

Expression of Hostility - Basis of Passive Aggressive Behavior. Correlational Study

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Abstract: Debating the existence and nature of a series of personality disorders, this study revolves around one of the most controversial of them, this being the passive-aggressive personality disorder. The history of its conceptualization is nuanced and complicated, this determining frequent changes in the disorder's structure and objectiveness. The purpose of this paper is to observe if there are any connections between the passive-aggressiveness, hostility and age. For this scope, there were being used two instruments, which are The Hostility Scale and the Existential Attitudes Questionnaire. Analyzing the results, it was once again showed that passive-aggressiveness cannot be correlated with variables such as the hostility levels or the age of an individual, this once named disorder remaining as difficult to interpret as it was before the decision of erasing it from the "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders" (2013).

Keywords: *passive-aggressiveness, disorder, hostility, age.*

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Introduction

Hostility is the trigger of passive-aggressive behavior, defined as a hostile and hateful attitude. Viewed as a negative aspect of human behavior, it stems from a flawed system that needs to be reset. The need to blame external factors for one's problems leads to the formation of hostility, a mechanism that is becoming increasingly worn-out in modern times. By blaming an external entity, whether it is an authority figure or a parental figure, we are given the impression of superiority and stability, but the reality is different from the self-stimulated image of the hostile individual. The need to blame or judge someone is simply a form of hatred, and all its forms suggest a lack of empathy. Both physically and mentally, a hostile attitude fuels systemic dysfunction.

The main structural components of this characteristic are cynicism, which is the belief that people are primarily motivated by their selfish nature, and mistrust, which represents the belief that people are frequent sources of malicious behavior (Rivers & Smith, 1994). The hostile attributive style is the tendency to interpret the actions of others as involving aggressive intentions. Therefore, as a general cognitive characteristic, hostility involves "a devaluation of the worth and motives of others, an expectation that others are likely sources of wrongdoing, a relational view of being in opposition to others, and a desire to harm or see others hurt" (Smith et al., 1998).

Hostility arises through a process of cognitive and emotional elaboration, characterized by contempt, mistrust, and pessimism. Faced with unpleasant situations in life, people with a certain inclination towards hostility react with antipathy and sadness, thus laying the foundations for aggression, especially when hostility is hypertrophied or manifested through anger or rage. At the same time, this attitude can cause cardiovascular problems or aggravate them. Types of internalized hostility are some of the main causes of the destructive effect on homeostasis (Chitu & Iamandescu, 2015).

Certain investigations have drawn attention to a number of potential difficulties in evidence-based prediction regarding hostile behavior from responses to personality tests (Berkowitz, 2006). Subjects who have behaviorally admitted the need to express verbal or physical hostility do not necessarily exhibit intense hostile behavior in interpersonal situations. Indeed, the same experiment applied twice has shown that the level of hostility observed after the first testing differs from the level obtained by the same individual after exhibiting a hostile episode.

Interiorization refers to the development of self, other, and relationship representations (i.e., schemas and scripts) that, in turn, form the general bases of interpersonal expectations. In this process, individuals see themselves and others in a manner that aligns with recurrent patterns of childhood and behave in ways that are consistent with these representations (Berkowitz & Cottingham, 2010). For example, a hostile person may generally expect others to exhibit rejecting, constraining, and blaming actions displayed toward them by parents. Such a person may continue to exhibit the cold, cautious, and defensive attitude that complements this treatment expected from others. Ultimately, in the process of introjection, people treat themselves as they have been treated by key individuals in their own developmental process. This mechanism is consistent with observations that hostile individuals have a vulnerable self-esteem and a critical character toward others, as well as toward themselves (Smith et al., 1998). Repeated over time and across contexts, developmental-based transactional cycles contribute to personality continuity, relationships, and other social experiences in a mutually reinforcing process similar to those described in recent accounts of personality stability and life course coherence (Caspi & Roberts, 1999).

Passive-aggressive behavior takes many forms, but can generally be described as a type of nonverbal aggression that manifests through negative behavior. Instead of communicating honestly when feeling upset, angry, irritated, or disappointed, individuals instead block their emotions, shut down verbally, make obvious changes in behavior, become obstructive, or put up a defensive wall. They may also indirectly resist others' requests, avoiding or creating confusion around the issue. Manifestations can be hidden and suppressed or obvious and blatant. A person exhibiting passive-aggressive behavior may not always appear upset or resentful. They may be approving, polite, friendly, grounded, kind, and well-intentioned. However, there may be underlying manipulations - hence the term "passive-aggressive."

By engaging in passive-aggressive behavior, the individual does not give themselves or others the opportunity to listen to or analyze what they are thinking. The recipient of this hostile communication may become confused, frustrated, offended, or guilty, as the emitter's subliminal message is that the interlocutor has done something wrong. This is the epitome of negative communication avoidance, creating insecurities for both parties, and at the same time, a conflict is formed that blocks rational engagement with the true problem.

The list of symptoms of this condition is growing, including apparent forgetfulness and intentional inefficiency. Considering the changes that passive-aggressive behavior has undergone during the update of the

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), the behavioral descriptions have remained roughly the same, such as resistance to routine tasks, disdain for forms of authority, self-pity, envy, resentment towards the lucky ones, and perpetual and exaggerated complaints about one's own misfortune. And, of course, the alternating between hostility and remorse remains the hallmark and origin of the original conceptualization.

The Purpose of the Research

Given that passive-aggressiveness has undergone many conceptual changes throughout the revisions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, we can say that it is one of the most enigmatic disorders of the human psyche. Several studies have shown that the passive-aggressive personality disorder does not have a valid construct, while other research has spoken of its consistency and rationality. Studies have shown that out of 1158 institutionalized patients, only 3% matched the DSM-IV diagnosis of passive-aggressive personality disorder, but its conceptual validity has been contested (Rotenstein et al., 2007). However, this diagnosis has been retained by other diagnostic systems, such as the World Health Organization and the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory - Fourth Edition (MCMI-IV).

Inevitably, several schools of psychotherapy react very differently to this construct, with some wishing to eliminate it from diagnostic plans, while others seek to learn more about how it can be treated. Thus, psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytic categories want to explore childhood and parental origins of this behavior, while cognitive-behavioral categories discuss the constant changes in cognitions regarding the perception and treatment of this problem.

Even today, being the subject of conflicting opinions, this behavioral trait, once seen as a mental disorder, requires greater attention in terms of its existence and manifestation on individuals. We know that at the core of passive-aggressive behavior lies the expression of hostility. Therefore, the aim of the research is to identify the correlation of this type of behavior with specific human typologies.

Research Objectives

1. Taking into account that the level of hostility is often correlated with people who grow up in an environment that promotes mistrust of others, we want to observe if hostile individuals with passive-aggressive tendencies are people who have problems in interpersonal relationships, if this behavior is based on a low level of self-esteem or on the contrary, if they are individuals with egocentric traits.

2. Additionally, we want to observe if age is related to the expression of hostile behavior, since no studies have been found in this regard. The interest in age is related to the fact that an unresolved toxic habit tends to be more and more used and highlighted in an individual's communication and relationship style over time, therefore we tend to believe that an older person tends to be more hostile, based on their existential attitude.

The research sample

In total, 96 subjects participated in this study, of which 69 were women and 27 were men, with a ratio of approximately 72-28%. The average age of the participants is 31.72 years (as shown in Fig.1), ranging from 17 to 68 years old. The majority of participants are students.

Fig. 1 Mean and standard deviation for age

N Valid	96
Missing	0
Media	31.72
Standard deviation	13.486

Source: Authors' own conception

The research hypotheses

For achieving the purpose and objectives of the research, we have proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. We assume that research participants will score higher levels of hostility only if their existential attitudes are imbalanced.

Hypothesis 2. We assume that the level of hostility is directly proportional to the age of the participants.

The methodology of the research

For the validation of the hypotheses, we used the following instruments:

1. The Hostility Inventory, developed by Arnold H. Buss and Ann Durkee, tracks the aggressive or antagonistic intentions of individuals.

2. The Existential Attitudes Questionnaire contains several statements that need to be evaluated. Based on the frequency of occurrence of each characteristic in the participant's everyday behavior, a score from 1 to 10 is assigned to each statement out of the 32, representing total disagreement and total agreement, respectively.

The methodology of the research consisted of the following steps:

Participant selection: We selected 96 participants, out of which 69 were females and 27 were males, with an average age of 31.72 years. Most of the participants were students.

Data collection: We used two instruments to collect data - the Hostility Inventory and the Existential Attitudes Questionnaire. The Hostility Inventory measures aggressive or antagonistic intentions of individuals, while the Existential Attitudes Questionnaire contains several statements that are evaluated based on the frequency of each characteristic in the daily behavior of the participant, using a scale of 1 to 10.

Data analysis: We analyzed the data using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis to test the two hypotheses.

Ethical considerations: We obtained informed consent from all participants, ensured confidentiality and anonymity, and followed ethical guidelines throughout the study.

Limitations: The study had some limitations, such as the small sample size, the use of self-report measures, and the limited generalizability of the findings.

Analysis and interpretation of results

Hypothesis 1: It is assumed that participants in the study will score higher on levels of hostility only if their existential attitudes are imbalanced. The hypothesis was refuted.

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is used to study the internal consistency of the items in a questionnaire or it can be used as a method of reducing some items. Observing Figure 2, the obtained coefficient has an unacceptable consistency, having a value of -0.281.

The value is negative due to a negative covariance mean between correlated items. This fact denies the model of hypothesis 1. We find that the

level of hostility scales and the predominant type of existential attitude do not influence each other. Thus, hypothesis H1 which states that "participants in the study will score higher on levels of hostility only if their existential attitudes are imbalanced" is refuted.

Fig. 2 *Alpha Cronbach*

Chronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items*	N of items
-2.81	-1.852	2

Source: Authors' own conception

To test the normality of the distribution of the scales (as shown in fig. 3), we applied the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Fig. 3 *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test*

		OST	AE
N		96	
Normal parameters	Mean	1.4735	6.1149
	Standard deviation	.12272	.94105
The largest differences	Absolute	.093	.058
Test Statistic	Positive	-.071	-.049
Asimp. Sig.(2 tailed)	Negative	.093	.058
		.041 ^c	.200 ^{c, d}

Source: Authors' own conception

The table presents the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality on two variables, OST and AE, with a sample size of 96 participants. The first row shows the sample size, while the second row indicates that the normal parameters were used for the test. The third and fourth rows display the test statistic and the asymptotic significance (two-tailed), respectively.

The test statistic is a measure of the maximum difference between the empirical distribution function and the hypothesized normal distribution. The higher the test statistic, the greater the difference between the two distributions. The asymptotic significance indicates the probability of obtaining such a large test statistic under the assumption of a normal distribution.

For the OST variable, the test statistic is 1.4735, and the asymptotic significance is 0.12272, which suggests that the distribution of scores is not significantly different from a normal distribution at the alpha level of 0.05. The same conclusion can be drawn for the AE variable, with a test statistic of 0.94105 and an asymptotic significance of 0.058.

The next four rows display the mean, standard deviation, absolute maximum difference, and positive and negative differences between the observed distribution and the hypothesized normal distribution. These values can be used to evaluate how much the observed distribution deviates from a normal distribution. For both variables, the mean and standard deviation are reported, while for the OST variable, the absolute maximum difference is 0.093, and for the AE variable, it is 0.058. In summary, based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results, we can conclude that the OST and AE variables have distributions that are not significantly different from a normal distribution.

After the Kolmogorov Smirnov normality test, it appears that the scale distribution is normal, so we will apply parametric tests ($p > 0.05$). The parametric test to be applied will be the Pearson correlation, which shows the correlation coefficient r (linear correlation coefficient), to define the dependence or relationship between the observed variables in the statistical population. The correlation coefficient r represents the ratio between the covariance of the series and the product of their standard deviation. Based on the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality, we can conclude that the distributions of both variables (OST and AE) do not significantly differ from a normal distribution. This suggests that we can use parametric tests, such as Pearson correlation, to examine the relationship between the observed variables in the statistical population.

The correlation coefficient r shows the linear relationship between the two variables and can be used to evaluate the dependence between them. If the coefficient is positive, there is a direct relationship between the variables, which means that an increase in one variable is associated with an increase in the other variable. If the coefficient is negative, there is an inverse relationship between the variables, which means that an increase in one variable is associated with a decrease in the other variable. If the coefficient is equal to zero, there is no linear relationship between the two variables.

Fig. 4 *Pearson correlation*

		OST	AE
OST	Pearson correlation	1	-.481**
	Sig. (2 tailed)		.000
	N	96	96
AE	Pearson correlation	-.481**	1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	
	N	96	96

Source: Authors' own conception

We have a medium negative Pearson correlation, indicating an inverse proportional relationship, with $p < 0.05$, representing a significant association (as shown in fig. 4). Since p is less than the chosen significance threshold of 0.05, we reject hypothesis 1. In conclusion, hypothesis 1 is refuted. In this study, the independent variable was the level of hostility, which is a measure of a person's tendency to be aggressive or hostile towards others. The dependent variable was existential attitudes, which reflect a person's perceptions and beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life, as well as their own existence.

The results show a negative correlation between the level of hostility and existential attitudes, suggesting that an increase in the level of hostility is associated with a decrease in existential attitudes. The interpretation of this result could be that individuals who are more hostile or aggressive may have a limited view of the meaning of life or may be less engaged in finding meaning in their lives. However, it is important to note that this explanation cannot be considered certain, as there are many variables and factors that could influence the relationship between the level of hostility and existential attitudes, and the study can only provide a piece of the psychological puzzle.

Hypothesis 2: It is presumed that the level of hostility is directly proportional to the age of the participants. This hypothesis was refuted.

To observe the veracity of Hypothesis 2, which refers to the proportionality between advancing age and increasing level of hostility, we proceeded with a descriptive analysis. Following the Pearson correlation (as shown in Fig. 5), we obtained $p > 0.05$, which represents a non-significant relationship. This indicates that the relationship is inversely proportional, and the magnitude of the correlation value represents a very weak relationship. Based on the results obtained, we can state that Hypothesis 2 is also refuted, so the level of hostility is not directly proportional to age.

Fig. 5 Pearson correlation between hostility (OST) and age

	OST	Age
OST	1	-.120
Pearson		.243
Correlation	96	96
Sig. (2 tailed)		
N		
Age	-.120	1
Pearson	.243	
Correlation	96	96
Sig. (2 tailed)		
N		

Source: Authors' own conception

One possible interpretation is that the level of hostility can be influenced by different stages of an individual's psychological and social development, such as life experiences, upbringing, or the influence of social and cultural environment. For example, while some authors (Berkowitz, L. 2006b) suggest that young people may be more hostile or aggressive due to impulsivity or risk-taking behavior, others (Chişu, A., Iamandescu, I. B. 2015b) suggest that older adults may develop a more hostile attitude due to changes in health, economic difficulties, or the loss of loved ones.

However, it is important to note that the relationship between these two variables can be affected by many other factors, such as gender, culture, education, and other environmental factors, which could significantly influence the relationship between hostility and age. Therefore, we must be cautious in interpreting and generalizing these data and consider the context in which they were collected.

The result of refuting Hypothesis 2 suggests that there is no direct proportional relationship between the level of hostility and the age of the participants. Typically, hostility is associated with impulsivity and a tendency to be aggressive or hostile towards others, which may be a typical characteristic of adolescents and young adults. However, this relationship was not supported by the data of this study.

There are several possible psychological explanations for this result. One of them could be that hostility is not a trait that increases with age, but is rather related to other personality traits or life experiences of individuals. Additionally, there may be other factors that influence hostility that are not related to age, such as social or cultural factors. In conclusion, this result suggests that age is not a determining factor in an individual's level of hostility

and that there is greater variation in the level of hostility among individuals of all ages.

Conclusions

We can understand that the level of hostility cannot be correlated with the type of predominant existential attitude, since passive-aggressive behavior cannot be diagnosed based on a human typology and a list of symptoms. It is rather a behavior that arises spontaneously and is only expressed in contexts where an individual feels their social identity is threatened or simply wants to project feelings of guilt onto others.

The way a person is in a psychosocial context does not influence passive-aggressive behavioral attitudes, as they are only spontaneous cause-and-effect elements. Regardless of their existential attitude, a person may or may not exhibit indirect hostile behaviors. Thus, passive-aggressive behavior is more of a normal human characteristic than a diagnosis.

It is not necessary for a person with low self-esteem to also have a high level of hostility, as we have found no connection between passive-aggressive behavior and self-image. This type of hostile and malicious attitude is just a form of expressing negative emotions in an individual, the attitude being learned from parental examples in early childhood. Therefore, we can conclude that age does not influence the degree of hostility. Consequently, accumulating unpleasant experiences over time at a social level does not increase the probability of passive-aggressive behavior.

Passive-aggressive personality has been and remains one of the most contested diagnosable disorders. It is necessary to keep in mind that in early editions of the DSM it was a separate disorder, but later it was removed from diagnostic manuals because it is "too narrow to be a complete diagnosis and not sufficiently supported by scientific evidence to meet increasingly rigorous definition standards" (DSM IV).

The passive-aggressive behavior cannot be diagnosed based on a human typology and a list of symptoms, as it is rather a spontaneous behavior than a behavior determined by a certain attitude or personality. The passive-aggressive behavior is a form of expressing negative emotions, which can be learned from parental examples in childhood, but is not influenced by age or existential attitude of a person.

The passive-aggressive personality is a controversial diagnosable disorder, which has been eliminated from diagnostic manuals due to the lack of scientific evidence and its unclear definition. In general, the conclusion is that passive-aggressive behavior is a complex and controversial aspect of

human psychology, which can be influenced by a range of factors, but cannot be reduced to a single attitude or personality.

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