THE RESCUE TRIANGLE

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Rescue is a concept that is central to our theory and practice. It describes a common set of transactions that arise from, and contribute to, inequalities of power. *Rescue* in our jargonistic sense does not mean what the dictionary says it does: "To free or save from danger, imprisonment, evil, etc." (*New World Dictionary*). Instead, we are referring to the act of "helping out" more than is actually needed, to an unequal distribution of helping or of self-sacrifice.

Rescue describes transactions involving three roles: the Rescuer, the Victim and the Persecutor.

The Rescuer does more than her or his share of the work, or (in an alternative definition) does something she doesn't really want to do. In relationships molded by sexist role training, for instance, women classically do most of the emotional work — initiating conversations about problems, giving strokes, healing wounds, facilitating intimacy — while men do more of the work of taking care of business in the world — earning money, fixing cars, planning finances, and so on. Each Rescues in her or his particular way.

The Victim feels that he or she has inadequate power or capability to do her share. She or he must depend on the Rescuer to "help out." Men who have never had to be tuned in to their own inner lives or to take care of the day-to-day details of domesticity, are thoroughly panicked when their wives vanish (die; pack up and leave; announce a conversion and a new distribution of labor). They may believe that they are not capable of carrying on a one-to-one conversation with the children, or changing a diaper or cooking a meal. And, in fact, they probably are not very capable, because they've had no practice. Women who have never had to negotiate with auto mechanics, or fill out income tax forms, or repair a broken light-switch, are similarly panicked when suddenly faced with the need to do so. It begins to be clear how Rescue and Victim are related; the Rescuer Rescues because the Victim can't do his share. But the more the Victim is Rescued, the less skill she accumulates and the less power she has to do whatever is needed.

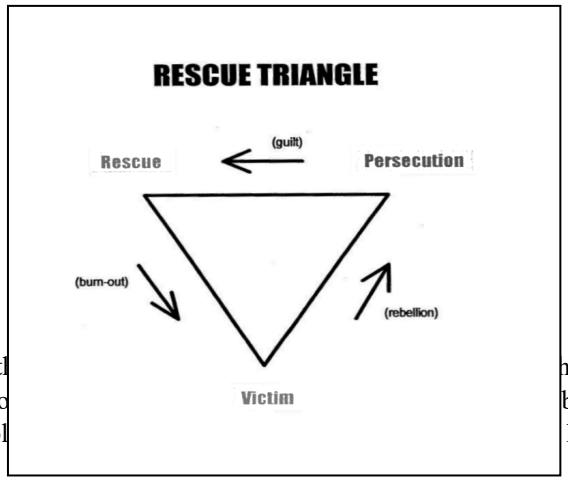
But people have a strong urge to be powerful. To feel like a Victim, to be treated like a Victim (with whatever good intentions), sooner or later becomes a disagreeable experience. Victims get mad and begin to Persecute. "Stop nagging me!" the husband protests angrily. "I'll make up with my friend (ask for a raise/take out the garbage/play with the children/talk about our vacation/etc.) when I'm ready. Back off!" Meanwhile, the Rescuer is victimized by her Rescue. The woman could be having a better time, and getting more rewards, if she took an art class, visited a friend, started a new career, soaked in a bubble bath, rather than hounding her man to talk about his feelings. She loses her power to be truly happy, and she, too, turns to Persecution. "I don't know why; I'm just not turned on to you any more."

Persecutions come in many forms. They are power plays (see Chapter 1), and they run the gamut from passive (silence, sulking, etc.) to active (yelling, throwing things, hitting, and, at the furthest extreme, homicide).

Because the roles are interlinked, and people move from one to another with a kind of inevitability, we have arranged the roles in a triangle. To diagram Rescue in this way is to indicate that it is a trap, a sort of pointed vicious circle. Once you begin to play, either as a Rescuer or a Victim, you move around the triangle and are compelled to play each of the other roles as well.

The concept of Rescue has been extraordinarily helpful over the years, because it speaks to some of the most common dynamics of interpersonal transactions in our culture, and because it is a way of analyzing power transactions which are commonly unstated and difficult to articulate.

Parent-child relations, for instance, can be constructively analyzed in terms of Rescue (see Chapter 17): parents see children as being less capable than they are and over-do their "care," tying shoelaces, cooking dinners, nagging about homework and on and on and on. Meanwhile, children rely on parents to do those things and don't do them themselves, and don't learn how. Meanwhile, parents wear out, nag more and more, feel judgmental and become abusive. Meanwhile, children rebel, going slow, making mistakes, being surly, and, when at last they reach adolescence and have grown bodies, become teenage "devils" in all the old familiar ways.



At t[RESCUE TRIANGLE] however, it also has a persistent tendency to be misused, to beco[RESCUE TRIANGLE] becomes an eleventh commandment). Moreover, its political impl[RESCUE TRIANGLE] have been constructive and clarifying.

THE POLITICS OF RESCUE

Indeed, we are drawn to Rescue as a working concept in large part because it is intrinsically political. It is a description of the uses and misuses of power in relationships among people who have the possibility of equality, or at least have equal rights to the satisfaction of their needs. These equal rights are the precondition for cooperation (see Chapter 4), and eliminating Rescue is an important part of being cooperative. On the other hand, simply to ask the question whether or not Rescue is applicable as a mode of analysis in a given relationship is to raise crucial questions about power (see Chapter 1). A promise not to Rescue, for instance, cannot by itself eliminate inequities based on institutionalized privilege, such as race, class, sex or age. We must ask what the *real* inequalities of power are, how people may be *actual* victims (with a little "v") as opposed to Victims (big "V") in the sense of Rescue.

There are two ways in which people are actual victims. The first is to be physically incapable of an action. Small children, for instance, cannot drive automobiles. They cannot lift heavy burdens or prepare elaborate meals, and so on. A person who is disabled and cannot walk may not be capable of climbing a staircase, or of rushing up a hill. Some women lack the physical strength to lift certain weights.

The second way in which people are victims, however, has nothing to do with innate capabilities, but rather is about socially imposed disadvantages. The woman in our example above, for instance, may be frightened of earning a living. Some portion of her fear may be inaccurate, a learned response to her historic dependency. But some part of it is completely accurate. Women's earnings are 60% of men's[1]. A middle-aged woman who has no credentials and who has not worked for most of her adult life will, in fact, have a very hard time finding paid work. The many skills she has amassed in the years of doing domestic labor are not economically valued.

Institutional racism disadvantages people of color. To have a pessimistic view of the future may be a result of an inaccurate sense of powerlessness. But if you are a teenaged black man in a large American city, if you come from a

[1]1978 - 80: 59%. By 1982: 61%. By 1996, 74%; but mostly because of decrease in men's earnings (figures from Beth Roy).

working-class family, or one where the adults are unemployed, your chances are actually very slim of finding work. The largest cause of death in young black men is homicide. The probability that any given man will reach middle age is very much reduced if he is black. Many studies have demonstrated the greater effort needed by people of color to graduate from college.[2] There is nothing psychological about these facts, although they may certainly have psychological consequences.

To make distinctions between Victims and victims is important. In the one case, help may well be in order, although help, too, must be carefully constructed to avoid indignities and exploitation. In the other case, Rescues beckon, resulting in greater Victimization and, eventually, in Persecution.

HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT

The concept of Rescue comes directly out of game theory, which Eric Berne developed in *Games People Play*. Berne defined a game as "...an ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome."[3] In other words, games are a set of recurring transactions within which people pursue a hidden agenda. Indeed, "concealed motivation" is one of two essential qualities by which Berne distinguishes games. An insurance salesman, for instance, conceals behind his glad-handing the hidden ambition to "make a killing."

The second defining characteristic of games is the payoff. At the end of the sequence is some "reward," an outcome which is the point of the procedure for the players.

Berne and other Transactional Analysts set about to delineate common games. Steven Karpman postulated that the roles basic to all games are Rescuer, Victim and Persecutor, and that these roles could be arranged in a triangle to indicate the way people switch from one to another. He named his diagram the Drama Triangle.

Radical Psychiatrists were enamored of the concept, both because it is descriptively apt, and because it soon became apparent that the triangle is a paradigm of power. It was generally clear how the Victim and Persecutor roles warranted criticism, but we understood that the Rescuer, too, made noteworthy mistakes, because she took and misused an unwarranted share of power. We renamed the concept the Rescue Triangle, to call special attention to the role of the Rescuer. In the process, we sought to underscore the political implications of the game.

Of our early interest in games, only the Rescue Triangle has survived in use over the years. The test of theory is its usefulness; what is most accurate is also most helpful, and theory which falls short tends to be forgotten in practice. Game theory in general is tainted by an attribution of intent and maliciousness to the players, a position which is the opposite of Radical Psychiatry theory. But Rescue, while not a perfect formulation, continues to be helpful and to occupy a prominent place in our practice.

Concepts similar to Rescue have, in recent years, gained popularity in other arenas. Twelve-step work, for instance, derived from the practice of Alcoholics Anonymous, uses the idea of "co-alcoholics" for those who Rescue an alcoholic and thereby contribute to the addiction. In *Women Who Love Too Much*,[4] Robin Norwood describes the ways in which women try to "fix" their men, taking "too much responsibility" for their partners' emotional availability and in the process losing their sense of self in the service of the relationship. Both these formulations differ from Rescue

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[2] See, for example, Robert Blauner's excellent book, *Racial Oppression in America* (Harper & Row, New York, 1972), and especially his "Case Studies in Institutional Racism."

[3] Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (Grove Press, New York, 1964), p. 48.

[4] Robin Norwood, *Women Who Love Too Much: When You Keep Wishing and Hoping He'll Change* (Pocket Books, New York, 1985).

in the absence of an analysis of power, and their reliance instead on the idea of "dysfunctional" families to explain behavior.

EXAMPLES OF RESCUE

In Relationship: Rescue is a common mode of transaction between parents and children in nuclear families. From the very beginning children are believed to be Victims (see Chapter 17 for many examples). At one time, small infants were fed according to schedules, a practice which assumed that doctors knew better than babies how babies needed to eat. Today, fashions in childrearing show more respect for infants' signals about hunger; feeding has reverted to an "on-demand" philosophy. In general, though, we tend to assume that children are less self-knowing and less capable than they actually are.

Take, for example, the question of helping around the house. Toddlers often like to cook. Mothers, however, who are usually the ones in charge of kitchen-duty, must be patient saints to allow small kids free access to cooking. Kids make a mess, cook inedibly, waste time. They can't reach things in kitchens constructed for adults and need constant help. Moms are overworked, worn out with boring clean-up duties, worried about the children's getting proper nutrition, conscious of neighborhood judgments about the condition of the kitchen floor. Mother therefore shoes children out of the kitchen, preferring to do it herself. Later, though, she complains that kids don't know anything about cooking, are totally dependent on her for their food preparation, and are hostile to the idea of learning kitchen-skills.

Mothers Rescue by doing more than their share of cooking, based on the assumption that kids are Victims, unable to do for themselves. Kids Persecute, pout and complain about exclusion from the kitchen, and later, Mom having been thoroughly Victimized by cooking her three millionth meal, she, too, moves to Persecution, accusing her kids of being lazy no-goods because they can't cook and won't learn how. Notice, by the way, that what starts this vicious circle with points is a combination of structural and ideological factors. If there were four adults minding the kids, rather than only one or at best two, someone would probably have energy and interest to help children learn their way around the kitchen. If mothering were not the predominant duty of women, if women had more relief from domestic duties, and more strokes outside the home, more "mothers" of both genders would be available to take joy in children's messy learning processes. On the ideological level, if Mom were not under injunction to monitor kids' nutrition, nor self-conscious about the censure of her community for messy kitchens, she might be able to relax more and let nature take its (messy) course.

Meanwhile, the Rescue is self-fulfilling. With little or no opportunity to learn their way around the kitchen, kids really are Victims, unskilled and convinced, perhaps, of their incompetence. They conclude they are stupid, clumsy, useless, and then Persecute by rebelling against these cruel judgments from without and within. Mom, realizing she has been mean and judgmental after her last outburst, feels guilty. "Good Moms," she believes, are endlessly patient, and forever willing to "care" for their young. She resolves to "do better," cooking harder, longer and more alone than ever — in other words, Rescues with ever more conviction — until the next time she is worn out, Victimized, and moves again to Persecute her children.

Dads Rescue, too. Classically, they are called upon to provide more than a fair share of money to the family, a Rescue which gives them a disproportionate share of power. In the process they are Victimized by being excluded from the day-to-day lives of their children. Personal contact with the kids is tainted by their culturally assigned role of "discipliner," which means to be traffic-cop to the kids. Again Victimized, they miss the sweetness of children's strokes at the same time that they heartily defend the need for discipline. They come to believe that their kids are really worthless, Persecuting with all the energy of hurt and longing. They feel guilty and take on the role of teacher and provider, or Rescuer, once again.

Heterosexual couples Rescue in classic ways. She is in charge of emotional well-being, while he worries about money, car repairs, and the state of the world. Witness the following recent telephone conversation between lovers:

> She: "Today I saw so-and-so, and I filed papers for such-and-such, and do you remember the plans for this-and-that, well we made major progress, and so-and-so is having a really hard time with this-and-that. So how was your day today?"
>
> He: "Okay."
>
> She: "Okay? What happened today with whosis?"
>
> He: "Nothing. It went okay."
>
> She: "What's the matter?"
>
> He: "Nothing. Everything's fine."
>
> She: "Something's wrong. Your voice sounds funny."
>
> He: "No it doesn't. I'm fine."
>
> She: "No you're not. What's the matter? Are you mad at me?"
>
> He: "No."

Fill in several more passes of the same sort, until finally...:

> He: "Well, I guess I am a little irritated at you for calling me at work today when I was busy."
>
> She: "See! I *knew* something was wrong. Why don't you talk to me? You always keep secrets and make me feel crazy."
>
> He: "Well, I hadn't realized it. I'd forgotten."
>
> She: "How can you be so tuned out? You're so out-of-touch with your feelings. I can't stand it any more! (yelling)"
>
> He: "This is why I don't tell you anything. You always flip out. Besides, I didn't want to hurt your feelings."

Familiar? She Rescues by intuiting that something is wrong and then pursuing it doggedly. Her Rescue is fueled by the fear that she is crazy, a belief that makes her feel like a Victim, and the more he denies that she is on to something, the more she feels crazy, is Victimized. Finally, she Persecutes him, accusing him of emotional idiocy, of being "always" out-of-touch. He, meanwhile, is really a Victim because he is not skillful at emotional transactions. Why should he be, when she does all the work? Moreover, he Rescues her, afraid to hurt her feelings, and afraid of her wrath. Then he turns on her, too, Persecuting her with accusations. Eventually, he surprises her by announcing he is no longer in love with her and wants to end their affair, the final Persecution.

Lesbians and gay men Rescue in many of these same ways, and in some that are peculiar to the ways that men and women are differently socialized in a sexist society. Women, for instance, often Rescue by protecting each other from their critical feelings, by being too ready to compromise, by losing track of their own desires and needs (see Chapter 18).

In Groups: It is very common for people working or living together to Rescue by doing more than their share of the work (See Chapter 4). Simon is a firebrand, eating, sleeping and dreaming The Cause. In his heart of hearts, he believes that nobody understands as clearly as he the true dimension of the problem, and nobody can come up with solutions as clear-sighted as his. He smiles at the others in his group, dutifully accepts their efforts, including criticism, makes superficially motions of including them in the work. But in truth, he is a one-man show.

On a daily basis, he oversees every detail. In discussions about plans and programs, he is several beats ahead of everyone else, makes more suggestions and exercises more energy to get his ideas accepted. He is a good-hearted man, sincerely devoted to his group and their shared Cause. But he does far more than his share of the work.

In turn, his group members depend on him. They, too, believe they could not manage without him, that their ideas are not as clear, their skills less effective, their resolve only a fraction of his. Indeed, they *are* less skilled, because he does so much of the work. They do not think as clearly as he, because he thinks for them; they never have the space to process their own ideas, to sort and refine them, to make mistakes in practice and learn more from the next trip to the drawing-board. Here again, we can see that the Rescue is self-fulfilling.

Eventually, however, people begin to feel bad. For too long, they have thought badly of themselves, believing that they are inferior to Simon. Moreover, their feelings are hurt that Simon respects their ideas and efforts so little. One by one, they begin to drop out of the group. Some caucus, compare notes and plot a palace revolution. They confront Simon and accuse him of being a power-hungry sexist elitist.

Simon is devastated. After all, he has always had their shared best interests at heart. And he's worked so hard! He concludes that people are hopeless, loses his fervor for the social good and drops out.

This example is an extreme one. But to a greater or a lesser extent, similar dramas are played out in many a group. Simon Rescues, the group members are Victims who eventually Persecute, Victimizing Simon, who in turn Persecutes them and the world with his cynicism.

Often old-timers Rescue newcomers; they have too little skill training new members to share responsibility and power. Women frequently Rescue men in groups by hanging back, allowing them to talk more often. Members of a collective household may collude in Rescuing one person who repeatedly fails to do his chores, covering up for him until one day they band together and kick him out.

Ways of Rescuing in groups are many-hued and imaginative. Often, the first sign of them is in-fighting, factionalization, and eventually splits and burn-out.

REASONS FOR RESCUE

Most of us are influenced by an ideology of "helping," of what constitutes help and to whom it should be given. So natural do these ideas seem that they are rarely critically examined. It is an ideology based on Judeo-Christian beliefs, and it teaches that we should help others without thinking of ourselves. Ironically, it coexists peacefully with capitalist assumptions of perfect selfishness. Adam Smith and other theorists of capitalism propose the notion that if each individual in a free enterprise system acts exclusively in his own best interest, then the best interest of the community will also be served. Untrammeled competition is supposed to be the mechanism by which the economy grows and a just distribution of resources is accomplished (see Chapter 6).

It is interesting, then, that in an economy propelled by selfishness ("Look out for Number One!"), self-sacrifice is held up as an ideal ("Charity begins at home." "It is more blessed to give than to receive.") To resolve the contradiction

we must look at who is to be helped: those "less fortunate" than ourselves. Implicit is an assumption of superiority on the part of the helper and inferiority on the part of those being helped. "Selflessness," we can see, is another way of supporting hierarchy. Governed by such a model, we have no need to seek equality. "Helping" in this conception is an outgrowth of inequality, and, in turn, helps to perpetuate it. People are not really helped by "being done for" by others, as the examples above demonstrate. In fact, they are harmed because they are robbed of their power to learn and to help themselves, which reinforces their position and feelings of powerlessness.

In recent years, we have seen a complicated debate within the black community on this subject. Some people want to refuse government assistance, insisting that people of color must improve their own lot, "pull ourselves up by our bootstraps." What advocates of this position are responding to is the sense of humiliation that has come along with welfare, and the real ways in which it perpetuates disadvantage, ameliorating the consequences without attacking the causes. Others in the community emphasize that the plight of people of color is caused by racism, and that the larger society owes redress. They are often more acutely aware of the institutional ways in which inequality perpetuates itself, and convinced that "bootstrap" operations are destined to fail without more profound and far-reaching social changes. There are dangers on both sides of the debate of "blaming the Victim," and of compounding powerlessness by relying on changes which only those in power can institute. The concept of Rescue is less than helpful in analyzing problems on this mega-level. But the example does contribute to an understanding of the differences between help and Rescue.

None of which is to say that people can't help each other; of course they can. But an ideology of selflessness mystifies the distinction between help and Rescue. The best kind of help is that which is mutually exchanged, or is asked for and freely given in a manner that allows the person helped to put her best efforts into it, matching the efforts of the helper. "Cooperative helping" is neither selfless nor individualistic; it assumes that both parties have some measure of power to effect whatever outcome is desired, and that each will contribute as much as she or he is able. It is based on the premise that both people have equal rights to happiness and well-being.

Why do so many of us nonetheless Rescue? The reasons are both structural and ideological.

STRUCTURAL REASONS FOR RESCUE

Let's go back to the example of Mother in the kitchen. The first glaring reason for her Rescue, as we have noted, is her isolation. She has too much to do, and too little help, to have extra time and patience to let children learn their way around cooking. Jesse, who was raised in a household of four adults, played cooking games especially with one caretaker. Josh, in a family with two primary caretakers and several nearby pinch-hitters, cooked eggs while being carried on his father's hip.

Scarcity of labor often fuels Rescue. So also do institutional arrangements that run counter to people's intentions. Men and women, for instance, more and more often seek to share childrearing and money-earning equally, stopping the traditional Rescues of the genders around these divisions of labor. But when men earn more money for the same number of hours in the work-market, the pressures to revert to the old distribution of roles is great. Time is scarce, good jobs hard to find; it is very easy for the man to work "just a few more hours" at his higher-paying job, while she covers the baby. After all, they really need both the time and the money, and it doesn't make sense for her to have to be away from home a third again as many hours to make the same income. In fact, a couple is lucky to be confronted by this particular problem; maternity and paternity leaves, part-time jobs, job-sharing and other unconventional work arrangements that might foster fathers' sharing care are only beginning to be available, and are in very great scarcity.

Similarly, between men and women, an enormous array of experiences in childhood promote the divisions of labor that are reflected in common cross-gender Rescues. Girls "gossip," which really means they talk about people, analyze and understand behavior, tune in, and so on — all the work of emotional literacy. Meanwhile, boys play sports, tinker with mechanical toys, and endure teasing that promotes worldly competency and emotional illiteracy. Eventually, his

competitive job locks him into an instrumental rather than an affective mode, while her people-related work (as teacher, nurse, waitress, airline hostess, secretary, etc.) all demand emotional fluency. If she tries to tune out his subtle mood changes, she must switch gears from her work life, and so must he if he tries to tune in. (Similar "in-the-world" dynamics between lesbians are detailed in Chapter 18, and Chapter 19 looks at Rescues involving people with disabilities.)

"PIG"-DRIVEN RESCUE

Rescue, as these examples suggest, is not "original sin." Instead, it is a prison in which people often find themselves locked. But if the bars are real and structural, what turns the key is ideological. Numbers of attitudes and ideas help to shepherd us into the cell, and to keep us there. These ideas are what we call Internalized Oppression, informally known as *Pig* (see Chapter 5).

We have already talked about a generalized philosophy of "selflessness." In day-to-day practice, this philosophy appears as a concept of "goodness." A "good woman" cares about her partner's feelings, intuits them before he knows they exist, spends every moment cooking, cleaning, make domestic harmony, and so on. She may be "liberated," work at any interesting job, but nonetheless believe she should always be interested in hearing the details of his day, and never complain that he rarely asks about hers and doesn't listen when she tells him. A woman who fails in these duties is "selfish, out-of-control, hard, unfeminine." The Pig, in other words, literally polices our actions from inside our heads. Notice that the behaviors that result, the particular Rescues that people do, are socially useful. Men who are busily competing in the marketplace all day do need women to tend the home fires. Women who labor unpaid in the domestic sphere all day, do need men who bring home their wages. Men do so because they believe that "good men" protect and shelter their women and children; that they are responsible for "taking care" of those who are weaker than themselves; that their own needs for human connection, art, and joy are "selfish, wimpy, weak and crazy."

Many other ideas lead to the same behaviors. Jonathan may Rescue, for instance, because he believes Susan is not capable of paying the bills, or because he fears she won't do it to his satisfaction, that she'll make mistakes in arithmetic and lose track of receipts. He does more than his share as a result, and soon is trapped into the necessity of doing many other tasks: reconciling the checkbook, preparing the taxes, negotiating with the bill collector, and so on.

Susan, on the other hand, may Rescue because she wants something for herself. She wants Jonathan to appreciate her, to give her "strokes," and so she cooks his favorite meal even though she is exhausted, folds his socks individually, and carefully arranges a vase full of flowers which he never notices.

Jonathan and Susan are a "traditional" couple in their division of marketplace and domestic labor. But consider Judith and Thomas, both of whom work in an alternative grocery store. He may Rescue by being the creative one, the person who dreams of new displays and innovative ways to organize the groups, while she is in charge of dealing with the public, negotiating with the distributors, and so on. He may feel incapable of doing the "hard-nosed" stuff, while she abdicates to him her spontaneity and artistry. Gender role reversals become increasingly familiar in our "alternative" communities, but Rescue goes on and on.

Guilt frequently leads to Rescue. Indeed, we have noted that it is the leg of the triangle that leads back from Persecution to renewed Rescue. Sometimes guilt provokes new Rescues, when people try to "make it up" to each other for imagined transgressions.

Fear also may prompt Rescue. Nancy pretends to be content in her relationship with Marianne because she is afraid that Marianne will be mad at her if she is critical. Marianne, in turn, stops her beloved dancing, because she is afraid Nancy will be jealous and will leave her.

ALTERNATIVES TO RESCUE

In general, Rescue depends on a disregard for our own feelings. Either we don't know what we truly want, or we dispute our right to get it. Most people learn to pay little attention to their feelings, because they are not taken seriously by others, or are considered to be "wrong" (crazy, inconvenient, selfish, and so on), or because the ways in which they have been Rescued in the past have trained them to tune out (as in the examples of men who have given over emotional caretaking to their women and never learned to do it themselves).

Even when we do know what we want, however, often we believe we have no right to ask for it. We think we can get along without strokes, while our partner is too fragile and needs to be "pumped up." We think we haven't worked hard enough, been smart enough, acted reasonably enough, to have earned the right to be taken care of. We think others are better people and deserve to come first.

In general, then, Rescue means giving something up, "self-sacrifice." The idea of stopping Rescue is not a very helpful one; it is difficult to know how not to do something, particularly when the reasons *to* do it are as compelling as we've indicated they are. What is needed, instead, is an alternative. If Rescue depends on giving up our wants, the opposite would be to talk directly and honestly about what we want. We counsel people to escape the Rescue Triangle by "asking for 100% of what you want 100% of the time." To do so is not the final solution. But it is the first step in a negotiation, a cooperative process of discussion and creative compromise.

It is crucial to note that cooperative compromise can only occur in a cooperative relationship, one in which exist equality and a willingness on everyone's part to be cooperative (see Chapter 4).

People sometimes seek to "stop Rescuing" their bosses, or to "ask for 100% of what they want" from someone who is in a competitive struggle with them, and then are surprised and disappointed that the boss or competitor counters with a killing power play. Hierarchical and cooperative relationships are fundamentally different; we want to emphasize strongly the need to distinguish one from the other.

In a cooperative relationship, however, for each person to communicate what she wants is the first step. Once all the relevant information is available to everybody, together they can figure out how to give each one a close approximation of satisfaction. Sometimes, people want much the same things, and resolution is easy. But other times, people's desires may be contradictory. The project then becomes one of finding a solution acceptable to all. This process is an art — a creative act based on hope (in the possibility that such a solution can be found) and goodwill (the belief that everyone has an equal right to satisfaction, and that the others will work as hard to protect your right as you do to protect theirs).

Sue, for example, is on the verge of Rescuing Paul by agreeing to go to his office party when she doesn't really want to go. Instead, she gathers her courage in hand and tells him the truth.

Paul may be relieved. Perhaps he was Rescuing her by inviting her, when he actually preferred to be there alone, without having to introduce her to people he knows and she doesn't.
But maybe he really does want her to be with him: "I'm disappointed. I've been looking forward to my office crowd's meeting you; I feel proud of you, and also I think you'd like Tom and Evelyn a lot and have been wanting to get you together."

Sue thinks through the reasons for her reluctance: "I'm afraid I'll be bored. You all know each other well, and I've never met most of these people. When we ran into Steve on the street that day, you guys talked shop and I felt excluded."

Paul: "Is there something I could do that would make the party fun for you?"

Sue: "Well, maybe you could brief me on people in advance, and then tell people one or two things about me when you make introductions, so they'll have some clues about starting a conversation."

Paul: "That's fine. What I'd like is for you to tell me if you're not having a good time. I'll be willing to leave pretty quickly if it's not fun for you after you've tried."

Sometimes, these sorts of conditional compromises are not possible. If Teddy wants to see the movie at the Roxy, while Sam is dying to go to the one at the Fox, neither is likely to be consoled by popcorn if he's given up seeing the film he wants. But Sam might be willing to trade his movie for first choice of a restaurant. Or Teddy may give up the Roxie this time if they go to his film next time. The art here is to watch the concessions made over time, so that ultimately they equal out.

What is important is that the solution arrived at is mutually acceptable, that each person has access to all relevant information and is making a free choice.

The process is similar in groups, although there are likely to be even more possibilities for solutions. When there are enough people involved, the likelihood is greater that someone will enjoy doing a particular task that others dislike; people won't need to Rescue. If not, the disagreeable deed can be shared around, so that no one is too oppressed by it. What is often frightening in groups is the moment of truth when someone who has done a major share of the work pulls back. Suzanne has been the person who generally volunteers to book the hall, design the brochure, sort the bulk mailing, write the checks, and so on. When she realizes she is furious, and becomes self-critical of her Rescue, she decides she wants to stop doing most or all of those tasks, that she's been further Rescuing by not asking to do the more appealing jobs: presenting material, brainstorming about ideas, and so on.

Anti-Rescue is one possible move for Suzanne here. One day shortly before the conference she appears at a meeting and announces that she has had a revelation: she's been Rescuing, and has decided not to finish any of the work. Since she's always done it, however, nobody else in the group knows where the printer is, how much money is owed to the conference center, what the registration system is. They are truly Victims, because they have given over all that responsibility (and, it now appears, power) to Suzanne. The morally-superior position of anti-Rescue ("It's not good for the group for me to continue this Rescue...") is actually veiled Persecution ("...so ____ you!").

But even if Suzanne is more cooperative, announces her desire for a change and trains people to take over and waits until the task at hand is completed, her fellow group-members may be frightened at the withdrawal of her seemingly crucial energy.

This juncture is familiar to many people working in well-meaning, progressive, socially responsible groups. The hard truth is that, if a group's work depends on the disproportionate overwork of a few members, then the group is doing something intrinsically wrong. Political Rescue is a very common affliction. We work too hard because we think the world needs us to do it, will not survive without our correct analysis of the problem and irreplaceable endeavors. The result is burn-out and another important worker lost to a good cause. As hard as if often is to accept, the fact is that, if our political agenda is fundamentally sound, we can usually afford to adjust the amount of work downward, or new people may come forth to do them, or the historic moment is not yet come (or already past) to do the work. Indeed, as we have seen in some of the above examples, Rescue often discourages participation and diminishes the amount of labor available to a group. The tension between political vision and vigor on the one hand, and Rescue on the other, is a constructive one. To discover oneself in the middle of a political Rescue is an opportunity to re-evaluate the essence of the politic.

Thus, an analysis of the Rescue triangle suggests a new model for helping based on equality. Understanding Rescue is an important basis for cooperation, as both a theoretical position and a working tool.