Victim Mentality

I. **Victim Mentality**

A. **What is it?**

1. Condition in which one has **LEARNED** to **BEHAVE HELPLESSLY, EVEN WHEN** the **OPPORTUNITY** is given to **HELP THEMSELVES** by avoiding an unpleasant or harmful circumstance to which they have been subjected.

2. A victim mentality can also be a **motivational problem**.
   a. Individuals who have failed at tasks in the past conclude **erroneously** that they are incapable of improving their performance.
   b. Can contribute to poor health when people neglect diet, exercise, and medical treatment, **falsely believing they have no power to change**.
   c. The more people **perceive** events as uncontrollable and unpredictable, the more stress they experience, and the less hope they feel about making changes in their lives.
   d. Many bad things beyond your control have happened.
   e. **Person comes to believe they have no control over their situation and that whatever they do is futile.**
      * Person will **stay passive in the face of an unpleasant, harmful, or situation**, **EVEN WHEN** they actually DO have the ability to improve the circumstances.

B. **Victim Mentality - Phenomenon Comprised of 3 Conditions:**

1. The person becomes **Inappropriately PASSIVE**, and
2. This change follows **exposure to PROLONGED UNCONTROLLABLE EVENTS**, and
3. There is a **CHANGE in the WAY the person THINKS** about their **ABILITY to CONTROL** similar future events.

C. **Uncontrollable Events Disrupt Subsequent Problem Solving Skills**

1. **When our lives are based on protecting and defending our self-identity, we can never wake up to the totality of AWARENESS and EXPERIENCE.**

D. **Victim Mentality can be thought of as:**

1. **Giving up**
2. Expectations of future **noncontingency**—outcomes no longer depend on actions.
3. **Believing: “It won't matter what I do.”**
4. **Believing: “I have no control over the outcome.”**
5. The belief that your actions are futile.
6. **Believing you are incompetent.**
7. In addition:
   a. You are **Overwhelmed.**
   b. Have **stopped trying to help yourself.**
   c. Your Vitality and Zest are GONE.
   d. You are **Listless** and **Discouraged.**
   e. You **believe that nothing** you do even matters.
E. Victim Mentality Conversations

1. "I can't do it," he said.
   "What prevents you?" I asked. (Long silence)
   "Do you know how to do it?"
   "Oh, yes," he replied, "but I can't."
   "'Can't' or 'won't,'" I asked, pushing a bit. (Another long silence)
   "You don't understand," he said. "Everything you say makes sense. I understand how to do it. But I can't."
   "So what prevents you?"
   "A lot of different things. I mean, I was brought up to be a nice person, you know, someone who treats people decently, who doesn't push, gives people a fair deal and expects to get a fair deal in return. I can't believe what has happened. I feel totally betrayed. I feel like I'm a victim of my own naivety. I feel helpless. Yes, I understand what you've suggested and, intellectually, I understand that I can take those actions, but internally, I'm very confused. I feel I'm being violent if I say, 'No, I'm not going to accept that and here are the consequences.' But the alternatives are terrible. I don't want to give up my job and have to move. Decent people shouldn't be in this position. I feel I've done something terribly wrong, but I haven't, have I?"

2. "You're kidding?! You're not serious?" she asked.
   "Yes, I'm serious. You said that you wanted to be clear and present. Clear and present means that you serve what is true," I replied.
   "But what will my family think? What about my friends? They won't understand," she said.
   "Yes, there are consequences. You HAVE to make a CHOICE. Do you continue to live the life DEFINED FOR YOU by others or do you ACT on what you know to be TRUE?"

3. The common theme in above conversations is an INTERNAL pattern called "Victim Mentality."

F. Victim Mentality results from being Trained & Locked into a SYSTEM

1. The SYSTEM may be a:
   a. Family
   b. Community
   c. Culture
   d. Tradition
   e. Profession
   f. Institution

2. Initially, a SYSTEM develops for a specific purpose. But as a system evolves, it increasingly tends to organize around:
   a. Beliefs
   b. Perspectives
   c. Activities
   d. Taboos
   (1) All of the above serve the CONTINUATION of the system.

3. Awareness of the original purpose fades and the SYSTEM starts to function automatically.
a. It calcifies.
b. The beliefs, perspectives, activities and taboos shift in subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) ways, to ensure continuation.
c. And those beliefs, perspectives, activities and taboos are trained into the people that comprise the system.

4. The **PURPOSE of a FAMILY**

   a. To provide a **NURTURING ENVIRONMENT** that **PROTECTS the children** from the vicissitudes of the world while they are developing the **Physical, Emotional and Intellectual abilities** to function on their own.

   b. Love, Compassion, Joy and Equanimity are vital:
      
      1. **LOVE** so that the child **OPENS to the world**
      2. **COMPASSION** so that the child learns not to fear
      3. **JOY** so that the child feels CONFIDENT in his or her own abilities
      4. **EQUANIMITY** so that the child can be FREE to go when he or she has matured.

   c. All too often one or more of these aspects is **DISTORTED** by the family System
      
      1. Instead of **LOVE**, child experiences a **Demand for Affection**
      2. Instead of **COMPASSION**, a **Fear of Suffering**
      3. Instead of **JOY**, Derision of his or her Abilities

   d. Whenever the child says, "Hold on, there's something wrong here," the power of the family system comes into play:
      
      1. "What? You don't love your mother! Shame on you."
      2. "You can't do that, you might get hurt."
      3. "You think you're hot stuff, huh? Let me show you a thing or two."
      4. "You must be evil to even think that."

5. Similar conditioning mechanisms operate in most systems.

   a. The system uses **SHAME** and the **WITHDRAWAL of ATTENTION** to instill a **FEAR of survival**.

   b. The system presents the view that power resides in the system, **not** the individual.

   c. The combination creates a **Dependence on the System for SURVIVAL**.

   d. Gradually, the system is internalized and the person identifies with it — HE SEES HIMSELF THE WAY THE SYSTEM SEES HIM.

   e. His sense of who he is, is defined by the system. (We see this tendency very clearly in the professions -- "I'm a doctor, so I do x, y and z" or "I'm an attorney, so I do x, y and z."")

6. One of the primary characteristics of victim mentality is that the person feels passive with respect to the system.

G. **Victim Mentality tends to be associated with certain ways of thinking about events**

   1. This way of thinking forms a person’s “**Explanatory Style**”

   2. Three major components of explanatory style are associated with victim thinking:
      
      a. **PERMANENCE** - the belief that negative events and/or their causes are permanent, even when evidence, logic, and past experience indicate that they are probably temporary.
(1) “Amy hates me and will never be my friend again” vs “Amy is angry with me today”  
(2) “I’ll never be good at math”  
b. **PERVASIVENESS** - the tendency to **generalize** so that negative features of one situation are thought to extend to others as well  
   (1) “I’m stupid” vs “I failed a math test”  
   (2) “Nobody likes me” vs “Sue didn’t invite me to her party”  
c. **PERSONALIZATION** - whether one tends to attribute negative events to one’s own flaws or to outside circumstances or other people.

3. Persons suffering from Victim Mentality tend to **BLAME THEMSELVES for EVERYTHING**  
   a. Tendency for **LOW SELF-ESTEEM**  
   b. Tendency for **DEPRESSION**

I. **Can victim mentality be undone?**

1. The answer is "**Yes.**" The cost, however, is high.  
   a. We **can only undo Victim Mentality by severing our INTERNAL CONNECTION** with the system that gave rise to it.  
   b. Our motivation must be **clear and STRONG.**  
      (1) Must **really WANT to hear and respond** to our own questions about life.  
      (2) Must **really WANT to live our own life** and not one prescribed by our family, society, culture, profession or tradition.  
      (3) Metaphorically, we must be willing to go north, the direction that takes us out of society.  
      (4) Must be **willing to endure pain**  
      (5) **Know** from direct experience  
      (6) **Act** on what we see  
      (7) **Receive** what happens.  
      (8) Must **yearn** to experience what **IS** without relying on our past “system’s” ideas and beliefs.

J. **How do we undo Victim Thinking?**

1. It **is** possible to change people’s explanatory styles  
   a. **REPLACE Victim Thinking with “Learned Optimism.”**  
2. **Must identify negative INTERPRETATIONS of events**  
   a. Evaluate their accuracy  
   b. Generate more accurate interpretations  
   c. **De-catastrophizing**  
      (1) Countering the tendency to imagine the worse possible consequences - for an event.  
3. **Dispute one’s negative thoughts.**  
4. **Promote problem-solving and social skills.**  
5. Find and join a support group.  
6. Be “accountable” to someone who may also be working to break free from Victim Mentality. **We cannot heal in isolation.**
It's a lot easier to throw a pity party than it is to pick up after one.

The Martyr Complex

A. Martyr Complex

1. **One of the most destructive behaviors in any relationship** is the existence of someone with a martyr complex.

2. A person who has a ‘martyr complex’ desires the FEELING of being a martyr for its own sake, seeking out suffering or persecution because it feeds a psychological need.

3. The **characteristics** of such persons include:
   a. They have the need to be a victim and complain always and relentlessly.
   b. They take little initiative in trying to fix any complaint.
   c. If any problem is solved, but in a different way than what they proposed, the problem still exists, as far as they are concerned.
   d. If any problem is solved according to their solution, they will find another problem to complain about.
   e. If any problem is solved, it is because they complained about it.
   f. They complain about problems that do not concern them in the least. They do not appreciate any good things being done
   g. They LIE and TWIST FACTS to prove their point.
   h. They selectively forget, ignore or avoid any facts that may conflict with their point.
   i. They resort to name-calling when everything else fails.
   
   1. “They did this, so I am doing this.”
   2. “I tried my best, but nothing worked.”
   3. “He can do what he wants, but I am prepared for anything.”
   4. “It is only a matter of time, and then I will be free and happy.”

4. To generalize, here are the **dysfunctional dynamics** that happen when someone starts developing the martyr complex:
   a. People may not take time to recognize this, but they do in time, and then they treat the person as “**The Boy Who Cried Wolf**”.
      1. The person loses all credibility.
      2. People start ignoring all their concerns, even if some are actually important, because they cannot make out what is truly legitimate.
   b. Since a martyr usually boasts that he was responsible for any change, people avoid doing anything that can be used by the martyr for feeding his ego.
      1. Sometimes the very fact that the idea came from a martyr is cause enough to abandon the idea.
      2. A martyr creates many enemies directly and indirectly.
      3. They picks fights with anyone who disagrees with them

5. Her friends have learned to nod their heads at whatever she says, reinforcing her opinions.

6. Friends realize that **too much close association** with that person can be harmful so they behave like double agents by slanderling the martyr in private and further lowering her image.
7. Communicating any issue starts with, "Don't think I am complaining like John Smith, but…"

a. A martyr can spoil the well for others by flaunting RULES and opposing authority, not for any good reason, but just because of their perceived issues.
b. When this happens, other people start putting up new rules or exhibit behaviors to prevent such incidents in the future.
c. Flexible policies can become inflexible, negatively affecting everyone.
d. The martyr demands ATTENTION, but the opposite can happen with people leaving them alone and ignoring them.
   (1) Take the example of some elderly people who gripe all the time. They may actually be suffering from pain or disease.
   (2) Their relatives and caregivers cannot take their complaining any longer and abandon them.

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Overcoming the Role of MARTYR or VICTIM

Ten differences between being a martyr and a victim
A comparison of victim and martyr characteristics
What are obstacles facing victims and martyrs?

A. Ten DIFFERENCES between being a MARTYR or a VICTIM

1. MARTYRS are people who RECOGNIZE they are being taken advantage of and CHOOSE to remain in the situation.

   VICTIMS are people who are taken advantage of but are UNAWARE of being treated as such. Once victims recognize that they are being treated unfairly, they have the CHOICE of remaining in the situation or not. If they stay, they risk becoming martyrs.

2. MARTYRS are those who RECOGNIZE that their rights are ignored and abused but CHOOSE to remain in the situation and CONTINUE to be treated this way.

   VICTIMS are individuals whose rights are ignored and abused but were UNAWARE that they would be treated in this manner BEFORE they entered the situation.

3. MARTYRS are people who let others know how unfairly they are being treated but CHOOSE to remain in this unfair position.

   VICTIMS are people who don’t let others know they have been treated unfairly. They have the chance to leave or change the situation in which they have been victimized. Victims often suffer silently for long periods of time before they are able to verbalize the unfairness of their life situations.

4. MARTYRS often KNOWINGLY continue to enable or set up situations in which their rights are violated or ignored. This “setting up” is like a prediction or prophecy of failure into which, consciously or unconsciously, the martyrs play, fulfilling the prophecy.
**VICTIMS** often UNKNOWINGLY set themselves up for **continued** abuse and violation of their rights. They are often confused and bewildered as to why this occurs. They lack **insight** into the actions that bring on this abuse.

5. **MARTYRS** often **seek sympathy** for their plight. They seek support, advice, and help from others. Yet they seem **STUCK** in their current course of action and seem to be unable to resolve it.

**VICTIMS** frequently **never seek help**. They are often **frustrated** and **lost** as to what needs to be done to get them out of their current situation. Once victims have been offered help and make a conscious choice to remain stuck in their situation, they become martyrs.

6. **MARTYRS** frequently let the people whom they feel are taking advantage of them know how badly they are being treated. Martyrs often resort to **badgering**, **nagging**, **scolding**, **threatening**, **belittling**, **antagonizing**, and **verbally putting down** those whom they PERCEIVE to be taking advantage of them.

**VICTIMS** RARELY let the **people** who are taking advantage of them **know** how they feel about this treatment.

7. **MARTYRS** often believe it is **their obligation to remain** in their position in life. They would feel guilty if they let go of the current situation. They **FEAR** taking the risk to change the situation. They are **apparently comfortable**, **habituated**, or **submissive** to the situation and believe a change would be worse for them and for the others in their lives.

**VICTIMS** often **want a change** and are **desperate for a solution** to their situation. As soon as a victim gives in to a situation, choosing not to resolve or correct it, they become martyrs. The saying, **“If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem,”** applies to the martyr's state in life.

8. **MARTYRS** have a **STORY LINE** which is **stereotypic** and **habitual**. They **rarely change their tales of woe**. One can meet them several years later and find them still suffering from the fate they were experiencing when you last talked to them.

**VICTIMS** experience their plight **temporarily**, **get help**, and are **more apt to get out** of the situation. If after getting help and changing, victims experience the same problems later, they could be martyrs at that time.

9. **MARTYRS** often **mask their behavior** with an aura of willingness and desire for behavioral change in their lives. Usually they are only **fooling themselves**, since the others in their lives can see by their behavior and attitude that there is no possibility of change.
VICTIMS usually are OPEN and HONEST about their discomfort and willingly seek behavioral change. Their sincerity is easily perceived by others due to the actions and behavioral changes that take place.

10. MARTYRS are “professional” HELP SEEKERS. They make the rounds of paid and volunteer helpers, advice givers, counselors, consultants, anyone willing to listen to their tale of woe. Unfortunately, they usually IGNORE the assistance, advice, or direction they are given. This frequently results in their "helpers" giving up on them in frustration and discouragement.

VICTIMS, on the other hand, SEEK HELP in a "crisis" only after the pressure of their problems becomes too great for them to bear. They are highly motivated for a "change" and are rewarding people to work with as they and their helpers witness the benefits of the help, advice, and direction given.

B. OBSTACLES facing VICTIMS and MARTYRS

1. VICTIMS often:
   a. Lack the knowledge that they are being TAKEN ADVANTAGE of by others
   b. Are so USED TO a certain way of being treated that they DON’T RECOGNIZE it as unhealthy for them.
   c. Lack HEALTHY self-esteem or self-concepts.
   d. Have little belief in themself.
   e. Come from HIGH-STRESS families where their rights were never respected; therefore, they lack the competencies, skills, and abilities to stand up for their rights.
   f. Lack information about assertive behavior and have no experience in using assertive behavior and setting healthy boundaries.
   g. Lack of "others" in their lives who can point out alternative healthy solutions to their problems.
   h. Are timid, scared, and SUSPICIOUS of help being offered to them.
      • Are SKEPTICAL about someone really wanting to help them.

2. VICTIMS often hold to some of the following IRRATIONAL BELIEFS:
   1. You must be nice to everyone, even if they are not nice to you.
   2. Life is supposed to be filled with unhappiness and uncertainty.
   3. The small guy never wins.
   4. This is the way things are supposed to be.
   5. There are winners and losers in all transactions between people.
   6. My role in life is to be a loser.
   7. Most people are basically selfish, mean, self-centered and disrespectful.
   8. You should never complain.
   9. Take it like a "man" (woman)!
   10. Be silent with your feelings.

3. VICTIMS often DO NOT stand up for their RIGHTS because they suffer from the irrational FEAR of:
   a. Disapproval
   b. Rejection
   c. Conflict
d. Taking a risk
e. The unknown
f. Change
g. Confrontation
h. Being overwhelmed emotionally and physically
i. Loss of self-respect
j. Making a mistake.

4. **MARTYRS** often:
a. Are so **caught up** in their problems that they **convinced themselves** no solution is possible.
b. Know they are being abused but are so **used to it** they can't visualize life any differently.
c. Lack **healthy self-esteem** and self-concepts.
d. Lack **belief in themselves** or in others.
e. Had “**martyr**” role models in their families of origin and **do not** see their own behavior as maladaptive.
f. Lack knowledge of assertiveness and may be **either** extremely passive or overly aggressive with their antagonists.
g. Have exhausted all of their outlets of “helpers”
h. Find “helpers” hesitant to offer assistance; their resistance and “**yes-but**” statements are too much for the helpers to overcome.
i. **Manipulate** their helpers. At first they are cooperative, open, verbal, and apparently honest in their assessment of their problems. However, once an objective helper begins to point out the martyr's contribution to the problem, they **feign newer, bigger, and more complex problems** to keep the helper's focus off of them.

5. **MARTYRS** often hold to some of the following **IRRATIONAL BELIEFS**:
   a. *You must be nice to people no matter how they treat you.*
   b. *Everyone needs me and they would be lost without me.*
   c. *I am depended upon.*
   d. *It is my role to keep everything together, no matter what price I have to pay.*
   e. *This is the way things are supposed to be.*
   f. *I can never win in the situation I am in, but I can't leave it.*
   g. *I must find a way to pay back those who hurt me.*
   h. *I never get angry; I just get revenge.*
   i. *My behavior is healthy, OK, but misunderstood by others.*
   j. *The louder I complain, the greater the chances of being heard.*

6. **MARTYRS** often do **NOT TAKE** the **ACTION** required to resolve their problems because they suffer from the irrational **FEAR** of:
   a. **Letting go**
   b. **Taking a risk**
   c. **Feeling guilty**
   d. **Being blamed for** the problem
e. **Being seen as** the real **problem**
f. **Being ignored in** the future
   g. **Being happy, peaceful, or content**
   h. **Change**
   i. **Loss of approval**
   j. Losing the **person(s)** who are taking advantage of or abusing them