
PSYCHOLOGICAL IDENTIFICATION TECHNIQUES AND BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION STRATEGIES FOR ATHLETES WITH PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Chukwuemeka O. O. Aletta (PhD)

Department of Psychology,

KO Mbadiwe University, Ogboko, Imo State, Nigeria.

Email: chukwuemeka.aletta@komu.edu.ng, chuks2207@gmail.com, chuxale@yahoo.com

Phone: +2348037261355; +2347032329593

ABSTRACT: *Human interactions in both team and individual sports require cohesion and synergy. This chemistry can often be deliberately but subtly sabotaged by athletes through the expression of passive aggressive behaviour by couching their loathing and resistance of leaders, coaches and other authority figures. This paper x-rayed the meaning and causes of passive aggressive behaviour, and suggested identification techniques and behaviour modification mechanisms psychotherapists and other behaviour modification experts can adopt in addressing the phenomena in passive aggressive personalities.*

KEYWORDS: Psychological Identification-Techniques, Behaviour Modification, Athletes, Passive Aggressive Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Passive-aggressive behaviour is a pattern of indirectly expressing negative feelings instead of openly addressing them. It is a behaviour characterized by a pervasive pattern of negativism, a crafty non-confrontational method of resistance (Aufiero, 2011; Hall-Flavin, 2011). It is a situation whereby an athlete agrees to do what his coach or others say but refuse to comply in a subtle manner. The underlying fact in this definition is that there is a disconnect between what a passive-aggressive athlete or personality says and what he does. For a passive-aggressive athlete, true feelings are expressed and shared through actions, not words. Passive-aggressive athletes mask their malicious intentions by lying to avoid being held accountable for the misfortune of others. Their duplicitous behaviour enables them to avoid confrontation and accountability for their actions. "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders," 4th Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) in Reuter (2011) states that passive aggressive behaviours stem from a negative attitude toward and resentment of others.

Literature indicates that before the psychological terminology became common language, people currently described as displaying passive-aggressive behaviour were called back-stabbers. They can make life difficult for all while seemingly doing nothing wrong.

Passive-aggressors rarely confront situations and will avoid straightforward, honest communication. Negative feelings such as anger, annoyance, impatience or resentment are expressed indirectly, thereby avoiding an open and obvious expression of such feelings. Instead of expressing their needs or desires, passive-aggressors will pretend that all is well. Hostility will be couched and hidden but never displayed overtly. Envy, jealousy, or dislike can turn into sabotage at every opportunity. For example, a passive-aggressive athlete might appear to agree - perhaps even enthusiastically - with another athlete's or coach's request; rather than completing the task, however, he or she might express anger or resentment by missing deadlines, showing up late to trainings, making excuses or even working against the task.

Characteristics of Passive Aggressive Behaviour

According to Pollar (2011) passive-aggressive athletes or personalities hoard information because information is power. When a passive-aggressive athlete has a high need for control, it can take the form of resistance. When angry they will often engineer a situation in which a fellow athlete will pay the consequences. For example, on a day when a great deal of work needs to be done, like perfecting a tactical strategy or approach for a crucial game, the passive-aggressive athlete will call in sick but not

let the coach know. That leaves the coach with the pressure of finding an alternative strategy or approach within a short period of time. Always having a way out of a sticky situation and being right are key emotional needs for a passive-aggressive personality. Aufiero (2011) and Boyd (2011) outlined the following as characteristics of passive aggressive athletes and individuals:

Agreement

Passive-aggressive personalities or athletes often mask their pent-up aggression through agreement, even an enthusiastic variation of agreement. Whether this agreement comes in the form of a vigorous nod of the head followed by caustic grumbling, or altogether compliance coupled with sullen behaviour, the passive-aggressive individual or athlete will only hint at his unwillingness to agree, while displaying contradictory behaviour all the while.

Procrastination

Procrastination, which is, delaying or putting off doing a task, is another sign of passive-aggressiveness. For passive-aggressive athletes and individuals, it is typically a deliberate ploy to annoy or create problem for the person who is expecting the task to be done. Often, athletes who do not want to do something or carry out an instruction may intentionally delay in a show of resistance. They will offer excuses and apologies as they defer an action or task until a later date with the key feature being that the delay is offered needlessly. Explanations and excuses are never in short supply among passive-aggressive athletes and individuals.

Purposeful Forgetfulness/Memory Lapses

Feigning forgetfulness and intentional memory lapses is also characteristic of passive-aggressive personalities and athletes. Since everyone is prone to forgetting, it is a valid and acceptable excuse. Also, it is easy to deflect blame because it is viewed as an unintentional action. Purposefully forgetting to do something allows the passive-aggressive athlete to upset a plan or aggravate someone else without taking responsibility for it. Passive-aggressive athletes may "forget" to deliver a coach's message to a fellow athlete. By doing so, they create rift between an athlete they dislike and the coach and hide behind their lie when accused of intentionally creating problem.

Deliberate Inefficiency

Ineffective task performance is often indicative of passive-aggressive behaviour. When unwanted demands are unavoidable, passive-aggressive athletes will invest the barest or minimal amount of time and energy to do it. They will expend little thought or effort engaging in an undesirable activity and therefore do a shoddy job so as to upset their superior into not delegating such jobs to them again. For instance, when covering for a sick co-athlete, passive-aggressive athletes may provide inaccurate data or incomplete reports hoping their coach or boss will ask another athlete to do it. By making an attempt, the athlete cannot be accused of insubordination and the athlete can deflect fault for the poor quality due to a lack of knowledge and experience to do a task that is normally assigned to another athlete. For example, if asked to wash the coach's car, the passive aggressor may deliberately scratch it. The bottom line of this behaviour is that he wants you to perform the task yourself rather than ask him to do it.

Sullenness

According to MedlinePlus, sullenness (brooding or gloomy mood) is characteristic of passive-aggressive behaviour. The athlete would seem to be saying, "You can make me attend the training, but I refuse to enjoy it." He allows his sullen mood to ruin the training for all involved, although he says nothing outright. He may decide to become a loafer (exerting less effort in a group task) or engage in performance withholding (performing at half his maximum in a given task).

Hostility

Whitson (2009) indicates that hostility towards others manifests itself through hidden but conscious revenge to avoid confrontation. The hostility felt by passive-aggressive athletes is usually toward others in a role of authority such as a coach, boss, teacher, elder family member or mother-in-law. On the surface, they appear to respect authority figures, but they carry an inner resentment towards them. Passive-aggressive people and athletes typically have low self-esteem and a fear of confrontation. As such, they retaliate against authority figures through lies and deception.

Cynical Attitude

Cynicism is the mainstay of passive aggressive personalities. Dictionary.com defines cynicism simply as "an attitude of scornful or jaded negativity, especially a general distrust of the integrity or professed motives of others." Cynicism is often expressed through sarcasm and other caustic or derisive behaviour, though sarcasm tends to be more specific and cynicism general in nature. For example, an athlete/individual may have a cynical view of another athlete's/individual's ability to be honest. He may express this cynicism through sarcastic, caustic or biting remarks, remarks meant to wound or hurt when spoken. In this way, cynicism and sarcasm are two of the most obvious and potent signs of passive aggressive behaviour.

Irritability

Irritability is another sign of passive aggressive behaviour. Athletes who seem irritable are often described as having a "short fuse" and are, according to Dictionary.com, "readily excited to impatience or anger." Though irritability may be a sign of depression, anxiety or high levels of stress, it can also be a form of passive aggressive behaviour, as irritated individuals and athletes lash out without expressing what is truly bothering them. Other characteristics of passive aggressive personalities include:

- Complaining about feeling underappreciated or cheated and
- Stubbornness

Causes of Passive-Aggressive Behaviour

Medline Plus in Ray (2011) posits that Passive-aggressiveness is not officially recognized as a mental disorder, but a condition that can cause problems. The behaviour consists of agreeing to do what others say while refusing to comply in a subtle manner. An athlete who displays passive-aggressive characteristics may become more aggressive and hostile, causing a host of conflicting responses from coaches and authority figures. Included in the list of possible causes of passive aggressive behaviour are:

Child Development

Children are socialized into their immediate environ and learn how to express their feelings from their immediate family, especially

their parents. Like their intentions, passive-aggressive people hide their true feelings from others. Powell (2004) states that, children who are raised by overly controlling parents in an environment where self-expression is not permitted are forced to learn other ways of expressing their feelings of anger and hostility. Since they are dependent upon their parents, they risk punishment if they do not do their parents wish. Therefore, they lash out at their parents covertly. Seltzer (2008) in Ray (2011) observed that, being pushed or forced into playing a particular sport may cause an athlete to develop the personality trait. For him, children whose wishes and desires for particular sport are ignored often develop resentment toward parental pressure and develop ways of reacting that may not involve direct refusal to participate in a sport. Children who are punished when they refuse to cooperate with their parent's instructions may develop a fear of confrontation and carry on their passive-aggressive behaviour throughout adulthood.

Authority

Passive-aggressive adults resent authority figures such as coaches, bosses, teachers, older siblings or in-laws because they place demands and have certain expectations. Rather than overtly disagreeing with a coach or another authority figure, an athlete with a passive-aggressive personality will openly comply with requests made of him, but will covertly plot sabotage. He may exhibit his feelings through procrastination, purposefully forgetting responsibilities and commitments and deliberately doing a poor job or performing tasks incompletely. By engaging in these negative activities, they are passively resisting authority, which makes them less vulnerable to repercussions. Passive-aggressive behaviour is often displayed through complaining, sulking, resentments and outright hostility.

Cover-up

A desire to cover up unacceptable behaviour may lie behind athletes' passive-aggressive actions and require interventions to treat the underlying causes of the problems. Joy (2002) in Ray (2011) states that, female athletes who suffer from eating disorders, which can lead to serious medical issues including missed

menstrual cycles and osteoporosis, (a medical condition in which the bones become brittle from loss of tissue, typically due to hormonal changes, or deficiency of calcium or vitamin D), suffer from deeper psychological issues that often are hidden behind passive-aggressive behaviour. The hostile behaviour is designed to cover up the medical considerations and keep people away who might discover the truth.

Anabolic Steroids

Anabolic steroids also play a role in hostile, aggressive behaviour, which is often masked with complacency. According to DrugAbuse.gov, athletes turn to the substance to increase muscle mass and improve performance. Anabolic steroids are controlled substances; DrugAbuse.gov reports that, they are used illegally by anywhere from one to six percent of athletes. The drugs affect their hormones and can lead to aggressive behaviour, especially if the athlete has a predisposition to develop a passive-aggressive personality disorder.

Lack of Self-Confidence

According to the DSM-IV-TR, passive-aggressive behaviour stems from lack of self-confidence. Unassertive individuals and athletes lack the capacity to ask for what they want. Consequently, they become dependent on others to meet their personal needs. In addition, they use criticism, sarcasm and cynicism to deflect focus from their own weaknesses.

Confrontation

Athletes who are unable to express their feelings in a healthy manner are prone to irrational outbursts of anger, which allow them to release pent-up negativity. These outbursts fuel the ember for passive resistance. Passive-aggressive acts allow passive aggressive personalities to preserve their personal worth, needs and beliefs at the expense of others. These acts enable them to continue to see themselves as good people.

Responsibility

Passive-aggressive athletes and individuals covertly avoid responsibility and tend to blame others for their misfortunes. They have an arsenal of lies and excuses at their disposal to deflect responsibility from themselves and redirect it to others. Coaches, authority figures and individuals who choose to "keep the peace"

and accept someone's passive-aggressive behaviour are actually reinforcing it, causing future acts of passive aggression.

Managing Passive Aggressive Behaviour Find the Causes of Passive Aggression

Passive aggressive behaviour is usually based upon fear, resentment or outright anger. In order to manage passive aggressive behaviour, these feelings and emotions need to be identified and addressed. Psychotherapists and other behavior modification experts can use counseling to identify the feelings and emotions that are the root cause of passive aggressive behaviour. Behaviour therapists, however, may be able to change passive aggression much more quickly by using known or expertly improvised behaviour modification techniques to achieve results.

Separate Passive Aggression from Normal Types of Behaviours

Before attempting to manage passive aggressive behaviour, it is important to separate this condition from laziness and procrastination that may exist within the normal realm of behaviour. Most people may feel uncooperative or resentful at times if they find themselves locked into a promise under duress or excessive compromise. Passive aggression, however, is marked by a constant and consistent display of these behaviours that have affected the individual's ability to complete basic responsibilities or carry on normal personal relationships.

Treatment

Medline Plus posits that, passive-aggressive behaviour often can be treated successfully with cognitive therapy to help the athlete learn more effective means of communicating. Behavioural therapy can teach athletes how to be healthily assertive. Underlying issues such as drug abuse and eating disorder or poor social skill development must be treated first; if those issues can be dealt with, therapeutic treatment for passive aggressive behaviour becomes much more effective.

Talk it Out

Passive aggression is usually the result of a lack of communication between people and deep-seated feelings of fear and resentment that have grown slowly over time. If these behaviours are not addressed and managed when they first

appear, the individual will recognize passive aggression as a solution to avoiding responsibility and will soon employ these tactics in all aspects of life. While a counselor can often help a person to recognize and manage these behaviours, a passive aggressive person may just need the opportunity to get "something off his chest." Passive aggression is usually the result of unexpressed anger or hostility and many of the passive aggressive behaviours may lessen or disappear if the individual is encouraged to express these frustrations in a meaningful and productive way.

How to Deal with Passive Aggressive Athlete

Dealing with passive aggressive athletes requires Patience, Positive Attitude and Communication Skills. Passive aggressive athletes are especially difficult to manage in a team, since their behaviours can create discord within the team. To deal with a passive aggressive athlete, the coach must identify his target behaviours and decide which methods to use to deal with those behaviours. Some examples of passive aggressive behaviours include repeated forgetfulness, procrastination, inability to make decisions, inability to accept responsibility and constantly making excuses. There are often other behaviours exhibited, but once the coach can identify and deal with one problem, he can take steps to deal with other issues and behaviours. Specific steps to deal with these issues are detailed next.

How to deal with repeated forgetfulness

Encourage the athlete to become more organized. Offer to help him set up a reminder book or 'to do' list for the tasks that he need to accomplish. Writing tasks down makes them real and helps the athlete to acknowledge his awareness of the tasks. It is usually hard for passive aggressive athletes to claim that they forgot when they have a written reminder right in front of them.

How to deal with procrastination

Set firm deadlines for tasks that need to be accomplished. Encourage them to plan ahead, using a calendar to keep track of upcoming deadlines and required completion dates. Break large tasks into smaller parts and require that they complete each part within a certain time frame. This creates an artificial schedule for them and

prompts them to start work sooner rather than later.

How to deal with the inability to make decisions

Give them a choice. If possible, offer several different options when asking them to make a decision. The ability to make their own choice empowers them and makes decision making easier and more fulfilling. Put them in control of the decision-making process. Inform them that the decision is for them to make and no one else will make that decision for them. Put the responsibility on them from the start. Do not offer advice or guidance, make them be in charge.

How to deal with the inability to accept responsibility

As a leader or coach hold people accountable. Do not accept excuses or let things just slide, because it is easier that way. That is exactly what the passive aggressive athlete is hoping you will do. They think "I will do such a bad job, that no one will ever ask me to do anything important again". Make them meet their obligations without any room for compromise. Withhold rewards when goals are not met. Express sincere disappointment when they fail to show responsibility for their inabilities. This will either make them aware that they have a problem and need to sit up or insult them so much that they just might move on and become someone else's problem.

How to deal with the athlete that is constantly making excuses

This is perhaps one of the most difficult passive aggressive behaviours to deal with. It is difficult in the sense that everyone makes excuses from time to time. It is natural to rationalize and blame other people or factors for failure. The problem is that people with a passive aggressive tilt use excuses to explain everything. They do not make occasional excuses for poor performance or mistakes; they are always blaming others for their failures or shortcomings. It is just never their fault. Put a stop to the constant excuse making with a simple statement: "I am not interested in excuses; I am interested in results". Once the passive aggressive (PA) person understands that excuses are not condoned by you, you will see one of two things. Their performance will either improve, or they will just try to avoid you

completely. You can hope for improved performance

Bonding/Cohesion

Sports and athletic competition can help deal with the inner resentment to authority that the passive aggressive person feels. By creating bonds/cohesion with teammates and forming a relationship with the coach, the passive aggressive person is drawn away from his own ego and sense of self-importance. What matters is the team and defeating the opponent, not his own individual self-centered interests.

Coaching

Young athletes can benefit from strong coaching in a variety of sports to build character early and prevent or resolve any developing passive aggressive behaviour. In football for example, coaches can encourage athletes to run back to his teammates and to avoid excessive celebration of individual accomplishments such as touchline dances and unsportsmanlike fist pumping after scoring goals. Coaches should guide celebration toward group efforts.

Contact Games

Because at the root of passive aggressive behaviour is the desire to avoid conflict, sports such as football, hockey and wrestling allow for an open expression of aggression. Sports give athletes a controlled environment in which to release anger. When disappointments or conflicts occur within the team, each athlete can be taught to accept responsibility and not blame others. By realizing that everyone makes mistakes, passive aggressive anger is less likely to simmer.

Managing a Passive Aggressive co-athlete

Passive-aggressive personality disorder is not accidental; it is premeditated. It can be identified by looking for a pattern of consistent behaviour. This behaviour is unusually difficult to manage. Winning over such an athlete is extremely difficult. While it may be difficult to change such athlete, an athlete can protect himself by using these strategies: minimizing his dependence on the unreliable athlete, and documenting everything. If you have a passive aggressive co-athlete, try these strategies:

1. To cover yourself when working on a project together with a known or identified passive aggressor, be sure you see all relevant documents and hear all

the instructions yourself. Check behind your passive-aggressive co-athlete to be sure nothing is being hidden or withheld from you.

2. In cases where there are a whole series of discussions, it is helpful to have your conversations with a passive aggressor in front of witnesses. The passive-aggressive athlete is less likely to deny an incident when someone other than you can refute or corroborate.
3. Where possible put all of your dealings with the passive aggressive athlete in writing. A brief memo or e-mail is sufficient. Keep private copies somewhere other than in your easily accessible desk drawer.
4. When necessary, take this a step further by having your passive aggressive co-athlete initial the documents after reading them. That way he cannot deny. This is one of the only ways to rein in a passive-aggressive co-athlete. Without documentation, he is very skilled at manipulating situations, finger-pointing and convincing others that any flaws are due to your perception, not his performance.

How to Respond to Passive Aggressive Behaviour

Although psychiatrists no longer define passive-aggressive behaviour as a mental illness, the symptoms of the behaviour can present obstacles to personal and professional relationships. Some of the ways of responding to passive aggressive athletes are:

Exclude the passive-aggressive individual or athlete from serving as a source of psychological or financial support. Vulnerability in any life area serves as an invitation to the passive-aggressive individual to impact you where it hurts most.

Avoid verbal confrontations and power struggles with a passive-aggressive personality. Power struggles produce reinforcement for the passive-aggressive person and heightened frustration for you. Rather than detailing inappropriate motives for problem behaviour, describe the behaviour and its negative effect on a goal. Offer a positive alternative and briefly state its advantages. Give the passive-aggressive

person an opportunity to contribute positive options.

Clarify the inconsistencies presented by the passive-aggressive individual's actions and words. For example, the passive-aggressive person can agree to complete a portion of an

REFERENCES

- Aufiero, B. (2011). *Characteristics of passive aggressive behavior*. Retrieved 15/5/12 from <http://www.livestrong.com/article/112076-characteristics-passive-aggressive-behavior/>
- Boyd, L. (2011). *What are examples of passive-aggressive behavior?* <http://www.livestrong.com/article/88342-examples-passiveaggressive-behavior/>. Accessed 12/6/12
- Coleman, A.M. (2003). *Oxford dictionary of psychology*. Oxford University Press.
- Daniel K. Hall-Flavin, M.D. 2011. What are the signs and symptoms of passive-aggressive behavior? *Adult Health*. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/passive-aggressive-behavior/AN01563>, Accessed 15/5/12
- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*, 4th Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR). American Psychiatric Association.
- How to Deal with Passive Aggressive Behavior http://www.ehow.com/how_4857393_deal-passive-aggressive-behavior.html
- How to Treat Passive Aggressive Behavior. http://www.ehow.com/how_4422007_treat-passive-aggressive-behavior.html#ixzz1vu1VN6zi Accessed 20/5/12
- Medline Plus: Passive Aggressive Personality Disorder
- Phillips, M. (2009). Three ways to manage passive aggressive behavior. <http://www.livestrong.com/article/13609-manage-passive-aggressive-behavior/#ixzz1vF8GobfH>
- Pollar, O. (2011). Passive-aggressive colleagues. consumer.healthday.com/encyclopedia/article.asp?AID=646733. Accessed 14/6/12
- Powell, D. R. (2004) passive-aggressive behavior, *Minding Your Mental Health*.
- important project but deliberately miss deadlines, make excuses or even sabotage the project's success. Calmly point out the discrepancies between the words and actions of the passive-aggressive person.
- Ray, L. (2011). Sports & passive/aggressive behavior. Retrieved 16/5/12 from <http://www.livestrong.com/article/308434-sports-passiveaggressive-behavior/#ixzz1vtyF9riR>
- Reuter (2011). What are the causes of passive aggressive behavior? <http://www.livestrong.com/article/112979-causes-passive-aggressive-behavior/#ixzz1vFB2o39d> Accessed 18/5/12
- Saylor, S. 2011. Sports & passive aggressive behavior http://www.ehow.com/facts_7150978_sports-passive-aggressive-behavior.html#ixzz1vtzTLEPV Accessed 20/5/12
- Swain, B. 2011. How to respond to passive aggressive behavior http://www.ehow.com/how_5341553_respond-passive-aggressive-behavior.html#ixzz1v4ICQtiH. Accessed 16/05/12
- Voight, G. 2011. How to deal with a passive-aggressive colleague. Retrieved 3/6/12 from http://www.ehow.com/how_8779470_deal-passiveaggressive-colleague.html#ixzz1vu3W3jFR
- Wainwright, N. 2011. How to decrease aggressive behavior. http://www.ehow.com/how_8294104_decrease-aggressive-behavior.html. Accessed 16/05/12
- What is the meaning of passive aggressive? Retrieved 16/5/12 from http://www.ehow.com/about_6298694_meaning-passive-aggressive_.html
- Whitson, S. (2009). Passive aggressive behavior in the workplace. *Psychology Today*.
- Woodman, C. (2011). How to deal with passive-aggressive people. http://www.ehow.com/how_4535323_deal-passive-aggressive-people.html#ixzz1v4CStqgT Accessed 23/5/12.