

Racket Science?

About the difficulty in dealing with feelings

On a mild winter day, Irmgard was buried with her family around her. Her widower, my uncle, arranged a loving funeral with many personal memories. At the graveside, he brought events from the past to life and talked about the many plans that the two of them had still had and that death had brought an abrupt end to.



Robert Kirschner
Principal Partner

It was a classic funeral service that left plenty of room for remembrance and reflection. Irmgard's favorite songs provided a varied background for the stories about her life. But the inappropriateness of the lyrics of one particular song caused in me the impulse to burst out laughing. I felt a fit of laughter growing ever stronger, but the feeling suddenly turned into a violent expression of sadness.

What happened there?

It's not just tennis players who use rackets

Did a so-called "racket" almost take over the helm of my emotions in this situation? A racket, a concept from transactional analysis, is a repeated pattern or strategy that individuals subconsciously use to hide their true feelings and instead experience and express a substitute feeling. These substitute feelings are often more socialized and acceptable to the individual or those around them, but they are not directly linked to the person's current experience.

In my case, mourning was appropriate, but my relationship with Irmgard initially allowed me to attend the funeral from a respectful distance. It seemed unlikely that I could become emotional under the circumstances.

The function and purpose of rackets

Rackets serve multiple purposes. On the one hand, they enable individuals to cope with emotionally stressful situations by replacing unpleasant or socially unacceptable feelings with more acceptable feelings.



