

The Masculinity Conflict Framework (MCF) is a practical 4-level decision tool for navigating one-to-one interpersonal conflict in status-sensitive environments. Find full details of MCF and how to use it on DNBStories.com.

Covert Conflict Tactics Common Among Black Gay Men

In environments shaped by **MSPL**—masculinity threat, social stigma, power and status, and legal risk—conflict often goes underground.

1) Relational Sabotage

- **Triangulation** — using third parties, mutuals, or group dynamics to pressure, isolate, control or relay messages to someone instead of contacting them directly.
- **The Freeze-Out** — withdrawing warmth, access, or recognition to punish without openly naming the conflict.
- **Subtle Ostracism** — excluding someone in quiet, deniable ways that leave them socially displaced but unable to easily prove intent.
- **Gatekeeping** — controlling access to people, spaces, invitations, opportunities, or information to maintain leverage.
- **Whisper Networking** — quietly circulating impressions, doubts, or warnings about someone through informal social channels.
- **Social Undermining** — weakening a person's credibility, confidence, or social footing without direct confrontation.
- **Selective Inclusion** — inviting someone around, mentioning events in front of them but not inviting them.

3) Communication Control

- **Weaponised Amnesia** — pretending not to remember key facts, promises, or prior behaviour when accountability becomes inconvenient.
- **Tone Policing** — shifting focus from the substance of a concern to the other person's delivery, emotion, or manner.
- **Vague-Casting** — speaking in suggestive, indirect, or slippery terms so that damage can be done without full ownership.
- **Deniable Shade** — making hostile or diminishing remarks in a form that can later be dismissed as a joke or misunderstanding.
- **Message Distortion** — subtly altering what was said, meant, or agreed to reshape the narrative.
- **Strategic Vagueness** — keeping intentions, positions, or complaints unclear so that responsibility remains difficult to pin down.

2) Passive-Aggressive Compliance

- **Malicious Compliance** — following instructions in a technically correct but deliberately harmful or unhelpful way.
- **Weaponised Incompetence** — performing confusion, inability, or helplessness to avoid responsibility or frustrate outcomes.
- **The Slow-Walk/Delay Tactics** — using postponement, lateness, or endless deferral as a covert form of control.
- **Performative Agreement** — appearing cooperative on the surface while quietly resisting, sabotaging, or disengaging underneath.
- **Minimal Compliance** — doing the bare minimum in a way that technically satisfies the request but undermines the result.
- **Intentional Misreading** — acting as though clear instructions or obvious meaning were confusing to avoid accountability.

4) Psychological Redirection

- **DARVO** — denying wrongdoing, attacking the person who raised the issue, and reversing the victim-offender dynamic.
- **Backhanded Apology** — offering an apology that minimises harm, redirects blame, or subtly criticises the injured person.
- **Reverse Victim Play** — repositioning oneself as the real victim to escape scrutiny or regain sympathy.
- **Gaslighting Lite** — using subtle doubt, reinterpretation, or minimisation to make someone question their own reading of events.
- **Deflection** — redirecting attention away from the core issue toward side matters such as timing, tone, or unrelated grievances.
- **Moral Reversal** — reframing the person raising harm as the one who is unfair, dangerous, cruel, or disruptive.
- **Strategic Innocence** — performing confusion, purity, or harmlessness to avoid being held accountable for obvious behaviour.

These tactics often flourish where direct conflict feels risky. The motive is to keep harm deniable, but in the end, hidden aggression destroys community trust, and everyone pays.