

THE VICTIM
ARCHETYPE



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THE VICTIM ARCHETYPE

HOW TO RECLAIM YOUR POWER by SUSANNA BARLOW

The Victim Archetype

There are few archetypes as pervasive and deeply entrenched into our cultural identities than the Victim. Many books and movies use the Victim as a protagonist to great effect. Everyone can relate to the Victim and we love to root for the underdog, the downtrodden and the disadvantaged. There is nothing wrong with this because hidden within the Victim is the Victor. I believe part of our fascination with this archetype and our cultural attachment to it, is the desire for transformation and personal empowerment that comes from the Victim becoming the Victor.

The root of the Victim archetype is a fear that you cannot survive or will not survive. Not just physical survival but the survival of your identity, your hopes and dreams or sense of self. Deep down there is a belief that you don't deserve to thrive and the Victim is a way to have passive control over your life.

All victims are entitled. It may take you some time to see your own sense of entitlement but it is important to identify it to be able to transform this interesting archetype from shadow to light. Working through the Victim may be the most difficult thing you do but it is the most life altering as well.

The Victim & The Villain

It is impossible to be a Victim without there also being a Villain. Your Villain may be something as simple as your work schedule or seasonal allergies but it doesn't take long for the Victim to perceive the situation as a Perpetrator or Villain. There are extreme examples of Victims and Villains such as prisoners of war and their captors, the child and abusive parent, the jailer and the convict - but the dynamics between the two are the same. One (the villain) has the power and the other (the victim) is powerless and at the mercy of the other. Recognizing the Villain is as important as recognizing your victimization.

Here are examples of the kind of things we can feel victimized by:

Motherhood or **fatherhood**. Feeling like a victim to your children and their care as though you have no choice.

Illness, injury and **disease** is a common one. You can feel a victim to your body, feeling you have no control over whether your body will heal or that your body has failed you and you cannot come to terms with an injury or disease.

Insomnia and **allergies** are two more common villains that many people must deal with. The lack of control that these issues cause, can plunge a normal person right into instant victimization.

Money is another major villain for many people. The lack of money, feeling victimized by debt collectors, feeling like you don't make the amount of money you deserve are examples of how you may feel victimized by the lack of money. Or on the flip side, you could feel like your wealth is a burden and feel victimized by how others expect you to help them with your loads and loads of money. Your relationship to money is great place to observe your Victim.

Even our **jobs** can be a source of victimization. You could feel unhappy or abused in a job and feel powerless to change the situation. Believing your financial security comes from a job or career is an example of feeling victimized by your job. Maybe you are the CEO of your company. You may also find yourself a victim to others' expectations and demands, paying employees before yourself and even a victim to others' perception of your role.

One interesting villain is your **gender**. You can feel victimized by being a woman or a man and especially by the roles the over-culture expects of woman or man. This victimization can be seen in many of today's sitcoms on TV where cultural stereotypes are amplified and highlighted.

Education can be a source of victimization as you may feel constrained and controlled by the system of education that decides what hoops you must leap through in order to get a degree. Or that the law demands you to go to school if you are a younger person.

Religion and the organization of such religions can be felt as victimizing because of the stringent expectations and demands that many religious organizations require to be a good member. This is true, really, of any organization. But in a religious setting the stakes are higher because usually your soul or personal salvation is on the line.

Another really common villain is appearance of the **body**, such as being overweight, aging and your genetic inheritances (i.e. "three generations of my family died of heart disease so I will probably die of it too" or "being overweight runs in my family. I have a fiery personality because of my red hair.) Blaming, even when it is done factually is still giving power to the Victim.

Feeling like a victim to your country's **government**, or to the **law** is another one. When you feel like a law is unjust a Victim will feel justified in complaining and in more extreme cases, such as losing your child in a custody battle, you may feel angry and resentful toward the judge or the law.

Or the expectations of our **culture** such as stereotypes can be a real means to falling into victimization for example, if you are from another country, you may feel shame about your heritage or you may be trying to fit in when it goes against who you are. This can cause you to feel like a victim to how others perceive you.

Fate. Many people have resigned themselves sorrowfully to fate, feeling like victims of fate and believing they are unable to have any control over their own destinies. Ideas about predestination and everything that happens was pre-planned can be a way to avoid responsibility. One of the key aspects to the Victim is the avoidance of personal responsibility.

A final word on examples of villains and perhaps the most powerful of all villains is our **thoughts**, **emotions** and our **fears**. These inner perpetrators can have more power to victimize than all the other villains put together.

The Victim & The Enabler

Enabling and victimization go well together and in most relationships where there is a strong Victim there will often be an Enabler nearby ready to reinforce the victim's victimization. Many victims will seek out enablers to keep the Victim feeling justified and entitled. Enablers enjoy their role because it guarantees the Victim will keep needing them and they will have the loyalty and acceptance of the Victim as well as a cultural nod of approval for your support of the Victim. If you aren't sure about your Victim and the mask it wears just notice the Enabler in your life. Enablers are easy to spot because they are the person you seek out when you want someone to sympathize with your struggle and they encourage the indignant sense of the Victim being wronged. Enablers enjoy the attention and being special, perhaps they are the only one the Victim can talk to. Enablers are simply Victims in disguise. This trap of approval can keep the Enabler as blind as the Victim.

The Victim Is the Perpetrator

When we are feeling victimized we are almost always in the act of victimizing someone else simultaneously. For example, if you are ill and feeling victimized by your disease you tend to complain or suffer loudly and this can victimize others. When you make your illness the centre of attention and nothing can be more important others can feel overlooked. Another example is when you are feeling like a Victim and you withdraw from others. This can be painful to loved ones and can be a form of victimization for them. Expectations and obligations create victims. When you have unmet expectations, you can feel victimized by the failed expectation. (It wasn't supposed to rain today. The weather forecast said no rain!) Or when you feel obligated to do something and you do not want to do it, this can turn into a victimization. This vicious cycle of Victim to Perpetrator then back to Victim is a painful realization because Victims need to feel innocent and blameless to maintain their victim status. Unless of course you have turned your sense of powerlessness into self-victimization.

Self-Victimization

Victimizing the self is a sneaky way of being a victim without being so obvious, but the pattern is identical to that of any other victim/villain relationship. You victimize yourself by beating up on yourself, speaking harshly and regarding yourself with disdain and self-loathing. You will not accept praise from others easily or be willing to look at your own successes and personal empowerment without having a secret dagger used to (metaphorically) stab yourself in the back. What does one gain by victimizing the self? Entitlement. Of all the Victim dynamics, self-victimization has the strongest element of entitlement. There is a deep unconscious belief that the self-abuse the Victim regularly inflicts is a great big permission slip. I have suffered so. . . (I am entitled to my unhappiness, my grief, depression, my pain, my revenge etc.) This sort of entitlement can be so difficult to spot that many who self-victimize are unaware of their entitlement. The Victim says, "I will never have what I need unless you/they/it. . ." Self-victimization says, "I will never have what I need and want because there is something wrong with me therefore. . ." That gives you the entitlement to complain, to remain stuck, to impose your suffering on others and to reject those that are offering support. Self-victimization is the ultimate example of the Victim/Perpetrator dynamic as you see how painful it is to be on both ends.

You don't have to look very far to find an abundance of examples of the Victim archetype. It might even be helpful to identify the sort of Victim that you relate to the most or the way you perceive it and to the method of entitlement that goes with the Victim.

Variants of the Victim

The victim has been around for so long that there are many and varied expressions of the victim. I will touch on just a few of them here. Perhaps you will identify one or two in yourself or maybe it will help you discover the way your own victim behaves. Most of us can be quite unaware of what the victim looks like in "me" while finding it easy to spot in others. Read through the list and see if you can see yourself.

The Patient: Victim to your health or lack thereof, victim to the bodily functions, diseases or injuries. Entitled to be healthy, to be healed and to have someone else responsible for your health and healing, such as a doctor/surgeon etc. It is also common to place the blame on this person when things go wrong.

The Prisoner: Victim to someone else's desire, manipulation, demands and absolute control. Entitled to revenge, exploitation, vigilante justice and anger.

The Long-Sufferer: Victim to circumstances and others' actions. Entitled to sympathy, attention, complaining and support of others.

The Robot: Victim to internal programming and stories. Entitled to being disconnected, judgmental and superior.

The Weaking: Victim to external demands, victim to the belief that you are helpless, overwhelmed and handicapped. Entitled to inaction, confusion and fear or rescue, advice and help.

The Crusader: Victim of loneliness, negativity and self-hatred. Entitled to recruiting others into being victims and victimizing those you believe deserve to be punished. *(These sorts are doomsayers, everything is wrong with the world, and conspiracy theorist types.)*

The Doormat: Victim to being taken advantage of, overworked, used and abused. Entitled to love, support, acceptance, approval and friendship.

The Hider: Victim to your own inadequacies and lack of confidence. Entitled to withdraw or hide, *(such as hiding your true feelings)* judging others, and to have others understand you, *(read your mind)*.

The Dummy: Victim to perceived lack of intelligence and mental acuity. Entitled to be uninformed, blameless and irresponsible.

The Cohort or Accomplice: Victim to others' influence, pressure and manipulation. Entitled to leniency, finger-pointing and immunity.

The User: Victim to scarcity, want, deficiency and robbery *(i.e. high gas prices, school fees and other kinds of robberies. This kind of victim will use terms like, highway robbery and stealing)*. Entitled to charity, to ask for favours, for aid and assistance as well as to blame others who you perceive to be are better off than you are.

The Righteous: Victim to trials and tribulation, afflictions and misfortunes. Entitled to respect, rewards, awards, fame/notoriety, compliments and adulation.

You can see how other archetypes influence the way your personal victim expresses itself. While there are many other variants, hopefully this list will help you identify the Shadow Victim in yourself.

The Shadow Victim

While I have already covered many behaviours of the Shadow Victim there is some general symptoms that will make it easier to realize when you have fallen into the shadow aspect of the Victim.

Behaviour: No energy, strong draw toward addictive behaviours, constant need to distract yourself, blaming yourself or others, complaining often and loudly, withdrawal from others, tends toward inaction and passivity or domination and control.

Emotions: Feels angry, frustrated, hurt, depressed, guilty, shameful, worthlessness and hatred. These feelings are the clues to understanding how to transform the Shadow Victim. An excellent book on understanding the messages of your emotions is Karla McLaren's book: *The Language of Emotions*.

Shadow Victim Storyline: It's not my fault/It's all my fault, I am always getting hurt, no one really understands me, I didn't have a choice, what am I supposed to do? this always happens to me and so on.

Unmet Expectations & Depression

The Shadow Victim always has expectations that others/self will not or cannot meet. Having lost all boundaries of self-protection you lash out like a cornered animal. When that doesn't work you pull in, inverting the strong emotions associated with the Shadow Victim into a deep depression. It takes a lot of weight and heaviness to hold down all those raging emotions that come from the angry and hurt feelings of victimization. This weight is the burden of the Shadow Victim's depression. This depression usually alternates between an eruption of strong emotions followed again by depression. This is the cycle of the Shadow Victim.

The Shadow Victim & Feeling Worthless

The Shadow Victim has become disconnected from personal worth. You lose touch with your intrinsic worth as a Victim. As a Victim, if the culture devalues you as you are, or devalues your behaviour, you will accept this opinion about you so that you can then belong. Blaming others or outside forces, even your own body (for how you feel and what happens to you) is a response to feeling worthless and powerless. Feeling stuck, separated from others and alienated from what you believe will make you happy and whole is a common complaint of the Shadow Victim and only feeds into the belief that you are worthless. When you believe you are worthless you stop trusting in yourself, deepening the separation and the sense that you no longer belong. This emptiness and loss cause the Shadow Victim to become more entrenched in fear, addictions and apathy.

The Shadow Victim & Power

The Shadow Victim's power is frozen in time and it often takes looking backward to find the moment you gave up your power. Challenging the Shadow Victim is no small thing. The Victim's energy is powerful, and in the Shadow this power is being experienced as the power to dis-empower. The Shadow Victim is an expression of a root chakra wound where survival and the need to belong predominate. Fear is a strong motivator for survival and is a feature of the Shadow Victim.

Fear-based information feeds the Shadow Victim and causes you to look outside yourself for comfort, answers, support or empowerment. When you look outside yourself for the answer your awareness diminishes and your consciousness lowers. The Shadow Victim encourages you to be afraid of change and uncertainty. This causes two reactions: domination, which is proactive control, or apathy and helplessness, which is passive control. Both reactions prevent the transformation of the Victim archetype. The challenge for the victim is this: Should I give up my power in exchange for not being at fault? Can I take responsibility for what is happening to me and recognize the power that I do have?

The Enlightened Victim – From Victim to Victor – Feel the Fear

A good way to begin transforming the Shadow Victim into the Enlightened Victim is to feel the fear and do it anyway. In the *Wizard of Oz* all of the main characters are representations of the Shadow Victim in various forms. **Dorothy** is the **Long-Sufferer**, subject to circumstance and loss of control, needing sympathy. The **Scarecrow** is the **Dummy**, who is blameless and uninformed. The **Tin-Man** is the **Robot**, disconnected and judgmental. The **Cowardly Lion** is a **Weakling**, who is unwilling to act and full of fear. The **Wicked Witch** of the West is the **Crusader** as she recruits others (the flying monkeys) to do her bidding and wants to victimize others and feels entitled to the ruby slippers. The **Wizard** is the **Righteous**, feeling misunderstood and seeks fame and importance to cover up his insecurities. All these characters transform themselves and empower the Victim to become the Victor. Being afraid and not running from that fear is the first step to transforming the Victim into the Victor.

Finding Your Personal Power

The Enlightened Victim understands that real power comes from within and is bound up with personal responsibility. When you are the Enlightened Victim you cannot blame others because you can see that the loss of power happens from within. It would be useless to look for empowerment where it does not exist. The Enlightened Victim asks, "what can I do with the situation that I have been given?" There is this great scene from *The Lord of the Rings* movie where Frodo, feeling victimized by the fact that the ring of power has come to him, says to Gandalf: "I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened." And Gandalf answers him wisely: "So do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us. There are other forces at work in this world, Frodo, besides the will of evil. Bilbo was meant to find the Ring. In which case, you were also meant to have it. And that is an encouraging thought." Here Gandalf shows Frodo where his true power lies. There are some things in life that are not for us to decide but we can decide what to do with what we have been given, or what has happened to us. It is a very encouraging thought.

Power Through Victimization

Sometimes we are not aware of how powerful we are and how much control we have over our lives. Sometimes being thoroughly victimized allows us to see where our real source of power is, inside ourselves. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl describes his own experience of discovering personal power in the midst of death and suffering at Auschwitz Concentration Camp. "We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." This statement reflects the wisdom Frankl gained while being brutally victimized in a death camp. It's pretty hard to beat that kind of power. So, sometimes the very act of being victimized can be a portal to reconnecting with our true power.

Another example of this, is the film *Gladiator* with Russell Crowe and Joaquin Phoenix. Maximus, General of the Roman Armies is captured by a slave trader who sells him to another trader as a Gladiator fighter. He is forced to kill for sport or die for sport. He is the ultimate example of the Victim but he uses his power and skill as soldier to defeat not only every person that faces him in the amphitheater and the Colosseum but by harnessing the power of the mob, he is able to have more power than the Emperor himself. A slave that becomes more powerful than an Emperor without ever rising above his station is a superb example of using the power you have access to and not feeling victim to the power you have not.

The Enlightened Victim & Compassion

The Enlightened Victim has learned the power of compassion through personal experience. The Enlightened Victim has found victory and wants to support others however it can be done. The story of *Les Miserables* is a good example of the compassion of the Enlightened Victim. When Jean Valjean is given love and trust by a compassionate priest after stealing his silver, he changes his life and devotes it to doing good for others, especially those who have been victimized. He is willing to risk being caught and taken back to prison to help Fantine and her daughter Cosette. The title of the book has been translated from French in many forms including *The Miserable*, *The Wretched*, *The Poor Ones*, *The Wretched Poor*, or *The Victims*. It is another powerful look at the Victim in both the Shadow and the Light and how compassion becomes a part of the Enlightened Victim. The Shadow Victim is wonderfully portrayed by the Thenardiers, who take in poor Cosette. They are the perfect example of The User.

Another good example is the book *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom. Her family offers shelter to Jews being hunted and victimized by the Nazi's until one day Corrie, her father and her sister become the victims of the Nazi machine.

Her sister is a constant source of strength and she never loses her sense of optimism and hope throughout their imprisonment even though she eventually loses her life. Corrie learns lessons of forgiveness and compassion for those who had abused her and killed her family. She transforms her victimization into compassion and love. Recognizing compassion as a form of empowerment is one of the great gifts of the Victim archetype.

The Enlightened Victim & Boundaries

The Victim is very good at helping us become aware of patterns that don't work and behaviors that result in heartache and pain. But it is not enough just to see what isn't working, it is at this point the Enlightened Victim sets boundaries. Setting boundaries is a two-part process, at least for me. First, define what works and what doesn't work. In other words, find your spiritual, physical, emotional and mental thresholds or limits and name them for yourself. Name or define your values to help you discover your limits and why you have them in the first place. The Enlightened Victim is aware of exactly where your boundaries are and why the boundaries should be maintained. The Enlightened Victim, in order to protect those boundaries, is very direct and straight-forward leaving no room for the Shadow Victim to squeeze in. Feeling anger is a good way to tell if your boundaries have been crossed and victimization is about to begin. The Enlightened Victim helps you understand and define what your boundaries will be and then it lets you know when those boundaries are about to be violated. Learning to be direct and assertive happens when the Shadow Victim is transformed into the Enlightened Victim. Having and maintaining healthy boundaries makes it much more difficult for others to take advantage of you and victimize you.

(Note: You will never be able to maintain good boundaries if you do not learn to take responsibility for the loss of those boundaries.)

The Enlightened Victim & Vulnerabilities

The Enlightened Victim is not afraid of weakness and fragility because you maintain vulnerability as a strength. You have learned that power can be found even in the worst victimization. You are no longer afraid of failures, losses, tragedies, suffering and misfortune because none of these outer circumstances has the power to control your life. Vulnerability is the keystone of your strength because it allows you to discover different kinds of power and especially recognize the strength of openness. Vulnerability makes you pliable and willing to be changed by your circumstances without losing your power.

Questions for Understanding the Victim Archetype

- Do you feel you have lost control of over some part or parts of your life?
- Is there something/someone that feels threatening to your happiness and peace?
- Do you feel like life or others owe you something? Or that you deserve something for what you have gone through?
- Do addictions and/or distractions play a large role in your life?
- Do you always feel tired, run down, with no support?
- Do you feel justified in complaining about what has happened to you?
- Do you say phrases such as "I can't do anything about that!", "That's not my fault!?" or "What did you expect me to do?"
- Do you feel as though everything you do is wrong or ineffective?
- Do you feel broken and irreparable?
- Does some part of your life feel controlled by external power?

Meditate Upon these Questions for Reclaiming your Power

- What do I have power over, in this situation? What can I alter or affect?
- Does this situation/person cause me to feel anger? (Check your boundaries)
- What would it feel like to draw toward fear, rather than pushing away from it?
- When I resist solutions what would happen if I questioned my thoughts about the solutions?
- What if I said Yes instead of No to whatever is in front of me?
- Have I explored every option?
- What have I discovered about my power in past successes?
- What thoughts am I believing about the situation that are keeping me dis-empowered?
- How is my victimization possibly victimizing someone else?
- How could compassion shift my perception of what is happening?

Meditating upon questions that require you to look inside yourself is a useful tool. Don't try to answer the question as much as letting the answers arise out of your own wisdom, in their own time. The Victim archetype is a powerfully transformational archetype. Don't get discouraged working with it and be gentle with yourself through the process. I hope this article provides an opportunity to explore this archetype more deeply and effectively.

This booklet on The Victim Archetype is also available electronically on my website. To download this booklet as well as a collection of other booklets and CD's, please visit my website – **www.susankriegler.com** - or scan the QR Code below. If you would like to schedule an appointment, please contact my reception.

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