

28 Troubled and Untroubled Situation Triangles:

1. Every situation contains a defining dyad, with the protagonist voice name. For example, if the protagonist is the controller, the name is CONTROL, but if the protagonist is the one being controlled by the antagonist, then the title becomes CONTROLLED. The situation where the reflex position is what is in focus, we take the active voice for the protagonist.

2. Every situation shows a protagonist affect, together with one of two poles of complementary roles. For example, with the NURTURE plot, there is a TEACHER or PARENT with the complementary student or child. Here the protagonist could be wary (threatened affect) or positive-happy (because he is secure in the relationship). He could be ANGRY, NEGATIVE-DEPRESSED also.

Therefore one goal for the therapist may be to change the affect. How do we do that?

3. The protagonist may be responding to the presence or absence of a third person. The protagonist may work directly on his relationship with the third person. Or pressure the protagonist to alter his style of relating with the third person. This includes altering Ap Avoid balance or Active Passive balance with antagonist.

4. Another possibility is that the protagonist may attempt a role transition within the situation. See 3 above. Or one may move outside for an outlet to the stuck role. For example, the typical extra marital triangle. One takes on a lover. It's still the same game, but now with another player. This is the couples plus one situation.

5. Or the protagonist may extract oneself from the current situation. This would be couples minus one. The protagonist chooses the LIBERATE or ABANDON plot. Note how one has taken control of one's destiny. But where does this put the protagonist? In a new dyad and a new situation. One may go from the frying pan into the fire. Or actually better one's situation.

But at what cost? The protagonist may suffer guilt (Plot 2) for having failed (Plot 3). The next step would be to work toward self acceptance in Discover (Plot 4).

5. We keep three generations in view: OUTGOING, CURRENT, INCOMING. This is especially true of persons in mid life. Triangles cross generations. How aware is the protagonist? If aware, he is able to differentiate and work out the situation where it belongs rather than in the current situation. Indeed, this may be the treatment of choice.

The responsible protagonist, however, will note and respond to the impact of his behavior on the other generation. Of course, an outgoing generation member may not be alive. Then the task becomes laying the ghost to rest and recognizing the individuality of the antagonist.

We may refer to the previous generation as a dyad echo and the incoming generation as a dyad substitute. The protagonist will have greater impact on the substitute than the echo in reality.. Thus the potential for greater damage to the other.

6. In every situation we have A. Voice posture, B. Movement, C. Target in process, which may be IMPEDED, ELIGIBLE, or FULFILLED. The director's intervention is to channel the protagonist toward the eligible. This may involve A. Recognizing the impeded as actually ineligible. B. To what extent can I ADAPT and still remain me? I may decide the price is too high and let go. In the long run I'll feel better about myself. C. Getting the other to adapt to me is in the long run a no win situation, for this may violate who the other is. D. A final possibility is to negotiate out in the open, with a view to altering the nature of the relationship. This may involve give and take, and a more limited and realistic adaptation. The dyad should end up with more than they started with.

7. Every situation has its healthy and troubled versions. The latter is unstable and what the director or therapist normally works with. To use Bowen's language, our triangles may be threesomes or active, the latter

being the problem for the protagonist. I use the word 'triangulation' also in this context. Our sociometry can readily show where the triangles are. Only one of two or them are likely to be the presenting problem.

Of course the antagonist has his triangles too, but unless we are face to face with him, he is beyond the scope of the director. One possibility is to have the protagonist become aware of the other's triangles. He may take a hands off posture, and remain neutral to that complication as 'not my problem.' He will not try to solve the other person's problem for him. Or he may choose to be sympathetic and helpful, giving the antagonist support so that he can resolve his issue, without trying to solve it from the outside for him. A third possibility is to pressure the antagonist, but making his own behavior vis a vis the antagonist contingent upon the antagonist's shaping up. This is an 'or else' demand. It has booby traps in it.