



Living with the Passive-Aggressive Man: Coping with Hidden Aggression - From the Bedroom to the Boardroom

By Scott Wetzler

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With more than 100,000 copies in print, *Living with the Passive-Aggressive Man* draws on case histories from clinical psychologist Scott Wetzler's practice to help you identify the destructive behavior, the root causes and motivations, and solutions.

Do you know one of these men?

The catch-me-if-you-can lover...

Phil's romantic and passionate one minute, distant and cold the next.

The deviously manipulative coworker or boss...

Jack denies resenting Nora's rapid rise in the company, but when they're assigned to work together on a project, he undermines her.

The obstructionist, procrastinating husband...

Bob keeps telling his wife he'll finish the painting job he began years ago, but he never seems to get around to it.

These are all classic examples of the passive-aggressive man. This personality syndrome—in which hostility wears a mask of passivity—is currently the number one source of men's problems in relationships and on the job. In *Living with the Passive-Aggressive Man*, Scott Wetzler draws upon numerous case histories from his own practice to explain how and why the passive-aggressive man thinks, feels, and acts the way he does. Dr. Wetzler also offers advice on:

- How to avoid playing victim, manager, or rescuer to the "P-A"
- How to get his anger and fear into the open
- How to help the "P-A" become a better lover, husband, and father
- How to survive passive-aggressive game playing on the job

Living with a man's passive aggression can be an emotional seesaw ride. But armed with this book, you can avoid the bumpy landings.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Passive-aggressive men are angry, but out of fear they display their aggressive impulses in passive ways, states New York City psychologist Wetzler. He explores the various ways men become passive-aggressive and advises women on how to deal with husbands, lovers, bosses, colleagues and employees who display these traits. From his own practice Wetzler draws numerous examples of how these men "drive women crazy," from "forgetting" an important meeting to sulking to delivering a barbed compliment. He also explains how women may unconsciously encourage passive-aggressive behavior, and offers tips on ways for them to break the vicious cycle. He even provides a short section on the "passive-aggressive organization." While this book is a trove of helpful and practical advice, many of Wetzler's examples of "passive-aggressive" behavior actually seem fairly benign.

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About the Author

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Chapter 1

ANATOMY OF PASSIVE-AGGRESSION

When the King of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland* tries to calm the Mad Hatter's hysteria by saying, "don't be nervous or I'll have you executed on the spot," the warning could easily have emerged from the lips of a passive-aggressive man. "Yes, no!" "Stop, go!" "I never lie, I was just protecting you from the truth!" *What does he mean?* The King of Hearts and most passive-aggressive men share the maddening characteristic of never saying exactly what they mean.

He may be a legal wizard, a computer genius, a brilliant analytical scientist or a guy who runs a newsstand, but when it comes to relating to others, the passive-aggressive man has just learned to read. *He's* as unclear about why he does what he does as you are about his behavior.

When patients describe his psychological abuse, they often begin the same way: "This guy is *impossible*." "This guy is *difficult*." "Every meal, every conversation and everything we decide to do is handled like we're two warring nations negotiating a pact, not two people who care about each other," one woman told me. She could be talking for other women about their husbands, fathers, bosses, the shoemaker.

What's the appeal of a guy who says in one breath, "I love you/I hate you," or, "I promise.../Why should I do anything for you?" If you have any emotional investment in a passive-aggressive man, it's because you've probably fallen for his salesmanship. He's brilliantly persuasive at selling himself -- whether it's his brooding stoicism, his understated charm, his boyishness or irresistible seductiveness. You buy into his elusiveness; but you also buy into his *neediness*. You feel for him and want to be the one who breaks through, who tears the walls down and gets him to shape up. In many cases, it is a thankless mission.

Problems arise with the passive-aggressive man because of his fatal flaw: an indirect and inappropriate way

of expressing hostility hidden under the guise of innocence, generosity or passivity. If what he says or does confuses you, or, more likely, angers you, this is why. You're not the only one to react this way. It's what passive-aggression is all about.

INSIDE PASSIVE-AGGRESSION

A seemingly paradoxical term, passive-aggression asks the question, How can a person be passive *and* aggressive, rather than one way or the other? It's a common misconception about passive-aggression that its perpetrators swing alternately between the two behaviors -- either willfully with premeditation to control others (aggression) or in a self-effacing manner (passivity).

The truth is that the passive-aggressive man doesn't ride an emotional seesaw (although he may put you on one); he's not passive today and aggressive tomorrow, depending on the circumstances. Rather, the passive-aggressive man is simultaneously passive and aggressive. The paradox reigns because he *renounces his aggression as it is happening*.

Since passivity and aggression are contradictory by origin and act, you can see that we are dealing with a complex and fundamentally ambivalent creature.

Passive-aggressive tactics aren't that easily read at first; it takes a while to figure out what this guy is getting at: the blur of meaning lies in his genius for creating discrepancies between how he pretends to be and how he acts, which is a better indicator of his true intentions and feelings. You're always receiving mixed messages because he wants you to guess what he wants almost as much as he wants to fool you or string you along. This is what his double-speak can sound like:

-- "I can't live without you," a passive-aggressive boyfriend says as he kisses you and leaves the room. Or, when the two of you are alone, he asks "Why are you around all the time?" when he means, *I'm terrified that you'll leave me*.

-- "Are you interested...?" a passive-aggressive husband may whisper to a wife who makes an affectionate advance toward him, while what he is really thinking is, *Why am I asking her when I'm not that turned on?* Or he says, contrarily, "Sometimes sex is overrated," when he means, *I want you*, all the while expecting his wife to know that he wants to be seduced.

-- "We've noticed your administrative skills and would like to discuss a special project that's coming up," a passive-aggressive boss says flatteringly, hinting at a promotion, but then you never hear from him again. What he really meant was: *What makes you think I'd even consider you for that secret project, and how'd you find out about it anyway?*

Or, he might try a version of this empty promise:

-- "Okay, I know I promised to pick up your kitchen stuff at Sue's place, but my car broke down. Maybe tomorrow..." a passive-aggressive brother assures you, but he's thinking, *Why do you keep asking me to do anything involving Sue when you know I can't stand the sight of her, and besides, I hate hauling freight in my new car*.

-- Or, a passive-aggressive friend says, "I wanted to be the first one to buy you a disk for your new CD player...something *really* great, something you'll love -- eighteenth-century harpsichord favorites that took me a week to find for you," but what he thinks is, *This should let you know how low-brow your taste in music*

is. *Your idea of culture is the Miami Sound Machine.*

The man in each of these examples isn't playing diplomat; his baiting behavior isn't *inadvertent*, though he hopes you'll think it is. This is a man who's driven to appear above suspicion, guiltless and guileless. That's why you find that most passive-aggressive men negotiate the world as "nice guys" denying even the slightest hint of hostility or conflict.

As with a brother who'll easily break a promise five or ten times rather than just say, "No, sorry, I can't," this man will lie to keep you on a string until the game reaches its limit and he's finally forced -- by you -- to confess that he can't come through. If he's someone who's been in your life a long time, you may find you're always arguing about the same thing, year after year. Most of all, you wonder why you still jump through the same flaming hoops he holds up, how he can still get a rise out of you.

If you're typical, and at the end of your rope with him, you may fantasize about ending your relationship -- and this includes abandoning relationships with "impossible" relatives, like fathers and brothers. But you don't act on it. Or, if he's a key player sorely affecting your job, you might just give up and quit, but the passive-aggressive colleague you leave behind won't believe he's done anything to obstruct your career. More likely, he expects a huge pat on the back for *doing everything* to boost your efforts and calls you ungrateful, to boot.

Whoever he is, your relationship with a passive-aggressive man probably leaves you feeling unsettled and insecure, wondering why you're always at an emotional crossroad. Most of all, you wonder how to make your life with him a better place to be. Before I get to the latter, I'll take you through what makes him tick and keeps him running. The passive-aggressive man's *modus operandi* has two primary component parts: passivity and aggression. Let's begin there.

A CLOSE LOOK AT PASSIVITY

When it's used as a power play against you, *passivity* can rouse you to anger just as much as an active display of hostility. But why does someone's *inaction* so anger you?

The answer lies in the qualities that make up "passivity." Traditionally, a passive person shows little initiative in getting what he wants; assertion is a labor and comes about hesitantly, if at all. Male passivity covers a wide range of behavior, from the classic "loser" -- the weak, inept type who has a hard time keeping a job -- to the "conformist" -- the man who rolls with the current, buoyed by approval seeking, not making waves, changing his opinions in order to be liked and rarely stating what he feels and thinks at any moment.

In certain corporate or bureaucratic circles, he's the yesman. On occasion, his quick-change sentiments delivered to the right person at the right time may serve to get him what he wants. As *a guy who just wants to fit in*, he may reach some level of success, but he's a poor leader and decision maker; he avoids big responsibilities, and he'll stop short of a top spot. As he sees it, others are better able to make the right decisions.

"*This man's a baby.* He's sharp, he's charming, but emotionally, he's about four years old!" women say, and they're right. Passive people -- and here I include women, too -- all suffer because they haven't quite grown up. They're childlike and continue to rely on others.

Larry is a good example of passive dependency. An engineer in the construction business, he can never remember to bring cash, check, or credit card when he goes out to dinner. It isn't that Larry is cheap; rather,

he has a compulsion to get others to pay for his meal -- he needs you to feed him. His excuses take the same unrealistic and juvenile line of thinking as, "The dog ate my term paper." You don't believe Larry's story, but it is that boyish, ingratiating look -- that need to be loved and forgiven -- that suckers certain of us who take to babying him.

That Larry needs to be "nurtured" by someone with money -- that is, an adult with power -- makes him passive; that he has to *trick* you into doing it makes him *passive-aggressive*.

You'll find that passive men and the more complicated passive-aggressive men have a trait in common: both are reluctant to assert themselves directly, in a firm but tactful way. They shun and fear *self-assertion*, mistaking it for unleashed aggression. The consequences of assertion scare them. Their internal line of thinking goes something like this: "If I do this, straight out and simply, I'm telling you what I think, what I'm going to do or what I feel. This leaves me open to a possible challenge, disagreement or loss of support."

This emotion-packed reasoning haunts them: If asserting themselves brings them into direct confrontation with others, what will happen next? Could they handle an attack? Self-doubt tells them they would not be able to, so they do what they can to avoid confrontation, winding and weaving all over the map. To passive and passive-aggressive personalities, denial and avoidance offer a safe haven. This is one reason why the roads in a passive-aggressive man's life lead to detours, dead ends or clover-leaf turns that circle back to the starting point: going *forward* puts him on his bumpiest road.

The passive-aggressive man pretends to be passive, when he's not that way at all. What underlies his apparent passivity -- his fear and dependency -- is aggression, pure and simple. And this is what rouses you to anger, makes you feel tricked. The passive personality is never infuriating because he poses no challenge; the passive-aggressive personality, however, is constantly giving you little tastes of his hostility in doses just large enough to irritate you.

Aggression is the other side of the issue. While passivity brings out restraint, inhibition, and a life without much challenge or "juice," aggression evokes images of force, energy and push. Together they add up to a mixed-up view of his power as a man.

A CLOSE LOOK AT AGGRESSION

Aggression, a basic drive older than predawn man, is often thought of as man's failing -- a dubious impulse equated with hostility, tyranny, anger, dominance and bloodshed. Yet aggression exists within a wide range of experience, and everyone is motivated to some degree by aggressive impulses. A masked terrorist aiming an Uzi at a planeload of tourists is one kind of riotous aggressor; a rude shopper pushing his way to the front of a line in a bakery and demanding to be served reveals another kind of unbridled nerve; pitching a set of dishes at the kitchen wall during a fight is anger with impact; and a Jets quarterback whose guts and muscle win a football game describes aggression a fourth way.

Of the two impulses, it is aggression, not passivity, that commands greater attention by social, psychological, biological, ethical and religious scholars, scientists, researchers and philosophers. Perhaps it is the power and intensity of aggression that fascinates us; it's a force that can build or destroy with equal strokes. Aggression not only makes headlines, it gets things done. Yet, those who study it unanimously view aggression as something to be contained.

The messages from social theorists, for example, reckon that aggression swims the eternal tides of our primordial gene pools -- a remnant from the days before we were civilized and prowled the earth as animals.

Aggression got us dinner, shelter and mates. It still does, but now it has a civilized veneer. However, some social theorists ask, with developed forebrains and space-age technologies, do we really need such impulses? Aggression, being more destructive than constructive, undoes the fabric of society, and results in war, crime and domestic violence. Theorists say we must control aggression, and we have built jails and a criminal justice system to do it.

Ethical philosophers, concerned only with behavior (action) not thoughts (unacted-upon ideas), inject aggression into a similar vein: to them, it's immoral. Their message is: behave in a hostile manner and you'll be judged harshly and suffer guilt that will follow you through life. Theologians, whose scope reaches to an individual's innermost soul, hold aggression as sinful and goodness as holy. Their message is more damning, full of brimstone and with even less understanding of the nature of man: don't feel anger or you'll go to hell. In quite different ways, each of these theories encourages the development of passive-aggression because they discourage the individual from acknowledging, or acting upon, his anger.

Psychology offers a contrasting message: everyone has aggressive impulses and it is beneficial for the individual's mental health to express them, but we must do so appropriately. If, for example, someone less talented and less experienced than you receives the promotion at work you want, it's not a good idea to show the anger you feel in any way that would sabotage your future possibilities of getting ahead. If you want to find out why you weren't promoted, you'd have to know your boss's style, how to approach him/her, in what manner to get the information you need and to know how much to say about your disappointment at losing out. You could even use your frustration to make yourself work that much harder.

But if you're annoyed because someone just recklessly cut in front of you on a highway, then it may be more appropriate to express yourself by word or gesture. Sometimes there are consequences -- maybe the guy tries another move to rear-end you in retaliation but, more likely, he'll respond, too, by word or gesture. This kind of direct and appropriate response is better than quietly seething, doing nothing or taking it out on someone else later on.

What humanity has in common is that we're all aggressive in some way. We also share the capacity to *judge* our aggressive acts, weighing them, comparing them, scrutinizing them, containing them. Were we too pushy, too loud, too demanding, too hostile, too prone to tantrums...?

As long as we're willing to take a look at how we're being aggressive, we can *hope* to control the impulse before it becomes destructive. What makes some people aggressive personalities is how *frequently* and *pervasively* they act on their aggressive impulses, whether it's Ralph Cramden on "The Honeymooners," perpetually exasperated, or "L.A. Law" 's Arnie Becker, a quintessential two-stepping attorney on the offense.

But most important, the man who's more vociferous in his aggression isn't necessarily more *aggressive* than the guy who's more subtle about it. The latter may just be more *passive-aggressive*.

As with other impulses and feelings that are difficult to compare or measure from person to person (the unresolvable argument of who loves more...who hates more...who hurts more...), so is it impossible to determine who's really more aggressive. What matters is the type of aggressive acts and how they're handled. Aggression employed to destroy, such as a husband who "accidentally" incinerates papers you need for work tomorrow, versus aggression used to build, such as fighting for what you believe is right, is more significant than how often the impulse is discharged.

Sigmund Freud and the early psychiatrists believed that if people didn't let off steam gradually, aggressive

impulses would mount internally, putting excessive pressure on the fragile psyche. They thought that aggressive impulses, like water fracturing the walls of a dam, would break through and flood the psyche, causing sudden and explosive acts of aggression -- wreaking havoc. The popped cork!

Freud's hydraulic metaphor is only a partial truth. Aggression, like love, isn't a limited commodity to be apportioned, spent, or lost. Rather, when aggression is ventilated one way, the desire to keep it going increases. Still, I believe, as did Freud, that aggression and anger require management and, in some cases, conscientious vigilance. Most important, the energy and impulses that govern aggression can be channeled into creative achievements, productive acts, and improved relationships, the most successful ways of handling them.

"Anger is a human emotion..." psychologist Carol Tavris wrote in her book *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion*, "because only people can judge actions for their intention, justifiability and negligence. Each angry episode contains a series of split-second decisions." So the decisions you make may be alternately (1) to bury or cool the anger/aggression: you may run it off, scrub the kitchen, make a piece of sculpture or ingest something "forbidden" -- alcohol, a tray of brownies, high-fat fast food -- to "reward" yourself and calm down; or (2) to let it all hang out, telling the object of your anger why you feel as you do. However you decide to deal with your anger, it is under your control.

APPROPRIATE PASSIVE-AGGRESSION

Under certain conditions, passive-aggression can be a healthy, highly adaptive response. Call it subtlety, tact, humor, restraint, altruism or even courage, it is also passive-aggression. Humor or diplomacy, for example, can defuse a highly volatile situation and prevent the dropping of bombs, real or metaphorical. More dramatic cases of passive-aggression are the "nonviolent" protests led by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

For anyone who is oppressed, truly deprived of power and with no other means of resistance, nonviolent protest is one way to get feelings and demands known: the lone Chinese student stalwartly defying a tank moving on him in Tiananmen Square is now a universal symbol of such defiance. To assert oneself, without showing inflammatory anger, is, in this case, healthy.

There is a clear distinction between healthy and neurotically played-out passive-aggression. It's the difference between tact and avoidance, humor and obnoxiousness, civil disobedience and plain obstructionism. You know it when you see it in action. A healthy person uses passive-aggression to help him achieve his goals. *Neurotic* passive-aggression clouds issues and gets you nowhere.

To some degree, passive-aggression describes *everyone*, normal as well as dysfunctional men and women. Its universality may be compared to a commonly understood feeling like *anxiety*. It may be an unpleasant emotion, but anxiety serves a psychological function necessary for survival: it signals us to take action when faced with impending danger, motivating us, hopefully, to perform at our best to get us out of the scrape and to a better state.

Evolution has its reasons. Maintaining a moderate level of anxiety is one of our most important adaptive functions. Too much anxiety interferes with functioning -- you just freeze or flail -- and too little provides insufficient incentive to take action. Similarly, the issue with passive-aggression is not that the behavior is present, but that *what is there is excessive or inappropriate*. When it pervades all different kinds of interactions, not just isolated instances, passive-aggression becomes neurotic.

It's this inappropriateness that causes all the trouble.

IDENTIFYING THE PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE MAN

A man who's passive-aggressive can function, make plans, make love, win career battles. He may even take up residence in the White House, as did Richard Nixon, a classic profile of this personality type. He revealed himself as an insightful foreign-affairs strategist and an impressive figure "one-on-one," but when he was hurt by public criticism, he felt victimized and betrayed, put upon and sacrificing, often stressing his credentials, as if they would excuse his actions ("I am the President").

Considered brilliant and competitive, Nixon was equally tormented by his jealousies, especially of men born into advantage. Much of politics relies on subterfuge or diplomacy, "counterintelligence," outsmarting the enemy and never letting others know too much of your plans and motives. It's the perfect profession for a passive-aggressive man. However, it was Nixon's profound sense of inadequacy, a real lack of self-respect, that led to his downfall.

This lack of self-esteem is shared by all passive-aggressive men.

Passive-aggressive men are rarely "bad guys," brutalizers, tyrants at home or at work, Lotharios or anti-social con men. But they're not purely "good guys" either, and all that implies -- an updated version of "Mr. Right," tolerably flawed but otherwise "perfect." Instead, they're the men who frustrate you -- men who suffer from subtle and profound internal bluffs, mechanisms destined to trip up both of you.

They can be great squanderers of time, talent and feelings, making you feel alternately sabotaged and hurt, manipulated and used, undermined and betrayed, devalued and patronized. One moment you're sure of them, the next they're withholding and cold. While you try ardently to get a job done or keep a relationship working, you wind up wasting your time in a dead-end situation.

Above all, the passive-aggressive man is riddled with conflicts, contradictions and convoluted layers of "truths" by which he is guided and to which he clings. Look closely and you'll see an angry man, who is *afraid* of his anger, simmering in resentment and brooding fear, all hiding behind a facade of congeniality. "Mr. Nice Guy" is pure camouflage. He's a commando in self-protection, trudging through miles of effluvia of underlying hostility. Expect to be spattered.

Let's see what kicks up the dirt.

Other psychological syndromes, such as depression, are more precise in their patterns and causes and effects, but passive-aggressive behavior doesn't fit neatly into any absolute boundaries. Although passive-aggression is fundamentally about one individual's psychological conflict, it is most poignantly played out in the arena of a two-person relationship. The passive-aggressive man needs an adversary -- you -- to be the object of his hostility. He also needs someone whose demands and expectations he can resist. Passive-aggression is often expressed through relationships and so appears to be a "relationship" problem. But more often than not, it is one person's problem: *his*.

Wendy's story is a great example of this behavior. When she came to see me for treatment, her focus was the state of her relationship with Vic, a divorced stockbroker. Her overall grievance was Vic's neglectfulness. As Wendy related the mounting and significant number of Vic's "little" omissions, I could see why this relationship was a fragmented one. Wendy described what happened:

Vic would sometimes "forget" that we had a date and at other times he would appear at my house without calling first. He wanted me to be happy that he'd come over -- and I was -- but I knew that what also made Vic happy was that he'd caught me off guard.

Then he'd be so sweet that I'd feel I was being unfair. The next day, he'd behave as if we'd just met! He'd be distant and irritated. If I asked what was wrong, he'd shout me down so I couldn't get a straight answer. If I told him he hurt my feelings, he'd say, "I can't help it if you're easily insulted."

I'm losing sleep over this guy, but I can't seem to get closer to him or to break it off either.

What makes Wendy's experience important in the overall analysis is that these "little" interactions with Vic are instantly recognizable to a woman involved with a guy like Vic. You probably understand why Wendy is angry, why she is *entitled* to her anger, why she might be blaming herself and why she has sought help. Vic, however, shows little consideration for her feelings, her standards or her time. Yet, because Wendy cares about him, she accommodates herself to his demands. She doubts herself but believes in him.

Let's analyze things between them a bit more deeply: Wendy loves Vic and she wants him to love her back, but she finds she's more occupied with unraveling his mind's workings than developing real intimacy with him. How he thinks and how he behaves are so alien to Wendy that they fascinate and frustrate her at the same time. *What is he up to now?* Vic's not perfect, but there is enough about him that keeps her interested and emotionally attached to him. If only, she thinks, there weren't so many *games* being played.

What bothers Wendy most is that Vic hides behind a veil of innocence and good intentions, dodging responsibility while belligerently insisting that he's pulling his weight. He puts a spin on her legitimate complaints about him so *he* comes out the wronged party. And she's not sure what she's done to offend him. There's aggression in the acts men like Vic commit, but it's not open warfare -- it's more like backhanded hostility.

When it finally became clear to Wendy through therapy that Vic was the prototypical passive-aggressive man, she no longer blamed herself or doubted her reactions. Her antagonist had a name -- the passive-aggressive man -- and, although the knowledge did not instantly cure her wounded feelings, she could begin dealing with him by *knowing* what drove him.

What will identifying the Vics in your life do for you? Like Wendy, you can clarify the ambiguity inherent in your relationship with such men. Passive-aggression causes emotional confusion and pain. The identifying -- or labeling -- process will differentiate your problems from his. You needn't feel like a failure because your efforts to communicate with him are ineffective. It's not your fault, and you're not the only one who feels this way. The identifying process should give you perspective on the relationship and help you formulate healthier responses to his machinations.

The complexity and ambiguity of the passive-aggressive man's behavior can make recognizing him -- at first -- a difficult but not impossible task. *Identification* is the first step toward dealing effectively with him.

THE PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE PROFILE

The passive-aggressive man may pretend to be sweet or compliant, but beneath his superficial demeanor lies a different core. He's angry, petty, envious, and selfish. He's often not as good as he pretends to be, but neither is he as bad as he feels he is. How do we reconcile these "irreconcilable opposites"?

Understanding the cause of a person's behavior does not excuse it. The person who serves food in a soup kitchen several nights a week after work only to "make up for evil thoughts" is no less admirable for doing it. Similarly, the fact that the passive-aggressive man's behavior is motivated by psychological dynamics, such as anger, dependency, fear of autonomy or power, *doesn't* make him any less responsible for his actions.

Understanding passive-aggression doesn't make hurtful behavior any more tolerable. If a passive-aggressive man treats you badly, then it matters little why he does it. However, by writing this book, I hope to help you resolve the problems of living or working with him and to understand the psychology behind his game. The better you know him, the less likely you are to be threatened or victimized by him.

You'll find that the following traits pretty much describe the range of passive-aggressive behavior. A passive-aggressive man won't have every single one of these traits, but he'll have many of them. By the same token, these traits don't make up the man's *whole* personality. He may have other traits as well, which are not passive-aggressive.

As we go along, I'll guide you through the steps in learning how to cope with a passive-aggressive man -- containing him, confronting him and accepting him -- and if he is willing to help himself, helping him change. But first, what to look for?

-- *Fear of dependency.* Unsure of his autonomy and afraid of being alone, he fights his dependency needs -- usually by trying to control you. He wants you to think he doesn't depend on you, but he binds himself closer than he cares to admit. Relationships can become battlegrounds, where he can only claim victory if he denies his need for your support.

-- *Fear of intimacy.* Guarded and often mistrustful, the passive-aggressive man is reluctant to show his emotional fragility. He's often out of touch with his feelings, reflexively denying feelings he thinks will "trap" or reveal him, like love. He picks fights just to create distance between you.

-- *Fear of competition.* Feeling inadequate, he is unable to compete with other men in work and love. He may operate either as a self-sabotaging wimp with a pattern of failure, or he'll be the tyrant, setting himself up as unassailable and perfect, needing to eliminate any threat to his power -- male or female. Few passive-aggressive men are "good sports."

-- *Obstructionism.* Just tell the passive-aggressive man what you want, no matter how small, and he may promise to get it for you. But he won't say when, and he'll do it deliberately slowly just to frustrate you. Maybe he won't comply at all. He blocks any real progress he sees to your getting your way.

-- *Fostering chaos.* The passive-aggressive man prefers to leave the puzzle incomplete, the job undone, taking on more and more responsibilities until his life is nothing but unfinished business. He sets up ongoing chaotic situations that are intolerable if your life is linked to his. But should you offer a useful suggestion to improve things, just watch his resentment grow.

-- *Feeling victimized.* The passive-aggressive man protests that others unfairly accuse him rather than owning up to his own misdeeds. To remain above reproach, he sets himself up as the apparently hapless, innocent victim of your excessive demands and tirades.

-- *Making excuses and lying.* The passive-aggressive man reaches as far as he can to fabricate excuses for not getting to a meeting on time, making love, meeting deadlines, fulfilling promises. As a way of withholding information, affirmation or love -- to have power over you -- the passive-aggressive man may choose to

make up a convoluted story rather than give a straight answer. Not only is he a genius at ignoring reality when he so chooses, so he is a virtuoso at spinning tales to make reality look better.

-- *Procrastination*. The passive-aggressive man has an odd sense of time -- he believes that deadlines don't exist for him. As he dawdles and procrastinates far beyond most anyone else's limit of patience, opportunities are lost and time is squandered.

-- *Chronic lateness and forgetfulness*. One of the most infuriating and inconsiderate of all passive-aggressive traits is this man's inability to arrive on time. By keeping you waiting, he sets the ground rules of the relationship. And his selective forgetting ("Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot to pick up the groceries") is, literally, not to be believed -- it's too convenient and self-serving, used only when he wants to avoid an obligation.

-- *Ambiguity*. He's the master of mixed messages and sitting on fences, and his language is filled with nonspecific suggestions. He's good at "maybe we can go away for the weekend...let's hang loose...maybe we can have dinner." When he tells you something, you may still walk away wondering if he actually said yes or no.

-- *Sulking*. Feeling put upon when he is unable to live up to his promises or obligations, the passive-aggressive man retreats from pressures around him and sulks, pouts and withdraws. Deep sighs are his preferred mode of communication, which makes reaching him all the more difficult.

As these traits tell us, a passive-aggressive man tries to hide his insecurities and fears by grandstanding. The key to his personality is the fear underlying his aggression. Once you know this, you'll be empowered to act differently and try to change the relationship, or decide to leave.

What I hope to impress upon you in this book is how to recognize and know a passive-aggressive man for what he is, *not for what you wish he could be*. There are many ways of dealing with a passive-aggressive man that can help you minimize the consequences of his behavior on you. In time, you won't fall for the same emotionally torturing games again and again. And, most of all, if he is willing, you'll be able to get the best from him and make your relationship work. Before I continue exploring the intricacies of the passive-aggressive man, let's look at *you*, how he makes you feel and what you can do about it.

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