

Triangles

Susan Peabody

Psychologically, triangles are very complicated. Most people don't seek them out—at least not consciously. They just seem to happen. One moment you are happily single. The next thing you know you are in love with someone who is married. Or you are happily married and suddenly you realize your partner is seeing someone else.

Sane people get out of a triangle as soon as they realize they are in one. Love addicts stay engaged hoping things will resolve themselves in time. This is because love addicts can't let go. They have no tolerance for separation anxiety. Once they have bonded with someone, letting go is like death to them. Some love addicts in a triangle will die trying to get to a resolution. They kill themselves or they kill someone in the triangle. The media is full of crimes of the heart.

One of the reasons love addicts have a high tolerance for the pain of a triangle is because when they were children the natural triangle between the mother, father, and child went horribly wrong. Usually the child was rejected by one of the parents and incested by the other—not necessarily sexual incest but certainly covert or emotional incest. The rejection/incest magnifies the triangle. The Oedipus experience, in which the child adores one parent and is in competition with the other, is not outgrown. Instead it becomes rooted in the child's psyche and wounds him or her.

All this means that the triangle is familiar and in some respects comfortable. This, in turn, means that the person involved has a high tolerance for the pain and suffering of the triangle once they get involved in one. Furthermore, some love addicts unconsciously try to

resolve the wound of their childhood by recreating the triangle of their childhood—over and over again. They are obsessed with the idea that things will end differently each time. Unfortunately, this is not how you heal the wounds of childhood. You don't go back to the scene of the crime and commit the crime all over again. You go back to the scene of the crime in therapy with an enlightened witness to guide you. You go back to grieve, forgive, let go and move on.

There are also those who accept the down side of the triangle for the ecstasy that often goes with it. Triangles can be like roller coasters. When one person is the front runner he or she is as high as a kite. But everyone pays a high price for the thrill of being chosen at any given moment—the winner of the competition. This, too, is often tied in with the early Oedipus experience in which the child is trying to get the parent she adores to choose her over the other parent.

The most important thing to know about triangles is that they are unhealthy, painful, and potentially dangerous. We are meant to be monogamous for more reasons than I can recount here. Only hedonists and sex addicts really defend the agony and ecstasy of the triangle. I also agree with professionals who believe there are rarely three willing partners in a *ménagé a trois*. Someone is usually unhappy even if they don't admit it. So if you ever find yourself in a triangle get out. Walk away. Cut your losses. Even if you are married with kids, walk away until your partner gets into recovery and gives up his, or her, penchant for multiple partners.