Questioning Jacqui Schiff’s Work

by Pat Crossman

Jacqui Schiff is dead.

However, the body of her work—known as reparenting or the Cathexis school of transactional analysis and described in the books she coauthored—survives and has been passed on to her followers. I contend that the theories she taught concerning the nature and treatment of mental illness—theseories accepted by her followers—have caused sufficient criticism and based on scientific research—have no basis whatsoever in real science. In fact, not only are her notions unscientific, but they have been responsible for gross patient abuse.

I would like to address three of these assumptions. Not only are Jacqui Schiff’s assumptions called into question, but perhaps we should reassess the whole theoretical basis of transactional analysis.

1. The theory of parental culpability, which states that negative parental injunctions cause schizophreria or hebephrenia (the term Jacqui Schiff preferred to use). There is no scientific evidence that the birth family is strongly discouraged. However, current medical opinion would suggest that such expectations are a common and inevitable part of the day. Family involvement is encouraged. The term hebephrenia is rarely used.

2. The theory of repressing with regression claims that the biological clock can be reversed. This assumes that the biological clock can be reversed.


For more information, contact Jacqui Schiff’s only child, Dr. M. P. Bishop (1963). It was designed to test whether there might be a psychological effect associated with schizophrenia that would inhibit avoidance learning in the laboratory. The paper does not refer to human treatment and/or psychotherapy. Similar to Schiff’s assertions, Bishop found that “the shock employed in the learning task was equally stressful for all animals as measured by the rate of defecation” (p. 86). But “the schizophrenic sample showed an extremely poor rate of learning” (p. 82), unlike controls. 

REFERENCES


Penfield, W. (1952). Memory mechanisms. The theory of passivity confrontation. The paper does not refer to human treatment and/or psychotherapy. Similar to Schiff’s assertions, Bishop found that “the shock employed in the learning task was equally stressful for all animals as measured by the rate of defecation” (p. 86). But “the schizophrenic sample showed an extremely poor rate of learning” (p. 82), unlike controls.
Advice from Eric on Writing

By Pam Levin

This is the introductory installment of a new Script column inspired by Melissa Failer, who served as Eric Berne’s coauthor in an adolescent group at St. Mary’s Hospital, San Francisco, in the mid-1960s. We were talking about how much there was to learn from him, and we were both feeling sad about the loss of the rich learning environment he provided. Realizing later that this richness is still available—although scattered throughout the world in many transnational analysts—I thought it would be fun and interesting to develop a column titled “After He Said Hello” in which we could all share what Eric “said” to us, either in person, in a group, via tapes, or through his writing voice. That way we could all benefit from and benefit the incredibly rich legacy he left us.

If you learned something from Eric after he said “Hello,” and you witnessed a tragic page in a book, please share it with us by sending a short vignette (up to a few paragraphs) to me at eric@biame.net. All submissions will be considered for the column. Let’s share the benefits of being part of Eric’s club.

To get us started, I offer the following vignette about Eric teaching me to write.

It was probably 1969. Eric had asked me if I could practice writing for “games nurses practice” because he was to give a speech at the Oakland Naval Hospital to the nursing staff. Afterward we talked about writing it up because, he said, the American Journal of Nursing had contacted him requesting an article. He told me he was going to write up the draft and before I had a look at it and make changes. I was having an extremely hard time doing it, every time I thought about it felt like I just ran into a cement wall and then felt as fast as I could in the other direction.

“He’s the secret to writing: You apply your backside to the seat of a chair and you don’t get up until you’ve written something.”

After the seminar a couple of weeks later, standing in his kitchen, I said somewhat wistfully, “Eric, teach me how to write.” He looked over his glasses, which were halfway down his nose, said that I was serious, changed his stance to square on, removed his pipe from between his teeth, and said, “OK. Here’s the secret to writing. Park your rear backside to the seat of a chair and you don’t get up until you’ve written something. That’s all there is to it.”

As time passed, I was increasingly impressed with Jacqui’s commitment to other people; the extraordinary demands made on her at every level of her work, her talent at doing it, her willingness to go to the heart of things with others with less therapeutic courage, skill, or knowledge would pull back; how essentially simple the processes were; the healing power of short-term regressions (a few minutes or hours) and fully supported regressions (up to 18 months); the wonderful value of creating a “reactive environment” for providing support and a profoundly therapeutic atmosphere; and the power and value of talking explicitly about every issue, from tiny shoe laces, to sexual intercourse, to inner psychological processes. Significantly, I felt at home in this environment, where I could find inner balance because I was met on the outside with a strength and caring that matched what I was dealing with and needed inside.

I also became increasingly concerned for Jacqui’s welfare because of the toll I saw the pressures of her work and lifestyle taking on her. She isolated herself from peer support and discussion and did not do sensible things to take care of herself physically, emotionally, and in other ways. As active and available to others as she was, she was very unavailable to input from others about herself. She seemed to me frightened of this. I sensed a vulnerability that she kept hidden most of the time behind her performance and by escalating conflict if people persisted. For example, in August 1975 I passed the Membership exam and headed home. I only saw Jacqui about five times after that. We exchanged occasional greetings directly and indirectly. However, we eventually lost direct contact. Before that, in 1976, she told me about an issue that turned into an ethics charge against her. While discussing what was afoot, a moment passed almost unnoticed when I said to myself, “She has just decided to fight this rather than to resolve the issues.”

I regretted her decision at the time. Subsequent events added to my regret as I watched month after month of protracted difficulties during which people faced the full force of Jacqui’s intra-personal and extra-personal behavior issues individually and emotionally and to a very high level. While an asset at times when work- ing with people with unresolved survival issues, her approach only served to polarize and demotivate many of those trying to sort through a very thorny issue for the ITAA. In the process, she even succeeded in alienating and hurting people who had supported her and her work for many years. Many became so traumatized by the process that they shut themselves off from and wrote some who carry scars and pain to this day. In the end, she was censured by the ITAA and required to submit a plan that we would have resolved things. Jacqui did not provide that plan and so terminated her own membership.

In the midst of all of these events she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS). The illness forced her to resign until her death. Even so, she managed to work in India and England, teaching the techniques that she had developed. Regrettably, and perhaps because of her deteriorating health and her general style, her work seems to have become at times her own. Her contact in some contexts created serious cause for concern. All the same, I still meet people who benefited from her through those final years of her work.

Eventually she became so disabled with MS that she was admitted to a total care facility in California and didn’t live long. When she died, it was there, in her son’s arms, that she died on 19 July 2002.

Chuck wrote, “In the end, there was a dramatic change in her breathing and I was able to take her into my arms for several minutes before she passed away. During this time, I spoke to her of all her children who had gotten ten well, all of the grandchildren, who we would be sure would remember her all and some who wanted her to suffer no longer.”

It seems fitting to me that she died giving what she gave so many in her life and so needed for herself. My hope is that her passing will stimulate a celebration of her contribution to transactional analysis and to the treatment of people with severe disorders, a reminder of all she contributed to many of us, and that it will promote the complete healing of old wounds.

Ken Mellor lives in southeastern Australia. He can be reached at BlameNetwork, email: kmellor@eck.net.au website: www.blamenetwork.net

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November 13-17, 2002: Perth, Australia. Annual Australasian TA Conference. Contact: Kate Meredith, 10a Itea Place, Mindarie, W.Australia 6030; 08-9300 1160; fax 08-9305 1150

February 4-12, 2003: France’s Cove, near Port Antonio, Jamaica. USATAA Gathering. Contact: Diane Maki, 973-763-7973; email: maliseth@hushmail.com

April 1-11, 2003: Swansea, Wales. Interpersonal Transactional Analysis Conference. Contact: Doug Hampton, dhampton@glam.co.uk

August 3-5, 2003: Oaxaca, Mexico. Redecision Conference. Contact: Janet Lee O’Connor, 220 South August Place, Tucson, Arizona 85710, USA; phone: 520-360-0007 or 520-486-1716; email: southwesttraining@yahoo.com


July 30-August 4, 2004: Bangalore, India. International Transactional Analysis Conference (designated ITAA conference) Contact: C. Suryanarayans, email: itaa2004@hotmail.com or child_saha@hotmail.com