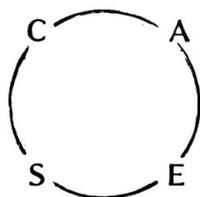


PSYCHOLOGICAL BLOCKS TO INTIMACY

By Stephen B. Karpman, M.D. *

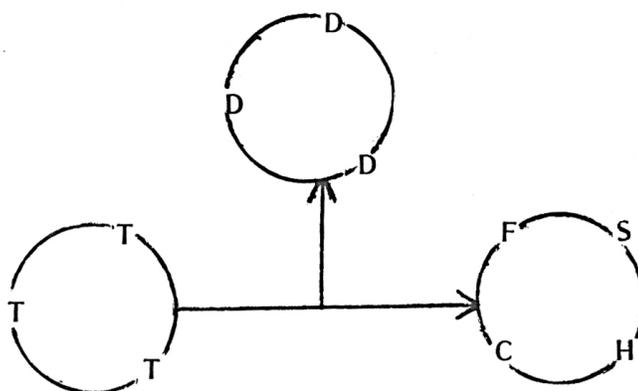
In 1971 I postulated that there were four ways of blocking intimate communication at a transactional level. They were called the Condensing, Abrupt, Secretive, and Evasive intimacy blocks. Generally, the four occurred simultaneously, so they were looped together in a diagram to illustrate their interconnectedness. (fig. 1). I called this the Intimacy Loser's Loop because people who use these four blocks are the losers in their quest for intimacy.



Intimacy Loser's Loop
Fig. 1

People were able to learn and control these intimacy blocks to promote intimacy just as they were able to learn and control their ego states to prevent cross transactions.

However, the question kept arising "Why do people block intimacy?" "What is the motivation and payoff behind the use of these avoidance tactics?" Over the years many reasons were collected and they seem to fall into three groupings, as illustrated in fig. 2 below: 1) Developmental, the past history of the Transferences, Training, and Triangular game relations with the scriptors of childhood. 2) Mental, the Depression, Disinterest, and Disorganization that affects a person's state of mind and mental energy while relating. 3) Social, the motivations of Fear, Spite, Control, and gamey Hooking for a payoff, in the here and now in relating to a person.



Internal Intimacy Loser's Loops
Fig. 2

INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTAL BLOCKS (T - T - T)

1) **Transference.** Early feelings are transferred from parents onto new people, and then the new people are avoided as if they were the parents. This occurs out of awareness, as does projection, where a person reads their own negative traits into another person, and then avoids intimacy with that person.

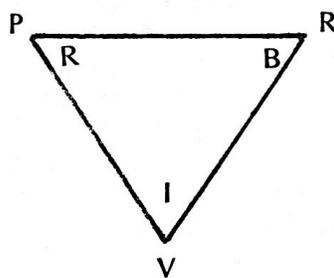
2) **Training.** Early training on how to relate to people influences the degree of caution or openness while relating. This is learned through identification or by teaching tapes such as "Don't trust strangers" that play out of awareness during present day intimate close encounters.

3) **Triangle.** Decisions made from the Drama Triangle roles of Persecutor, Rescuer, and Victim during key script scenes in childhood play on out of awareness during close encounters. Unconscious reactions against intimacy rooted in the family drama are:

a) **Revenge (Persecutor)** which includes the avoidance of intimacy with winners to get even with the parents for their neglect, abuse, jealousies, false values, and/or pressure tactics. These frustrate the parents' wish for their children's success, and to have grandchildren that they can call "their own."

b) **Injunctions (Victim)** are implanted by victimizing the child through sheer power, repetition, deception, and negative example at a brainwashing intensity until the "Don't be close" is ingrained at a reflex level.

c) **Bargains (Rescuer)** made with the parents to protect them from awareness of their craziness and their fear of being left alone, result in sacrificial secret pacts that the child will not seek out intimacy with others, or at least not improve on the parents' techniques at gaining intimacy.



The Family Scripting Triangle
Fig. 3

INTERNAL MENTAL BLOCKS (D - D - D)

1) **Depression.** A depressed person usually has low energy to match their low self-esteem, and are not inclined to reach out in a relationship for many reasons including; a) They feel they have nothing to offer, b) they couldn't live up to the other person's expectations, c) they are too sad and vulnerable to risk a rejection, d) their secret faults would eventually be exposed, and e) it's hopeless to try to talk through problems in intimacy anyway.

2) **Disinterest.** Temporary or permanent disinterest may be present for several reasons; a) It's the "wrong day" or the "wrong person" or the "wrong time of day" or the "wrong place," b) Their energy is overcommitted to too much work or too many people, c) Their energy is drained off with drugs, illness, or fatigue, d) Their Free Child is high on themselves and their newly liberated enlightenment, self-discovery, and narcissism, or e) Their Adapted Child has a boredom racket, and is into being boring and reading others as boring.

3) **Disorganization.** A person's mental state may be too disorganized to follow the logic in an Adult discussion of an intimate issue, or be too scattered to creatively build a relationship.

INTERNAL SOCIAL BLOCKS (F-S-C-H)

1) **Fear.** Intimacy creates a variety of fears for people, such as 1) fear of overinvolvement or abandonment of personal goals; 2) fear of exposure of weaknesses, gamey ness or inadequacy; 3) fear of dependency leading to vulnerability to repeated hurts; 4) fear of eventual manipulation, deception, abandonment, and rejection; 5) fear that talking too much can end a relationship; 6) fear of disappointment once the "conquest" is made; 7) fear of intimacy leading to smothering and stifling possessiveness; 8) fear of an intimacy that leads to too much compromise and responsibility; and 9) the fear of intimacy may be part of a more generalized fear racket.

2) **Spite.** A person may not listen or be open to problem solving in retaliation for a hurt that has not been discussed. The refusal to be open may range from half-hearted participation in the discussion all the way to a deliberate campaign to frustrate each initiative and goodwill gesture in a vengeful action designed to punish the person. In an anger racket, the trading stamps may never be discussed for fear of losing them and having to start a whole new collection.

3) **Control.** The desire for power and control over others may lead someone to "tie up" the other person so the development of intimacy goes according to their rules and their rate of speed, or even to thwart the other person so that nothing they try will work. The control may be for internal reasons as in the compulsive personality who fears overstimulation, "letting go," and losing something valuable.

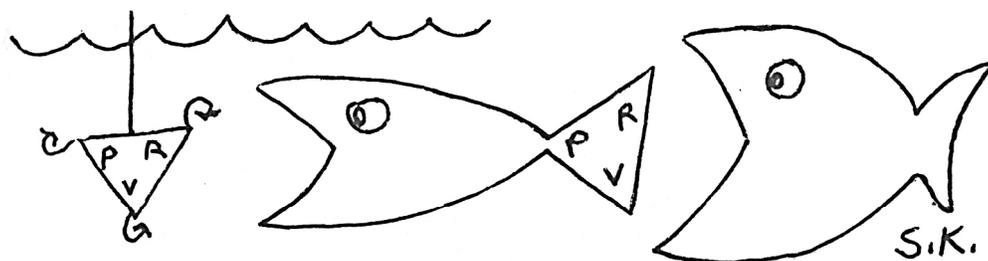
4) **Hooks.** The condescending, abrupt, secretive, and evasive behaviors may be used as hooks for sport, for testing people or to draw the partner into a game, which will then proceed, according to the rules of game analysis, to the inevitable payoff. People respond to the blocks

in varying ways. For some, secretiveness provokes a digging, demanding, and determined effort to find out what's being hidden. In others, abruptness provokes rage while condescension does not.

DISCUSSION

This new diagram was presented to the Eric Berne Seminar on September 2, 1980 several days after I put it together. The feedback was excellent for giving me additional examples, questioning some of the groupings, and helping me pull together a perspective on the concept. An astrologer at the seminar was later interested in my mention that the new internal intimacy loser's loops were, constructed on Saturday August 30 between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m., but I have not yet received a followup of the significance of that. Jim Horewitz added a case example on the successful use of phenothiazines to deal with a severe Disorganization block of a child in his family therapy practice. There was an intriguing question asked by Vi Callaghan about a patient's daughter who was too high in her Free Kid to want to relate, and that was determined to be a Disinterest block with possibly some Disorganization if she was "high." Other blocks would be checked out.

The procedure to test if there was any correlation between the external social blocks and the internal psychological blocks, would be to put the four blocks in preferential order for a person and run a statistical correlation with the person's main internal intimacy blocks. (This would be similar to Taibi Kahler's determining an individual's driver order to predict miniscript behavior.) In a manner similar to the miniscript method, one could read a person's external intimacy blocks and make educated guesses about the underlying script issues around intimacy.



*This article was originally published as: Karpman, S. (1981). Psychological blocks to intimacy. Bulletin of the Eric Berne Seminar. 3(2), 6-9. Reformatted for the website www.KarpmanDramaTriangle.com. Copyright © 1981 by Stephen B. Karpman, M.D. All rights reserved. Downloads free.