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THE SUBSTITUTION FACTOR: RACKETS AND REAL FEELINGS

PART I

FANITA ENGLISH, M.S.W.

It is not hard to recognize what T.A. practitioners call a "racket" when it manifests itself in, say, a patient, student or friend. The expression of feeling seems artificial, repetitive and stereotyped. One wonders: Is this genuine regret, or a "guilt racket"? Genuine sadness, or a "depression racket"? Genuine friendliness or a "sweetness racket"? Surely this person could become more authentic?

But it is not that easy to intervene successfully in regard to someone's racket, even under a treatment contract. Pointing it out does not change it; some-

times this only reinforces the racket. However artificial his feelings may appear to the outsider, the patient holds on tightly to his racket, saying: "Don't you want me to express how I feel?"

The key to treatment lies in this challenge.

For, behind each racket, however phony it may seem, there are real feelings or perceptions of another kind which the individual is not allowing himself to be aware of in the present because they were prohibited in the past.

Rackets substitute, within a feeling category that was permitted in the past,

for other feelings which would appear now had not this category of potential real feelings or perceptions been suppressed when the person was growing up.

How does this come about?

Before proceeding, let us distinguish three separate aspects to perception and feeling in the grown person. These are:

1. Present, inner awareness (e.g. Right now I know that I see or hear something strange, or feel scared, angry, glad, hungry, in pain, etc.)

2. Demonstration or expression by means of appearance, behavior or words. e.g. I stretch to see or hear, I cower, or frown, or say: "I'm . . . mad, glad, hungry, scared, happy . . ." or: "I see, hear, touch, smell," etc.)

3. Action directed at someone or something. e.g. I kiss you, hit you, grab a banana, a gun, etc.)

You and I know that even when I am aware of, say, feeling angry, (aspect 1), I have options about action (aspect 3) in that I don't have to hit you.

If I'm skillful, I have options about showing or telling you how I feel (aspect 2). In fact, the more capable I am of aspect 1 (awareness of feeling) the broader are my options about aspects 2 and 3.

The young child has no such refined choices.

Originally, in the infant, aspects 1, 2 and 3 co-existed in undifferentiated fashion. In fact, the capacity for 1) awareness, 2) expression, and 3) action, did not develop in this order. In the very young child action (3), such as grabbing, hitting, etc. is almost simultaneous with expression (2), such as screaming, flaying about, etc., and, developmentally they precede self-awareness (1), i.e. the ability to know what is perceived or felt.

Identification of perception and feeling is initiated by parents. They say: "see the cat . . . hear the rattle . . ." and thereby the child sorts out what he perceives and feels. Often the child shows a reaction and the parent names a feeling even before the child brings it into awareness. ("Oh, you jumped when it popped; were you scared?")

With parenting a child learns to distinguish between (1) awareness and (3) action, and, later, he also uses his Adult to determine (2) showing or telling (e.g. Mother to daughter: "Yes, I see you're mad at baby brother for kicking your blocks, but you may not hit him with them.") Here mother teaches the difference between feeling and action, permitting one but not the other. Eventually daughter will decide also how, when, and to whom she reveals her feelings.

Some parents, when they recognize certain feelings in their child, train him to *not feel* them, or force him to be *not aware of* certain perceptions. They make no distinction between feeling and action, thereby communicating that danger lies within the feeling itself. Suppress emotional awareness!

The method of enforcement for this suppression is: a) either by strict "no-no," but naming the feeling. (e.g. You're mad! How dare you be . . . (jealous, nosey, unhappy, boisterous, etc.) (Conclusion by child: I daren't be aware of such feelings, because I might, unknowingly, reveal having them, and death would ensue); or b) worse, by not even naming forbidden feelings or perceptions, i.e. discounting any evidence of feelings in "dangerous" categories, such as sex, anger, unhappiness, or whatever. Conclusion by child: these strange body-discomforts I feel at times: — they aren't real; I don't really feel them, since I don't know what they are.

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Each family does, however, permit, and even encourage, certain *other* categories of feeling, even if they are constructed artificially. "Kindness does it." "Go, go, scare them away!" "Helpless and hopeless, that's you." "Johnny's a sexy little devil; nose-y!" "Love thy neighbor . . ." "Watch out, don't trust . . ." "Aren't you ashamed?" "He's so . . ." (nervous, sickly, anxious, sensitive, belligerent, mean, shy, fearful, etc.) "It's these d.....d . . ." (ethnic group)"

A child who has had to suppress awareness of certain "forbidden" feelings makes up for it by expressing with extra emphasis whatever he *may* express. Thereby, at least he vents emotion; not the genuine one, to be sure, but some emotion; however, because it is not the real feeling, he is dissatisfied and remains with a continuing need to present the phony emotion. It is as though repetition would clarify what's unexpressed. Hence the "broken phonograph" effect of a racket.

In the family his racket may gain him some strokes, but as he goes out into the world the strokes diminish or become ritualized as acquaintances become irritated with his stereotyped repetitiveness. To allay the increased feelings of dissatisfaction, and in a frantic effort to gain more strokes he enlarges the racket. Now the individual is embarked on a self-defeating cycle, seeking trading stamps to justify the enlarged racket, and then, in turn, increasing the racket as he finds more stamps.

If he is resourceful, he "hooks" partners into giving him strokes or stamps. Thus does the racket turn into a game. (Structurally, rackets precede games; they are more primitive, requiring no partners at the outset. They can develop into games as the individual transacts with others outside the family circle.)

On treating a patient with a racket, the therapist's main job is to determine

what feelings and/or perceptions are being suppressed by the patient in a category *other* than that represented by the racket. As the examples to follow will show, a depression racket does *not* cover up sadness, a hostility racket does not cover up anger, etc. They cover *other* feelings. And sometimes the underlying feeling is more than suppressed. The patient has never really "experienced" it, and practically needs to "learn" it! Lucy, for instance, demonstrated cloying sweet rackety consideration whenever someone in her treatment Group said something that might have generated envy in her, but she was unaware of envy or jealousy, and she maintained her "sweet concern" was genuine. When Susie expressed her own feelings of jealousy about a cousin, Lucy became involved with "amazement" about Susie's feelings. She had "never" been jealous when her baby brother was born; she had been stroked for "sweet consideration" instead and now needed to "discover" envy before her cloying behavior abated.

In addition to permission for envy, Lucy needed help to distinguish between awareness of feeling, identifying or naming the feeling, showing it, and acting on it. As in many "racket" cases, Lucy's Parent kept insisting that her new awareness was dangerous, because it would "automatically" lead to dangerous action. And Lucy's Child feared that she would now become unlovable and incapable of being genuinely tender.

To identify underlying feelings, the therapist needs alertness to "here-and-now" clues, and imagination as to how a Natural Child *might* feel in the Now if allowed awareness.

Remember, also, that a category of feeling which may be highly disapproved of in one family could be the "permitted" kind from which a racket develops in another. In one family,

anger may be prohibited, and a "guilt" or "suffering" racket is substituted by a child. In another, a "hostility racket" is fostered to channel away, perhaps, sexuality or joyousness.

Also, within the same family a girl might be supported in an anxiety racket; (fear is permitted to girls, here, but not sexual feelings); the boy, however, may be forbidden fear, and supported in a hostility racket.

Forbidden feelings are not always in the areas of sex or anger, though these are highly charged categories in our culture. Sometimes such feeling may be so innocuous, it's hard to believe they ever appeared dangerous to anyone.

Take the case of Thea.

She was sixty-five and had had recurring depressions all her life..

After an extended interval in treatment without appreciable change by Thea, one day, my exasperated Child exploded: "OK, Thea, you want to hold on to your depressions. Maybe you're better off this way! After all, look at the advantages: your husband brings your breakfast, no housework, no cooking for visiting relatives; you lie in bed, read and watch TV to your heart's content. Enjoy your depression!"

Instead of taking brown stamps, Thea startled me with a peal of giggling, from a pure delightful Child ego-state. I joined the giggling and we went on conspiratorially listing all the fun available from faking a depression. Suddenly Thea stopped: "But I don't fake my depressions; I suffer, I don't have fun!"

Heady from the last few minutes I hastily climbed a Parental perch and said: "OK, then, Permission to scheme and not suffer and have fun!" Giggles and laughter again. "I haven't laughed so much in years. Am I becoming manicky? That's what my husband will say. He's a physician. When I was a child I remember I was always told I was

much too loud and boisterous; that can be harmful!"

There it was. Gaiety, fun and laughter had been prohibited in her childhood, and the husband was, unknowingly, reinforcing the same prohibition.

Thea's mother had suffered from a prolonged illness; quiet had been a requirement. If Thea came home from school with friends, gay and boisterous, there was long-suffering reproof. Then, when father came home and found Thea moping around he stroked his sweet, unhappy little girl who was "sad because mother was sick."

So Thea learned to exchange gaiety for depression. Fortunately, even at sixty-five it was possible to tap her capacity for gaiety, and capitalize on it. Thea's racket had not become a game, perhaps because some gaiety had existed in very early childhood, perhaps because her husband had not participated wholeheartedly. Many rackets do, however, become two-or-more handed Games, and are thus harder to cure. Thea dropped the depression racket when she discovered a whole range of "new" feelings which were real. Two years after treatment ended she reported no depressions whereas there had never been more than a three month interval before.

And, of course, she did not become manicky. This point is important regarding some other cases of depression where eruption of feeling held down for years is diagnosed perhaps too fast as "manicky" in order to fit the patient into a "manic-depressive" diagnosis. The patient may need practice in handling smoothly new awareness, which might, at first, appear in the original, undifferentiated Child form -- i.e. intermingled with a call for action. This need not alarm the therapist who can support Adult control of dangerous behavior.

Margy had a great "inadequacy"

racket. "You're putting me down, boo-hoo, just when I need a little self-confidence!"

Margy had never been permitted anger at her good mother who had over-protected the "poor half-blind little thing." Mother herself, however, had often expressed irritation and impatience.

One day the therapist lost her temper at Margy's persistent whining, but Margy was "unable" to be angry in response, even when other group members pointed out that they would have in her place. She simply went on whining, which, in the past, had earned her guilty artificial strokes from her mother. With treatment, Margy learned to identify feelings of anger when she experienced them for which, in her case, the signal was when her eyelids flickered back and forth. The boo-hoo racket became superfluous.

In contrast Stanley practiced a "hostility" racket to which he felt entitled because of a gruesome childhood history. His mother had died when he was very young. Expression of nostalgic, loving feelings about his dead mother or even his father had been prohibited because they were too threatening to his father and stepmother, but Stanley was stroked for being a "tough guy." In group, Stanley's hostility racket, with put-on mean, pseudo-sadistic verbiage became most apparent when warm feelings were stimulated. Stanley needed permission to be warm and loving!

Suzanne exploited a "feeling hurt" semi-depressive racket which appeared similar to Margy's. But the underlying prohibited feelings were different. She was very intelligent and her inquisitiveness and "smartness" had been teasingly encouraged by her father to threaten the mother's competence. After the parents' divorce which occurred in Suzanne's childhood, and father's disappear-

ance, Suzanne decided that being bright and alert was dangerous; but by looking withdrawn she could get strokes from mother, who wanted to be needed. Suzanne thus developed a "schizophrenic-appearing withdrawal racket" to protect her from the temptation to be inquisitive and to challenge. Treatment focussed on supporting Suzanne's curiosity and sexuality, which she had learned to hide even from herself after father left.

Thea's case illustrated how a racket, developed structurally within her, could have become a game, played transactionally with her husband. In Suzanne's case we can see how the racket substitutes both for a genuine quest (curiosity) and for what might have been a script injunction from father — ("challenge mother"). Rackets can also have episcrypt aspects; Stanley kept trying to enlist others in joining him in his hostility racket, in a fruitless effort to 'pass on' the "hot potato" of his excessive fabricated rages.

Thus, understanding the principle of the "substitution factor" of rackets is essential to game and script analysis. Fortunately, there are many cases where it is not even necessary to resort to game or script analysis because the racket can be abolished as explained above, and the individual can blossom with better ownership of authentic feelings.

This point is of practical value to teachers, who are faced with children's rackets before they become established games, and in situations that do not permit elaborate treatment.

To a teacher I say:

1. Note your own exasperation. If a child's expressed feelings repeatedly irritate you when you "should" be sympathetic, you may be dealing with a racket.

2. Don't attack the racket; watch the situation. If something occurs that

would make a natural child angry, but it makes this child sad, use the opportunity to encourage what may be real. ("I thought you looked angry for a moment," and . . . "if someone tore my paper, I'd feel mad.") The child may deny the feeling, but the teacher can persist in noticing and checking: ("Happened again, and you're still not angry!")

3. If real feeling is expressed, stroke lavishly, even for the expression of an "unacceptable" feeling. ("I'm glad you told me you're angry. That's a very natural feeling, right now.")

4. It may be helpful to a child to be told that the expression of a feeling need not lead him to act on it, if his Adult decides not to.

Some teachers may be concerned by the idea that, no matter what happens in school, the child must maintain certain emotional patterns at home.

It is still worthwhile for the teacher to help the child's Adult know that, while certain expressions of feeling endanger him at home, they can be expressed safely in other situations. The child may need to continue to hide, say, his rage, at home, but now he knows how to identify it. Ground-work is laid for Adult supervision of his own behavior rather than panicky Child suppression of awareness. The child has less need of artificial "approved" feelings to substitute for real ones. A racket is kept from taking deep root when the child can say to himself: "I may feel *whatever* I feel without fear. I can decide what I show and what I do."

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Cartoon
from
"New
Yorker"
magazine

RACKETS AND REAL FEELINGS

PART II

FANITA ENGLISH, M.S.W.

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In Part I, I have detailed how people who indulge in Rackets have experienced, in childhood, prohibitions about certain feeling and perceptions, but permission for others.

Rackets are stylized repetitions of "permitted feelings" which were stroked in the past. They are expressed each time a real feeling (of a different category) is about to surface.

The substitution operates because the individual has trained himself to be *not aware* of certain formerly prohibited feelings or perceptions. The racket ventilates emotion, although it presents a different type of emotion than the one being felt. I call this the "substitution factor" of rackets; this is why rackets are so tenacious in spite of confrontation. Yet the racket dissolves when the patient becomes aware of the real (other) feelings or perceptions he is suppressing in the present.

Often a racket is also the overt manifestation of a Script injunction.

Developmentally, a Racket is often the precursor of a Game. Ventilation through substitute feelings (i.e., a

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racket) is a structural procedure of the individual who carries the racket. When he becomes skillful in Ulterior Transactions he can "hook" others into supporting his racket, offering trading stamps, or otherwise complementing it, and the racket is thereby transformed into a Game.

In many cases Script or Game analysis are not necessary when the real feelings and perceptions that the Racket substitutes for can be appropriately brought into awareness, perhaps in a series of instances. The patient may need additional help in identifying the feelings and naming them, in order to "own" them. Thereby he can learn to separate awareness from action (i.e. Child feelings from Adult supervised activity). Had he had good parenting he would have learned this in early childhood. If he has not, the therapist's or teacher's ability to deal with the "substitution factor" of rackets can compensate effectively for this lack.

Real feelings and perceptions are here-and-now responses to internal or external stimuli. An authentic person can allow himself to know and accept any and all feelings that occur in his Child, whether his Parent likes them or not. His Adult can separate feeling from action; he can also choose what and when to show or to express.

FANITA ENGLISH

Feelings and perceptions can be listed in three categories, representing a developmental sequence, as follows:

I. *Basic bodily cravings related to survival, and sensual perceptions:*

Hunger, thirst, cold, heat, sleep and other bodily feelings (circulatory, digestive, glandular, etc.). Touch, smell, hearing, seeing, vocalizing. Stroke hunger. Eventually, motor needs.

II. *Reactions to having the above fulfilled or frustrated, and to other external stimuli such as noise, rocking, jolts, warm milk, stroking, rough handling, etc. Ex.: pleasure, comfort, pain, discomfort, hate, sadness (from loss), joyfulness, etc.*

III. *Later stage cravings related to drives which appear as the organism develops, and reactions to having these new cravings fulfilled or frustrated. Feelings in this category are more complex than those in the other two because their particular manifestations have differential characteristics in humans. They are interwoven with imagination and thought. Ex.: Curiosity, exuberance,*

A. REAL, SPONTANEOUS APPETITES AND FEELINGS

I. Basic bodily cravings. Stroke hunger. Physical expression (face, body and and limbs). Locomotion. Perceptions (smell, touch, hearing, sight). Rage.

II. Comfort, discomfort. Contentment, joy, frustration, pain, rage (anger), fear, confusion, empty feeling (loss). Desire and yearning, hopefulness. Self concern or awareness. Helplessness. Omnipotent feelings. Hatred (wish to destroy or eliminate).

4.

playfulness, aggressiveness, competitiveness, envy, sexuality, tenderness, recognition hunger, need for mental growth, for autonomy, for intimacy.

All feelings can be genuinely experienced in the present, but they can also be models for Rackets. It is helpful to develop a vocabulary to distinguish between these, and below I present some comparisons that I use. I invite the reader's additions and modifications, since inevitably there is overlapping and there are personal connotations.

Under Column A, I name feelings as they appear in the genuine, undisguised form. In Column B, I list the caricatured forms of rackets. If you use this list for help in treatment, please remember that when you identify a racket in Column B it substitutes for feelings *other than* the equivalent real feeling of Column A. The racket signifies that both rackets and real feelings of that particular grouping *were* permitted. It's others, which you must seek in a different "A" grouping that were prohibited. So you'll need your Child's detective powers to use this list well. Good luck!

B. RACKETS (ARTIFICIAL FEELINGS MASQUERADING AS REAL)

Chronic dissatisfaction, restlessness, "nervousness," disgust, irritability, exhaustion, deprivation ("I don't need...") overeating, vomiting, alcoholism, hypersexuality, some depressions.

Psychosomatic ailments, including digestive, skin and breathing troubles. "Sweetness and light." Sulkiiness. "Hurt oversensitive." Victim (martyr). "Waiting for Santa." Hopelessness, persistent reassurance demands. Picking at self and others ("torture" racket).

Mourning racket (exploitative). Hostility and violence. Suicidal and homicidal threats. "Stupid dummy." Confused. Harried. "Little boy lost." Anxiety. ("What if . . ." alias: Henny Penny)

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III. Curiosity, exuberance and playfulness. (These, with imagination, can lead to creativity.)

Need to express and grow, often related to above. Also includes aggressiveness, competitiveness, envy. Anger.

Feelings related to developing need for self-identity (actualization) and autonomy.

Recognition hunger; yearning to relate; feelings related to quest for intimacy (empathy). Sadness. Genuine regret. Sorrow.

Sexuality (ranging from infantile to grown sexual urges and feelings). These sometimes overlap with stroke hunger felt physically.

Generativity. Feelings related to procreative and productive needs. Generosity. Human "OK" feelings, concern, care, sympathy, loyalty.

Existential sorrow or despair. (Awareness of the absurdity and complexity of existence). Recognition of human fallibility and the reality of Death. Love.

A real "OK" feeling with full recognition of the other. Real "I'm O.K. and you are!"

RACKETS AND REAL FEELINGS

Nervous inquisitiveness and questionings. "Peeping Tom." Complaining, whining, nagging. Obsessive, earnest "busybodiness." Gossipiness.

Pushy "one-up-manship." Rackety "I'm OK, you're not," or vice-versa. (Aren't you lucky, I never am"). Hard luck Helga.

Rebelliousness. "I never get a break." "Unfair!" Chip-on-the-shoulder. "Absent-minded" turning off. Violence.

Back-slapping good humoredness; "We're all pals, ha-ha." Over socializing. "Let's include all." Parties, parties! Fear of loneliness. Guilt racket. Shame. "If people knew." Always embarrassed.

Innumerable sexual rackets, including "sexiness," fear of rape, castration, anxiety. Sexual perversions. Excessive prudery, voyeurism, "he-man" syndrome. "Shocking." Sexual victim.

Overprotectiveness. Excessive helpfulness. "Sweet charitableness and unselfishness." "Devoted" (mother, wife, son, citizen, etc.) Chronic resentment; ("I'll never forgive. . .")

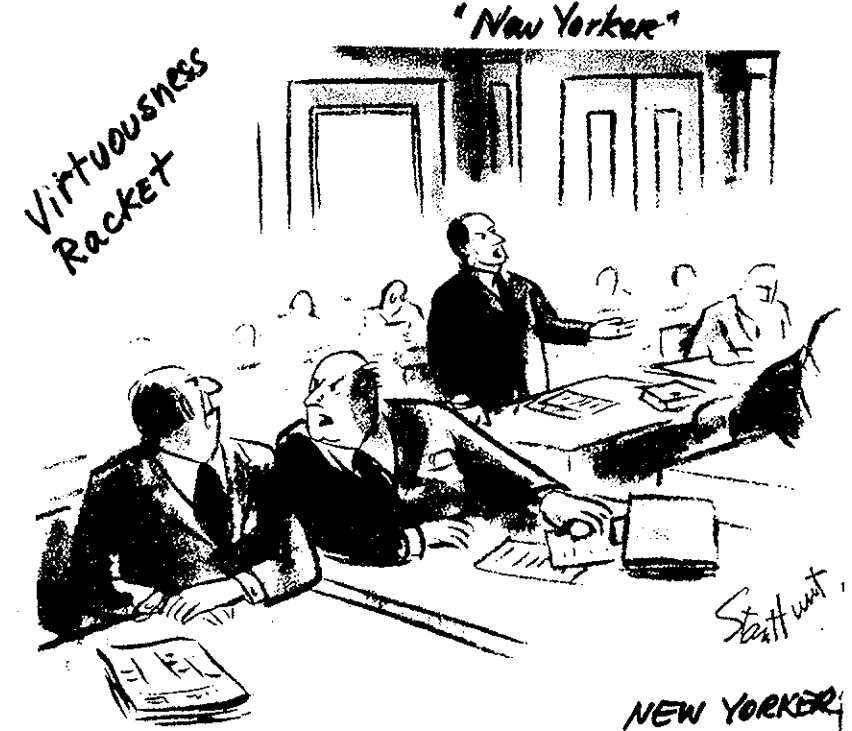
Suicidal and homicidal rackets. Some guilt or depression rackets. Chronic pessimism. Destructiveness. Violence Chronic challenging. "Death is the outcome anyway, so that proves . . ."

Phony trust, optimism. Projected "hope." "Always forgive." "How could you do this to me?" Unfeeling, banner-waving love and happiness rackets. "All you need is love, sweet love."



HOSTILITY RACKET

"Admit it, Llewellyn. If I could read three thousand words a minute, you'd find something else about me to resent."



Virtuousness Racket

"New Yorker"

NEW YORKER