

Relationship Rescue

Exploring the Dynamics Behind Being a Rescuer

Part 2 – The Pathology of Rescue

In Part 1, we discussed the dynamic behind rescuing and some fundamental qualities of a rescuer. Typically, as evidenced by the Self-test Questionnaire, for most of us rescuing has become part and parcel of how we interact with the world. In Part 2, we will take a deeper look at the pathology, and the Core Beliefs, which underlie the decision to rescue.

Core Beliefs & the Pathology of Rescuing

Receiving unconditional love, acceptance, validation and respect are qualities essential to our living healthy, balanced lives. Without these qualities, our sense of self-worth becomes compromised and we resort, usually unsuccessfully, to rescuing in order to fulfill these needs. A look at the pathology behind rescuing identifies three fundamental traits: Pride, Power and Sentiment.

Rescuing through Pride, whether overt or covert, is based in a desire for recognition. It emerges from the belief that “we are the ones who are most responsible for the good that happens in others lives”. Overtly, pride manifests as a sales pitch about how indispensable, superior and omniscient we are and that we always have the right answers. Proud rescuers will jump in and enjoin an individual to ‘do it their way’ and be saved. And in their zeal, are blind as to how invasive, invalidating and ultimately disrespectful their behavior is to the recipient. When we come from pride to rescue, we negate an individual’s choice, and right, to experience life and learn for themselves. And as pride acts from an expectation of being rewarded, should there instead be rejection, it uses hurt and becomes self-righteous and blaming of others, rather than questioning its own motives.

Covert Pride by contrast, while still seeking recognition and praise, will deny this fact and use false humility-love & eventually, martyrdom to get attention. Covert rescuers manipulate individuals by evoking guilt and then emotionally hijacking them to do what they want. As such, it is both insidious and dangerous as it pretends to be selfless whereas, it is totally selfish. It is patronizing in character and by its very nature and when its needs are not met, it gravitates towards negative states such as competition, jealousy and self-trashing. You can identify covert pride when you hear someone say “I do so much but no one appreciates it” or “It’s really nothing!”

The need for Power is another reason we rescue. While growing up we learn that to be secure in the world, we must have power and that such power comes from **outside** ourselves. This is what I call rescue through the abuse of power. For example, we may seek status by being a ‘good’ person who cares about their community & shows it by actively getting involved in charitable causes and projects. We may even gain the recognition we want in the form of ceremonies and awards for our actions, thus gaining in status and power. Yet concurrently, within our personal family lives, we may be

alcoholics who are physically and verbally abusive to our loved ones. This split and contrast between external status and power and internal feelings of powerlessness, is fertile ground for leaving us feeling inauthentic, hypocritical and ultimately more insecure. And this further becomes an endless cycle of seeking external validation in order to feel powerful yet each time, ending up feeling less powerful and even more insecure. Essentially, unless we look 'within', we end up feeling like the biggest victim around.

Rescuing through Sentimentality uses our own experiences of loss, grief, and hurt to altruistically sympathize & identify with another's burden. The belief is that "we can avoid or relieve our own feelings of pain and suffering by taking charge and responsibility over others who must also be suffering as much." A sentimental rescuer will typically see someone on crutches trying to board a bus and automatically rush in to assist them, without asking or being asked. Instead, looking through their own pain and grief filters, they project their fears and indulge in pity, thus negating the individual's right to own their experience of helping themselves.

Sentimentality also presents itself when parents enable a child to become co-dependent and ultimately afraid to stand on their own two feet, by constantly rescuing them. They are often heard saying "I don't want my child to go through the difficulties I went through!" Sentimentality as rescue doesn't allow for the establishment of healthy boundaries and creates confusion instead of clarity. It offers a defense when vulnerability would be more appropriate or, sympathy where empathy would be the healthier choice. Essentially, sentimentality places the rescuer in the same hole with the recipient and consequently renders the help offered ineffectual & useless, if not outright harmful.

In Part 3, we will discuss how we can go beyond rescuing to a healthier place of being wherein we can 'truly' be of service