



New Trends  
in Psychology

## Manipulation - A Characteristic of Human Behavior

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**Abstract:** According to the Dictionary of Sociology, manipulation is the action of causing a social actor (person, group, community, etc.) to think and act in a way compatible with the interests of the initiator, and not with his interests, by using techniques such as persuasion, which intentionally distorts the truth, leaving the impression of freedom of thought and decision. From a political point of view, manipulation is a form of imposing the interests of a class, group, collectivity not by coercive means, at the disposal of the power, but by misleading. Manipulations can be classified according to different criteria. One of the criteria is the use of changes made in a certain social situation. Deindividuation is a much simpler technique, but with equally shocking effects. In the sense of social psychology, deindividuation is defined as a feeling of loss of anonymity. The pressure of different types of manipulation can be felt in the most common sequences of life. The importance given to interpersonal relationships, obedience to group rules, the emotion produced by minor social rewards such as a smile, a compliment, or a friendly gesture, are precisely the effects of manipulation. "Despite the aggressive and destructive effects in the relationship that manipulation has, it is often used in the closest relationships, in which the emotions and beliefs of the other person matter for the well-being of the aggressor.

**Keywords:** manipulation; emotions; human relationships; dehumanization; social psychology

### Introduction

By behavioral manipulation we mean influencing human subjects (individuals, groups, human sets) in order to perform actions inconsistent with their own goals, without them - human subjects - to realize the discrepancy between their own goals

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and the distant goals of those who influence them. Behavioral manipulation is, therefore, a type of social influence, namely a negative social influence, condemnable from an ethical point of view, because it harms human dignity. Behavioral manipulation is based on conformity (lat. *Conformitas* - changing a person's position toward the group's position) and obedience (fr. *Obeissance* - changing a person's behavior as a result of an order given by a legitimate authority).

According to the Dictionary of Sociology, manipulation is the action of causing a social actor (person, group, community, etc.) to think and act in a way compatible with the interests of the initiator, and not with his interests, by using techniques such as persuasion, which intentionally distorts the truth, leaving the impression of freedom of thought and decision.

Unlike the influence of the type of rational conviction, manipulation does not seek a deeper understanding of the situation, but the inoculation of a convenient understanding, resorting to misleading with falsified arguments, as well as the appeal of emotional or non-rational levels. In the case of manipulation, the real intentions of the sender of the message remain imperceptible to the manipulated person.

From a political point of view, manipulation is a form of imposing the interests of a class, group, collectivity not by coercive means, at the disposal of the power, but by misleading. For this reason, the use of this path in situations of divergence of interests is becoming more common in today's society, manipulation being a more efficient and powerful tool than the use of force.

Herbert Marcuse (Frankfurt School) is the author of an extensive analysis of manipulation, considered to be an essential tool of the "mass industrial society". He highlights the particular forms that manipulation takes in different spheres of social life, starting with the political and ending with the economic.

### **Manipulation as a form of Expression in the Media**

"The hidden nature of influence therefore appears to us to be intimately linked to its" transitional "(or mediated) character. Influencing needs the presence, in the world around the manipulated, of cognitive objects of which he is not aware. So in order to influence, one must first induce in the receiver a particular "state", obtained by manipulating his emotions. Emotion occupies a very important place in manipulation, for example: pity, compassion. The same happens when a state of horror, fear sets in. And the awakening of interest through manipulation triggers the

behavior desired by the transmitter, which sometimes reveals a latent desire. The receiver gets to see his subsequent actions in a positive way”.

“Influence through propaganda tends to provoke fear among the population, seeking to build a negative image”.

In conclusion, the meaning of the influenced person’s attitude is given by the motivation, interest or emotion that were induced. All modern research shows the fundamental influence of the situation on the way in which the meaning of human behaviors appears. In light of this research, it seems that the meaning of an actor’s behavior does not depend exclusively on the actor’s internal psychological factors. Those who act exclusively according to their mental states are essentially “pathological” actors, incapable of decentralization, people locked in their own world and who are taken by surprise by the significance of things coming “from the rest of the world”.

Those transformations of the contexts that are realized under the impact of the communications, give rise to different meanings, because the meaning is related to the contexts. Changing the contexts changes the meaning of the actions performed within them. The meaning is born from the set of other objects of the situation.

### **We Can Talk about Two Types of Influence:**

1. Influencing by manipulating emotions;
2. Influencing by manipulating interests.

Influencing by manipulating emotions - in order to influence, you must first induce a particular “state” in the receiver, obtained by manipulating his emotions.

Influencing by manipulating interests - the second major category of explanations given to influence starts from manipulating the interests of the audience. To influence, you need to know these interests and say things that lead to their possible satisfaction. And in this case, the content of the message, centered on the interests of the interlocutor, “triggers” the desired behavior through an inner state (awakening interest.)

In terms of social psychology we can speak of manipulation when a certain social situation is created premeditatedly to influence the reactions and behavior of the manipulated in the sense desired by the manipulator.

Manipulations can be classified according to different criteria. One of the criteria is the use of changes made in a certain social situation. Thus “small manipulations” are those obtained by minor changes in the social situation. Classified as small, medium and large, their consequences do not follow a strict correspondence with the amplitude of the initial changes. For example, small changes can have major consequences and vice versa.

### **Small Manipulations**

Obtained by minor changes in the social situation, they can sometimes have surprisingly large effects. For example, donations can increase significantly when the request is accompanied by a small, seemingly insignificant service, a call to heavenly blessing, or even just the appearance of those who make the request.

The beggars also use countless tricks to stimulate the charitable spirit of the passers-by. At begging are sent especially the children naked in winter, crying in summer, sometimes intentionally mutilated to increase the mercy of the citizens. Significant sums are paid to those who compose the lyrics and music of some particularly tearful songs.

### **Medium Handling**

It refers to important changes in social situations, with effects that sometimes dramatically exceed expectations, precisely because the enormous power of influencing social situations on human behavior is overestimated in most cases. In 1973 Robert Watson conducted a study of 24 cultures in terms of their ethnographic characteristics. It turned out that warriors who change their appearance by painting their faces or bodies or putting on masks before going to battle, commit far more acts of sadism, murder, mutilation than those who do not disguise themselves. Deindividuation by hiding the face behind masks, is found in many cases, both in history and in the reality immediately following.

Two decades ago, Stanley Milgram initiated a series of experiments with shocking results in terms of subjecting the individual to a certain authority.

The question: “How many would agree to go to the limit of four hundred and fifty volts?” Several groups were included in questionnaires, which included both ordinary people and students or psychologists.

The answer was almost unanimous: “Approx. one percent”. No one could have imagined that the limit of common sense and general human behavior could be exceeded.

But the result of the experiment dramatically refuted all these predictions: 62.5 percent of the volunteers put in the position of “teacher” administered the maximum shocks of four hundred and fifty volts, and 80 percent continued to press the switch even after the “student” he began to scream in pain and say that he could suffer a heart attack at any moment!

Stanley Milgram’s experiments are an almost abstract form of studying some of the average manipulation techniques.

In addition to techniques designed to induce a sense of submission to the authorities or, on the contrary, to trigger strong riots, other examples of moderate manipulation can be those aimed at dehumanizing victims or deindividualizing attackers, in order to encourage the aggressive spirit.

These techniques can fall into the category of average manipulations, due to the fact that, although they are relatively simple, their effects exceed any expectations.

Mainly, the techniques of dehumanizing the enemy are used to make it possible to exterminate him without hesitation and without remorse from the executors, most of whom came from ordinary people. The fundamental purpose of dehumanization techniques is to cleanse the image of the enemy of any human trait, to present him as an unworthy and dangerous monster to the human species, to identify him by nicknames or by any other names that must no longer retain any human connotations. If necessary, the very meaning of the words is perverted in order not to leave any crack through which the future aggressors will notice that, in fact, the enemies are like them in reason. Concretely, the methods used in the dehumanization propaganda of the enemy consist in imposing through the media some horrible caricatures, some aggressive slogans, some falsified press materials, in which the enemies are presented as violent and dangerous troglodytes.

Deindividualization is a much simpler technique, but with equally shocking effects. In the sense of social psychology, deindividualization is defined as a feeling of loss of anonymity. Liberation from the inherent constraints, imposed by a normal and correct behavior in society, liberation obtained through this immersion in anonymity, leads to an increase of aggression, of deviant manifestations.

The loss of a sense of identity also has the role of making the individual much easier to manipulate. That is why some totalitarian regimes require their subjects to dress the same. In China or North Korea, the ordinary dress of the citizens was a kind of “working uniform”, meant to make the maneuvering mass as uniform as possible...

A disturbing and serious effect of the great manipulation exerted by the integration of the individual in a certain system is the phenomenon of anomie, which occurs in the case of large socio-political earthquakes, when the whole system of values, concepts and social standards suddenly collapses.

The concept of anomie (from Greek: a nomos - without law) was introduced in 1893 by Professor Emile Durkheim, the founder of the French school of sociology, in his work *La division du travail social* (Division of social work). Anomie designates a social phenomenon abnormal, pathological, generated by the lack of moral and legal rules meant to organize economic and social life. The lack of these norms is felt at the level of the ordinary person by the appearance and accentuation of a feeling of diffuse insecurity, of permanent fear, which leads to vindictive actions in parallel with the increase of aggression. In other words, an entire society becomes ill when rules, traditions, and laws suddenly change, disappear, or are delayed in time. Lacking the old system of values through which they permanently related to social situations, people become vulnerable, disoriented, nervous.

### **Large Manipulations**

They are represented by the influence of the whole culture in the middle of which the individual lives. The value system, the behavior, the way of thinking of the individual, are determined first of all by the written and unwritten norms of the society in which he lives by the subcultures with which he comes in contact. Neglecting this permanent and huge influence, the individual can make misjudgments much easier or can be easily manipulated. As the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget pointed out, before being a means of communicating the knowledge necessary for the future adult, the school accustoms him to the spirit of subordination to the authorities, represented primarily at his level by educators, teachers, inspectors, examination boards. . Later it will be much easier for him to comply with the laws and various social regulations, to instinctively obey the bosses at his future job and the state authorities. Secondly, the student is accustomed to the sense of responsibility, by the obligation to do his homework in a certain period of time, to present the results of his studies at the well-established deadlines, in regular

examinations, to order time and study methods, so as to successively overcome the obstacles represented by timeless, theses, exams, graduation papers.

All manipulation strategies and techniques are focused on gaining control over the behavior, thinking or feelings of the subjects, in a certain social situation and over a certain period of time, in order to gain substantial advantages for the artisans of manipulation and to the detriment of those controlled. The changes intended to be produced in one of the three components of the subjects' identity, can be precisely focused or can be part of a very complex process.

They can have immediate effects or they can remain in the latent phase, in order to later determine radical mutations of mentality, they can be induced visibly or in subtle ways, they can result in lasting results in time, or they can register changes only for a certain period. Considered by manipulators.

Although some methods of manipulation are based on "exotic" techniques such as hypnosis, drug administration or electric shocks, brain surgery, most strategies for gaining total control over the individual consider "secular" techniques, in most extremely effective cases. They are based on the exploitation of the fundamental needs of man (the need for food, shelter, information, integration into a certain social group, etc.), in the sense of immersing the individual in anonymity, to make him more docile and more willing to it is subject to the rules imposed by the authorities, regardless of the form in which they are perceived. "

"Manipulation techniques are constantly encountered, even in the most mundane moments of life. More than likely, everyone has used the "front-door-slamming technique" at least once in their lives, without knowing that it is so called and that it has been studied by entire groups of psychologists, and the effect has been the same as the one obtained by specialists. Children, too, often apply instinctively the method of slamming their foot in the door, asking their parents to take a minor thing, then something else and something else.

The pressure of different types of manipulation can be felt in the most common sequences of life. The importance given to interpersonal relationships, obedience to group rules, the emotion produced by minor social rewards such as a smile, a compliment, or a friendly gesture, are precisely the effects of manipulation".

In psychosociology textbooks and treatises, even in the recently published ones, the phenomenon of behavioral manipulation is not given special chapters or paragraphs of analysis, although research on this phenomenon has progressed in recent decades.

“In the specialized literature in our country there are no specialized studies, dedicated to behavioral manipulation”. Manipulation involves a series of tactics and behaviors used with the intention of completely modifying or changing another person’s perspective or decisions. Whatever the positive intention behind such an initiative, the manipulative behavior is an aggressive one, which does not respect the freedom to one’s own individuality of the person on whom one acts more or less subtly. And because manipulation can take many forms, it is important to note which levers it can be used to achieve its goals.

Hidden in the form of positive intentions, a “believe me, this time I know better for you” or simply wrapped in the form of insinuations or direct threats, the manipulation is most often used by the victim’s emotions that they direct to fulfilling one’s own goals.

In the struggle for power, the manipulator can induce a feeling of helplessness (“you don’t know what to do”, “next time you ask me”, “if you came to me it wouldn’t happen”), it can strengthen the person’s vulnerabilities by formulating them as weaknesses (“but you know you can’t do this”, “you saw that you’re not good at this”) and, most of the time, it can induce a feeling of guilt in order to aggressively intimidate and limit the victim’s behavior.

Any form of manipulative behavior or tactics, violation of personal freedom and aggression of needs can soon become annoying. In other words, even if initially the manipulation is not consciously experienced by the victim, he becomes aware of it, without having control over the emotional consequences of the aggression.

In this sense, the self-image can be affected (“I am a weak, vulnerable, sensitive person...”, “he is right, I can’t do without him/her”, etc.), and the daily adaptation efforts reach to affect self-esteem, lower and lower.

Despite the aggressive and destructive effects in the relationship that manipulation has, it is often used in the closest relationships, in which the emotions and beliefs of the other person matter for the well-being of the aggressor. In the couple’s relationship and in the parent-child relationship, the balance of power is often restored through manipulation that suggests selfishness or non-involvement in the relationship. I don’t care about you, “if you were really interested in me, you would have taken into account...”. Unfortunately, the relationship will not be balanced and conflicts will not be resolved once manipulative behaviors are used. On the contrary, they can hide under the guise of passivity and compromise increasingly annoying



conflicts and feelings of revolt, fear and anger directed at the aggressor. In addition, for the victim himself, the repeated confrontation with situations in which the other seems to have power over himself will have lasting repercussions in the formation of his own self-image, in which shame, helplessness and guilt will be added in the relationship with himself.

Inducing guilt and taking responsibility for what does not work in the relationship can trigger a series of fears or fears similar to those felt by children in the first period of life, when failing to meet the expectations of important people felt ashamed, guilty and obliged to remedy the situation. In addition, in situations where the parents resorted to feelings of shame or guilt, the child was put in a hopeless situation: either fix the mistake or risk rejection or abandonment.

It is important to realize that we are all victims of the same types of manipulation - some intentional, others accidental, and to understand that: everyone's opinions are influenced and confirmed by personal preferences, group of friends and algorithms we all feel right and easy to group into "us" versus "them".

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