

SOCIAL DYNAMICS THE INTIMACY EXPERIMENT

Eric Berne

We have hitherto refrained from publishing anything about the "intimacy experiment" for fear that it would become a fad or be subject to quantitative research, both of which would be undesirable outcomes. As a fad it would have the same dangers as uncontrolled experiments with LSD, in regard to both internal homeostasis and external social action. To use it for quantitative research would be begging the question, since playing the role of "experimental subject" (in the narrow sense) would invalidate the intimacy. There are now so many people acquainted with the procedure, however, that it seems advisable to record it in order to prevent other kinds of abuse.

The first requirement is that the subjects must have valid clinical experience with transactional analysis, otherwise the instructions cannot be understood in their phenomenological and operational meanings. The second requirement is that a referee be present who understands the rules even more clearly than the subjects. The rules are as follows:

(1) The two subjects sit facing each other in comfortable chairs so that their faces are less than twenty inches apart (taking 20" as the near point for visual acuity). (2) They must avoid the following options: withdrawal, rituals, pastimes, activities, and games. The referee's job is to interrupt if he thinks that they are breaking the second rule. If the "experiment" or experience is properly performed, within 15 or 20 minutes some of the subjects will begin to experience phenomena similar to those induced in susceptible people by prolonged sensory isolation or by LSD and similar drugs. The original object of the experiment was to discover whether there was any option available other than intimacy if the other five were eliminated: that is, whether the sixfold classification of time-structuring was exhaustive. The evidence is now fairly convincing that it is exhaustive; the production of archaic phenomena during the experiment is an unforeseen side-effect. The question now being studied is whether it is possible for two people to undergo this experience (properly carried out according to the transactional rules) and not end up liking each other. In most cases, because of rising tension in both the silent audience and in the subjects, the experiment has been terminated in less than 30 minutes, yet it is "unforgettable."

The conditions of the experiment tend to diminish Parental influence and Adult data-processing, thus partly exposing the unadapted, expressive Child. The unadapted expressive Child in most people has been buried since nursing days. The reason for sitting within the near point of vision is that that is the way the infant originally sees people (namely, his mother). The visual contact gives rise to "eidetic perception," which has different effects from the usual perception of people. In ordinary life, people either see each other from a distance only; or if they approach closely, they may look at each other but are careful not to see. All this is in accord with Parental teaching.

In the intimacy experiment, the subjects see each other and cannot avoid the consequences of their seeing by the usual procedures (withdrawal, rituals, activities, pastimes and games). Hence they find themselves in a situation such as they have not experienced (in most cases) since early infancy, and the consequences follow. It is a question whether even lovers are not inhibited in seeing each other. Thus, in one experience, a young professional couple who had been married for several years came out of the experiment with the conclusion: "We never really saw each other before."