

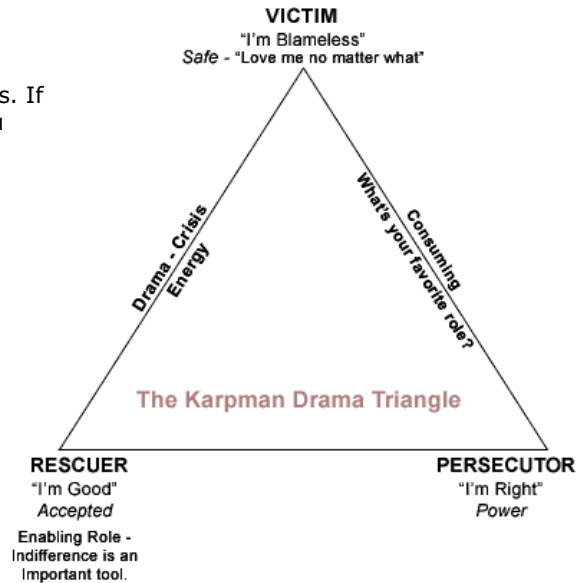
The Karpman Drama Triangle

Original Source © 1968 by the Transactional Analysis Bulletin.

Mental health is about growth, taking responsibility for how you affect others, recognizing choices, and being willing to risk mistakes. The Karpman Drama Triangle is a game played all too often in relationships. If this game defines a pattern of your relationships with others, then you have serious work to do.

The Purpose of The Victim, Rescuer, Persecutor Game

1. Keeps responsibility out there.
2. There is a lack of internal conflict within the individual. It's all created in others.
3. Players lack empathy, are very self absorbed in their own role of the moment.
4. Patterns of game prevent problem solving — *the drama rules*.
5. Maintains bad boundaries.
6. The game provides identity and fills emptiness, because two people can jump around in all three roles.



Good guy/Bad guy split thinking leads to drama. Drama obscures the real issues. People are seduced by the false excitement the drama offers — all style, no substance. Manipulation is the core of the game. It creates confusion and upset, not solutions.

Playing Victim, Rescuer has become a powerful cultural pastime. It is the core of all the repetitious plots of soap operas. This game could be used to describe Bill, Hillary, Monica, and Ken.

Here's how it works: Let's suppose Bill was emotionally dependent on Hillary to feel good about himself. Perhaps Hillary was persecuting him through emotional distance because she lost the national health care bill and was licking her wounds after the Arkansas State Troopers reported Bill's philandering. Monica enters the White House, ripe for the role of Rescuer to Victim Bill. The beauty of the game is that roles can be switched to enhance the drama. For example, Bill could rescue Monica by finding her attractive, while Monica feels like a victim because she's a chubby girl no one would ever love. Enter Ken Starr to play Persecutor in his own over-the-top style.

Another example could be O.J. He was accused of being the Persecutor and Nicole was the Victim. One way to look at what O.J.'s attorneys did is that they flipped him from the Persecutor role to the Victim role. Then the Jury stepped in to play the rescuer.

This game is what operates in many relationships. It is all style and no substance. It has become a lifestyle for too many people. The game provides people with their identity as Victim, Rescuer, or Persecutor. People generally favor one or two roles.

Most of us in the helping professions (nurses, teachers, counselors) all begin with favoring the Rescuer role. (So be sure to choose a therapist who's been a client and seriously worked on issues in their own backyard. This means they'll more clearly see who you really are instead of projecting their own issues onto you.) Rescuers get caught up in enabling. They see themselves as good and have to learn to back up. Doing too much for someone else is rationalized because "I care so much." Rescuers are often unaware that pity and disrespect are the fuel for this role. "I know what's best for you." is illustrated in the mother's role in the movie "[The Deep End](#)." The reality is that backing up from the rescuer role means learning that indifference can be a useful tool. Wait and see if the person you're trying to rescue steps forward for themselves or how they do it differently.

Victims can be manipulative, particularly if they are operating on a "love me no matter what" basis. Being loved no matter what is not something two honest adults should expect from each other. After the age of 18, love me no matter what should be hard to come by. Victims are trying to remain blameless. Remember an unhappy relationship is always created by two people. Blame may be distributed 60/40 or 70/30, however it always takes two. The more blaming and finger pointing someone does, the more fragile the point of view. Noise simply creates smoke and mirrors, and it is less likely that an honest reality is being addressed. Elegant truth is generally never "I am good/You are bad," it is usually a more complicated frame of reference. "I did this part and you did this part" etc. Finding the bravery to look at your own part in creating problems can change and transform your life. If you've been loving the victim role over many years it is time to face the truth - it is a **boring way of life**. One key to interrupting this pattern would be to relocate your imagination, to find other ways of conducting your life.

Persecutors love the power of moving people around on the chess board of life. Brad Pitt in [Fight Club](#) is an extreme example of this. Everything is win or lose, with very little ability to be a part of a team. There is a desperate need to be right at all costs and you can end up doubting yourself even about the facts of what happens.

Playing in this drama triangle ultimately leads to a very boring life. Over and over again the game is repeated, and there are never any solutions. Nobody grows as all the players are very stuck in the cycle of repeating their tired lines, all for drama.

Specific Guidelines for Playing VRP Roles	vs.	How to be a Grown Up
Creating drama and chaos	vs.	Solving problems
Dodging, deflecting, and blaming others	vs.	Taking on responsibilities
Denial/pretending	vs.	Honestly facing painful situations
Making excuses and instigating bad boundaries	vs.	Maintaining boundaries to have true respect for others
Ignoring damage that has been done and pretending it has nothing to do with you	vs.	Making amends and recognizing consequences
Maintaining your illusions at all costs	vs.	Having the courage to become more self aware
Giving yourself too much respect (narcissistic) or too little respect (martyrs)	vs.	Balancing both respect for others and yourself
Letting drama rule	vs.	Letting integrity/character rule
"I know what's best for both of us"	vs.	No one has a market on truth-it always lies in between people
Creating doubt in the other person	vs.	Seeing what hard truths the other person may have to teach you
Assuming others are there to be an audience	vs.	Realizing what happens between people is unknown, not orchestrated
Thinking in simple terms of Right/Wrong, Good/Bad	vs.	Recognizing complexity
Manipulating others, which is a shell game that ends up hollow	vs.	Using your heart and head together to be more emotionally honest with others
Trying to have it both ways	vs.	Facing sacrifice
Taking the easy way	vs.	Knowing the right thing to do is the hard thing to do
Monologue	vs.	Dialogue
Short-term thinking	vs.	Long-term thinking
Manipulating/Controlling	vs.	Negotiating

Choices, choices, choices.

Rhoda's Triangle

Honesty: Say what you mean, mean what you say. There is greater soul in honestly facing painful situations. Look fearlessly within. The people you love the most are the ones to risk more honesty with.

Respect for Self & Others: Balance both. Take Responsibility. Learn boundaries. Have empathy and self-protection. Do not be either too self effacing or too narcissistic.

Make Agreements That Work: Negotiation/middle ground leads to possibilities. More able to handle complexity. There has to be room for both people's wants and agendas. Solve problems together.

