

**UNCOVERING ‘WHO WE REALLY ARE’**  
**Personas and the Triangle Game**  
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We were all born as pure essence beings, complete and perfect. Then ‘life happened’. We all had experiences that obscured our essence in some way. In response, we began to build shields of protective armor around our essence. These defense structures become our personas.

‘Persona’ is the word we use for an aspect of ourselves that we assume or a role that we play. The word ‘persona’ comes from the Latin word for “mask”. Carl Jung says that “the persona is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual.” (Carl Jung, "The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious" (1928). In CW 7: Two Essays on Analytical Psychology. P.305)

As Jung said, some personas get us positive recognition, while others are more ‘troublesome’ personas which come forth when we are pressured, stressed or threatened or when the ‘positive’ ones aren’t working. Examples of positive personas are: ‘super competent’ or ‘good listener’ or ‘helpful daughter’, while more troublesome personas are ‘rebel’ or ‘overwhelmed’ or ‘critical judge’. Both our positive personas as well as our troublesome personas keep our issues, concerns, or problems in place.

Our personas tend to come from one of three ‘tribes’. Our teachers, Drs. Gay & Kathlyn Hendricks, currently use the terms: **Villain**, **Victim**, and **Hero** as names for these three ‘tribes’. When we are interacting with others from our Victim, Villain or Hero personas, we say we are participating in the ‘**drama triangle**’.

Gay Hendricks says, “There is a quick way to find out if you are making a relationship problem worse. Ask yourself if you are playing one of three roles: victim, persecutor, or rescuer (often called victim, villain or hero). Each of these roles is deadly; each makes relationship problems worse. You cannot solve any relationship problem if you are playing one of these roles.... Victim is the most popular role. If you look around you in life, you will notice that most people are eating up their creative energy in dramas of victimhood. They perceive themselves as the victim of something – their boss, the world, their headaches. The energy that’s consumed by playing victim is exactly the amount of energy that’s required to change their lives.... It is absolutely imperative for you to avoid thinking of yourself as a victim, and equally important to avoid placing other people in the role of your persecutor. But the third role – the rescuer – is also highly toxic to your mental health. When you step into the rescuer role – by being nurse or avenging angel or caretaker – you actually disempower the person you are trying to empower. The rescuer often keeps the whole toxic drama going.” (from The Ten-Second Miracle, 1998, by Gay Hendricks, p. 127 – 128)

Here's one version of the drama triangle:

**Damsel in distress (Victim):** I can't pay the rent!

**Villain:** You must pay the rent!

**Hero:** I'll pay the rent!

You will find if you watch sit-coms on TV that the drama triangle is the basis for all of the interactions. If you explore your relationships with other people and the world around you, you will notice that at times you fall into each of the roles on the triangle.

We originally developed our personas to deal with feelings that were too confusing or overwhelming for us to handle. When we are operating from within a persona, we do not think creatively. We think "I AM my persona". We think we have no choice about how we respond to a given stimulus. We are on automatic pilot, run by our past programming. The persona keeps us locked into familiar patterns of interaction. When we are in persona we do not have to feel our feelings, but we also do not get to experience genuine love.

Most of us get in trouble because we use our personas as a way of hiding feelings or getting attention. When a persona does not work, we often 'run' it more forcefully instead of discarding it. The only way we can get out from under our personas is to find the authentic feelings on which they were or are based.

From within personas there is no possibility of genuine freedom. Even when they work, personas conceal authenticity. Our teacher, Dr. Gay Hendricks says, "A persona is like a pair of boxer shorts that is 2 sizes too small." (personal communication)

However, the answer is not to try to get rid of our personas. Each of our personas is smuggling a piece of our essence in it, our spiritual core. The best way we have found to loosen the grip of personas is the 'triangle game' and 'persona play'. In both the triangle game and persona play, we take a persona and deliberately magnify it, make it 'bigger'. We deliberately let ourselves become our personas and allow others to interact with them, to talk to them. We may dress up, use props, talk like a persona, use exaggerated body postures or facial expressions. In that way we find out what is important to our personas, when and where they were created, what they are most afraid of and what they really want.

In playing with our personas we learn how they interact with other people. Each of our personas has a whole set of 'requirements'; i.e. those complementary personas that it calls forth in others. When Marlene is being her 'sharp pencil' persona, Bob tends to be a 'loose cannon' persona, in other words, we 'attract' other personas that keep us in our persona. We call that a 'persona interlock'. The triangle game helps us uncover our persona interlocks.

The goal of persona play is not to get rid of our personas. Our goal is to be able to make friends with our personas. We want to be able to choose when we use a certain persona,

like we might choose what article of clothing we want to wear. Persona play helps us understand our personas, and explore the feelings underneath and the essence or genius qualities that the persona is hiding. Playing with our personas helps us to uncover our essence, 'who we really are' at our core.

*Marlene & Bob Neufeld practice body-centered Coaching and Psychotherapy. They are a couple who help couples learn life-changing skills and create closer, more loving relationships with one another. To learn more, see [www.marleneandbob.com](http://www.marleneandbob.com) or call 613-594-9248 to arrange a complimentary 1-hour introductory session*