

Victim to Victor

Part 2: Moving Out of the Victim Triangle The Pursuing Perspective Podcast Season 2 The Hero's Journey, Episode 25

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Notes	
Summary	<p>In this episode we review the victim triangle and the roles we all play. We learn about the thoughts and behaviors associated with these roles and how to begin to change them so we can move out of the triangle. When we move out of the triangle, we can show up in our relationships in a healthier, more grounded way. This is a vital action to move from victim to victor.</p>
Introduction:	<p>Review of roles in the Drama Triangle (aka Victim Triangle) by Stephen Karpman:</p> <p>Victims: The stance of the victim is “poor me!” Victims see themselves as victimized, oppressed, powerless, helpless, hopeless, dejected, and ashamed, and come across as “super-sensitive,” wanting kid glove treatment from others. They can deny any responsibility for their negative circumstances and deny possession of the power to change those circumstances.</p> <p>Rescuers: The stance of the rescuer is “Let me help you!” Rescuers work hard to help and caretake other people, and even need to help other people to feel good about themselves, while neglecting their own needs or not taking responsibility for meeting their own needs.</p> <p>Persecutors: The stance of the persecutor is “It’s all your fault!” Persecutors criticize and blame the victim, set strict limits, can be controlling, rigid, authoritative, angry and unpleasant. They keep the victim feeling oppressed through threats and bullying.</p> <p>As a model of interaction, once we step into a role, we need others to play their parts so we can play ours. Victims depend on a savior; rescuers yearn for a basket case; persecutors need a scapegoat. There is a payoff for us in playing these roles: (1) Usually, we are getting unhealed needs met, albeit in a very unhealthy way,</p>

	<p>and (2) we are supporting our beliefs about ourselves and others based on our childhood experience where we entered the triangle.</p> <p>In order to break free of the triangle, we have to first become aware of the roles, second, identify how we entered the triangle, third, determine the payoffs and consequences for continuing to act within the triangle, and finally learn how to shift our thoughts, beliefs and behaviors to get out of it.</p>
<p>Main Ideas:</p>	<p>This section covers more detail of each role along with the costs and payoffs for each of the three roles. Each role has its own language, beliefs and behavior – it’s beneficial to know them. This helps us to identify when we’re on the triangle. Studying the roles also promotes a quicker recognition of when we’re being baited to play. We will look at the cognitive distortions and the self-defeating beliefs that get created and keep us locked into the role. As we explore each role, think about your interactions with others and ask questions like, “What hooks me? From where do I enter the triangle once I’ve been hooked?” We begin to train our Internal Observer to notice, without judgment, our conversations with loved ones, especially those more “sticky” moments (where we walk on eggshells).”</p> <p>Note: The bulk of the information in this section is taken from Lynne Forrest’s (2008) article, <i>The three faces of a victim—An overview of the victim triangle</i>.</p> <p>Rescuer:</p> <p>“The Rescuer might be described as a shadow aspect of the mother principle. Instead of an appropriate expression of support and nurturing, the Rescuer tends to “smother”, control and manipulate others – “for their own good,” of course. Theirs is a misguided understanding of what it is to encourage, empower and protect.</p> <p>A Starting Gate Rescuer is the classic, co-dependent. Rescuing is an addiction that comes from an unconscious need to feel valued. There’s no better way to feel important than to be a savior! Taking care of others may be the Rescuers best game plan for getting to feel worthwhile.</p> <p>Rescuers usually grow up in families where their dependency needs are not acknowledged. It’s a psychological fact that we treat ourselves the way we were treated as children. The budding Rescuer grows up in an environment where their needs are negated and so tend to treat themselves with the same degree of negligence that they experienced as children. Without permission to take care of themselves, their needs go underground and they turn instead to</p>

taking care of others” (Forrest, 2008).

Rescuers are often praised for their helping, which fuels the belief that it is a “good” thing to be rescuer.

There is a belief behind all of it that if they help enough, sooner or later they will be taken care of too. That rarely happens, as those they are helping are not usually capable of that. Then the rescuer becomes resentful, moves into feeling like a martyr and steps right into the victim role. Rescuers have a great fear of being alone and continually try and prove they are needed. They tend to create the core belief that their own needs are not valued.

Let's review how our beliefs are established:

- Through our experiences or they are projected onto us.
- They are associated with strong emotions.
- The thoughts and experiences are repeated and eventually become a core belief. Our beliefs are unconscious. They are so deep below the surface we lose awareness of their existence, and yet they are driving our thoughts and actions and creating our experience. We will continue to look for evidence to support them (confirmation bias).
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is what helps us identify and change our unhealthy core beliefs.
 - ABC: Activating Event (A) + Our Belief (B) = the Consequence (C) (ex. the feeling or behavior)
 - We often believe that A = C. We do not recognize the role our beliefs play in how we feel, think and act.
 - If we can add the D (Dispute) and look for evidence to the contrary, we can start to change things (What evidence do I have to the contrary of this belief?) This can prove to be difficult since we only tend to see evidence supporting our beliefs, so we begin to shift it by looking at the situation from a different perspective. We can ask, *Is there another way to look at this? Could something else be true?* Another way to dispute the belief is by honestly looking at the negative consequences of functioning from the current belief. (ex. If we keep showing up as a rescuer, our own needs will continue to be unmet, we will feel resentful, we will feel like a failure, and we will continue to play this out in our relationships.)

Alber Ellis identified 14 Self-Defeating Core Beliefs that we can attribute most of our negative thoughts and behaviours to. There are two of these beliefs that seemed to be driving the role of rescuer:

- I must succeed in everything I do to be valuable.
- My future outcomes will be the same as my past outcomes.

You can be helpful without being a rescuer. “Authentic helpers act without expectations for reciprocation. They empower rather than disable those they serve. What they do will be done to encourage self-responsibility, rather than promote dependency. True Supporters believe that the other can handle their own business. They believe that everyone has the right to make mistakes and learn through sometimes hard consequences. They trust the other has what it takes to see themselves through times of difficulty without them, as Rescuers, needing to “save” them. They will also take responsibility for meeting their own needs and realize their value is not dependent upon them saving others or being perfect and successful at everything they do” (Forrest, 2008).

Persecutor:

“Like the other roles, the Starting Gate Persecutor is shame based. This role is most often taken on by someone who received overt mental and/or physical abuse during their childhood. As a result they are often secretly seething inside from a shame based wrath that ends up running their lives. Persecutors, for survival sake, repress deep-seated feelings of worthlessness; they hide their pain behind a facade of indignant wrath and uncaring detachment. They may choose to emulate their primary childhood abuser(s), preferring to identify with those they see as having power and strength – rather than become the ‘picked on loser’ at the bottom of life’s pile. SGP’s tend to adopt an attitude that says; ‘The world is hard and mean ... only the ruthless survive. I’ll be one of those.’ In other words, they become perpetrators. They ‘protect’ themselves using authoritarian, controlling and downright punishing methods.

In the same way that the Rescuer is the shadow mother principle, the Persecutor is the ‘shadow father principle.’ A healthy father’s job is to protect and provide for his family. Rather than providing nurturing direction, the Persecutor attempts to ‘reform’ and discipline those around him using manipulation and brute force” (Forrest, 2008).

The Persecutor overcomes feelings of helplessness and shame by overpowering others. Domination becomes their most prevalent style of interaction and they must always be right. Persecutors need someone to blame. They deny their vulnerability in the same way Rescuers deny their needs. Their greatest fear is powerlessness. Because they judge and deny their own inadequacy, fear and vulnerability, they will need some place else to project these disowned feelings. In other words, they need a victim” (Forrest,

2008).

Persecutors likely have core beliefs that they are only powerful if they have power over another. They have unconscious beliefs that they are worthless, and thus their entire life becomes about proving their worth in grandiose ways. When they feel worthless or lacking control, that will be the trigger to put them in the triangle. They will think their actions and feelings (C) are a result of what the person did to make them feel that way, without realizing it is all coming from B (their beliefs based on their experiences).

“It can feel very threatening for someone stuck in Persecutor consciousness to get really honest with themselves. To do so feels like blaming themselves, which only intensifies their internal condemnation” (Forrest, 2008). Just as with the other roles, self-accountability is the only way off the victim triangle for the persecutor. There has to be some kind of breakthrough for them to own their part. Unfortunately, because of their great reluctance to do so, it may have to come in the form of crisis.

Other Self-Defeating Core Beliefs of the Persecutor:

- My emotions are illnesses I cannot control (or are caused by another).
- Events in my past are to blame for my attitudes and behaviors today.
- People who do not make me happy should be punished.

Victim:

“The role of Starting Gate Victim is also a shadow aspect. It is the wounded shadow of our inner child; that part of us that is innocent, vulnerable AND needy. This child-self does need support on occasion – that’s natural. It’s only when we become convinced that we can’t take care of ourselves, that we move into Victim. Believing that we are frail, powerless or defective keeps us needing rescue. This relegates us to a lifetime of crippling dependency on our primary relationships” (Forrest, 2008).

Victims believe they are broken and project an attitude of being weak and unable to overcome or even heal. Their greatest fear is that they won’t make it. That anxiety forces them to be always on the lookout for someone stronger or more capable to take care of them.

Victims deny both their problem solving abilities and their potential for self-generated power. They often resent the rescuer they seek because the rescuers attempt at “helping” just keeps reinforcing their

belief that they are not capable and that they are permanently broken.

Other Self-Defeating Core Beliefs of the Victim:

- Someone somewhere should take responsibility for me.
- My future will be the same as my past.
- Everyone needs to rely on someone stronger than them.

Their belief that they are indeed a victim will keep playing out until they can take responsibility for their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Lynne Forrest (2008) said this: "Ironically, a main exit way off the triangle is through the persecutor position. This does not mean we become persecutors. It does mean however, that once we decide to get off the triangle, there most likely will be those who see us as persecutors. ("How can you do this to me?") Once we decide to take self-responsibility and tell our truth, those still on the triangle are likely to accuse us of victimizing them. "How dare you refuse to take care of me," a Victim might cry. Or "What do you mean you don't need my help?" a primary enabler storms when their victim decides to become accountable. In other words, to escape the victim grid, we must be willing to be perceived as the "bad guy." This doesn't make it so, but we must be willing to sit with the discomfort of being perceived as such."

There are such serious consequences to whatever role we play in the triangle. When we really look at the consequences for playing these roles, it helps motivate us to change so that we can show up in our relationships, including the one with yourself, in a healthy way.

Consequences of triangular living:

- Emotional, mental, and even physical pain
- Lack of personal responsibility
- Painful beliefs
- Painful feelings (result of cognitive distortions)
- Denial
- Dishonesty
- Projection
- Failed intimacy

"As long as we chase ourselves and others around the triangle, we relegate ourselves to living in reaction. Rather than living spontaneously and free through self-responsibility and personal

	<p>choice, we settle into dull and painful lives ruled by the agendas of others and our own unconscious beliefs. To experience a fulfilling life requires a conscious willingness to get off the triangle and extend grace to those still encumbered by their drama” (Forrest, 2008).</p>
<p>Lesson Summary</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Becoming conscious of our behaviors in the triangle allows us to look deeper at our thoughts, emotions, and beliefs that get us there and keep us there. 2. When we challenge our core beliefs and begin to change them, we can begin to change our behavior and start on the road to freedom from the triangle. 3. This is a journey, not a destination. Using the triangle as a map helps us to know where we are starting from and how to get off the triangle. It is something we will find ourselves on again and again, but it will be less frequent and the way out will be clear. Just because someone becomes a victor doesn't mean they will never fight another battle--they will have many battles in life. It just means with each new battle you show up strengthened and more adept to overcome what is in front of you. You keep fighting and rising. This is victory.
<p>Sources:</p>	<p>Forrest, L. (2008, June 26). The three faces of victim – an overview of the victim triangle. <i>Lynne Forrest</i>. https://www.lynneforrest.com/articles/2008/06/the-faces-of-victim/</p> <p>Graham, L. (2017, July 24). The triangle of victim, rescuer, and persecutor – what it is and how to get out. <i>Linda Graham</i>. https://lindagraham-mft.net/triangle-victim-rescuer-persecutor-get/</p> <p>Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karpman_drama_triangle</p>