



Specialising in Personality Disorder  
and Complex Trauma



# On Manipulation

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28th March 2023





# Definition: to manipulate

- to handle something, or move or work it with the hands, especially in a skilful way
- to control or *influence* someone or something *cleverly* and unscrupulously, especially to one's own advantage
- to give false appearance to something, change its character, etc



Manipulation is often characterised  
as a form of influence that is neither  
*coercion* nor *rational persuasion*.



# The Ethics of Manipulation

- Is *every* form of influence that is neither coercion or rational persuasion a form of manipulation?
- What distinguishes manipulation from other forms of influences that are neither coercion nor rational persuasion?
- Is manipulation always immoral?
- *Why* is manipulation immoral (when it is immoral)?
- If manipulation is not always immoral, then what determines *when* it is immoral?



# Answering the Identification Question

## *What characterises manipulation?*

- manipulation as an influence that bypasses reason
- manipulation as a form of trickery/deception
- manipulation as a form of pressure

**What , if anything , makes all forms of manipulation manifestations of the same phenomena ?**

**Conclusion: the common use of manipulation refers to such diverse set of phenomena that no single analysis will capture every form of influence to which the term is commonly applied .**



# Manipulation as Pressure

- a third way to characterise manipulation is to treat it as a kind of pressure to do as the influencer wishes
- on a continuum between rational persuasion exerting no-pressure, coercion exerting maximum pressure, and the middle region, manipulation, exerting pressure that falls short of being coercive
- on this account , tactics like emotional blackmail and peer pressure are paradigm cases of manipulation, since they exert pressure on the target by imposing **costs for failing** to do what the manipulator wishes

# Answering the Evaluation Question

A complete answer to the evaluation equation should tell us about the sort of wrongfulness that manipulation possesses:

- Is manipulation always immoral, *pro tanto* immoral, *prima facie* immoral etc?
- When manipulation is immoral if it is not always immoral?
- Why is immoral in cases when it is immoral?



# The Nature of Relationship Patricia Greenspan

- When manipulation is immoral, it is because it **violates the terms of the relationship** between the manipulator and his target - **terms** will vary according to the nature of the relationship between them
- The moral status of a given instance of manipulation will depend at least in part on the nature of the relationship between the influencer and the target of the influence





# Parameters of Relationship

- Power
- Control
- Ascendancy (position of having power)
- Competence
- Responsibility
- Intimacy
- Dependency
- Permanence



## Social Contract (eg Health Setting)

**Social Contract** is tradition bound and context dependent ( eg office, hospital, examining room) and establishes appropriate boundaries in the relationship ( eg degree of intimacy, responsibility, permanency, dependency etc).

The clinician and client are negotiating a mutually acceptable role relationship containing a number of obligations and privileges ie Social Contract

Ways of modifying/ influencing Social Contract or Role Negotiation?



# Influences in Role Negotiation

- Reasonable persuasion: no deception/ no pressure
- Assertion: no deception/ yes pressure
- Manipulation: yes deception / yes pressure
- Coercion: maximum pressure



# Interpersonal Effectiveness - DBT

Assertion as a form of Influencing

## Options for Intensity of Asking and Saying No

Low Intensity: Accept the situation as it is

High Intensity: Try and Change the Situation

## 10 Factors to Consider :

Priorities, Capability, Timeliness, Homework, Authority, Rights, Relationship, Reciprocity, Long versus Short term, Respect.



## Goals For Interpersonal Effectiveness / Priorities

- **Getting Your Objectives or Goals in a Situation:** *What specific results or changes do I want from this interaction? What do I have to do to get the results? What will work?*
- **Getting or Keeping a Good Relationship:** *How do I want the other person to feel about me after the interaction is over? What I have to do to get ( or keep) this relationship?*
- **Keeping or Improving Self-Respect and Liking Yourself:** *How do I want to feel about myself after the interaction is over? What I have to do to feel that way about myself? What will work?*



## Manipulation as a First Choice in Influencing Other

When the child is denied:

- A shared way of understanding situation
- A shared goal-directed interaction
- Reciprocal validation of roles

The child must learn from this that the only way to overcome feelings of helplessness and incompetence is to control interpersonal situations with the techniques available eg argument, passive resistance, demonstrations, non-operation, strikes, self-harm etc



## Reference

- Chambers 21st Century Dictionary
- The Ethics of Manipulation, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2018
- Relationship Management of the Borderline Patient, From Understanding to treatment, David Dawson and Harriet McMillan