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SOCIAL RAPO

## DESCRIPTION AND CURE

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According to the original description of *Rapo*<sup>1</sup>, it is a sexual game, in which the male pursues and the female is pursued. It has since become clear that *Rapo* has much deeper and broader applications than the original description encompassed.

The first recognition of the broader possibilities was Karpman's description<sup>2</sup> of a variant which he called *Reverse Rapo*, in which the female pursues and the male is pursued. Next, it was noticed that *Rapo* is not strictly a heterosexual phenomenon that it is extremely common among (male, at least) homosexuals, too. It may even be that homosexuals who do *not* play *Rapo* constitute a rather negligible minority, numerically, in the homosexual community. *Rapo* is still *Rapo*, regardless of which partner does the pursuing, and even if both partners are of the same sex.

These two expansions are still sexual ones. There is, in addition, a social (non-sexual) form, which is at least as common as the sexual game. The clinician who notices *Rapo* in the sexual context only, is missing between 50 and 75 percent of all the *Rapo* his patients are playing. He certainly is overlooking a great deal of *Rapo* that patients play through completely under his very eyes, right in the therapy group.

## DESCRIPTION

There are two basic patterns, two basic sequences of transactions, which characterize *Rapo* in both its social and sexual forms. The patterns are identical in the two areas. The first sequence of transactions is:

1. Offer made.

2. Offer accepted.
3. Offer withdrawn.

In the non-sexual context it looks like this:

## Example 1.

Red: "Would you like to go to the movies with me Thursday evening?"

Blue: "Let's see ... I have no commitments that night, yes, I'd like that."

Red (typically this move comes on Thursday afternoon): "Oh, I just remembered I have to go to a board meeting, and won't be able to go to that movie with you after all."

## Example 2.

Red: "Would you like a piece of chewing gum?"

Blue: "Oh, It's Spearmint, my favorite kind. Thank you very much."

Red: "On second thought, it's my last piece, I think I'd better save it for after lunch."

In each case, Red offers something, Blue accepts the offer, and then Red withdraws the offer.

The second basic sequence for *Rapo* is:

1. Request made.
2. Request granted.
3. Request withdrawn.

In the non-sexual context it goes like this:

## Example 3.

Red: "I noticed you have a copy of *The Red and the Blue* on your bookshelf. I've been dying to read it for some time and haven't been able to find a copy. Do you think I could borrow it?"

*Blue*: "Sure. I've already finished it. I think you'll enjoy it. It's a pleasure to lend it to you."

*Red*: "Well, come to think of it, I have an awful lot of things to read. I don't think I'll be able to get to it. Anyway the review in the *New York Times* was not very favorable."

*Example 4.*

*Red*: "I'm terribly thirsty. Would you get me a drink of water please?"

*Blue*: "Certainly. Here it is. I put ice cubes in it, too."

*Red*: "On second thought, I'll be having lunch soon. I'll just wait 'til then."  
(Or, alternatively, Red simply, without comment, fails to drink the water.)

In each case, Red makes a request, Blue grants the request in good faith, and then Red, by withdrawing the request, rejects it.

*Example 5. (A Consulting Room Variant)*

*Patient*: "Would you please explain to me why...?"

*Therapist*: "OK. The reason is that ... and furthermore ... and therefore it follows that ... Understand?"

*Patient*: "I knew that already."

What therapist has not been "had" by *Consulting Room Rapo* of this kind, saying or thinking, "If you already knew the answer, what the hell did you ask the question for?"

*Example 6. (Third Degree Social Rapo)*

*Red*: "Let me pick up your symphony tickets for you. The box office is right near my work, and I can do it easily on my lunch hour."

*Blue*: "That would be great."

*Red*: "Here are your goddamn tickets. God, what a hassle. I had to stand in line for three hours and of course I missed my lunch and was late for work and the boss is mad at me. I wish I'd never let you talk me into getting your tickets for you."

Here Red — just as in sexual *Rapo* — actually fulfills the offer, and then, by professing that the whole thing had been Blue's idea forced upon an unwilling Red, makes Blue feel guilty.

These two basic patterns can be played out in an almost infinite variety of specific content, and in an almost infinite variety of situations. But the framework itself, the essential transaction-sequence, is constant, whether the arena is sexual or non-sexual. The *feelings* of the players when the payoff comes, are also the same for both types. Emotionally, as well as objectively, social *Rapo* and sexual *Rapo* are the same game. This does not seem surprising when one recalls how often a problem which a patient might present and regard as "sexual" turns out on analysis to be only the sexual aspect of a problem in getting-along-with.

In my experience to date, people who play *Social Rapo* do not necessarily play *Sexual Rapo*, although many do. On the other hand, I have not yet seen a *Sexual Rapo* player who did not also play *Social Rapo*.

### TREATMENT AND CURE

The steps and procedures for curing *Rapo* will be given for Red players first, and then for those who preferentially play the Blue hand. The same procedures equally well describe the steps in curing *any* game, except that 2, 4, and 5 are specific and different for each game.

1. Point out the game to the patient.
2. Be sure he understands exactly how the game goes, and at least generally what gains are involved. For the Red end of *Rapo*, the main advantage is the opportunity (with an alleged "justification") to slap Blue psychologically, to *hurt* the partner by disappointment (by generating guilt, in third degree *Rapo*).
3. Ask him if he wants to stop, i.e., give up the game; this of course means giving up the advantages of the game, too.

If — and only if — he agrees to stop playing *Rapo*, proceed to:

4. Establish the rule that he *must* go through with all offers he makes, once they are accepted, without

pretending he was forced into it; and,

5. Establish the rule that he *must* go through with all actions of others generated by his own requests.
6. As he carries out steps 4 and 5, deal with the dynamics, and the pressures to play *Rapo*, and the inevitable "static" from Parent and Witch, as they come up.
7. Give strong, effective Permission<sup>3</sup>, and then Protection<sup>4</sup>, in specific instances of 4 and 5 as they occur, in the group and outside.

Do not allow any cop-outs, however well the patient rationalizes them. He must deliver on *every* offer he makes, and he must accept delivery on *every* one of his requests.

8. Stay with the patient during the period of despair and existential vacuum, after *Rapo* is clearly obliterated from his repertoire for getting-along-in-the-world.
9. Work with the patient to generate strokes to replace the ones lost as a result of his resigning from *Rapo*. (Note: sometimes this can be done or partly done between steps 3 and 4.) This means to find non-hurtful ways of dealing with others, ways of exchanging positive strokes, and/or delivering hurtful strokes, when appropriate, in a straight way rather than through a game.
10. Watch out for the patient's proclivity to play *Rapo* with the therapist over the offer-made-and-accepted cure for *Rapo*! It would be easy for a *Rapo* player to announce at any stage in the cure process, that, on second thought, maybe he'd just as soon go on playing *Rapo* like he used to. "I've changed my mind," he's tempted to say at some point, "I don't want to get cured of *Rapo* after all." The therapist needs to counter this move: "It's too late for that; you decided to get cured and made a contract, and now you're committed to follow through."

For patients who prefer the blue side of *Rapo*, the same program works, except that steps 2, 4, 5, and 9 need to be modified. It is essential to keep in mind that no matter how much Blue *feels* like an innocent victim being "taken" by Red, no matter how much Blue *appears* to be an innocent victim, it takes two to play the game, and Blue is in fact an active, willing player. The necessary modifications in Blue's treatment program are:

2. The payoff for Blue is *getting hurt*, getting disappointed (or being made to feel guilty).
4. Establish the rule that before acceding to any request, he must think first, and say "yes" only if he is genuinely willing. These patients are inclined to say "yes" indiscriminately, without making a real choice, simply because they cannot say "no." They do not realize that it is *possible* to say "no," that they have that right; so they need permission to say no. Also, they assume that saying no would necessarily hurt the other's feelings (while overlooking the fact that to say "yes" and then fail to follow through hurts more). So they need permission to say "no," even if it does hurt someone's feelings.

Establish the rule that once Blue has said yes, Red is obliged to accept delivery, and Blue is to act on that expectation. That means confronting Red with his cop-out and pressing for follow-through, much as the therapist does in step 10, above.

5. Establish the rule that he is to think before accepting an offer: "Is the offer real, does Red intend to keep his commitment?" These patients tend to discount clues available at the outset, that Red has no intention of following through on the contract. They need permission to be suspicious, to recognize that there are people, namely Red *Rapo* players, who make agreements only

to break them and thereby hurt the other.

Establish the rule that once an agreement has been made between Blue and Red, Blue is not solely responsible for it, as Red may claim — it is bilateral, and Blue need not feel guilty.

9. The strokes lost by giving up *Rapo*, for Blue, are hurts. Ways will need to be developed for the ex-Blue *Rapo* player to replace these with loving strokes.

### SUMMARY

*Rapo* needs to be understood as a much broader phenomenon than "he pursues —

she protests." Clinically the social form accounts for at least half of all instances of *Rapo*. The basic sequences are:

1. Offer made — offer accepted — offer withdrawn.
2. Request made — request granted — request withdrawn.

The steps for effective cure of *Rapo* — sexual or non-sexual — are spelled out in chronological order.

### REFERENCES

- 1 Berne, Eric. *Games People Play*. New York: Grove Press, 1964, pp. 126-129.
- 2 Karpman, Stephen. Oral report at SFTA Seminar, 1969 (unpublished).
- 3 Crossman, Patricia. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, V:19.
- 4 Ibid.