

On the Couch

The latest news and psychology views, plus our brand new columnist, top psychologist Dr Nicola Davies explains how to deal with the manipulator

In psychology, personality is about the essential psychological aspects of our lives – our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, skills, and motives. The term comes from the Latin word persona, meaning mask. We put on a mask or personality to portray a certain image. Everyone's personality defines and distinguishes them from others. Despite our uniqueness, some key traits can be found across people and it is these traits this new column will be introducing. This month we look at the manipulator – a wolf in sheep's clothing.



BRAIN CHANGE

Childhood abuse can affect brain development. Researchers at the department of psychiatry at Harvard University scanned the brains of nearly 200 people who were questioned about abuse or stress during childhood. They found that three important hippocampus areas were reduced by up to 6.5 per cent in volume in those exposed to several instances of abuse.

Men are at their most competitive between the ages of 45 and 54, psychologists at the University of Oregon have discovered

THE MANIPULATOR

Controlling

Meet the manipulator. Underneath a manipulator's charming exterior is a need for control. Charm is a deceitful mask to help them gain this sense of control. They have seven key identifying traits:

- **Deceitful** – they mislead others in order to get their own way
- **Controlling** – they need to have control over people and circumstances
- **Self-efficient** – they are independent and know how to progress in life
- **Compelling** – they are charismatic and often have a hypnotic hold over other people
- **Self-conscious** – they are often over-concerned with their appearance and how they look to others
- **Paranoid** – they have a tendency towards anxiety and worry that other people are talking about them behind their back
- **Emotionally numb** – they have difficulty expressing deep emotions such as grief

Negatives

These are some of the traits to watch out for in a manipulator:

- Uses sexual flirtation to control
- Has unpredictable emotions
- Finds it difficult to maintain successful relationships and will often go in and out of them looking for the right partner
- Enjoys a good fight
- Holds grudges to the extent that they can push someone out of their life forever
- Needs to control so much that they can become 'stuck' in unhealthy situations

Positives

As with any personality type, the manipulator has a few positive traits too:

- They get things done
- They are often highly respected by others
- They are driven towards success and usually achieve this success
- Women with this personality have no trouble competing in a man's world
- They are good at whatever they choose to do in their life
- They are never short of energy

THE AGGRESSIVE NATURE OF THE MANIPULATOR

Even if we are suspicious of the manipulator, often we cannot readily pinpoint evidence for this suspicion, which means we can't validate our feelings and end up ignoring our nagging doubts. In addition, the tactics manipulators use can create feelings of sympathy towards them. We might question whether their actions are due to internal pain as opposed to any underlying personal agenda.

HOW DO I DEAL WITH A MANIPULATOR?

Compromise is essential, and balance will provide the context for the manipulator's better qualities to come through. For example, you might respond to the manipulator in a way that gives them the illusion of being in control when, in fact, you also have some control. "A fantastic choice of wallpaper for the bedroom – good job!" you might say, as you follow with, "We still have the lounge to do. What are your thoughts on blue?" In other words, let them feel that they own the decision – this way everyone is happy.

WHAT IF I AM THE MANIPULATOR?

Try to remind yourself that kindness is not a weakness or a sign of lack of control. You can have both. Furthermore, if you are in a relationship with another manipulator, compromise is even more important from both of you.