Psychological Manipulation

Authored by

mohammad looti

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Psychological manipulation is a type of social influence that aims to change the perception or behavior of others through underhanded, deceptive, or even abusive tactics. By advancing the interests of the manipulator, often at the other's expense, such methods could be considered exploitative, abusive, devious, and deceptive.

Social influence is not necessarily negative. For example, doctors can try to persuade patients to change unhealthy habits. Social influence is generally perceived to be harmless when it respects the right of the influenced to accept or reject it, and is not unduly coercive. Depending on the context and motivations, social influence may constitute underhanded manipulation.

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Requirements for successful manipulation

According to George K. Simon, successful psychological manipulation primarily involves the manipulator:

concealing aggressive intentions and behaviors.
knowing the psychological vulnerabilities of the victim to determine what tactics are likely to be the most effective.
having a sufficient level of ruthlessness to have no qualms about causing harm to the victim if necessary.

Consequently the manipulation is likely to be covert (relational aggressive or passive aggressive).

How manipulators control their victims

According to Braiker

Braiker identified the following basic ways that manipulators control their victims:

positive reinforcement - includes praise, superficial charm, superficial sympathy (crocodile tears), excessive apologizing; money, approval, gifts; attention, facial expressions such as a forced laugh or smile; public recognition.
negative reinforcement - includes nagging, yelling, the silent treatment, intimidation, threats, swearing, emotional blackmail, the guilt trap, sulking, crying, and playing the victim.
intermittent or partial reinforcement - Partial or intermittent negative reinforcement can create an effective climate of fear and doubt. Partial or intermittent positive reinforcement can encourage the victim to persist - for example in most forms of gambling, the gambler is likely to win now and again but still lose money overall.
punishment
traumatic one-trial learning - using verbal abuse, explosive anger, or other intimidating behavior to establish dominance or superiority; even one incident of such behavior can condition or train

victims to avoid upsetting, confronting or contradicting the manipulator.

According to Simon

Simon identified the following manipulative techniques:

Lying: It is hard to tell if somebody is lying at the time they do it although often the truth may be apparent later when it is too late. One way to minimize the chances of being lied to is to understand that some personality types (particularly psychopaths) are experts at the art of lying and cheating, doing it frequently, and often in subtle ways.
Lying by omission: This is a very subtle form of lying by withholding a significant amount of the truth. This technique is also used in propaganda.
Denial: Manipulator refuses to admit that he or she has done something wrong.
Rationalization: An excuse made by the manipulator for inappropriate behavior. Rationalization is closely related to spin.
Minimization: This is a type of denial coupled with rationalization. The manipulator asserts that his or her behavior is not as harmful or irresponsible as someone else was suggesting, for example saying that a taunt or insult was only a joke.
Selective inattention or selective attention: Manipulator refuses to pay attention to anything that may distract from his or her agenda, saying things like "I don't want to hear it".
Diversion: Manipulator not giving a straight answer to a straight question and instead being diversionary, steering the conversation onto another topic.
Evasion: Similar to diversion but giving irrelevant, rambling, vague responses, weasel words.
Covert intimidation: Manipulator throwing the victim onto the defensive by using veiled (subtle, indirect or implied) threats.
Guilt tripping: A special kind of intimidation tactic. A manipulator suggests to the conscientious victim that he or she does not care enough, is too selfish or has it easy. This usually results in the victim feeling bad, keeping them in a self-doubting, anxious and submissive position.
Shaming: Manipulator uses sarcasm and put-downs to increase fear and self-doubt in the victim. Manipulators use this tactic to make others feel unworthy and therefore defer to them. Shaming tactics can be very subtle such as a fierce look or glance, unpleasant tone of voice, rhetorical comments, subtle sarcasm. Manipulators can make one feel ashamed for even daring to challenge them. It is an effective way to foster a sense of inadequacy in the victim.
Playing the victim role ("poor me"): Manipulator portrays him- or herself as a victim of circumstance or of someone else's behavior in order to gain pity, sympathy or evoke compassion and thereby get something from another. Caring and conscientious people cannot stand to see anyone suffering and the manipulator often finds it easy to play on sympathy to get cooperation.
Vilifying the victim: More than any other, this tactic is a powerful means of putting the victim on the defensive while simultaneously masking the aggressive intent of the manipulator.
Playing the servant role: Cloaking a self-serving agenda in guise of a service to a more noble

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cause, for example saying he is acting in a certain way for "obedience" and "service" to God or a similar authority figure.
Seduction: Manipulator uses charm, praise, flattery or overtly supporting others in order to get them to lower their defenses and give their trust and loyalty to him or her.
Projecting the blame (blaming others): Manipulator scapegoats in often subtle, hard to detect ways.
Feigning innocence: Manipulator tries to suggest that any harm done was unintentional or did not do something that they were accused of. Manipulator may put on a look of surprise or indignation. This tactic makes the victim question his or her own judgment and possibly his own sanity.
Feigning confusion: Manipulator tries to play dumb by pretending he or she does not know what you are talking about or is confused about an important issue brought to his attention.
Brandishing anger: Manipulator uses anger to brandish sufficient emotional intensity and rage to shock the victim into submission. The manipulator is not actually angry, he or she just puts on an act. He just wants what he wants and gets "angry" when denied.

Vulnerabilities exploited by manipulators

According to Braiker, manipulators exploit the following vulnerabilities (buttons) that may exist in victims:

the "disease to please"
addiction to earning the approval and acceptance of others
Emotophobia (fear of negative emotion)
lack of assertiveness and ability to say no
blurry sense of identity (with soft personal boundaries)
low self-reliance
external locus of control

According to Simon, manipulators exploit the following vulnerabilities that may exist in victims:

naïveté - victim finds it too hard to accept the idea that some people are cunning, devious and ruthless or is "in denial" if he or she is being victimized
over-conscientiousness - victim is too willing to give manipulator the benefit of the doubt and see their side of things in which they blame the victim
low self-confidence - victim is self-doubting, lacking in confidence and assertiveness, likely to go on the defensive too easily.
over-intellectualization - victim tries too hard to understand and believes the manipulator has some understandable reason to be hurtful.
emotional dependency - victim has a submissive or dependent personality. The more emotionally dependent the victim is, the more vulnerable he or she is to being exploited and manipulated.

Manipulators generally take the time to scope out the characteristics and vulnerabilities of their

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victim.

According to Kantor, the following are vulnerable to psychopathic manipulators:

too trusting - people who are honest often assume that everyone else is honest. They commit themselves to people they hardly know without checking credentials, etc. They rarely question so-called experts.
too altruistic - the opposite of psychopathic; too honest, too fair, too empathetic
too impressionable - overly seduced by charmers. For example, they might vote for the phony politician who kisses babies.
too naïve - cannot believe there are dishonest people in the world or if there were they would not be allowed to operate.
too masochistic - lack of self-respect and unconsciously let psychopaths take advantage of them. They think they deserve it out of a sense of guilt.
too narcissistic - narcissists are prone to falling for unmerited flattery.
too greedy - the greedy and dishonest may fall prey to a psychopath who can easily entice them to act in an immoral way.
too immature - has impaired judgment and believes the exaggerated advertising claims.
too materialistic - easy prey for loan sharks or get-rich-quick schemes
too dependent - dependent people need to be loved and are therefore gullible and liable to say yes to something to which they should say no.
too lonely - lonely people may accept any offer of human contact. A psychopathic stranger may offer human companionship for a price.
too impulsive - make snap decisions about, for example, what to buy or whom to marry without consulting others.
too frugal - cannot say no to a bargain even if they know the reason why it is so cheap
the elderly - the elderly can become fatigued and less capable of multi-tasking. When hearing a sales pitch they are less likely to consider that it could be a con. They are prone to giving money to someone with a hard-luck story. See elder abuse.

Motivations of manipulators

Manipulators have possible motivations, including:

The need to advance their own purposes and their own gain at virtually any cost to others
The manipulator has strong needs to attain feelings of power and superiority in relationships with others
Manipulators want and need to feel in control - control freakery
To feel power over others in order to raise self-esteem.

Psychological conditions of manipulators

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Manipulators may have any of the following psychological conditions:

machiavellian personality
narcissistic personality disorder
borderline personality disorder
avoidant personality disorder
dependent personality disorder
histrionic personality disorder
passive-aggressive behavior
type A angry personalities
antisocial personality disorder
addictive personalities

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