

## **Eric Berne**

### **Break with Psychoanalysis & the Creation of Transactional Analysis**

Eric Berne was born May 10, 1910 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Probably the most significant traces of the origins of transactional analysis are contained in the first five of six articles on intuition Berne wrote beginning in 1949. Already, at that early date, when he was still working to gain the status of psychoanalyst, he dared to defy Freudian concepts of the unconscious in his writings. When he began training in 1941 at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, and later when he resumed his training at the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute, Berne obviously believed that becoming a psychoanalyst was important. However, in the end that coveted title was withheld; his 1956 application for membership was turned down with the verdict that he wasn't ready, but, perhaps after three or four more years of personal analysis and training he might reapply. For Eric the rejection was galvanizing, spurring him to intensify his long-standing ambition to add something new to psychoanalysis. He set to work, determined to develop a new approach to psychotherapy by himself, without benefit of blessings or support from the psychoanalytic fraternity. Before 1956 was out, he had written two seminal papers based on material read earlier that year at the Psychiatric Clinic, Mt. Zion Hospital, San Francisco, and at the Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Clinic, U.C. Medical School: Intuition V: The Ego Image and Ego States in Psychotherapy. In the first article Berne indicated how he arrived at the concept of ego states and where he got the idea of separating "adult" from "child." In the next article he developed the tripartite scheme used today (Parent, Adult, and Child), introduced the three-circle method of diagramming it, showed how to sketch contaminations, labeled the theory "structural analysis" and termed it "a new psychotherapeutic approach." The third article, titled Transactional Analysis: A New and Effective Method of Group Therapy, was written a few months later and presented by invitation at the 1957 Western Regional Meeting of the American Group Psychotherapy Association of Los Angeles. With the publication of this paper in the 1958 issue of the American Journal of Psychotherapy, transactional analysis, the name of Berne's new method of diagnosis and treatment, became a permanent part of the psychotherapeutic literature. In addition to restating his concepts of P-A-C, structural analysis, and ego states, the 1957 paper added the important new features of games and scripts.

### **Key Ideas in Transactional Analysis**

**Ego States:** Eric Berne made complex interpersonal transactions understandable when he recognized that the human personality is made up of three "ego states"; each of which is an entire system of thought, feeling, and behavior from which we interact with each other. The Parent, Adult and Child ego states and the interaction between them form the foundation of transactional analysis theory. These concepts have spread into many areas of therapy, education, and consulting as practiced today.

**Transactions:** Transactions refer to the communication exchanges between people. Transactional analysts are trained to recognize which ego states people are transacting from and to follow the transactional sequences so they can intervene and improve the quality and effectiveness of communication.

**Strokes:** Berne observed that people need strokes, the units of interpersonal recognition, to survive and thrive. Understanding how people give and receive positive and negative strokes and changing unhealthy patterns of stroking are powerful aspects of work in transactional analysis.

**Games People Play:** Berne defined certain socially dysfunctional behavioral patterns as "games." These repetitive, devious transactions are intended to obtain strokes but instead they reinforce negative feelings and self-concepts, and mask the direct expression of thoughts and emotions. Berne tagged these games with such instantly recognizable names as "Why Don't You, Yes But," "Now I've Got You, You SOB," and "I'm Only Trying to Help You." Berne's book *Games People Play* achieved wide popular success in the early 60's.

**Life Script:** Eric Berne proposed that dysfunctional behavior is the result of self-limiting decisions made in childhood in the interest of survival. Such decisions culminate in what Berne called the "life script," the pre-conscious life plan that governs the way life is lived out. Changing the life script is the aim of transactional analysis psychotherapy. Replacing violent organizational or societal scripting with cooperative non-violent behavior is the aim of other applications of transactional analysis.

**I'm OK - You're OK:** "I'm OK - You're OK" is probably the best-known expression of the purpose of transactional analysis: to establish and reinforce the position that recognizes the value and worth of every person. Transactional analysts regard people as basically "OK" and thus capable of change, growth, and healthy interactions.

**Contracts:** Transactional analysis practice is based upon mutual contracting for change. Transactional analysts view people as capable of deciding what they want for their lives. Accordingly transactional analysis does its work on a contractual basis between the client and the therapist, educator, or consultant.