

THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

I personally was caught in the Drama Triangle, a social model of interaction developed by psychiatrist Stephen Karpman in the late 1960's. The principles of transactional analysis guided its development – transactional analysis simply means that you can learn about an individual's internal processes by observing him interacting with people. Having also studied theatre, Karpman was adept in perceiving the different roles people would play and attributed these roles to people's need to manage their fears and anxieties. He defined three roles in the dynamic: Rescuer, Persecutor and Victim.

Imagine these three roles on an inverted triangle. An individual enters the Triangle as one role, and will attract individuals who know how to serve in the other roles to play opposite. The Victim is someone who feels helpless, powerless and unable to solve problems. This person's early childhood did not enable him or her to develop the self-efficacy, the faith in themselves, to make decisions on their own. The Rescuer is someone who is always there to help, and feels guilty if they don't help. During the Rescuer's early development, they learned that by pleasing others and being good, they could avoid getting in trouble. The Rescuer's payoff is that he can avoid dealing with his own anxiety and issues by focusing on other people and their problems. The Persecutor is critical, authoritative and controlling. Their reaction to fear is to maintain the illusion of controlling everything going on around them by being tough.

These roles are learned in the family of origin, and everyone tends to gravitate toward a particular role. The drama occurs when the roles shift. For example, at some point, the Victim becomes tired of feeling threatened and instead becomes the Persecutor, or the Rescuer feels there are too many demands placed on him and therefore assumes the role of the Victim. An individual inside the triangle perceives life through that lens, and it is difficult for them to perceive other solutions or how they may be contributing to their own misery.

We are able to step outside of the Triangle by first becoming aware of being in it. Once aware, we are able to observe our interactions with others from this fresh perspective. We learn to look closely at our motives with an attitude of curiosity rather than blaming or shame. We remind ourselves that just because we have believed these stories does not make them true. Our true self is way beyond the smallness found in the Triangle.

EXERCISE

Drama Triangle, Restoring Personal Power

Draw a very large inverted triangle in your journal. Label the three points of the triangle with Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim. Identify the role that resonates the most with you and put a circle around it. Recall as many Triangle incidences as possible in five minutes and write them in the space below the triangle.

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Now choose one of the incidences. Give that incident a name and write that name in the middle of the triangle. For example, Doctor's office, child's school, Tom's wedding. Write your name, and the names of the other two people who were a part of the triangle, in the appropriate corners—i.e. if you were a Victim, write your name in the Victim corner. Activate that memory in full detail. Notice any body sensations, a heaviness or subtle pain or twitching. Just notice. Keep breathing and noticing. The heavy energy is stored in your body and you are activating it and releasing it. You may want to gently close your eyes to increase your ability to focus and engage your senses: hear, see and smell. Notice the other two people in the Triangle? Play the scene forward and backward to see if anyone suddenly switches roles and observe what happens in those moments. Perhaps you began as the victim but became the persecutor, defensive, with a raised voice. As you remember, stay in a neutral third person position, with no judgment of self or other. Just observe.

Now go back to your initial memory and re-create the scenario, but this time make it so that the scene occurs outside of the Triangle, where no one is the persecutor, victim or rescuer. Be aware of everyone's posture, tone of voice, eye contact. As you recreate the scene, notice what is going on in your body. Don't get caught up with "reality" thinking, just let your heart lead your thoughts to where they want to go. Let that part of you that seeks harmony take charge. Once you have arrived at a positive state, pull your stone to your 3rd chakra. Anchor your stone with this empowered energy, pushing the stone gently into your chakra. When you feel satisfied, place your Stone on your altar. Draw a heart around the Triangle to represent the healed energy. Place other Love objects on your altar, anything that speaks to you of forgiveness and healing. You have just stepped into your own desired future and anchored it into your energy field with your stone.



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