**The Drama Triad**

Stephen Karpman, a psychiatrist, is credited with conceptualizing the Drama Triad.

Being caught in a Drama Triad is easy to spot. Some signs you might be caught in a relationship Drama Triad include: feeling the relationship is too dramatic or feeling caught in repetitious interactions and arguments to the extent that you can almost predict how the interchange will unfold.

The three roles of the Drama Triangle include: Victim, Persecutor and Rescuer.

In a Drama, only one person can occupy one role at each time, but in the space of an argument a person may swap from one role to another very quickly. In fact, we can all identify occupying victim, persecutor and rescuer roles in relationship interactions; however, it is likely that we have a preferred mode of being in relationships. It is important to note that all three roles (V, P and R) are negative roles, roles whose origins stem from past, painful experiences in relationships.

**Persecutor:**

Persecutors behave in such a way that others are inconvenienced or suffer. They discount the feelings and importance of the persons who are affected because of their actions.  They cannot hear or accept a “No."

Persecutors are often aggressive, angry and judgmental. They use put-downs, shame and blame, and manipulation. Persecutors need to feel in control as it helps them to feel okay or better about themselves. They need to feel powerful to prove to themselves and others that they are not weak or insignificant.

**Active Persecutors:** use their energy to get their own needs met (which is fine – except that the way in which they do it means that others often suffer). E.g.:  Loud, in your face, physically or verbally aggressive; or deliberately doing something to hurt / inconvenience another.

**Retaliatory Persecutors:** aim to punish and experience triumph.  (They are also likely to believe that their actions are justifiable as they are to get their own needs met). E.g.: Getting the neighbors car towed because it is parked in the wrong place rather than actually going over to speak to the neighbor first. Any kind of "getting him back" behavior. Often this can be very passive aggressive: e.g.: "forgetting" to do something for your spouse when you are angry with them.

**Passive Persecutors:** persecute by default. Punishment is not necessarily their intent but they are willing to discount others at a level that results in suffering for others. E.g.: A worker that is so caught up in his own personal crisis that he creates stress, extra work and anxiety for his workmates.

**The Persecutor in Disguise:**These are the “terribly nice” people that may genuinely love and care for you – but also covertly seek to control you and make you exactly like them – or who they think you "should" be. This can be very hard to spot and understand – the victim often feels confused and angry at themselves for being ‘bad.’ They see no reason for them being the way they are – as the persecutor is so ‘good.’

**The Victim!**

A victim will act as if they do not have the resources to solve their problems; or as if the resources they need have to come from outside; and as if they can feel "ok" only if someone else either changes or does something.  A victim will often feel justified in staying the same. They will complain of unmet needs but still have plenty of excuses for their situation. Often the person will feel "less ok" than others.

**Victims are:**

* Downtrodden
* Helpless
* Hopeless

**They Have:**

* No responsibility
* No power
* No control
* Strong feelings that prevent action (fear / depression / anxiety)
* Plenty of Internal Anger (strong negative feelings towards themselves)

**They Need:**

* Lots of attention – they can sometimes ‘suck the life out of others.’
* A Rescuer!

The great paradox of the victim role is that while the victim believes and acts like they have no power; they actually have ALL the power. They very skillfully manipulate and control those around them to help them in exactly the way they want to be helped. This is a powerful and addictive role and one that will not be given up lightly or easily.

 Examples of Victim behavior could be:

* The person who waits to be asked then feels like they always miss out.
* The person who always gives in or is submissive with others.
* The person who continues to live in a unhealthy relationship.
* The person who believes their own needs aren't as important as others.
* The person that feels stuck and unfulfilled in life; but can't make any changes either.

**The Rescuer!**

The rescuer will often move quickly to assist people – often out of a genuine concern for others. HOWEVER, rescuers rescue in order to meet their own need to feel worthy or superior; or to convince themselves that they are "OK." A rescuer will take over the thinking and problem solving for the person. In doing this, they totally discount the Victim’s ability to assess the situation, take appropriate action and ask for help if needed.  Rescuing not only discounts others abilities, but it also shows a lack of awareness of one’s own needs, wants and boundaries. Rescuers often end up bitter, hurt and burnt out. They are so busy looking after everyone else's needs, they neglect to see their own; (and the needs of those closest to them).

**Rescuers:**

* Are ‘People-Pleasers.’
* Can’t hear “No’s” and can’t say “No!”
* Often feel power and control or elation when needed by others.
* Can sometimes use covert or overt put downs to maintain this control over their victims.
* Take over the thinking and problem solving for others.
* Do more than their fair share.
* Do things that they really don’t want to do; (often because there is no one else to do it).
* Believe that the victim can not solve his/her problem.
* Believe that they should do it because they will ‘do it properly’ or ‘better.’

Often the rescuer will surround themselves with people that are ‘unwell’ or needy. They can have good intentions but their behavior invariably leads to the victim staying the victim because they become dependent on the rescuer. The rescuer can quickly jump to the persecutor when they begin to feel like they are tired, overworked and under-appreciated.

Imagine a mother who always ties her son's shoelaces for him in the morning. One morning they are running late. She becomes angry at the child who "still doesn't know how to tie his laces!" She has been doing the job for him - she has not empowered him to do the job himself.

Imagine there is a large pothole in the road. The rescuer is the one who takes on the responsibility for filling the hole. It's hard work filling the hole - the rescuer is tired; he has a sore back and feels a bit under-appreciated (because no-one is really noticing all the hard work he's doing). He's right! Because he is filling the hole, no one else has noticed that there is a problem. Because the hole is always filled there is no need to call the road works contractors. Nothing can be done about 'the problem' because, as far as anyone else is concerned - there isn't one!  Are you 'filling in any holes' in your world at the moment?

**The Bystander**

The Bystander is sometimes called the fourth member of the Drama Triangle. The Bystander is the person who is aware that there is a problem but chooses (for one reason or another) to do nothing. The problem with bystanders is that, in choosing not to be part of the solution, they are actually passively keeping the problem going - or sometimes even making it worse!

**A Bystander might say something like “It’s none of my business” or “The problem is too complicated – I don’t want to get involved.” They might claim that they don’t have enough information to act or that they don’t want to get involved because they need to protect themselves. Sometimes they’ll claim that they don’t want to take sides; or that “whatever I do won’t make a difference.” Some bystanders prefer to stand back and gossip about the situation – spreading rumors instead of getting actively involved.**

**Bystanding can be difficult in a work situation. Sometimes a person will do nothing if they feel like their job might be in jeopardy if they speak up and take action.**

**The Bystander may say “It’s somebody else’s problem” or “I don’t want to rock the boat.” They may not want to take action if they feel it may disrupt their own sense of well-being or stability in life.**

**A bystander will quite likely stand in judgment of a victim and make a statement like: “They just brought it on themselves – they've made some bad choices.”**

 If, while reading the above, you are reminded of times when you have been in the Bystander role, I hope you can allow yourself to view your choices through the eyes of compassion and encouragement. It is not often that a person will bystand out of sheer malice or evil intent. Instead, often we can feel empathy towards the victim but overwhelmed by the problem. Sometimes there is a huge amount of fear and uncertainty about how to help – even if you could. Sometimes getting involved in the past has ended badly for you or others.

**BE ENCOURAGED!** Even the smallest action that you take could make a huge difference in a person’s life.

**BE CAREFUL!** Jumping into a situation without first pausing and carefully considering your options could end up with you becoming either a Rescuer, a Persecutor – or even a Victim! Remember, we want the situation to get better, not worse!

**Ask Yourself**…..are there any other ways I could help here? Is there anyone else (e.g.; a professional) that I could get involved? Is there a professional person or agency that I could ask for some confidential advice?

**Remember:**"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for *good men* to *do nothing*." Edmund Burke

**The Internal Drama Triangle:**

**Persecutor:**

If we have strong negative beliefs about ourselves, our internal negative voice can be very powerful. The internal critic can take on many voices: the voice of a parent, teacher or bully. It can be your own voice. Whatever shape or form it takes it is completely negative. It can be loud and forceful; shouting your lack of worth at full volume. Or it can be quiet and scathing – a continuous monologue of your faults and failings. The internal persecutor is strongly linked to Emotional Reasoning. Because you feel like what the voice is saying is true – it must be true. BUT IT’S NOT!

Take a stand against the inner critic. Start speaking Truth over your life – regardless of how you are feeling!

**Victim:**

The Internal victim is the part of you that fully agrees with the persecutor; the part that leads deep into depression, anxiety and sadness because you have lost sight of who you are. This is the part that engages in negative, circular thinking patterns that always end up reinforcing the negative belief. This is the part that pushes away any kind words spoken to you because if they are true, then maybe you aren't as powerless as you’d like to believe. Victim thinking can be very addictive. The more you allow it, the longer you will spend wallowing in self-pity and hopelessness.  The paradox is that while you are feeling like you are useless and you’re not worth people’s time and energy; you are actually fully focused on yourself and try to draw others in to focus on you too.

**The Rescuer:**

The internal rescuer is the part of you that tries to make yourself feel better – to hide the pain inside. Sometimes this can take the form of self-medication: addiction / drugs / alcohol / sex / excessive shopping etc. Sometimes we put on masks: we make ourselves feel happy all the time. We push down our anger or sorrow and ‘put on a happy face.’ Maybe the mask is anger: when we get angry we feel powerful instead of weak – and we keep people at arm’s length so they can never get close enough to see our pain.

Sometimes the rescuer is Self-harm or an Eating Disorder. The binge / purge cycle or self-harm / starvation cycle can numb or distract from hurtful thoughts and feelings and give us a sense of control; as well as a physical adrenalin ‘buzz’ which makes us feel powerful and satisfied.

Unfortunately, hiding the pain doesn't make it go away. We were created to feel emotions – good and not so good. If we push away one emotion, what we inevitably do is loose the ability to feel anything. We end up numb and disconnected from life.

**So……What can I do??**

* The **Winners Triangle**
* Counseling – learn about yourself and ways to move from the drama
* Learn new skills – boundaries / communication / assertiveness etc.
* Learn your triggers – how are you likely to react in certain situations? (e.g.: if you are under pressure / in an argument / accused of something etc.). Find new healthy behaviors instead.
* Understand Flight / Fight / Freeze (Adrenalin) Response – move from anxiety.
* Ask forgiveness for previous behavior patterns. (If safe to do so)

**The Winners Triangle:**

**= Everybody feels good in the end!**

**A Vulnerable Person:**

* Knows what they feel
* Knows what they need
* Can maintain responsibility (for these needs and emotions)
* Can be transparent
* Maintains adult thinking (Stays in the moment with the problem at hand. Isn't distracted by strong feelings or emotions that are rooted in past pain or negative beliefs).
* Can ask for help but can also accept a “No”
* Can use an "I Statement" (which takes responsibility for feelings and opens the door for positive communication).

E.g.:    I felt………………

When……………

Because………

I would like……(Clearly but gently state your intentions).

**An Assertive Person:**

* Knows their boundaries and is prepared to stick to them
* Can communicate effectively
* Can give fair consequences for bad behavior
* Has no need to punish or violate others
* Sticks up for own rights – won’t be steamrolled.
* Can negotiate; compromise and be flexible.

BE Careful!! There is a very fine line between an assertive person and a persecutor.

**A Caring Person:**

* Can say no and hear no. (They don’t have to fix things)
* Encourages the person to find ways to help themselves.
* Will not take over - or take on another person's responsibility.
* Encourages the person to learn new tools to become more healthy.
* Understands that the vulnerable person is capable of change.
* Can ‘share the load’ vs. ‘taking the load.’

**Moving from the Drama Triangle to the Winners Triangle is not always easy - especially if you have been in these patterns for a long time. The first step is becoming aware of what is going on and identifying the primary roles in which you would usually fit. When you have identified yourself in these roles, you now have the power to make change!**