**Manipulation and Relationship Triangles**


*"Do you want to be honest, or do you want to win?
You could have it all if you could gracefully give in
Like when a martyr knows he's a martyr
And looking in the mirror makes you cry harder
'bout your glittering ball and chain
In love, In love with your
Beautiful pain

Excuses and old theories repeat themselves and die
But when they don't hold water
You try to keep them safe and dry"
- lyrics from the song Beautiful Pain
by Rosanne Cash*

**The Karpman Drama Triangle**

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.


*Original Source © 1968 by the Transactional Analysis Bulletin.*
 **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 the 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 to fuel the drama.

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. (Read more about this on the [Black/White Thinking/Feeling](http://www.therapyideas.net/divorcce.htm) page of this website.)

Playing Victim, Rescuer has become a powerful cultural pastime. It is at 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.

**Rescuers**

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](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000QXDCM4?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B000QXDCM4) ." 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**



Victims can be easily manipulated. Victims can also learn to 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 interupting this pattern would be to relocate your imagination, to find other ways of conducting your life.

**20 Questions to Determine Whether or Not You Set Yourself Up to be a Victim**

1. Is it easier for you to stay silent instead of asking for what you want?
2. Do you believe the lyrics of the old Dean Martin Song; You're Nobody Until Somebody Loves You? So you end up feeling bad about being single.
3. Would you be convinced to leave your friends behind ending up isolated?
4. Are you too committed to pleasing others?
5. How desperate are you to be loved?
6. Do you swallow your anger?
7. Are you able to say NO, and to set limits & boundaries?
8. How over responsible are you?
9. Do you suffer from exaggerated guilt?
10. Do you feel appreciated in your own life or are you hungry?
11. Do you end up feeling lost in relationships?
12. Are you afraid to disagree?
13. Are you an extreme caretaker who does not take care of yourself?
14. Are your relationships follow a lopsided pattern where you do too much catering to the other person?
15. Do you apologize so often it's become a habit?
16. Are you easily taken in by others, perhaps a bit sappy?
17. Do you allow others to suffocate your own spirit or creativity?
18. Is it easy for you to hang onto false hopes & ignore your own suspicious inner voice?
19. Do you minimize your problems in relationships & avoid addressing them?
20. Are you too eager to forgive?

**Persecutors**



Persecutors love the power of moving people around on the chess board of life. Brad Pitt in [Fight Club](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0007DFJ0G?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B0007DFJ0G) 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 roles, all for drama.

**10 Types of Emotional Manipulators**
*Used by permission from a workshop given by Dr. Jim Fogarty on 10/28/11.*

1. **The Constant Victim** - No matter what happens, with many twists and turns, this emotional manipulator becomes the victim. They love to triangulate.
2. **One-Upmanship Expert** - With skillful manipulation, like put downs, this person always needs to gain the high ground with others.
3. **Powerful Dependents** - Dependents who hide behind the guise of being weak & powerless, but gain considerable power through helplessness, in the lives of those they are dependent upon. Their hidden message is "Don't let me down."
4. **Triangulators** - "You are so special. I'm so happy you're on my side. Let me tell you what these terrible people are doing to me! Plus they are saying very nasty things about you too!" They turn people against each other.
5. **The Blasters** - It is not uncommon for teens to be blasters. Hopefully, they grow out of it. The goal for blasters is to not be confronted on any issues. They blast you with anger & side issues to throw you off topic. It's a good technique to hide secrets.
6. **The Projector** - A projector denies they have any dysfunctional issues and only see their own issues in other people, which is very convenient. You are manipulative, not them.
7. **The Intentional Mis-Interpreter** - They intentionally misinterpret information to feed you bad information about others & themselves. Or they feed other people bad information about you. They appear friendly & trustworthy.
8. **The Flirt** - "Look at me! Be attracted to me! I have plans for you!" They use flirting toget what they want. They need to be preferred & admired.
9. **The Iron Fist** - Intimidates & demands that you give me what I want! They scorch & burn & may become physical.
10. **The Multiple Offender** - Uses a blend of these techniques.

**Ten Ways to Recognize Emotional Manipulators**
*Also with permission from Dr. Jim Fogarty*

1. Emotional manipulators often begin by being charming, but they are never really accessible.
2. Too early in the relationship, your every need seems to be filled.
3. They lie by exaggeration, distorting the truth & by omission.
4. You notice that you end up apologizing a lot!
5. The manipulator persuades you to do things you would not normally do.
6. You constantly have second class status & your opinion is never really good enough.
7. The manipulator has huge reactions that are way too big over small irritations.
8. Manipulators promise a lovely future that never materializes.
9. The manipulator is successful when they give only vague indications that something is bothering them & you jump to fix it for them.
10. Problems are never the manipulators fault, they never take responsibility & are always quick to blame you.

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| **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 (narcissists) 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.

Please follow [this link](http://relationshiprealities.wordpress.com/category/manipulation/) to read more detailed blog posts on manipulation.



**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.

This triangle might seem like a simple alternative, it is not. This triangle requires risk taking, vulnerability and authenticity. This triangle is about developing greater self awareness about your own dark side instead of hiding out in blaming others. This triangle is about being open to dialogue instead of self protective monologues. This triangle is about the courage to work hard at relationships instead of being dramatic to get your way.

**Movies that Illustrate VRP**

[**Notes on a Scandal**](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000NIVJFY?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B000NIVJFY)
Judi Dench plays a lonely woman who lives in a *Star Trek* parallel universe of her own creation. She favors the Persecutor, Rescuer roles. Cate Blanchette favors the Victim, Persecutor roles. Despite the consequences of playing VRP twice, the end of the movie suggests that Judi Dench will continue on unchanged.

[**Shattered Glass**](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0001907AI?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B0001907AI)
Hayden Christensen portrays the true story of Stephen Glass who was an expert in all three roles.


[**House of Sand and Fog**](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0001DMVBC?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B0001DMVBC)
The two main characters play VRP until the very dismal end and of course nobody wins.


[**Mystic River**](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B003ASLJQS?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B003ASLJQS)
Powerful movie about the futility of taking the persecutor role to the threshold of murder.


[**Monster**](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00005JMUK?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B00005JMUK)
It was clear that Charlize Theron brought some personal reality to her role when she describes her childhood (while riding in a car). This role brought her an Oscar.


[**Weight of Water**](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0000844LU?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B0000844LU)
Starring Sean Penn is a movie that demonstrates the drama triangle in both the stories that are woven together. Watch Sean Penn flip through all three roles (victim, rescuer, persecutor) right through his final scene.

**Books**

[Emotional Blackmail: When the People in Your Life Use Fear, Obligation, and Guilt to Manipulate You](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0060928972?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0060928972) by Susan Forward

[In Sheep's Clothing: Understanding and Dealing with Manipulative People](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1935166301/ref%3Das_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399369&creativeASIN=1935166301) by George Simon, Jr., Ph. D.

[The Gaslight Effect: How to Spot and Survive the Hidden Manipulation Others Use to Control Your Life](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0029LHWPO/ref%3Das_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399369&creativeASIN=B0029LHWPO) by Dr. Robin Stern

[Who's Pulling Your Strings?: How to Break the Cycle of Manipulation and Regain Control of Your Life](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0071402780/ref%3Das_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399369&creativeASIN=0071402780) by Harriet B. Braiker, Ph. D.

[Why Is It Always About You? : The Seven Deadly Sins of Narcissism](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0743214285/ref%3Das_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=217145&creative=399369&creativeASIN=0743214285) by Sandy Hotchkiss, LCSW

**Learn about the game:**
[Power with People: How to Handle Just About Anyone to Accomplish Just About Anything](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0964145804?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0964145804) by Greg Lester Ph.D.

**The game is defined in the 70's classic:**
[What do you say after you say hello?: The psychology of human destiny](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0394479955?ie=UTF8&tag=theridea-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0394479955) by Eric Berne