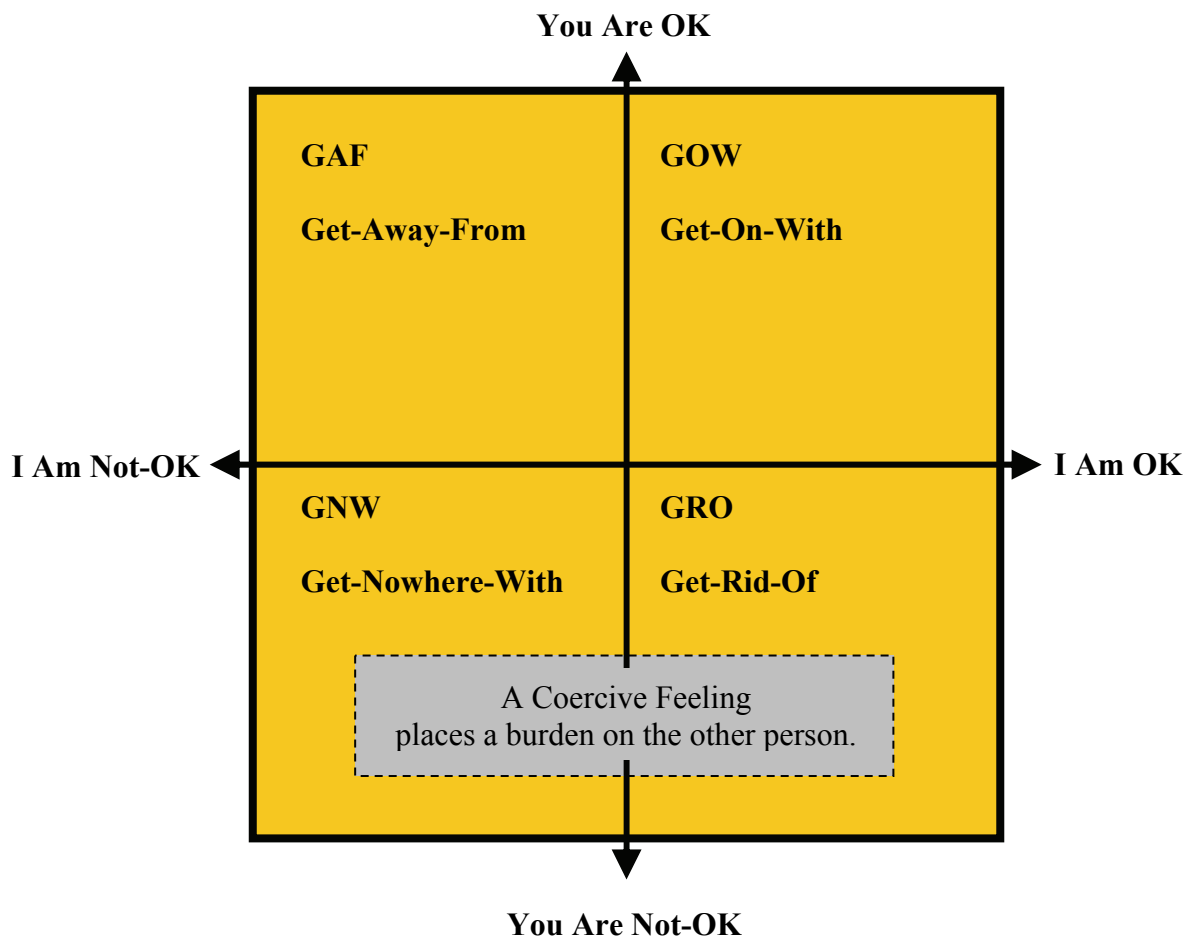


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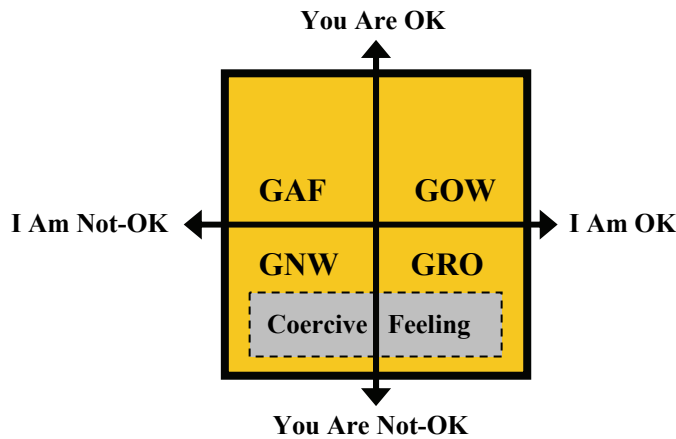


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# Coercive Feelings

## Psychological Rackets in the OK Corral

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Franklin H. Ernst Jr., M.D.

A “coercive feeling” is one which places a burden, (blame for the feeling) on the other person, for example: “You make me feel guilty.” Feelings which **can be** used for coercive purposes include: Tears, Rage, Anger, Guilt, Desperation, Anxiety, Helpless, Tired, Confused, Scared, and Hurt. Eric Berne M.D. called coercive feelings “**rackets.**”<sup>1,2</sup> This paper describes how to understand, diagram, and handle **psychological rackets**, i.e. **emotional blackmail, coercive feelings.**<sup>3</sup>

A psychological racket is a repetitively displayed, coercive emotion with fraudulent and intimidating qualities which is designed to bring about the outward consent of the other person.<sup>4</sup> A racket may be defined phenomenologically, operationally, and pragmatically.<sup>5,6</sup>

**Phenomenologically** a psychological racket is better termed as a **coercive feeling.**<sup>7</sup>

**Operationally** a psychological racket is a repetitive emotional display lacking authenticity which also prevents emotional displays by other parties in the vicinity, victimizing the recipient (victim) and restricting the responder’s choices to either inaction or avoidance.

**Pragmatically** a psychological racket is the display of a **coercive emotion** which places a burden on the party at whom it is directed.

Social encounters progress through a series of transactions. They are concluded by one of the four methods of resolving social encounters: 1) **Get-Away-From** (GAF) which results from concluding the particular encounter with I Am Not-OK and You Are OK; 2) **Get-On-With** (GOW) which results from the encounter concluding with I Am OK and You Are OK; 3) **Get-Nowhere-With** (GNW) which comes from concluding a social event with I Am Not-OK and You Are Not-OK; or 4) **Get-Rid-Of** (GRO) which comes from closing an encounter with an I Am OK and You Are Not-OK.

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<sup>1</sup> Berne, E. M.D.: “Principles of Group Treatment,” Oxford University Press, NY, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Berne, E. M.D.: “The Impotence Racket,” Transactional Analysis Bulletin, 5:181-2.

<sup>3</sup> The term “coercive feelings” comes from Arlie D’Angelo, Managing Editor of the Transactional Analysis Journal, Vol. 6 No. 3, 1976, pg 345.

<sup>4</sup> In the criminal “protection” racket the victim purchases “protection” from the source of danger; the alternative being the ruination of the enterprise of the victim.

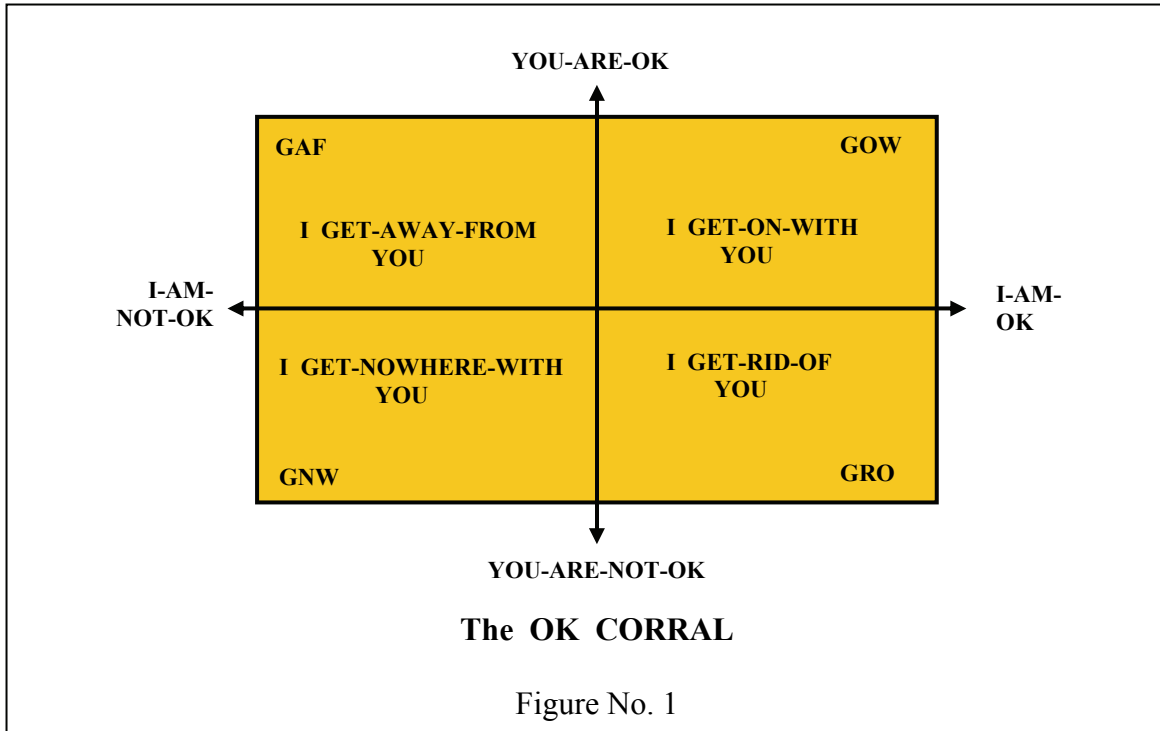
<sup>5</sup> Ernst, F.H. Jr., M.D.: “Formulation: Alphabet of Behavior Letter No. 4. The Psychological Racket Diagram,” The Encounterer, Vol.2 No.36, 5-1-1974, Golden Gate Foundation for Group Treatment, Inc.

<sup>6</sup> Ernst, F.H. Jr., M.D.: “Formulation: Alphabet of Behavior Letter No. 4, Rackets continued,” The Encounterer Vol.2 No.37, 2-28-1975, Golden Gate Foundation for Group Treatment, Inc.

<sup>7</sup> Ernst, F.H. Jr., M.D.: “Psychological Rackets in the OK Corral,” Transactional Analysis Journal, 3:2, 1972.



This is shown in the "The OK Corral: Grid for What's Happening." <sup>8,9</sup> See Figure No. 1.



When a social encounter concludes with I am not OK and you are OK the social dynamic (movement) is that of I **Get-Away-From** You (**GAF**).

When a social encounter concludes with I am OK and you are OK the social dynamic (movement) is that of I **Get-On-With** You (**GOW**).

When a social encounter concludes with I am not OK and you are not OK the social dynamic (movement) is that of I **Get-Nowhere-With** You (**GNW**).

When a social encounter concludes with I am OK and you are not OK the social dynamic (movement) is that of I **Get-Rid-Of** You (**GRO**).

The key element of the **OK Corral** is that it describes: the dynamics, the (physical) movement or non-movement of the parties which result from the forces ("OK/Not OK") at play between the parties at the conclusion of a particular social encounter.

<sup>8</sup> Ernst, F.H. Jr., M.D.: "Transactional Analysis in the OK Corral: Grid for What's Happening," Addresso' Set Publications, Vallejo, California, 2008.

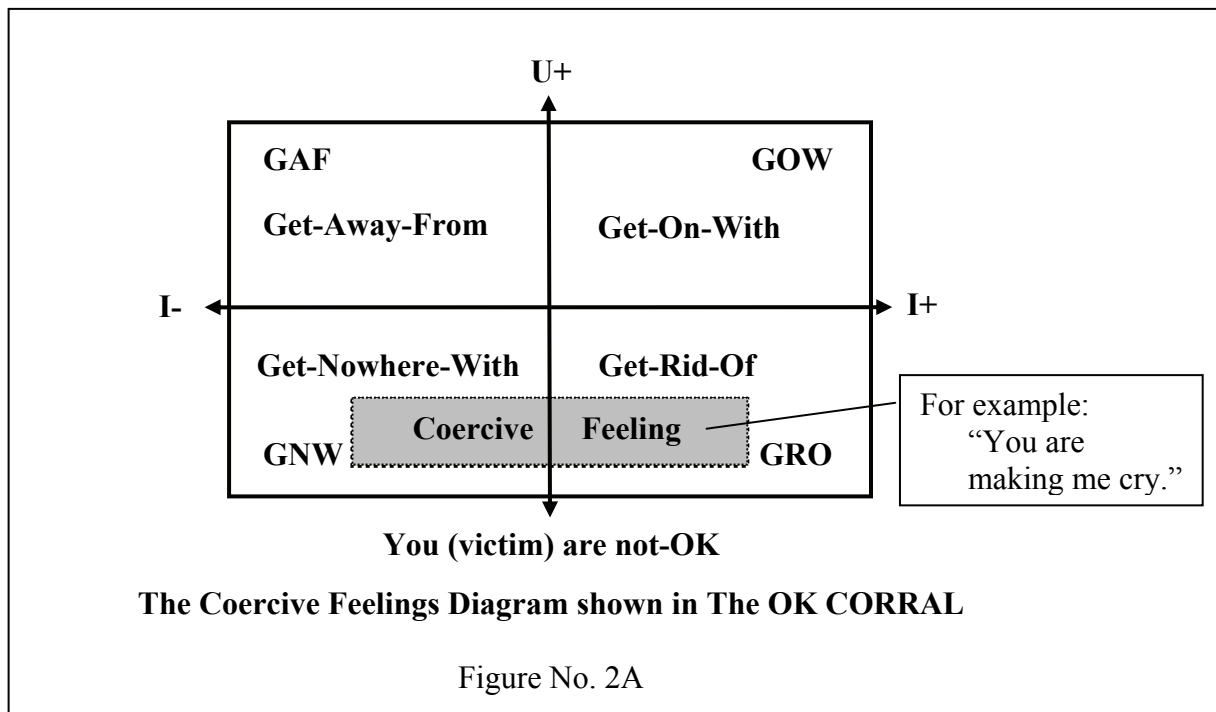
<sup>9</sup> Ernst, F.H. Jr., M.D.: "The OK Corral – Grid for Get-On-With," Transactional Analysis Journal, 1:4, 230-239.



The person who repetitively bursts into tears during his social encounters with others is coercively controlling others; is thwarting any further unfolding of the particular social event at hand. For example everyone else has to deal with these “tears” first before any other proceedings can take place in the given social setting. This person is a social racketeer. A racketeer requires that all other social activity be stopped and that his (implied) demand be satisfied, that he be paid off. This blackmailer demands to be paid off and if not, the current social activity will be damaged, if not ruined.<sup>10</sup>

Racketeers are recognized by the techniques and skills they have developed. Racketeers can easily turn on and off their non-authentic displays of dramatic emotional (feeling) behavior. Racketeers bring themselves to the center of attention (on stage) while all other activities and social action pale into insignificance. Also characteristic of a psychological racketeer (while displaying his coercive feelings) is the skill he/she has for recruiting allies and intimidating others.

It is within this framework that both the racketeer (with his coercive feeling display) **and** the victim (person being imposed on) issue and collect psychological brown stamps.<sup>11</sup> Both parties will potentially cash in their “stamps” later in the form of retaliatory acts (of revenge). The “racketeer” potentially will load the other person down with much more trouble if he doesn’t pay attention to him. The following diagram “Figure No. 2A” summarizes what’s happening.



<sup>10</sup> Ernst, F.H. Jr., M.D.: “Encounter –Tears Racket,” The Encounterer Vol.2 No.38, 3-20-1975, Golden Gate Foundation for Group Treatment, Inc.

<sup>11</sup> Berne, E. M.D.: "Trading Stamps," Transactional Analysis Bulletin, 3:127.



The feature that attracts the other person to respond to the racketeer during the display of the coercive feeling is the tantalizing possibility that maybe, eventually, he/she could get a "You-are-OK" back from the racketeer. The coercive, intimidating quality comes from the fact that the racket feeling is specifically aimed at giving an extended specialized coercive "You-are-not-OK" to the other person until the racketeer's demand is given in to; until the other person e.g. apologizes to the racketeer for some supposed "sin" he committed against the racketeer. The racketeer as shown in Figure 2A is operating from the lower half of his OK Corral. He is depicting that "either way you come back to me, you are not OK with me until I get what I demand. I may be OK or I may be not-OK, but either way you are not going to get the best of me nor get an OK back from me (make me give you a "You are OK)."

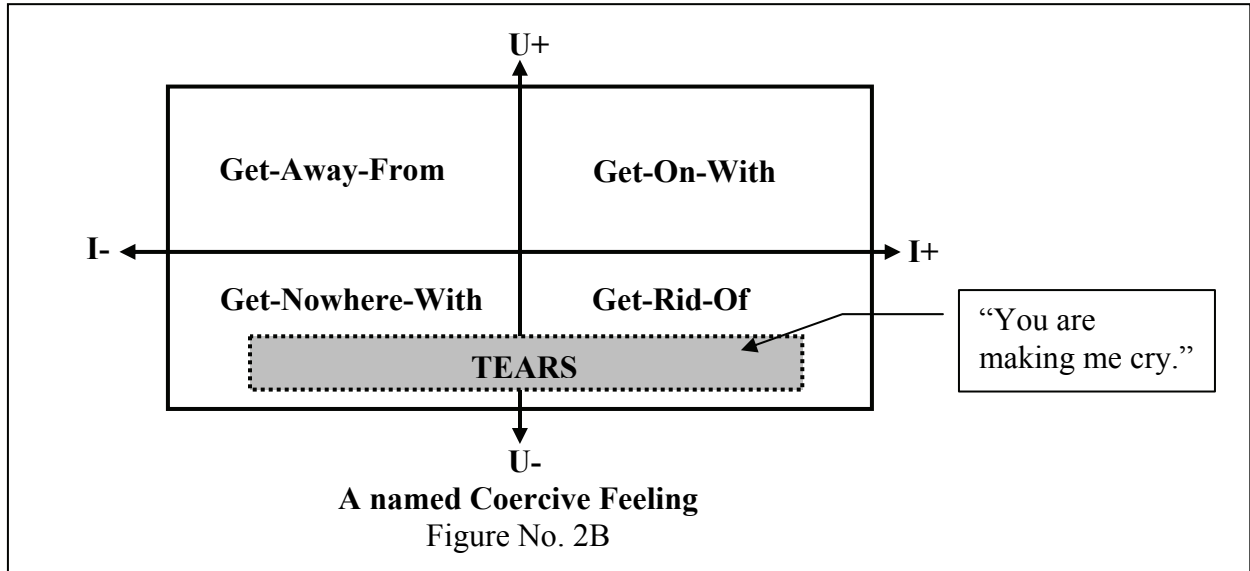
In the following example a forty-one year old woman boasted in group treatment of her mighty strength during her angry exploits at home. "Nobody can get the best of me then. When I get really mad I'm stronger than my husband. Nobody can get me down when I get that mad." She told how she would throw all caution and concerns for personal safety to the winds. In her treatment it was not long before her anger was given the term "sacred temper;" and she became known as "Marie St. Wrath." The first time she was called "Marie St. Wrath" in group she immediately burst into a strong infectious giggle, laugh. This infectious laugh was her Child telling the group she was OK AND they were OK. **Her new nick-name was curative, i.e., it evoked her Child into giving "I'm OK and you're OK," an infectious full giggle.** After this event she discontinued using her favorite coercive social technique at home. She had gotten well of what she came to get treated for. And the group therapist agreed with her. Her offspring also stopped most of their fighting with and around her after this.

The phrase "You can't get the best of me!" describes the racketeer's method of handling events. "The best of me" has a two-edged quality. It signifies both, "You can't get me down unless you are willing to go down, too," AND it also means "I am not going to give you my best, the best side of me, my OK. You are not OK with me under any circumstance!"

A fifty-eight year-old woman promoted contenders onto each other by the applause implicit in her "People fighting makes me shake all over, I get so frightened!" She was told "You are getting a case of the Holy Shakes."

Operationally the co-respondent to the psychological racketeer often finds himself mired down as if in a bed of quicksand when transacting with a racketeer. The more "the other person" struggles to get an OK from the racketeer, the deeper he sinks. He finds he has two choices, a) to stop all struggling in order to not be sucked any deeper, for a stalemate and a get-nowhere-with ending to the encounter **or**, b) the other person may find a chance to excuse himself and pull free and flee the scene. Thus the options for the other party are to either (1) get-nowhere-with or (2) get-away-from the racketeer and his coercive feeling. See the Racketeering Diagram, Figure No. 2A. The racketeer is shown restricting the outcome choices of this particular social encounter. A named racket is shown in Figure No. 2B.





### Ego States and the Diagram of Coercive Feelings

Each of the three classes of ego states in a person is capable of handling and resolving a full range of social situations.<sup>12</sup> A person using his Adult during an encounter is OK or not OK and he will also assign an OK or Not-OK to the other person at the conclusion of the particular specific event. The same is also true for his own Childself as well as his Parent. Each of these three personality structures (circles), therefore, can be viewed as having an OK Corral within himself. The diagram for this operational view of the personality structure is shown in Figure No. 3.

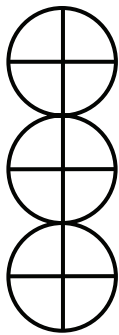


Figure No. 3

One individual with a HURT FEELINGS racket said of his mother: "I could not stand my mother's expression of being hurt. Whenever she had that expression I would do anything to get it to stop. It meant that someone, maybe me, had been unthinkablely cruel to her. If I could help it I'd try to keep her from suffering that way, whether I caused it or not." Later he told of this same training program going on now for his ten year-old daughter. "My wife and I will not be able to come to the next session. Our daughter is having her tonsils out and she will still be hurting very badly. I know! I remember! We can't leave her then." Having sanctified this expression of "Hurting" to his daughter he was now prepared to worship at the altar of this ten-year-old girl's hurt and to act as if compelled and held by it.

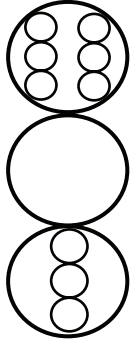
The term "spoiled child", as a rule, refers to a childhood racketeer exercising his/her coercive angry feeling.

<sup>12</sup> Berne, E. M.D.: "Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy," Grove Press, NY, 1961.

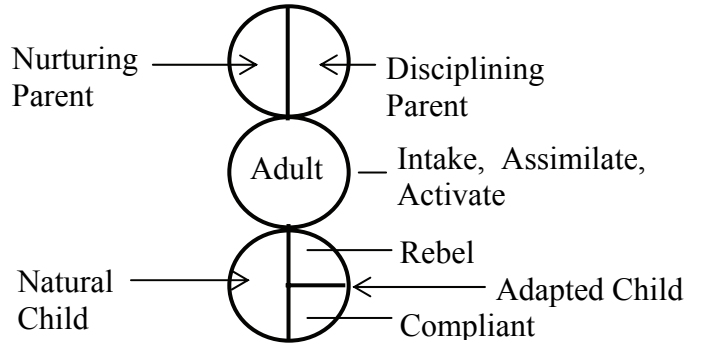


The following diagrams show more information about the Parent, Adult, and Child within the person.<sup>13</sup>

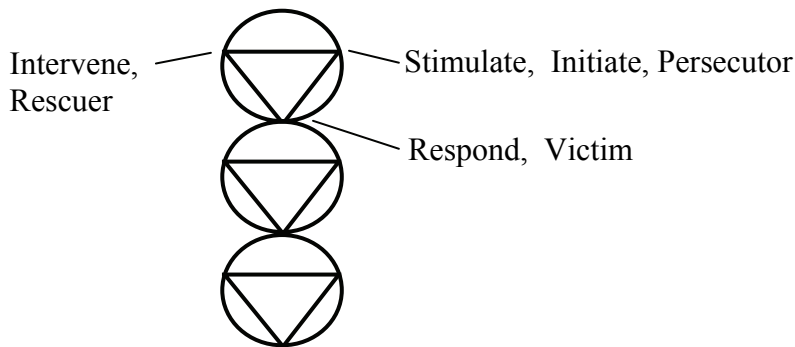
**Structure Diagram**



**Function Diagram**



**Social Modalities Diagram**



Rackets begin in homes where the expression of a certain emotional display is handled as if it were a sacred event. Little sister suddenly bursts into noisy tears. Mother solicitously, even worshipfully, hastens to little sister's side, implying great concern, offering an umbrella of protection, apparently unable to do anything else until little sister's tears have ceased. Mother may initiate sanctions against any sinful instigator who may be in sight. Ominously, gravely, mother inquires: "What happened? Who hurt you?" Little sister here is worshipping at the altar of the family shrine to sacred feelings. Her cry signifies, "Someone has sinned! It must be so!" Little brother, in the vicinity, recognizing that worship services are in progress, has three choices; run as fast as he can, stay and take his beating, or if he is nimble-witted enough, he may join up in a mutual display of lachrymation to save his hide. Any protest of his innocence without his own tears may well be an added sin.

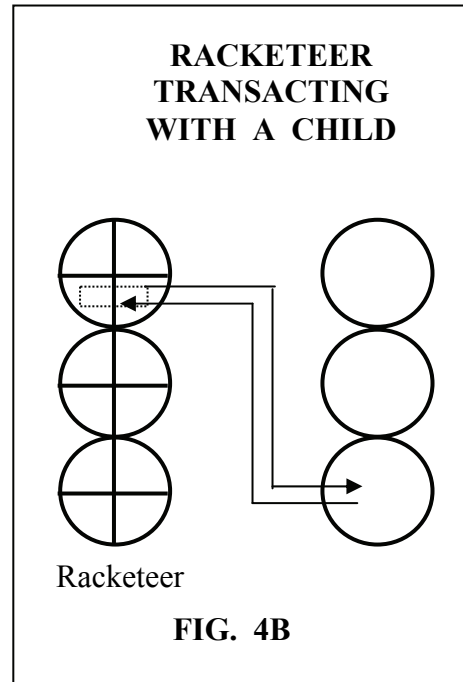
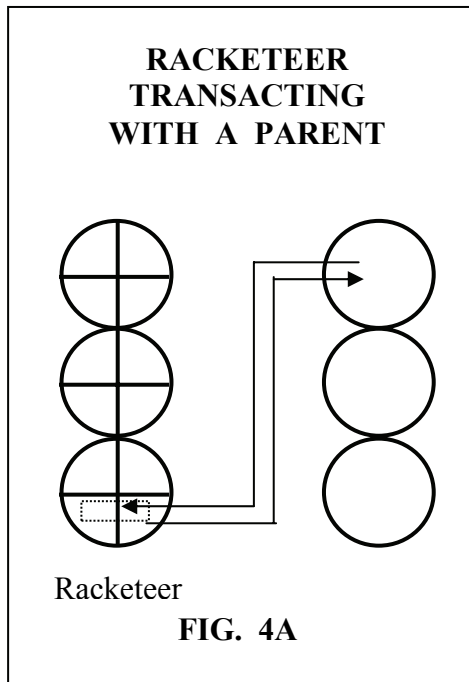
<sup>13</sup> The three circles of the personality are different points of view, i.e., (1) Structure (anatomy) including primary and secondary personalities, (2) Function (physiology), (3) Operational (goal), and (4) Social Modality.





Racketeers, as encountered in the group setting, are sometimes emanating from the Child-self; other times from the person's Parent-self. The diagnosis of Parent or Child, as often as not, is made by the social response, i.e. the Parent racketeer will be transacting with a Child in the particular social setting group and the Child racketeer will be transacting with a Parent. See Figures 4A and 4B.

"Emotional blackmail" is another term for psychological racketeers, for example "Who else do you blackmail with tears?" One favorite tactic of racketeers is to say: "Are you accusing me of . . . ?" as a basis for the initiation of their racket. The responder can readily deal with this kind of blackmailer by asking: "Oh, are you accusing me of accusing you of ..."



A thirty-eight year-old man in prison for the fourth time was heard saying "Doc, if you don't get me released I'm going to become so bitter that I don't know what I might do when I get out on the streets." This was approached four ways: 1) He could see himself being released sooner or later, so now he was promoting his continued confinement, 2) Becoming bitter or not was his own decision, was under his own control, 3) His game "See what you made me do" was diagnosed and 4) He was trying to blackmail writer with this threat. **The elements of threat, intimidation and coercion to force compliance from the other person, are the heart of psychological blackmail, rackets, and coercive feelings.**



### Summary of the Coercive Feelings (Rackets) of Racketeers:

- 1) The TEARS racket is to tyrannize the victim.
- 2) The RAGE racket is to flush out uncontrollable rage in the quarry.
- 3) The ANGER racket is to provoke a show of burning anger back from the other party which is then his to control or not (a game switch?).
- 4) The GUILTY racket is to send the prey scurrying to his own fault vault.
- 5) The DESPERATION racket is to shatter the calm of the other person.
- 6) The ANXIETY racket is to stimulate apprehension in the respondent.
- 7) The HELPLESS racket is to render the other person impotent.
- 8) The TIRED racket is to fatigue and wear out the other party.
- 9) The CONFUSED racket is to bewilder the companion.
- 10) The SCARED racket is to frighten the other party.
- 11) The HURT FEELINGS racket is to ruin the other person's day.

Note: This paper does not describe rackets as: (1) game payoffs, nor (2) the so called sexualization process of rackets, nor (3) the element of substitution of feelings. For these the reader is directed to the bibliography.

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