs to be watched and struggled against?

**Third**, what specific techniques are effective in counteracting the Pig's influence?

Let's look more closely at the three steps outlined here:

### 1. Stalking the Pig

The first task in fighting the Pig is to make conscious those particular Pig messages which affect the person. The process of making the Pig conscious and demystifying the way it operates is analogous to peeling an onion. Pig messages are layered one upon the other. As we become

aware of and begin to discard one layer, another layer comes into evidence. Some people need to work on a totally unpeeled onion, and others have already achieved a level of understanding of the Pig which implies that a number of layers have been discarded. In any case, starting from the most mystifying Pig, I will describe several layers that a person might have to work through.

The first and most obscure layer of the Pig is one in which its effect on the person's consciousness is a negative emotion of some sort. The emotion can be a very subtle feeling of impending doom, a sudden fright, or a terrifying fear. It can be a persistent hatred, a creeping doubt, or a dread of disease or death. It can be a claustrophobic feeling of being smothered, of extreme disapproval of the self or of another. The experience is often one that does not seem to be attached to anything in particular. It just comes over the person and engulfs her unexpectedly, irresistibly, at any time.

Frequently, when we are happy and feeling OK, the first presage of the Pig is a lurking fear which starts invading our consciousness: “Things are going too well; it must end soon. Whenever I feel this good, I inevitably feel bad later.” The person might suddenly realize that he's had a whole week of careless, happy days, and will suddenly be overcome by anxiety. This is merely the first stage of the Pig's blitz. The next stage of the Pig attack is the familiar

feeling of fear, dread, or doubt, whichever is the favorite of that person's Pig. Each Pig has its own characteristic emotions, its own specific messages and its own specific techniques. In fact, each Pig is just like a real, complex person with strengths and weaknesses, tricks and strategies of its own.

A Pig attack can last for a few intense seconds and spoil a person's day, or it can start slowly and build up to a fierce pitch, which then subsides. A Pig attack can take a minute, a day, a week, or even longer, depending on the power of the Pig Parent.

With this kind of strictly emotional Pig strategy, it is important the person learn to recognize the specific feeling which is characteristic of his Pig. After having identified the feeling, the next step is to recognize that behind the emotional experience there is always a cause for its onset. This cause may be a verbal statement, an image, or a series of images. There is always some sort of mental activity which causes the feelings.

For instance, one person had sudden attacks of anxiety that came from nowhere, as far as she could tell. She realized, after focusing on the mental events previous to the attack, that they were always preceded by a visual fantasy. This particular fantasy had no words attached to it; it was merely an image of her standing in front of a large crowd

of people who were jeering, pointing at her, laughing and throwing stones as she stood wondering what she had done wrong, and feeling terrified. Another man's Pig approached him through a sudden fear of death which wasn't even as explicit as the previous image, but was simply a feeling of lying in a coffin with his eyes closed and being led somewhere, probably to his grave. Other pre-verbal Pig attacks can be fantasies of being killed or raped, of failing miserably, starving to death, being hated by everyone around, being tortured, or getting cancer or some other dread disease.
In any case, the first defense against a Pig attack is to make that pre-conscious fantasy clearly conscious, to discover its contents and to become aware every time that it intrudes into one's consciousness.

Having done that, the next step in stalking the Pig is to verbalize the content of the Pig attack. In my experience, it is always possible to find the verbal messages which underscore the attack. The actual language involved is the next aspect of the Pig that needs to be made conscious. The sentence that is attached to the fantasy might be, “You are going do die,” “Everybody hates you,” “You'll get a heart attack,” “You'll never succeed,” or, “You are rotten and no good.”

Once the verbal form of the Pig's message is made clear, we come to the next stage of the battle. Here it is useful for

the person to get a small notebook to keep a Pig-attack diary of sorts. Every time there is a Pig attack, or every time the person feels bad — even if he isn't sure he's being pigged — he writes down the feeling, and, if possible, the fantasy and the verbal content behind it. This way the person starts to become conscious of not only the specific feelings, fantasies and words attached to his Pig attacks, but also the magnitude of the Pig's offensive. Some people find that when the Pig strikes, it totally blanks out every other mental activity for seconds, minutes or hours. Some people feel totally overwhelmed and others feel only a slight annoyance. In any case, the purpose of this portion of the process is to document the extent to which the Pig is active and the exact messages which the Pig uses.

During this process, people who are quite willing to keep a record of their negative feelings may or may not be willing to accept that these experiences represent Pig attacks — namely, that they are false ideas, introduced into consciousness by an external source from the past which has now been internalized. People who have Pig attacks have a tendency to assume that the predictions and statements of the Pig are valid. “I *may* get cancer; all the people in my family have.” Or, “I *may* fail; I have failed all my life so far.” Or, “I *am* no good; I have ruined three marriages and my children are all in trouble.” Or, “I *am* stupid; I can't even balance my checkbook.” These are all examples of the way in which people will actually takes

sides with their Pig and defend the Pig's point of view. There is a very good reason for this: Pig arguments are almost always built around a grain of truth. One cannot completely discount the Pig's point of view without doing violence to some truth, however small. What is important to realize is that these statements are wrong on the whole, or in principle, not completely wrong but substantially wrong. In other words, the Pig's messages are categorical and not open to question or modification. This brings us to the second stage in the battle against the Pig — namely, making conscious the specific external origin of the Pig.

### 2. Separating the Self from the Pig

Having located the fantasy words associated with the Pig, it is now essential to re-emphasize that the source of all the negative messages we harbor about ourselves is external, and therefore optional. This is often the most difficult part of the struggle: making clear that the Pig is *always* wrong, although not necessarily wrong in its totality, and that its belief system reflects somebody else's interests.

To be convincing, it is necessary to re-emphasize the difference between Pig Parent messages and Critical Adult messages. The critical messages coming from the Adult, such as: “If you do this this way, it won't work,” or, “There is a good chance that you will not get this job,” or,

“If you continue to smoke as you are, you are likely to get cancer,” are not really negative messages about ourselves, but are statements of probabilities which are associated with negative outcomes, and are not Pig messages.

If we can assume as a basic given that every human being is OK — that is, that every human being is beautiful, smart, health-seeking, good and right on — then we can also assume, as a consequence, that any statement to the contrary (namely, that she is not OK; that she is bad, stupid, ugly or crazy) is a falsehood. When a person tells himself such falsehoods, they can be confidently rejected. We must choose between whether we are basically OK or not.

Our choice in Radical Psychiatry and Transactional Analysis is to embrace the view that people are basically good. This choice was put in words by Eric Berne when he said that the first and universal existential position held by people about people is, “I'm OK, you're OK.” This is our view, and operating from this view implies that the nasty, demeaning things we say about ourselves (and about other people) are falsehoods to be rejected in principle.

One of the most effective ways of showing the basic falsehood of Pig statements is that they are usually blatantly opportunistic. For instance, one classic form of Pig harassment is, “You are a failure. You never do

anything." One woman who was plagued by this type of statement also reported that whenever she succeeded in something, she would tell herself, "You are trying too hard; most people could do this with no effort at all." When I pointed out that she could not win no matter what she did, she said, "That's right! Come to think of it, when things come real easy, my Pig say, 'That doesn't count; it was too easy.'"

Another favorite paradox the Pig likes to use is illustrated by the following example: John reported extreme feelings of incompetency and stupidity, reinforced by constant voices in his head saying, "You dumb bastard, you're retarded. How can you be so stupid?" A group member commented, "That's your Pig," and John answered, "I know, and I feel real stupid for having such a heavy Pig."

Pig Parent statements are often confused with, but can easily be distinguished from, negative feelings of anger emanating from the Child. This anger is directed outward against external frustrations. Only when those negative expressions are turned around and addressed back to the person do they become Pig statements. In fact, it is a prime Pig strategy to turn our legitimate anger against others into feelings of self-hatred and alienation. Later in this paper I will explain how the same Pig that plagues us will also have extremely harsh opinions about others, causing further alienation from our fellow human beings.

In any event, it is crucial that the person fighting his Pig recognize how Pig statements are different from Critical Adult statements and from angry Child emotions, and that Pig statements are arbitrary and externally generated, and therefore can be isolated and validly rejected.

During this phase, it is common for the therapist to have to argue heartily in favor of this thesis. It is very hard for a person under the influence of the Pig to see her separateness from it. After all, she has taken the truth of the Pig's statements for granted for years, and there is no real proof or evidence that the therapist can muster to the contrary. Everyone fails sooner or later, everyone makes mistakes, everyone commits occasional evil acts, and so when a person hears his Pig say, “You are evil,” or, “You are wrong,” or, “You'll never succeed,” it is hard to see that this is a Pig Parent strategy, rather than a true statement. The therapist continually has to point out the difference between a rationally-stated negative expectation such as, “That isn't likely to work,” and an intense, accusatory, damning, emotional attack on the OKness of the person, such as, “You can't do it,” which is characteristic of the Pig Parent. The therapist also has to point out always that the occasional grain of truth in the Pig's statements does not prove the Pig is right. (See Chapter 3 for more about this distinction.)

Sometimes people will argue hotly in defense of their Pig. It needs to be pointed out to the person at this time that his insistence on maintaining and defending the Pig position is, in itself, part of the Pig's hold on his consciousness. In time, the therapist may need to complain that this is an unfair situation, one in which the lone therapist is fighting both the client and the client's Pig.

This process can take weeks, sometimes months, to accomplish; the therapist needs to be patient and under no circumstances should she overextend herself to the point of being irritated in the struggle. She simply needs to point out repeatedly, and whenever relevant, that the person is having a Pig attack and is again siding with his Pig against himself.

The therapist should remember that in a therapeutic contract which involves cooperation — and therefore, no Rescues (see Chapter 7) — the therapist should never do more than half the work in the fight against the Pig. It is essential that the client do her part by actively fighting alongside the therapist against the Pig, and if the client sides with her Pig, she is essentially embracing the Victim role. If the therapist indulges in the Rescue role in the situation, he will eventually have to persecute the client. As a consequence, the process of fighting the Pig has to be engaged in slowly and patiently, always making sure that the client is equally involved and taking equal

responsibility in the struggle. The work is greatly facilitated when it is done in groups. More allies, more arguments, more support are available than any one therapist can provide (see Chapter 9).

Once this particular portion of the work is completed — namely, once the person fully recognizes the emotional fantasy and verbal content of the Pig, and that the Pig is an external influence which can be separated from the self and fought effectively — we come to the third stage of the struggle, which is the development of the specific moves which are effective in defeating the Pig.

### 3. Techniques

**Exposure**: One of the most effective techniques against the Pig is exposing it to other people. As long as we harbor Pig ideas, they have tremendous power over our subconscious because within our minds they go unchallenged. In group therapy, with eight people listening, the act of stating openly what the Pig says has a tremendously cleansing effect. It is as if the Pig is a creature which can live only in the murky shadows of our minds. As we turn over the rocks under which the Pig lives and open it up to the group's perceptions, it tends

to shrink and die away, almost by itself. Very often, this approach is sufficient to defeat the Pig, but in other cases, even when a person is reasonably convinced of the fact that the Pig is an external, oppressive influence, there will be continued Pig attacks.

**Confrontation**: It is at this point that it is necessary to develop specific confrontations of the individual Pig and to analyze in detail each Pig attack, and what the person is doing to fight it. For instance, some people try to turn deaf ears to the Pig's statements, some people will shout back, and some people will argue with the Pig on a logical basis. While each of these techniques might work with a certain Pig, it may not work with another. For example, a person's Pig may be a nagging, insistent presence which follows him from room to room, constantly repeating its accusations. This Pig is not one you can easily turn a deaf ear to. Instead, it might be more effective to face it squarely and calmly say, “Get out of here! If I ever see you again, I'm going to kill you!” On the other hand, that approach may not work with a brutal, blood-thirsty Pig, which can only be defeated by pumping oneself up to a large size and staring it down until it disappears. Each Pig has its particular source of power, and it is

necessary to match power with power. The clever, devious, mind-raping Pig needs an equally clever response; the Pig that predicts illness and death requires a radiant, healthy self-confidence; the Pig that deliberately lies requires truthfulness and knowledge of what is and isn't true.

**Nurturing**: The Nurturing Parent is the natural enemy of the Pig. When being attacked by the Pig, it is often very effective to get nurturing from either oneself or from another person.

In this connection it is important to be able to distinguish Nurturing (You are OK) statements from Pig (You are not OK) statements. Usually, the difference is obvious.

Examples:

N: "I love you." P: "I hate you."

N: "You are beautiful." P: "You are ugly."

N: "Go on, you can do it." P: "It'll never work."

N: “Go ahead, enjoy yourself.” P: “You don't deserve it.”

So far, so good. But at times what appears to be a Nurturing statement is contaminated with a Pig message.

Examples:

“You are very pretty for someone who is as old as you.”

“You are my favorite child.” (Competitive, puts other children down.)

“I don't hate you.” (Any negative word in the statement is suspect of being Pig-originated.)

And, given a certain tone, even a sentence like, “Go ahead, enjoy yourself,” can have a Pig undercurrent.

Asking for (and getting) or giving oneself nurturing strokes is a potent Pig antidote. Strokes

can be written down and hung in a prominent place, such as the bedroom or kitchen, where they can easily be seen, or they can be recorded and kept nearby to be played back when needed.

Whichever form the strokes take (from self or others, verbal, physical, written, spoken, or recorded), the person has to be alert to the moment they are needed — namely, during a Pig attack.

**Stopping Pig Collusions**: Insulating oneself from people who collude with or agree with the Pig Parent is another important technique. This often involves a separation from relatives who hold the same opinions which are the original source of the Pig Parent, or friends who were chosen in the past because they shared what later turned out to be Pig points of view.

Relating to someone who shares our Pig's opinions can lead to collusions, in which two or more people develop blind spots for certain piggy points of view which they all hold. Scapegoating is an example of a Pig collusion. Racism and other forms of prejudice such as sexism are mass pig collusions. It is necessary to avoid such collusions to fight the Pig effectively. This can be

done by mutual agreements to be critical of each other's Pig-originated statements. However, other people sometimes aren't willing to make such agreements, especially if they don't think that the statements and opinions in question are objectionable. In those instances, it may be necessary to avoid contact with such people, especially as long as one is vulnerable to the Pig.

Pig collusions are very important to detect and avoid, since some people's Pig attacks are exclusively the result of their contact with others whose Pigs agree with and stimulate their own.

For instance, one man, after months of working on Pig attacks that seemed to come on just before the group meeting on Mondays, realized that he had a standing telephone date with his parents on Sunday evenings. He hated the calls, but was locked into them and felt he could not get out of them. His parents always talked to him in veiled critical tones by asking questions about his work and relationships. These questions came from their Pigs and stimulated a Pig attack in him. (“You'll never amount to anything,” “You'll never be loved.” ) When he realized this, he decided not to call his parents for a month, during which he was free of Pig attacks.

> Eventually, he reopened communication with them, but this time with an understanding of what he was and wasn't willing to accept in his conversations with them. In fact, he was able to educate them about the Pig, and they stopped "laying their Pig on him," and presumably on each other and themselves as well.
>
> Pig collusions can come from anyone, but tend to come from people who would like to control us and are angry at us because they can't, such as certain kinds of parents, spouses or lovers, employers, teachers, preachers, and politicians.

This stage of the work is an intense period of analysis of the Pig's tactics and techniques, and the countertactics and techniques which serve to neutralize it.

My experience has been that after experimenting with this work, we hit on the effective method, which almost suddenly makes the Pig vanish. When the specific approach that works is found, the person needs to use it every time the Pig rears its ugly head — which it will. The person needs to practice, to be alert to renewed Pig attacks, which, incidentally, will become more subtle as the Pig tries to find new avenues around effective defenses. Yet,

the point in the struggle when an effective strategy is found is clearly marked by a sudden release from the great anxieties caused by intense Pig attacks, so that the person is now in a whole new phase of well-being and feelings of OKness, even though Pig attacks may continue at a much lower level of intensity and with less frequency.

These feelings of well-being come from having developed techniques against Pig attacks which demonstrate that the Pig is wrong, that it is really not part of us, and that we can stop it from dominating our lives.

Sometimes a person will come to group after a week of unsuccessful struggle, and despondently describe their powerlessness when confronting the Pig. Nothing seems to work; the Pig has dominated their lives constantly for days. What to do?

It is important, at this point, to become very specific about the time, place and details of the Pig attacks, and the strategies used to fight it. When did it happen? Where did it happen? What was the beginning of it? How did it proceed? And especially, what was done to stop the Pig? In doing this, one finds what techniques are unsuccessful in fighting the Pig. The techniques need to be analyzed in order to understand the reason for their lack of success. Other techniques need to be developed to replace those that didn't work. If turning a deaf ear to the Pig didn't

work, perhaps calling someone up and getting nurturing strokes will. If that doesn't work, maybe the strokes that are needed are physical, and one needs to get a massage or run around the block. If massage and running don't work, maybe one needs to stage a shouting match with the Pig. If a shouting match doesn't work, then perhaps one can develop finely tuned arguments to defeat the Pig. If having a list of strokes written by the group doesn't work, perhaps this was because the list was kept under one's pillow instead of hanging next to the bed; if arguing against the Pig didn't work, perhaps it was done in a pleading rather than an angry tone of voice. Eventually, a technique that works will be found if the person, the therapist and the group keep at it.

**Exposing Pig for Others**: One very difficult kind of Pig attack is one in which it is not the person herself who is the target of the Pig Parent, but others in her circle. This kind of Pig specializes in making everybody else not OK, and thereby indirectly making the person not OK. This Pig says, “Any club that would have you as a member is not worth belonging to.” In this very devious approach, the Pig first completely invalidates everyone in the person's social circle, and than, having done that, invalidates the person for being in it.

Exposing one's Pig when it is attacking other people is a special problem which requires careful handling. In such cases, as in all others, the person is asked to expose their Pig in group; however, when exposing this type of Pig, I follow a careful procedure designed to protect the people involved, as follows:

***1. Never expose the Pig unless there is a therapist present.***

***2. Before exposing the Pig, announce your intention to do so***, turning to the person that your Pig is attacking and saying something like, "Sally, I want to expose my Pig about you, to you. Are you willing to hear it?"

***3. Now the person needs to check how she feels***, and if she is ready to accept what could collude with her own Pig about herself.

***4. If the person is willing, the Pig is exposed*:** "I don't like or believe what I'm going to say, but my Pig says about you that you are ugly (stupid/bad/crazy/sick)."

Very often a Pig statement of this sort will not particularly affect the recipient, who will be able to brush it off. On

occasion, it can be very difficult to take. In that case, the situation can be an occasion for Sally to work on her own Pig, which also says she is ugly. The only thing that needs to be remembered about the exposure of this kind of insidious Pig is that it is delicate work, and needs to be done more carefully than exposing the Pig when it doesn't involve anyone else in the group.

The Pig often carries implications about other people because, in our culture, its form is so frequently competitive. It seeks to compare us to others, ranking us as better or worse. (We discuss competition in detail in the next chapter.) Sometimes such comparison-making is the front-line strategy of the Pig, and will be obvious as soon as the work begins. But often competitive ranking is a better-hidden, more deep-rooted activity, and only appears late in the work. In either case, both the person whose Pig is at issue, who often feels bad and guilty, and the person on the other end of the comparison, need lavish protection.

# CHAPTER SIX:
# COMPETITION

*JoAnn Costello*
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Internalized Oppression (as we have shown in the previous chapter) is a process by which we incorporate a body of ideas that cruelly inform our picture of ourselves and of the world. In the voice of the Pig, which is the form such messages take as they actually address each of us, we are told how to behave, what to feel, when we are good and bad. The Pig carries with it a set of moral injunctions about right and wrong, and a powerful set of accusations about those who digress.

The content of that morality differs greatly from time to time and place to place. The ideas pressed by the Pig have an ideological function. Every society selects for certain attitudes, by the very nature of its organization, as well as through its culture. In an agricultural community, for instance, characteristics of patience, endurance and quietness are highly useful. Without them, farmers would

become restive, dissatisfied with the isolation of rural living and with the need to accommodate the rhythms of nature. In an industrial, urban, capitalist society, other values are important: ambition, manual dexterity, an impatience to succeed, and so on. Because the sum total of our thoughts and attitudes perform a function in socializing individuals to particular political forms, the body of our Internalized Oppression is ideological. That is to say, it is no accident that we hold the particular beliefs and have the precise attitudes and values that we do: they serve to keep us doing the things our social order requires us to do.

In capitalist society, the leading ideological edge of Internalized Oppression is *individualism* — the set of beliefs which places the individual above the collective. Behavior inspired by individualism takes a certain form as well, and that form is *competition*.
Together, individualism and competition represent the special way our Internalized Oppression is organized, and the vehicle for its perpetuation.

## INDIVIDUALISM

Individualism gives people the impression that when they achieve something it is on their own and without the help of others and that when they fail it is, once again, all their own doing. Belief in the value of individualism obscures

any understanding of the way in which human beings affect each other in both good and bad ways; thus it completely mystifies both oppression and cooperation. Individualism results in the isolation of human beings from each other so that they cannot band together against the well-organized oppressive forces that exploit them.

Individualism makes people easily influenced and also easily targeted when they step out of line and begin to want to remedy their oppression in an individual fashion. Finally, individualism prevents people from validating their growing awareness of oppression with each other. Healthy paranoid suspicions that may accompany demystification of oppression are invalidated, and people are reduced to schizophrenia, each person in her individual, impotent, paranoid system.

Individualism as a way of relating to other human beings, while highly touted, can, in fact, be a most self-destructive form of behavior. We do not mean to suggest that individuality, individual action or self-centered behavior is invariably wrong. It is clear that some individuals and their individual actions have been of ultimate benefit to themselves and others. In fact, it is the clearly positive individual actions of certain scientists or politicians that are used by our educational institutions as showcases to highlight the value of individuality. But these examples are distortions and exaggerations of its value, for the purpose

of instilling individualism and competitiveness in the young. Every individual "achiever" is connected by a thousand threads to others — colleagues and co-workers, teachers and students, families and friends — and all contribute to the achievement.

## COMPETITIVENESS

Individualism goes hand in hand with competitiveness. Since we stand or fall strictly on our individual efforts, it follows that we must think of everyone around us as individuals equally invested in succeeding and, in the mad scramble to the top, also necessarily invested in achieving superiority or one-up status to us. Being one-down is intolerable; the only alternative in our society is to try to stay one-up. Equality is not comprehended by us and often not even considered. Competitiveness is trained into human beings from early in life in our culture. Yet, not all human beings are bred into competitive styles of life, and there are some societies, some American Indians for instance, for whom competitiveness is not seen as a positive trait. In an individualistic, competitive society a person who is not highly competitive cannot keep up and becomes chronically one-down and eventually highly alienated. Therefore, competitiveness persists in appearing to be a good trait, because it is so difficult in our society to

achieve well-being without having very strong competitive skills.

Competition consists of an internal process of thought, a feeling, and an external action. By *competitiveness*, we mean an internal, two-step process: first comparing oneself with another person, and second assigning ranks (he is best, I am better, she is worst.) The feelings which coincide with that process are varied, and we'll say more about them later. *To compete* is to take any action designed to win something at the expense of others. The prize may be material, such as food, a job, a prize, etc., or something interactional, such as attention, love, recognition — strokes in general. Competition occurs when the rewards are, or appear to be, in scarcity so that success for some means loss for others. (Some writers argue that competition can occur even without scarcity; we'll return to this point below.)

To be against competition is controversial in twentieth century America. Competition is what makes things work, what makes people valuable, what creates wealth, the source of all good things, according to the ideology of our society. However strongly we may believe that competition is a major source of difficulties in our lives, we must also acknowledge that there is a grain of truth to what is said in favor of it. Historically, it was the mechanism by which early capitalism supplanted

feudalism, a progressive change. In its day, economic competition had a useful function, which, however, in its very nature, undid itself. As certain firms, originally competing in a free market, succeeded, economic (and with it political) power passed into fewer and fewer hands, resulting eventually in the monopoly capitalism we know today.

For a period of time in the 1960s and ‘70s, competition came under serious critical scrutiny by people on the left and those engaged in experiments with alternative lifestyles. Communes bloomed; hierarchic organizations were reorganized as collectives. Competitive sports were contrasted with cooperative games. Feminist redefinitions of intimacy and friendship highlighted the destructive effects of competition in personal relationships. Much of the pro-cooperation stance of Radical Psychiatry evolved in the context of this broad-based and progressive critique.

More recently, however, the pendulum has swung again, and many of the cooperative experiments of the previous decade have been abandoned in favor of a “new” spirit of competitiveness. Burned out by endless competitive struggles in “cooperative” settings, where old habits, lack of skills and a naive misunderstanding of the realities of power too often swamped ideals, many ex-counter-culture participants re-evaluated both the practicality of

cooperation and its desirability. Often people left the fray, feeling discouraged, worn-out and cynical.

Is competition all bad, they asked? Aren't the experiences of exhilaration, of competency and — let's face it — pride in winning, legitimate highs? Women began to notice that they were working harder at the cooperation game than men seemed to be. As their brothers embarked on the scramble to the top, they found themselves left behind in non-competitive jobs. Let's join the race, said a new breed of feminists. Cooperation is another ploy to keep us from getting our just rewards.[2]

These arguments in favor of competition deserve careful attention.[3] Indeed, in a competitive setting, to cooperate unilaterally is a contradiction in terms. As we have said, success in a competitive society does demand competitive skills. If you run the race and hope to win, you'd better

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[2] On another level, skepticism about cooperation was heightened by Reagan-era attacks on socialism. “It just hasn’t worked,” people concluded. “Even the Russians and the Chinese are returning to competitive private enterprise.”

[3] For a lively and provocative dialogue about these questions, see *Competition: A Feminist Taboo?*, edited by Valerie Miner and Helen Longino. Alfred Kohn’s thoroughly-documented, highly readable and passionate defense of cooperation, *The Case Against Cooperation*, is also a valuable contribution to the debate.

have trained hard, and be unconfused about *wanting* to win.

To compete, then, may be a wise and justifiable choice. But too often we compete, psychologically and in actions, when we have not chosen to do so. We compete, at times, because we don't know what else to do, or because the only alternative we see is to drop out. Competition becomes the mode in personal relationships, often against our best intentions.

Sometimes we compete because we want to be wholly and passionately engaged in an activity. Competition can indeed “feel good” : it energizes us, captures our interest, bonds us with others on our team, and makes a bond of a negative sort with those we battle against. In our alienated lives, it is hard indeed to find pursuits that are so compelling. Lacking social movements, cut off from art and learning and growth in our daily lives, sidetracked from intimacy by the battle of the sexes, we turn to competitive endeavors to find that experience of being fully alive. The catch is that intense joyfulness usually comes with winning, and most of us lose most of the time. Even when we do win, we lose, for we are denied another whole set of intensely human experiences: pleasure in the process rather than the end, room to experiment, the joy of appreciating varieties of means, of reveling in the differences among us which are squeezed away in the

linear act of ranking winners against losers, best against worst.

Some writers distinguish two different situations denoted by the word competition.[4] In both, winning is the objective. But in one model, more than one winner is theoretically possible. In fact, everybody could potentially win. A race is one example of this form of competition. Theoretically, if eight runners compete, all could cross the winning line together. In baseball, however, the game goes on and on until one team wins. Tennis matches cannot end in a tie. A college professor who grades "on a curve" can award only a finite (usually very small) number of A's, even if everyone does substantially as well as everybody else; not everyone can excel, by definition.

In the first model, people often experience the exhilaration of performing together with a competitor. Indeed, the word "competition" comes from the Latin *competere*, which is often translated "to run alongside." To pace yourself against a comrade can encourage you to do your best, perhaps even to exceed what you thought your best was. It may be a constructive and inspirational experience.

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[4] Helen E. Longino, "The Ideology of Competition," in *Competition: A Feminist Taboo?*

But in fact, most competition in our society is of the scarcity category typified by many sports. It is this form of competition, where people are not pacing each other but rather ranking themselves, that is most at issue, because it is this type of ranking, which demands that the success of one necessarily mean the failure of others, that invades our hearts and psyches and drives us to distraction. So intricately is scarcity-based competition entangled in our psychology that even when we do "run alongside" each other, we very often find ourselves vying to win nonetheless. The distinction between these two models is, therefore, more interesting theoretically than it is useful in practice.

Win/lose competitiveness is based on the premise that there is not enough to go around of whatever a person needs, even when in fact there is. If the material needs of human beings are in drastic scarcity, it follows obviously that competitiveness is the mode for survival. If there is one loaf of bread daily, evenly shared, to feed twenty families, it is pretty clear that all will starve. If a competitive member of this subgroup manages to obtain the whole loaf of bread for his family, that one family will survive while the others will still starve. The net effect of competitiveness in scarcity is actually a positive one for those who compete and win, and even for the survival of the species. But as scarcity becomes a thing of the past, as it is in the United States, competitiveness actually *creates*

scarcity and hunger. The hoarding behavior which goes along with competitiveness causes certain people to have a great deal more than they truly need, while large numbers of others, who could be satisfied with the surplus of those few who have, go without. Competitive, hoarding behavior is based on unrealistic anxiety based on fears of scarcity. Oppressive as he is to others, the hoarder is himself oppressed by it.

I (Claude) first experienced the relationship of cooperation to scarcity at a large gathering in the Santa Cruz mountains. One evening everyone sat around in a circle in the center of which was the food for dinner. To my scarcity-oriented eyes it did not appear that there was enough to go around. I was alarmed and scared by the prospects of going hungry and in great conflict about the situation. Portions of food began to be passed around the circle, everyone eating from them as much as they wanted and passing them on. The food circulated over and over, and to my amazement, I found that there was actually enough food to satisfy me quite fully. Yet my experience, because of my scarcity-oriented, competitive and individualist training, was one of anxiety and alarm about not being properly fed. As food went by me I took larger bites than I needed; I felt guilty, but I schemed about ways in which I could make certain kinds of food return to me; I worried as food went around the circle as to whether it would reach me again. I ate more than I needed and was,

in short, unable to enjoy the meal because I was so driven by fears of scarcity and feelings of competitiveness.

This anecdote illustrates how we are not only mystified into being competitive and individualistic but into believing that competitiveness and individualism do in some way bring us benefit, when in fact, at this point in our development as human beings, the opposite is often true.

## ORIGINS OF COMPETITIVENESS

Competitiveness is taught us from an early age by our parents, but especially in school. Sports, grades, tests, are all training exercises in competitive skills — mock scarcity situations that prepare us for the business world, for the assembly line, for the job market. Competitiveness is taught to boys in its most blatant form; girls are taught to compete in more subtle, psychological forms.

In the nuclear family we are taught early and hard that there is a scarcity of what we need, and that in order to get what we need we must be better than the next guy. The nuclear family (whether single or double parent) is a perfect training ground for this lesson. There is, in fact, not enough of what children need — attention, time, love, respect, stimulation, praise, space, maybe food — to go

around. If both parents are scrambling to make it in the difficult, highly competitive job market, they are likely to be worn out by the end of the day. This family exists within a society that promotes scarcity — both real and manipulated. It is an unassailable belief in this society that people deserve to have their needs be met on a system of merit. Those who have an unequal share of the goodies (an empty mansion in Pacific Heights, fantastic job, several wonderful lovers) deserve that share because they are harder working (smarter, prettier, morally superior). Those who sleep on the streets must have brought it on themselves. Had they worked harder, drunk less, prayed more, jogged longer, they, too, would have a bed in which to sleep.

When the world's resources are divided in a way that is grossly unequal, an ideology must exist to rationalize the inequities. Otherwise, people could be expected to fight for their equal share. It is this ideology — that there is not enough of what we need to go around and that it is merit that determines how large one's share should be — that invades our minds and hearts. It pits us against each other in a lifelong rivalry. We compete for the material things we need — jobs, food, safety, as well as for life's essential intangibles — love, appreciation, respect, self-regard. For a young child who has no understanding of the difficulties in her parents' lives, or the causes of lack of attention or irritability, the message is simple. “I have to be better,

louder, smarter, bigger, smaller, prettier so Mommy'll pay attention to me." This message is amplified by well-meaning parents who want their children to succeed and reward them for being competitive: "You can count to ten and you're only two. Johnny couldn't count until he was three." "You have such pretty, curly hair. Poor Annie's hair is straight." "Look how cooperative Katie's being — she shares her toys. You're so selfish."

## THE INTERNAL PROCESS: COMPETITION AS INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

People with a progressive stance vaguely understand that competition is a politically incorrect attitude and the source of a lot of difficulties. But when we attempt to translate these beliefs into everyday experience in this most competitive of societies, we're not exactly sure how it all works and what to do about it. We vaguely know that we're competitive, and have a feeling that it's not right, but that's where we usually stop and we remain confused and without a clear idea of how to act.

As the human facts of competition are put into an ideology that is basically constructed to serve the rich and powerful in society, competition becomes not a matter of "running alongside" anymore but of winning. And in order to win, we have to be better, we have to assess where we stand in

relation to others, and we begin to think in terms of what's better and what's worse — good, better or best. We start arranging all the human qualities we consider important (body, intelligence, looks, success, wealth, age, health) along a straight line on which we rank ourselves as being the best, the middle, or the bottom. This ranking does complete violence to reality, since human qualities like intelligence or beauty simply can't realistically be ranked along a linear dimension.

Of course, we never get a chance to rank ourselves as the best unless we win in a competition that pits us against all comers and proves that we have the best body or the strongest biceps or that we are the best salesman or marathon runner. Most people are really not ever going to be the best anyway. So we resign ourselves to being somewhere below the best, and take a position in relation to other people; we do it constantly, day in and day out in all relationships and situations.

What ranking does is reduce the range of human qualities and the options in the areas that we value. Huge numbers of female teenagers worry about nothing but whether their bodies are OK or not, and huge numbers of students in college worry about nothing but whether they're getting A's or are the best in the class. All the other human qualities that are somehow not categorized become irrelevant and get shunted aside.

When we are so heavily inundated by the competitive ideology, every aspect of life becomes a contest; our heads and hearts are never free of the anxious comparisons that fix our place on the endless myriad of scales. We want always to win; we feel usually that we fail.

## One-Up, One-Down

We identify ourselves as being one-up or one-down types. Either we feel we are not good enough, or we feel better than others. People who feel one-down are usually very aware of how competitive they are, of how many there are ahead of them and how low down they are on the scale. Being one-down is an experience that's easy to identify: it is often labeled “low self-esteem,” “weak ego,” “not OK.”

In contrast is the competitive experience of feeling one-up, which is often imperceptible to the one who's feeling it. A one-up competitive person assumes he is better: he knows more, is smarter, healthier, more aware, whatever, than the other person. He behaves accordingly, which may mean that he doesn't behave in any perceptible way at all. One-up transactions are noteworthy for their absence of action. The one-up player doesn't listen, fails to pay attention, does not get uptight. Under all conditions, he remains

calm, relaxed, laid back, because he doesn't really care about what anybody else thinks or wants.
In his mind there runs a constant tape: "He really doesn't know. She isn't really smart enough. They don't have enough money, her car isn't really hot, and his body is not as good as mine." To himself, it appears that he's not doing anything competitive; in fact, he's involved in an intense competition in which he always construes himself to be the winner.

We've described people as "one-up" or "one-down," but in fact everyone shares both of these attitudes. Although people may tend to take one position or the other more habitually, everybody is one-up to some and one-down to others when they are in this competitive system. We can always think of people who are better than us and people who are not as good as us, and we relate to those two groups accordingly.

## FEELING COMPETITIVE

Each one of these positions has associated with it certain feelings. Being one-down is often accompanied by unpleasant physical sensations, such as a driving, burning energy in the stomach and chest. A person often becomes tense and anxious in the presence of the person to whom he feels one-down, as though in the clutch or grip of a pain

that is driving him to be noticed. He feels angry, hurt, or envious, or sometimes he experiences feelings of panic, urgency, shame, fear. The compounding of those emotions coalesces into the one-down feeling of competition.

Being one-up is accompanied by its own set of emotions, this time pleasant, calm, relaxed but also perhaps slightly anxious in the knowledge that this one-up position is tenuous and can be easily lost.

Samuel will usually survey a room to see how he compares with others on a scale of handsomeness. If he thinks he is among the best-looking men, he feels happy, secure, sure of himself and well-disposed toward other people. If he thinks there are several men who are much better-looking than he is, he feels embarrassed, even ashamed. He thinks obsessively about his balding head, and does not speak to anyone in the room.

Nancy, on the other hand, does not notice where she ranks on a beauty scale, but knows exactly how many times she spoke in her history seminar. If she did not speak more often than the other students, or failed to elicit particular praise from the professor, she feels frightened, worried, and disagreeable. She is critical of her colleagues and thinks about dropping out of school. If she is the most vocal in his class, she feels excited and pleased with herself. Obviously, it is fine to be excited and pleased with

oneself; however, when these feelings are dependent upon being the best — one-up to all other people — they become hard to obtain.

The particular stimuli that elicit competitive feelings vary from person to person. While Nancy feels especially competitive for respect in an intellectual environment, her brother may want acclaim for his creativity, emotional stability, talent, physical fitness, moral rectitude, long-suffering, wit, wardrobe or charm. Some people even feel competitive about being politically correct or about being non-competitive.

The precise rank (best, better, good, OK, among the majority, not awful) that a person needs to feel pleased with himself also varies. Samuel, mentioned earlier, needs to be "among the best-looking" on an appearance scale. He does not feel competitive about creativity or talent, but has to be the most sexy and "win the girl." Nancy is plagued with the need to be best in everything she does. Consequently, she does not attempt very much, and feels bad about herself most of the time.

## COMPETITIVE BEHAVIOR

The desire to be best causes us to rely heavily on power plays to get what we want, because with power plays one

can win — or so we think. People who feel one-up in groups often talk too much, interrupt, shout, don't listen, don't address the previous speaker's point, and assume they have the correct approach and need only explain it so that others will eventually agree. One-down behavior in groups is less obviously competitive. Someone may be silent, whisper to a friend, look bored or disapproving, withhold strokes, read a book, listen but say little, withhold opinions while deciding the other people are loudmouths or stupid, leave the meeting and trash people later. The people who remain will be left with a vague feeling of unease that they can't explain.

Acting competitively happens not only in groups, but also in friendship and couple relationships. It is a stunning blow when two people move from the early days of liquid adoration — when comparisons are awe-inspiring (your eyes are so blue, mine so brown, isn't it wonderful!) — to vicious battles of right/wrong, good/bad, one-up/one-down and “I'll tear out those blue eyes if you don't...” This dramatic alteration makes sense when you consider how early love (idealization, adoration) satisfies a competitively one down person. You are finally number one — the most beloved, beautiful, sexy, witty, pleasing — whichever of your competitive categories you prefer. You're in a heaven of feeling good about yourself because of the reflection in your lover's eyes. Inevitably the idealization of each other runs into contradictions. He is grumpy and uninterested.

She's tired and has gas. He gets a pimple, then two. It seems impossible to keep him in the rank he's been assigned. When he loses rank, his ranking of her loses credibility.

She starts to feel bad about herself, critical of him, guilty for being critical, angry about feeling guilty. The competitive battle now begins. This must be somebody's fault. The dimensions of right/wrong, good/bad, success/failure lend themselves perfectly to competitive battles being waged for the long-forgotten goal of feeling really good. This is not to discount the serious content to couples' disagreements (see Chapter 10 on Mediation.) It is just fine to argue about the division of labor in a relationship. But deadly fights about the correct way to take out the trash (dress the baby, cook vegetables) are acting-out competitive feelings.

Identifying competitiveness can be difficult. In the cases of Samuel and Nancy, the comparisons and their results were fairly easy to identify. But often competition is much more subtle. For instance:

1. You're involved in a disagreement and you're sure you're 100% correct. You are without self-criticism. You refuse truly to listen to the other person's position, certain that you understand it and that she is simply wrong.

2. You're feeling bad about a relationship and you're sure it's all your fault. You have no criticism for the other person. You withdraw into hopelessness and resignation.

3. You see a friend that you used to juggle with juggling on the Tonight Show. You suddenly feel sick and go to bed. (This could be the flu, of course.)

4. You're working on a project with two other people and you're positive that what you're doing is superior to what they're doing. You proceed unilaterally, without discussion.

5 In a group discussion, you:

- speak numerous times, before everyone else has had a chance to talk.

- always speak immediately after Paul, with whom you especially disagree.

- do not refer to the content of people's remarks, but state new ideas or disagreements in a declarative manner.

- sit silently, feeling inadequate (the competitive behavior being the withholding of your contribution).

- take notes, writing rapidly when you agree with something said, but keeping your pen conspicuously still when you do not.

- interrupt.

- make faces, laugh, or talk behind your hand to your neighbor, while others are speaking.

6. You are interested in a job (lover, friend, apartment, etc.) that you know also interests your good friend. You silently go about getting it without talking it through together.

7. You know your friend is interested in the same job (lover, etc.) as you are, and so you withdraw from the contest without a word Some months later you realize that you no longer care for your friend, and you silently fade away from the relationship.

8. You comfort your friend (lover, co-worker, etc.) when she is upset, but never tell her when you feel bad or need something from her.

9. You insist on being comforted without trying to reciprocate

10. Your friend says, “I feel so down in the dumps. I just don’t know what would make me feel better.” You comfort him by comparing your own experience: “That must be really hard. I’m never depressed for more than a few minutes. I just have such a strong spirit.” Your friend never tells you when he’s blue again.

11. You meet a new person and she asks you about yourself in some detail. You tell her. You do not ask her about herself. You feel you’ve had a wonderful time, and wonder why she never calls you.

12. You have a habit of not giving strokes, even when you think and feel them.

It is a challenge to expand this list. Once our consciousness is attuned to notice competition, it begins to appear with remarkable frequency. Competitive transactions can be as creative as human ingenuity (which is considerable) allows.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING: Two recent books present thoughtful discussions of these questions:

Alfie Kohn: *The Case Against Competition: Why We Lose in Our Race to Win* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1986)

Valerie Miner and Helen E. Longino, editors: *Competition: A Feminist Taboo?* (The Feminist Press, New York, 1987)

# CHAPTER SEVEN:
# THE RESCUE TRIANGLE

*Sandy Spiker*
*Beth Roy*

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Rescue is a concept that is central to our theory and practice. It describes a common set of transactions that arise from, and contribute to, inequalities of power. *Rescue* in our jargonistic sense does not mean what the dictionary says it does: "To free or save from danger, imprisonment, evil, etc." (*New World Dictionary*). Instead, we are referring to the act of "helping out" more than is actually needed, to an unequal distribution of helping or of self-sacrifice.

Rescue describes transactions involving three roles: the Rescuer, the Victim and the Persecutor.

The Rescuer does more than her or his share of the work, or (in an alternative definition) does something she doesn't really want to do. In relationships molded by sexist role training, for instance, women classically do most of the emotional work — initiating conversations about problems, giving strokes, healing wounds, facilitating

intimacy — while men do more of the work of taking care of business in the world — earning money, fixing cars, planning finances, and so on. Each Rescues in her or his particular way.

The Victim feels that he or she has inadequate power or capability to do her share. She or he must depend on the Rescuer to “help out.” Men who have never had to be tuned in to their own inner lives or to take care of the day-to-day details of domesticity, are thoroughly panicked when their wives vanish (die; pack up and leave; announce a conversion and a new distribution of labor). They may believe that they are not capable of carrying on a one-to-one conversation with the children, or changing a diaper or cooking a meal. And, in fact, they probably are not very capable, because they've had no practice. Women who have never had to negotiate with auto mechanics, or fill out income tax forms, or repair a broken light-switch, are similarly panicked when suddenly faced with the need to do so. It begins to be clear how Rescue and Victim are related; the Rescuer Rescues because the Victim can't do his share. But the more the Victim is Rescued, the less skill she accumulates and the less power she has to do whatever is needed.

But people have a strong urge to be powerful. To feel like a Victim, to be treated like a Victim (with whatever good intentions), sooner or later becomes a disagreeable

experience. Victims get mad and begin to Persecute. “Stop nagging me!” the husband protests angrily. “I'll make up with my friend (ask for a raise/take out the garbage/play with the children/talk about our vacation/etc.) when I'm ready. Back off!” Meanwhile, the Rescuer is victimized by her Rescue. The woman could be having a better time, and getting more rewards, if she took an art class, visited a friend, started a new career, soaked in a bubble bath, rather than hounding her man to talk about his feelings. She loses her power to be truly happy, and she, too, turns to Persecution. “I don't know why; I'm just not turned on to you any more.”

Persecutions come in many forms. They are power plays (see Chapter 1), and they run the gamut from passive (silence, sulking, etc.) to active (yelling, throwing things, hitting, and, at the furthest extreme, homicide).

Because the roles are interlinked, and people move from one to another with a kind of inevitability, we have arranged the roles in a triangle. To diagram Rescue in this way is to indicate that it is a trap, a sort of pointed vicious circle. Once you begin to play, either as a Rescuer or a Victim, you move around the triangle and are compelled to play each of the other roles as well.

The concept of Rescue has been extraordinarily helpful over the years, because it speaks to some of the most

common dynamics of interpersonal transactions in our culture, and because it is a way of analyzing power transactions which are commonly unstated and difficult to articulate.

Parent-child relations, for instance, can be constructively analyzed in terms of Rescue (see Chapter 17): parents see children as being less capable than they are and over-do their "care," tying shoelaces, cooking dinners, nagging about homework and on and on and on. Meanwhile, children rely on parents to do those things and don't do them themselves, and don't learn how. Meanwhile, parents wear out, nag more and more, feel judgmental and become abusive. Meanwhile, children rebel, going slow, making mistakes, being surly, and, when at last they reach adolescence and have grown bodies, become teenage "devils" in all the old familiar ways.

At the same time that the notion of Rescue is helpful, however, it also has a persistent tendency to be misused, to become a new Pig injunction ("Thou Shalt Not Rescue" becomes an eleventh commandment). Moreover, its political implications have been hotly debated, often in ways that have been constructive and clarifying.

## THE POLITICS OF RESCUE

Indeed, we are drawn to Rescue as a working concept in large part because it is intrinsically political. It is a description of the uses and misuses of power in relationships among people who have the possibility of equality, or at least have equal rights to the satisfaction of their needs. These equal rights are the precondition for cooperation (see Chapter 4), and eliminating Rescue is an important part of being cooperative. On the other hand, simply to ask the question whether or not Rescue is applicable as a mode of analysis in a given relationship is to raise crucial questions about power (see Chapter 1). A promise not to Rescue, for instance, cannot by itself eliminate inequities based on institutionalized privilege, such as race, class, sex or age. We must ask what the *real* inequalities of power are, how people may be *actual* victims (with a little "v" ) as opposed to Victims (big "V" ) in the sense of Rescue.

There are two ways in which people are actual victims. The first is to be physically incapable of an action. Small children, for instance, cannot drive automobiles. They cannot lift heavy burdens or prepare elaborate meals, and so on. A person who is disabled and cannot walk may not be capable of climbing a staircase, or of rushing up a hill. Some women lack the physical strength to lift certain weights.

The second way in which people are victims, however, has nothing to do with innate capabilities, but rather is about socially imposed disadvantages. The woman in our example above, for instance, may be frightened of earning a living. Some portion of her fear may be inaccurate, a learned response to her historic dependency. But some part of it is completely accurate. Women's earnings are 60% of men's[5]. A middle-aged woman who has no credentials and who has not worked for most of her adult life will, in fact, have a very hard time finding paid work. The many skills she has amassed in the years of doing domestic labor are not economically valued.

Institutional racism disadvantages people of color. To have a pessimistic view of the future may be a result of an

[5]1978 - 80: 59%. By 1982: 61%. By 1996, 74%; but mostly because of decrease in men’s earnings (figures from Beth Roy).

inaccurate sense of powerlessness. But if you are a teenaged black man in a large American city, if you come from a working-class family, or one where the adults are unemployed, your chances are actually very slim of finding work. The largest cause of death in young black men is homicide. The probability that any given man will reach middle age is very much reduced if he is black. Many studies have demonstrated the greater effort needed by people of color to graduate from college.[6] There is nothing psychological about these facts, although they may certainly have psychological consequences.

To make distinctions between Victims and victims is important. In the one case, help may well be in order, although help, too, must be carefully constructed to avoid indignities and exploitation. In the other case, Rescues beckon, resulting in greater Victimization and, eventually, in Persecution.

## HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT

The concept of Rescue comes directly out of game theory, which Eric Berne developed in *Games People Play*. Berne

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[6] See, for example, Robert Blauner's excellent book, *Racial Oppression in America* (Harper & Row, New York, 1972), and especially his "Case Studies in Institutional Racism."

defined a game as "...an ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome."[7] In other words, games are a set of recurring transactions within which people pursue a hidden agenda. Indeed, "concealed motivation" is one of two essential qualities by which Berne distinguishes games. An insurance salesman, for instance, conceals behind his glad-handing the hidden ambition to "make a killing."

The second defining characteristic of games is the payoff. At the end of the sequence is some "reward," an outcome which is the point of the procedure for the players.

Berne and other Transactional Analysts set about to delineate common games. Steven Karpman postulated that the roles basic to all games are Rescuer, Victim and Persecutor, and that these roles could be arranged in a triangle to indicate the way people switch from one to another. He named his diagram the Drama Triangle.

Radical Psychiatrists were enamored of the concept, both because it is descriptively apt, and because it soon became apparent that the triangle is a paradigm of power. It was generally clear how the Victim and Persecutor roles warranted criticism, but we understood that the Rescuer,

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[7] Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (Grove Press, New York, 1964), p. 48.

too, made noteworthy mistakes, because she took and misused an unwarranted share of power. We renamed the concept the Rescue Triangle, to call special attention to the role of the Rescuer. In the process, we sought to underscore the political implications of the game.

Of our early interest in games, only the Rescue Triangle has survived in use over the years. The test of theory is its usefulness; what is most accurate is also most helpful, and theory which falls short tends to be forgotten in practice. Game theory in general is tainted by an attribution of intent and maliciousness to the players, a position which is the opposite of Radical Psychiatry theory. But Rescue, while not a perfect formulation, continues to be helpful and to occupy a prominent place in our practice.

Concepts similar to Rescue have, in recent years, gained popularity in other arenas. Twelve-step work, for instance, derived from the practice of Alcoholics Anonymous, uses the idea of "co-alcoholics" for those who Rescue an alcoholic and thereby contribute to the addiction. In *Women Who Love Too Much*,[8] Robin Norwood describes the ways in which women try to "fix" their men, taking "too much responsibility" for their partners' emotional

[8] Robin Norwood, *Women Who Love Too Much: When You Keep Wishing and Hoping He'll Change* (Pocket Books, New York, 1985).

availability and in the process losing their sense of self in the service of the relationship. Both these formulations differ from Rescue in the absence of an analysis of power, and their reliance instead on the idea of “dysfunctional” families to explain behavior.

## EXAMPLES OF RESCUE

**In Relationship:** Rescue is a common mode of transaction between parents and children in nuclear families. From the very beginning children are believed to be Victims (see Chapter 17 for many examples). At one time, small infants were fed according to schedules, a practice which assumed that doctors knew better than babies how babies needed to eat. Today, fashions in childrearing show more respect for infants' signals about hunger; feeding has reverted to an “on-demand” philosophy. In general, though, we tend to assume that children are less self-knowing and less capable than they actually are.

Take, for example, the question of helping around the house. Toddlers often like to cook. Mothers, however, who are usually the ones in charge of kitchen-duty, must be patient saints to allow small kids free access to cooking. Kids make a mess, cook inedibly, waste time. They can't reach things in kitchens constructed for adults and need constant help. Moms are overworked, worn out with

boring clean-up duties, worried about the children's getting proper nutrition, conscious of neighborhood judgments about the condition of the kitchen floor. Mother therefore shoes children out of the kitchen, preferring to do it herself. Later, though, she complains that kids don't know anything about cooking, are totally dependent on her for their food preparation, and are hostile to the idea of learning kitchen-skills.

Mothers Rescue by doing more than their share of cooking, based on the assumption that kids are Victims, unable to do for themselves. Kids Persecute, pout and complain about exclusion from the kitchen, and later, Mom having been thoroughly Victimized by cooking her three millionth meal, she, too, moves to Persecution, accusing her kids of being lazy no-goods because they can't cook and won't learn how. Notice, by the way, that what starts this vicious circle with points is a combination of structural and ideological factors. If there were four adults minding the kids, rather than only one or at best two, someone would probably have energy and interest to help children learn their way around the kitchen. If mothering were not the predominant duty of women, if women had more relief from domestic duties, and more strokes outside the home, more “mothers” of both genders would be available to take joy in children's messy learning processes. On the ideological level, if Mom were not under injunction to monitor kids' nutrition, nor self-conscious

about the censure of her community for messy kitchens, she might be able to relax more and let nature take its (messy) course.

Meanwhile, the Rescue is self-fulfilling. With little or no opportunity to learn their way around the kitchen, kids really are Victims, unskilled and convinced, perhaps, of their incompetence. They conclude they are stupid, clumsy, useless, and then Persecute by rebelling against these cruel judgments from without and within. Mom, realizing she has been mean and judgmental after her last outburst, feels guilty. “Good Moms,” she believes, are endlessly patient, and forever willing to “care” for their young. She resolves to “do better,” cooking harder, longer and more alone than ever — in other words, Rescues with ever more conviction — until the next time she is worn out, Victimized, and moves again to Persecute her children.

Dads Rescue, too. Classically, they are called upon to provide more than a fair share of money to the family, a Rescue which gives them a disproportionate share of power. In the process they are Victimized by being excluded from the day-to-day lives of their children. Personal contact with the kids is tainted by their culturally assigned role of “discipliner,” which means to be traffic-cop to the kids. Again Victimized, they miss the sweetness of children's strokes at the same time that they heartily

defend the need for discipline. They come to believe that their kids are really worthless, Persecuting with all the energy of hurt and longing. They feel guilty and take on the role of teacher and provider, or Rescuer, once again.

Heterosexual couples Rescue in classic ways. She is in charge of emotional well-being, while he worries about money, car repairs, and the state of the world. Witness the following recent telephone conversation between lovers:

> She: "Today I saw so-and-so, and I filed papers for such-and-such, and do you remember the plans for this-and-that, well we made major progress, and so-and-so is having a really hard time with this-and-that. So how was your day today?"
>
> He: "Okay."
>
> She: "Okay? What happened today with whosis?"
>
> He: "Nothing. It went okay."
>
> She: "What's the matter?"
>
> He: "Nothing. Everything's fine."

She: “Something's wrong. Your voice sounds funny.”

He: “No it doesn't. I'm fine.”

She: “No you're not. What's the matter? Are you mad at me?”

He: “No.”

Fill in several more passes of the same sort, until finally...:

He: “Well, I guess I am a little irritated at you for calling me at work today when I was busy.”

She: “See! I *knew* something was wrong. Why don't you talk to me? You always keep secrets and make me feel crazy.”

He: “Well, I hadn't realized it. I'd forgotten.”

She: “How can you be so tuned out? You're so out-of-touch with your feelings. I can't stand it any more! (yelling)”

He: “This is why I don't tell you anything. You always flip out. Besides, I didn't want to hurt your feelings.”

Familiar? She Rescues by intuiting that something is wrong and then pursuing it doggedly. Her Rescue is fueled by the fear that she is crazy, a belief that makes her feel like a Victim, and the more he denies that she is on to something, the more she feels crazy, is Victimized. Finally, she Persecutes him, accusing him of emotional idiocy, of being "always" out-of-touch. He, meanwhile, is really a Victim because he is not skillful at emotional transactions. Why should he be, when she does all the work? Moreover, he Rescues her, afraid to hurt her feelings, and afraid of her wrath. Then he turns on her, too, Persecuting her with accusations. Eventually, he surprises her by announcing he is no longer in love with her and wants to end their affair, the final Persecution.

Lesbians and gay men Rescue in many of these same ways, and in some that are peculiar to the ways that men and women are differently socialized in a sexist society. Women, for instance, often Rescue by protecting each other from their critical feelings, by being too ready to compromise, by losing track of their own desires and needs (see Chapter 18).

**In Groups:** It is very common for people working or living together to Rescue by doing more than their share of the work (See Chapter 4). Simon is a firebrand, eating,

sleeping and dreaming The Cause. In his heart of hearts, he believes that nobody understands as clearly as he the true dimension of the problem, and nobody can come up with solutions as clear-sighted as his. He smiles at the others in his group, dutifully accepts their efforts, including criticism, makes superficially motions of including them in the work. But in truth, he is a one-man show.

On a daily basis, he oversees every detail. In discussions about plans and programs, he is several beats ahead of everyone else, makes more suggestions and exercises more energy to get his ideas accepted. He is a good-hearted man, sincerely devoted to his group and their shared Cause. But he does far more than his share of the work.

In turn, his group members depend on him. They, too, believe they could not manage without him, that their ideas are not as clear, their skills less effective, their resolve only a fraction of his. Indeed, they *are* less skilled, because he does so much of the work. They do not think as clearly as he, because he thinks for them; they never have the space to process their own ideas, to sort and refine them, to make mistakes in practice and learn more from the next trip to the drawing-board. Here again, we can see that the Rescue is self-fulfilling.

Eventually, however, people begin to feel bad. For too long, they have thought badly of themselves, believing that

they are inferior to Simon. Moreover, their feelings are hurt that Simon respects their ideas and efforts so little. One by one, they begin to drop out of the group. Some caucus, compare notes and plot a palace revolution. They confront Simon and accuse him of being a power-hungry sexist elitist.

Simon is devastated. After all, he has always had their shared best interests at heart. And he's worked so hard! He concludes that people are hopeless, loses his fervor for the social good and drops out.

This example is an extreme one. But to a greater or a lesser extent, similar dramas are played out in many a group. Simon Rescues, the group members are Victims who eventually Persecute, Victimizing Simon, who in turn Persecutes them and the world with his cynicism.

Often old-timers Rescue newcomers; they have too little skill training new members to share responsibility and power. Women frequently Rescue men in groups by hanging back, allowing them to talk more often. Members of a collective household may collude in Rescuing one person who repeatedly fails to do his chores, covering up for him until one day they band together and kick him out.

Ways of Rescuing in groups are many-hued and imaginative. Often, the first sign of them is in-fighting, factionalization, and eventually splits and burn-out.

## REASONS FOR RESCUE

Most of us are influenced by an ideology of "helping," of what constitutes help and to whom it should be given. So natural do these ideas seem that they are rarely critically examined. It is an ideology based on Judeo-Christian beliefs, and it teaches that we should help others without thinking of ourselves. Ironically, it coexists peacefully with capitalist assumptions of perfect selfishness. Adam Smith and other theorists of capitalism propose the notion that if each individual in a free enterprise system acts exclusively in his own best interest, then the best interest of the community will also be served. Untrammeled competition is supposed to be the mechanism by which the economy grows and a just distribution of resources is accomplished (see Chapter 6).

It is interesting, then, that in an economy propelled by selfishness ("Look out for Number One!"), self-sacrifice is held up as an ideal ("Charity begins at home." "It is more blessed to give than to receive.") To resolve the contradiction we must look at who is to be helped: those "less fortunate" than ourselves. Implicit is an assumption

of superiority on the part of the helper and inferiority on the part of those being helped. “Selflessness,” we can see, is another way of supporting hierarchy. Governed by such a model, we have no need to seek equality. “Helping” in this conception is an outgrowth of inequality, and, in turn, helps to perpetuate it. People are not really helped by “being done for” by others, as the examples above demonstrate. In fact, they are harmed because they are robbed of their power to learn and to help themselves, which reinforces their position and feelings of powerlessness.

In recent years, we have seen a complicated debate within the black community on this subject. Some people want to refuse government assistance, insisting that people of color must improve their own lot, “pull ourselves up by our bootstraps.” What advocates of this position are responding to is the sense of humiliation that has come along with welfare, and the real ways in which it perpetuates disadvantage, ameliorating the consequences without attacking the causes. Others in the community emphasize that the plight of people of color is caused by racism, and that the larger society owes redress. They are often more acutely aware of the institutional ways in which inequality perpetuates itself, and convinced that “bootstrap” operations are destined to fail without more profound and far-reaching social changes. There are dangers on both sides of the debate of “blaming the

Victim," and of compounding powerlessness by relying on changes which only those in power can institute. The concept of Rescue is less than helpful in analyzing problems on this mega-level. But the example does contribute to an understanding of the differences between help and Rescue.

None of which is to say that people can't help each other; of course they can. But an ideology of selflessness mystifies the distinction between help and Rescue. The best kind of help is that which is mutually exchanged, or is asked for and freely given in a manner that allows the person helped to put her best efforts into it, matching the efforts of the helper. "Cooperative helping" is neither selfless nor individualistic; it assumes that both parties have some measure of power to effect whatever outcome is desired, and that each will contribute as much as she or he is able. It is based on the premise that both people have equal rights to happiness and well-being.

Why do so many of us nonetheless Rescue? The reasons are both structural and ideological.

## STRUCTURAL REASONS FOR RESCUE

Let's go back to the example of Mother in the kitchen. The first glaring reason for her Rescue, as we have noted, is her

isolation. She has too much to do, and too little help, to have extra time and patience to let children learn their way around cooking. Jesse, who was raised in a household of four adults, played cooking games especially with one caretaker. Josh, in a family with two primary caretakers and several nearby pinch-hitters, cooked eggs while being carried on his father's hip.

Scarcity of labor often fuels Rescue. So also do institutional arrangements that run counter to people's intentions. Men and women, for instance, more and more often seek to share childrearing and money-earning equally, stopping the traditional Rescues of the genders around these divisions of labor. But when men earn more money for the same number of hours in the work-market, the pressures to revert to the old distribution of roles is great. Time is scarce, good jobs hard to find; it is very easy for the man to work “just a few more hours” at his higher-paying job, while she covers the baby. After all, they really need both the time and the money, and it doesn't make sense for her to have to be away from home a third again as many hours to make the same income. In fact, a couple is lucky to be confronted by this particular problem; maternity and paternity leaves, part-time jobs, job-sharing and other unconventional work arrangements that might foster fathers’ sharing care are only beginning to be available, and are in very great scarcity.

Similarly, between men and women, an enormous array of experiences in childhood promote the divisions of labor that are reflected in common cross-gender Rescues. Girls "gossip," which really means they talk about people, analyze and understand behavior, tune in, and so on — all the work of emotional literacy. Meanwhile, boys play sports, tinker with mechanical toys, and endure teasing that promotes worldly competency and emotional illiteracy. Eventually, his competitive job locks him into an instrumental rather than an affective mode, while her people-related work (as teacher, nurse, waitress, airline hostess, secretary, etc.) all demand emotional fluency. If she tries to tune out his subtle mood changes, she must switch gears from her work life, and so must he if he tries to tune in. (Similar "in-the-world" dynamics between lesbians are detailed in Chapter 18, and Chapter 19 looks at Rescues involving people with disabilities.)

## "PIG"-DRIVEN RESCUE

Rescue, as these examples suggest, is not "original sin." Instead, it is a prison in which people often find themselves locked. But if the bars are real and structural, what turns the key is ideological. Numbers of attitudes and ideas help to shepherd us into the cell, and to keep us there. These ideas are what we call Internalized Oppression, informally known as *Pig* (see Chapter 5).

We have already talked about a generalized philosophy of "selflessness." In day-to-day practice, this philosophy appears as a concept of "goodness." A "good woman" cares about her partner's feelings, intuits them before he knows they exist, spends every moment cooking, cleaning, make domestic harmony, and so on. She may be "liberated," work at any interesting job, but nonetheless believe she should always be interested in hearing the details of his day, and never complain that he rarely asks about hers and doesn't listen when she tells him. A woman who fails in these duties is "selfish, out-of-control, hard, unfeminine." The Pig, in other words, literally polices our actions from inside our heads. Notice that the behaviors that result, the particular Rescues that people do, are socially useful. Men who are busily competing in the marketplace all day do need women to tend the home fires. Women who labor unpaid in the domestic sphere all day, do need men who bring home their wages. Men do so because they believe that "good men" protect and shelter their women and children; that they are responsible for "taking care" of those who are weaker than themselves; that their own needs for human connection, art, and joy are "selfish, wimpy, weak and crazy."

Many other ideas lead to the same behaviors. Jonathan may Rescue, for instance, because he believes Susan is not capable of paying the bills, or because he fears she won't

do it to his satisfaction, that she'll make mistakes in arithmetic and lose track of receipts. He does more than his share as a result, and soon is trapped into the necessity of doing many other tasks: reconciling the checkbook, preparing the taxes, negotiating with the bill collector, and so on.

Susan, on the other hand, may Rescue because she wants something for herself. She wants Jonathan to appreciate her, to give her “strokes,” and so she cooks his favorite meal even though she is exhausted, folds his socks individually, and carefully arranges a vase full of flowers which he never notices.

Jonathan and Susan are a “traditional” couple in their division of marketplace and domestic labor. But consider Judith and Thomas, both of whom work in an alternative grocery store. He may Rescue by being the creative one, the person who dreams of new displays and innovative ways to organize the groups, while she is in charge of dealing with the public, negotiating with the distributors, and so on. He may feel incapable of doing the “hard-nosed” stuff, while she abdicates to him her spontaneity and artistry. Gender role reversals become increasingly familiar in our “alternative” communities, but Rescue goes on and on.

Guilt frequently leads to Rescue. Indeed, we have noted that it is the leg of the triangle that leads back from Persecution to renewed Rescue. Sometimes guilt provokes new Rescues, when people try to “make it up” to each other for imagined transgressions.

Fear also may prompt Rescue. Nancy pretends to be content in her relationship with Marianne because she is afraid that Marianne will be mad at her if she is critical. Marianne, in turn, stops her beloved dancing, because she is afraid Nancy will be jealous and will leave her.

## ALTERNATIVES TO RESCUE

In general, Rescue depends on a disregard for our own feelings. Either we don't know what we truly want, or we dispute our right to get it. Most people learn to pay little attention to their feelings, because they are not taken seriously by others, or are considered to be “wrong” (crazy, inconvenient, selfish, and so on), or because the ways in which they have been Rescued in the past have trained them to tune out (as in the examples of men who have given over emotional caretaking to their women and never learned to do it themselves).

Even when we do know what we want, however, often we believe we have no right to ask for it. We think we can get

along without strokes, while our partner is too fragile and needs to be "pumped up." We think we haven't worked hard enough, been smart enough, acted reasonably enough, to have earned the right to be taken care of. We think others are better people and deserve to come first.

In general, then, Rescue means giving something up, "self-sacrifice." The idea of stopping Rescue is not a very helpful one; it is difficult to know how not to do something, particularly when the reasons *to* do it are as compelling as we've indicated they are. What is needed, instead, is an alternative. If Rescue depends on giving up our wants, the opposite would be to talk directly and honestly about what we want. We counsel people to escape the Rescue Triangle by "asking for 100% of what you want 100% of the time." To do so is not the final solution. But it is the first step in a negotiation, a cooperative process of discussion and creative compromise.

It is crucial to note that cooperative compromise can only occur in a cooperative relationship, one in which exist equality and a willingness on everyone's part to be cooperative (see Chapter 4).

People sometimes seek to "stop Rescuing" their bosses, or to "ask for 100% of what they want" from someone who is in a competitive struggle with them, and then are surprised and disappointed that the boss or competitor

counters with a killing power play. Hierarchical and cooperative relationships are fundamentally different; we want to emphasize strongly the need to distinguish one from the other.

In a cooperative relationship, however, for each person to communicate what she wants is the first step. Once all the relevant information is available to everybody, together they can figure out how to give each one a close approximation of satisfaction. Sometimes, people want much the same things, and resolution is easy. But other times, people's desires may be contradictory. The project then becomes one of finding a solution acceptable to all. This process is an art — a creative act based on hope (in the possibility that such a solution can be found) and goodwill (the belief that everyone has an equal right to satisfaction, and that the others will work as hard to protect your right as you do to protect theirs).

Sue, for example, is on the verge of Rescuing Paul by agreeing to go to his office party when she doesn't really want to go. Instead, she gathers her courage in hand and tells him the truth.

Paul may be relieved. Perhaps he was Rescuing her by inviting her, when he actually preferred to be there alone, without having to introduce her to people he knows and she doesn't.

But maybe he really does want her to be with him: "I'm disappointed. I've been looking forward to my office crowd's meeting you; I feel proud of you, and also I think you'd like Tom and Evelyn a lot and have been wanting to get you together."

Sue thinks through the reasons for her reluctance: "I'm afraid I'll be bored. You all know each other well, and I've never met most of these people. When we ran into Steve on the street that day, you guys talked shop and I felt excluded."

> Paul: "Is there something I could do that would make the party fun for you?"
>
> Sue: "Well, maybe you could brief me on people in advance, and then tell people one or two things about me when you make introductions, so they'll have some clues about starting a conversation."
>
> Paul: "That's fine. What I'd like is for you to tell me if you're not having a good time. I'll be willing to leave pretty quickly if it's not fun for you after you've tried."

Sometimes, these sorts of conditional compromises are not possible. If Teddy wants to see the movie at the Roxy, while Sam is dying to go to the one at the Fox, neither is

likely to be consoled by popcorn if he’s given up seeing the film he wants. But Sam might be willing to trade his movie for first choice of a restaurant. Or Teddy may give up the Roxie this time if they go to his film next time. The art here is to watch the concessions made over time, so that ultimately they equal out.

What is important is that the solution arrived at is mutually acceptable, that each person has access to all relevant information and is making a free choice.

The process is similar in groups, although there are likely to be even more possibilities for solutions. When there are enough people involved, the likelihood is greater that someone will enjoy doing a particular task that others dislike; people won't need to Rescue. If not, the disagreeable deed can be shared around, so that no one is too oppressed by it.

What is often frightening in groups is the moment of truth when someone who has done a major share of the work pulls back. Suzanne has been the person who generally volunteers to book the hall, design the brochure, sort the bulk mailing, write the checks, and so on. When she realizes she is furious, and becomes self-critical of her Rescue, she decides she wants to stop doing most or all of those tasks, that she's been further Rescuing by not asking to do the more appealing jobs: presenting material, brainstorming about ideas, and so on.

Anti-Rescue is one possible move for Suzanne here. One day shortly before the conference she appears at a meeting and announces that she has had a revelation: she's been Rescuing, and has decided not to finish any of the work. Since she's always done it, however, nobody else in the group knows where the printer is, how much money is owed to the conference center, what the registration system is. They are truly Victims, because they have given over all that responsibility (and, it now appears, power) to Suzanne. The morally-superior position of anti-Rescue ("It's not good for the group for me to continue this Rescue..." ) is actually veiled Persecution ("...so ____ you!").

But even if Suzanne is more cooperative, announces her desire for a change and trains people to take over and waits until the task at hand is completed, her fellow group-members may be frightened at the withdrawal of her seemingly crucial energy.

This juncture is familiar to many people working in well-meaning, progressive, socially responsible groups. The hard truth is that, if a group's work depends on the disproportionate overwork of a few members, then the group is doing something intrinsically wrong. Political Rescue is a very common affliction. We work too hard because we think the world needs us to do it, will not

survive without our correct analysis of the problem and irreplaceable endeavors. The result is burn-out and another important worker lost to a good cause. As hard as if often is to accept, the fact is that, if our political agenda is fundamentally sound, we can usually afford to adjust the amount of work downward, or new people may come forth to do them, or the historic moment is not yet come (or already past) to do the work. Indeed, as we have seen in some of the above examples, Rescue often discourages participation and diminishes the amount of labor available to a group. The tension between political vision and vigor on the one hand, and Rescue on the other, is a constructive one. To discover oneself in the middle of a political Rescue is an opportunity to re-evaluate the essence of the politic.

Thus, an analysis of the Rescue triangle suggests a new model for helping based on equality. Understanding Rescue is an important basis for cooperation, as both a theoretical position and a working tool.

# CHAPTER EIGHT:
# EMOTIONAL LITERACY

*Claude Steiner*

*This chapter is excerpted from* When a Man Loves a Woman *(Grove Press, New York, 1986). It was written as a guide to men in relationships with women. The chapter will be revised and updated for this volume, to include new thinking and more recent questions.*

The term *literacy* is ordinarily applied to the capacity to read and write. But it can also be applied to the knowledge of other matters, including emotions. Emotional literacy, the capacity to understand and deal with emotions, is a skill that women value highly when it is present in men.

An emotionally illiterate man will not know his own emotions and what causes them. He will have no control over the extent to which his emotions express themselves. He will not be aware of other people's feelings and what causes them. And when other people express themselves emotionally, he will not know what to do. An emotionally illiterate person will not be able to communicate his emotions and will not know what to do when he is overwhelmed by them.

Consider Lucas, a 38-year-old accountant who consulted me with his wife for a mediation of their marital difficulties. His wife, Clara, had just given a tight-lipped, tearful account of her anger and hurt about the way things were between them. I turned to him. He looked stiff and uncomfortable.

> “How do you feel, Lucas?”
>
> “Well, I feel that she is being unfair.”
>
> “Okay. We'll talk about that later, when we get your point of view, but how does the way she talks make you feel?”

He hesitates, wriggles in his chair, thinks. Finally, looking embarrassed, he adds:

> “I guess I don't feel anything.”
>
> “I doubt it. Let's see, do you have any sensations in your body? Some people feel lumps in their stomach, funny sensations...”
>
> “Well, I feel sort of numb all over. Not now so much but when she was talking.”
>
> “Good, what else?”
>
> “And I also feel a tight band around my forehead.”
>
> “Okay. Do you think that it makes you angry when she talks like that?”
>
> “Yeah, angry, I suppose.”
>
> “How about hurt?”

"I guess so...Yeah, hurt and angry," he says with emphasis.

Lucas' answers are a fairly typical example of garden-variety emotional illiteracy. He eventually learned a great deal about his emotions and Clara's.

At the other extreme of the literacy scale, an emotionally aware man will be conscious of experiencing a variety of emotions at a variety of intensities. He will know what he feels and why. For instance, when he is afraid, he will know when he is mildly anxious or when he is terrified, and he will know why. He will also know how to make these feelings clear to others, as well as *how* and *when* to express them most productively. If another person is not expressing emotions freely, he will know how to investigate what they are. He will know the effect of the combinations of his and another person's emotions, and be able to avoid those situations in which feelings escalate catastrophically. On the other hand, he will also know how emotions can combine between people in a harmonious and positive manner.

A person who cannot read often becomes afraid and defensive about his incapacity and fakes understanding out of embarrassment. Illiterate persons tend to invalidate the importance of reading and writing and often become anti-literate and discount the value of the written word. People who are illiterate often try to compensate in other ways; they try to live a normal life outside of the realm of letters. However, they are never able to escape the fact that they are unable to understand or communicate through the written word.

Likewise, emotionally illiterate persons are often embarrassed by their incapacity and attempt to compensate for their handicap through logical and rational methods. They discount emotions as being meaningless and useless and are embarrassed and defensive when their incapacity is revealed. Since emotional illiteracy is the rule rather than the exception, the anti-emotional consensus acts as a powerful reinforcement of the illiterate condition.

After some months of work, Lucas, reflecting on his emotional upbringing, said: "I remember as a boy being proud of acting like my father and not like my mother. I even imitated how he sat when my mother hassled him with tears and scenes. Later, in the service, I was proud of being very calm, not ice-cold like some guys but calm. We all had contempt for guys who got excited or upset. I notice, lately, that soldier movies make a big thing out of the sergeant having feelings. Ours didn't, I'll tell you that for sure."

The consequences of emotional illiteracy are many. On one hand, when emotions are not acknowledged but are instead suppressed, human relationships become one-dimensional, cold, and simplified.

Rationality and logic prevail at the overt public level. Interactions seem "civilized" and "grown up." But barely hidden beneath the surface, emotions do continue to exist and create the effects of their presence. When suppressed, pent-up emotions distort thinking and communication, produce erratic behavior, and even create physical symptoms such as head-, back-, and stomach-aches and chronic conditions like arthritis, ulcers, colitis, and hypertension. Heart disease and some forms of cancer may also be the result of inadequately expressed feelings, as can be depression and addiction to drugs.
As emotionally illiterate human beings, many men discount and deny their emotions. When we lose track of what we really want in order to go along with other people's wishes, we eventually become angry and persecute them. When events hurt or sadden us and we cannot cry, that sadness becomes the bedrock of our personality. We become walking dead, forever depressed and joyless. When our impulse to embrace, love, kiss and celebrate our loved ones is denied, our hearts shrink. We become attached to inanimate objects that we can then love, discard, and replace with minimal pain.

Our lives may appear to be orderly, productive, and well-organized, but our emotions are in shambles. Our homes, bedrooms, and kitchens are neat and clean, but our closets are piled high with psychic junk and our basements are cluttered with emotional dung. We understand the trajectory of rockets and bombs. We can compute megadeaths.

But we cannot direct our loving energies at home, at the office, or across the negotiating table. We have the most advanced medical system in the world, but we have forgotten how to die with dignity.

Alienated from their emotional nature, people become living dead—alive physically but morally deceased. Emotions are unavailable to the emotionally illiterate, but power isn't. Being unaware and unconcerned with feelings gives people a heartless advantage over others who are restrained by their scruples. And when the living dead acquire power, as they so often do, they subject the rest of us to their control, power plays, and violence. When the emotionally illiterate inhabit the corridors of power and dominate whole governments, they threaten the citizenry with apocalypse—war, death, hunger, and disease.

## EVALUATING YOUR EMOTIONAL LITERACY

More concretely, I may love a woman and she may love me. We may be fantastic lovers and make fabulous love, but unless we understand and effectively deal with our emotions, our relationship will deteriorate. It'll either unravel relentlessly until there's nothing but loose ends, or it'll become a trap from which only divorce or death can release us.

You may wonder where you stand on the emotional literacy scale. Here is a questionnaire that may help you find out:

1. Do your feelings sometimes get out of control? Anger? Tears? Depression? Do your feelings puzzle you? Are you unable to understand them?

2. Do you sometimes feel empty inside, or dead—that you are missing something very important in life?

3. Do people complain that you lack feeling, that you are cold? Arrogant? Rejecting?

4. Do you find that most of your relationships with women are like turns at the bat—“Three strikes and you're out!” ? Do you have trouble getting involved with a woman beyond a few dates?

5. Do you experience your feelings of love coming and going inexplicably and uncontrollably?

6. Are you embarrassed asking for what you want or talking about being hurt? Do you have trouble saying, “I love you” ?

7. Do you avoid emotional situations like goodbyes or people who are grieving or sick? Do you have trouble crying? Are you embarrassed when someone shows affection for you in public?

If you answered yes to these questions, you have some of the most common symptoms of emotional illiteracy. The more of these experiences you are familiar with, the more you will be able to profit from this section of the book.

## WHAT WE FEEL AND WHY

To be emotionally literate we need not only to feel, but to know. We need to know both what it is that we are feeling and what the causes for our feelings are. It is not sufficient to know that we are angry, guilty, happy, or in love. We also need to know the origin of our anger, what causes our guilt, why we are in love.

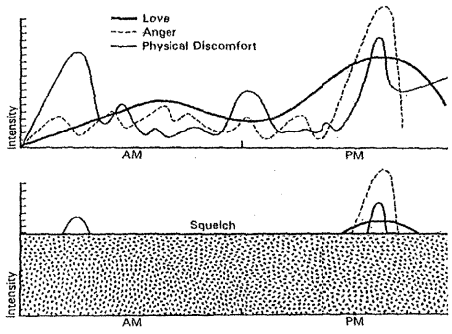
Let's begin by learning to determine *what* we are feeling. There is no convincing final word on precisely how many different emotions there are; an exact taxonomy remains to be developed. But it is fairly clear that there are at most

three handfuls of primary emotions—that is to say, emotions that are reasonably distinct from each other—including love, anger, fear, joy, shame, guilt, pride, sadness, hurt, confidence, and hatred.

To begin with, emotions can be divided into positive and negative, depending on whether we seek them or avoid them because they give us pleasure or pain. Every positive emotion seems to have a negative counterpart. For example, love is the positive counterpart of hatred. Shame is a negative emotion; pride is the positive counterpart. Likewise, guilt and self-righteousness, hurt and well-being, sadness and happiness, fear and confidence—all line up on the positive and negative sides of the same spectrum. When two or more primary emotions occur simultaneously, they combine into secondary emotional hues. Love can occur with shame or with anger or even with its counterpart, hate. When more emotions are added, they can create such a muddy experience that chaos and confusion are the consequence. Jealousy is often such a compost of emotions—anger, fear, shame, love, sexual desire—that it is both incomprehensible and unmanageable.

Emotions can also be strong or weak. Each of the emotions mentioned above has powerful and weak manifestations. For instance, anger can go from minor irritation to blind rage. Shame can go from slight embarrassment to intense blush-provoking humiliation. People who are emotionally illiterate may recognize their emotions only at the very intense end of the spectrum.

*Figure 1* *The Squelching of Feelings and the Resulting Contents of Consciousness*



Men, for instance, are often either completely unaware of mild forms of anger or unable to speak about them. Yet, when they get angry enough, men will express their anger and know that they are feeling it. The same is true of men's awareness of and capacity to express their feelings of love. Men have a tendency to feel love only when it is at the very intense end of the spectrum, and to feel it very intensely but, when the feeling wanes, suddenly find themselves utterly out of love.

As in a CB radio, where all signals of a certain intensity or less are completely suppressed and only those that are strong enough will break through and be heard, people with a high level of emotional squelch will experience themselves as having no major feelings for the most part of their waking lives. With the exception of sudden breakthroughs at certain dramatic moments, they experience their lives as rational and emotionally free. They tend to see occasional experiences of irrepressible emotion as unpredictable, highly unwanted disruptions in their everyday lives, and are not aware of the constant interplay of emotions below the level of consciousness that is the cause for the outbursts.

Figure 1 is a graphic example of what I am trying to explain. In a typical day, Lucas may have many emotions taking place in his body, but he is aware of only the tips of his emotional iceberg; one brief experience of love in the morning; another of anger in the afternoon.

Another example: A man who is in love with a woman who is being less than candid about her affections for another man may, after weeks or months, suddenly explode into a jealous rage. The blinding feeling that overcomes him is a combination of strong emotions: of love and anger because of her unfair treatment, of envy and jealousy because he feels that she is giving her love to another, of humiliation because of his powerlessness, and of rage because of her deceit. All of these together will be experienced as an amorphous and overwhelming emotional chaos that he'll likely want to suppress because of its unmanageable nature.

If he had been more emotionally literate, he might have noticed his feelings several weeks before and expressed, rather than hidden, them. He would have known the specific feelings involved and their intensity and how they combined with each other. That is:

1. He is very much in love,

2. He feels needy of her attention,

3. He is suspicious of his beloved's relationship with another, and

4. These three feelings—love, neediness, and suspicion—led to fear, hurt, and anger and combined into jealousy.

Knowing this, he might have been able to express these feelings earlier when they were at a much lower level of intensity. If he had, she might have changed the course of her actions: She might have been more aware that he really loves her. She might have decided to treat him more honestly and clarified her feelings about him. One way or another his expressions of feeling could have made the uncontrollable breakthrough less likely and also could have alerted her to his feelings so that she could do something about them. But how was he to determine these emotional facts when he didn't really know about his feelings in the first place?

## LEARNING EMOTIONAL LITERACY

There is a strong tendency in our culture to denigrate the learning of emotional skills, especially for men. A man who wants to learn about these matters is not going to receive a lot of support in his everyday life.

Learning emotional literacy in our unsympathetic environment will be difficult. Expressions or inquiries about emotions will be deflected or discounted, and there won't be many interested in assisting with the task. It's important to remember that in order to learn emotional literacy it is helpful to be in an emotionally nurturing environment in which people applaud and support the learning of these skills. Therefore, a major first step is to find such an environment.

Friends, church groups, men's groups, a human potential workshop, or a supportive therapy group can be the source of backup for men who want to learn emotional literacy. A nurturing lover can be very helpful, of course, but should not be the only support, since emotional learning can be exhausting for the teacher. It's a good idea to take the pressure off the single lover, who can then be helpful without being central to the process. There are also situations in which whole families and groups of people are open to emotional dialogue; such cooperative environments are ideal for learning emotional literacy.

Like any complex skill, it takes time and patience to learn emotional literacy. Ideally, it would be learned during childhood in an emotionally literate environment. When it's not, as is generally the case, several complications emerge. First, when learning does not occur at the developmentally appropriate age, it will be more difficult later. Second, while failing to develop the skill, the child will probably develop poor habits that will need to be unlearned before learning can occur. When people learn to play an instrument or type or read on their own, they often have to go through a difficult period of unlearning counter-productive habits before further effective learning can occur.

This is also true of emotional literacy: it is more difficult to learn later in life and requires unlearning certain bad emotional habits that interfere with it. However, while difficult, the task is far from impossible given the desire and resolve to do so.

## UNLEARNING EMOTIONAL POWER ABUSE

Emotions have power. They have an impact that at times can be overwhelming to others. We are aware of the power of emotions when we hold them back so as not to upset their target. We abuse power when we unload them without warning on the unwary, unprepared, or unprotected.

We further abuse our emotions' power when we use them in power plays that are a sort of emotional blackmail, a tactic used to intimidate others into some form of compliance. To give our feelings more power and justification, we couple them with judgments, accusations, exaggerations, and lies, and we wield them like clubs.

For instance, when John is slow in doing the evening's dishes, Mary would do best to say something like: “John, we agreed that if I cooked, you would do the dishes, and you are making me angry the way you are dragging the job out; please do as we agreed and finish the dishes.”

But because she is feeling frustrated and powerless, and in order to get him to do as they agreed, she might say: “Goddammit, John, I am getting sick and tired of your dragging your feet. I can't believe how far you'll go not to do your share around here; you are setting a fine example of laziness for the kids, is all I can say...”

Common sense indicates that other people affect us emotionally. Yet, it has been said that it is not possible for one person to make another person feel something. Some pop psychologists argue that only you can make yourself happy, for instance, or that if someone gets you angry, it's only because you allow it. According to this theory, John and Mary are ultimately and completely responsible for how they feel.

When you think about this, however, it seems obvious that one person's actions can create emotions in another. If Mary suddenly starts yelling about the dishes in the middle of a pleasant conversation with John, he is very likely to react emotionally. Perhaps after being scared, he will feel hurt, and after feeling hurt, he will be angry. Meanwhile

John's feelings are affecting Mary, who might respond with guilt, anger, or hopelessness. All these reactions will be the consequence of Mary's outburst. Emotions have real energy that sets up a powerful field of influence and affects people in its physical vicinity.

John, for example, has practically no choice but to feel scared when Mary suddenly shouts at him about the dishes. The hurt and later anger may be optional, but all three feelings are the consequence, to some extent, of her behavior.

A common response of an emotionally illiterate person to another person's feelings is to disclaim responsibility. If John is scared, hurt, or angry, Mary's reaction may be "That is your problem," or "You are choosing to be angry," because she feels no duty to respond or react to them. This discounts the whole realm of emotional responsibility and flies in the face of the obvious interconnections between people. Women often complain of such responses coming from men and feel them to be major obstacles to emotional dialogue.

The truth is that we are able to cause feelings in other people, and they can cause feelings in us. That capacity can be abused when we assault each other with anger, or try to create guilt with our hurt. Only when this is acknowledged can an emotionally literate dialogue occur. To deny this fact is a form of emotional illiteracy.

People are intimately affected by each other's emotions, whether or not these emotions are fully acknowledged. In fact, it is probably true that the less the emotions are discussed, the more they are discounted and the more they affect their hosts.

The discounting of emotions can take several forms. On one hand we can discount our own. We may know that we are feeling something, but we purposely brush it aside. Doing this can lead to the gradual loss of awareness that we are feeling at all. On the other hand, we can discount other people's feelings. Here again we may be aware that another person is having a strong emotion and decide to ignore it, or we may have lost the capacity of being aware of other people's feelings altogether.
Even when discounted, however, the emotions continue. People think they interact rationally, but at the same time, at a very real but unacknowledged level, the emotional dialogue proceeds on another channel with its own puzzling consequences. One major consequence of discounting emotions is that they can stimulate each other and snowball and eventually rage out of control. Some people feel that emotional outbursts of this sort are a healthy blowout that cleans the system of emotional trash. In a way, it is true that such outbursts release some of the tension of discounted feelings, but usually somebody gets hurt in the process, often women or children, leaving behind emotional wounds and scars that sometimes never heal.

It takes emotional literacy to understand and direct the emotional dialogue, the feeling content of a relationship. Consider the following statement:

"You have been *absolutely impossible* today. I'm ready to *throw in the towel.*"

This sentence, said in anger, contains an exaggeration ("absolutely" ), a judgment ("impossible" ), and a metaphor ("throw in the towel" ). Clearly, the person is angry and probably has reason enough, but the power plays with which the anger is expressed are an example of emotional illiteracy.

The above statement is unlikely to communicate what the person is really feeling, how intensely, or why. It is even less likely to bring about a solution to the problem that evidently exists between the two people. It is more likely to invite a response in kind. For example:

"Oh, yeah? Well have you looked at yourself in the mirror lately? You have been such a bitch that you're lucky I'm still around. Go ahead, leave, see if I care, but do it soon because I may be gone by the time you do..." etc.

Again, this response contains no clear message of what the person is feeling, how strongly, or why. Instead, it is an escalation of chaotic emotions (hurt and anger, self-righteousness, power plays, blaming, insults, name-calling, exaggeration, threats, and judgments). Much better would be to say: “Now wait a minute. I want to say something. When you talk like that, when you say that I have been absolutely impossible and talk about throwing in the towel, that makes me really angry, you hurt my feelings, and you scare me. What is your point? What is bothering you?”

This last statement may seem clumsy but it is an emotionally literate response that will produce positive problem-solving responses. It avoids three major errors by doing the following.

1. It *warns* the recipient that something is about to be said, and therefore, it is more likely to fall on sympathetic ears. (“Now wait a minute. I want to say something.” )

2. It *describes* the *emotions* being experienced without judgments, accusations, exaggerations, or power plays. (Angry, hurt, scared.)

3. It *describes* the *actions* that are the cause of the emotions beings felt, thus leaving little doubt about the reasons for the feelings. (“When you talk like that, when you say that I have been absolutely impossible and talk about throwing in the towel.” )

By doing all of the above without judgments, or power abuse, this way of talking creates an optimal climate for emotionally literate, problem-solving dialogue.

## DEALING WITH EVERYDAY EMOTIONAL TRANSACTIONS

To deal with some of the major emotional issues ordinarily not attended to in people's everyday social transactions, it is necessary to know:

1. What and how strongly we feel.

2. What other people are doing to contribute to how we feel.

3. Our intuitive suspicions and explanations about what causes other people's actions.

4. What it is that we want and don't want from people.

5. How to listen to and assimilate all of the above when we are the recipient.

For instance, after a hard day's work, Anthony comes home and finds that Sandy, instead of being home as he hoped, is working late with a new account. Anthony is disappointed, hurt, frustrated. He wants to strangle Sandy, her boss, and the new account. Realizing that he is irrationally angry, he suppresses his fury. He suspects that the boss is keeping Sandy at the office because he is turned on to her and that she reciprocates his attraction. He assumes that the two of them and the new account are having a rip-roaring dinner party at his favorite new restaurant.

When she finally comes home, he is calm but sullen and lifeless. He responds with irritation to her enthusiasm about the new account and does not acknowledge her apology for leaving him stranded.

The essentials of an emotionally literate dialogue require that he:

1. Tell her how he felt when he got home—hurt, angry, humiliated.

2. What she did that caused his feelings—stay out late with the boss on short notice.

3. What he suspects is going on with the boss—carrying on a flirtation.

4. What he wants her to do next time—call him at work and give him some warning.

If, in turn, she responds in an emotionally literate way, she will:

5. Listen sympathetically without defensiveness, acknowledge how he feels, and validate whatever truth there may be in his suspicions.

If all these steps are taken, the likelihood is that this difficult situation will be dealt with in a positive way, and that Anthony and Sandy will be able to continue their relationship in harmony. If not, and emotional chaos is allowed to take place, this incident could be the beginning of the disintegration of their relationship.
And now for the basics of emotional literacy.

Here are some simple exercises that break down the process of learning emotional literacy, step by step. They are like training wheels on a child's bicycle that make the complicated task easier to master.

The seven basic steps are:

1. Asking for permission to deliver an emotionally laden statement.

2. Making a statement without judgment or accusation in which we inform another person of how we felt in connection with what he or she did.

3. Accepting without defensiveness another person's statement about how our actions felt.

4. Telling another person of an intuition, theory, or suspicion about what he is doing or why he is doing it.

5. Validating another person's intuition, theory, or suspicion by searching for its truth rather than denying it.

6. Apologizing for committing an error.

7. Accepting an apology.

**1. Asking for Permission:** Whenever you are planning to say anything relating to your emotions, whether positive or negative, always prepare the person, preferably by specifying what you are about to say.

Example: “Can I tell you something I like about you?” or, “I have been feeling something that upsets me lately. Can I tell you?” or, “There is something going on between us that I don't like. Are you interested in hearing about it?”

When asking a person's permission to speak in this manner, we are: a) giving him a warning that something difficult is coming; b) giving him a choice as to whether he wants to deal with it at this time, and; c) giving him a chance to prepare himself and be ready to listen. When we follow this approach, we are ensuring that our statements will fall on fertile soil and will have a chance to generate productive responses. There has to be a genuine choice. We need to be willing to accept that the timing of our statement might not be particularly good and to wait for a better moment. Also, we are avoiding, as far as possible, guilt, defensiveness, and anger in the other person.

**2. Making an Action/Feeling Statement:** An action/feeling statement describes in one simple, understandable sentence what emotion occurred in connection with another person's action. "When you [*action*], I felt [*emotion*]." This statement is designed to inform the person of an emotion or emotions you had in association with his or her behavior. It is designed not to provoke guilt or defensiveness because it contains no judgment, accusation, or reproach.

An action/feeling statement simply states that a verifiable action resulted in an undeniable feeling.

For instance:

John: "When you wanted to stop talking on the phone last night, I felt hurt at first, and then angry."

Assuming that Mary can agree she hung up the phone yesterday, and that she understands how John felt (hurt and angry), this statement will have been successful in its purpose: to provide Mary with information about how John felt last night when she hung up. It is a way for John to be heard, and to express his feelings in a way that doesn't hurt or abuse Mary.

In the expression of an action/feeling statement, a number of errors can be made.

***Error A: Confusing Action and Motivation***. When attempting to describe an action, it is possible to go beyond a simple statement, such as, "When you hung up the telephone," or "When you arrived late," or "When you interrupted me," and add to it a judgment, such as: "When you so *rudely* hung up on me," or "When you *humiliated* me by being late," or "When you *showed your disregard for my opinion* by interrupting me." One thus includes information of a completely different nature than the description of an action. These judgments constitute a theory about the other person's motivation and a judgment about those reasons. These elaborations are likely to get you into trouble because they may be incorrect and because they judge and blame and will create guilt, anger, and other complications that it is the purpose of this exercise to avoid. Step No. 4, outlined below, is designed to express these intuitions, fears about other people's motivation, and paranoid fantasies. But these should not be included with the action/feeling statement so as not to cloud the emotional landscape.

***Error B: Confusion of Feeling and Thought***. In trying to express a feeling, we often name a thought instead.

For instance: "When you interrupted our conversation, *I felt that you were angry*," or, "When you interrupted our conversation, *I felt that you weren't interested in what I had to say*."

These aren't feelings at all; they're again thoughts, theories about what was going on with the other person at the time. A proper feeling would be anger, fear, or shame, in varying degrees.

A more subtle version of this confusion is a statement such as: "When you interrupted our conversation, *I felt rejected*," which is an error as well.

"Feeling rejected" is not really a statement of a feeling and does not give an idea of what you were feeling. Were you angry? Were you sad? Were you embarrassed? Were you ashamed? When you say that you *felt* rejected, you are saying that the other person rejected you, and you are stating a theory about the other person's motivation: a desire to reject you. This is a thought rather than an emotion. No one can argue with you if you say that you experienced a certain feeling, assuming that you are being truthful. But a theory about why the other person is doing something may be incorrect.

**3. Accepting an Action/Feeling Statement:** For an emotionally literate communication to be effective, it has to be received as well as sent. You might ask yourself why Mary should care about John's feeling. You might tell yourself that this kind of disclosure is self-indulgent and immature. But that would be discounting John's feelings, and we already know the kind of trouble ignoring people's feelings can cause. An emotionally literate recipient of such an expression will take careful note of the emotion and when it happened. Mary may already know that John was angry and hurt, or she might be surprised. She may understand why he feels this way, or she may be puzzled by it. In any case, all she needs is to have the information and to acknowledge it. Then she can start the process of emotional dialogue in which feelings are given proper recognition. By doing this, Mary learns about John's responses to the situation, and she gives him an opportunity to let go of his bad feeling.

In the above case of Mary and John, it will suffice for Mary to acknowledge that, yes, she understands that when she wanted to stop talking, John felt hurt and angry. This acknowledgment can be in the form of a nod or by saying, "I hear you," or "I understand that when I ended the conversation, you felt hurt, and then angry."

But let's say John says, "When you so rudely hung up yesterday, I felt that you didn't care even a little bit for me."

In order to extract an action/feeling statement from the above, Mary will have to ignore the judgments and accusation.

She might respond, "Now wait, let me get this straight. You are saying that when I stopped our conversation yesterday, which I remember doing, you felt something, but I don't know what. Were you angry?"

> "No, I felt you were being rude."
>
> "Okay, your opinion is that I was being rude, but would you be willing to tell me how you felt? I'm interested in how you felt at the time."
>
> "I don't know. I felt that you didn't like me."
>
> "Well, you still haven't told me how you felt."
>
> "Hurt, and then angry."
> "Okay, now I know what I wanted to know; you felt hurt and angry."

By now, you, dear reader, may say: "People don't talk like that in the real world, maybe in California, but not anywhere I know. I'm not willing to talk like that. I'd be embarrassed to death."

That's a fine action/feeling statement: "When speaking in an emotionally literate way, I feel embarrassment." I recognize the problem and can only agree with you: People don't usually talk that way and it is embarrassing and difficult at times. What can I say beyond *that it works?*

What does it do? It creates a favorable climate for emotional expression coupled with rationality. It cools down unruly emotions, gives people an opportunity to express those emotions in a way least likely to result in further hurt, and lays the groundwork for further safe, productive, emotional dialogue. It informs people of each other's emotional topography—the lay of the land in the world of their feeling—so that they can more easily find their way around in it in the future.

***Error C: Defensiveness and Guilt.*** The ever-present danger in being the recipient of another's feeling/action statements, especially if imperfectly formulated, is guilt and defensiveness.

“I thought you were done talking; that's why I wanted to stop;” or, “Rude? What's so rude about ending a conversation? You were being rude by talking on and on about your troubles with Anne;” or, “Angry? You have a lot of nerve being angry. I should be angry about the waste of my time;” or, “Hurt? Don't be so self-indulgent;” and so on.

These responses are beside the point. First things first. If Mary feels misunderstood, guilty, or angry, she can talk about that later. Right now what matters are John's feelings, not Mary's. It is just a matter of taking turns. First, it is important that Mary acknowledge what John felt when she wanted to stop talking. Then, she can talk about how she felt.

Sometimes not being defensive is very difficult. It requires biting one's tongue and talking oneself into patience and forbearance. But it is worth doing for the sake of a continuing orderly dialogue. It cools down the potential escalation of emotionally laden conversations and gives empathy an opportunity to come to the surface. But more importantly, it is the only fair thing to do when a friend or loved one is in emotional distress.

**4. Expressing your Intuitions:** The above conversational suggestions are designed to express action/feeling statements to the exclusion of all other potentially confusing material. But surely, we can't speak very long without dealing with our suspicions about other people's motivations and intentions. The next step in emotionally literate dialogue is designed to deal with them.

In our daily lives we are constantly trying to make sense of other people's behavior. When we are not in good communication with them, we are forced to make up theories and guess what they are up to by using our intuition and whatever information is available. We don't normally go to the people in question and investigate why they are doing whatever they are doing. We don't because we don't know how and don't trust that we'll get an honest answer if we do.

Behind John's hurt and anger about Mary ending their phone conversation, there is a fear, perhaps an assumption, that Mary doesn't like him. Having once stated how he felt and when, he could now (after asking for permission) express these fears as follows:

> “I have a fear that you don't like me, that you are angry at me.”

This states what I call a paranoid fantasy. It puts in an objective manner an intuition about what the other person is thinking or feeling. It is stated tentatively, not as a fact, but as an intuition that may in fact be mistaken or ill-conceived. The intuition may be incorrect, but it is real because it exists in the speaker's mind. Its reality has to be acknowledged, and its truth should be evaluated. Since people's intuitions are rarely completely mistaken, it gives the recipient the opportunity to search his or her own consciousness to see if there is some truth in it.

Paranoia is considered a form of madness. When it presents itself in the full-blown form of a persistent delusion of persecution (for example, the F.B.I., C.I.A., and K.G.B. are trying to poison me because of my political ideas), it is clearly associated with insanity.

In my opinion, paranoia has its origin in heightened awareness. Our intuition is a powerful reality-sensing tool. We are aware of many things that are never spoken of, or are discounted and denied by others. When we sense something and it is denied, we have two options. Either we forget whatever it is our intuition brought to our attention, or if we are stubborn and don't give up so easily, we persist in our idea. Perhaps we try to find our own answers. If we continue to get denials and dismissals of our intuitions, our efforts to figure out what's going on may lead us far off the mark, especially if we have an active imagination. As an example, John's simple intuition becomes elaborated from:

"Mary is unhappy," to

"Mary is unhappy with me," to

"Mary is angry with me," to

"Mary hates me."

Now John needs a reason for which Mary hates him. He talks to Nancy, Mary's best friend, who offhandedly guesses that Mary is bothered by John's sexy manner. That's it! John concludes:

"Mary hates me because she thinks I'm a chauvinist pig."

Meanwhile, Mary hasn't got a clue about what is going on. In fact, she was short with John, but it had to do with being tired, anxious about another phone call she was expecting, and slightly annoyed with John because he kept talking about his troubles with Anne.

So John's intuition was somewhat correct (as intuitions almost always are). Consequently, when he checks it out with Mary, she will be able to validate his experience to a certain extent. But suppose she does the usual in these circumstances. Suppose when he asks if she's angry, she answers, "Angry? Not at all. I feel fine. I like you, John."

***Error D: Discounting an Intuition***. This response, well-meaning as it may be, leaves John confused. Mary likes him (maybe), but what about his sense that there is something wrong? He'll have to forget about it.

Emotionally, this is a catastrophic event. Is he happy because Mary likes him (or so she says), or is he angry because she is denying that something is wrong? Does he trust her? Does he like her? It's enough to make his head spin. His mind is messed up and his emotions confused.

Confusion and heightened paranoia are the usual result of such a discount. On the other hand the discovery and acknowledgment of a grain of truth in the intuition has a clarifying effect.

**5. Responding to an Intuition:** Mary's correct, emotionally literate response would be to search for the grain of truth in John's intuition. What I mean by grain of truth is that part of the intuition that is correct, as opposed to the part that is off the mark. Hearing the grain of truth in his intuition will provide an explanation that will help John let go of the part that is truly paranoid. It will help him reconcile with reality by validating the portion of his experience that is valid.

In any event, Mary's above response to John's intuition does not validate his experience. He insists:

"Somehow I thought something was amiss. Am I wrong?"

After thinking about it, Mary suggests:

"Actually, John, I was angry after you called, not at you, but at Nancy—maybe that's it."

John may still not feel that this explains what he's thinking about the conversation. He goes on:

"Well, that doesn't deal with my intuition that you were angry with me when we talked, *before* you spoke with Nancy. Was there something wrong while we were talking?"

This causes Mary to reconsider. Her annoyance with John was minor, but he does have a habit of going on and on over the phone. Since he seems willing to hear her criticism, maybe she can tell him without a lot of complications.

> "Actually, no, I am not really angry at you. But when you called, I was tired and expecting another call, and slightly irritated with what you wanted to talk about. I thought I was giving you hints that I didn't want to talk about Anne, but you didn't seem to catch on. Does that make sense?"

John's reaction to this is one of relief. He was right; something was wrong. Mary is not angry at him, however, and he now knows what the problem was. He understands his and her feelings at the time and where they came from. He realizes he has tried her patience going on and on about Anne. He can now believe that she truly likes him. The facts of the situation and his feelings fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. He feels OK; he has been validated.

Sometimes the entire intuition will be correct.

> "Yes, John, I am angry with you; in fact, I haven't liked you very much since I met you."

Harsh words indeed, but better for John to hear them clearly expressed than to have to live in a confusing and potentially hurtful climate.

They may go on to a discussion about why she doesn't like him, or about their relationship; his tendency to talk on and on and her inability to be clear when she doesn't want to talk. Or they may drop the matter. Either way, they are several steps ahead in the process of understanding each other, and have avoided the potential proliferation of paranoia and suspicion.

To recapitulate, in an emotionally literate dialogue, a person who has an intuition of something amiss, after asking permission, states it as an unconfirmed intuition seeking to be validated. The emotionally literate response to such an intuition is a search for and production of a validating grain of truth.

Whether John gets complete validation or not, he will feel better than when he started, if only because he tried. Future interactions with Mary may or may not improve matters. Most likely, if carried on in this emotionally literate way, they will. At any rate, the correct response to an intuition is an earnest and truthful search and statement of whatever may be going on in the recipient's emotional life that could possibly account for the intuition expressed. It will help John let go of those parts that aren't true and will replace confusion with knowledge and information.

Being able to discuss each other's feelings can bring spectacular results when trouble develops between two people. When both people are committed to frank cooperative communication without power plays or lies, most emotionally difficult situations can be dealt with quickly and effectively.

**6. Making an Apology:** The next step concerns the fine art of acknowledging one's mistakes and begging for forgiveness for whatever harm we may have caused.

The thought of making a heartfelt apology strikes terror in the average man. Losing face, backing off, eating crow—all bring back memories of schoolyard struggles that tested and prepared us for our manhood. We have learned that standing one's ground is manly, that backing down is weak and humiliating. Yet, a truly emotionally literate man will admit his mistakes and apologize if he caused any harm. Being emotionally literate definitely goes against the old-fashioned stereotype of "being a man." Whenever you behave in an emotionally literate way you are choosing to change yourself into a different kind of a man, a man who acknowledges and deals with his emotions.

To go back to John and Mary's phone conversation, emotionally illiterate behavior does not occur in isolated transactions but in patterns. Two ways we engage in these patterns are to either: a) do something we don't want to

do; or b) do more than our share in a given situation. We Rescue. We do these things for people whom we see as being Victims unable to take responsibility for themselves. Sometimes we even Rescue people who don't expect or want to be Rescued.

In the situation between Mary and John, Mary could have Rescued John by continuing the original phone conversation for another fifteen minutes, which, in addition to being something she did not want to do, might have caused her to miss Nancy's call. If she did Rescue John, it would be because she assumed that he would be hurt or upset if she cut him short. She may have rescued John without John knowing it or particularly wanting to be rescued. The fact that he didn't like to be cut short does not imply that he would want her to continue a conversation she was not interested in.

The inevitable outcome of Rescuing people is anger : Anger in the Rescuer who gets fed up with doing things she doesn't want to do or with doing more than her share; and anger in the Victim for being condescended to as someone who can't take care of himself. Inevitably, the Rescuer will eventually Persecute the Victim, or the Victim will Persecute the Rescuer. Anger will spill freely in all directions.

The best way of interrupting this cycle is to stop Rescuing and apologize. But stopping Rescuing is difficult. One has to know what one wants and doesn't want to do and what is a fair distribution of a relationship's responsibilities.

> “Do I want to continue this conversation?”
>
> “Do I want to have sex?”
>
> “Do I want to help John fix the car?”
>
> “Do I want to go to the ball game?”
>
> “Do I want to eat out tonight?”
>
> “Is it fair for me to do the dishes if Mary cooks, or should I also sweep the floor?”
>
> “Is it fair that I always have to initiate sex?”
>
> “Do I always pay for dinner when we go out? Do I want to?”

The correct thing to do when we discover that we have been Rescuing is one of self-criticism rather than anger, an apology rather than an accusation. In addition, when we have Rescued and want to stop, it is important to do so with a gentle, nurturing explanation rather than an abrupt withdrawal or sulk.

There are many times when we discover that we have made a mistake. At those times, the emotionally literate transaction is to acknowledge one's error and apologize by saying something, such as the following:

> “When I [*action*] I made a mistake. I apologize.”

Mary:

> “When I talked to you on the phone last night, after a few minutes I really didn't want to go on talking, so I started getting angry with you, even though it was my responsibility to let you know that I wanted to stop. I am sorry I let it go. I should have let you know earlier.”

***Error E: Blaming the Victim***. Mary could have said:

> “Listen, John. I'm sorry that I let you go on and on about Anne because I am sick of hearing about it, so I apologize, okay?”

Obviously, this is an example of a statement that falls very short of a heartfelt apology. Mary is actually blaming John for her mistake. It is an example of emotional illiteracy that is worse than no apology at all.

**7. Accepting the Apology:** Again, the correct response to such a statement, as is the case with the response to an action/feeling statement, is to acknowledge the facts that are being stated.

*Error F: Bashing the Righteous.* John could use this opportunity to take out his anger and hurt feelings on Mary.

> “Well, it's about time you apologize for patronizing me. I resent it, and I hate you for it.”

This won't do. If John is angry or hurt, he can use an action/feeling statement to deal with his reaction:

> “It makes me angry that you have let me go on and on about Anne when you didn't want to. I am also hurt. Thanks for the apology, though.”

The seven steps presented in this chapter will go a long way toward providing a positive emotional environment for emotions to be expressed, whether it be between friends, lovers, or co-workers or within a family. As people become skilled in the use of these techniques, they become second nature, and people lose their initial awkwardness. The techniques simply become part of everyday routine, similar to brushing one's teeth, raking the leaves, or walking the dog. Once assimilated, they contribute to a well-ordered life in which emotions are acknowledged and integrated into our lives.