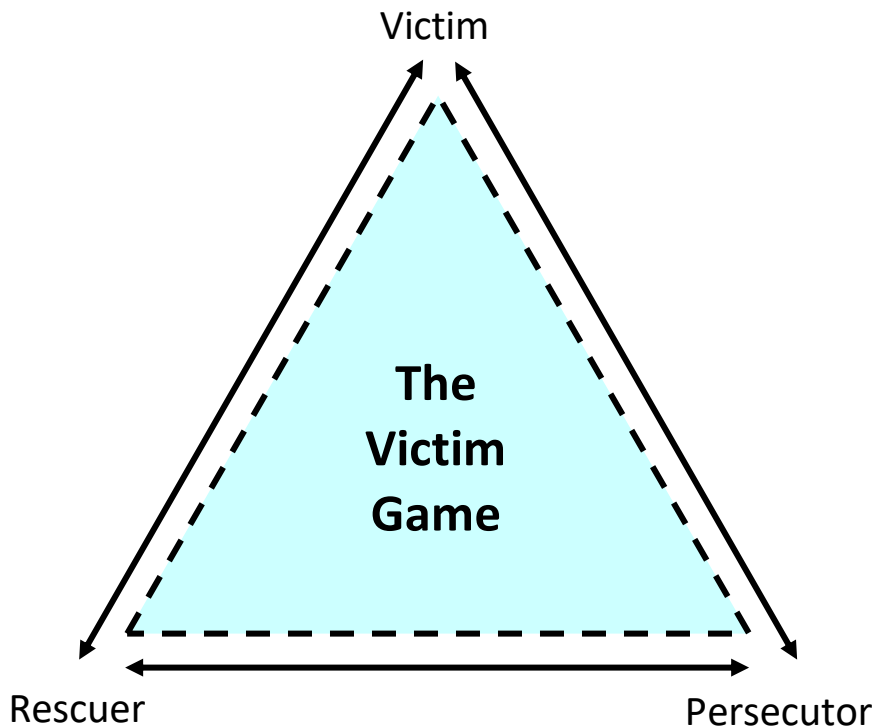


Moving Beyond the Victim Game

Marti Wibbels, M.S., L.M.H.C.

The Victim Game is a destructive form of interpersonal interaction that subtly becomes a lifestyle without its participants even knowing they're players. Participants in this emotional game shift in and out of any of its three roles, changing their beliefs and behaviors from **Victim**, to **Rescuer** or **Persecutor**.



Brought into awareness by Stephen Karpman, M.D., the Victim Game is often referred to as the Karpman Drama Triangle.

The role of Victim is as old as Adam and Eve, both who blamed each other and God for their own choices. On the other hand, many people experience serious problems they have not chosen. These individuals truly have been *victimized* by other people, or by circumstances, poor health, and other serious difficulties, but not everyone who has been *victimized* chooses to live as a Victim.

For those who move into the role of **Victim**, their choice feels more like a problem totally out of their control than a choice. Therefore, it is important to differentiate between *awareness* of the difficulties of your situation or condition and the assumption that you, a Victim, have no choice.

How can you tell if you are living in the Victim role? Observe how you think about yourself during one day this week. If you feel persecuted, unloved, powerless, believe you don't belong, or view life as happening *to* you, you may have unconsciously assumed the Victim role.

An important distinction of the Victim Game's unwritten rules is that a person cannot declare herself/himself the Victim. Instead, the victim is anyone who has been declared Victim by someone else. For example, a friend, family member, psychiatrist, counselor, rabbi/minister/pastor/priest, or anyone else in a position of personal or public authority can declare another person a Victim. Many people invest significant amounts of time and money finding someone to legitimize their internal belief of Victim Status. The reason for this quest is simple: individuals who admit they are living as Victims accept responsibility for being Victims, which would indicate they could actually do something about their situation, condition, experience, or problem. Recognizing responsibility is not a Victim trait.

Those who know a Victim might validate his or her beliefs by saying something similar to the following. A family member or friend might say, "I can't believe how much you're going through, and I don't know how you cope with your husband [or wife]. He [she] drinks all the time and there's no way you can do

anything about it!” Similarly, a man or woman might find a family physician or psychiatrist to affirm significant concerns with, “Considering your excessive stress at work, your own health concerns, and your partner’s addictions, this is more than you can handle. I’m prescribing something to ease your pain [calm your nerves, etc.]” *[Please note: these are illustrations and not any sort of assessment that persons utilizing psychotropic medications are in the Victim role!]*

When an individual assumes the emotional role of **Victim**, there must eventually be a **Persecutor**. This could be another person, a circumstance, a job, lack of a job, an illness, or even a natural disaster. There is a subtle but significant difference between individuals who see themselves as “Victims” and those who are in a situation where they are “Victimized.” Those who are in the Victim role believe their feelings of self-pity, helplessness, depression, and hurt are directly caused by their Persecutor(s), in whatever form a Persecutor appears in their lives.

When a Victim is faced with a Persecutor or Persecutors, s/he looks for a **Rescuer**, in the form of a person, activity or situation designated to alleviate real or perceived suffering. As a Rescuer emerges, the Victim feels a sense of empowerment, with either the conscious or unconscious search for others to validate internal beliefs such as, “My suffering is real. I am not responsible for the difficulty in my life. My identity is defined by my problems.” For those individuals facing genuine difficulties, capitulating to the role of Victim reduces them from people who can choose their responses to people who let their circumstances or other people compel them to *react* rather than *respond*.

A Rescuer works hard to “help” others with their problems or concerns, perhaps trying to fill a void in his or her own life with the temporary satisfaction of trying to control or “fix” someone else. Each time a Rescuer sees a Victim as powerless, the Rescuer is not truly being loving or kind. In fact, some Rescuers are doing their extraordinary good deeds to somehow satisfy their own insatiable desire to look good to others. Some Rescuers become either loud or quiet “martyrs,” using quiet sighs or well-placed complaints to proclaim their heroic, unappreciated efforts. Eventually, though, the Rescuer becomes so tired of “fixing” the Victim’s problems that s/he views the Victim as a Persecutor.

In this game, all three roles continue to shift, at different rates. One role might last for a week—or a year, but it can’t last indefinitely. The Victim eventually has to see his or her Rescuer as a Persecutor. After all, if a successful rescue occurs, the Victim cannot stay in the familiar role of Victim. Therefore, a Persecutor—in the form of a person, event, problem or circumstance—must emerge so the Victim can stay “helpless.”

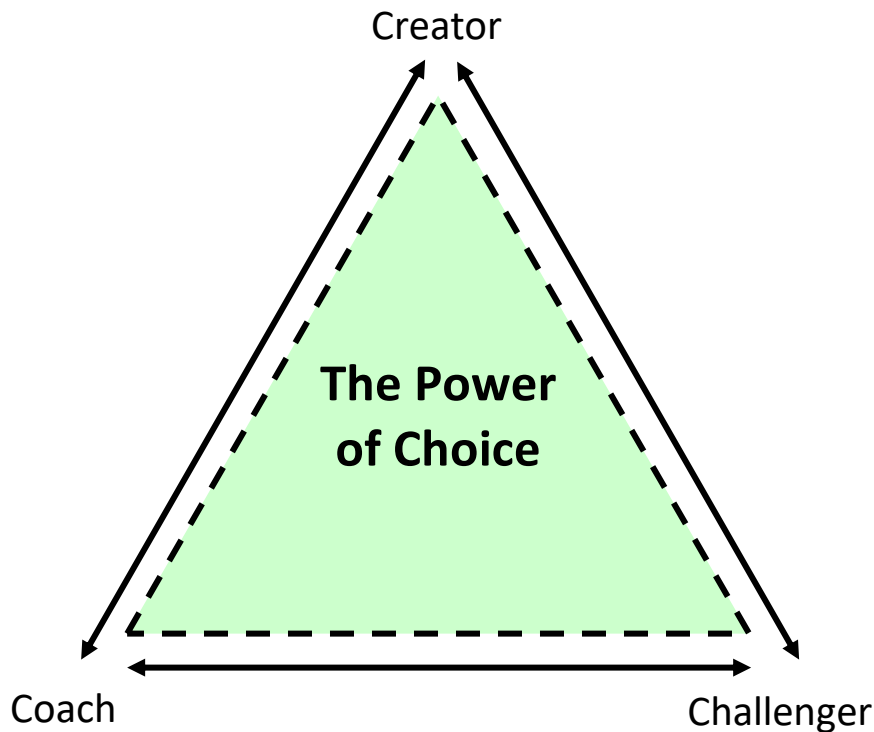
Transforming a Rescuer into a Persecutor isn’t at all difficult for the practiced Victim. A few words, a few lies (which the Victim can convincingly make sound like truth), and the person who has been exhausted by prolonged futile attempts to bring deliverance to the Victim is suddenly viewed by others as the unkind, unfair, cruel or heartless individual the Victim crafts him or her to be.

Every role in this game is debilitating to every player! To stay out of harm’s way, stay out of the game! If you realize you have been “playing” the role of Victim, Rescuer, or Persecutor, begin now to look for healthy roles in your relationships with others.

Based on your current understanding of the Victim Game, please read the following affirmation, and then rewrite it in your own words: *“The circumstances of life, the events of life, and the people around me in life, do not make me the way I am, but reveal the way I am”* (Dr. Sam Peeples).

I think Dr. Peeples’ statement means: _____

To get out of the Victim Game, you can make new choices and learn new perspectives about your life.



Instead of seeing yourself as Victim, learn to view yourself as a Creator. This distinction has been offered by David Emerald, author of *The Power of TED** (*The Empowerment Dynamic*).

One significant difference between a Victim and a Creator is that a Creator realizes s/he has *choices* and can *make* choices about how to live life. A Victim and Creator can be facing similar problems, fears, concerns or difficulties, but the Creator chooses to look at problems as Challengers rather than as a person or event who is persecuting— or “out to

get”—him or her. This is a profound difference! In addition, rather than looking for someone (or something) to “rescue” him or her, a Creator finds a Coach—perhaps in the form of a person, a book, a course, instruction, group or activity—to help the Creator discover and apply practical help and new perspectives needed to cope with the situation, problem or issue.

In other words, a Creator believes s/he has both the responsibility and opportunity to decide what to do about challenging situations, difficult people and genuine problems. When a Creator doesn’t know how to tackle a problem or when s/he wants to learn new ways to grow, s/he finds a “Coach” who comes alongside him or her, with the unspoken assumption that the Creator is a human being capable of making wise choices, no matter how difficult the situation or concern.

The role of a Coach is quite unlike the Rescuer role. Instead of doing for an individual what s/he can do—or can learn to do—a Coach helps the Creator grow and cope with the situation, problem or issue. The growth process might involve several “coaches,” each who shows respect for the Creator by giving input but not “taking over” his or her life.

A Coach helps a Creator see that living with Challengers—whether they appear in the form of people, circumstances, events or other concerns—is a positive part of life. That Creator learns to view Challengers as catalysts to change and growth rather than Persecutors delivering defeat and misery. An internet search, a trip to the library or a call to a friend can help the Creator find the coaching help s/he needs.

If you identify yourself in the role of Victim and don’t even feel you have one friend, this is a wonderful time to decide to become a person who can make and keep friends. With proper coaching and encouragement, you can move from Victim to Creator. There are growth groups available through community organizations, churches, synagogues and many other areas within society. They are as close to discovery as your daily newspaper.

In the first book of the Bible, God established the Creator role, stating “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1:27-28, NIV). Sometimes referred to as the Dominion Mandate, that passage describes each human being as remarkably created in God’s image to subdue, rule or manage a specific domain. A Victim gives up, gives in or lets others walk over or decide for him or her. A Creator chooses and believes there is purpose for his or her unique existence. Psalm 139 gives further description of each person’s incredible design and worth.

There are surprising choices available to each of us when we view difficulties as challenging rather than as persecuting, debilitating or defeating. Accepting challenge as a part of life results in opening one’s mind to discovering new ways to face the challenge instead of giving up or feeling there is no way to cope.

English poet John Milton said, “The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.” Describe how Milton’s statement applies to the concepts of Victim and Creator:

Review the key differences between the roles in the Victim Game (Karpman Triangle) and The Choice Triangle.

After reviewing, please complete the following exercise. **Underline** the names of role(s) that apply to you at this time. **Circle** the name of the role(s) you want to apply to your life.

Compare and contrast the roles of **Victim** and **Creator**:

Compare and contrast the roles of **Rescuer** and **Coach**:

Compare and contrast the roles of **Persecutor** and **Challenger**:

Jesus spoke these words to his disciples: “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NASU).

What choices can you make today to begin living as someone created to thrive and overcome rather than someone reduced to living as a Victim?

Describe a Coach who could help you live as a Creator: _____

The book *The Power of TED**, by David Emerald, gives detailed information about what I am referring to as “The Power of Choice” in this worksheet. Mr. Emerald refers to his antidote to the Karpman Triangle as “The Empowerment Dynamic.” You can order *The Power of TED** at his website <http://powerofted.com>, or at online retailers Barnes & Noble or Amazon.