33. HOW TO DEAL WITH MANIPULATIVE BEHAVIOUR/HOW TO LIVE WITH A PSYCHOPATH. 
A PERSPECTIVE BASED ON PERSONAL CONSTRUCT THEORY AND ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING

FINN TSCHUDI AND SIGRID SANDSBERG

University of Oslo, Norway


A common problem in interpersonal relations is evasiveness, deviously going about one's aims, what we generally have called 'posing loaded questions'. When deviousness is combined with eliciting and playing on the other person's guilt feelings, this is a pattern which often (especially in Scandinavian psychiatric literature) is called 'psychopathy'. Such manipulative behaviour may be regarded as a violation of the other's personal rights. A tentative definition of manipulative behaviour might be: imposing one's own structure on the other, not permitting the other to elaborate his/her own construct system. (This may be carried out in different modes of consciousness.)

We apply a Kellyian perspective in understanding and dealing with such behaviour.

Some recent advances in 'assertiveness training' (see especially M.J. Smith (1975) When I say no I feel guilty. Bantam) offer techniques to withstand manipulative behav-
'tightening' are particularly useful in clarifying assertiveness techniques as 'fogging', 'negative inquiry', 'negative assertion' and 'broken record'.

We use the concept of 'manipulation' in a restricted manner, focussing on hostile behaviour in close relationships, where the participants cannot easily leave the field. Perhaps the ultimate aim of the transaction is a quest for growth and intimacy?

Emphasizing the mutuality of the interaction, it may often be difficult to decide who is manipulating whom. This implies reciprocity; generally the quality of the interaction is created by generic processes and does not simply unfold according to a predetermined script. There is an emergent quality to most interactions. On the other hand the interaction may have stagnated in a Hegelian master - slave relation.

The process point of view underlines the need for techniques which give both participants in the interaction the possibility of elaborating the relationship.

If manipulation means imposing one's own construct system on the other (treating the other as a thing), one alternative is to invite to a dialogue; trying to understand the other's construct system and at the same time clarifying one's own. This suggests a dialectic process, as for instance role taking, uncritical acceptance, using the invitational mood and loosening and tightening. The assertiveness techniques we are discussing may be regarded as further explorations of these avenues.

The notion of 'the personal scientist' is fundamental in our discussion. Our aim is to promote techniques which enable us to collaborate as personal scientists: understanding each other's hypotheses, offering alternatives, and - when the contradictions are outlined and the aims clarified - to negotiate workable compromises.