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# In Sheep's Clothing

**REVISED EDITION**

**Understanding  
and  
Dealing with  
Manipulative  
People**

**George Simon, Jr., Ph.D.**

**As seen on  
CBS Newsmagazine  
48 HOURS**

“ [After reading *In Sheep's Clothing*]  
I am beginning to reclaim my life,  
find my self-respect and confidence.”

— Marc, Virginia



# In Sheep's Clothing

## Understanding and Dealing with Manipulative People

“After having read several books on several different self-help topics, psychology books, psychiatry books, etc., I MUST recommend you buy this one, first. It cuts straight through the bs - neatly and cleanly. I have bought copies of this book for friends and can't recommend it enough.”

—E. Adams, Online Purchaser

“Don't Be Bossed-Around Ever Again !!! ... ***In Sheep's Clothing: Understanding and Dealing with Manipulative People*** by George K. Simon, Jr., Ph.D., is a godsend to anyone who has ever questioned their own sanity while in any kind of relationship with a controlling and manipulative person.

—The Aeolian Kid, Online Purchaser

“Dr. Simon teaches the mechanics of popular tactics used by manipulators and how you can identify and thwart their attacks so that you control the outcome. This book helped me with a person that I have no choice but to see daily. After the end of every “friendly” conversation I felt depressed or insulted but could not figure out how this person was doing it. This book helped me to understand what was really happening. Dr. Simon's guidelines exposed this person and [allowed me to take] control. Because this person knows [I] can no longer [be] controlled, I now have — not a perfect relationship — but one that's better than the alternative.”

—A reader in Chicago

“This book is like the secret decoder ring for the jumbled mess that is a manipulator's modus operandi. **Do yourself a favor and get this book now.**”

—Christy, Missouri

“It's sad that there are people out there that make life so much harder than it should have to be for others. Being able to identify such people in your life (both at home and at work) is very important and can be of invaluable help to 1) not go crazy oneself, and 2) take corrective action. Dr. Simon's book is written with amazing clarity. **If you read only one book this year, read this one.**”

—JA008, Online Purchaser

“This is one of the best books I've ever read and **I would recommend it to anyone.** It has redefined how I judge people and helped me to become a stronger person. I used to be very naive and unaware of people's ulterior motives, and I have learned a tremendous amount from reading this book.”

—S. Brescenti, Online Purchaser

“This book makes it clear that evil is allowed free rein because of our ignorance of its nature. Simon shows us what seemingly mundane interactions that leave us perplexed may really be about. According to him, master manipulators leave us drained and confused as we try to change them into the good person we want to believe they really are. I would add that the manipulators are just plain evil because evil requires lies, manipulation and a weakening of the other's will through deception. Simon shows you how to recognize the signs and what you can do about it. Good people are responsible for informing and protecting themselves from the manipulators in society. This book is a necessary start.”

—Kaye, a reader in New York state

“Pithy and often funny, George Simon takes the bluster and obfuscation of overbearing, weasely bosses, nasty neighbors, and obnoxious coworkers and boils it down to show you the simple psychological strategies being used to impose on your patience, good will, or even wallet. **I have recommended this book to everyone I know and bought extra copies for my kids** when they went out into the work world. Highly Recommended!”

—C. MacCallum, Online Purchaser

# **In Sheep's Clothing**

## **Understanding and Dealing with Manipulative People**

**George K. Simon, Jr., Ph.D.**



Parkhurst Brothers, Inc., Publishers

LITTLE ROCK

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The vignettes contained in this book are fictionalized versions of actual events and circumstances provided to the author. The names, professions, locations, situations, and other biographical data have been altered to preserve anonymity and privacy to the greatest degree possible without distorting the fundamental psychological realities the stories are intended to illustrate.

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I owe a supreme debt to the many individuals willing to share with me their experiences with manipulative people. They taught me much and enriched my life. This book, in large measure, is a tribute to their courage and support.

I am most appreciative of the validation, support, and enriching input consistently afforded me by workshop attendees. They have helped me clarify, refine, and enhance one of my principal missions in life.

Words cannot express the gratitude I have for the thousands of readers who have kept this book on the active lists of online booksellers and retail outlets for over 15 years. The many emails, blog posts, and letters readers have sent helped me make necessary updates and changes to this Revised Edition. I have attempted to honor the considerable feedback I continue to receive by



expanding the discussion of key concepts as well as introducing important new content for this newly revised edition.

Finally, I want to thank Roger Armbrust and Ted Parkhurst of Parkhurst Brothers, Inc., Publishers. Ted encouraged me at the outset and was there when I needed him; Roger's grace and presence have only benefitted my work and readers.

# PREFACE

Whether it's the supervisor who claims to support you while thwarting every opportunity you have to get ahead, the co-worker who quietly undermines you to gain the boss's favor, the spouse who professes to love and care about you but seems to control your life, or the child who always seems to know just which buttons to push in order to get their way, manipulative people are like the proverbial wolf in sheep's clothing. On the surface they can appear charming and genial. But underneath, they can be ever so calculating and ruthless. Cunning and subtle, they prey on your weaknesses and use clever tactics to gain advantage over you. They're the kind of people who fight hard for everything they want but do their best to conceal their aggressive intentions. That's why I call them covert-aggressive personalities.

As a clinical psychologist in private practice, I began to focus on the problem of covert aggression over 20 years ago. I did so because the depression, anxiety, and feelings of insecurity that initially led several of my patients to seek help eventually turned out to be in some way linked to their relationship with a manipulative person. I've counseled not only the victims of covert-aggression, but also manipulators themselves experiencing distress because their usual ways of getting their needs met and controlling others weren't working anymore. My work has given me an appreciation for how widespread problem of manipulative behavior is and the unique emotional stress it can bring to a relationship.

The scope of the problem of covert-aggression seems self-evident. Most of us know at least one manipulative person. And hardly a day goes by that we

don't read in the newspaper or hear a broadcast about someone who managed to exploit or "con" many before fate shed some light on their true character. There's the tele-evangelist who preached love, honesty, and decency while cheating on his wife and fleecing his flock, the politician, sworn to "public service," caught lining his pockets, or the spiritual "guru" who even managed to convince most of his followers that he was God incarnate while sexually exploiting their children and subtly terrorizing those who challenged him. The world, it seems full of manipulators.

Although the extreme wolves in sheep's clothing that make headlines grab our attention and pique our curiosity about what makes such people "tick," most of the covertly aggressive people we are likely to encounter are not these larger-than-life characters. Rather, they are the subtly underhanded, backstabbing, deceptive, and conniving individuals we may work with, associate with, or possibly even live with. And they can make life miserable. They cause us grief because we find it so hard to truly understand them and even harder to deal with them effectively.

When victims of covert-aggression first seek help for their emotional distress, they usually have little insight into why they feel so bad. They only know that they feel confused, anxious, or depressed. Gradually, however, they relate how dealing with a certain person in their lives makes them feel crazy. They don't really trust them but can't pinpoint why. They get mad at them but for some reason end up feeling guilty themselves. They confront them about their behavior, only to wind up on the defensive. They get frustrated because they find themselves frequently giving in when they really wanted to stand ground, saying "yes" when they mean to say "no," and becoming depressed because nothing they try seems to make things better. In the end, dealing with this person always leaves them feeling confused, exploited and abused. After exploring the issues in therapy for a while, they eventually come to realize how much of their unhappiness is the direct result

of their constant but fruitless attempts to understand, deal with, or control their manipulator's behavior.

Despite the fact that many of my patients are intelligent, resourceful individuals with a fair understanding of traditional psychological principles, most of the ways they tried to understand and cope with their manipulator's behavior weren't getting them anywhere, and some of the things they tried only seemed to make matters worse. Moreover, none of the ways that I initially tried to help made any real difference. Having an eclectic training background, I tried all sorts of different therapies and strategies, all of which seemed to help the victims feel a little better, but none seemed to empower them enough to really change the nature of their relationship with their manipulator. Even more disconcerting was the fact that none of the approaches I tried was effective at all with the manipulators. Realizing that something must be fundamentally wrong with the traditional approaches to understanding and dealing with manipulative people, I began to carefully study the problem in the hope of developing a practical, more effective approach.

In this book I would like to introduce you to a new way of understanding the character of manipulative people. I believe the perspective I will offer describes manipulators and labels their behavior more accurately than many other approaches. I'll explain what covert-aggression is and why I believe it's at the heart of most interpersonal manipulation. I'll focus some needed attention on dimensions of personality that are too often ignored by traditional perspectives. The framework I will be advancing challenges some of the more common assumptions we make about why people act the way they do and explains why some of the most widely-held beliefs about human nature tend to set us up for victimization by manipulators.

I have three objectives to fulfill in this book. My first is to fully acquaint you the nature of disturbed characters as well as the distinctive character of

the covertly aggressive personality. I'll discuss the characteristics of aggressive personality types in general and outline the unique characteristics of the covert-aggressive personality. I'll present several vignettes, based on real cases and situations, that will help you get the “flavor” of this personality type as well as illustrate how manipulative people operate. Being able to recognize a wolf in sheep's clothing and knowing what to expect from this kind of person is the first step in avoiding being victimized by them.

My second objective is to explain precisely how covertly aggressive people manage to deceive, manipulate, and “control” others. Aggressive and covertly aggressive people use a select group of interpersonal maneuvers or tactics to gain advantage over others. Becoming more familiar with these tactics really helps a person recognize manipulative behavior *at the time it occurs*, and makes it easier, therefore, to avoid being victimized. I'll also discuss the characteristics many of us possess that can make us unduly vulnerable to the tactics of manipulation. Knowing what aspects of your own character a manipulator is most likely to exploit is another important step in avoiding victimization.

My final objective is to outline the specific steps anyone can take to deal more effectively with aggressive and covertly aggressive personalities. I'll present some general rules for redefining the rules of engagement with these kinds of individuals and describe some specific tools of personal empowerment that can help a person break the self-defeating cycle of trying to control their manipulator and becoming depressed in the process. Using these tools makes it more likely that a one-time victim will invest their energy where they really have power — in their own behavior. Knowing how to conduct yourself in a potentially manipulative encounter is crucial to becoming less vulnerable to a manipulator's ploys and asserting greater control over your own life.

I have attempted to write this book in a manner that is serious and substantial yet straightforward and readily understandable. I have written it for the general public as well as the mental health professional, and I hope both will find it useful. By adhering to many traditional assumptions, labeling schemes, and intervention strategies, therapists sometimes hold and inadvertently reinforce some of the same misconceptions that their patients harbor about the character and behavior of manipulators that inevitably lead to continued victimization. I offer a new perspective in the hope of helping individuals and therapists alike avoid *enabling* manipulative behavior.

# AUTHOR'S NOTE ON THE REVISED EDITION

Since this book's first wide publication in 1996, I have received literally hundreds of calls, letters, and emails, and heard countless testimonials and comments at workshops from individuals whose lives were changed merely by being exposed to and adopting a new perspective on understanding human behavior. A common theme voiced by readers and workshop attendees is that once they dispelled old myths and came to view problem behaviors in a different light, they could see clearly that what their intuition had told them all along was correct, and thus felt validated. A similar phenomenon has held true for mental health professionals attending the many training seminars I have given. Once they abandoned their old notions about why their clients do the things they do, they were better able to help them and their significant others. I had already been doing workshops for 10 years before writing *In Sheep's Clothing*. At that time, only a handful of theorists, researchers, and writers were recognizing the need for a new perspective on understanding and dealing with disturbed characters (e.g., Stanton Samenow, Samuel Yochelson, Robert Hare). What professionals today call the *cognitive-behavioral* approach was in its infancy. The early research on character disturbance inspired me and helped me validate my own observations. Today an increasing number of professionals are recognizing the problem of character disturbance and using cognitive-behavioral methods to diagnose and treat it.

We live in an age radically different from that in which the classical theories of psychology and personality were developed. For the most part, truly pathological degrees of neurosis are quite rare, and problematic levels

of character disturbance are increasingly commonplace. It's a pervasive societal problem about which all of us would do well to expand our awareness. During the last 15 years, my experience working with disturbed characters of all types has grown immensely, as has the body of research. So, I have included in this edition an expanded discussion on the problem of character disturbance in general and what sets the disturbed character apart from your garden-variety neurotic.

I am deeply grateful for the excellent word-of-mouth support responsible for transforming a once small, independent work into a best seller enjoying ever-increasing popularity even after 15 years. I sincerely hope this revised edition will provide you with all the information and tools you need to better understand and deal with the manipulative people in your life.

*George K. Simon, Jr., Ph.D.*

January 2010



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**PART I**

**UNDERSTANDING MANIPULATIVE  
PERSONALITIES**

