

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

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, weaselly 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

www.parkhurstbrothers.com

© Copyright 1996, 2010 George K. Simon, Jr., Ph.D. Published by Parkhurst Brothers, Inc., Publishers; printed and bound in the United States of America. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by an information storage and retrieval system — except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review to be printed in a magazine or newspaper — without permission in writing from the Permissions Director at the publisher's address shown on its web site.

Although the author and publisher have made every effort to ensure the accuracy and completeness of information contained in this book, we assume no responsibility for errors, inaccuracies, omissions, or any inconsistency herein. Any slights of people, places, or organizations are unintentional.

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.

A.J. Christopher printing history: First printing, November 1996; Eleventh Printing, September 2009.

A. J. Christopher edition is out-of-print effective 3.31.2010 by agreement with Parkhurst Brothers, Inc., Publishers, whose edition is available as of 4.1.2010.

2016 2015 2014 2013 ■ 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

PARKHURST BROTHERS paperback edition ISBN 978-1-935166-30-6

Library of Congress cataloging reference information is available on the publisher's website pages for this title. Please consult www.parkhurstbrothers.com for the information.

Readers may source an e-book edition of this title by consulting the publisher's website, www.parkhurstbrothers.com.

ATTENTION CORPORATIONS, UNIVERSITIES, COLLEGES, AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: Quantity discounts are available on bulk purchases of this book for educational or training purposes. Special editions or excerpts can also be created to fit specific needs. For information, please contact the publisher using the contact information on its website.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my wife, Dr. Sherry Simon for her unfailing love, faith, understanding, patience, and support. She is responsible for the title of this book and was a valuable resource in helping me clarify my thoughts during its writing.

I wish to thank Dr. Bruce Carruth for his critique of the original manuscript and suggestions for making it more readable.

I am deeply indebted to the work of Dr. Theodore Millon. His comprehensive approach to understanding personality has not only influenced my thinking on the subject but also proved invaluable in my efforts to help people change.

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.

Also by George K. Simon, Jr., Ph.D.:

*Character Disturbance:
The Phenomenon of Our Age*

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part I – Understanding Manipulative Personalities

<i>introduction</i>	Covert-Aggression: the Heart of Manipulation	17
<i>chapter 1</i>	Aggressive and Covert-Aggressive Personalities	30
<i>chapter 2</i>	The Determination to Win	58
<i>chapter 3</i>	The Unbridled Quest for Power	65
<i>chapter 4</i>	The Penchant for Deception and Seduction	71
<i>chapter 5</i>	Fighting Dirty	76
<i>chapter 6</i>	The Impaired Conscience	83
<i>chapter 7</i>	Abusive, Manipulative Relationships	90
<i>chapter 8</i>	The Manipulative Child	100

Part II – Dealing Effectively with Manipulative People

<i>chapter 9</i>	Recognizing the Tactics of Manipulation and Control	111
<i>chapter 10</i>	Redefining the Terms of Engagement	137
<i>epilogue</i>	Undisciplined Aggression in a Permissive Society	162
	Endnotes	173

PART I

Understanding Manipulative Personalities

COVERT-AGGRESSION: THE HEART OF MANIPULATION

A Common Problem

Perhaps the following scenarios will sound familiar. A wife tries to sort out her mixed feelings. She's mad at her husband for insisting their daughter make all A's. But she doubts she has the right to be mad. When she suggested that given her appraisal of their daughter's abilities, he might be making unreasonable demands, his comeback, "Shouldn't *any* good parent want their child to do well and succeed in life?" made her feel like the insensitive one. In fact, whenever she confronts him, she somehow ends up feeling like the bad guy herself. When she suggested there might be more to her daughter's recent problems, and that the family might do well to seek counseling, his retort "Are you saying I'm psychiatrically disturbed?" made her feel guilty for bringing up the issue. She often tries to assert her point of view, but always ends up giving-in to his. Sometimes, she thinks the problem is him, believing him to be selfish, demanding, intimidating, and controlling. But this is a loyal husband, good provider, and a respected member of the community. By all rights she shouldn't resent him. Yet, she does. So, she constantly wonders if there isn't something wrong with her.

A mother tries desperately to understand her daughter's behavior. No young girl, she thought, would threaten to leave home, say things like "Everybody hates me" and "I wish I were never born," unless she were very insecure, afraid, and probably depressed. Part of her thinks her daughter is still the same child who used to hold her breath until she turned blue or threw tantrums whenever she didn't get her way. After all, it seems she only says and does these things when she's about to be disciplined or she's trying to get something she wants. But a part of her is afraid to believe that. "What if she really believes what she's saying?" she wonders. "What if I've really done something to hurt her and I just don't realize it?" she worries. She hates to feel "bullied" by her daughter's threats and emotional displays, but she can't take the chance her daughter might really be hurting — can she? Besides, children just don't act this way unless they really feel insecure or threatened in some way underneath it all — do they?

The Heart of the Problem

Neither victim in the preceding scenarios trusted their "gut" feelings. Unconsciously, they felt on the defensive, but consciously they had trouble seeing their manipulator as merely a person on the offensive. On one hand, they felt like the other person was trying to get the better of them. On the other, they found no objective evidence at the time to back-up their gut-level hunch. They ended up feeling crazy.

They're not crazy. The fact is, people fight almost all the time. And manipulative people are expert at fighting in subtle and almost

undetectable ways. Most of the time, when they're trying to take advantage or gain the upper hand, you don't even know you're in a fight until you're well on your way to losing. When you're being manipulated, chances are someone is fighting with you for position, advantage, or gain, but in a way that's difficult to readily see. Covert-aggression is at the heart of most manipulation.

The Nature of Human Aggression

Our instinct to fight is a close cousin of our survival instinct.¹ Most everyone “fights” to survive and prosper, and *most* of the fighting we do is neither physically violent nor inherently destructive. Some theorists have suggested that only when this most basic instinct is severely frustrated does our aggressive drive have the potential to be expressed violently.² Others have suggested that some rare individuals seem to be predisposed to aggression — even violent aggression, despite the most benign circumstances. But whether extraordinary stressors, genetic predispositions, reinforced learning patterns, or some combination of these are at the root of violent aggression, most theorists agree that aggression per se and destructive violence are not synonymous. In this book, the term aggression will refer to the forceful energy we all expend in our daily bids to survive, advance ourselves, secure things we believe will bring us some kind of pleasure, and remove obstacles to those ends.

People do a lot more fighting in their daily lives than we have ever been willing to acknowledge. The urge to fight is fundamental and instinctual. Anyone who denies the instinctual nature of

aggression has either never witnessed two toddlers struggling for possession of the same toy, or has somehow forgotten this archetypal scene. Fighting is a big part of our culture, also. From the fierce partisan wrangling that characterizes representative government, to the competitive corporate environment, to the adversarial system of our judicial system, much fighting is woven into our societal fabric. We sue one another, divorce each other, battle with one another over our children, compete for jobs, and struggle with each other to advance certain goals, values, beliefs and ideals. The psychodynamic theorist Alfred Adler noted many years ago that we also forcefully strive to assert a sense of social superiority.³ Fighting for personal and social advantage, we jockey with one another for power, prestige, and a secure social “niche.” Indeed, we do so much fighting in so many aspects of our lives I think it fair to say that when human beings aren’t making some kind of love, they’re likely to be waging some kind of war.

Fighting is not inherently wrong or harmful. Fighting openly and fairly for our legitimate needs is often necessary and constructive. When we fight for what we truly need while respecting the rights and needs of others and taking care not to needlessly injure them, our behavior is best labeled *assertive*, and assertive behavior is one of the most healthy and necessary human behaviors. It’s wonderful when we learn to assert ourselves in the pursuit of personal needs, overcome unhealthy dependency and become self-sufficient and capable. But when we fight unnecessarily, or with little concern about how others are being affected, our behavior is most appropriately labeled *aggressive*. In a civilized world,

undisciplined fighting (aggression) is almost always a problem. The fact that we are an aggressive species doesn't make us inherently flawed or "evil," either. Adopting a perspective advanced largely by Carl Jung,⁴ I would assert that the evil that sometimes arises from a person's aggressive behavior necessarily stems from his or her failure to "own" and discipline this most basic human instinct.

Two Important Types of Aggression

Two of the most fundamental types of fighting (others, such as reactive vs. predatory or instrumental aggression) will be discussed later are *overt* and *covert* aggression. When you're determined to have your way or gain advantage and you're open, direct, and obvious in your manner of fighting, your behavior is best labeled overtly aggressive. When you're out to "win," get your way, dominate, or control, but are subtle, underhanded, or deceptive enough to hide your true intentions, your behavior is most appropriately labeled covertly aggressive. Concealing overt displays of aggression while simultaneously intimidating others into backing-off, backing-down, or giving-in is a very powerful manipulative maneuver. That's why *covert-aggression is most often the vehicle for interpersonal manipulation*.

Covert and Passive-Aggression

I often hear people say someone is being "passive-aggressive" when they're really trying to describe covertly aggressive behavior. Covert and passive-aggression are both indirect ways to aggress but they're most definitely not the same thing. Passive-aggression

is, as the term implies, aggressing though passivity. Examples of passive-aggression are playing the game of emotional “get-back” with someone by resisting cooperation with them, giving them the “silent treatment,” pouting or whining, not so accidentally “forgetting” something they wanted you to do because you’re angry and didn’t really feel like obliging them, etc. In contrast, covert aggression is very *active*, albeit veiled, aggression. When someone is being covertly aggressive, they’re using calculating, underhanded means to get what they want or manipulate the response of others while keeping their aggressive intentions under cover.

***Acts of Covert-Aggression vs.
Covert-Aggressive Personalities***

Most of us have engaged in some sort of covertly aggressive behavior from time to time but that doesn’t necessarily make someone a covert-aggressive or manipulative personality. An individual’s personality can be defined by the way he or she habitually perceives, relates to and interacts with others and the world at large.⁵ It’s the distinctive interactive “style” or relatively engrained way a person prefers to deal with a wide variety of situations and to get the things they want in life. Certain personalities can be ever so ruthless in their interpersonal conduct while concealing their aggressive character or perhaps even projecting a convincing, superficial charm. These covert-aggressive personalities can have their way with you and look good in the process. They vary in their degree of ruthlessness and character pathology. But because the more extreme examples can teach us much about

the process of manipulation in general, this book will pay special attention to some of the more seriously disturbed covert-aggressive personalities.

The Process of Victimization

For a long time, I wondered why manipulation victims have a hard time seeing what really goes on in manipulative interactions. At first, I was tempted to fault them. But I've learned that they get hoodwinked for some very good reasons:

1. A manipulator's aggression is not obvious. We might intuitively sense that they're trying to overcome us, gain power, or have their way, and find ourselves *unconsciously* intimidated. But because we can't point to clear, objective evidence they're aggressing against us, we can't readily validate our gut-level feelings.
2. The tactics that manipulators frequently use are powerful deception techniques that make it hard to recognize them as clever ploys. They can make it seem like the person using them is hurting, caring, defending, or almost anything but fighting for advantage over us. Their explanations always make just enough sense to make another doubt his or her gut hunch that they're being taken advantage of or abused. Their tactics not only make it hard for a person to consciously and objectively know their manipulator is fighting to overcome, but also simultaneously keep the victim unconsciously on the defensive. This makes the tactics highly effective psychological one-two punches. It's hard to think clearly when someone has you emotionally unnerved, so you're less likely to recognize the tactics for what they really are.