



Transactional Musings

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Rackets People Play continued

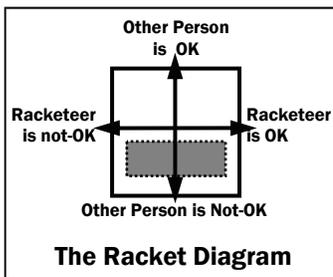
Origins of Racket

Behavior

By Franklin H. Ernst Jr., MD

Racket behavior is the quality of behavior which originates during childhood development at almost precisely 18 months of age. Rackets are specialized displays of feelings which occur during social transactions by which a "You're not OK" quality of stroke can be forcefully delivered to another person. Children learn that by giving these kinds of strokes to their parents they are (better) able to keep their parents anchored to themselves, e.g. for purposes of survival.

The rackets children learn are a form of emotional display behavior that unequivocally informs the parent that "You are not OK if you don't pay attention to me, don't hold me, don't do something for me, or don't stop doing something to me." And the child learns this and is able to effectively organize and portray this, has developed the neurological-biological equipment to behave in this manner by the time he is about 18 months old.



When somebody bursts into tears at another person "You're hurting me" during a large social gathering, makes an accusatory public scene, such is defined here as racketeering behavior. If someone loudly, angrily singles out an individual making accusations or accusatory demands of the other, it is quite legitimate to define this as social racketeering behavior, eg loudly angrily "Stop pawing me, you masher!" That could be very frightening especially if there were police around. "You hurt me (my feelings)", loud in an auditorium. It is intimidating, scary to the person it's directed at. Either they are going to give in or put some distance between themselves and the accuser. Or some guy hollers at his wife in righteous anger "You tramp." That would be a rage racket. If this is done in the larger social setting she will modify her behavior very dramatically (for the time being).

To burst into tears, if that's what counts, in the family; to have a temper tantrum, if that's what will routinely arrest the attention of the rest of the family, draw the attention of one or both of the parents. Maybe a "hurt feeling" scream works better in the Franco family. While in the Philip family a pouting form of "hurt feeling" is the most efficient at drawing attention to a family member. Whatever it is that the child has worked out AND counts in the family will be the racket(s) the child becomes most skilled at showing. Whatever this form of emotional display is, that the growing person learned, the goal of the specialized feeling will be to hold the unqualified attention of the beholder by, in effect indicting the beholder with an undeniable stroke that says "YOU ARE NOT OK WITH ME NOW. IT IS BECAUSE OF YOU THAT I AM FEELING THIS WAY."

Rackets are accusatory in nature, accusing the other person of having done wrong to the accuser, of having wronged the feeling exhibitor: "You scare(d) me, make me nervous, are hurting me," etc, whatever quality the person has learned AND become skilled at dramatically portraying (by a show of feelings) with or without corresponding words. Almost routinely by the age of 18 months, a

person begins to exhibit this addition to his behavioral repertoire that enables him to command his parents attention.

The fact is that the feeling being shown, which has such a commanding effect on the beholders in the family, is one learned from one or the other parent. The young one has himself experienced the dramatic effects of that particular feeling on himself earlier. Perhaps experimentally at first he displayed it back on the parent. Seeing it's prompt and commanding, coercive effect on others such a behavioral display has on others, then quickly becomes an almost indispensable part of the child's behavioral armamentarium. This is one of the earliest tactics learned by a child by which to experience personal social (family) potency.

A child finds that when used with reasonably good timing these feeling exhibitions are quite potent in their binding/bonding effect on their own family members.

A racket display is one of those qualities of social behavior the child learns, which from the child's point of view, gives him increased social potency and command, which, among other potential advantages prevents him, eg from being evicted from his own home.

Special points of Interest:

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Through experience he finds that his learned and trained racket in his family has a very powerful emotional binding effect on his parents. Initially with only rudimentary skill in tactical timing, a child early on learns this particular feeling can be shown almost without fear of recrimination in his own home. It is as if church services were being held when the racket special to the home is played. There is a degree of reverence by the family for the racket when it is played. As if a "sacred shrine" had been built for worship of that particular "feeling."

The rackets in a family are one of the elements, one of the stroking elements that hold a family together. The ability to deliver very strong, meaningful central-quality "YOU ARE NOT-OK" emotional strokes back and forth that are remembered and vitalizing for weeks, even years later, that, if you will, "get the juices going." That's one of the elements that bonds families.

And a racket is defined as a specialized show of feeling that says "You are NOT-OK!," implicitly, not in words "You are NOT-OK" until the demand has been satisfied. Not in words, it may be in words, but it usually is not. A racket is played to enforce a demand on the behavior of another or others.

OK, now these particular behaviors are called FAMILY (behavior) RACKETS. And they are used in families and they help to hold families together.

For example, Pat is very clear about it. He says that when he "hurts Helen's feelings" she let's him know. So Helen's "hurt feelings" are very important among the strokes that hold the two of them together. On the other side his counter-prevailing racket behavior includes a

quality of righteous wrath when she doesn't give in to Pat or back off. Alternatively, he is skillful at showing that another person, for example Helen, is to blame for embarrassing him, "You embarrassed me (It is your fault)!" She gets her feelings hurt as her way of controlling him and holding him close. Then every once in a while he gets her back, will counter-control her behavior with his wrath racket or embarrassed racket. Helen and Pat are able to hold each other in close, able to count on each other. She will embarrass or enrage him until she eventually feels he is up close to hitting her. Then they both subside. And that's the way these "NOT-OK" strokes hold families together. Very strong, vitalizing, effective, emotional words and gestures, emotional expressions that give substance to people's lives and stimulate their physiology.

The "rackets people play," like "the games people play," contain some of the critical elements for biologically sustaining meaningful life. The rackets people play is not pathological, damaging or harmful as long as the individual person does not rely solely on this form of gaining responsive strokes and recognition. Like the games people play, so also with the rackets people play when reasonably spaced and decently timed they add zest, like salt and pepper to the social encounters people have with each other.

Rackets come onto us in life in four areas. However, they are primarily for family member bonding. In the more general social setting, when used sparingly, they are not out of place or detrimental to the person who periodically relies on one of his rackets.

The Categories of Rackets People Play

Rackets and racketeering behavior are found in four general areas of life. These four are:

1. **FAMILY RACKET behavior** - as noted above.
2. **SOCIAL RACKET behavior** - in the general social setting, "out in public."
3. **POLITICAL RACKET behavior** - in the political setting to influence the passage of legislation and enforce legislatively authorized and mandated regulations. These are the ones for example passed under the demanding insistence of "special interest groups" who progressed, - gained muscle by way of mob appeal - from "Social Racketeering to Political Racketeering." Much of political racket behavior uses the CLOAKING DEVICES of "protecting" and "helping" members of the "public."
4. **CRIMINAL RACKET behavior** - here the "protection" racket is probably the clearest as a behavior racket.

Categorized in this manner, it is also possible to organize rackets and racketeering behaviors into **The OK Corral: Grid For What's Happening**, shown below.

Family Rackets

Family rackets are part of how family members hold onto each other, one could even say part of how families get-on-with each other. Certainly the majority of pairs of authentic individuals for whom some form of intimacy is a part of their lives do use family rackets as one of the elements for holding onto each other. Rackets are part of how they get-on-with each other as individuals. When all else fails they'll use a racket stroke to verify the authenticity of their significance to the other person. The net effect of mutually played family rackets is (physical) health.

The rackets people play are balanced. By this is meant: each person becomes skilled at playing two rackets during childhood. AND each person becomes especially sensitized to two rackets. This latter could be likened to becoming immobilized, "paralyzed" when either of those two is played on him.

One woman told how two principal rackets she found herself using, especially with intimates were "Suffering" - from her father - and "Tears" - from her mother.

The two she found herself most likely to worship, to be "victimized" by, were "The

OK Corral: Grid for What's Happening



Wrath (Rage) Racket" (one of her father's) and "Hurt Feelings Racket" - (one of her mother's).

Each person learns and becomes a specialist in two major rackets while growing up. These are:

1. The one that was personally the most successful in handling mom, AND
2. The one that was the next most successful at handling home "disasters" where, from the learning and growing child's viewpoint, there was the potential threat of eviction, eg the racket that would put dad on hold, "from throwing you out of the house."

Occasionally a person may have become skilled in more than two, but the third will not be as effective in "commanding an audience" because of lack of practice playing it.

As a rule, those who have not been trained in a symbiosis to rely on rackets, to protect themselves from censure, rarely use more than two rackets either in family or social settings.

A few other family behavior rackets are listed below. Feelings and emotions that are dramatically portrayed without any need for words:

- You Hurt My Feelings.**
- You're Making Me Angry.**
- You're Confusing Me.**
- You make me feel guilty.**
- You scare me.**
- You are making me feel anxious.**
- You make me feel desperate.**
- You make me feel Helpless.**
- You make me feel Tired.**
- You burn me up.**

This list is not intended to be complete.

The key element of a racket form of emotional display is: the one using "this feeling is simultaneously portraying that the responsibility for the coercive feeling, AND the cessation of it being displayed, lies not with the

one showing the feeling. The responsibility for causing this feeling and for keeping it going lies instead with the person at whom the feeling is being directed.

Social Rackets

Two types:

1. Those to blackmail an individual FOR PERSONAL REASONS in front of a (potential) audience.
2. Those played to larger groups FOR REASONS OF A "CAUSE" where demands are being made against a group or program which may not be present.

Example of a Personal Social Racket Behavior

Social rackets include those in which an individual will begin to predominantly use a specialized show of feeling in order to point out to others in a gathering that the singled-out-person "Is NOT-OK."

A classic example was in the case of Ilene, an abrasive demanding woman in the medical profession. She was given to rude, impulsive interruptions at meetings which she was attending. She did this in order to competitively insert her latest, "more-up-to-date-than-anyone-else's" information in an "Only-Trying-To-Help" style.

She managed again to gain the floor at a 1987 meeting. Ostensibly up to report on a finite subject, she used the opening to get started in a long dissertation on a matter already settled.

Someone of those seated gave out with a loud impatient clearly audible "Uuhhhh! Aaahhhh!" (Do we have to listen to this again) sigh. Within less than a second she retorted in her own "hurt" near-tearful tones, as if threatening to burst into tears if interrupted any further, "I was just trying to explain what you asked me to." All of a sudden the place

went dead quiet.

The reason, it was a racket; one of the diagnostic features of the racket, was that it was optional behavior. There was no personal commitment on her part to the feeling. Once her demand for total "attention" had been met, and she got the silence, she dropped the "hurt" and went ahead with her monolog.

One member of the audience stayed with his explicit, externally manifested disapproving disciplining Parent, which said by his appearance and gestures to her Child "Young lady stop that!, Knock it off! You know very well you are being naughty."

This professional woman looked in the direction of the disapprover as he gave an impatient combination head-shoulder movement. She understood. She did knock it off.

Another Example of Personal Social Racket Behavior:

Ellie spilled her tears all over Dr. Bob's office. As their 4/22/87 appointment came to an end, the physical therapist told Ellie her next appointment (as usual) would be in three weeks, on 05/13/87. "Oh please, can't I come in 2 weeks instead?" She'd been in pretty good shape for 3 years and in spite of periodic mutterings about how awful her hip was paining her, she had been doing quite well, socially and physically animated, visiting friends daily, going up and down stairs, fighting with her daughter almost daily in a standard and unchanged manner. Firmly the request had to be denied.

Not being one to easily give up getting her (Child's) way, skillful at manipulating her social resources and enforcing her demands, the next thing her therapist heard was a call from her internist who takes care of her diabetes. She had been

to his office just the hour before the telephone call (two weeks and a day after she was last in to see the physical therapist). There was an urgency to his tones and words, "She had completely broken down (in tears)" in his office saying she hurt so bad she felt like killing herself, she had been in to her physical therapist, but he would not let her come in as often as she "needed" to, she could not get another appointment to see him for another week yet and he would not let her come when she "needed" to. Dr. Bob's closing comment was "She should be seen by you as soon as possible."

This was a specialized display of feeling by Ellie aimed at enforcing a demand, one that placed the internist on the spot and aimed him at the supposed source of her distress; distress, the responsibility for which, she was endeavoring to pass onto him to take care of. She was going to cry on her internist until he gave into her demand that he call her physical therapist. She scared him with this kind of talk. He capitulated.

Getting her physical therapist to give in to her demand was now in Dr. Bob's hands. Wittingly or not, he believed he was taking the easy way out. Ellie had transferred the pressure on to Dr. Bob to put the pressure on one of Dr. Bob's fellow colleagues in the community.

There was no way for Dr. Bob. The only way out, that he could see, after Ellie had restricted his choices in this pressured situation, was to give in to her non-verbal demand that he call her therapist. The implicit accusation he faced was that if he did not give in to her he would be personally responsible for whether or not she attempted suicide. And he could not tell if she meant to try it right there in his office,



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"Mastery of the universe is proportional to the symbols man has by which to represent his universe."

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or later.
 Ellie's tears were directed at making Dr. Bob feel most uncomfortable. The further implication, once he had accepted her restriction of his choices, was that the sole route left open to restore her composure (and thus his) was to do, without words, what she "asked" him to do.

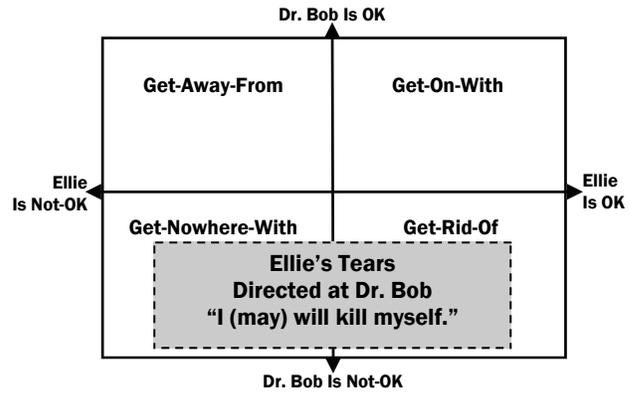
On his promise, she then partially "composed" herself before she walked back out through his waiting room, and in full view of other patients, to catch her bus home. On his promise, she took the pressure off him. On his promise, she decreased the intensity of her accusatory (tearful) emotional display at him, both there in his office, AND as she walked out through his waiting room and past his other patients, some of whom probably heard her audible tearful display.

Until he did as Ellie's non-verbal behavior demanded obviously, by this specialized show of emotion to Dr. Bob. She meant to convey (to Dr. Bob) that he was not OK. The emotional display was also to enforce her demand.

Ellie also called her physical therapist immediately after getting home to announce she had just seen Dr. Bob. "He wants you to call him right away to talk to you." Answering her, her therapist told her they had already talked. Her tones were steady, insistent, without distress and with something rather like triumph in them. Ellie had not been taking her anti-depressant medication, did not like it.

The therapist asked her, if in the meantime until her next appointment her daughter should not be informed of her present distress and "depression." She adamantly denied that would be necessary and

Ellie's OK Corral: Grid for What's Happening



that she would be quite alright until she came in at her next appointment to see him. She was fearful that her daughter would again start talking about how she might need to go to a psychiatric hospital.

At that, it became clear that this was much less a depression than a coercive attempt to enforce a Childhood emotionally based demand. The next thing done was to let her know that in fact Dr. Bob had been authentically alarmed by her office display, that she had in fact scared him. The upshot was her volunteered "I promise to be good" until she came in for her next physical therapy session, just please don't call her daughter.

Her long standing emotional disorder was a "Personality Disorder" rather than a mental illness.

The way to deal with these is in terms of the person's actions as they relate to the treatment relationship, to leave the past history alone.

Confronted matter-of-factly during the next appointment, after a careful detailed inquiry into the event, she sheepishly admitted she was "getting her therapist in dutch with her internist." As a follow-up, her demands decreased. There were no untoward effects by her over the next year. In fact, after that, she became involved in community volunteer work, as a first for her. But her internist continues to remain cool toward her therapist.

Her one major Life Game continues: "Let's-You-And-Him (Her, Them) Fight." ...

To be continued

Ellie's OK Corral: Grid for What's Happening

