

## LET'S NOT CLAIM IT'S SCRIPT WHEN IT AIN'T



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Berne accurately observed sequences of transactions which he called games. He also noted that there are players who apparently escalate such sequences to "3rd degree" (lethal) levels, often culminating in tragedy (Berne, 1964).

Unfortunately he drew inaccurate conclusions from these observations. He assumed that players engage in games *in order to* advance their scripts—and the implication followed that tragic "third acts" of scripts are pre-decided in childhood because of stroke-associated injunctions from "witch-mothers," and so forth. This is an unproven—and, I think, incorrect—hypothesis, except in rare cases of deliberate malevolent episc scripting (English, 1969).

Berne misinterpreted what constitutes the "payoff" sought by players. My clinical evidence demonstrates that the payoff sought does not result from the crossed transaction at the end, as he thought. Players "con" others into transacting with them, not for the sake of completing a "game" in accordance with Formula G

(Berne, 1972) but rather in the hope of maintaining complementary transactions that will offer *continuing* strokes for their rackets. So what are thought to be game players are, in fact, *racketeers* (English, 1976a).

Racketeers will switch ego states and cross complementary transactions only when they fear that their partner is about to stop giving them further strokes. What Berne called a game does not constitute a sequence of *pre-decided* moves. It constitutes the end of *racketeering that fails*.

This distinction is not just a distinction in vocabulary—but one of process and goal. Although racketeering includes a "con" and, sometimes, a "gimmick," it does not involve a switch in ego state. Racketeering consists in ongoing *dyadic* complementary transactions between a racketeer and a more or less willing partner. Even unconsciously a racketeer does not plan to cross his partner's transaction after he has hooked him into complementary transactions. He seeks to extract as many strokes as possible from this process and to go on for as long as possible. "Hard-line" racketeers seek such strokes desperately and repetitively, even if they are contrived or ritualized.

### WHY RACKETEER?

Racketeers crave strokes far more than average persons for four reasons:

- 1) To compensate them for the emo-

tional constriction they suffer from, due to the repression of the feelings that are being substituted for by their rackets (English, 1975, 1976a).

2) To reinforce the identity they have carried since early childhood (e.g. "depressed Thea," "hostile Stanley," "Sweet Suzy," etc.) even though it may not correspond to their "true" selves and was taken on as a result of their rackets. (This is an existential issue. Our most primitive recognition of our existence is connected to what we are called.)

3) To obtain strokes for their rackets from present-day partners in the manner in which they were stroked in childhood.

4) To reinforce their defensive existential position and to maintain it rigidly. In two previous papers (English 1971, 1972) I described how most people develop, at about age three, a "defensive existential position" which protects them from being flooded by global "not OK" feelings.

People with heavy rackets operate under the condition of holding down many underlying feelings and feel threatened by the surfacing into awareness of what were unacceptable feelings during their very early childhood, since they mistakenly equate these with dangerous behavior.

They need strokes as sustained protection from such a feared invasion. Even so, they switch from this ego state into the opposite one at points of crisis—as when the "hooked" partner looks evasive and signals that he or she is about to discontinue interminable stroke exchanges which, typically, become more and more stereotyped as time goes on. The prospect of losing further strokes generates panic within the racketeer and sets off glandular changes that result in an unpremeditated switch in ego state. In his or her less habitual ego state the racketeer becomes "trigger happy" and suddenly crosses the last transaction of the defaulting partner—a case of quitting

before getting fired."

Alternately, the racketeer's partner may be the first to finally cross his partner's exploitative invitations, following which the racketeer might quickly "double cross" the transaction in a face-saving attempt to punish him or her for refusal to cooperate.

### CONSOLATION, NOT PAYOFF

Berne's mistaken assumption about the "payoff" being *at the end* of a crossed transaction rather than *in the process* of racketeering was based on his observation that following the final crossed transaction which breaks off communication between the partners, a "player" will often lean back, laugh, or show a fleeting smile. Berne deduced that the smile represented internal strokes from the player's past. This is true, but its appearance does not prove that it is *for the sake of* these strokes that the player "hooked" his partner in the first place. Such strokes simply represent "consolation prizes" which the racketeer pulls out of his "credit bank" to compensate himself for the frustration he experiences as a result of the crossed transaction, even if it is his own switch in ego state that made it happen.

All of us carry a "credit bank" of accumulated strokes to draw on at times of crisis or scarcity, like food reserves in the larder (English, 1971a). Such accumulated internal strokes are not necessarily associated to witch messages or harmful injunctions, although they may have been acquired at times of crisis. Most children have experienced stroking from someone at times of pain or frustration ("there, there, better luck next time"), and such stroking does not necessarily represent reinforcement for frustration. Though some consolatory strokes are associated with frustration and are reproduced in the

"now," their presence does not necessarily mean that it is *in order to* acquire these internal strokes that a "player" will initiate transactions with a partner. If it was primarily internal strokes he was after, he would not need a partner. He could acquire such strokes more reliably by withdrawing.

The smile which may follow a racketeer's crossed transaction operates to reassure him that perhaps all is not lost. Or, sometimes, it corresponds to the smile of embarrassment or the shy laugh with which a 2-4-year-old "saves face" and tries to reconnect with those around him when he feels shamed, or scared. It does not necessarily carry the weighty significance ascribed to a "gallows laugh."

To use a gangster analogy, as is implied by Berne's reference to the "con," a gangster might whistle and feel temporarily satisfied with having "gotten revenge" when he shoots a defaulting patsy whom he was blackmailing for regular cash payoffs, but soon after this fleeting moment he faces the chore of having to dispose of the dead body. When he killed, he did not do so in order to acquire a secret payoff represented by the dead body or by whistling. The payoff he was after was a continuous flow of cash, and the killing was the consequence of his not getting assurance of continuing payoffs. In the same way a transactional racketeer prefers continuing strokes—

even extorted ones—to crossing his partner's transaction, but he crosses the transaction when he becomes "trigger-happy" through panic. Thence the pathetic and typical "cop-out" cries of racketeers following a "game ending"—the crossed transaction which follows a racketeer's sudden switch: "I didn't want to do it, but she *made me* mad (sad, scared, guilty, etc.)."\*

### STAGES OF RACKETEERING

There are five stages in the racketeering sequence:

1) "Racketeering" as an ongoing process (or an attempt). The racketeer seeks strokes through continuous complementary transactions with a partner who participates because she or he is a complementary racketeer, (Type I "Helpless" or "Bratty" meeting Type II "Helpful" or "Bossy") or because he or she has been "hooked" in a social or business situation. This process can consist of only one exchange, or it can go on and on and be resumed again and again after intervals of time.

2) Panic or rage on perceiving his chosen partner is about to evade him and discontinue the flow of continuing strokes. The anticipated "desertion" leads to a switch in ego state (Type I, Child to Parent; Type II, Parent to Child).

\*Note: I suspect that Berne's blind spot about "payoffs" was due to his own involvement with the identity of being a "winner" and working to prove it at poker. The chips collected at poker after each round *appear* to be the "payoff" that was being sought by players, but if we analyze the playing of poker in terms of Berne's own concepts about strokes and time-structure, it becomes obvious that it is not the cash collected or lost at the end of each game that truly constitutes the payoffs being sought by poker players. They seek payoffs *in the process* of playing, in that each player gets himself stroked for the particular racket that leads him to invest his time into playing poker rather than a more creative occupation. Some players play to reinforce racket

feelings of being dumb, confused, insensitive, smart, crafty, powerful, etc. Berne sought continuing strokes at poker for being a "winner." Presumably, he did not racketeer much beyond the "normal" first degree level, so there were no perceptively harmful consequences to his racketeering, except that even a racket involving the need of repeated proof for being a "smart winner" can be counter-productive. Berne was more brilliant and creative when he was not invested in his racket. In my opinion, even he might have benefited if he had identified the underlying feelings for which he was substituting his racketsy preoccupation with "winning."

3) The crossed transaction—"game ending"—whereby the racketeer "pulls the trigger" on his "uncooperative" partner, as if by reflex action, from the "new" ego state. This can happen just before the partner appears ready to leave, or else instantaneously right after the partner crosses the racketeer's transaction.

Type I "game ending" is a variation of NIGYSOB or "Blemish" (attack from the racketeer's Parent to the partner's Child). Type II ends with the racketeer being kicked by his partner's unappreciative Parent (even if it is the partner's Child who did it) so it corresponds to what is erroneously (English, 1976a) referred to as the game of "Kick Me."

4) The smile or laugh with which the racketeer tries to buck up his courage when he suddenly notes that he has just cut off his source of supply for live stroke payoffs.

5) The racketeer's return to his basic defensive existential position for renewed attempts to racketeer. The racketeer thus reverts to the ego state habitually used for racketeering.

Following stage 5 the racketeer seeks to start the sequence all over again, even more frantic for strokes than before, but friends and acquaintances who have been "hooked" once too often are likely to have left the scene. Thus, opportunities for acquiring strokes shrink while stroke-hunger grows. Efforts to get strokes lead to the opposite result: increased deprivation. With increased franticity, the frequency of ego state switches accelerates as does the frequency of "game endings." These not only aggravate frustration, but deplete his or her "credit bank" and can ultimately lead all the way to suicide or homicide.

But such a tragic ending was not predecided in his script. Quite the contrary. His script probably contains a happy

ending, albeit an unrealistic one ("they lived happily ever after"). A tragic ending becomes an inevitable *result* only when there is acceleration from desperate racketeering to panic, to switch, to crossed transactions, to frustration, to depletion, to resumed desperate racketeering, renewed panic, and so on with escalating intensity.

### THE RACKET'S FUNCTIONS

Racketeers feel unable to divest themselves of the rackets that cause their problems, even when they see them, because rackets carry three interlocking functions that they believe are necessary for continued existence:

1) To *substitute* for other, underlying feelings that are seeking expression in the "now" but which are not recognized by the racketeer.

At their origin rackets start from the fact that disapproved behavioral manifestations of feelings of the two to three-year-old child get discounted, shamed or mislabeled by his caretakers as he learns the words with which to communicate inchoate stirrings of feelings. Thus, a substitution of approved for disapproved feelings is made and stroked (English, 1971b, 1972).

Example: "You're tired, darling, let me take you to bed, poor tired baby," to a child who is exploring the living room and expressing excitement and curiosity. Eventually the child learns to *enact* whatever it is that is connoted by the substitute vocabulary and this, then, becomes his racket.

Later, outside the family of origin, the growing child invites strokes for the expression of substitute feelings rather than the nameless ones that stir within him. ("Teacher, I'm too tired...to have fun at recess with these excitable kids.")

2) To constitute the *vehicle for discharging the pressure* that builds up within a racketeer from the fact that he suppresses even from his own recognition the awareness of the underlying feelings which seek to surface. (I "need" to be "tired," in order to feel *something*.)

3) To represent the racketeer's "certificate of demand" (comparable to trading stamps) when he seeks strokes. ("See how tired I am; gimme strokes for it.") In childhood this was the racket that best elicited strokes and responses. It is this function of rackets that is most obvious in racketeering, and is most likely to turn off average people from 3rd degree racketeers. Racketeers tend to present their rackets as manifest claims that allegedly entitle them to extort strokes from willing and unwilling partners, the way a beggar might aggressively exhibit his sores in demanding alms.

#### *A LITERARY EXAMPLE OF PROGRESSION FROM RACKETS TO TRAGIC ENDINGS*

Shakespeare's Othello is a Type II racketeer (mostly Parent to Child transactions) with "masculine" rackets of courage, love and righteousness. But his inner needs remain unappeased, however much stroking he obtains from Desdemona because he lacks awareness, even of the dimensions of the jealousy which he does recognize. Iago activates his anxiety about the possible loss of continued Adapted Child strokes from Desdemona. Stimulated by this panic, Othello switches to feeling kicked by her and gets to the murderous rage reaction of a hurt Child. In his raging Child ego state, operating with the strength of a grown body, he accomplishes the murder that a chronological child does not have the power to commit even when he wishes to do so.

This tragic ending was not necessarily predecided in his script, though spectators of the play can anticipate, as might therapists with patients, that if unchecked, Othello's "tragic flaw" (his lack of awareness) must lead to disaster. In addition to jealousy, the feelings covered over by Othello's rackets and his rigid Type II position were probably anger at having been discounted by whites before he achieved power, or inarticulate infantile yearnings about idealized women. If he had recognized that he was covering up such feelings from himself because of childhood mislabeling, there would have been no tragedy.

This points up how I differ with Berne in explaining why classic tragedy continues to fascinate its spectators throughout the ages. It is not because the play demonstrates that the hero or heroine has predecided the tragic end to Act III. Rather it is because spectators can recognize in advance how the hero/ine's "blind spot" inevitably leads to a tragic end through a chain of ups and downs that can be followed in sequence. Our fascination as spectators resides in the fact that our Child can identify with the hero/ine and we keep hoping that s/he becomes insightful and, thus, clear-sighted enough to avert tragedy. At the end of a tragedy, as in a morality play, we are given in dramatic form the feared, but anticipated, demonstration of why we had better recognize our blind spots—lest we meet with a similarly dreadful catastrophe as that which befell the hero/ine.

#### *RACKETEERING PARTNERS*

Heavy racketeering between two people can often go on for a long time in the same manner as in *Othello*, unrecognized by its protagonists although outsiders can easily identify it by watching or by getting "hooked" briefly. Like the Greek

chorus, such outsiders can often predict tragic consequences even while the racketeers are still blithely engaged in garnering strokes. For racketeers have a way of finding each other and establishing complementary racketeering partnerships or marriages, and for a while (months, years) this appears to be a fine solution for them.

A Type I and Type II racketeer might complement one another so evenly that they can sustain each other for a period of time in what looks like a fine "love" relationship. If they both operate on a first or even a second-degree level there are few problems, just that occasionally they will "hook" others into the drama triangle (Karpman, 1968) for variety. However, it usually turns out that one of the partners is less invested in maintaining complementary racketeering as consistently as the other. If the more invested partner operates on a 3rd degree level, "de-investment" leads to increases in ego state switches amongst them and increasing frustrations from crossed transactions. What follows is that the less invested partner might get ready to break away from the relationship, whereupon the more invested partner might suddenly "pull the trigger," figuratively or literally.

Most "crimes of passion" involving murder and/or suicide get committed by 3rd-degree racketeers who feel jilted by a racketeering partner to whom they previously felt "perfectly matched." Such a crime does not necessarily represent a player's script decision about the last act of his life. As in the case of Othello, it is the tragic consequence of his panic about not continuing to get the quantity of craved-for rackety stroke consolations he was depending on from his partner.

#### NOT SCRIPT

A person will finally, unwillingly,

divest him or herself of a racket by getting in touch with the feelings and/or attitudes (usually more than one) that are being covered over by rackets. It is to this end that therapy must be directed, otherwise a heavy racketeer will reach a morgue sooner rather than later, regardless of how much script analysis he has been given.

We now know why classical game analysis did not work. It was erroneous to look for a "payoff" at the end of a game rather than to understand what was beneath the racketeering process that *precedes* such endings. Similarly, the belief that "script analysis" can prevent the escalation of the process described above can only lead to therapeutic blunders since both rackets and the position for racketeering *predate* script formation (which occurs between 4-7). Therefore, neither rackets, nor their resulting behavioral patterns are *caused* by the script, even though they may become incorporated into the script in one way or another and the existential position does, indeed, offer a bedrock for the script.

Neither rackets nor hard-line racketeering can be modified through script analysis. Therapists who glibly refer to scripts as an explanation for what they themselves don't fully understand add to the confusion of their patients when they mysteriously invoke "the script" and, by implication, attribute to it what is now often seen as its magically deterministic power of secret knowledge about the alleged predecided ending to a patient's life. This can mystify patients just as badly as did some of the very therapeutic practices that Berne rejected in favor of TA.

Sadly, 3rd-degree racketeers often go into therapy, not for cure, but in quest of a steady, paid racketeering partner, having lost hope of finding one any other

way. They will participate in anything the therapist suggests, even erroneous script analysis as long as the therapist goes in for promiscuous stroking. So the patient will be satisfied for a while, showing "progress in script analysis" except that thereby the patient and therapist can get locked into a symbiotic relationship that is no different from the "therapy interminable" that Freud finally recognized and deplored.

How, then is a therapist to proceed with "hard-line" second or third-degree racketeers? For sure, not by getting sucked into racketeering. Still, it may be necessary temporarily to stroke a patient's rackets, both to acquire more diagnostic certainty, and as a first-aid measure that will keep the patient in treatment until underlying feelings and attitudes are identified and incorporated in awareness.

Eventually, when the therapist gets a sense of the feelings for which the racket substitutes, it becomes necessary to point out, sympathetically, that some of the overt feelings or attitudes for which he or she keeps expecting strokes might, in effect, be impostors that prevent the free expression and awareness of the full range of emotions.

The task of treatment then consists in helping the racketeer to recognize, identify, experience and *name* the underlying, usually nameless feelings or attitudes that are substituted for or covered up by his rackets.

### CASE HISTORY

Annabel Archley racketeered with "fatigue" and "nervousness" from a Type I ("helpless") position. Eventually it became clear that Annabel came on with "fatigue" as a substitute for excitement and curiosity, for she would lean forward with a gleam in her eye and an animated face whenever there were references to stimulating events in other

people's lives, but immediately thereafter she would "cover up" her interest by reporting on insomnia and exhaustion.

Annabel equated "restlessness" with "lack of rest" and we soon reconstructed that when little Annie was learning words, at ages 2-3, she had been taught to feel "tired" when she was "restless" although it was energy, curiosity and adventuresomeness that she had probably been manifesting; but her oversolicitous nurse had carefully soothed her into resting instead. As a grown person Annabel continued to seek strokes for the identity of "tired little Annie" most particularly when she felt the stirrings of excitement or curiosity that she did not know how to acknowledge within herself.

Persistent feedback to Annabel about how bodily indications of excitement-regularly preceded verbal racketeering efforts about fatigue helped Annabel discard her mislabeled identity of chronically "fatigued Annie" and moved her to broadening awareness of many other feelings which she had previously been unable to recognize within herself due to their having been mislabeled, discouraged, or shamed at *pre-script* ages.

### DISCUSSION

The *naming* of underlying feelings and attitudes must keep taking place in treatment and there must be several discussions on a 2-3 year old level as to how the awareness of certain feelings, even "bad" ones like murderous rage, need not lead to action, or even to their manifestation to others, if the grown person's Adult considers them inappropriate to the social situation of the present moment.

After they have had repeated experiences in identifying and accepting previously unrecognized feelings and thoughts, some patients experience a tran-

sitional period of *existential despair*. This is not the same as "helpless" racketeering or game switches. It is due to the "softening" of boundaries in the person's defensive existential position—essential for the ability to move freely between the basic defensive position (which remains useful at stress periods) and the "fifth position" (OK Adult). Temporarily the first effect of this new capacity for movement is a flood of pervasive "not OK" feelings which were previously held down by a rigid defensive stance (English, 1976b).

Patients need concerned empathetic assistance to get through this difficult period so they can reduce the rigidity of their defensive positions. Flexibility and the capacity for free recognition and translation of our inner feelings can connect a person to his or her expansive "self" and, thence, to all the people in the world.

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## SUMMARY

The feeling substitutions that result in

rackets and in a person's typical racketeering patterns are developed before age three and predate script formation. Thus, analysis of the script will not relieve 3rd degree racketeers of their symptoms. Berne's concept of games was erroneous in that he assumed games represented script decisions and were played (unconsciously) to rehearse or advance a predecided tragic script. The author contends that though games have endings, sometimes tragic, their endings do not necessarily imply an earlier script decision. Treatment of "game players" (racketeers) is effective only when feelings that underlie the patient's rackets are identified, brought to awareness, and named accurately. A case history is given.

## Sumario en español

Las sustituciones de tipo emotivo que llegan a formar chanchullos (rackets) se desarrollan antes de los tres años de edad y datan de antes de la formación del guión. Por lo tanto, el análisis del guión no aliviará los síntomas de los chanchullos. La idea de los juegos que tenía el doctor Berne era errónea en la medida que él tomó por dado que los juegos representarían las decisiones del guión y se jugarían (subconscientemente) para que uno ensayara o adelantara un guión trágico pre-decidió. El tratamiento de los chanchullos será eficaz sólo cuando los sentimientos que subyacen los chanchullos del paciente se identifiquen, traídos los chanchullos a la conciencia y nombrados con acierto. Se ofrece la historia de un caso.

## Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch

Das Ersetzen bestimmter Gefühle das sich in Schwindelsgefühle ergibt,



entwickelt sich vor dem dritten Lebensjahr und entsteht vor der Schrift. Deswegen kann eine Schriftanalyse die Zeichen der Schwindelsgefühle nicht verbessern. Bernes Idee von Spielen war falsch, indem er annahm, Spiele spiegelten Schrift-Entschlüsse, und damit im Unhewußtsein die vorherbestimmte tragische Schrift fortgebildet wird.

Die Behandlung von Schwindelsgefühle ist nur wirksam, wenn die unterliegenden Gefühle bestimmt werden, ins Licht gebracht und genau benannt werden. Ein Fall wird beschrieben.

*Résumé en français*

Les substitutions émotionnelles qui

conduisent au racket se produisent avant l'âge de trois ans, et sont antérieures à la création du scénario. Donc l'analyse du scénario ne saurait alléger les symptômes du racket. Le concept du jeu formulé par Berne était erroné en ce que celui-ci partait du principe que le jeu représentait une décision relative au scénario, et qu'on s'y livrait (inconsciemment) pour répéter ou faire avancer un scénario à dénouement tragique décidé au préalable. Le traitement du racket est efficace uniquement dans la mesure où l'on identifie les émotions qui constituent les raisons profondes des rackets du client, et qu'on les ramène à la conscience en les désignant par leurs noms précis. On présente un dossier à titre d'exemple.