

Running head: VENGEANCE

Vengeance: Effects of Gender, Age, and Religious Background

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Abstract

Vengeance can be commonly defined as the infliction of harm in return for perceived injury or insult or as simply getting back at another person. Three-hundred fifty-three participants responded to eight hypothetical scenarios which may illicit vengeful behavior in which the offending party was either a romantic partner, a friend, a co-worker, or a stranger. Participants also completed a vengeance scale and a measure of Biblical literalism. Participants were most vengeful toward co-workers and least vengeful toward romantic partners. Age, religious conservatism, and gender were significant predictors of attitudes toward vengeance. Although men were more likely than women to be accepting of vengeful attitudes as measured by the vengeance scale, only age was a significant predictor of behavior in the vengeance scenarios. The current research provides a basis for a systematic investigation of vengeance within the structure of human relationships and interactions.

ATTENTION!

The abstract summarizes the study in 120 words or less and appears on page 2. The word Abstract is centered with only the first letter capitalized, and the first line of the abstract is not indented.

What to include

- Problem under investigation
- Participants used in the study
- Research procedures
- Findings
- Conclusions or implications of the study

Vengeance: Effects of Gender, Age, and Religious Background

Vengeance can be commonly defined as the infliction of harm in return for perceived injury or insult or as simply getting back at another person. Stuckless and Goranson (1992) have outlined the distinctions between revenge and other similar constructs such as retaliation, hostility, reciprocity, and retribution. Vengeance can have many irrational and destructive consequences for the person seeking vengeance as well as for the target. The person seeking vengeance will often compromise his or her own integrity, social standing, and personal safety for the sake of revenge, yet little is known about the predictors of vengeful behavior.

Although many psychologists assume revenge to be a motivation for much human aggression, researchers have devoted little energy toward understanding vengeance (Stuckless & Goranson, 1992). Vengeance has only recently become a unique topic heading in PsychInfo, and few empirical references are listed under this heading. The following presents a brief exploration of the concept of vengeance in Western culture as well as an empirical study of various factors that may influence attitudes toward vengeance.

Revenge fulfills a wide variety of goals including righting perceived injustice, restoring the self-worth of the vengeful individual, and deterring future injustice. Central to the concept of revenge are perceptions of personal harm, unfairness, and injustice and the "anger, indignation, and hatred" associated with the perceived injustice (Kim & Smith, 1993, p. 38; see also Stuckless & Goranson, 1992). The perceived injustice must be righted or undone, and revenge, despite social taboo, is often seen as an acceptable means of doing so.

ATTENTION!

The introduction starts on page 3 with the title of the paper centered at the top of the page. The text begins immediately (one double space) below the title.

The paper starts with a general introduction to the topic under investigation – in this case, what we mean by vengeance- followed by a review of previous research that is relevant to the topic. The author-date system is used to cite references to previous work.

Revenge is often tied to the self-worth of the originally offended individual. Frequently, individuals with little power seek revenge against powerful adversaries even though the action has overwhelming costs (Kim & Smith, 1993). Revenge is also a deterrent to future unjust treatment. The vengeful individual "sends the message that harmful acts will not go unanswered" (Kim & Smith, 1993, p. 40). Not only is the goal to stop this particular form of maltreatment in the future, it is to deter the offender from wanting to commit similar crimes; additionally, vengeance may stop other potential offenders from committing similar crimes or from even considering similar crimes (Wilson, 1983). The motives of deterrence, restoration of self-worth, and elimination of perceived injustice are persistent human motives, surviving despite social taboo and legal denial, and are unlikely to fade into social obscurity.

Many diverse factors may influence an individual's attitude toward vengeance. A review of the literature suggests that vengeance might vary with gender, age, area of socialization (rural, suburban, or urban), and religious attitudes such as religious conservatism (defined as Biblical literalism). Moreover, consistent with the literature on aggression, it seems reasonable to expect that vengeful motives might be situationally evoked and controlled. The current study was designed to examine these possibilities.

Are men or women more vengeful? Early research by Stuckless and Goranson (1992), lends some support to the contention that men have more positive attitudes toward vengeance; they also found substantial positive correlations between vengeance and trait anger. Such findings are consistent with previous research reporting that males score higher on general measures of aggression (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974, 1980). Wilson and Daly (1995) point out that violence is a male resource where broad sex differences emerge. "Men possess evolved morphological, physiological, and psychological means for effective use of violence" (Wilson & Daly, 1995, p. 118; also see Daly & Wilson, 1988; 1990; 1993; Wilson

& Daly, 1985). Research by Kenrick and Sheets (1994) offers additional support for sex differences. They found that males recall more homicidal fantasies than females; "Males also reported longer and more detailed fantasies and were more likely to imagine strangers and coworkers as victims" (Kenrick & Sheets, 1994, p. 231). Males' greater acceptance of interpersonal aggression may correlate with acceptance of attitudes related to revenge and participation in vengeful behaviors.

Older participants may be less vengeful (Cota-McKinley & Woody, 1998). When comparing first-year college students with juniors and seniors the difference is striking (Cota-McKinley & Woody, 1998). As people age, they may become more likely merely to think about, rather than act out, their vengeful ideas, or people may simply become less vengeful with age.

Jacoby (1987) notes that "the very word 'revenge' has pejorative connotations" (p. 4), and, as a motive, it is publicly rejected by modern society. Despite contemporary rejection, vengeance is most likely as old as human social behavior, and it has a long, varied, and colorful history in both religious and secular realms.

Christianity and its Jewish heritage provide many interpretive challenges regarding vengeance. The Bible provides conflicting notions of revenge. The Old Testament presents several instances of justified revenge by humans and by God, and humans may even call out for God to seek vengeance for their innocent suffering (see Carlson, 1982). The Old Testament presents a God whose vengeance is to be known and feared. The New Testament brings a different approach to God and vengeance. Jesus tells the disciples "You have heard that it was said, 'eye for eye and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:38-39). These varying concepts of revenge across both testaments of the Bible have resulted in a cultural confusion

regarding the Christian position on vengeance, and Christians have struggled with these concepts throughout history and into the present.

Ellison (1991) found two religious variables that influenced acceptance of defensive violence to defend the honor and safety of one's self and one's family. He found that hierarchical images of God as a master and judge were associated with increased acceptance of defensive violence. "Much of hierarchical theology stresses the themes of moral judgment and divine punishment prominent in the Old Testament" (Ellison, 1991, p. 1233). These views are highly correlated with the literal acceptance of the Old and New Testaments including all of the views on revenge described above. It is therefore expected that Biblical literalists (often called religious conservatives) may possess more positive attitudes toward vengeance when compared to individuals who do not accept the Bible as the literal word of God.

In addition to participant variables that may affect general attitudes toward vengeance, many situational variables may influence decisions about whether or not to engage in vengeful behavior. Daly, Salmon, and Wilson (1997) have argued for the examination of different types of close relationships, because relationships differ in many ways beyond various degrees of intimacy. Traditional social psychological studies have focused primarily on stranger interactions; however, since 1980, research has expanded to the study of close relationships including dating and marital relationships and friendships (Daly, Salmon, & Wilson, 1997). The specific type of relationship, including the degree to which the offensive person and individual seeking revenge are familiar with each other, may be a significant predictor of vengeful behavior. For example, a close friendship between two people may tend to inhibit vengeful motives, or a violation of trust between two lovers could increase desires for revenge.

According to Haslam (1994), social relationships are at the core of the social sciences but our understanding of the cognitive processing of those relationships is unclear. Haslam's (1994)

study examining the mental representations of relationships concluded that they are categorical in nature and that "implicit knowledge of social relationships is modeled better by a small number of local, discontinuous representations, or categories, than by global laws and dimensions" (p. 582). For example, intimacy has often been proposed as a generalizable dimension characterizing social interaction. However, it can be observed that intimacy as experienced between husband and wife is very different than the intimacy shared between brother and sister (Daly, Salmon, & Wilson, 1997). For this reason, discrete categorical relationships have been included as the basis for comparison within the present study. Stranger, partner, and friendship interactions have been included in this study since previous social psychological research has focused on these areas. Furthermore, as workplace violence has seen increasing coverage in the popular press (Baron & Byrne, 2000), workplace interactions were also investigated.

Participants in the current study were asked to evaluate several hypothetical situations which may or may not elicit vengeful behaviors and to rate how vengeful they would be in those situations. They were then asked what vengeful behaviors, if any, they would perform in those situations. More realistic simulations in which participants are placed in actual situations that may or may not elicit revenge may have more ecological validity but raise a host of ethical concerns regarding the welfare of the participants.

Hypotheses for the study included both correlational and experimental variables. First, it was hypothesized that males would be more vengeful than females because men are socialized to be more accepting of aggression. Second, Biblical literalists were expected to be more vengeful than individuals who are less religiously conservative. Third, it was hypothesized that offensive acts by people with whom the participant had a close relationship would elicit more intense vengeance than acts by more emotionally distant individuals.

Attention!- The final paragraph of the introduction states the objectives and predictions of the study.

Method

Participants

Three-hundred fifty-three introductory psychology students, 118 males and 235 females, from Colorado State University participated to fulfill a class research requirement. The mean age of the participants was 19.56, $SD = 3.93$. Students also provided the general type of environment in which they were raised (rural, suburban, or urban). Of the 354 students participating, 89 were from rural environments, 199 were from suburban environments, 65 were from urban environments, and one was unknown. All participants were treated in accordance with *Ethical Principles of Psychologists* (APA, 1994).

Materials

Participants read eight hypothetical scenarios depicting an event that may or may not elicit a vengeful response. The scenarios were brief ($M=96$ words) descriptions of an event that may be offensive enough to inspire vengeful behavior. In each case, participants were instructed to place themselves in the scenario as the individual who was wronged and who may or may not seek vengeance. The character in the scenario who wronged the participant was either a romantic partner, a friend, a co-worker, or a stranger. Each relationship was presented in two scenarios. A seven-point Likert scale asked the participant how vengeful he or she would be in that situation, with high scores indicating a higher willingness to engage in vengeful behavior, and the Likert

Attention!

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The *Participants* section describes the participants and how they were selected. Report the number, sex, and age of the participants, along with their general demographic characteristics.

The *Materials* section describes the special equipment and materials that were used for the study.

The *Procedure* describes in a step-by-step fashion precisely how the study was conducted.

Included here is information regarding experimental manipulations, instructions to the participants, and all research procedures.

scale was followed by an open-ended question asking the participant what she or he would do in that situation. Participants also completed the Vengeance Scale (Stuckless & Goranson, 1992) for which they used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree) to address 20 statements regarding their attitudes toward vengeance. At the end of the scale, participants were asked how many times they had been vengeful within the past few months as well as how many people they would get back at if they could. To address Biblical literalism, participants completed a religious conservatism scale (Bensko, Canetto, Sugar, & Viney, 1995). Higher scores on the religious conservatism scale denote a literal acceptance of both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

Procedure

After giving informed consent, participants filled out a sheet of demographic information and responded to the eight scenarios. They then completed the vengeance scale and the religious conservatism scale. They were given as much time as needed to complete the tasks. Participants were then debriefed; participation took approximately 40 minutes.

Results

A 2 x 4 repeated measures analysis of variance was performed on participants' willingness to be vengeful in response to the scenarios with gender of participant as the between participants variable and type of relationship (partner, friend, co-worker, and stranger) as the within participants variable. Differences in vengeance score across the four types of relationships

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An excellent resource to help you with writing this section of your paper is called "*From Numbers to Words: Reporting Statistical Results for the Social Sciences*" ISBN# 0-8013-3280-X

were significant, $F(3, 1053) = 56.71, p < .001$, partial eta squared = .14; however there was neither a gender effect nor a gender x relationship interaction. Means for each relationship were as follows: Partner, $M = 9.95, SD = 2.95$; Friend, $M = 10.16, SD = 2.72$; Co-worker, $M = 11.67, SD = 2.42$; and Stranger, $M = 10.63, SD = 2.60$ (see Figure 1).

On the vengeance scale (Stuckless & Goranson, 1992), the mean total was 65.97, $SD = 20.23$, and Chronbach's alpha was .918. The mean for total score on the religion scale was 83.09, $SD = 23.45$, and Chronbach's alpha was .913.

Participants' total score across the eight vengeance scenarios was used as the dependent variable in a multiple regression analysis to examine the effects of predictor variables. In addition to gender, religious conservatism (total score on the religious liberal/conservative scale), age of the participant, and the general type of environment in which the participant was raised (rural, suburban, or urban) were entered as predictors in the analysis. Of these variables only age was a significant predictor. The entire equation explained a significant amount of vengeance scenario score variation, $F(1, 351) = 4.18, p < .05, R^2 = .012$; as age increased the total score on the vengeance scenarios decreased, $R^2 = .012, b = -.237, seb = .116, \beta = -.108, p < .05$.

The Vengeance Scale was also used to predict vengeful behavior, and scores on the Vengeance Scale were correlated with total scores on the eight vengeance scenarios, $r = .3789, p < .001, R^2 = .1435$. Gender and the same series of participant variables used above (religion score, age, and type of environment) were entered into a stepwise multiple regression analysis with total score on the Vengeance Scale as the dependent variable. Gender, religion score, and age were significant predictors of Vengeance Scale score, $F(3, 351) = 18.14, p < .001, R^2 = .135$. Gender was the first significant predictor, $R^2 = .089, b = -.13.114, seb = .2.153, \beta = -.306, p < .001$. Men scored higher on the Vengeance Scale ($M = 74.48, SD = 21.37$) than women ($M =$

61.69, $SD = 18.23$). Religion score ($\Delta R^2 = .031$, $b = .159$, $seb = .043$, $\beta = .184$, $p < .001$) and age ($\Delta R^2 = .015$, $b = -.683$, $seb = .259$, $\beta = -.124$, $p < .05$) were respectively the second and third predictors in the equation.

To help assess validity of scales, participants were asked how many times they had been vengeful in the past six months and against how many people they would seek vengeance if they could. The total of the eight vengeance scenario scores was correlated with both the number of times students said they had been vengeful ($r = .2314$, $p < .001$) as well as the number of people against whom students wished to seek vengeance ($r = .3273$, $p < .001$). The total Vengeance Scale score was also correlated with the number of times participants had been vengeful ($r = .4164$, $p < .001$) and the number of people against whom participants wished to seek vengeance against ($r = .4976$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

The relationship between the offending individual and the participant was a significant predictor of willingness to seek revenge. Participants' willingness to seek vengeance was highest for co-workers, followed by strangers, friends, and romantic partners, respectively. An analysis of aspects of the various relationships sheds light on the intensity of attitudes toward acceptance of vengeance.

People do not have the opportunity to choose the individuals who are their co-workers nor can they choose the strangers with whom they interact. Relationships with co-workers are extremely important to job success and therefore the livelihood and social standing of

Attention!

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individuals. However, one's co-workers are rarely freely chosen; most co-worker relationships are assigned. In some situations, one may also be competitive with one's co-workers, as depicted in the experimental scenarios. In such unchosen relationships of high financial and social importance, individuals were most willing to react vengefully against others. For example, in response to a co-worker stealing and taking credit for their ideas, an employee may be willing to blackmail his or her co-worker into telling the truth, slash the tires on his or her co-worker's car, or even use physical violence to address the wrongdoing. However, overt acts of aggression are quite rare in work settings; it is more likely for a co-worker to express hostility or obstruct or impede their co-worker's performance (Baron & Byrne, 2000). The aggression extended to a fellow co-worker tends to be subtle, covert aggression; it "allows aggressors to harm other persons while simultaneously preventing the targets from identifying them as the source of the harm" (Baron & Byrne, 2000, p. 466).

When dealing with a stranger, one is in another relationship which is not actively chosen, and participants are more willing to be vengeful than in either chosen relationship. Individuals do not choose the strangers with whom they interact, and these relationships do not have the mutual investment that exists among co-workers. Without this mutual investment, individuals are not as personally involved, and participants did not seek vengeance as intensely. It is also likely that the intensity of the vengeance scenarios for stranger interactions were not as great as the co-worker scenarios and therefore did not warrant as strong a vengeful response.

Friends and romantic partners are relationships chosen by the individual. When friends and partners were offensive, participants reacted with a level of vengeance driven by the closeness of the relationship. When the actions of a friend demand revenge, individuals are more willing to be vengeful than when faced with offense from a romantic partner. As closeness of the chosen relationship increases, participants' willingness to seek revenge in response to offensive

behavior decreases. This line of reasoning contradicts Wilson and Daly's (1997) research on marital and affinal relationships where the authors indicate that "suspected or actual infidelity is a uniquely potent source of marital conflict and violence" (p. 260). While generalized concepts of conflict and violence might certainly be present, the specific behaviors tied to vengeance were not observed.

Gender did not have a main effect on willingness to seek revenge in specific situations, and there was no significant gender by relationship interaction, although a gender main effect was found in participants' attitudes as measured by the vengeance scale. Findings in specific scenarios challenge the social norms that women are more vengeful than men (see Jacoby, 1987). As measured by the vengeance scale, men are more accepting of vengeful attitudes. Men's greater acceptance of revenge is predicted from several well established lines of research (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Kenrick & Sheets 1994; Stuckless & Goranson, 1992; Wilson & Daly, 1995).

Not only was gender a predictor of vengeful attitudes, age was a predictor of vengeful behavior in specific situations as well as vengeful attitudes. Age was a significant predictor of vengeful behavior in specific situations, and age was a significant predictor of vengeance scale scores. Generalizability of these findings may be limited due to the limited age range of the participants. With this caveat, though, it may be that college education and/or "the wisdom of age" decreases vengefulness.

Biblical literalism was a significant predictor of attitudes toward vengeance; Biblical literalists were more accepting of revenge as a motivation for human behavior. Despite New Testament arguments against vengeance, Biblical literalists are able to draw from a wealth of sources to justify vengeful behavior, and they appear to be willing to do so (Ellison, 1991).

Vengeance permeates human life. Developing a comprehensive picture of revenge from cultural, social, legal, and political viewpoints has brought researchers to investigate the

psychological aspects of this topic which is publicly taboo in contemporary society. As the knowledge base grows, humans will better understand the roots and the effects of revenge as well as the possibilities to control its consequences and its occurrence. Research investigating both general attitudes toward vengeance and the specific situations in which revenge is most likely to occur will allow psychologists to significantly contribute to a more hopeful global environment.

The current project suggests a number of future directions. Further exploration is needed to understand the dynamics of vengeance in different relationship types. Studies of revenge may shed light on other constructs such as forgiveness, jealousy, and the culture of honor.

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The references begin on a new page. Type the word "References" in uppercase and lowercase letters, centered, at the top of the page. Like the rest of the manuscript the references are double-spaced (NOT double-double spaced between references). APA publishes references in a hanging indent format, meaning that the 1st line of each reference is set flush left and subsequent lines are indented.

The first three references are to books. It includes the author's name, year of publication (in parentheses), title of the book (italicized), city of publication, and publisher.

The Bensko, Canetto, and Viney (1995) reference is to a journal article. It includes the authors' names, year of publication (in parentheses), title of the article, journal (italicized), volume (italicized), and page numbers.

The Daly and Wilson (1993) reference is to a chapter in an edited book (on the next page). It includes the authors' names, year of publication (in parentheses), title of the chapter, editor's names, book title (italicized), page numbers (in parentheses), city of publication, state of publication, and publisher.

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Figure Caption

Figure 1. Differences in vengeance scores across the four types of relationships: partner, friend, stranger, and co-worker.

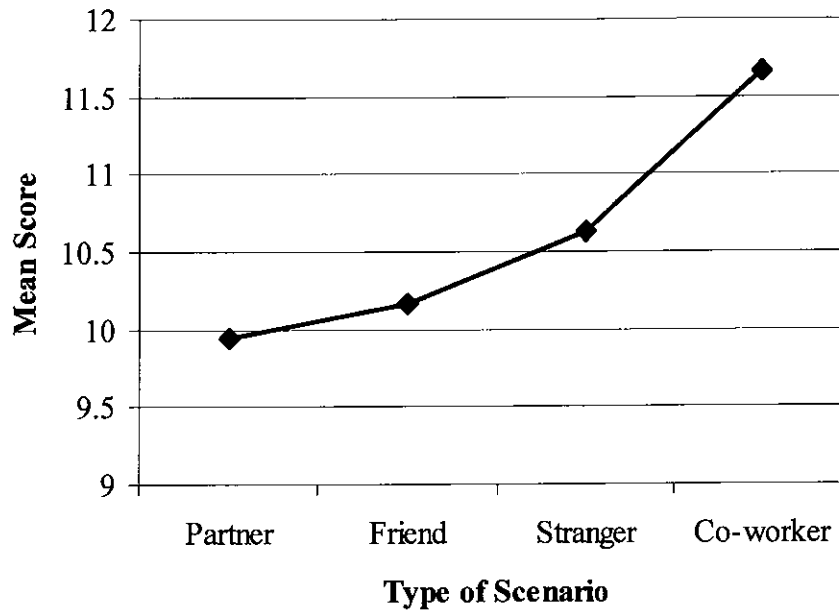
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Figure Caption Page and Figures (APA manual 5th edition - p. 302, 176-201)

NOTE – there is no manuscript header on this page

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