

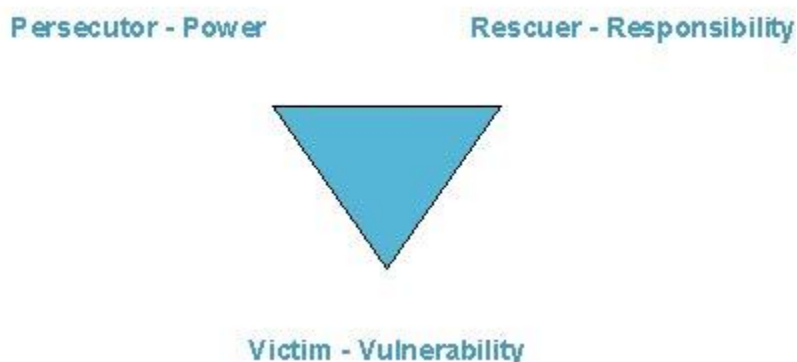
A Few Basics of the Karpman Drama Triangle

In families or systems of people, there can often be consistent and unrelenting drama. In family systems, it is often attributed to one or more people in the family dealing with addiction (or being an offspring of someone with addiction or co-addiction) or personality disorders. In order to function best in that system, it is helpful to understand the (sometimes) rotating roles that are played. There are three: VICTIM, RESCUER and PERSECUTOR.

You can always tell the victim because it's some version of "that's not fair!" The rescuer is always in some version of "I was only trying to help," and the persecutor is in some version of "how dare you. Often what happens is the victim doesn't want to be rescued in the way the rescuer wants to do the rescuing, and ends up feeling victimized. Either way, in order to feel comfortable or safe, people will float around in the triangle, trying to not feel vulnerable.

The rest is a cut and paste from this website:

www.coachingsupervisionacademy.com/our_approach/karpman_drama_triangle.phtml



The basic concept underpinning the Karpman Drama Triangle is the connection between responsibility and power, and their relationship to boundaries.

The Karpman Drama Triangle was originally conceived by Steven Karpman and was used to plot the interplay and behavioral "moves" between two or more people. Karpman's original premise was based on the Transactional Analysis (TA) model as proposed by Eric Berne in the 50's. Berne's hypothesis is that people form a "Script" which is essentially an individual's concept or belief about who they are, what the World is like; how they relate to the World, and how the World relates to them, and how others treat them. Psychologists theorize that an individual forms their Script by the time they are four or five. A Script is based on what an individual is told, what they experience, and how they interpret these external stimuli from their own internal frame of reference.

Berne suggested that each of us play "Games" which are unconsciously motivated

behavioral interactions with the World, our environment and those people with whom we are in contact. A "Game" in this context is an unconscious belief/s which drives our actions/behavior, in such a way as to result in either contributing to, or causing situations to occur that evoke a familiar feeling, usually negative. This feeling reinforces our beliefs or perceptions about ourselves, the World, other people, and how we fit in, and how we are treated. – i. e. our "Script". Not all Scripts are negative, and Berne talked about having a positive Script, however in reality 99% of Scripts are negative and support, in coaching terms, a limiting belief about ourselves, other people, or the World/ Universe.

As coaches this is useful to remember, as part of our work is to uncover limiting beliefs, challenge them and support our client to change them.

How does the Karpman Drama Triangle work?

While it was originally devised as a therapeutic tool, it is also a communications device and plots the moves of a series of transactions between people. It is in this context that we use it in coaching, although its use will give us insights into our client's belief system and behavior.

Essentially Karpman devised a simple formula which plots the moves of a "Game".

It is this;



The moves are as follows.

Some one - usually the Victim - presents a con - "Can you help me?"

The particular con matches the specific hook of the person to whom it is directed, who will usually be a Rescuer, however some Victims play to and "hook" a Persecutor.

The other party – (let's imagine it is a Rescuer) responds by saying "Yes of course I can help you!"

[Note. If the con does not match, the perspective Rescuer/Persecutor usually will not be "pulled in" or "hooked", and the Victim will wander off to find someone else to play the game. Alternately the Victim may try to initiate another Game this time from the position of being a Persecutor, e.g. "You're a lousy coach" or perhaps "Are you accredited" or even "Do you belong to a professional organization?"]

Once the Game begins, a series of complementary transactions will continue as long as it suits both parties. In some instances this series of complementary transactions can go on indefinitely and may take the form of a lifelong friendship or marriage as both parties are content to stay in the Game without going for the pay off. However more often than not, one party becomes discontented or unhappy, for whatever reason, and pulls the SwitchOh dear. Things then usually fall apart pretty quickly, and the players whiz round the Triangle like players on a snakes and ladders board!

The Rescuer usually at this point becomes the Victim, and the Victim often becomes the Persecutor, The Game is over and both retire with that "Old Familiar Feeling" to nurse their

wounds. Game Set and Script!

It can be observed that the Karpman Drama Triangle works at both the social level, that is observable behavior, and at the internal dynamic level, that is what a player feels inside. It is therefore quite possible to feel a Victim and be seen by others as a Persecutor, or present as a Victim but in reality be a Persecutor.

Definitions of the Roles.

A **"Rescuer"** is someone who often does not own their own vulnerability and seeks instead to "rescue" those whom they see as vulnerable. The traits of a Rescuer is that they often do more than 50% of the work, they may offer "help" unasked rather than find out if and how the other person wants to be supported, and what the Rescuer agrees to do may in actual fact not be what they really want to do. This means that the Rescuer may then often end up feeling "hard done by" or resentful, used or unappreciated in some way. The Rescuer does not take responsibility for themselves, but rather takes responsibility for the perceived Victim whom they rescue.

The Rescuer will always end up feeling the Victim, but sometimes may be perceived by others who are on the outside looking in, as being the Persecutor.

A **"Victim"** is someone who usually feels overwhelmed by their own sense of vulnerability, inadequacy or powerlessness, and does not take responsibility for themselves or their own power, and therefore looks for a Rescuer to take care of them. At some point the Victim may feel let down by their Rescuer, or perhaps overwhelmed or even persecuted by them. At this stage the Victim will move to the Persecutor position, and persecute their erstwhile Rescuer. They may even enlist another Rescuer to persecute the previous Rescuer. However, the Victim will still experience themselves internally as being the Victim.

The position of **"Persecutor"** is synonymous with being unaware of one's own power and therefore discounting it. Either way the power used is negative and often destructive. Any player in the "game" may at any time be experienced as the Persecutor by the other player/players. However their own internal perception may be that they are being persecuted, and that they are the Victim. There of course are instances in which the Persecutor is knowingly and maliciously persecuting the other person. If this is the case, then strictly speaking the Persecutor is no longer playing a "Game " in the TA sense of the word, as the Persecutor is operating from a place of conscious awareness; it could then be argued that they are in fact employing a strategy.

Each of the positions are taken up as a result of an issue being discounted or disowned. To remedy this the

- The **Rescuer** needs to take responsibility for him/herself, connect with their power and acknowledge their vulnerability.
- The **Victim** needs to own their vulnerability and take responsibility for themselves and also recognize that they have power and are able to use it appropriately.
- The **Persecutor** needs initially to own their power, rather than be afraid of it or use it covertly.

Another way of looking at the Karpman Drama Triangle using the OK Corral by Eric Berne

1 I-U+ Get away from	2 I+U+ Get on with
3 I-U- Get nowhere with	4 I+U- Get rid of

The Rescuer position is depicted by Quadrant (3). This is not immediately obvious: however it may be seen that the Rescuer very often has low self esteem and since they do not wish to connect with their own vulnerability, they take care of another whom they see as vulnerable - a victim, hence the I'm Not Ok You're Not OK (I- U-) position. Ultimately this position will not result in either party getting their needs met. So "Get nowhere with"

The Victim is seen in Quad (1), and experiences themselves as powerless and at the mercy of the world – I'm Not OK, You're OK (I- U+). They automatically see others as better than themselves, however the catch phrase here is "get away from" and that is exactly what happens as ultimately the Victim will "Get way from" their "helper" usually by becoming a Persecutor. (Please note that a Victim might also see themselves and the world as not OK – I- U- in which case the Victim would present as very angry and would simultaneously "hook " a Rescuer whilst persecuting and blaming the world")

The remaining Quad (4) is obviously that of the Persecutor - the I'm Ok, You're Not OK. – (I+ U-). The catch phrase "Get rid of "speaks for itself!! The issues to be examined and resolved are self-empowerment, ownership, setting boundaries and seeing where roles and responsibilities lie, and having an appreciation of where the power is being appropriately or inappropriately used.

Not Playing the "Game"

When an individual is taking responsibility for themselves and allows the other to also take responsibility for themselves, they are adopting the I'm OK Your OK - (I+ U+) position Quad (2). This is a position of equality in which the responsibility of each individual is acknowledged. It is a position of empowerment and is one of honesty, reality and respect. Boundaries, contracts, accountability and responsibility are all active here. The catch phrase for this quadrant is "Get on with"

On board with all of that? You might like to experiment with the concepts in the two exercises shown below. Have fun!

Exercise 1

Think of a situation where you know you have been a Rescuer, Victim, or Persecutor...you might have been all three at some time in the same scenario!!!!

Using that situation ask yourself the following questions.

What am I not doing?

What do I need to do?

Who is taking responsibility for whom? Who am I taking responsibility for?

Am I allowing the other person to take responsibility for themselves and their actions?

Who has the power? How do I know?

Have I agreed to more than I want to do?

Am I doing more than half the work?

Am I owning my power positively and appropriately?

Am I using it to set my own boundaries and take responsibility for myself and my actions?

What boundaries do I need to set up?

Am I using my power to take care of myself properly?

What am I feeling about this situation? What would I like to feel?

What action do I need to take to make sure that I deal with this in the best possible way so that it has the best possible outcome?

What else, what else, what else?