Victims, Victimizers, and Rescuers:

The Double Edge to Power and Vulnerability

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Abstract

This paper is a heuristic and phenomenological exploration of the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer, as seen in everyday interactions. It presents a review of literature and research studies on the topic of victimhood and its implications. Using Process Work theory and tools, the three roles are investigated through the study of my personal experience. This investigation aims to understand how these roles appear in everyday interactions. Furthermore, this project is an exploration of the inner processes behind these roles. My analysis shows that all three roles experience vulnerability and all three roles express power. The main finding of this paper is that the roles have a common process, namely that all of them are expressions of a double edge to vulnerability and power. This double edge is explored further through Process Work methodology and theory. The Process Work concept of processmind is used as a tool for understanding the complexity of this double edge.

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This project is an exploration of my experience in taking the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer. Early on I realized that I didn't choose this topic. Rather it chose me. This paper is a small reflection of the journey I embarked on years ago and is still continuing. There have been many people along this time who supported me, held me, encouraged me, and challenged me. I cannot imagine this project without them. It would take more pages than my actual project to name all the people who contributed in this work. Knowing that this is impossible to do, I wish to express my acknowledgements to a number of people that were critical in this journey.

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Preface

My first emotional encounter with power was before I can even remember. Actually it comes from a memory my mother has about me. As the story goes, I was about four years old when this event happened, and my father was away on a trip. My father was a Navy officer, and during most of my childhood, we would see him about once every two months, for a few days each time. That day, which was the day after he left, the rest of the family (my mother, my grandmother, my older brother and myself) gathered to eat in the kitchen as usual. We had a big table with assigned positions. When my father was at home, he would sit at the head of the table. When he was away, his seat would remain vacant. So, that day, as my mother narrates, I went and sat at his seat, and announced to the rest of the family that when my father is away, I will be the head of the family.

I don't think my announcement was greeted with enthusiasm or acceptance. However, when my mother first told me that story, she woke up my own memories and feelings about the power dynamics in my family. Although I do not remember events, I remember feeling huge injustice for the fact that I had no power to make decisions. I remember feeling immensely frustrated, because even when I felt I was right about something, my parents' opinion was the law, irrespective of my feelings or arguments. I also remember understanding intuitively and on a feeling level, the gender power differential between my father and my mother, and finding it utterly wrong, and gloomy for what it predicted for my own future. In short, I felt my parents' power was unsurpassable, huge. I despised their use of power and at the same time I wanted to

desperately claim it, as my mother's story reveals, and my own emotional memories remind me. Power was something that could harm me, unless I was the one having it!

Since then I have often wondered: what is power? Why do we crave it so much? Is there only one kind of power? Why do we tend to abuse power so often when we have it? How is power connected to privilege? What is powerlessness? How is it connected to victimhood? Why is it that we mostly notice where we are powerless or victims, and forget our own power?

Although I cannot claim to have answers for these questions, this paper is an attempt to explore the dynamics associated with experiences of power, vulnerability and victimhood.

Introduction

Early on in the course of my studies for the Process Work Diploma, I stumbled upon a difficulty that was not unfamiliar to me. In short, I found myself attacking a friend, while she was attacking me back. The interesting part of this interaction, which was painful for both of us, was that we both had the experience of being on the defensive, and of being the victim of the other's attack. The most interesting and painful part for me was that I was identified by others present in the conflict as the attacker, and she as the victim of my attack. But I felt that it was me who was clearly the victim!

A journey had begun. In the years that followed, I would find myself again and again in the position of being accused of being too powerful and hurtful (a victimizer), or weak (a victim), or patronizing (a rescuer), in different contexts in every field of my life, whether personal or professional. However my own, persistent, experience was of feeling hurt, scared and the victim of other, more powerful people or forces. Fascinated, I started looking at interactions within groups, with clients, with friends, and discovered that I could frequently notice what appeared to be these roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer. However, their appearance was often subtle and usually went unnoticed, leaving a feeling of frustration and hurt to all participants.

This paper is an attempt to unfold and deepen the understanding of the complexity of the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer, as they appear in everyday interactions. Most of the literature or research around the topic focuses on the roles of victim and victimizer, and the dynamic between them in the context of abuse, crime, trauma, and war (Herman, 1997;

Baumeister, 1999; Zimbardo, 2007). However, what I find intriguing is the subtle presence of all three roles, including the rescuer role, in our everyday lives. I believe that in this subtle presence lies the source of many misunderstandings, hurts, and conflicts. It has been shown that violence is often the result of a gradual escalation from minor hurts and conflicts (Johnson, 1995; Gondolf, 1985). Thus, I find it critical that we deepen our understanding of the process of victimization in its subtle appearance. My hope is that a better understanding of these roles and the dynamics between them in everyday interactions, before the roles escalate, might add to the efforts of stopping the perpetuation of victimization and the cycles of violence it feeds.

I further believe that the understanding of the inner processes of these roles is crucial beyond the scope of explicit violence. I feel that the process of victimization affects the lives of most people in different ways and on different levels. Many of us feel powerless in our relationships and in our work. We may feel put down by our employer or our friends, or struggle to express our views and feelings in relationship. We often feel that somebody else, our employer, our partner, our government, has more power, or that we do not have enough power. This affects all fields of our lives. It can make us feel stripped from our power, and even depress us or make us feel apathetic. Therefore, I believe that by focusing on the analysis of micro-interactions, we can gain insights on challenges that affect greatly our lives.

Brief Description of the Roles

From the beginning of my exploration I was faced with the challenge of naming and defining the three roles. I was using the terms “victim”, “victimizer”, and “rescuer”, but I was also reluctant about their use. These words are heavy with meaning. In my exploration I wanted

to focus on subtle behaviors and experiences that I believe are common and known to all people. I needed to differentiate the way I am using the terms from their common meaning. How could I make the distinction clear, and what could I call the roles? The fact that the behaviors and experiences are subtle is exactly what made definition difficult. In the end I decided to use these terms, though I have given them a specific meaning for the purpose of this paper.

In chapter two, I will go into depth describing and analyzing these roles. However, I would also like to give a brief description here. I define the victim experience as the experience we have when we feel hurt and/or angry, but, for whatever reason, we also feel unable to say it clearly and directly. It might be that the person we are interacting with has more power than us, for example they are our boss; or it might be that we feel we are not allowed to express hurt or anger. I define the victimizer experience as the experience we have when we suddenly become angry, and before realizing it, we make a verbal attack with accusations. The rescuer experience finally, is the experience we have when we want to 'rescue' someone from their problems and fix things fast; when we feel that the other person is drowning in something that is easily solvable, and we might even be a bit annoyed with their difficulty to deal with their problem.

Research Questions and Methodology

My study was centered on the following research questions:

1. How do the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer appear in subtle everyday interactions?
2. What are the inner processes behind these roles, as seen through a Process Work lens?

3. Why do we sometimes seem to get stuck in these roles?

This is a heuristic phenomenological project. It aims to make a conceptual and theoretical contribution to the understanding of these roles from a Process Work perspective. The basis and core of my research has been the investigation of my own experience. I intend to show the inner processes of the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer in our everyday interactions, as I experienced them in moments or periods where I slipped into them. In addition to the exploration of my experience, I researched and reviewed the existing literature of victimization in the social and humanistic sciences, in which focuses mainly on situations of abuse and violence.

My intention is to show that these roles, although painful and potentially dysfunctional, are the result of a natural and almost inevitable first reaction to a threat. I further want to show that they are complex roles, with two common characteristics. First, they all carry an experience of victimhood. By victimhood experience I refer to the experience we have when we are faced with an overwhelming power, feeling threatened and vulnerable. Second, all three roles express power in some form. By power I am referring to an energy that has elements of an overt or covert aggression, which however has the seeds of a deeper, spiritual and psychological power. My goal is to shed light on the human struggle to identify with, and express, both vulnerability and power.

I chose to focus on my own experience mainly because I wanted to do an in-depth analysis of the roles in what I consider to be a sensitive and emotionally charged topic, especially regarding the roles of the victim and victimizer. From early on, I realized that it is often taboo to speak of the power of the victim, or of the vulnerability of the victimizer. Focusing on the power

of the victim can be confused with blaming the victim, or minimizing a painful experience. Similarly, focusing on the vulnerability of the victimizer can be considered as providing an excuse for a hurtful behavior. I felt that by focusing on myself, I had the opportunity to go in depth in a way that I would not have been able to do through research on other people.

Focusing on my experience has an inherent limitation, as my experience cannot include all the diversity of experiences of people in these roles. However, I also believe that my experience is not unique, and that by investigating my inner processes, I can also offer insights around this human struggle. As a consequence, I struggled with the use of “I” and “we” in writing this paper. My desire is to stress both that it is a personal exploration and that our inner experiences are never unique to us.

Focusing on my experience also has the unavoidable limitation of possible biases or blind spots. One bias that I struggled with was the role of the social activist in me. This role draws me to the victim position, making me polarized against structured authority. The other bias, which is closely linked to the former, is that I tend to see where I do not have power and I am often oblivious to where I am powerful. However, these biases are also what make a heuristic research a potentially powerful technique: my biases are exactly my research topic. In this project I tried to be as transparent as possible so as to expose the inner workings of the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer.

My exploration was based on the theory and philosophy of Process Work, also known as process oriented psychology. Process Work is an awareness paradigm that is based on the assumption that all experience is meaningful. Its goal is to unfold and facilitate all aspects of our

experience, including the experiences we marginalize and reject (Goodbread, 1997). One of the core principles in Process Work is that nature is behind all events and experiences. Every painful or difficult event is viewed as valuable. Process Work suggests that a compassionate awareness of even the most troubling experiences and perceptions may reveal the seeds of what we need. Events and experiences are not viewed through a lens of "right" or "wrong", but rather as opportunities to unfold the potential purpose behind them (Mindell, 1990, 1992). This philosophy both implies and is based on a deeper attitude of compassion. I feel that this compassion and acceptance of all our parts, especially including the ones that we desperately want to marginalize, is essential for a deeper understanding of the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer. As the social psychologist Roy Baumeister says: "it is difficult and perhaps impossible to understand any human phenomenon at the same time that one is condemning it" (1999, p. 386).

I believe that Process Work theory and philosophy can contribute greatly in the understanding of the inner processes and dynamics of these roles. Although there has been extensive research on this dynamic, I believe it remains central in human interactions and extremely difficult to be changed. I feel that Process Work theory can offer new insights in the understanding of the inner processes and dynamics of these roles. Most importantly, Process Work philosophy can allow for the different, marginalized experiences to be explored and unfolded, so that they reveal their deepest message.

Chapter Overview

In chapter one, I present a brief review of literature and studies of these roles in cases of violence and trauma (Herman, 1997; Van Dijk, 2009). I discuss the Drama Triangle, which is the

Transactional Analysis model of analyzing the dynamics of these roles as they appear mainly in co-dependent families (Karpman, 1968). Finally, a brief review of Process Work theory (Mindell, 1992; 2010) is included, which constitutes the basis for my research.

In chapter two, I present an extended case study of my own struggle with the emergence of the three roles. I analyze the structure of my experience and provide some more general conclusions from a process oriented perspective about the role experience. Finally, I describe my slow awakening to the experiences of power and vulnerability in me.

In the third and final chapter, I discuss my finding that the process in the background of all three roles is a deep human struggle between power and vulnerability. I present the concept of a "double edge" and show how it can explain the different outward presentation of each role. I also develop my thoughts on how power and vulnerability are inextricably linked to two complementary and at the same time diametrically opposite sides of human nature: namely finitude and the infinite. Furthermore, I show how the Process Work concept of processmind (Mindell, 2010) can be transformative in going beyond the painful experiences of power and vulnerability, and accepting all sides of human nature.

Chapter One: Literature Review

In this chapter, I present a synthesis of the literature and research on the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer in the context of abuse, violence, and trauma. I discuss the concepts of "victim" and "victimizer" as presented in the literature, and their implications. I also present the victimhood experience in both the roles of victim and victimizer. Additionally, I present the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer, as developed by Karpman (1968) in the context of Transactional Analysis. Finally, as my analysis of the roles in the chapters two and three is based on Process Work, I give a brief review of the philosophy of the main concepts of Process Work, as well as of its main concepts.

Literature about the victim experience has focused on the roles of victim and victimizer, with significantly less attention on the role of rescuer. There is a vast literature on the victim-victimizer concept and the relationship or the dynamics between them, with entire disciplines (criminology, victimology) dedicated to the exploration of the topic.

The depth of this literature is easy to understand if we consider that these two words touch on some of the deepest and most prevailing questions in human civilization. Wherever there is a victim, there is often trauma. Trauma represents the ultimate vulnerability of a human being (Herman, 1997). Vulnerability is also frequently connected with a feeling of helplessness when faced with an overwhelming power that threatens our very existence (Herman, 1997). And accordingly, the victim is often associated with innocence (Van Dijk, 2009; Christie, 1986). Furthermore where there is a victim, there is usually a victimizer. The victimizer is typically

associated with the abuse of power, and sometimes even with evil. The victimizer thus becomes a mysterious role. People rarely identify with being perpetrators of evil (Baumeister, 1999).

The concepts of victim, victimizer, evil, power, and vulnerability give rise to a number of questions. To name just a few: Why and how can some people abuse others and carry out despicable deeds? How can people claim they are victims themselves even when they are obviously the victimizers? Is there a way we can protect ourselves from overwhelming powers that act against us? What are these powers? Is there evil? Is evil unpredictable? Are people basically good or evil by nature? Can we have a society without evil deeds? What is the point of life, if an unpredictable, unjust power can take it away so easily?

As we might expect from these questions and associations with the words victim and victimizer, this topic has been the focus of many different disciplines. Philosophy (Arendt, 1998), criminology (Garland, 2001), victimology (Van Dijk, 2009), social psychology (Baumeister, 1999), psychology and psychotherapy (Herman, 1997; Carlson & Jones, 2010), and law (Fattah & Parmentier, 2001) have all explored these questions. I have found that the majority of the literature or research on this topic focuses on the appearance of these roles in extreme situations of trauma, like rape, murder, torture, physical abuse, war etc.

As I mentioned in the introduction, my focus in this paper is not on these extreme situations, but on the experience of victimhood in our subtle everyday interactions. To provide a context for my research, I will present a review of the research and the discourse in social and humanistic sciences around some key questions, namely: the inner processes and common view of the victim and perpetrator and the dynamic between them.

I am doing this, not only to place my project within the broader literature, but also because I believe that to a certain extent there are similar underlying processes between the more extreme victimhood situations and our everyday experience. It has been found that both victims and perpetrators present similar patterns of describing their experience whether it is an extreme case or a minor everyday transgression (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990). Other research also shows that violence often starts from minor incidents and misunderstandings (Johnson, 1995; Gondolf, 1985), and thus I believe that the study of traumatic victimhood can offer insights to victimhood in everyday interactions and vice versa.

Study of victimhood in recent history

Social science, and all sciences in general, tend to follow and co-create world movements. They express and explore the world field. In the end of the 19th century – beginning of 20th, the industrialization, the technological achievements and later the I and II World War, marked a - tentative in the beginning and continuously rising – interest in the social and psychological underpinnings of victims and perpetrators, and the dynamic between them (Herman, 1997). The industrialization and technological achievements were both born from and reinforced a world philosophy that encouraged the human endeavor to understand, predict, and control the environment. The goal has been to create safety and ensure the longevity of the human species. True enough, social science studies have shown that there is a strong positive belief in modern Western society that the world is friendly and fair, and that if you are a good person you deserve and will get good things in life (Baumeister, 1999). I find it fascinating that in the world I live in at least, the Western society, the basic assumption held is that the world is safe and that good things happen to good people. I believe the result of this belief is a marginalization of the

fragility of human nature. Thus, this belief also marginalizes our vulnerability, to an extent at least.

Within that context, where predictability became central in the altar of control and safety, violence, crime and evil became the focus of sociology, psychology, and legal science. If the world is not chaotic, and Gods don't rule our lives with their inexplicable motives, then there must be some logic behind violence. The two World Wars, with their massive deaths and the huge psychological impact on surviving soldiers, gradually alerted the public and social sciences to trauma, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and the victim – victimizer psychology (Herman, 1997). Trauma has been shown to shatter this positive belief about the world. While the physical impact of trauma is often relatively minor and brief, the psychological impact is grave. Part of that impact is that people who undergo a traumatic experience, often lose faith in mankind, question the assumption that the world is safe, and feel helpless and unmotivated (Herman, 1997; Baumeister, 1999). So, I believe that the issue of violence, evil and abuse of power, also challenges this positive belief about the world.

At the same time, the common views about victim and victimizer seem to contradict this belief. Victims are considered to be innocent, well-intentioned, passive and helpless, while perpetrators are thought of as evil, intentionally inflicting harm on others often with selfish, sadistic motives, are often unpredictable, and act without being provoked (Dell & Kilty, 2013; Zimbardo, 2007; Baumeister, 1999; Christie, 1986). This seems to be the stereotypical understanding and perception of trauma and of the roles involved in cases of violence. In short,

this describes a notion of victim and victimizer in absolute terms of black and white, good and evil, where the two roles represent two diametrically opposite poles of a spectrum.

So, in the context of this worldview, that the world can be understood and predicted, social sciences tried to approach and deepen our understanding of violence, power and the abuse of it. In the following section I will present a review on the views of the roles of victim and perpetrator, as well as research on the actual experience of the people who find themselves in these roles.

Etymology, history, and meaning of the word victim

Very often the etymology and history of a word can give us a deeper understanding of the concept it represents. The word victim is intriguing from that lens. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, there are two modern senses of the word victim. The first, and original, sense is: "A living creature killed and offered as a sacrifice to some deity or supernatural power". The second meaning is: "A person who is put to death or subjected to torture by another; one who suffers severely in body or property through cruel or oppressive treatment". Etymologically, the word victim is derived from the Latin word "victima", which had only the first of these modern meanings.

In my search for the history of this word, I came across an interesting article by Van Dijk (2009), a prominent victimologist. In this article he stresses the significance of using the same word for sacrificial animals and for people affected by crimes. He further claims that this phenomenon is not unique to the English language, but is actually the same in all Western languages, including Arabic and Hebrew.

What is even more interesting is that the word "victima" (and all its equivalents in other Western languages) referred only to sacrificial animals until the middle of the 16th century. It was then, in a theological text, that for the first time the word was used to refer to a human being, rather than an animal: the figure of Jesus Christ, whom we could see as a transitional figure between God and human being. . The term 'victim' was meant to describe the sacrificial nature of His life and death. It took another century for the word to be used in colloquial language in a broader sense, for people suffering mainly from disasters (Van Dijk, 2009).

What does it mean for our modern understanding of victimhood that the word derives from a word that meant a sacrificial animal, and then referred to the son of God sacrificed to absolve human sins, finally referring to people suffering disasters and then crimes? Van Dijk (2009) claims that the Western history of the word is one reason why we believe today that victims are deserving of society's compassion. He further claims that society expects victims to be forgiving of the perpetrators, like Jesus Christ. Finally, he argues that we condemn victims to eternal misery and helplessness by using the same word that was used for sacrificial animals, and even worse, that this label suggests that the perpetrator has higher or spiritual motives (Van Dijk, 2009).

The etymological link between an animal, sacrificed to a higher power, and a human individual, subjected to a violating force, is important for understanding the experience of victimhood in the three roles (victim, victimizer and rescuer). There is an element of sacrificial subjection to forces beyond our control that is constellated, for example, in the concept of a martyr.

Last but not least, the word victim is used in a colloquial sense to accuse someone of using weakness to manipulate a situation, or of blaming others for their problems. For example, someone might say to their friend: “don’t be such a victim”. I find this usage important for number of reasons. First, it shows that victimhood gives an opportunity to ask for something, whether it is kindness, compassion, tolerance, or favors. Second, it points to the fact that it is believed there are “real” and “fake” victims, people who fit the “ideal victim” (term used by Christie, 1986) notion, and people who don’t. Thus, there is a subjective experience of victimhood, which can be disputed, or questioned.

Stereotypes of victim and victimizer

Stereotypical victim

Van Dijk (2009) helps us define what we might call the stereotypical victim. He claims that the word’s etymology suggests a purity and utter innocence for people who claim the victim role. Even more, it suggests that victims are helpless and passive. Christie (1986) and Rock (2004) have described the dominant representation of the ‘ideal’ victim as a person (usually woman or child) who is weak, helpless, innocent, and typically attacked while carrying out a respectable project. Furthermore, the offender is in no way related to the victim. Conversely, Christie argued that the notion of the ideal victim suggests the existence of the non-ideal victim. The non-ideal victim is strong, knows the offender and should or could have protected themselves from the attack (Christie, 1986).

Stereotypical victimizer

Christie (1986) also described the concept of the ideal offender. The ideal offender is portrayed as the opposite of the ideal victim. As the ideal victim is the incarnation of innocence and good, the ideal offender is the embodiment of evil. They are usually male and they are strong. Furthermore the ideal offender is a stranger or a foreigner, who, unpredictably and without being provoked, inflicts harm (Christie, 1986). The notion of the perpetrator in its absolute form is equated with evil. It describes villains who attack with no clear reason. They are revengeful, selfish, malicious and often derive pleasure from hurting others. They are also the inherent enemies of beauty, peace and order (Baumeister, 1999).

Implications of the victim – victimizer stereotype

There are a number of implications deriving from the notion of the ideal victim and the ideal victimizer.

First, the concept of the ideal victim creates an idea about who has the right to claim to be a victim (Rock, 2004). It legitimizes the experiences of some and dismisses those of others. A person needs to fit these characteristics in order to be considered a worthy victim. For example, it has been found that a woman who has been the victim of a sexual assault has more chances of winning a trial against the offender if she is white, and apparently vulnerable and weak; conversely, sex workers in similar situations are considered to be deserving of their fate rather than innocent victims (Razack, 2000). Thus, as Balfour (2008) argued, these clearly distinct identities of victim and victimizer as good and evil, powerful and weak, can be used as a form of

social control. More specifically, they can and have been used to categorize and describe race, gender and class divisions (Dell & Kitty, 2013).

Second, as the victims can be portrayed as innocent and kind, they naturally attract society's sympathy. People tend to feel compassionate towards the victims of a natural disaster or human crime. At the same time, the fact that victimizers are seen as a figure of evil makes society more indifferent to punitive and vengeful actions taken in the name of victims (Fattah, 1992). In other words, a victimizer cannot properly be called the 'victim' of revenge because they are not innocent.

A third implication of the ideal victim concept is seen when we try to reconcile the fact that although victims are considered passive, weak and helpless, they often experience inner strength. Van Dijk (2009) analyzed the narratives of victims and found that, in contrast to the popular belief about victims' helplessness, victims often feel they are autonomous individuals with considerable strengths. The surprising finding was that not only were the people in the victim role surprised by their strength, but also their social environment, the media and/or certain officials responded negatively to their expression of that strength. Therefore, it seems that if people in the role of the victim don't conform to the stereotype of helpless and weak, they are negatively judged and disapproved by the environment. As Van Dijk points out, this reaction by the society constitutes a secondary victimization. Indeed, this connection of the concept of victim with helplessness and passivity led feminist theorists to propose the replacement of the word 'victim' with the word 'survivor' (Van Dijk, 2009, Walklate, 1994).

I believe there is a further concerning implication of the notion of the ideal victimizer. It stops us from easily identifying with the victimizer role and therefore reduces our ability to take responsibility for victimizer behaviors. We all have times or moments at least in our lives where we used our power unconsciously and harmed somebody, even to a small degree. Although the vast majority of people do not commit crimes, most of us have found themselves accused of harming another. I think that one reason why even people who have committed crimes have difficulty identifying with being perpetrators is the fact that the victimizer as a concept is related to evil, to unjustified and unprovoked violations.

Subjective experience of the victimizer role

On a first level, it looks like we have assigned the roles clearly in these stereotypes or ideal types. We have named the sides of victim and victimizer, good and evil. Two clear polarities. However, a closer look at the way people see themselves when they actually have been in these roles, shows that the roles are certainly more complicated than that. As Fattah (1992, p.7) says: “the roles of victim and victimizer are neither static, assigned nor immutable. They are dynamic, revolving and interchangeable.” In particular, people who have perpetrated violence usually do not see themselves as evil, and certainly do not identify with the concept of the ideal offender, but actually see theselves as victims (Jacobsson, Wahlin & Andersson, 2012). As Baumeister (1999, p.38) argues: “the perpetrators of evil are often ordinary, well-meaning human beings with their own motives, reasons and rationalizations for what they are doing.” There is a great deal of literature and research that shows that victimizers frequently feel that they are victims even when they have obviously caused harm (Buchbinder & Eisikovits, 2004; Bandura, 1999; Noor, Shnabel, Halabi & Nadler, 2012). They most commonly feel that external

circumstances and forces bigger than themselves pushed them to act the way they did. They typically transfer responsibility for the crime to factors outside themselves. Surprisingly, research has shown that even some of the Nazis of World War II Germany felt their actions were justified as retaliation for injustices they had suffered in the past. They were acting in the name of the creation of a utopia, and setting right the wrongs they had experienced (Baumeister, 1999).

Social psychology research

The question of why and how people come to commit violent or even horrific acts has greatly occupied the social and humanistic sciences. World War II and the Nazi atrocities shocked the world. It marked a turning point in academic attention on people's ability to commit atrocities. The Second World War inspired social psychologists to conduct research in an effort to understand how ordinary people act inhumanely. I want to present very briefly here two of the most famous and controversial social psychology experiments that were the result of this quest, namely the Milgram experiment in the early 60s and the Zimbardo experiment in the early 70s.

The Milgram experiment (1974) was devised to study people's willingness to obey an authority figure even when the instructions went against their personal conscience. This experiment had an ingenious design. There were three roles in the experiment: the first was the authority figure (experimenter), the second was the learner (confederate) and the third was the teacher (experimental subject). The true subjects of the experiment did not know that the learner role was a confederate, but thought that the students were subjects as well. They were led to believe that they were assigned the role of the teacher randomly. The task of the subjects was to teach the learners and then ask them questions on what they had been taught. Every time the

student made a mistake, the 'teacher' was asked to inflict an electric shock on the student. The more mistakes the student made, the larger the shock the teacher was supposed to inflict. The voltage reached up to 450 volts and was marked "xxx" while the lowest setting was marked "danger: severe shock". The infamous finding was that an unexpectedly high percentage of people continued to inflict shocks up to the highest voltage. The results of this experiment surprised the scientific community and discussion about it continues today. In interviews later, some subjects who inflicted the highest level of punishment claimed that they were not responsible, since they were asked to do so by the experimenter (Milgram, 1974).

The Zimbardo experiment, otherwise known as the Stanford prison experiment, was designed to test whether the violence of guards towards prisoners, reported in American prisons, was the result of personality traits of the guards or an outcome of situational forces and group dynamics (Zimbardo, 2007). The subjects in this experiment were randomly assigned to the role of the guard or the prisoner in a simulated prison environment, constructed by Zimbardo and his team. In the course of the experiment, some of the guards slowly started abusing the prisoners. Zimbardo himself, who was in the position of the head of the prison, initially failed to recognize signs that the experiment had crossed ethical boundaries, and should discontinue. His findings showed that powerful authority figures, group pressure and role expectations can make otherwise decent people behave in inhumane ways. In his courageous writing about the experiment, in the book "The Lucifer Effect", Zimbardo (2007) argues that most of us, given certain conditions, could act inhumanely. Once again, similarly to the Milgram experiment (1974), the subjects of the prison experiment did not consider themselves responsible for their actions.

Haritos–Fatouros' (2003) study of Greek torturers during the dictatorship period in Greece (1967-1974) confirmed the Milgram and Zimbardo findings outside a laboratory setting. Haritos–Fatouros interviewed ex-torturers, and found that they were ordinary people, who through extensive training ended up being able to commit horrific acts. In other words she found that torturers are made and not born. From this research we see that even torturers may not fit the ideal offender concept.

These studies show firstly the role of social and systemic factors in the production of what we might call 'evil' acts. C.P. Snow captures it wonderfully: "More hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience than in the name of rebellion" (cited in Bandura, p. 207, 1999). But secondly, and importantly for my project, they confirm that an experience of victimhood underlies the apparently opposite role, the role of the victimizer. The research suggests that perpetrators typically avoid responsibility for their use of power and tend to feel that they were victims themselves. As I will show below similar findings have also been observed in the research on domestic violence.

Domestic violence

Domestic violence, also known as intimate partner violence, is another field where the roles of victim and victimizer have been widely researched. It reveals another experience of the victimizer, which is perhaps a little closer to everyday interactions. Although the perspective of the batterer has not being researched as much as that of the battered woman, the existing research suggests that men who become violent in the context of their intimate relationships tend to perceive themselves as victims (Buchbinder & Eisikovits, 2004). It is very common that they feel

disempowered in their relationship with their partner and/or in other relationships, and they feel they are lacking control of their lives and are being manipulated by their partners (Buchbiner & Eisikovits, 2004; Moore, Eisler & Franchina, 2000; Tonizzo, Howells, Day, Reidpath & Froyland, 2000; Straus, 1980).

What I wish to show from these studies is that people have a tendency to deflect responsibility for their violent or even horrific acts. Also, that we tend not to identify with the power we have in a given situation, even when we are the ones with the power to harm. Rather, we tend to argue that we did not have an option, or that something bigger and outside of us made us act in the way we did. Finally, that we usually wish to be moral and good, and paradoxically it is often in the name of morality and of higher ideal motives, that we commit atrocities (Bandura, 1999). Thus, we both tend to identify with good and disregard the abuse of power we might enact in order to impose that "good."

Benefits of victimhood

My research on the roles of victim and victimizer showed me something that I also found through my own experience. People tend to claim they are victims, whether they are in the victim role or in the victimizer role. Several explanations have been proposed for why people seem to prefer to identify with being victims.

One reason relates to the question of responsibility. When people are subjected to victimization, they tend to ask themselves why this happened to them, and whose fault it is (Herman, 1997). Accepting it is our responsibility, wholly or partly, could suggest that we deserve whatever happened to us. A common finding in different studies has been that being a

victim frees us from blame and responsibility (Noor et al., 2012; Bandura, 1999; Baumeister, 1999; Milgram, 1974).

There are several consequences of rejecting responsibility described in the literature. Firstly, if we are not responsible, then we preserve a good image for ourselves. We might have suffered a blow, but at least our self-esteem is protected from feeling we were guilty of something, or not careful enough, or stupid etc. (Baumeister, 1999). Secondly, we can then claim the sympathy, compassion and support of others (Dell & Kilty, 2013; Rock, 2004, Noor et al, 2012, Baumeister, 1999). A third advantage, closely linked to the previous one, is the advantage of gaining access to resources, like financial and material aid, and/or legal support (Dell & Kilty, 2013; Landau & Freeman – Longo, 1990; Baumeister, 1999). Fourthly, if the responsibility does not lie with us, then our own negative actions or misdeeds are excused. This fourth point is extremely important, as it shows our need to excuse the use of our power, without identifying with the harm we might cause. For example, in medieval times in Europe, people and their families had the right to claim revenge for a murder or a serious crime (Van Dijk, 2009). An example of this today is the right to kill in self-defense (Baumeister, 1999). Also, it has been shown that groups, or nations, can excuse the use of retaliatory force against other groups or nations, if they consider themselves rightfully justified to do so because the other side provoked it in some way (Noor et al., 2012).

Finally, Baumeister (1999) raises a very important point as to why being a victim is advantageous. The victim holds a high moral ground. There is a strong feeling of righteousness that usually accompanies the victim role. When we are in this role, we feel we have suffered

some injustice. Thus, justice is on our side. We are the wronged ones, the hurt ones, and the ones deserving compensation. This phenomenon is what Process Work refers to as the 'spiritual rank' of the victim and it will be seen in my case study analysis in chapter two.

So, it seems that claiming victimhood and denying responsibility has substantial advantages. However, although claiming victimhood is common, this does not mean that people necessarily want to be called victims. It has been found that victims of crime increasingly reject the term victim, as being a victim is often associated with weakness, helplessness and lack of agency (Rock, 2004). This tendency is also apparent in feminist reactions to the term victim and the proposal for it to be replaced with the term "survivor" (Van Dijk, 2009, Walklate, 1994). Indeed, this proposal was greeted with success, and formal texts in the United States use the term survivors to describe victims of domestic violence or rape (Van Dijk, 2009). As Rock (2004) argues, society in our times values individual strength. Therefore, as the stereotype of victim portrays a person who was passive and helpless, people tend to refuse to be associated with this role.

I find this contradiction fascinating, and in exploring my own experience, I found a similar ambivalence. Less agency seems to be appealing in the sense that it transfers the responsibility to the other side, and strengthens the righteousness on our side. In this sense, victimhood is powerful in a spiritual and psychological level. At the same time, being called a victim can also feel detestable, as it implies weakness and vulnerability.

Responsibility and blaming the victim

As I discussed above, the concept of victimhood seems to be closely linked to the concept of responsibility. As victimhood offers social and practical benefits, we often tend to deny responsibility in order to claim victimhood, even when we are the ones who caused harm. Often in situations where there is a victim and a victimizer, the question of who is responsible arises. Therefore, attributing responsibility seems to be the measure of fault. Similarly,attributing agency assigns blame. If we have low agency in a situation, then we cannot be blamed, and conversely, if we have high agency, then we can be accused whether we are in the victim or the victimizer role.

A fine example of this comes from the field of victimology. Victimology appeared as a sub-field of sociology, and as an alternative to criminology in the 40s, having as its main focus the scientific study of victims (Landau & Freeman – Longo, 1990; Walklate, 1994; O'Connell, 2008). From early on, different victimologists suggested the need to investigate the role victims play in their own victimization. It was further argued that the victim and the victimizer often comprise a duet, and that victims sometimes contribute to the crime by their negligence or precipitation (O' Connell, 2008). Victim precipitation was later considered to be a form of victim blaming and was criticized heavily. However, as Fattah (1992) points out, precipitation does not justify the violence that the victim is subjected to.

I believe that both sides have a serious point to make. There is a thin line that separates responsibility and agency from causation and blaming or considering that somebody deserves the violence they suffered. The responsibility for violence has been attributed to the victim often in

the past (Walker, 1979; Ryan, 1971) and even today. This can act as a secondary victimization and also, it can deprive the victim from access to resources and support. Also, as Ryan (1971) argued, blaming the victim often acts as a reassurance that the world we live in is just. However, at the same time, being reluctant or refusing to investigate the victim's part in the incident, may also further disempower people who have been in the victim role. Still, as victimization has affected people who have been in a less powerful position in the society, it is important to discriminate between supporting the victim to have a sense of agency and blaming them for a violent crime.

Another example of this comes from the study of domestic violence. Two of the theoretical fields that have explored domestic violence are family systems theory and feminism. Family systems theorists have proposed that partner violence is the result of circular causality, a concept of family systems which refers to the fact that conflict and communication is the result of multiple causes, which influence each other (Murray, 2006; Carlson & Jones, 2010; Straus, 1980). They further propose that violence arises from conflicts and is perpetuated by both men and women (Murray, 2006; Straus, 1980). On the other hand, feminist scholars propose that violence between partners is a result of a patriarchal system, and that is primarily caused by men's desire to control and dominate (Walker, 1979). Murray (2006) offers a review of feminist criticism of the family systems approach to partner violence, with the main points being: family systems approach fails to address the different power dynamics, and therefore implies equal responsibility to both parties; by focusing on interactional process, the abused ends up being blamed for the abuser behavior; and that it provides excuses for the abuser. The feminist approach has been widely influential in legal and social policy in the United States, and has

further been the basis for batterer intervention programs which frame violence as the result of men's desire to dominate (Carlson & Jones, 2010). However, as cited in Carlson & Jones (2010), a review of effectiveness studies of such intervention programs has shown that they have only minimal effects on reducing violence.

Although this discourse between feminists and family systems scholars is ongoing, and I have only presented a small fraction of it here, what I mainly want to stress is that responsibility and agency can be easily confused with blaming and worthiness. For example, if a person who is a victim of domestic violence does not consider his/her role in relationships, s/he is in danger of choosing one violent partner after another (Murray, 2006). However, As Murray writes (2006, p. 236): "Although a person is never responsible for being abused, recognition that the abused person had opportunities to make different choices can lead to a realization that violent situations and experiences may be preventable in the future." This agency of the victim, though, can sometimes be used as an accusation for provoking or deserving the abuse. I further believe that at a societal level we have acquired traumatic experiences from this confusion. This can make it difficult to examine perpetrators' views, and even more to look at ourselves when we act in a violent way. Furthermore, the fear of ending up blaming the victim, which is very real, can also be the cause for not looking into the agency of the victim, in certain situations at least. This can act to further disempower victims, by removing agency, and also removes the hope and ability to potentially change our fate, when we find ourselves in the victim role.

The subjectivity of the experience of victimhood, and the sensitivity around questioning it, has been a big part of my exploration. While researching my project, and particularly in

analyzing my case study for chapter two, I caught myself feeling extremely cautious in framing what is behind the victim experience, for fear of sounding like I am doubting the experience of suffering, or that I blame the victim for its suffering. At the same time, I realized that I also felt cautious to discuss how the experience of victimhood exists in all three roles (victim, victimizer and rescuer). My fear was that by focusing on the suffering of the other roles, it would seem like I am justifying aggressive or hurtful actions and deeds. This review of the literature demonstrates the social complexities and sensitivity required to explore the topic.

The Drama Triangle

A different perspective on the roles of victim and victimizer and rescuer was proposed by Karpman (1968), a transactional analyst and an early student of Eric Berne, founder of transactional analysis. Karpman developed a psychological and social model of human interaction, called the “drama triangle” (Widdowson, 2010). He was the first to distinguish clearly between victim, victimizer and rescuer as roles and as a real life concepts. His theory was based on his observations in his work with domestic violence, and thus, his model was originally conceived as an analytic tool for dysfunctional families (Whitfield, Whitfield, Park & Prevatt, 2006; Mrotek, 2001).

The name “drama triangle” originated from Karpman’s famous article on the drama analysis of fairy tales (1968). In this article, he suggested that fairy tales have a conscious and an unconscious function. The conscious function is to help children internalize societal norms. However, at the same time, fairy tales unconsciously teach a number of roles. He further claimed that children may identify with these roles and thus, fairy tales may contribute to the

development and implicit support of what he called errant life-scripts (Karpman, 1968). Life-script is a term of transactional analysis, similar to personal myth. A life-script refers to the development of a personal narrative for our life, based on the interactions and the dynamics that we experience in our childhood (Berne, 1964).

Karpman presented and analyzed the three roles, which he called, Victim, Persecutor and Rescuer. The words were capitalized to show the distinction from real life victims, persecutors and rescuers (Karpman, 2012). More specifically, the roles have the following characteristics: The Victim is helpless and powerless. An individual in the victim role will avoid taking responsibility, will likely attribute both their successes and failures to somebody else, and will end up being with somebody who takes care of them (Rescuer) or criticizes them (Victimizer). The Persecutor is authoritarian, righteous, and criticizing. People in the victimizer role will often be judgmental and show either a lack of understanding for the motives behind the actions of other people, or attribute negative intent. The Rescuer looks helpful at a first glance, but their behavior resembles parental behavior, is actually dependency-inducing, and professes superior knowledge. An individual in the Rescuer role usually assumes that the other person is unable to handle situations, and tries to "save" them by either doing it themselves or by giving detailed instructions (Schwarz, Davidson, Carlson & McKinney, 2005; Mrotek, 2001; James & Jongeward, 1996).

The three roles were also shown in a diagram, depicting an equilateral upside-down triangle, with the roles of the Persecutor and the Rescuer on top, and the Victim role at the bottom corner, indicating the perceived power positions. Between all roles there are arrows

connecting each role to the other two. The multi-direction of the arrows indicates the interchangeability of the roles, namely that all people in the triangle both play all roles and see others in all roles, at different times (Karpman, 1968).

As the drama triangle was developed within the school of transactional analysis, it was focused on the dynamics of psychological games (McMahon, 2005). Games are one of the main transactional analysis concepts. They refer to a recurring and ongoing series of complementary transactions, or units of social intercourse, which aim to achieve a desirable and predictable outcome. Thus, these transactions have a concealed motivation to produce an emotional situation where the resulting feelings are justified (Harris, 1969). For example, when the Victim role enters the game, the motivation under their actions is to prove that they are justified in feeling they are victims. Berne (1964) presented a number of different games in order to describe different interactional patterns. As Karpman (2010, 1968) claims, the drama triangle reduced all games to the three changing roles of Persecutor, Rescuer, and Victim. Furthermore, the drama triangle has a greater number of events and switches of roles (Karpman, 1968).

Although the drama triangle was originally based in observations of abuse, and more specifically on interactions of couples with domestic violence and the police, it became popular and has been used widely in coaching and organizational work. Also, many variations have been proposed in different contexts and applications, including nursing, teaching, co-dependent families and so on (Karpman, 2010).

The drama triangle is a model that aims to reveal patterns that characterize relationships that lack authenticity, and thus result in dependency, failure and rebellion. It has been described

as a model that indicates our unilaterally controlling behavior (McMahon, 2005). I find it extremely insightful, resourceful and groundbreaking, in that it established a clear distinction between the roles in an interactional pattern and the roles in real life situations.

However, I believe that these roles and the patterns of interactions they follow, compose a much more frequent and everyday phenomenon. They are not just found in dysfunctional or co-dependent families, although they might be more obvious in these contexts. In my observations of myself and others, I notice that many people, if not all, occupy these roles in everyday interactions, even momentarily. Furthermore, as I will discuss in later chapters, I find that all three roles come from an experience of the victimhood process, and express double signals of power and vulnerability, or powerlessness. In that sense, I think that Karpman's model is limited because it is static model which presents, for example, the roles of Rescuer and Persecutor as the ones with the perceived power, distinguishing them from the Victim, which is in a powerless position. Finally, Karpman proposed that the concealed motivation of all three roles is to achieve a repetition of a scenario that will justify their position, and that the means to achieve this is manipulation. This process is suggested to be largely unconscious. I believe that though manipulation is a result, or even an unconscious motive at times, focusing on it does not do justice to the experience we have when we are in the roles. In contrast, from a process oriented perspective, our experience of vulnerability, or suffering is very real, and so is our power. The reason I stress this is because manipulation is a powerful concept with negative associations. When we feel manipulated, something that frequently happens when interacting with the victim role, we tend to marginalize the vulnerability that the person in that role is actually experiencing. It is important to recognize the power that is used against us, but to also make space for the

experience of vulnerability in the victim role. Moreover, it is difficult to open ourselves up to exploring these roles inside us with compassion, if we focus on the manipulation they encompass. When we are in these roles, all our experiences, either of power or vulnerability, are very real. The focus for me around the roles, is on the difficulty to identify with either power or vulnerability, and to experience the latter to the fullest. I feel that the game that transactional analysis claims to be behind these interactional patterns, can explain only partly the reason why we tend to slip into these roles so often. As I will show later, I feel that a process oriented approach to victimhood offers an understanding that the roles are indicative of a deeper human struggle between power and vulnerability.

Process Work

My exploration of the three roles, victim, victimizer and rescuer, is based on Process Work philosophy and structural analysis. It is important for the further presentation of my journey and understanding, to give a brief presentation of the Process Work aspects that comprised the background for my investigation.

Process Work, or Process oriented Psychology, is an awareness paradigm, which was developed by Arnold Mindell, a physicist and Jungian analyst, in the 1970s. Process Work is a teleological modality; its philosophy is based on the assumption that all experience is meaningful. Its goal is to unfold and facilitate all aspects of our experience, including the experiences we marginalize and reject (Goodbread, 1997a). According to Mindell (1989, p.82), “the Process Work philosophy behind interventions is that those things we are consciously and unconsciously doing will aid us in solving problems and enriching our own experiences.”

Process Work, as the name suggests, focuses on studying and following process. The concept of process is closely related to change, and it refers to all the dynamic aspects of our experiences and the way they are related with each other as well as with the environment (Goodbread, 1997a, Mindell, 1985). Thus, Process Work focuses on what is happening in the moment and how it is expressed and changing through the flow of signals (Mindell & Mindell, 2002). Based on the premise that what is happening is meaningful, it is also considered right even when it is disturbing (Goodbread, 1997a). Furthermore, what is happening is viewed as an experience that needs to come to our awareness and be integrated. Following what is happening, or following the flow of process, means facing the difficult and often disturbing experiences we encounter in order to unravel their deepest message and integrate it into our identity (Diamond & Jones, 2004).

Primary and secondary process

In our everyday reality, it often feels impossible to follow what is happening in its totality. Our lives often have disturbing aspects, which we try to avoid, like thoughts, feelings and desires that scare us, symptoms that disturb us, and relationship interactions that unsettle us. These disturbers threaten our homeostasis so to speak. We live our lives within the boundaries of a specific identity, creating a narrative that explains and gives meaning to our experiences. Whatever disagrees with this identity, or challenges it to grow is often felt as a disturber.

Process Work uses the terms primary and secondary process to distinguish between the different degree of familiarity and awareness we have with our experiences. More specifically, primary process refers to those experiences that are closer to our identity and awareness; it is all

the parts that are most known to us, the parts we identify with (Diamond & Jones, 2004). As Goodbread (1997b) explains, it is called primary exactly because we are more aware of it, and process because it is not static. The primary process is extremely important because it is the foundation of a stable identity (Goodbread, 1997b). However, we are all more than what we identify with. We are home for more experiences and energies than the ones that are familiar or comfortable. The experiences that disturb us and come to challenge this identity, or our primary process, comprise the secondary process. These experiences are usually farther from our awareness, and even if we become aware of them, we tend to marginalize and disavow them (Diamond & Jones, 2004; Mindell, 2002; Goodbread, 1997b).

Primary and secondary identities can be stable over long periods of time, but can also be momentary (Diamond & Jones, 2004). For example, I might identify with being a joyful person in general, but in different days or times, I may also identify with being depressed in the moment.

Edge

The term edge is used to refer to the boundary between the primary and secondary process. It is what separates them (Diamond & Jones, 2004). It is the structure that lies at the end of what we are aware of, and what we are comfortable with. As Mindell & Mindell (2002, p.34) put it: "An edge is a filter to what you are perceiving. It marks the limits of who you are and what you imagine yourself capable of." So, for example, if I identify with being polite and non-confrontational (primary process), I will tend to marginalize the moments I want to fight (secondary process), and I will probably have an edge to enter a conflict.

Edges are extremely important in the way that they help us have a stable identity. Edges mark the boundaries of our primary process. However, they do not only separate. They are also the point of contact of the primary and secondary process (Diamond & Jones, 2004). So edges create an experience of safety by keeping us within familiar ground and giving us a sense of stability. At the same time, they can create a very painful experience also, when the emerging secondary process feels difficult to face. In the process of becoming aware of a secondary experience and integrating it, new edges appear, marking the new limits beyond which lies what is now unknown or disturbing (Diamond & Jones, 2004).

Signals – double signals

The primary and secondary processes are expressed through signals. Signals refer to the verbal and non-verbal, intentional and non-intentional ways that we have of communicating. Mindell (2002) explains that primary signals are the ones we intentionally send, and thus the signals we are aware of and in control of. Conversely, the term "secondary signals" refers to the non-intentional messages; the ones that are farther from our awareness, and that express our secondary process. The moments we are fully into one experience and fully identifying with it and aware of it, the signals we send are congruent. However, when there is an emerging secondary process that we are not conscious of, the primary and secondary signals may differ, or even be diametrically opposite. Thus, in these situations we send double signals, which are often the reason behind misunderstandings (Mindell, 2002; Mindell, 1995). When we are on the receiving end of the double signals, but are not consciously aware of them, we can feel frustrated, irritated or confused (Diamond & Jones, 2004).

As I will show in the next chapters, I explore how the roles of victim, victimizer and rescuer show double signals of power and vulnerability. These double signals also mark the corresponding primary and secondary processes of power and vulnerability in all three roles. Furthermore, I will present how my analysis led me to believe that the three roles reveal different versions of the same structure, which is the edge to both power and vulnerability.

Channels

As mentioned above, signals carry information about the process. This information is conveyed in different ways or channels, such as seeing, hearing, feeling, and moving. As Mindell (1985, p. 15) puts it: "channels are like the tracks upon which the process train moves, the potential direction of the river." There are four main sensory channels: visual, auditory, proprioceptive, and kinesthetic (movement) channel. The visual channel is usually the most familiar to us. We know we are in the visual channel when our experiences are expressed as images and pictures. The auditory channel refers to experiences being expressed as sounds, noise, music and inner dialogue. Tone of voice, speed, and rhythm are also part of the auditory channel. The proprioceptive channel refers to body sensations, such as lightness and heaviness, temperature, pressure etc. Finally, the kinesthetic channel refers to signals conveyed through body movement, like the movement of hands and feet, body posture, rocking etc. (Diamond & Jones, 2004). Apart from these four basic sensory channels, Process Work defines two composite channels also, namely the relationship and world channels. We know that our process is in the relationship channel, when we are interacting with or thinking about somebody else, and are affected by their behavior. Finally, we know we are in the world channel, when our focus is on

the world and its messages, when for example we feel that world events have an effect on us (Mindell, 1990).

Primary and secondary process information is expressed in channels. Thus, both intended and unintended communication, signals and double signals happen through these channels. A Process Worker focuses on recognizing signals, unfolding them and amplifying them in the channel they are expressed, so that their message is unraveled. The goal of this process is to make the secondary experience conscious, and help the person integrate it (Mindell, 1985).

Levels of awareness

Process Work has a conceptual model to describe the different levels of awareness. Apart from primary and secondary process, Process Work theory suggests that our experiences are expressed and/or understood on three different levels (Mindell, 2010).

- Consensus reality: this level refers to the common and "objective" understanding of the world. It is the reality we all consent to, a world of causality. For example, if I am having a conflict with my boss, we can all agree that s/he is the boss and I am the employee.

- Dreamland: this level refers to subjective experiences. Dreams, symptoms, mythical figures and roles are all expressions of this level. In the previous example of the conflict, the dreamland level of the conflict might also include the mythic, cultural role of the boss, as well as all the subjective experience and personal history I have about what a boss is.

- Essence: this level is "the nondual level of awareness (…) a noncognitive 'knowing' that is difficult to explicate" (Mindell, 2010, p. 273). This means that on this level, all polarities,

all energies and experiences are melted into oneness, and cannot be separated. In the example of the conflict, my boss and I no longer represent two polarities in a conflict. If I am on that level, I will feel that somehow we are one, the energy that s/he represents will not feel difficult or hostile, but part of myself and of the whole "field" (explained further below).

Rank

Process Work often discusses power in terms of rank. The concept of rank, as developed by Mindell (1995) has been crucial in my understanding of power. Mindell in his book "Sitting in the Fire" (1995) presents beautifully how rank is a key concept on an inner, interpersonal and world level, and how the awareness or lack of awareness about rank can create wars. Rank can be described as "the sum of a person's privileges" (Mindell, 1995, p. 28).

Three kinds of rank are identified in Process Work:

- Social rank: This is the rank that is given to us by society. It is based on society values, biases and prejudices. Examples of this rank are the skin color, gender, socio-economical class, sexual orientation, age, health, education and so on.
- Psychological rank: this rank is acquired through experiencing challenging life situations. It refers to the inner resources and abilities we build through our experiences. One expression of this type of rank is feeling secure and cared for.
- Spiritual rank: this rank is also often, although not always, the result of going through physical, emotional and psychological hardship. It refers to the feeling of being

connected to something bigger than ourselves, something spiritual or divine. It characterizes people who seem detached, as if they are beyond vulnerability.

All people have some form of rank. Rank is dynamic, and often depends on the context of the environment we are in. It is also stable, in the sense that there are certain aspects of rank that are independent of the changes in our environment. Mindell (1995) argues that power is not inherently good or bad. It is the way power is used that matters; and the way we use our power depends largely on our awareness of our rank in any given moment.

Being aware of our rank and using it consciously is one of the basic teachings of Process Work. The challenging aspect of that is that we are usually very aware of where we do not have rank – or where somebody else has more – and conversely, we are typically and torturously unaware of our own rank. Unawareness and unconsciousness of rank is often expressed through a lack of understanding of the other side, or a marginalization of the other side's position. Therefore, rank unawareness is often inflammatory in relationships. Mindell (1995) argues that in some way we are all powerful and powerless, and thus in some way we are all persecutors and victims.

Processmind and deep democracy

In Process Work people are seen both as individuals with distinct experiences, and as integral parts of a larger field. From early on, Mindell (1989, 1992) used Field Theory to explain human interactions and inner processes. Using concepts from physics and systems theory on organizational development, Mindell (1992) proposed that our interactions and our experiences are organized by the fields they arise in. In this way, the world or the environment calls and

changes us, and we also change the world or the environment (Mindell, 1989). Mindell (1992) further proposed that fields often have opposing energies, polarizations and roles. People are called, or dreamed up to fill these roles. Every role is greater than any individual, and at the same time every individual is greater than the role. For example, the role of the mother is larger than any single mother could fill; it has many variations and qualities, and in order to express all its sides, more than one person should speak from this role. At the same time, a woman who might be in the mother role at any given time, is larger than the role. She has qualities and sides that go beyond the specific role (Mindell, 1992).

The field, as an organizing 'intelligence' behind all events, has been central in Process Work. In recent years, Mindell further developed the field concept, and described the organizing intelligence as the "processmind"(2010). Processmind can be viewed as an invisible force field, much like an electromagnetic field, or the gravity field. Like a field in physics, it "moves and organizes our bodies and dream images in a meaningful way" (Mindell, 2010, p. 14). Processmind has a non-dualistic quality, is the deepest part of ourselves. It is the whole field that encompasses all dichotomies. Processmind underlies all levels of experience. It is both oneness and diversity. From a processmind perspective, viewing the world through polarizations and seeing beyond these polarizations and the unifying oneness is equally valuable. It is the flow that is important, and not any individual state.

In that sense, processmind is deeply democratic. Deep democracy is a Process Work concept that refers to a feeling and belief that all experience is important and valued. It is a "sense that the world is here to help us become our entire selves, and that we are here to help the

world become whole" (Mindell, 1992, p. 13). Exercising deep democracy means paying attention to all expressions and experiences both in yourself and others, and including and encouraging the marginalized parts of our experience to come out more. From a processmind view, all levels of consciousness are "of equal value and should also have equal representation" (Mindell, 2010, p. 82).

In the following chapters, I discuss my experience and understanding of the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer in all three levels of awareness. My goal is to show how Process Work can offer a new understanding of these roles and the dynamics between them. Furthermore, I show that developing awareness of how the roles are expressed on all three levels, can contribute towards the facilitation of the challenges these roles present.

Chapter Two: Lived Experience of the Three Roles

In this chapter I will present the subjective experience and objective signals of the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer as they appear in everyday interactions. I use an in depth case study of my own experience in order to track the phenomenology of these complex, usually hidden dynamics. And I show how Process Work concepts provide new ways for understanding and working with the role experience.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the roles of victim and victimizer have been widely researched in cases of abuse and trauma. Furthermore, Karpman (1968) developed a model called the Drama Triangle, which added the role of the rescuer. His model aimed to explain how these roles function in fairy tales, suggesting that these roles also appear in our everyday lives and not only in extreme cases of abuse or trauma. Karpman's model has been used primarily to describe dysfunctional and codependent relationships. However as I will demonstrate in this chapter, I believe we all slip into these roles in our everyday interactions, usually without much awareness. By providing a phenomenological perspective through my case study, I hope to contribute to the understanding of these roles and demonstrate the potential for using Process Work concepts and techniques to bring greater awareness.

Defining the Roles

Before presenting my case study, I will briefly define how I am using the terms victim, victimizer, and rescuer to distinguish my exploration of the roles in an everyday context from the more extreme versions discussed in the previous chapter, associated with overt trauma and abuse.

One way to describe them is through the impact we feel when someone else is in one of the roles. So, for example, we are reacting to this impact when we say the phrase "don't be such a victim". With this commonly used expression I believe we are reacting and referring to someone who is in what I call the victim role. When somebody is attacking us by yelling, or telling us in a stern manner all the ways in which we are wrong, I describe this as someone who is in the victimizer role. Finally when we ask for help and somebody gives us fast solutions without hearing our experience, and somehow we end up feeling worse after sharing, I describe this as the impact of a person in the rescuer role.

I believe we all exhibit these behaviors to different extents. My intention is to show that these roles, although painful and potentially dysfunctional, are the result of a natural and almost inevitable first reaction to a threat. I further want to show that they are complex roles, with two common characteristics. First, they all carry an experience of victimhood. By victimhood experience I refer to the experience we have when we are faced with an overwhelming power, and feel threatened and vulnerable. In Process Work terms, this experience can be primary or secondary, meaning that the person in the role may identify with it consciously or, if it is secondary, the experience can be subtle, almost unconscious and/or momentary. Second, all three roles express power in some form. By power I am referring to an expression that has elements of an overt or covert aggression, and, I believe, also has the seeds of a deeper, spiritual and psychological power. In Process Work terms, all three roles have the different kinds of rank described in the literature review. I will show below how these different kinds of rank contribute to creating the dynamics of victimhood in different roles.

Victim

I define the victim role as the experience we have when we find ourselves in a situation where we mostly (or sometimes completely) identify with, and experience, our suffering, but still more or less consciously use a subtle power, usually in the form of what gets called, 'passive aggression.' For example, I might ask for help and get a 'no' in response but instead of expressing my disappointment directly, I say: "It's OK. I don't want to pressure you. I know you have more important things to do, and I always end up without help anyway". In this example, I feel the pain of not getting what I want, and I am irritated, but I do not feel powerful enough to express it directly. In other words, what I am defining as the victim role often includes a sense of mildly revengeful martyrdom.

Victimizer

I define the role of the victimizer when we express our power in the form of direct aggression, but we still identify with our victimhood, and may, in fact, be totally blind to our power. For example, if I feel hurt by a friend, but instead of sharing or expressing that hurt, I start to forcefully describe the ways in which my friend is wrong, building a solid case with arguments and ignoring their signals of intimidation, I have slipped into the role of victimizer. In this case, I am identifying with the threat and vulnerability I am feeling, and I could be unaware of the power of my attack. This role has the feeling of a prosecutor.

Rescuer

I have found the role of the rescuer to be the trickiest one to understand and define. I describe it as the one we slip into when we experience a fragile kind of power. It is fragile because underneath the power lies the most marginalized experience of victimhood out of the

three roles. The power in this case is expressed as a power of superiority or authority. For example, if I am talking to a friend who feels depressed and complains for their life, and I immediately jump into giving them solutions and directions for making changes, I have just landed in the rescuer role. In this role, I am identified with my power to help the other person and am likely to feel frustrated if I cannot exert my power by fixing them. My victimhood lies in the fact that I am incapable of dealing with my friend's depression. I am afraid to even go near it, and listen to the experience. At the same time, I feel superior, and somewhat frustrated with my friend, because I can clearly see the steps that are needed in order for this awful state to disappear. This role usually identifies as the caretaker.

I have found that it usually is easier to recognize these roles in somebody else's behavior than when we are occupying them. On the receiving end, we usually feel more of the power that is directed towards us, and the misuse of it. When we are in them, we feel more of our vulnerability, and often fail to see the impact of our power. In other words, it is easier to see where others have more rank than us, and at the same time, it is harder to identify with our own rank (Mindell, 1995).

Although these roles can be dysfunctional, and create pain for all sides of the interaction, I view them from a process oriented perspective as inevitable stages in a process, a process we go through when dealing with a threat. Through bringing a Process Work awareness to the role experiences, I have found we can go beyond the dysfunction and see the roles as 'dreamdoors' that can lead to deeper, existential understandings, as I will show in the final chapter.

My Story

We these definitions in mind, I will now present the case study which tracks my subjective experience of these roles over a number of years. During this time I experienced some significant outer world events that threatened my own well-being and my country. In the case study, I present my inner experience and outer behaviors in response to these threats and show how they occurred within a group context, and how they impacted my relationships.

A financial crisis impacts Greece

In 2009 the global financial crisis hit Greece. It was totally unexpected and I, like many others, was extremely surprised. I remember the day I heard on the news a report, leaked from the government, that Greece was considering signing an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2010). To me, that sounded as grave as a declaration of war. I remember exactly where I was when I heard the news on the radio, the way we remember big events in our lives. It was Friday evening and I was driving home from work. I remember I was stuck in traffic, with the sea on my left, and yellow clouds in the sky from a burning sun that would set soon. I froze, and I did not really believe it. I thought it could not be more than a rumor.

The reason for my reaction was that I had a very specific idea of what an IMF agreement meant. I was an avid reader of world news and politics. Based on my readings, I had formed a specific view on the negative consequences of the IMF arranging the financial debts of other countries. Pictures of extreme poverty and violence from countries very far from me flooded my mind. Stories of irrational injustice returned to my memory, from the accumulated readings of years. This could not be happening to my world. This was a bad, hellish fairy tale, which

couldn't possibly be on my doorstep now. As I hope is clear, my point is not about the validity of these views on the IMF, European Union, Greek government and mass media. Rather, I wish to show how my own perception and experience helped shape the roles inside me.

In that moment, I had begun my experience of victimhood. The IMF, the Greek government, and the European Union were the overwhelming forces that were beginning to gather up against me and my people, like a tsunami that would fast approach the shore of my life. Indeed, soon enough, it was not just an imaginary fear. Gradually I lost my jobs. My friends and my family started suffering. I experienced extreme and it seemed to me and others, unjustified violence in demonstrations and protests against implementation of laws, eroding employment and human rights (Smith, 2011). So, here I was, a victim of an abusive power.

The stage had been set and the roles were distributed. On one side there was me, a vulnerable, weak, innocent victim. I was not corrupt. I definitely was not lazy, working three jobs, and certainly the fact that I was hardly making a living with two salaries showed that I was not overpaid. On the other hand, there were these big, overwhelming, powers, namely the IMF, the EU, the Greek government, the mass media, namely, in my view, the victimizers. They were making decisions that were deeply affecting my life, and on top of that, when I protested, they were claiming that I should be blamed for the suffering they needed to impose. Furthermore, I felt they had the media at their disposal to make their views known, whereas I had nothing.

My experience of victimhood was both real and valid, in the sense that I was vulnerable and suffering the consequences of the changes in my country. However, what I missed was that I was also beginning to have an experience of power simultaneously, which would come to be

expressed later in different ways. This experience of power was on many levels. First, it was the feeling of connectedness to other people who were suffering as well. I felt this during demonstrations, but also with my closer community of friends. We would meet and discuss and somehow the sense of outside injustice would bring us closer to each other. Second, there was the power of the victim. Knowing and feeling the validity of my arguments, made me feel righteous. I felt I had justice on my side, which gave me what Process Work calls spiritual rank (Mindell, 1995). On a deeper level though, lay another even more unexpected power.

The crisis had my mind spinning, trying to understand the causes, and the different levels. I was always interested in the workings of the world system, and of the ways in which our philosophical and spiritual beliefs, often unconscious, form and support the financial structures. However, as the years went by, my work and life demands had put me into a routine, which left little room for deeper quests. I had been semi-sleeping and now I was waking up as the crisis pushed me away from a "normal" life. Apart from the pain, an excitement was being born. I could now go deeper. I could see more levels, connect more dots between the levels, and feel more how I myself was the system. This excitement felt like coming back to life. I was beginning to love my thoughts again and the connections I was seeing. I had ideas and things to say. In short, I felt a deep love for life and existence. I believe that this is another kind of spiritual rank, as it connected me to something larger than myself, which went beyond morality and justice; it expanded to the pure joy of being. However, as I said, all this was still far from my awareness. At that time, I mostly identified with having the low positional rank of being a person from a debt-stricken country, and I failed to see my emerging inner power, or feel my higher spiritual rank.

Also, there was an expression of vulnerability on the side of the big powers that I named, which I was not consciously aware of yet. It was apparent in the fact that they were choosing violence, among other interventions, as a way to implement their political decisions. I see the use of violence in this example as a sign of vulnerability, in the sense that it indicates an inability to manage a situation in any other way. The Greek government, for example, was faced with protests and demonstrations. These protests did not change government policy and yet they apparently threatened the implementation of new laws, and/or public order, since the government saw the need to react to them with such severity. In my view, the people in government felt vulnerable to the threat of ruptured social cohesion, and helpless in their inability to appease the protesting citizens through political dialogue. However, I think, as others have claimed, that the use of state violence also endangers social cohesion, as it strongly marginalizes parts of society (Bessell, 2001). Furthermore, in my view, one of the consequences of state violence is the creation of feelings of rage and revenge on the side of the victims of violence. Therefore, I believe that the violence enacted by the Greek government against the protestors was a desperate means of avoiding a social crisis, which came as a reaction to the threat of demonstrations. In this way, I believe that violence was a sign of vulnerability against this threat. Vulnerability was also apparent in the small signals and expressions of different politicians and journalists. They would say how they had no other choice, how they were forced to take this path, etc. Thus, in their statements at least, they were identified with being victims as well, and unable to make free choices.

My case study focuses on my own experience of the roles, so I cannot explore these outer signals any further here; a more comprehensive sociological analysis would be required, and is a

direction for future research. My point however is to show how the signals of vulnerability and power seem to co-exist in each of the roles. Thus, even though from my perspective it was apparently clear that I was the victim and the Greek government was the perpetrator, I found that in fact victimhood seemed to be a shared experience. As explained in the previous chapter, this understanding about shifting and shared roles in a social field is core to the Process Work concept of deep democracy.

Inside me, the victimhood experience was constellating into the roles of victim, victimizer and rescuer. And as I moved through these roles, partly depending on the outer context, as I will show in more detail below, I was suffering from the impact on my mood and emotions. Reading the news, the feeling of injustice and even more my inability to fight this injustice, made me at times feel very angry and at other times depressed and hopeless. Going to demonstrations, I would at times feel more powerful when surrounded by a big crowd of people. However, the police violence, and the fact that we didn't seem to have any effect on stopping the government from voting laws that condemned us to poverty, would quickly make me go back to feeling weak and defenseless.

Preparing to interact with people outside of Greece

As all this was unfolding, I was studying in the Masters in Process Work program (for which this is the Final Project) in Portland, OR, USA. As part of the requirements, I travelled three times a year from Athens to Portland, for two or three weeks each time, to attend a 10-day residency. I was part of a cohort that consisted of people from around the world. I was the only Greek living in Greece in the group. The program was experiential to a large extent. As it

happens with experiential programs, I had developed a strong affection for the people in my group. We had a beautiful bond, which was the result of our shared choice to drop everything in our lives three times a year, to travel often long distances to study Process Work, which meant living together and sharing what were often our most vulnerable parts. I highlight this because in the months to come, my relationship with the group would be tested, and at times I would forget our bond. As I will show later in this chapter, I believe this disruption to my relationship with the group was largely the result of my lack of awareness as I experienced the three roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer. I have found that this dysfunctional impact of unawareness of the roles is partly the result of how the roles involve identifying with low rank, and forgetting the less expected emerging powers or high rank, as I have been describing above.

Soon after hearing the radio announcement about Greece's involvement with the IMF, it was time for me to travel to Portland for my residency again. As my trip date approached, I found myself getting more and more stressed. My life in Athens was intense. Everything was changing. My normal life was not that normal anymore. However, Portland had not changed. The rest of the people in my group had no experience of these overwhelming changes in my life and my country. How could I fit within two so different worlds? How could I hold both worlds inside me? How could I share what was happening for me?

Slowly many overwhelming fears clouded me. Would my friends and teachers understand? As I said, the coming of the IMF was like a declaration of war for me. However, I knew that not everybody agrees with that viewpoint. And if they did not know or agree, how could I show them side of things? Furthermore, I knew that the mass media both in Greece and

worldwide were distorting the news, or providing one-sided or false information that was hurtful to me and my country. I was familiar with the stories about Greeks being lazy, corrupt, and spending big amounts of money. The actual European Union statistics, which indicated that Greeks were amongst the most hardworking and low paid in the European Union, were disregarded and never mentioned by journalists and mainstream TV, radio and newspapers (McDonald, 2012). A stereotype was being created, which was based on the notion that if people in Greece suffer now, it is acceptable because they deserve it. A just punishment for a just crime[1]. Finally, I was afraid that my friends would find it difficult to feel my pain because the experience was so far from their own.

I was experiencing a second layer of victimhood. Not only had something bad happened to me, which was beyond my control and damaged my well-being, but I began to fear that my relationships and support network were threatened also by potential prejudice or ignorance. This new victimhood also created the roles inside and outside of me.

For example, I had formed the assumption that the people I would interact with in Portland were misinformed and would not understand the seriousness of the situation. I felt I was the victim and they were the potential perpetrators. Unfortunately at that point, I didn’t consider it an assumption so much, as a certainty. I am making this distinction, not because my assumption was necessarily wrong, but because forgetting it is an assumption and considering it a certainty, can mark the beginning of a process where the outside environment is experienced as hostile. If nobody knows and nobody will understand, then I am already against a big power.

[1] Later commentators commented on the fact that Greece was sacrificed for the Euro-zone to be saved (Wall, 2012).

That then can mark the beginning of inner dialogues, which usually just inflame the feelings of victimhood more. Furthermore, when the time for the actual interaction with the outside finally comes, signals that contradict our assumptions are disregarded. It is true that often we are misinformed, and that we usually have difficulty feeling something that is far from our experience. However, when an assumption turns into certainty, the words “often” and “usually” in the previous sentence become “always”.

Being in Portland

My arrival in Portland that time was destined to become the beginning of a long and painful process of awakening to the different roles that I slipped into unconsciously, and their effect on my life. Carrying all my victimhood and my assumptions, I went to meet my cohort. I experienced both heavy feelings and relief at having left Greece. However, it was difficult to identify with the relief, because it brought me guilt, as if I was choosing to forget the suffering of my people back in Greece. Also, I struggling with the fact that I had higher social rank than most of my friends in Greece, as I had the privilege to be able to travel and take a break from a depressing everyday reality. I remember that there were times when I felt like laughing during that residency, happy to be with my friends, or enjoying the beautiful Oregon nature. Most often however I would repress my joy. I had difficulty allowing myself to enjoy the privileges of my high rank. Even worse, it actually made me feel shame, guilt and illegitimacy. If I was truly suffering in Greece, then there was no space for joy. Also, if my friends could not experience the same privilege, then I had no right to enjoy it either. I felt it would be impossible to make people understand the seriousness of the situation in my country, if I allowed them to see me happy.

Based on my assumption that people were misinformed and would not be touched by the tragedy of my country, how could I reach them and convince them if they saw me laughing?

I was resisting a natural fluidity inside me, the flow between sadness and joy, and enforcing one-sidedness, by identifying with only one of my experiences, namely victimhood and suffering, because my feelings contradicted my beliefs around my role. It was as if I was taught that if I have two experiences, only one of them is real. And the real one should be exhibited constantly on the outside. Any expression of another experience would invalidate my real experience. All these were mostly not conscious, or at best they were fleeting thoughts that I hardly had the opportunity to catch and realize. Unconsciously, I was trying to be the ideal victim, so that I could get others' compassion and understanding (Baumeister, 1999; Van Dijk, 2009).

Interacting with my cohort

Unaware of these dynamics, I was found myself stuck in heavy moods and often angry. I was slowly sinking into a mood of loneliness and hopelessness. When people around me would laugh, I would sometimes feel that their laughter was proof that they did not understand my pain, or that they were ignoring me and did not care. This would intensify my negative mood. The outer situation in Greece gave me an experience of deep vulnerability and a longing to connect. I was feeling the need for community. I needed friends to hold me. I needed to share how terrified and small I felt, and how a systemic injustice was slowly destroying my life and the lives of people in my country. This was my vulnerable side.

At the same time, I felt excited and I needed to share my emerging ideas, as mentioned above, about the possibility of new social connections as well. I felt that my need for community was not just personal but societal also. I dreamt of the birth of new societal bonds. I felt I could see more deeply what was not working, and I wanted to explore new ways of interacting and being with my friends. I saw the cohort as a wonderful opportunity for exploring this. We could start changing the world if we only changed ourselves within the group, as well as the way we related to each other, and to the outside world. These ideas and a feeling of connection to something greater was an emerging sense of power and a form of spiritual rank, as I said above, but I was not yet able to identify with it consciously.

In retrospect, I can see how my behaviors were expressing both my vulnerable and my powerful side. It sounds pretty clear as I am writing it now, but in reality it wasn't that clear, inside me nor in what I expressed and how I expressed it. I tried to share both my vulnerability and my sense of empowerment not only in that residency, but also in many others that followed. However, because I was unaware of how the roles were operating within me, I often did not get the response I was hoping for.

For example, sometimes I would give long speeches, filled with political or historical information. During these speeches, I would avoid pausing. I realize now that I was scared that in the pause I would realize that nobody was listening or believing me. As a result, I probably resembled a canon firing arguments at a speed that made it difficult to internalize and digest. Other times I would share my own experiences in an angry tone. My angry tone was my defense against my fear. It was my victimhood expressed through a victimizer role. Part of my fear was

that others would not understand, but yet another fear was that they would understand. And if they did, then I was equally scared that their kindness would take me deeper into my own feelings. It would bring me closer to my vulnerability, and that was almost terrifying. Once again, I would hardly pause in order to avoid my fear being actualized. Sometimes, I would suggest changes that I believed should happen in the group. However, as I felt small and not entitled to have a lot of space, I would not explain my whole thinking behind my idea. I would rather imply what I was thinking; I did not feel powerful enough to explain fully. If the group did not respond as I hoped, I would at times get in a strong mood, which hovered above the group like a dark cloud, and was not easily ignored.

As I mentioned earlier, I wanted to share both my vulnerable and my powerful side, namely my fear and hurt from the changes in my country, and my excitement about my new ideas. However, there were two complications around that.

The first complication was that my powerful side had vulnerabilities also, and second, my vulnerable side had powerful parts. The vulnerability of my powerful side was that although I was excited, I also doubted myself. I questioned whether my ideas were actually worthy, and feared to claim that I have something beneficial to propose. This was a familiar fear for me, but in this case particularly reflected in part the low social rank I had as a person from a country in crisis. Even worse though, I was afraid that I might indeed have valuable opinions and thoughts. This would question my uncomfortably comfortable belief that I was not so important. In Process Work terms, my normal or primary identity was associated with low rank, and a feeling of empowerment threatened this identity. The power of my vulnerable side was that it was filled

with righteousness, with the spiritual rank of the ‘ideal’ victim. I had all the arguments to support my justified pain, historically, politically and scientifically. This added an unconscious confidence to my vulnerability.

The second complication was that I did not want to express either my vulnerability or my power. As I explained, showing my power was dangerous to my primary identity, which informed me that I was not important. Therefore, I would have to become somebody else, somebody confident and big. My primary identity had to grow, in order to include more secondary characteristics. In Process Work this is described as having an edge to feeling my power, because this was a secondary experience for me. I also didn’t want to express my vulnerability. I was afraid to feel it myself. If I actually felt the pain I wanted to share, I felt I would break. Paradoxically, I needed a lot of power in order to be vulnerable.

Of course I was not aware at the time of all these processes inside me. They were expressed through double signals. I would bring out my primary experience of vulnerability in words, but my non-verbal signals, like tone of voice, facial expressions, body postures, would also show my secondary process of emerging power. Also, at times I would claim space in order to share my ideas. This was a powerful act, reflecting high psychological and spiritual rank. However, as this rank and power was secondary to me, I would soon be overcome by fears around the value of my ideas, and I would retreat without completing my thoughts. Or I would feel afraid to talk, but then I would get in a mood and then my mood would take over, permeating the space. This mood was coming from the difficulty to identify with the power of having ideas, and it was in itself an expression of power.

Feedback from the group

The feedback I got from the group was both painful and deeply surprising. Mostly I was accused of being too powerful and using my power in a way that hurt people. I was accused of being the victimizer. I was also accused of preaching, of speaking in a condescending way, and of not being sensitive to how people felt. Thus, I was accused of being the rescuer. Finally, some accused me of using my pain in order to get something from them, namely of being the victim. Therefore, in the perception of the cohort, I was taking all three roles, victim, victimizer, and rescuer, at different times.

It took a very long time before I could digest this feedback. It completely contradicted the way I viewed myself, my primary identity. I was repeatedly told I had too much power, yet I was feeling small and vulnerable. I was further accused of hurting others, whereas I identified with being kind and compassionate. I was accused of preaching, but my own feeling was a fear that my ideas were probably worth nothing. People felt I was condescending towards them. However, I identified with believing that it is the group wisdom that is most important, and that we are all invaluable participants in creating a different world. Finally, I was seen as manipulative, which was particularly painful as it hurt the part of myself that valued integrity. Integrity has been central in my life, and though it feels unattainable to me, like the treasure at the end of the rainbow, I never cease to seek it. The idea that I was manipulative both infuriated me and hurt me. I felt I was not seen. All the pain I was carrying was disregarded. People refused to see my vulnerability. All they could see was a misuse of power. The more I got this feedback, the more I got hurt and amplified my own behavior.

This interaction between the group and myself intensified so much inside me that in the following year, I almost quit the program. I gradually felt isolated and unjustly attacked. The group had turned from being a haven to being a hostile environment, which almost terrified me. I was scared to open my mouth, because I felt that people would attack me. This process somehow spread to the rest of my life, and to almost all of my important relationships. I was constantly being accused of being unconscious of my power, whether I was expressing it as a victim, victimizer, or rescuer. At the same time, I was constantly feeling, and trying to express to others, that I was actually the true victim. Moreover, I could see how everybody else was misusing their own power, how they had higher rank than I did, and how they were expressing their power mostly secondarily through the same three roles. I became an expert in catching and analyzing all verbal and non-verbal signals of power when coming from other people. I was still blind to my own.

Going More Deeply into the Role Experiences

Following this overall presentation of my case study, and having shown how the roles appeared in my experience, I will now take the analysis further. In this second half of the chapter, I will try and draw out some more general findings, using some core Process Work concepts.

As I studied my own experience of these roles I began to realize how these roles appear both in momentary interactions and in long-term relationships. I began observing interactions through the lens of these roles in my everyday reality wherever I was, at work, with clients, with friends, with groups, on TV, in politics etc. Gradually I got fascinated with the mechanics that seem to underlie these roles, and the ways we slip into them, mostly unconsciously.

Right or wrong

From the perspective of the roles, right and wrong is very important. As I discussed in the previous chapter, our stereotypes of the ideal victim and ideal perpetrator are built around ideas of good and evil, innocence and responsibility. When I feel the suffering of victimhood, regardless of which role I find myself in, I tend to identify as being in the right, and will typically feel that whoever or whatever has threatened me is in the wrong. In every conflict we have, we usually try to find who is right. I have also witnessed that in my work as a counselor with couples. When couples are in conflict and they come to see a counselor, they often hope that the counselor will provide judgment. They imagine and wish that somebody objective, and with authority, will finally see that they are right and their partner is wrong.

As I hope I've shown in this case study, the way these roles express the victimhood experience tends to polarize reality into right and wrong sides, and this is often counter-productive and even agonizing for the parties involved and their relationship. In a way, it is inevitable not to follow this route, at least temporarily. The hope and goal of trying to prove we are right is that the other side will finally see our suffering and change. In the following section, and then further in the next chapter, I describe the search for the eldership to hold the painful polarities of good and bad, and reach a common ground where each part is valued. This is the deep democracy of a process oriented approach.

The threat: first appearance of the roles

From my analysis, I have concluded that the roles first seem to appear when we experience a threat. The threat may be an actual threat, like for example the risk of losing one's

job. It may be a threat to our primary identity. For example, if I identify as a nice person and someone accuses me of being mean, then I may experience that as a threat to my identity. As I have said, I am exploring simple everyday interactions, and not situations where our physical integrity is directly threatened. More specifically, I am focusing on interactions where there are double signals of power and vulnerability, which typically cause frustration and irritation rather than overt abuse or harm.

In Process Work we might think of a threat as a disturber. Threats can be a challenge. Threats are destabilizing. They challenge our equilibrium. Disturbers are events or behaviors which invite us to encompass characteristics or behaviors that are far from our primary identity (Mindell, 1995). The reason I am calling them threats in the context of the appearance of the roles, is because we can feel them as threats, and we often react to them as if they were threats. From a process oriented perspective, they invite us to grow by realizing and accepting that we are much more than we think. They come to remind us that we contain diverse and at times antithetical energies.

Similarities of the three roles

The three roles appear very different at a first glance, but actually share many similarities.

In the more extreme setting of abuse and trauma, the differences between these three roles, appears to be very clear. Reflecting on the literature presented in chapter one, and on popular understandings, I believe that in our collective perception, the victim represents vulnerability, while the victimizer and the rescuer represent power. The victimizer is associated with an abuse of power, whereas the rescuer represents with a positive use of power. However, a

closer look at these roles reveals a more complicated picture, especially in the case of victims and victimizers. As I discussed in chapter 1, victims can also experience and express power (Van Dijk, 2009; Herman, 1997; Frankl, 1992) and victimizers often claim their victimhood (Jacobsson, Wahlin & Andersson, 2012; Baumeister, 1999).

On a much smaller scale, in our everyday interactions, I observed that I had similar assumptions about the three roles. Through my research and analysis for this project, I was surprised to realize that they are not as clear-cut as they look. In fact going deeper into my own experience of the roles, I realized that in all of them I experienced both vulnerability and power. Furthermore, and most disturbing, I found that at moments where I was consciously identifying with vulnerability, my signals also expressed power. In general, all three roles experience vulnerability to a certain extent, and all three roles express power in different ways. What we are experiencing primarily and what actually becomes the message we deliver can be quite different. Also, the victim and the victimizer roles express power with different forms of aggression, whereas the rescuer role expresses power with a sense of superiority and authority.

Victimhood expressed through the three roles

I would like now to go a bit further in analyzing the roles as I experienced them inside me, and to show what the impact can be when interacting with them. My goal is to present how each role experiences both vulnerability and power with more or less awareness, and how all roles send double signals of both vulnerability and power as well. I present one example for each role. However, all roles can have a very diverse presentation. What I want to stress is the experience underneath the presentation.

1. Victim

The victim role has a primary experience of being a victim and feels that they are weak and suffering. By primary experience, I mean that this is the experience that is closer to the awareness of the person. We are in the victim role when we feel overwhelmed, almost to be point of being paralyzed. Whatever we are faced with, feels powerful way beyond our abilities to react. Behind this state, lies a feeling of despair, even if it is momentary and almost unconscious. However, we are not completely surrendering to this despair and in our unintended communication there may be signals of secondary anger or blame.

In the example I used in the beginning of this chapter, where I got upset with my friend's refusal to help me with a task, I clearly identified with my victimhood. I was feeling overwhelmed with the task ahead of me. I was almost paralyzed and swimming in a sea of doubt regarding my ability to complete the task I asked for help with. I was primarily identified with being small and weak. The threat to my well-being was amplified when my friend refused to help me; I felt I was being left with no support. However, at the same time, the response of my friend irritated me. My irritation was coming from a sense of entitlement. Somewhere in me, some part inside me was saying that I deserved to be supported and have help. This entitlement was a sign of high rank in the moment, although I was unable to identify with it as it was mostly unconscious, the entitlement of an ideal victim. Thus, this irritation was springing from a feeling of power. However, as it was further from my awareness, it was a more secondary experience.

However, the picture was more complicated, because I had an edge to feeling my power, that is to feel and say I was entitled to help. As we saw in chapter one, the ideal victim is helpless

and the entitlement to assistance is based on this ideal weakness. This edge was based on a cultural belief system that a deserving victim must have no power. At the same time, I also had an edge to feel my vulnerability, namely to feel my smallness and express it. This edge was based on a belief system that said that I should be able to do it alone, and not depend on anybody else. Therefore, although the feeling of victimhood was more primary, I still had an edge to identify fully with it. The combination of these two edges led to my passive aggressive response. I couldn't express my entitlement, or my needs. However, they were both so strong, that I couldn't contain them either. Feeling stuck at edges can constellate fury. As I was not allowing myself to express this fury, it became an indirect attack. Thus, my expression of the victim role was primarily vulnerability, and secondarily power.

On the receiving end of the victim role, the secondary power may be felt as an attack but more often these signals are marginalized because they do not go along with the primary, intended communication of weakness. As the victim role emphasizes their weakness, the receiving side can often feel guilt, a need to caretaker, and/or irritation. It was a surprise to me when I began consciously noticing that the victim role was often indirectly attacking the other. It helped me understand why a person crying which usually evokes my empathy, sometimes irritates me. I have felt a lot of guilt in the past for this irritation. I have wondered how I could be so insensitive to another's pain. However, realizing more about the workings of the roles, I became aware that often my irritation reflected an unconscious signal of power on the other side, which was either not picked up, or was used against me.

2. Victimizer

The victimizer role also has a primary experience of victimhood even though they are usually perceived as a perpetrator. When we are in this role, we usually feel vulnerable, small, and unjustly treated. Going back to my case study, my main feeling was that of suffering. I primarily identified with being small and threatened by a group of people who I felt could not understand me. However, I also had a secondary experience of power. As above, my victimhood gave me an entitlement to be heard. This spiritual rank gave me a sense that I had something important to say, and I deserved the space. I was more connected to my entitlement to be heard than in the previous example, when I found myself in the victim role. This gave me access to more energy and power inside myself. I also had the power of hope. Somewhere deep inside me, I felt that changes are possible. Still, I could not identify with the hope and it remained further from my awareness. I could not see my high rank in the moment and therefore I was unconsciously using my rank to claim space.

Although my primary experience was that I was small and vulnerable, I had an edge to allowing myself to really feel this fully. It felt dangerous, as if it would leave me exposed to outer attacks. At the same time, I also had an edge to my power. I found it difficult to believe in my hope and power to realize or even propose the changes I wanted. I was afraid to attach too much importance to myself. Once again, I was between two edges. My frustration at the edges came out as an attack and with double signals. I also had signals of vulnerability. The result of these internal processes was a direct attack on my cohort members. When I found myself in the victimizer role, I would claim space, and accuse people of not understanding, or for behaving in ways different than what I thought appropriate. My primary expression would show power. It

was my feeling that I was defending a rightful cause. However, my edge to open up to my suffering, and to believe in my insights, turned this emotional energy into frustration. This frustration in combination with my feeling that I had to defend myself against the group fueled my attack. The signals of vulnerability were possibly harder to discern. They were apparent mostly in the verbal content of my communication, and less in fleeting body signals, like facial expressions or body movements which expressed fear.

On the receiving end of the victimizer role, we often only feel the attack. It is difficult to guess that the person is experiencing fear and vulnerability. Unlike the interaction with somebody in the victim role, here the situation seems more clear. There is a direct force coming towards us. It is frequent that the message that this role may be carrying is getting lost because of the manner it is expressed. I have often witnessed in conflict resolution groupwork, situations where a marginalized group is trying to deliver a valid message to the side which represents the powerfully hurtful mainstream. However, the fury that accompanies the message frequently makes the other side unwilling to listen, as their energy is consumed in defending themselves from the attack.

3. Rescuer

In my analysis of the rescuer role I have found it is different from the other two, as it has a primary experience of power. The power of this role may have a flavor of superiority and authority. This role is often one we slip into when we are unconscious of our psychological rank. Psychological rank is often acquired through surviving challenging life situations. If we are unconscious of this rank, we may come across as patronizing or dismissive of other people's

difficulties (Mindell, 1995). Usually we slip into this role when we feel called to become a caretaker in a specific interaction, and have an urge to fix things. An example, already mentioned earlier in this chapter, is talking to a friend who is depressed, and immediately giving a list of steps, which if the friend would only follow, would enable them to come out of the difficult situation they are in. What is happening inside me in these situations is quite complicated. Unfolding my experience, I have found that it often starts with an experience of fear. I am afraid to really listen, and stay with their experience. I am afraid that their depression will drag me down too. In other words, I feel my emotional state is fragile. In that sense, my own feeling of vulnerability is knocking at my door and I don’t want to open. In that moment, I have an edge to feeling vulnerable.

However, this experience is fleeting and secondary. My more primary experience, which is fueled by the latter, is a sense that I need to bring them out of their depression fast. I feel that I know the way, and in that sense I feel superior in the moment. Thus, my more primary experience is that of power. However, the double signals of this role occur because I still don’t fully trust this power. Somewhere in me, I feel its fragility. This edge to my power awakens my need to become the helper, the rescuer. If I can only rescue my friend, I will verify my power and avoid my vulnerability.

On the receiving end of the rescuer role, we often feel not heard, or even put down. We might even feel inferior, or frustrated. This is easily understandable, as the message we receive is complicated. We might see the eagerness of the person in the rescuer role to help, and wonder why it doesn’t feel like help when they tell us what to do. Depending on the person and the

situation, the one being rescued might blame themselves more, thinking that not only can't they deal with their problem, they can't even accept help. For someone else the experience might include frustration with the rescuer for not listening and being present. By understanding this role inside me, I can remember when I am on its receiving end, that the rescuer role is trying to experience their power more fully, and that it has a hidden seed of vulnerability.

As I discussed in chapter 1, Mindell (2010) proposed that there is an organizing field called processmind behind all that is happening. This field expresses itself in all three levels of reality, namely consensus reality, dreamland, and essence. Roles or timespirits appear on dreamland level (Mindell, 1992). So, if I have a conflict with a person, in consensus reality I may be angry with the person, but on dreamland this person represents a role, e.g. the victim role. The double signals we sometimes send in our interactions are seen as expressions of roles and figures we do not identify with (Mindell, 1990).

What I discovered through my exploration of the roles in the dreamland level was that these three roles, victim, victimizer, and rescuer can be further broken down to the polarities they encompass. The roles themselves have double signals, which point to these polarities. So, all three roles appear to be a struggle between the two deeper rolesenergies of vulnerability and power. Mindell (1992) suggests that conflict can be understood as "an attempt by the timespirits to confront, conflict with and know one another" (p. 34). In this sense, I believe that all three roles are in themselves an attempt of vulnerability and power to know one another. I will discuss this further in chapter 3.

The dynamic characteristics of roles: 'dreaming up' and the field

In this section, I discuss the main dynamics between these roles using the Process Work understanding of the field of human interactions, and the phenomena called 'dreaming up' which arises from double signal communication.

Apart from what seems to be our habitual preference for a role, the dance of the roles with each other seems to be a decisive factor in determining which role we will slip into in a given moment, namely which role is already occupied and which is available in the field of an interaction. This can be explained in Process Work through field theory (Mindell, 1992). According to Mindell, every interaction takes place in a field. A field is not static, but rather it is a continuous process. Fields have a tendency towards balancing themselves, or towards reaching equilibrium. In their process of developing, polarizations appear in the form of disturbances. Polarizations disturb the equilibrium (Mindell, 1992). Thus, when a disturbance appears in the form of a role, it can act as a "call" for another role to appear. So, as I mentioned previously, if in a specific interaction one role is taken first by one person, then frequently, the other person will occupy a different role, even if it is not their primary role. So for example, even if my primary role is the rescuer, if the person I am interacting with takes the role of the victimizer and starts accusing me for things I have done, it is possible that I will slip into the victim or the victimizer role myself.

Roles can often be an intense experience. In the words of Mindell:

> Timespirits are like figures in our dreams. They are like whirlpools or vortices in an otherwise invisible field; they attract you, suck you into their swirl of energies. When you identify with a timespirit in a given field, you actually experience the

> emotions of that spirit; your consciousness is altered, so to speak. You get angry or become inflated. You feel heroic or victimized. The timespirit's energies make you moody and possessed, crazy and joyous, depressed and suicidal. (1992, p. 34)

Partly because of their intensity, I believe that one of the main characteristics of the dynamics between these roles is that they call each other to appear. Once one of them appears in the field, almost automatically another one comes in response. As I showed earlier, in my experience all of them send a double signal of vulnerability and power. Moreover the power is usually expressed in some form of attack, which potentially feels threatening. In other words, the original threat sparks one role, whichever one is chosen. This role in turn responds with a double signal, which feels threatening due to the covert power it encompasses. Thus, the double signal may act as a new threat. In that case, the new threat causes the appearance of a new role.

Diamond and Jones explain that double signals can lead to the phenomenon Process Work calls 'dreaming up.' Dreaming up, they explain:

> …refers to the effect of one person's unintended communication on another. Someone is dreamed up when they respond to another's unintended communication signals without being aware of the communication that has triggered their response. Dreaming up happens as a normal part of all human interactions. (2004, p. 27)

For example, the victim role can frustrate, irritate, or infuriate the person on the receiving end. In that case, this latter person may become a victimizer and attack. The victim role can also feel like a call for help, in which case the rescuer might appear. The victimizer role may direct the person they are interacting with to slip into the victim role. The rescuer role may make the person on the other side feel patronized. This might frustrate the person on the receiving end, who then might slip in the victimizer role and attack the rescuer.

There are endless possibilities of how each role can invite the others. This brings us to another characteristic of the roles, which is an –often- rapid switching from one to the other. One person can go through all roles during the same interaction, based on the response of the other. From one perspective, these roles seem to create a perfect dance with each other, with the same people in an interaction occupying all three of them, and switching in response to the other.

For example, the victim role, as I mentioned, may "bring" the rescuer role. However, the rescuer role may make the person in the victim role feel not understood and frustrated. In that case, the victim role may start accusing the rescuer and thus, turn into the victimizer. The rescuer then, might feel threatened by the attack of the victimizer, and turn into a victim. At this point, the roles have been switched and a new cycle might begin.

Once again there are endless possibilities of how these roles can switch inside us. However, the switch can be very fast and is usually unconscious. I have noticed in myself and others a remarkable fluidity in flipping from one role to the other. Unfortunately this fluidity is usually automatic and without awareness. Thus, the pain is perpetuated, and this often leads to more hurt, creating a cycle that can even be traumatic at times. Role switching is considered organic in Process Work (Mindell, 2010). It is a natural characteristic of the process. As I showed above, the interaction between the roles can "call" this switching to happen. However, an unconscious switch that remains unnoticed can cause further pain. One of my goals in describing these switches is to make them more familiar. I believe and have found that this helps to bring awareness to the power and vulnerability that are struggling to be seen through these roles.

I have found that we have a tendency to occupy one in particular of the three roles when we perceive a threat. This role is frequently the most familiar or habitual to us, and the one closer to our conscious identity. I believe our tendency to express a particular role is based on past experience, and more specifically, on how we learned to respond to threats and conflicts in our interactions throughout our childhood and our life in general. Our preference or tendency to slip into one role more than another is influenced not only by the specific and unique dynamics of each family, but also by societal norms, as well as cultural and historical rules and stereotypes. While I cannot explore these broader cultural influences in this project, it is worth noting that they do contribute to an individual's tendency to express a particular role.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on the three roles, victim, victimizer and rescuer, the dynamics between them and the underlying inner processes in each of them. I used my own experience as a tool of exploration. Through difficult and challenging situations, where I was accused of being one-sided and of using my power in hurtful ways, I managed to go beyond right and wrong and see what moved me to behave in a specific way. This opened up a new world for me, where I saw myself and others struggling with feeling vulnerable and/or powerful. I found that all three roles are challenged by both experiences, vulnerability and power. The two latter are more primary or secondary, depending on the role. In general, power tends to be secondary for the victim and the victimizer role, and the high rank that goes with it is hard to be identified with. The rescuer role may identify with power more, but still uses their high rank unconsciously. I also realized that irrespective of what the roles might look like from the outside, the experience of victimhood is real and painful. Conversely, I became aware that the expression of power that

is felt from the outside is also real, and although it was unconscious on my side to begin with, I discovered it was part of what formed each role. Finally, I presented how we all have a preference or familiarity with a role, but however, we are all fluid in all of them, and even more, fluid in switching between them.

Chapter Three: The Double Edge

In the previous chapter I discussed how I discovered that when I am threatened or challenged, I often slip into one of the roles of victim, victimizer, or rescuer, usually without awareness. I explored how these roles appear and interact on the dreamland level and showed that in my experience all three roles experience and express both vulnerability and power. However, I discovered that all three roles also have an edge to both vulnerability and power, which is reflected in the double signals that create unintended hurt and relationship issues. In this chapter, I name this phenomenon the 'double edge' to vulnerability and power and unfold the process behind the double edge on the essence level.

In this chapter, I use the Process Work concept of the edge, and describe Process Work techniques for going deeper into our experience to reach the essence level, and access what Mindell calls the processmind (2010). I shift from the roles to an exploration of the energies of vulnerability and power, and explore the existential and philosophical roots of the victimhood experience. Finally, I present my conclusion that a process oriented approach to victimhood reveals the roles as a call from the processmind to open up to both our vulnerability and power.

The double edge

As described in the literature review of chapter one, the Process Work concept of the edge: "marks the limits of who you are and what you imagine yourself capable of" (Mindell & Mindell 2002, p.34). An edge represents a boundary between our primary and secondary

processes, and it also contributes to our sense of a stable identity. Edges are sustained by belief systems that can be related to culture or our own personal history (Diamond & Jones, 2004).

As I continued to unfold my experience of the roles, they started to dissolve in my mind, to reveal a common struggle with a double edge: an edge to feel, identify and express either my vulnerability or my power. In every case, no matter what role I was in, I was always having difficulty to go all the way with either power or vulnerability. Depending on the situation I was in, the context etc I would choose the role that was more fitting. But in reality in all cases I had an edge to feeling both my power and my vulnerability. This double edge then became my main focus.

As I became less interested in the roles themselves, I realized that the roles are useful as a starting point, as what Process Work calls a dreamdoor, or a point of entry into the underlying process (Diamond & Jones, 2004), and that they are just different expressions of the same phenomenon.

I propose that the expression of each role reflects a slightly different structure of the double edge in each case:

- **Victim:** In the victim role, the edge to power is greater than the edge to vulnerability. Both experiences are still secondary, but the person in the victim role is more strongly identified with their weakness, and less able to consciously recognize their power.
- **Victimizer:** In the victimizer role, there are strong edges to both power and vulnerability, although the edge to power is smaller than in the victim role. Surprisingly, the person

might identify more with their victimhood, thus making vulnerability a more primary experience.

- **Rescuer:** In the rescuer role, the edge to vulnerability is greater than the edge to power. Once again aspects of the experiences of power and vulnerability are secondary, but the person in this role will more likely identify with their power more than their vulnerability.

In each case, everything starts with a threat. And every threat reminds us of our vulnerability, and calls us to feel our power. In the context of the seemingly small threats in our everyday interactions, why do we get stuck between these two edges and trapped in the expression of these painful roles? Why is it so difficult to feel our power, and our vulnerability?

To answer these questions, I will begin by describing the Process Work techniques that I used to bring awareness and unfold the dreamland level of the roles, and show how they brought me to confront the double edge and to turn to the essence level.

Confronting the Double Edge: Double Signals, Inner work and Belief Systems

Double signals

A key Process Work technique that I used to bring awareness to the role experience was tracking the unintended signals within myself and in people I was interacting with. As explained in chapter one, Process Work focuses on both the intended communication and on additional, unintentional signals that may be expressed across the different channels of our experience including body posture, movements, body feelings and tone of voice. This signal awareness

allowed me to anchor and test my growing realization that both vulnerability and power were being expressed within each of the roles.

The awareness I gained through processing the dynamics of these roles inside myself brought me some relief. I could now also see more clearly the double signals from other people. I could see how a person in the victim role, although identifying with the hurt they were feeling, was at the same time very powerful, supported by the spiritual rank of a righteous victim, and furthermore, that this power could be directed towards me at times through implicit attacks. I could also see how a person in the victimizer role would attack me and feel they were justifiably retaliating since they identified themselves as a victim. Finally, I could feel the frustration of a person in the rescuer role feeling rejected if I did not accept their solutions or objected to their condescending attitude, who might exclaim that they were just trying to help and that I am never satisfied.

Seeing these signals of unidentified power so clearly around me relieved me deeply. Before recognizing them, I would often feel confused and doubt my experiences. As power was secondary, it was expressed through double signals. Double signals are expressed usually non-verbally (body gestures, expressions, tone of voice etc), they are unconscious and they express the parts of ourselves that we don't identify with (Mindell, 1990). As Diamond and Jones (2004) point out, when we are not aware that we are receiving double signals, we might feel frustrated, irritated or confused. Thus, being able to link my experience to specific signals expressed through different channels grounded my experience. What was just a feeling before now became a tangible observation.

Bringing awareness to the three roles and their double signals of vulnerability and power gave me some relief, but it still didn't improve my situation. Even when I could see the roles in me, it was still mainly a rational understanding, not an experiential feeling of how the roles worked in me. From a process oriented perspective, I understood that I needed to further unfold my experience and particularly explore the edges to vulnerability and power that I had discovered.

I was still getting feedback for misusing many different kinds of power. I was told so many times, that I did start getting it rationally. I was waking up to the impact. However, I could not identify with this power. Power remained secondary to me, and thus it was expressed through double signals. It would come out through strong silent moods, which would strongly affect people around me; it was expressed through arguments or accusations voiced in an angry tone and a fast pace, so that people felt paralyzed; it was expressed through my signals of disapproval when people were doing something different from what I wanted them to do. Yet for me it was all springing from my victimhood experience: inside me I felt threatened and scared. My double signals naturally frustrated and confused many people. Yet I couldn't feel powerful. I took for granted my ability to respond with arguments to behaviors that were hurting me. I could see the impact of my moods, but when I was in them, I felt paralyzed and drained from all my energy. I felt I was a victim of my moods as much as the people around me. Where was this power, which everybody saw, coming from? Why couldn't I feel it too? On the other hand, I felt my victimhood was not seen. Situations and relationship conflicts were hurting me and I was feeling vulnerable. Why couldn't anybody see that? I was giving plenty of arguments to show it. I couldn't see that I had an edge to feeling and expressing vulnerability.

It was the agony of being stuck on my edges that motivated me to use further Process Work techniques and go deeper to the essence level of my experience, to find the processmind behind the roles.

Inner work

As I explained above, seeing the signals of both power and vulnerability, and being able to recognize the channels they were expressed in, was relieving. But it was only the first step. For some time, I tried to understand my experience more by doing inner work, that is to work on myself using a Process Work methodology and tools (Mindell, 1990). I will first present a brief description of inner work, as developed by Mindell (1990), and then move on to show how I applied it to my own experience.

The first step in inner work is to focus on your experience and realize in which channel this experience is happening. You notice whether you are having images (visual channel); a special body feeling, tension, heaviness (proprioceptive channel); if parts of your body are moving, or want to move, or what your posture is (kinesthetic channel); if there is a sound in your mind (auditory channel); perhaps you can't stop thinking about a relationship issue (relationship channel); or you feel world issues are occupying your attention (world channel). You also notice secondary process expressions in any channel. For example, you are identified with feeling your physical exhaustion (primary proprioceptive channel), but at the same time your foot is tapping the floor rapidly (secondary in the kinesthetic channel). The next step of the inner work is to amplify your secondary experience in the channel in which it is happening. The purpose of amplifying is to make space for the secondary process to unfold and reveal its full

meaning. The larger goal in inner work is to familiarize ourselves with our marginalized experiences, and to integrate them in the process of becoming more whole.

Focusing on my experience, I could see how my double signals were being expressed. I could see how for example I would identify as being small, and feel I want to shrink and vanish, and at the same time I would say my arguments in a loud tone, with my body standing straight and strong. Over a period of time, I tried to unfold both experiences in whichever channel they appeared. However, I was continually getting stuck at an edge. If I tried to follow my more primary experience of shrinking, I would have difficulty staying with the experience for long. Amplifying it felt very difficult. I would try to follow my body, but then my mind would soon become foggy and I would lose concentration. These are experiences that are closely linked to an edge (Diamond & Jones, 2004). On other occasions, I would try to follow my signals of power. For example, noticing my posture, I would try to stand even more straight and amplify the bigness my body was implying. However, I would again soon come to an edge. I would feel the need to shrink and hide. For a long time, I would go back and forth, stuck between the two edges. It was a painful experience that I could not shake off let alone embrace or integrate.

Process Work suggests that you explore the edge, when you feel you cannot go over it and explore the emerging secondary experience. Exploring the edge often involves exploring the belief systems that are behind the need to marginalize an experience (Diamond & Jones, 2004).

I will now briefly describe the belief systems and personal history that support my particular experience of the double edge, before moving to a more general exploration by unfolding my essence level understanding of vulnerability and power.

Belief systems at the edge

Looking at my own experience, I became aware of fears I knew I carried, but never really saw their depth before. These fears reflected cultural and family belief systems that supported my primary identity and created my edge to really unfolding my experiences of vulnerability and power.

I realized that I was more scared of the world than I was aware of. I was scared to be vulnerable. I was raised in a family where being vulnerable was equal to being weak, and being weak was disapproved and dismissed. Thus, feeling and expressing vulnerability felt like a cause for rejection. I was surprised to discover how deeply I carried this belief, and how it affected my mood, and even my perception of the world; to the point that when I was faced with challenges, it could trigger feelings from my early childhood and make me feel that the world is hostile and I should protect myself.

At the same time, I realized that being powerful was also not encouraged in my environment, both the familial and the cultural. I was often told as a child that I was too strong. In Greek culture also – at least in the way I experienced it - being different, or too strong and standing out was not approved. You are not supposed to think you are better than others, or that you have better ideas or behaviors. I became aware of my fear to clearly support my beliefs, to believe in them and feel their power.

These beliefs and fears underlie my experience of the edge to vulnerability and power, and are specific to my personal history. However I believe this double edge, which creates the roles of victim, victimizer and rescuer, is also sustained by more general, existential concerns.

Certainly, the victimology literature reviewed in chapter one, and my own observations in different cultural contexts suggest that these roles and the underlying double edge have some more universal roots. Many people seem to get stuck on this same double edge. What then is the deepest essence of the double edge to vulnerability and power?

The Victimhood Process – Essence Level

Going back to my case study, although I now knew more about the belief systems supporting my edges, I still could not go to the essence of my experience. In the end I dropped all techniques. I felt defeated. Accepting my defeat paradoxically relieved me. It allowed me to surrender to being stuck. In the end it was this surrender that took me to the essence level. At that level, it was hard to discern vulnerability from power. I was finally feeling congruent. In a way, I accepted that I was the "victim" of my process, and admitted that this process was larger than me. Allowing this victimhood, brought me in touch with my vulnerability finally. That was a big relief. And surprisingly, opening up to my vulnerability, made me feel powerful. Accepting that I am fragile, made me feel that a part of myself was beyond this fragility. Even more, I felt powerful for facing my fragility. I was at the essence level, the level of non-duality, which encompasses all dichotomies (Mindell, 2010).

By befriending my victimhood on the essence level, I discovered that the roots of this victimhood are deep. Having the experience of this level took me to a philosophical exploration of the essence of vulnerability and power. In the remaining part of this chapter, I present my own ideas and findings of this existential and philosophical exploration of the two energies. I show how I for me the double edge is a dreamdoor to existential concerns about finitude and infinite.

This philosophical exploration has been an essential part of my exploration. Along with my experience on the essence level, I felt it connected my struggle to a human struggle, which is beyond my personal psychology. In other words, it put my experience in a larger context, which holds and supports all struggle. As I will show, this larger context is what is called processmind in Process Work; the organizing field behind all events and experiences (Mindell, 2010).

A small note about the use of "I" and "we." I struggled to decide which one to use. On the one hand, I am only describing my own understanding and exploration. Therefore, I cannot claim that I speak for all diversity of experiences and understandings. At the same time, I feel that what I explore is bigger than me, and that my experience is not unique. In that sense, I decided to use both "I" and "we", while recognizing at the same time that this is simply an exploration of my own thoughts and experiences.

Vulnerability

As I have explained, the victimhood process begins with a threat. The threat, by definition, challenges our sense of security and forces us to remember that we are vulnerable. Yet the edge to vulnerability is seen in the way we often avoid expressing our vulnerability and even feeling it ourselves. I wondered, what does it mean to realize you are vulnerable? Vulnerability is a reminder and an awareness that we can be, or we are hurt, and that we can die. It is a reminder that we are separate from all other things in the world; that we have a body, which is very fragile; that we have limits and boundaries. It is a reminder of the finitude of our existence, of our finitude.

We come to this world full of vulnerabilities. From the moment we are born we experience a deep dependency on others. In the first years of our lives, we need others to fulfill all our bodily needs. We cannot feed, or clean ourselves. We can hardly move. We rely on others for learning how to interact and communicate. We also have emotional needs. We need socialization. We flourish with love and approval. We avoid actions that bear disapproval and rejection.

However, it is not only other people we need. We need all nature in order to stay alive. We need plants and/or animals to feed and water to drink. We need air to breathe. We cannot be autonomous from our environment. Our survival depends on the environment. Our finite bodies separate us from the rest of the world, but at the same time they are one with the world in terms of dependency.

Not only do we depend on the world for our survival, but also we are extremely fragile. It is overwhelming to think of all the things that can hurt and/or kill us, and the amount of conditions that need to be present for us to survive. We are vulnerable to diseases, illnesses and all kinds of viruses in the environment. We need very specific temperatures in order to survive. There are hundreds of environmental causes that can lead to our pain, injury and death. Animals, insects, and plants are potentially dangerous, as are hurricanes, storms, earthquakes, volcanoes, heat waves and extreme cold. The whole world our bodies live in, reminds us of our vulnerability and finitude. Our Earth, beautiful and majestic, can also be extremely hostile. It invites and creates life, and with the same ease it also takes it away.

Our finitude can be unbearable. It is very difficult for us to face being vulnerable, because it means we have to face our finitude, and thus face death. Facing our vulnerability raises an existential fear and a quest, independent of whether it is conscious or not.

Our awareness of our separate, finite bodies also marks a feeling and a fear of loneliness. We are alone inside our bodies. We are separate from everything else through the physical boundaries of our skin. We are individuals. We perceive the world through our brain, our thoughts and emotions. On one level at least, we are trapped in the perception of our senses. Vulnerability reminds us that our whole identity can be shattered within seconds. As Bertolt Brecht (2006) wrote in his poem “Of poor B.B.”: “we know we are provisional/ and that after us will come: really nothing worth mentioning”. In some ways, the world does not exist outside of us. We only know the world through our finite nature. And vulnerability reminds us of this finitude.

I believe the edge to vulnerability at its essence reflects a primordial need to marginalize our fragility. If we were constantly aware and open to considering all the dangers that threaten us, we would be paralyzed. We mostly want to avoid thinking about it, so that we can function.

But still, what does this fear of vulnerability mean for the way we face life? How can we protect ourselves from our physical death, our finitude? And why would we not want to express vulnerability in relationship?

Power

In my view, and through my inner work on the experience of vulnerability, I came to see that vulnerability and power are interconnected. To a degree, I can say that the separation line between them becomes fuzzy in my mind. One is born of the other, and one results in the other. So, my attempt to answer more questions around vulnerability led me to power. I saw power, in the beginning at least, as an energy born out of the need to face our vulnerability.

I have come to believe that in the victimhood process, a threat triggers our awareness of vulnerability, which in turn activates a process of using our power to protect and defend ourselves. As I will explain in this section, I speculate that the edge to our vulnerability then leads to using and valuing our power to control our environment. From this perspective, I find that the cultural value placed on a certain kind of power (the power to control) can be understood as an expression or by-product of the edge to vulnerability.

In human history there have been many attempts to deal with our finitude and vulnerability. One main attempt has come through our resourcefulness around using our power. We are not only weak, fragile and vulnerable. We also have abilities and powers that help us survive. Our power has been two-folded. We have tried to face and overcome our finitude on a physical and on a spiritual level.

On a physical level, we have tried to literally save our bodies from all environmental dangers. Our intelligence helped us realize we can control the environment around us. We can build houses that protect us from challenging weather conditions and animals. We developed and continue to develop technologies that try to turn nature to our advantage. If we can control nature,

we have nothing to fear. We can have all the food we want, and be protected from all physical threats. The hope has been that we can eliminate the pesky unpredictability of nature, which can endanger us. The more we understand the mechanisms of nature around us, the more we can ensure that nothing will harm us.

Therefore, control has been crucial for a big part of our societies, especially in the Western world. Power revolves around control. We try to control agriculture, the weather, the animals that live around us. Anything that is disturbing we wish to eliminate. True enough, our technological progress has raised our survival possibilities so far, at least on a physical level. We are more protected than ever, from environmental dangers like predatory animals, and weather conditions. Our life expectancy has never been so high in the Western world. Our whole world is indicative of our proud achievement to control our environment. The one who controls more, the strongest, is the one with the most possibilities to survive.

The power to control, with its ultimate goal of protecting us from the hostilities of the environment, is a power well known for most of us. It takes many forms in our everyday lives. It is there every time we try to kill the ants that are invading our homes, every time we feel proud for the tomatoes we planted and are coming out, every time we take the medicine that helps us overcome an illness.

It seems to me that in much of the western world, we have created societies that value, often to the point of worshiping, the ability to control. The more you control, the more successful and worthy you are. The more you are dependent on others, the more you are failing. I looked in myself and discovered my fear to share my vulnerability and expose that I am weak in any way.

Facing my vulnerability meant I had to face my finitude, my separation from the world, my embodiment and the natural limits of my body. Expressing my vulnerability would expose me to even further danger, namely the danger of being considered unworthy, being rejected from my groups and isolated, and thus, more susceptible to dangers. Declaring my dependency on others, and my need to get support and companionship, would make me less valuable, would lead to having less social rank.

A deeper kind of power: going through finitude to reach the infinite

The attempt to control our environment has not been the only way and the humans have responded to vulnerability. In an effort to address our fragility, we also attempt to create a meaning that can support us through life's unexpected and threatening events. In the course of human history, different spiritual meanings have been developed. We have created religions and discussed higher ideals, which go beyond the physical realm. These religions and ideals, often in very diverse ways, offered a deeper meaning for understanding life miseries and difficulties. They give us the message that we are connected to, and part of something bigger and stronger than our limited bodies. This part, whether it is called divine, or belief in an ideal, or nature, was there before us, will be there after us. And by being part of it, we are continuing as well. No matter what adversities we face, no matter how harmed, injured we are, and even if we die, this part remains untouched.

I have found for myself at least that the essence of this power is access to the infinite part in us. It is the part that does not succumb to this world's challenges and painful experiences. It is beyond our limited nature, and thus it cannot be affected by world's tragedies.

I discovered the beginnings of this access to the infinite part of my nature in the case study of my own victimhood experience: the threat of financial crisis in Greece exposed my vulnerability but also gave me access to unexpected, new kinds of power. Most significantly, it gave me access to the spiritual rank of being able to see a bigger picture and feel my creative ideas for a better world.

This is a power that everybody can have access to. It is a power that goes beyond social and contextual rank, beyond education and money. To borrow Goodbread's term it is an inalienable power (2010). It comes to us by right of birth. By being embodied, we are becoming just an expression of the energies and forces that have created and are moving this world, whether they are called God, or nature, or ideas. In short, this kind of power speaks to a connection with the world, rather than a separation.

The power of higher meaning and connection is widely known, shown and discussed in different contexts. One of the most prominent examples of theorizing around this power in psychology came from Frankl (1992). Frankl developed existential psychology based on his experiences at nazi camps. He observed that the people who had the largest chances of survival were the people who believed in a higher meaning. One that could go beyond the inhuman treatment they were being subjected to. One that could go beyond the irrational cruelty that they lived.

Paradoxically perhaps, this power is, in a way, the exact opposite of control. It requires and speaks to a surrender to something larger and often inexplicable. It longs for the experience of unison with the larger part of us, which encompasses the whole world.

There is also a similarity between the power to control and the power that connects us to something bigger than our bodies and physical existence. Both powers carry the concept of being untouchable. In both powers we are attempting and accessing a part that is infinite, in the sense that it is beyond anything that can be harmed by this world. For me, this is one of the reasons that we can get drunk on power and rank. It is a release, although temporary, from the bounds of finitude and fragility. It is touching the ultimate dream of invincibility. Even for a moment, we don't have to care for all the things that can harm us.

I believe that this existential struggle creates the double edge, which in turn creates the roles as an initial expression of the victimhood process. With a process oriented approach, we can see the roles as entry points into the victimhood experience, and go further into unfolding the experience of both vulnerability and power. At the essence level, we find a processmind that holds the entire process in a deeply democratic and compassionate way, seeing the value and necessity in all parts.

Through exploring the processmind beneath my experience, I became aware that my edge to feeling my power, beyond my personal, familial and cultural experiences which spoke against it, was in its deepest essence an edge to be one with the infinite.

While dwelling on the concept of power, I was reminded of the concept of hubris. Hubris is an ancient greek word, which referred to a key concept of Greeks' world view. To commit hubris meant to be arrogant, disrespectful and even abusive of your power towards other people or towards the laws of society. When somebody was committing hubris, they were thought to express behavior that showed they thought of themselves as equal or superior of Gods. Hubris

was always punished by Gods with nemesis, the wrath of Gods expressed with divine justice. For me, the concept of hubris, coming from a very different era, with different ideals and religion, shows how deep in our nature lies the edge to our power.

I was further reminded of the quote by Marianne Williamson:

> Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. (1992, p. 190)

A Call to Power and Vulnerability: a Process Oriented Approach to Victimhood

At the end, it was life, in other words the process itself, which took me deeper into myself, where I dared not go on my own. The crisis in my country, and my personal crisis got amplified to the degree that I felt stripped from all power. I could no longer resist feeling my vulnerability. My edge disintegrated, as my feelings could not be contained. In time I realized how strong this edge has been in my life. I also realized how much power I need in order to allow myself to be vulnerable. By going into my vulnerability, I surrendered to the powers that felt bigger than me; and surrendering paradoxically required more strength than fighting. I saw that it was my fighting against this surrender, which lay at the heart of all my double signals. I could not deny anymore that I needed support and people in my life. I couldn't do everything on my own. I needed relationships. I was longing for a connection to something bigger than myself.

Unfolding the process behind my victimhood experience, I found that the edge to vulnerability is connected in its depth to the edge to feeling, integrating and expressing our finitude. Conversely, I found that the edge to power is connected in its depth to the edge to feeling, integrating and expressing our infinite part. I find that both edges are useful and part of

human nature. Feeling our vulnerability can potentially paralyze us. We can't walk this world with a constant awareness of our fragility. Similarly, feeling our power is equally dangerous. Forgetting our vulnerability exposes us to dangers. Even more, identifying with our infinite part marginalizes our physical existence.

I believe that these edges comprise a tragic form of human nature. I call it tragic in the sense that it is an innate struggle, which cannot be avoided or eliminated permanently. We are both vulnerable and more than our bodies at the same time, irrespective of whether we are religious or not. Most of us have experiences of times when we felt stronger and bigger than our bodies. When although something was hurting or endangering us, we still felt relatively untouched by it.

In a way we need both edges in order to survive, and even live happily. At the same time, our survival and happiness also depends on our navigating these edges. I think our deepest nature is comprised of both. We are finite and infinite. We are both and neither. And paradoxically going over one of the two edges takes us beyond the other as well. I have found that when I dare, or I am forced to go deep into my vulnerability, is when I start feeling the strongest. And conversely, when I dare to be powerful, I am suddenly open to my vulnerability.

I feel that this awareness journey from recognizing the double signals of power and vulnerability, to unfolding them and getting stuck at the edges, and then even further beyond the edges to the essence level where the two energies became one, is transformational. We all tend to marginalize some experiences in our everyday lives to a different extent. I feel that the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer, are amongst the most difficult to explore, because of the strong

double edge to both power and vulnerability. At times, some edges can feel very difficult to overcome. The result is a painful experience of feeling stuck between them. Process Work suggests that the goal is not necessarily to go over the edge, but to grow awareness around the process. This includes valuing the edge as well. This is difficult to accept at times, especially because being stuck at the edge can feel so challenging.

In the end, I felt that through a processmind view it was possible to accept and allow all states and processes to be. Allowing them to be, somehow allows them to unfold further. This means respecting the state of being stuck at the edge as well as respecting the desire to go over it. It means respecting the difficulty and the desire to feel vulnerable and finite, and also respecting the difficulty and the desire to feel powerful and infinite. By accepting all parts, the process can unfold and unexpected change may occur. I found that the deeply democratic view of processmind is the feeling attitude, what Amy Mindell (2003) has called the metaskill, that is needed when dealing with these roles in ourselves and in others. By calling it deeply democratic, I mean that from a processmind view, all parts, viewpoints and experiences are of equal importance (Mindell, 2010).

Processmind is the field underlying all experiences. The deep value of processmind is that it does not value only the oneness, but the diversity as well. In my understanding, it is the container for both the finite and the infinite part of our nature. It is not only the essence level, where all dichotomies disappear. Rather, it underlies all levels. It is in consensus reality, where we just have a conflict with a specific person. It is also in dreamland, where that person becomes a larger role, e.g. the victimizer. It values our need to be separate and our need to connect.

As Mindell explains:

> Our ability to reject deep experience is in fact important to our overall nature as humans. This rejection separates us from our deepest nature, creating diversity, a world of many parts, and the possibility for reflection – that is, self-reflection! And saying "no" to the essence level of our experience allows us to focus more on visible signals and the tangible, consensual realities of the world. Thus, separation from the processmind gives us the ability both to create a consensus reality *and* to reflect upon what we experience – including the spaces between heaven and earth, between our own internal parts, and between people and things! Separation leads to the possibility of observation, including the possibility of noticing the processmind field between the observer and the observed. (2010, p. 21)

Through a processmind perspective, our challenges and difficulties are not "wrong", or the problems that needs to be corrected. Rather, these challenges are an integral part of the whole. It is exactly this openness to all human experience, which I believe can allow the facilitation of this difficult process of the double edge to power and vulnerability.

Conclusion

In this chapter I focused on the essence level of the victimhood process. I showed how the experience of the roles can be understood as an effect of a double edge to vulnerability and power. Then I showed how unfolding the double edge and exploring the essence of both vulnerability and power opened me up to a profound experience of my own finite and infinite nature. The investigation of my own experience in addition to my observation of people I interacted with in different contexts and relationships, led me to acknowledge that the three roles of victim, victimizer and rescuer, in their depth are different manifestations of one and only struggle; the struggle to experience and express both vulnerability and power. Using a process oriented approach and unfolding the flow of signals, at some point, the roles dissolved and

merged in my mind. My focus turned to what I have called the double edge to vulnerability and power.

My initial exploration of what lies beneath this struggle made me aware of the hurts we carry from childhood, either from family or cultural experience, which act as triggers to feeling both our vulnerability and power, and even more as inhibitors to fully identifying and expressing both energies. However, going deeper into my experience, I found that the vulnerability edge can be seen as an edge to our finite nature. It is an edge to feeling how fragile our bodies are and how dependent on our environment we are. And I realized the importance of marginalizing this awareness at times also. In a similar manner, I realized that the edge to our power on a deeper level, seems to be linked to our edge to feeling the infinite part of our nature; to feeling the part of us that can remain unharmed and untouched by the powers that can hurt our bodies.

In conclusion, I feel that somehow this double edge is an innate and essential part of human nature. It serves us and protects us from dangers. It is also very painful and hurtful, if we remain within its limits. I have a sense that power and vulnerability are interconnected and that the process of victimhood leads toward crossing the edge to vulnerability and getting to its essence, which paradoxically gives us access to a deeper kind of power, part of our infinite nature, the processmind.

Conclusion

In this paper I presented my findings and interpretation of the inner processes behind the roles of the victim, victimizer and rescuer in our everyday interactions, based on the exploration of my own experience of being in these roles. My goal was to show my conclusion that in their essence, these roles reveal one basic human struggle, namely the challenge to identify with both power and vulnerability.

My research set out to explore the following research questions:

1. How do the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer appear in subtle everyday interactions?
2. What are the inner processes behind these roles, as seen through a Process Work lens?
3. Why do we sometimes seem to get stuck in these roles?

I used a heuristic phenomenological method to investigate my own experience and to make a conceptual and theoretical contribution to the understanding of these roles from a Process Work perspective. I have shown the inner processes of the roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer as they appear in everyday interactions. In addition to the exploration of my experience, I researched and reviewed the existing literature of social and humanistic sciences, mainly in relation to situations of abuse and violence.

I found that a large body of research in many different sciences has focused on the inner processes of the roles of the victim, victimizer and rescuer. The exploration of the roles of victim

and victimizer especially touches on trauma, abuse, and thus on the timeless human investigation on whether human nature is good or evil. In my research I discovered that although the roles of victim and victimizer are distinct from an outside perspective, the inner experience of the people embodying these roles is not found to be that different. It seems that in both roles, the experience of victimhood is common whereas the experience of power is marginalized. I presented some key studies that illustrate these points.

Using an in depth study of my own experience through a Process Work lens, I described how the three roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer appear in everyday interactions. I found that the three roles of victim, victimizer, and rescuer are challenged by the experiences of vulnerability and power. In general, I found that power tends to be secondary for the victim and the victimizer role. The rescuer role may identify with power more, but still uses their high rank unconsciously. I also realized that irrespective of what the roles might look like from the outside, the experience of victimhood is a background process for all three roles. At the same time, all three roles express power in different ways, although they usually do not identify with it. Finally, I presented how the double signals of each role can dream up the other roles in the field.

My most valuable finding was that all three roles can be seen as an expression of a double edge to power and vulnerability. I found that the roles are dreamdoors to a common process, which is the process of this double edge. Thus my interest was transferred from the roles to the exploration of this edge. I believe that understanding how the double edge functions, and its implications, makes a contribution to Process Work and to our understanding of victimization. Furthermore, I feel this edge is an inevitable part of being human. I find that the concept and

practice of processmind, with its deeply democratic view of valuing all parts of human nature, can be essential in working with this process. Allowing all states and processes to be, and even more, valuing the hidden potential they carry, can be transformative in addressing the process of vulnerability and power.

The sharing of this journey to compassion was central in my writing. In the course of my studies in psychology, which started more than twenty years ago, and even through reading research for this project, I often felt discouraged to explore myself. I believe that at the altar of objective and scientific knowledge, the way of presenting human nature and psychology can sometimes feel pathologizing to the reader. I remember reading about victim and victimizer or trauma, and feeling a part of me identifying with what was written, and at the same time, feeling another voice in me saying: “no, this is nothing like me. Even if I do that, I don’t do it to that extent.” I believe that this atmosphere may inhibit many of us from exploring our experiences. Thus, one of my main goals and hopes in writing this paper, was that the reader would feel comfortable to follow their own journey while reading mine; to see and love human nature with all its faults and beauty; and to have compassion for our imperfections, which on one level at least seem perfect.

With this project I feel I have only scratched the surface in analyzing the complexity of the roles and unfolding their inner processes. I find that the implications of understanding these roles are endless, and I feel that in them lie the seeds of violence. It has been shown (Johnson, 1995; Gondolf, 1985) that violence frequently starts from small incidents and hurts, which

escalate by time. I believe that familiarizing ourselves with our inner struggle between power and vulnerability is crucial in the reduction of violence.

The fact that I am still at the beginning of this journey is evident from the limitations of this project as well. First of all, I feel that the investigation of my experience is still unfinished. There are still closed doors and foggy paths to explore. Second, although I hope that I have contributed to our knowledge through a phenomenological approach and transparent exploration of my own experience, I must accept and acknowledge the limitations of my subjective viewpoint. It would be interesting in the future to explore in depth the experience of other people in these roles, using more objective methodologies. Thirdly, my experience does not account for all instances of the existence of these roles, and certainly cannot be simply transferred and generalized to situations where there is serious abuse and violence. I believe there are similarities, however, there are many different experiences and many different versions of violence, and it would be unethical and overly simplistic at this point, to claim that it is all explained through one dynamic. Future research could address the application of my findings in the context of abuse and trauma.

Finally, I would like to offer a couple of speculative thoughts about the application of this work to world issues. I feel that our struggle to identify with our finitude has important world implications. We live in times of big changes. Financial crises are not anymore a challenge for the poor countries only. Although on an everyday level we forget we are all interconnected, the global economy is one more example of our interdependence. In the last six years, both the European Union and the United States have been struggling to overcome financial crises.

Furthermore, an environmental crisis is threatening our existence and the future generations. I feel that the apathy, or the lack of action on our part to these challenging world issues is partly connected to this struggle. The fact that we feel small and unable to bring big change often paralyzes us. We become victims. We try to forget, or are too exhausted and overwhelmed to take action. And while it is true that we are small and separate, and that there is only so much we can do, I feel that this paralysis is also debilitating and hurtful to us as well; and at the same time, we are bigger than we think. I feel that times demand that we discover the eldership inside us, and steer towards finding the smallness and bigness inside us, rather than looking for an outside leader and elder. As Process Work suggests, leadership and eldership are only moments and roles inside any human being. Thus, it is impossible to demand that any human being can hold them permanently for all of us.

Afterword … A Different Definition of Power

I have spoken of different kinds of power in this project. There is the power of enforcing your will, the power of entitlement, the power of control, the inalienable power of being one with something bigger than ourselves. There is also the power that is linked with abuse and conversely power which is used benevolently. Through my research and my personal experience, I came up with a different definition of power. I felt that power for me is the ability to be all of who I am. To open up, embrace, incorporate and express all the different conflicting energies I encompass. To broaden my identity so that it includes all my marginalized experiences. And strangely enough, this kind of power requires my vulnerability. Only through accepting and facing my vulnerability can I reach this power. And conversely, when I am most powerful, I can stand being vulnerable.

The longing for us to be whole, and find a way to incorporate and integrate all that we are is also tragic and beautiful in my eyes. By being embodied and finite, we are destined to be separate. But it is through this body and this finitude that we get to experience the infinite. This longing and its impossibility is expressed so eloquently in the following quote of the poem "Dust" by Kiki Dimoula (1998, own translation from Greek):

> One more rupture of the Whole
> It keeps breaking
> Before it even exists, it breaks
> As if its being exists for exactly this purpose, to not be.

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