



Does TA need a Biological School?

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Abstract

This article addresses the question of whether we need a new school of Biological Transactional Analysis in reaction to the increasing focus within TA publications on neurodiversity and war. It considers how are we similar to other animals which are not scripted as humans are but show some of the same patterns of behaviour; how some TA concepts and values are inappropriate in some cultures, and challenges the TA approach to war as a psychological process that can be 'cured'. It concludes that we need take more account of health as well as context.

Key words

Transactional analysis, biological TA, schools of TA, war, neurodiversity, genetics

Introduction

In 2022 I began publishing a series of reviews and critiques of TA concepts as they had been developed over the years since Berne had started the process of introducing TA. These were provided as free open-access books (see <https://sherwoodpublishing.com> to download). I focused on English publications as my own language but also because the International and European TA Associations (ITAA and EATA) have English as their official language, and produce their own publications in English.

When I began the series of free books, I began with one called *TA from Then to Now: Core Themes* (Hay, 2022), in which I described 11 different TA schools, as shown in Table 1. When I came to produce the second edition of that same book (Hay, 2024a), I added two more schools and chapters – spiritual and ecological – plus a mention of the social cognitive school in Italy that was increasingly being written about in English. Table 2 shows the additional schools, plus I highlighted in that edition that Integrative, Process Communication, Developmental, and Social Cognitive have their own separate qualifications not operated by ITAA/EATA.

Now I am considering whether I need to produce a third edition of the book to include a new school called Biological TA – to counter the impression that TA can

'cure' anything. I have been prompted by so much appearing recently about neurodiversity and wars (references later); although these do not claim cures they give the impression that TA practitioners are working with them rather than stressing that we can only offer support with the psychological impacts of them. It reminds me of how Graham Barnes (2004) told us about how homophobic Eric Berne was; Pamela Levin (2010) told us about how racist Berne was; and Berne (1964) himself told us that war was [no more than] a psychological game, when he wrote "The grimmest of all, of course, is 'War'." (p.45). We can excuse Berne because he was writing so many years ago, but we should take into account what science has taught us since.

We have known for years that some TA concepts have been presented inaccurately. For instance, we have known since after the end of the Vietnam War that addictions are genetic and not script (Robins, Davis & Goodwin, 1974). It was not true that bystanders watched Kitty Genovese being attacked (Clarkson, 1987; Kassin, 2017). We have also known that ego states do not match a neat simplified idea of three parts of the brain. And it is over 30 years since I suggested we stopped using names of games that imply rape is a game or refer to women as bitches (Hay, 1993) or that we imply a physical disability is a game (Hay, 1995) but Rapo, NIGYSOB and Wooden Leg are still used.

A few years ago I (Hay, 2021) wrote about four different dynamics that had occurred within the TA community that challenged the notion that our colleagues behave more ethically after they have spent years learning TA. These included: my experiences of being invited to help another with an ethics case that they had been forced to bring; how a Manifesto had been issued and adopted by ITAA and EATA that likened the behaviours of refugees and politicians to playing psychological games; how I was advised to use a non-existent complaint policy when EATA reneged on their support of a journal set up for them (this journal that continued without their support); and how ITAA and EATA (and others) cancelled the

School	Originators	Principles
Classical	Berne	analyse, decontaminate the Adult ego state; share the TA theory with the client
Cathexis	Schiff	use regression and create a healthy symbiosis; create a reparenting relationship
Redecision	Goulding & Goulding	the power is in the patient; we can re-decide in the Child ego state
Integrative	Erskine	inquiry, attunement, involvement
Psychodynamic	Moiso, Novellino	transference, countertransference
Process Communication	Kahler	process, personality type
Personality Adaptations	Joines, Stewart	adaptations, contact and target areas
Co-creative	Summers & Tudor	co-creation of reality
Constructivist	Allen, Loria	we construct our reality
Developmental	Hay	health rather than pathology and development rather than cure
Relational	Sills & Hargaden	use the relationship with the therapist to bring about change

Table 1: Schools of TA (Hay, 2022, p.4-5)

School	Originators	Principles
Social-Cognitive#	Scilligo	ego states as schemas
Spirituality	James, Mellacqua	spiritual self, betweenness
Ecological	Barrow & Marshall	ecological space rather than relational space.

Table 2: Additional Schools of TA (Hay, 2024a, p.5)

World TA Conference 2020 after Covid emerged even though it had already been rescheduled for three years later plus an online conference had been set up, and the cancellation involved considerable financial losses for all participants under UK law.

Hence, we need some alternative explanations of what happens because being scripted does not explain even our own behaviours. Apart from how my colleagues have behaved, how did I develop – or was I born with - an I'm OK, You're not OK life position, when born during a war that lasted until I was three years old, and to a soldier father who made it clear that he did not want a child. So how come I did not finish up as I'm not OK and nobody else is OK? Maybe we need to consider biology more.

Humans are animals, and it is hard to believe that other animals, and birds, fish and insects, even worms, are scripted by what their parents do or communicate. What happens when people are neurodiverse? How does the TA concept of autonomy fit cultures other than California in the 1960's? And why do humans still have wars when the results are so terrible? I will address these questions in the rest of this article.

Humans are Animals

Within TA we often equate consciousness with self-awareness, autonomy and/or (structural/internal) Adult ego state and being in the here-and-now. The

following selection are some ideas that, for me, illustrate how other animals (and birds, insects, etc) are similar to humans – so vice versa applies – we are in many ways similar to other animals and no one expects to apply TA to them. Some TA practitioners work with animals but their focus is on how that benefits the human clients – maybe we should change that.

40 scientists who work with animals have initiated *The New York Declaration on Animal Consciousness* (Andrews, Birch, Sibó & Sims, 2024). They describe consciousness as having a variety of meanings, including phenomenal consciousness or sentience, sensory experiences that may feel good or bad, and how subjective experience requires more than the mere ability to detect stimuli but does not require language or reason. They caution that they are not talking about proof or certainty but that the behaviours evidenced provide strong scientific support for saying that there is a realistic possibility of consciousness. There are now there are 536 signatures to the Declaration, dated as April 19, 2024, plus some great photos, and several examples at the link shown in the References.

Other examples where other animals are similar to humans include:

- *Mating for Life* – in theory, humans do this although increasingly this is no longer true and

often only applies because of religious or other cultural effects. Swans, beavers, gibbons

macaroni penguins, sandhill cranes and bald eagles also mate for life, and prairie voles even foster the young of others.

- *Leadership* – Meyer, Cassidy, Stahler, Brandell, Anton, Stahler & Smith (2022) found that grey wolves in Wyoming infected by a common parasite are 11 times more likely than uninfected ones to start a new pack, and 46 times more likely to become leaders – and often the only wolf in the pack that breeds. Maybe this would explain why some humans become leaders – the authors suggest that one third of humans might be infected 😊.
- *Homosexual Animals* – the fact that the world's largest Adélie penguin colony in Antarctica contained many gay animals was hidden when the research was published early in the 19th century (Bagawan, 2019). Nowadays it is obvious that many animals, including humans, are gay and examples are abundant on Google – at least in countries where it is not still regarded as illegal.

Some other ways in which animals act the same as humans include:

- *Monkeys* – mirror neurons were first described in 1992 (di Pellegrino, Fadiga, Fogassi, Gallese & Rizzolatti, 1992; Rizzolatti, Fadiga, Gallese & Fogassi, 1992) when monkeys were seen to copy an experimenter or another monkey performing an action, such as grasping a food morsel. Researchers also put a complex vending machine with two groups of semi-wild chimpanzees and none of them could work out how to do it until the researchers trained one mid-to-high-ranking adult female in each group and they showed the others how to do it.
- *Farm Animals* – pigs show signs of empathy because they will work out how to open a pen in order to rescue trapped companions; cows put together that like each other begin grooming each other, whereas if they are put with cows they do not like, they start head-butting; goats will seek help from a human when they are presented with food in a bowl they cannot access. It has also been found that goats, like dogs, can distinguish between pictures of happy and angry people; they can find food more quickly if they observed where the humans were hiding it; and they seem to understand what we mean when we point at something. And goats will help other goats to reach food they cannot reach themselves.
- *Bees* – Bridges, Royka, Wilson, Lockwood, Richter, Juusola & Chittka (2024) trained some

individual bees how to open a box to get at a treat, other bees observed what the trained bees did and were able to follow the entire sequence.

- *Birds* – since the 1940's, trained pigeons have been used to peck at screens for missiles; zebra finches that babble are actually imitating adult birds so they can memorise the sounds they hear and later imitate the songs, just as children learn language; Japanese tits apparently flutter their wings to say "after you" to indicate that they are allowing their mate to enter the nest first – it seems Japanese birds behave politely just like Japanese people.
- *Worms* – I cannot resist mentioning a research study reported on by NTA Nowogrodzki (2024) that shows even worms have memories. Apparently, a worm can be trained to dislike a smell by being starved for a short time. They then remember that they dislike the odour for about two hours.

The Values of TA and Neurodivergence

Okayness

Recently Bill Cornell (2024) commented on the Codes of Ethics of ITAA and EATA as if they hold some values that we hold in common, although he does not mention various conflicts including those I have described in my introduction. Those examples reinforce Cornell's suggestion that we need to move on from OKness as a primary value of TA; however, he still refers to only four life positions. These have been extended by Graham Barnes' (1981), Tony White (1994, 1995, 1997) and me (Hay, 2000, 2009, 2012, 2014), and many mistake Ernst's (1971) descriptions of behaviours as being the same thing that Eric Berne was writing about. Hence it is doubtful whether the OKness that is regarded as a primary value of TA is even understood in similar ways by members of our community.

Although I notice his lack of references, I fully agree with Cornell's suggestion that we need different values for TA. He concludes his article with a list of 11 "values, hopes, aspirations, and wishes that we may hold as transactional analysts" (p.122), which include factors that might well prove difficult for colleagues living in non-democratic countries in the world, such as recognising the impacts of social or political environments, engaging in more open and challenging relationships, and challenging social and cultural norms.

This reminds me of Vladimir Goussakovski (2009) writing that "... after a transactional analysis workshop in a mid-Asian country, one woman said to me that it all was very interesting, but if she shared these ideas

of “I’m OK, You’re OK” with her husband, he would kill her.” (p.323). Although this was written many years ago, we know that in many countries the same culture still applies, and even in Goussakovski’s own country, many people have left because it is dangerous to challenge the leadership.

Applying a TA approach that was generally developed within California in the 1960’s makes an article by Jackson and Medvedev (2024) even more relevant. These authors analyse survey data scanning 1981 to 2022, from 76 different national cultures ($n = \text{equals } 406,185$) and conclude “Values emphasising tolerance and self-expression have diverged most likely, especially between high income Western countries and the rest of the world. We also find that countries with similar per capita GDP levels have held similar values over the last 40 years. ... values have diverged globally but converged regionally.” (Abstract, p.1). Hence, we need to factor in cultures much more than we do when we pass on TA concepts.

Neurodivergence

Cornell’s article appeared in an issue which was devoted to neurodivergence. As Editor, Thunnissen (2024) paraphrased Cornell’s article as including “acceptance of disowned or shamed aspects of ourselves as well as reaching out to others, discussing instead of depersonalizing and demonizing all those different from ourselves. (p.111). As Cornell’s article is about these ‘dark times’, in which he seems to include wars, I am puzzled at the implication that individuals should feel shame about wars begun by others, and I am disappointed to realise that many of my colleagues feel shame about being different even though they are within the TA community. Either way, it is not a good ‘advertisement’ for TA and reminds me of the risk within the TA community of placing the responsibility for playing a game with individuals instead of recognising that they may have no choices if they born with any form of divergence that is not accepted within their society.

When I read TA material about neurodivergence and how many authors are sharing their own experiences, I am prompted to reflect on my own. I have a grandson, born in 1996, with whom I interact only by clapping my hands to make loud noises, both of us smiling a lot, which indicates that we are paying attention to each other (unconditional strokes). I am aware that when I hear what children are doing nowadays to get the label of ADHD, they seem ‘normal’ to me, at least compared to my grandson, my own childhood, and what my grandfather told me about what he did as a boy.

Perhaps my approach has been shaped by experiences – during my childhood I had a father who returned from World War II with ADHD; I had contact with a man of short stature (called at that time a midget) as a friend of my father; I knew that my uncle

was homosexual and knew it was illegal so it was a family secret; I pronounced (and still do) speech in a different way to neighbours and at school because my grandmother had a Cockney (i.e. lower class) accent; from 11 years old I was the only child in the class at school from local government housing (i.e. lower class again); my mother had a period of being a Jehovah’s Witness so expected me to marry the first ‘boyfriend’ I had from 14 years old. Hence, maybe I can be seen as fitting the diagnosis of ADHD – and I wonder whether everyone who learns to be a TA practitioner is also neurodivergent.

Also, when writing about his therapy work with clients with some form of neurodiversity (Asperger’s but that is no longer an acceptable term), Flowerdew (2016) wrote “There is misunderstanding, misattunement, hurt and grief for all concerned.” (p.20). When I read that, I cannot help thinking that it often describes any interactions between any people - maybe we are all neurovariant.

Steven Porges (1995, 2011, 2017, 2024) introduced polyvagal theory and described it as we are all biologically different. This theory explains how our responses of flight, flight or freeze to emotional stress come from our heart and brain, linked together, based on our need to feel safe through connection to others as “a primary biological imperative for humans.” (Porges, 2017, p.7) (underlining added). He differentiates polyvagal theory from the traditional view of the autonomic nervous system because that supports defence instead of health when we need to react, and because our autonomic state is also our physiological state.

Porges also comments that we have “bottom-up and top-down strategies. We have bottom-up strategies in which our body subjugates our brain and conveys feelings associated with adjustments to stress and danger that impact on our ability to perceive the world. But we also have top-down strategies that we can use to put ourselves into safe environments ... “ (2017, p.206). When he was asked a question about working with adult children of spectrum adults, Porges reminds us of the need to recognise the impact on the feeling of safety and security on those who have survived “world wars, the depression, and things we don’t even think about in our culture today.” (p.206).

Autonomy

I have challenged (Hay, 2024b) the idea of how Berne suggested we needed to be autonomous in a way that might be appropriate only in North America, Western Europe and similar cultures. As shown in Figure 1, I have suggested that to Berne’s components of autonomy of awareness, spontaneity and intimacy (called awareness, alternatives, attachment) we also need to be authentic, accountable, and appropriate -

<i>awareness</i> - being in the here-and-now, knowing who we and others really are;
<i>alternatives</i> - having several options for how we might behave, being able to choose what to do;
<i>attachment</i> - being able to connect and bond with other people;
<i>authenticity</i> - knowing that we can be our real selves and still be OK, not having to wear a mask;
<i>accountability</i> – accepting responsibility for our own behaviour, recognising that we act based on our own decisions (and that we can change previous decisions);
<i>appropriate</i> – the choices we make in order to function safely in whatever context within which we find ourselves.

Figure 1: *Autonomy* (Hay, 2024b, p.29-30 summarised)

we need to make choices to function safely in whatever context within which we find ourselves, especially if we live in cultures where some behaviours have very negative consequences. The key is that the person chooses to fit in with the context rather than believing they have no choice.

PANDAS

An article by Lucy McDonald (2024) seems a good way to end this section about neurodiversity and biology. McDonald tells us that there is an illness called PANDAS - paediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorders associated with streptococcal infections - and this is a subset of PANS - paediatric acute-onset neuropsychiatric syndrome - which is triggered by a misdirected immune response and can often be mistaken for a psychiatric condition. She gives a case study about a 12-year-old who had suddenly changed from being an outgoing child to being frightened to leave his room, and had been seen by two doctors, two psychiatrists and two psychologists, and given antipsychotics and antidepressants that were making no difference. When PANDAS was shown via blood tests, he got better within a few days when given antibiotics.

War

As I wrote in my introduction, I am prompted to include this subject here because of several articles that have appeared in the *Transactional Analysis Journal (TAJ)*, including a recent one that referred to how Berne applied TA to the topic of war. I am doubtful about how my colleagues make it appear that TA can prevent wars. I have a strong objection to thinking of war as a game. I suspect that war is more biological than psychological, and I hope I have shown above how

humans are basically animals, albeit with the power of speech.

The articles about war within the *TAJ* began when Leonard Campos (2014) introduced the game of 'Tyrants and Terrorists' to show how a game of war can start, labelling it as a game on the basis of how Berne (1972) analysed games. Campos went on to propose that "... transactional analysts, working together with the international community, can contribute their expertise to preventing war." (Abstract, p.1). He commented on whether wars can be called games but then mentioned gladiatorial contests in ancient Rome, lethal family feuds, genocide, and specified civil, religious and military wars. He also admitted that it is sensitive to refer to a game and that such a label is emotionally unacceptable "to the wounded, maimed, crippled, brain-damaged, traumatized, or depressed soldiers returning from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan [to whom war] is probably not subjectively experienced as a game." (p.69). He described war as a metaphor because people use the word when talking about wars, or battles, against drugs, poverty, cancer, and even in the name of the [childrens'] game of tug-of-war.

He goes on to comment that "... conflict is an inevitable part of being human ... political, religious, ethnic, and national differences divide people but do not necessarily involve them in violent conflicts – unless individuals are radicalised by extremism." (p.70). He then describes events such as between the USA, Israel and Palestine and the USA strike against Iran as retaliation for the attack on the New York World Trade Centre, as being on the drama triangle. He went on to give examples of crossed and duplex transactions between what he refers to as peacemakers, before claiming that TA could work with international mediators to expose these hidden barriers.

In this article, Campos next illustrated how war can be aligned to Berne's original game analysis of thesis, aims, roles, social dynamics, examples, social paradigms, moves, and the advantages of the drama itself, pride, national solidarity, medals, profits, and as an outlet for aggression. The antithesis is to have the "... international community working collaboratively with the United Nations and its peacemaking agencies. This includes transactional analysts with intervention skills that can help prevent a conflict from escalating into a war." (p.76). This was written only 10 years ago - where are these people who have such skills?

A year later, Campos (2015) provided another article called "Cultural Scripting for Forever Wars" (Title, p.1). He began by mentioning the ongoing conflicts in Syria from 1274 BC but then concentrated on the USA. He commented on the 1776 *Declaration of Independence*

and the war that followed against the British [with no mention of the inhabitants of the USA before that!]; mentioned that many USA presidents had been former military officers; mentioned also the right to bear arms; and described the leaders of the USA as script carriers. He then wrote about script beliefs that include such aspects as: you win or you lose, kill or be killed, fight to the death, we were just following orders, and several others. He suggests how these exist at the family level, at the military subculture level, and at the broader national cultural level, before adding that these include aspects such as patriotism, displaying superpower, polarised thinking, fear of terrorism, and a “collective memory of old unforgiven injustices.” (p.284). Again, Campos claims that TA can combat a cultural script of forever war.

In the same issue of the *TAJ*, Rod Sandle (2015) referred to Campos' 2014 article a couple of times briefly. Sandle also mentioned other TA authors in more detail, including Berne, Steiner, Cornell, Hargaden, Erskine, Sills, Tudor and Kahler, as well as drawing on non-TA authors Freud, Reich and Federn; he comments on the conflict within the TA community about the Take It driver in 2008, before going on to propose that Freudian sexual therapy generates a “process full of conflict. At its peak, it constitutes warfare with those who are or have become members of another group ...” (p.294). He recommends that we consider sexual theory in our understanding of script. Although he concludes with a comment on “the links between narcissism and war” (p.298), he includes only a case study with a client whose only connection to war appeared to be he believed he was hidden inside a tank.

Several years later, Irina Filipache (2022) wrote about oppression in a totalitarian country. Although she does not mention war, she wrote that the Romanian Communist Party offered an illusion, and referenced Berne for the comment that shattering such illusions “occurs most commonly in wartime” (Berne, 1972, p.152). Hence this might support the concept of a just and/or necessary war because she describes how the totalitarian regime ensured pathology, hindered the maturation process, and instilled shame and hatred.

A year later, Keith Tudor (2023) entitled his article “War – a Transactional Analysis Analysis” (Title, p.1) and in the Abstract he wrote that it was to apply Berne's group theory to the topic of war. He gives us a review of previous TA publications about war, including Berne (1946/2020) writing about psycho-neurosis under the title of *Human Nature in Peace and War*, about a chapter in a different book (Berne, 1947) that did not appear in a later edition of the same book (Berne, 1969/1971), how Berne used war as an example of violation of the group structure (Berne, 1963), and how Berne named war as the grimmest

game (Berne, 1964/1968). Apart from Berne, Tudor mentions how Campos (2014, 2015) provided most of what we have about war as a TA community.

Tudor goes on to review Berne's material on groups and relate this to wars such as invasions as when different powers claim a major internal boundary is within their own external boundary. He also describes Berne's (1963) processes by which a group can be terminated – decay, destruction, disruption – and how these are preceded by infiltration, erosion and attrition. However, it is not clear in Tudor's material where killing people by bombing them fits into Berne's ideas, unless we believe these are third-degree psychological games.

Tudor summarises that Berne used a few examples of war and conflict to illustrate his group and organisational theory [which theory later Tudor claims is little known although it is used very much by organisational TA consultants]. He also mentions politics but makes no reference to the politics described by me (Hay, 2021) within the TA community, or his own experiences of conflict within the TA community about the Take It driver as described by Sandle (2015) above, in spite of telling us to think “in terms of the therapist knowing, surviving, and processing their infiltrative, disruptive, erosive, and decaying parts or tendencies in order to remain open, reflective, curious, critical, creative, and facilitative.” (p.319). He does not mention that this may not only happen when practitioners are with clients!

Finally, in this section I am mentioning a very recent article by Karen Minikin (2024) who describes her own intergenerational trauma as she considers the impact of the partition of India and Pakistan, and on her husband whose father and mother were both active with World War II. However, she also tells us that her father managed to achieve a Master's degree in politics in Pakistan, his family funded his travel to the UK and he attended the London School of Economics. Maybe the main impact on her was the racism that was rampant in the UK at that time [and sometimes still is]. He even had to deal with racism against Karen when he discovered that the daycare centre shut her up alone because she was brown.

A Biological School of TA

When I first listed the schools of TA (Hay, 2022), I described Developmental TA, which I introduced many years ago to counter the emphasis I experienced within the other schools on psychotherapy. Although the Institute of Developmental TA (IDTA) that I set up with colleagues ended up closing after what happened when Covid emerged in 2020, there is still a developmental school that encompasses the non-psychotherapy fields of TA qualifications offered by ITAA and EATA. I am now proposing that we need an

additional school that relates to both developmental and psychotherapy TA.

Hopefully, readers will agree based on what I have covered above about how similar humans are to animals, how some TA concepts and values clearly do not apply to every culture in the world, and how we need to avoid presenting TA as if it can cure neurodiversity and wars. Hence, we need more of an emphasis on biological considerations – some things seem to be ‘built in’ to people – including TA practitioners as well as our clients.

Even Berne (1961) wrote about the protocol as what we arrive with before the script develops, so maybe Berne was identifying that there is something biological within us. However, in his final book (Berne, 1972) he no longer had protocol within the index and only referred to a “primal protocol” (p.98) which he described as the skeleton of the script and as formed within the first two years of life. He did write in 1972 that “The child is born free, but he soon learns different.” (p.98) and we might query whether anyone is born free when we consider biology.

Hence, I am proposing that we describe ourselves as practising TA within a biological school, as using TA to help people maximise their quality of life taking into account their health and their context. In other words, we do not assume script is enough of an explanation and take into account the limitations (and benefits) of the biological aspects of humans. This means we need to keep up-to-date with research about our bodies and brains, as well as paying more attention to cultural contexts.

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