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## MARITAL ROLE EXPECTATIONS BASED ON TRIANGLE BY STEVE KARPMAN

*The article presents the results of research of role expectations in marital interaction between men and women according to the concept of the Drama Triangle by S. Karpman. The results of the study reveal the peculiarities of the use of the Drama Triangle role triad by married men and women, as well as the expectations from the partner to fulfill these roles and of their role contribution for the sense of mutual support in marital relations. Statistically significant gender differences in manifestations of the role triad of the Drama triangle have been found. They are reflected in the phenomenon of cultivation of the Rescuer role in family interaction, in significance of the act of registration of marriage for actualization of the role of the Rescuer, in the peculiarities of switching between the roles of Victim - Persecutor and in inclusion of a role triad in the construction of marital and parent-children relationships. It has been proved that actualization of the Rescuer role in family interaction grows in men together with the indicator of age, and in women together with the duration of marital life and the increase in the number of children over two. It has been proved that the role of the Victim in marital life is activated in the situation of reducing the material status, and Persecutor – in a situation of conflict and antagonism.*

**Keywords:** marital interaction, gender differences, relationships, roles, role position, the « Drama triangle».

### Introduction

Despite the rapid development of scientific achievements, the issue of psychology of marital life continues to be inadequately studied, and for each new generation the desire for perfect marital relationships and “love throughout all life” appears as a task. On the other hand, scientific achievements are mostly focused on explaining constraints and obstacles to the achievement of desirable ideas. One of these concepts is S. Karpman’s “Drama Triangle”, which fixes cyclical stagnation processes in communication, which can be mistakenly taken by spouses as acceptable to family well-being from the point of view of keeping persistence indices. In practice, the efficacy of the application of this concept has been confirmed and disclosed in detail in foreign studies [5-6; 8-9]. However, its empirical verification, in particular in Ukrainian science, needs to be elaborated and refined. It is important for a psychologist who works with married couples to distinguish the network of these relationships, identifying the developing ones and taking into account the stagnating ones.

At present, in the area of domestic research scientific achievements of P. Gornostay concerning the role approach in social psychology of personality can be noted, as well as the works of A. Nikonova, who studied the shifting of roles in “Drama triangle” in co-dependency relationships [2; 3-4]. She proves that the role of a “victim” may be a sign of co-dependent personality, and the role of a “rescuer” may indicate a request for personal support, which, when embedded into a system of Drama triangle, causes merely switching the role positions without solving a problem situation [3-4]. She also establishes

the gender conditionality of variability of inclusion of participants in the game interaction. The latter position is particularly important in the development of marital interaction, and currently it has not been studied on families without the characteristics of co-dependency.

Thus **the purpose of this article** is to study the role expectations of men and women in marital interaction according to the role concept of Drama triangle. The following **tasks** served achieving the goal: to determine the probability of use of role triad of Drama triangle by married men and women and expectations from the partner to fulfill these roles, and their contribution to mutual feeling of support in marital relations.

### Research Methods

To carry out the identified tasks, the developed instruments were formed into one diagnostic unit, which included a questionnaire to determine the social status characteristics of respondents (age, marital, financial), a test to determine the roles of Drama triangle (O. Nikonova); Network of Support Relationships Method (by U. Furman D. Burmest) and author’s questionnaire on satisfaction in different areas of marriage [3; 7]. The study was conducted in 2015 with the use of questionnaires in Ukraine mainly among residents of Kyiv and the region. The sample consisted of 250 individuals (78% - women) aged from 19 to 75 years and marital life experience from 0.5 to 55 years. Most of the respondents lived in marriage and had children. Only a small part of the sample (10.4%) presented couples lived with their spouses without registration of marriage (mostly young people under 30 years).

**Research Results and their Discussion**

The analysis of the sample for the social functioning of respondents indicates that they are well balanced without marked deviations and characteristics of co-dependence. A distinguishing feature of the sample is its readiness to marriage and well-being: their support and development. Analysis of the average numbers of the “Network of Support Relationship” test data has shown the domination of scores (above 60 points) on relations of support (by a partner and of a partner) and requests for support (of a partner and from a partner) and also displays of sociability. However, manifestations of criticism, antagonism and conflict received average indicators lower than 45-55 points. Respondents are mostly happy with family life; they have no such areas that could be called

truly problematic: all areas without exception have average indicators significantly higher than 50 points and the average satisfaction with family life is 70.58 points. The respondents expressed the greatest satisfaction with the children’s well-being, psychological and sexual relations. They were the least satisfied with financial sphere, joint leisure time, fixing thereby the subjective feeling of reducing a sense of resourcefulness in them. In this perspective, we can note that, according to theoretical concept of Drama triangle, a feeling of reduced resourcefulness and impairment of power may constitute the risk of “starting the game” [8-9]. This is also indicated by revealed significant level of representation of the three roles of Drama triangle in respondents, especially a “persecutor” and a “victim” (Table. 1).

Table 1.

*Average Numbers of Assessments of Own Roles from the Drama Triangle (N = 250)*

Indexes	Avg.numbers	Std.deviation	Std. avg. error. (95%)
I am a Victim	52.03	11.59	1.44
I am a Persecutor	62.21	14.89	1.85
I am a Rescuer	62.67	12.07	1.5

While studying the peculiarities of manifestation of these three role positions in the marital interaction, it was found that the role of a rescuer is prevailing with an in-

crease in the duration of marriage and age indicator, where the latter also points at the growing expectation of this role from a partner (tab. 2).

Table 2.

*Significant Correlations of Role Positions According to Social-Status Characteristics of the Respondents*

Duration of marriage	up to 1.5 years	6-10	11-20	20 or more	-	H	p
I am a Rescuer	59.62	60.54	60.54	70.76	-	29.47	0.000
Age	up to 30 years old	31-40	41-55	55 and older	-	H	p
I am a Rescuer	60.33	60.04	65.44	76.35	-	38.70	0.000
I expect a Rescuer	64.34	56.96	53.18	65.33	-	19.46	0.000
Material wealth	1	2	3	4	5	H	p
I am a Rescuer	69.23	68.50	66.48	60.64	56.92	19.62	0.001
I expect a Victim	69.23	58.24	55.59	50.53	50.77	13.03	0.011
Sex	Woman	Man				U	p
I am a Persecutor	63.51	57.58	-	-	-	6607.5	0.008
I am a Rescuer	61.69	66.15	-	-	-	4047.0	0.005
I expect a Rescuer	60.85	53.82	-	-	-	6734.5	0.004

Note: 1 - 5 - index of material wealth, where the figure 1 indicates provision with only basic needs of life, and 5 provides for buying the items of luxury.

It has been found that in the formation of the position of a Rescuer the indicator of marriage as a legal marital relationship is significant (U = 1970.0; p ≤ 0.007). However, marital status itself is not a factor of satisfaction with married life (as a whole and with its different spheres), which is proved by the lack of statistically significant links between these indicators. It has also been statistically proved that in the situation of reduced material wealth the position of a Rescuer, as well as the position of expecting a Victim, are complementary in terms of assistance: the readiness to provide assistance and the

signal of need in it. It is logical that with the increase of material wealth, these positions decrease (see. Table 2).

The study also identified statistically significant differences by gender (see. Table. 2). So, a man more than a woman is focused on implementation of the role of a Rescuer (U = 4047.0; p ≤ 0.005), and a woman – on expectation of this role from her husband (U = 6734.5; p ≤ 0.004), and on expression of her role of a Persecutor (U = 6607.5; p ≤ 0.008). Identified links point to a mutually supportive relationship of acceptance of support by a woman and giving it by her husband through the role of a Rescuer. At the same time, the prevailing in a woman’s

mood of the role of a Persecutor was identified, and it may also indicate her willingness to put demands on her husband and to blame him for not fulfilling them. It also serves to a hypothesis that the responsibility for the quality of building a family life is felt more by women, but its real embodiment takes in marital intercourse non-constructive forms of the role of a Persecutor. Furthermore, it is statistically found that a man in marriage are most prone to a role of a Rescuer ( $U = 124.0; 22 p \leq 0.0$ ), while identifying his wife as a Persecutor ( $U = 126.0; 24 p \leq 0.0$ ). Instead women see more romance in unofficial married relationships, expecting from a partner acting as a Rescuer ( $U = 3115.5; 14 p \leq 0.0$ ) and accepting it ( $U = 2959.5; 51 p \leq 0.0$ ): it is under such circumstances that a woman, according to “Support Network” test, shows a lower propensity to displays of antagonism ( $U 7665 = 1.5; 49 p \leq 0.0$ ). The above analysis of the data confirms the basic concept of pro-social disposition

of role position of a Rescuer, which is particularly evident in situations of possible review of marital relationship, fixing through indicators of age, marital status and experience and also changes in material status.

In general, the analysis of gender differences indicates a greater variation in the changes of test scores according to age and social status variables in women than in men. So the data of the male sample statistically proves the connection between satisfaction with the material provision of family life and age (the highest at the stage of 31 - 40 years) as well as satisfaction in the field of leisure and marital experience (the highest at 6-10 years). Also during this period, when the level of activity and work efficiency is the highest, the expectations of a role of a Rescuer from their wives in men decrease, together with increasing perception of them as being more aggressive and less sacrificial (table 3).

Table 3.

**Significant Correlations According to the Test Data (Men)**

<b>Experience of marriage</b>	<b>up to 1.5 years</b>	<b>6-10</b>	<b>11-20</b>	<b>≤ '20</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>p</b>
Satisfaction with leisure	64.00	80.00	61.33	51.00	8.21	0.042
<b>Age</b>	<b>up to 30 years old</b>	<b>31-40</b>	<b>41-55</b>	<b>≤ '55</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>p</b>
Satisfaction with material well-being	55.56	65.79	53.89	40.91	9.01	0.029
“Persecutor” wife	51.18	65.29	60.68	64.71	7.91	0.048
“Victim” wife	56.67	48.67	46.67	62.42	16.38	0.001
“Rescuer” wife	56.67	46.00	46.67	67.27	12.95	0.005
I am a Rescuer	66.41	60.51	62.75	74.83	9.82	0.020
I expect a Rescuer	54.00	47.33	47.02	70.30	14.10	0.003
Sociability	84.67	72.00	71.93	86.67	10.06	0.018

We can state that in his most productive period of life a need of a man to be included in the gamy patterns of marital relationships significantly decreases. Under such conditions, assessment of his own role position and position of a wife can mostly rely on the actual operation focused on supporting family life as the basis for the development of marital relations [1]. It also follows that men are more reflective of changes in the role positions of women, than in their own ones. Instead, they assess their own role either as a Rescuer or as someone who expects a Rescuer, thereby potentially forming a position for a new gamy situation. The age range of men before 30 years old and over 55 years old have the strongest presentation of a

Rescuer role, accompanied by high indexes of sociability displays (see. Table 3).

In female sample also the most expressed role is the role of a Rescuer, which increases not only (as in men) with increasing of age index ( $H = 32.8; 0 p \leq 0.00$ ) but with the experience of married life as well ( $N = 28.98; p \leq 0.000$ ). Detected dependence is accompanied by an increase in the perception by the woman of her partner as a Persecutor ( $N = 7.83; 50 p \leq 0.0$ ). However, women in the early years of married life display the highest indexes of expectation of the role position of a Rescuer from the husband, as well as of obtaining this position from him (tab. 4).

Table 4.

**Significant Correlations of Manifestation of Role Positions in Accordance with Duration of Marriage (Women)**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>5 years</b>	<b>6-10 years</b>	<b>11-20years</b>	<b>≤ 20 years</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>p</b>
I am a Rescuer	60.22	60.71	60.05	71.83	28.98	0.000
I expect a Rescuer	67.17	57.37	57.54	58.52	14.74	0.002
Husband-Rescuer	62.42	53.33	53.80	60.56	11.28	0.010

Unlike the male sample, where the correlations according to the categories of the Drama Triangle test were

more represented, in female sample the test indicators of “Network of Support Relationships” prevailed. We can

state that the female sample is more focused on building strong relationship (Table 5).

Table 5.

**Comparison of Average Indicators of the “Network of Support Relationship” Test by Gender Factor**

Indicator	Woman	Man	U	p
Search for partner’s support	70.37	62.73	6870.5	0.001
Supporting the partner	71.68	68.89	6266.0	0.051

At the beginning of married life, a wife mostly perceives her husband as seeking acceptance and support from her, gives him this support and gets it from him the most. With the experience of married life for over 20 years a woman also has high indicators of assessment of

her husband as both needing support and providing it (Table 6). In the intermediate period of married life, these characteristics are reduced (6-10 years of marriage) with the actualization of manifestations of antagonism and criticism (11-20 years of marriage).

Table 6.

**Significant Correlations according to the “Network of Support Relationship” Test (Women)**

Age	up to 30 years old	31-40	41-55	more than 55years old	H	p
Sociability	81.85	76.06	81.67	76.44	8.48	0.037
Support from the husband	85.44	78.29	74.79	78.67	8.52	0.036
Search for support from the husband	74.19	69.90	66.32	67.41	9.32	0.025
Husband’s search for support	68.46	60.92	64.58	72.22	11.37	0.010
Experience of marriage	up to 1.5 years	6-10	11-20	more than 20 years	H	p
Support from the husband	84.55	78.08	75.56	80.93	8.04	0.045
Husband’s search for support	66.41	60.49	62.48	70.83	8.59	0.035
Criticism	44.26	46.28	52.63	47.02	7.67	0.053

As for material wealth, the greatest satisfaction of women in this area is at the beginning of middle age – up to 30 years (N = 8. 98; 30 p ≤ 0.0) and in the period from 6 to 10 years of marriage (H 9 = 44; 24 p ≤ 0.0), which is usually characterized by achieving a certain level of stability, coordination of family roles and adaptation of the couple to new social conditions of their life. Instead leisure sector is most satisfied in the early family life (H = 10. 89; 12 p ≤ 0.0), symbolizing its romantic period.

Basing on the above mentioned it can be summarized that with age both partners’ feelings of being a Rescuer increases, accompanied by increased sociable qualities in men and relationships of mutual support in women. Line of development of marital relationships in men relies more on role positions, and in women on relations of mutual support. However, the number of children showed reverse trends: men show more communicative tendencies, while women are more likely to fixate role positions. Having one child in the family appeared to be the most difficult situation: for men it brings strengthening of conflict (H = 7. 65; p ≤ 0.0 22), and for women – a significant decrease of relations of mutual support and growing of role position of a Victim (N = 6. 43; p ≤ 0.0 40). Women have the strongest feeling of marital mutual support if she has no children and (slightly lower in strength) if she has two or more children. The latter is accompanied by growing of the role position of a Rescuer in a woman (N = 7. 71; p ≤ 0.0 2 1).

The analysis of data correlation in tests has shown that all three role positions have negative correlations with the index of “Satisfaction with family life”: with role position of a Victim (r = -0.41; p <0,001) as well as with the role of a Persecutor (r = - 0 3 4; p <0,001) including the expectation of these roles from themselves and from a partner. The role of a Rescuer has a negative correlation with satisfaction with family life particularly in case of expecting it from a partner (r = - 0.26; p <0,001). However, that role significantly increases a woman’s life satisfaction when her partner shows this position (r = 0. 33; p <0,0 01) and increases satisfaction in the field of leisure (r = 0. 22; p <0,0 01), joint entertainment (r = 0. 26; p <0,0 01), sexual (r = 0. 26; p <0,0 01) and psychological (r = 0. 42; p <0,0 01) relationships. In turn, in men this role has less important links, but its expectation and manifestation by the partner also brings satisfaction in the field of joint entertainment and sexual (p <0,05) and psychological relationships ( p <0,0 05).

Summarizing the above data we can mark a slight border between manifestations of care in marital interaction realized through the network of supporting relationships and actions aimed at rescuing. This border can be described as the change in perceiving the situation where the role position and relationships have a common field, as well as diametrically-separated parts. The research has shown that activation of the role presentation increases the probability of starting the game and fixating the dynamic position of each of its participants. On the contra-

ry, in supporting relationships significance of such qualities as sociability and ability for critical assessment of the situation is more emphasized, and basing on them each one can give and receive support (see Table 6). Absence of direct correlations between indicators of supporting network and indicators of “satisfaction with family life” can also point at variety in construction of supporting relationships in a married couple and their non-positional orientation. On the other hand, fixation of the role position of the Drama triangle clearly focuses the direction of further interaction.

### Conclusions

The study provides an opportunity to state the cultivation of a Rescuer role in family interaction, which in men increases with age, and in women also with duration of marriage and increase in the number of children (more

than two). In marriage without characteristics of co-dependency the role of a Victim is activated in situations of reduce in financial well-being, and Persecutor – in situations of conflict and antagonism. It has been found that the relationship of mutual support within the couple and role positions of the Drama triangle are gender-dependent and in a situation of their differences can steer communication processes in marital interaction in the direction of start of the game. It has been proved that the focus on the role of a Rescuer is supported by satisfaction in the area of sexual and psychological relationships of a married couple, which is especially true for women whose partner shows this position. Clarifying the influence of cultural determinants on display of the Drama triangle roles in family life can bring further deepening to our research achievements.

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### **РОЛЬОВІ ЕКСПЕКТАЦІЇ У ПОДРУЖНІХ ВЗАЄМИНАХ ЗА ТРИКУТНИКОМ СТВІВЕНА КАРПМАНА**

В статті представлено результати дослідження рольових експектацій у подружній взаємодії чоловіків та жінок згідно концепції «Драматичного трикутника» С. Карпмана. Актуальність теми обумовлена важливістю посилення психологічного інструментарію для аналізу подружніх взаємин, а також недостатністю представленості концепції «Драматичного трикутника» С. Карпмана на терені української науки. Результати дослідження розкривають особливості використання одруженими чоловіками та жінками рольової тріади «Драматичного трикутника» а також очікувань від партнера виконання цих ролей та їхнього рольового внеску щодо відчуття взаємопідтримки у подружніх стосунках. Встановлено статистично значущі гендерні відмінності у проявах рольової тріади «драматичного трикутника», що відображаються у явищі культивування у сімейній взаємодії ролі «Рятівника», значенні акту реєстрації шлюбу для актуалізації ролі «Рятівника», особливостях переключення ролей «Жертва» - «Переслідувач» та включення рольової тріади в побудову подружніх та батьківсько-дитячих взаємин. Доведено, що актуалізація у сімейній взаємодії ролі «Рятівника» зростає у чоловіків із показником віку, а у жінок ще із тривалістю подружнього життя та збільшенням кількості дітей (більше двох). Установлено, що для чоловіка включення ролі «Рятівника» пов'язано не з тривалістю сімейних взаємин, а з актом офіційної зміни статусу на одруженого. Натомість жінка більше вбачає романтики в неофіційних стосунках, де її очікування від чоловіка позиції «Рятівника» та його налаштованість на цю роль збігаються. Доведено, що роль «Жертви» у подружньому житті активізується в ситуації зниження рівня їхнього життєвого забезпечення, а «Переслідувача» - в ситуації конфліктної ситуації та антагонізму. Доведено, що стосунки взаємопідтримки у подружній парі та рольові позиції «Драматичного трикутника» є і різно-детермінованими, і гендерно-залежними, і такими, що по-різному представлені у розбудові двох типів сімейних стосунків – подружніх та батьківсько-дитячих. Це може формувати у чоловіків та жінок різну систему координат для оцінки ситуації їхньої взаємодії, змінюючи тим самим напрямок комунікативного процесу в системі «позиція – стосунки» і запускаючи рольовий паттерн «Драматичного трикутника».

**Ключові слова:** подружня взаємодія, гендерні відмінності, стосунки, ролі, рольова позиція, «Драматичний трикутник».

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