

Manipulation



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I am an accomplished manipulator of people and I have a professional obligation to be transparent about that. Psychologists mostly just talk, and practically none of the things we actually say requires a license. But I do need a license to *call* myself a psychologist and I am committed to a code of ethics that includes informed consent. Personal counseling and psychotherapy are intermittently manipulative in the sense that some insights must be gained in stages that counselors and therapists already understand as we lead you through them, which we do at your invitation.

Good parenting, friendship, mentoring and teaching of all kinds are also intermittently manipulative, and properly so as long as you are serving the genuine interests and have the reasonably informed consent of whoever you are counseling, treating, mentoring, parenting, partnering or otherwise helping out.

This sort of informed benevolent manipulation is clearly a good thing, and I only use the term in this context to highlight its evil twin; covert self-interested manipulation. This other species of manipulation is universally resented whenever it is suspected, and it routinely masquerades as its admirable sibling when it is challenged. The two species of manipulation have in common the fact they both involve intervals during which someone is intentionally leading someone else in some direction by influencing them in ways that may be invisible or unclear. The difference between benevolent manipulation and its evil twin boils down to the question of motive, which can never be established objectively. Covert self-interested manipulation engages our trust and then violates it. Its hallmark is that it continues to conceal itself even after its objectives have been achieved. Even the ongoing *suspicion* of covert self-interested manipulation will poison human relationships. The only effective antidote to this type of suspicion is systematic remedial transparency, if you or they are up to that. Trust me. Call me.

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