A Preservation Partnership: Processing the Papers of Eric L. Berne

by Kate Tasker

"We don't want patients to make progress. We want them to get well. Or, in our lingo, we want to turn frogs into princes. We're not satisfied with making them braver frogs."[1] – Eric Berne

So said Dr. Eric Berne in 1966, after the publication of his best-selling book *Games People Play*. A psychiatrist, author, consultant, and lecturer, as well as a keen poker player with a larger-than-life personality, Eric Berne shook up the traditional practice of psychiatry and psychoanalysis in the 1960s with his ground-breaking theory of Transactional Analysis (TA). The UCSF Archives and Special Collections and the International Transactional Analysis Association (ITAA) are excited to announce that eight accessions of Eric Berne's papers, as well as an accompanying digital collection portal, have been fully processed and are now open and available to the public.

Eric Berne posited that every person has three parts to his or her personality: a part that behaves like a parent (P), a part that behaves like an adult (A), and a part that behaves like a child (C). Social interactions, termed "transactions" by Berne, depend on which part of the personality each participant uses to respond to the other. A set of transactions is a "game," and Berne provided humorous names like "Kick Me," "If It Weren't For You," and "Let's Pull a Fast One on Joey," to describe common games and behaviors. In 1964 Berne published his book *Games People Play* as a resource for other psychiatrists and psychoanalysts. It became immensely popular with the general public, eventually selling over 5 million copies and spending 111 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. *Games People Play* has been translated into nearly 20 different languages and influenced later works such as Thomas A. Harris's *I'm OK, You're OK.*

About the Creator

Eric Berne was born to parents Dr. David Hillel Bernstein and Sara Gordon in Montreal, Quebec, in 1910. He grew up in Montreal's Jewish community with his younger sister Grace, and often accompanied his father on rounds to visit his patients. Dr. Bernstein also ran a clinic from the family's home on St. Familie Street. When Berne was only ten years old his father died from tuberculosis, leaving his mother to support the family by working as a teacher and reporter.

Berne attended his parents' alma mater, McGill University, and graduated with degrees in medicine and surgery in 1935. He was known as "Lennie Bernstein" to his classmates and as "Lennard

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[1] quoted by Jack Langguth, "Dr. Berne Plays the Celebrity Game," *The New York Times Magazine*, July 17, 1966, p. 43

Gandalac" to readers of the *McGilliad* literary magazine. Berne was a prolific writer of both creative fiction and academic papers, publishing eight major books on psychiatry, a children's picture book, and dozens of articles and short stories over the course of his career.

Berne immigrated to the United States in 1935 to take a one-year internship at Englewood Hospital in New Jersey, followed by a two-year residency at the Psychiatric Clinic of Yale University School of Medicine, where he worked under the direction of Dr. Eugen Kahn. In 1937 he embarked on a trip to Turkey and the Middle East to study psychiatric institutions and cultural practices. His resulting paper "Psychiatry in Syria" (1939) was his first published scholarly work and marked the beginning of his investigations of cultural and comparative psychiatry, which continued throughout his life. Kurt Vonnegut later commented in his 1964 review of *Games People Play* that Berne had visited mental health facilities in 30 different countries, paying his way with winnings from his poker games.[2]

In 1938-1939 Berne became an American citizen and officially changed his name from Bernstein to Berne. During this time he was employed at two different East Coast sanitariums, set up a private practice in Connecticut, and was appointed Clinical Assistant in Psychiatry at Mt. Zion Hospital in New York City. He also began training at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute under the renowned Austrian psychiatrist Dr. Paul Federn, a devoted follower of Sigmund Freud whose theories on ego states influenced much of Berne's later work.

Berne left the East Coast in 1943, when he enlisted as a psychiatrist in the U.S. Army Medical Corps. He was first stationed at Baxter General Hospital in Spokane, WA, and later transferred to Fort Ord Regional Hospital near Monterey, CA. After his discharge from the Army in 1946 Berne decided to make his home in the nearby community of Carmel-by-the-Sea. He fit in with the creative, free-thinking artists and residents, and began hosting regular salons to test his theories of interpersonal dynamics and psychoanalysis.

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[2] Vonnegut, Kurt. "Headshrinker's Hoyle on Games We Play." *Life*, June 11, 1965: 15, 17.

By 1947 Berne had opened private practices in Carmel and in San Francisco, commenced his training at the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute under Erik Erikson, and published his first book, *The Mind in Action*. Berne and his first wife, whom he married in 1942, had also ended their brief union which produced two children. Berne remarried in 1948, to a divorcee with three children. They had two more children together before divorcing in 1964.

The 1950s were a period of intense work and development for Berne. He held a position as Assistant Psychiatrist at Mt. Zion Hospital, San Francisco, and also began serving as a Consultant to the Surgeon General of the U.S. Army. He was Adjunct and Attending Psychiatrist at the Veterans Administration and Mental Hygiene Clinic, San Francisco, from 1951 until 1956, when his contract was ended due to suspected affiliations with Communist organizations (the allegations were later retracted). In 1956 Berne also separated from the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute; his thinking had diverged from the classical theories of psychoanalysis and the Institute decided to terminate his training. This catalyst resulted in a series of papers in which Berne outlined his theory of Transactional Analysis. "Intuition V: The Ego Image," based on material Berne had presented at Mt. Zion Hospital and at the Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute at the University of California Medical Center, San Francisco, was published in 1956, followed by "Ego States in Psychotherapy." In 1957 he wrote "Transactional Analysis: A New and Effective Method of Group Therapy" and presented it to the Western Regional Meeting of the American Group Psychotherapy Association.

Berne's work attracted many mental health practitioners and social workers, and he convened weekly Tuesday evening meetings in his home on Collins Street in San Francisco. Incorporating as the San Francisco Social Psychiatry Seminars (SFSPS), this organization also produced the *Transactional Analysis Bulletin* and sponsored Berne's "Transactional Analysis 101" lecture series. After the worldwide success of *Games People Play* Berne and his followers formed the International Transactional Analysis Association (ITAA) as a successor to the SFSPS.

Berne continued consulting and lecturing, notably at UCSF's Langley Porter Clinic and at the Stanford-Palo Alto Psychiatric Clinic. He married a third time, but divorced again in 1969. In addition to his previous books *The Mind in Action* (1947, later revised as *A Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis,* 1957), *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy* (1961), *The Structure and Dynamics of Organizations and Groups* (1963), and *Games People* Play (1964), Berne went on to publish *Principles of Group Treatment* (1966) and *Sex in Human Loving* (1970). His last book, *What Do You Say After You Say Hello?* (1972) was published after Berne's death in 1970.

About the Collection

The International Transactional Analysis Association has worked since Berne's death in 1970 to find a permanent home for his papers and to make them available for research. The first of Eric Berne's records came to the UCSF Archives and Special Collections in 1982, when the ITAA donated 4 cartons of reel-to-reel audio recordings and over 300 books from Berne's personal library. The collection has grown over the past 32 years to include personal and professional correspondence (including letters from significant figures such as Gertrude Stein, Alfred C. Kinsey, Paul Federn, and Karl Menninger); drafts and
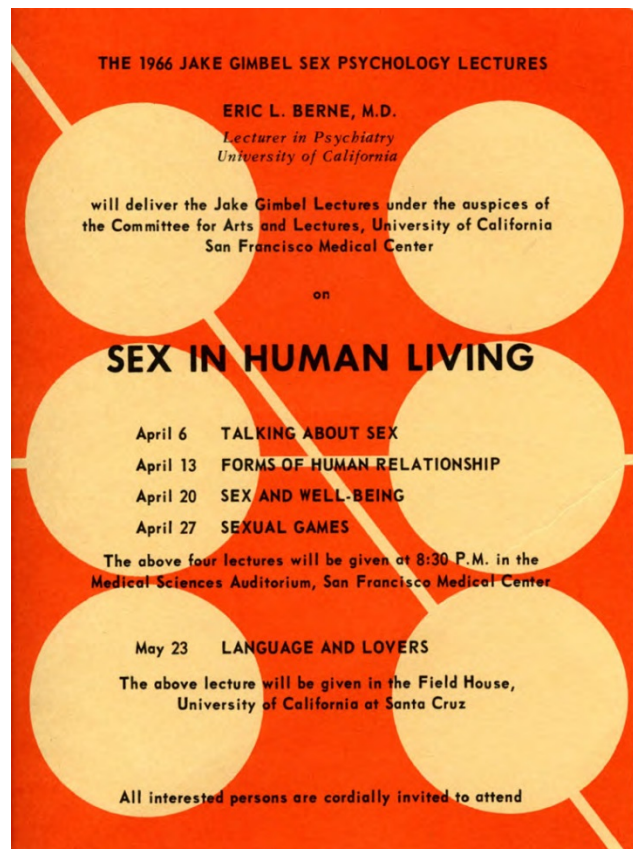
published reprints of Berne's articles; records of his education, military service, and private practices; documents from the first SFSPS meetings and ITAA conferences; research data from Berne's work on cultural psychiatry; photographs, videotapes; and film. Processing was begun on the two earliest accessions in 1982 and in 1989, but the majority of the material remained unarranged and inaccessible.

In 2010 the Eric Berne Centenary Conference was held in Montreal, Canada, spurring a renewed effort to fully process the Berne papers and make them available to in-person and online researchers. The Eric Berne Archives Committee consulted with UCSF Archivist Polina Ilieva and began raising donations to fund the project.

Project Archivist Kate Tasker was hired in September 2013 to process the six existing accessions and to digitize a significant portion of the collection. Two additional accessions arrived in February 2014 and were added to the processing timeline. The accessions were arranged and rehoused, totaling 77 boxes or 41.8 linear feet. The archivists scrutinized the collections for records containing sensitive patient data or medical records and placed appropriate restrictions on material to comply with UCSF privacy policies and HIPAA regulations. Six detailed collection guides, created in Archivists' Toolkit, were published on the Online Archive of California. Progress was reported to the ITAA and to the UCSF community through the Archives' blog Brought to Light (https://blogs.library.ucsf.edu/broughttolight/)

As of May 2014, nearly 400 items have been added to the Eric L. Berne Digital Collection at the UCSF Library. The Digital Collection features photographs of Eric Berne and ITAA events, early manuscripts and typescripts of Berne's work on Transactional Analysis, transcripts of Berne's lectures for the 1966 Jake Gimbel Sex Psychology series at UCSF, letters describing Berne's publications, lectures, and personal activities, promotional materials for *Games People Play* and some of Berne's other books, and ephemera from Berne's international travels. A digital portal and exhibit will be launched in August 2014 to coincide with the International Transactional Analysis Association annual conference, which will be celebrating its 50th anniversary.

The ITAA and the Berne family were involved throughout the project as donors and as consultants, sharing specific knowledge about the papers. The ITAA's international membership made the digitization component particularly crucial, as it is expected that psychiatrists and researchers from around the world will want to access the Berne Papers online. The Eric Berne project at UCSF was a marvelous opportunity for Archives and Special Collections to partner with an organization outside the field of archives and libraries in order to bring a valuable collection to the public.

Visit the Eric L. Berne Digital Collection at https://digital.library.ucsf.edu/collections/show/15

Finding aids to the Berne Papers are available on the Online Archive of California (http://www.oac.cdlib.org/)

Sources

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