The Psychology of Revenge

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A relationship is inequitable when an individual/group is harmed by another individual/group.

This causes the victim to feel stress. They will try to restore equity to ease the stress (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973).

The initial harm-doer now feels that there is an inequitable relationship and will try to exact revenge on the initial victim.

This creates a cyclical pattern of violence.
When an individual or a group “becomes trapped in a circular or escalating process that perpetuates violence or leads to repetition of violent acts” (International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement, 2005 p.586).
A cycle of violence is more likely to occur when a violent act occurs in the direction of multiple people rather than a single individual (International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement, IWG; 2005).

- The Civil Rights Movement
- Discrimination, segregation, and police brutality
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF REVENGE & THE WORLD

◆ The death of Osama bin Laden
◆ May 1, 2011
◆ Heightened security on the 10th anniversary of 9/11 and major holidays.
◆ Famous tourist sites in the U.S.
Gelles (1980) found that those individuals who have experienced childhood abuse will be more likely to grow up to become child and spousal abusers themselves.
We will examine whether or not an individual will exact revenge even when they do not know who their harm-doer is. We will observe if that individual, when given the opportunity, will exact revenge on an innocent person in order to restore equity to the relationship between the individual and the initial harm-doer.
We hypothesize that participants who are assigned to an anger induction condition will be more likely to exact revenge on an innocent person than will a participant who is assigned to be in a control condition.
Students from the University of North Texas were recruited to participate through Sona.
They received 2 extra credit points in a psychology class for participating.
MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

- PANAS – Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988)
- Baseline for feelings/emotions
- Positive and negative scales.
- Demographics
Materials and Procedure

- Lobbestael et al. (2008)
- How to push someone’s buttons: A comparison of four anger-induction methods
What is the name for a medical doctor who specializes in diseases of the skin?

1. Endocrinologist
2. Dermatologist
THAT ANSWER IS INCORRECT!
MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

- False feedback and honest feedback conditions.

- Trivia Question Task
  - All participants will answer trivia questions (Nelson & Narens, 1980) and receive feedback about their performance on the task.

- False Feedback – Told that they got 50% of the questions wrong, regardless if they answered correctly or not.
  - Exposed to a loud noise through the headphones and a big flashing red “X.”
Participants are informed that the previous participant assigned them to their condition.

They are then required to assign the condition of the next participant.
MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

- 1 = Very Pleasant
- 2 = Pleasant
- 3 = Neither Pleasant nor Unpleasant
- 4 = Unpleasant
- 5 = Very Unpleasant

- Manipulation check
- Considering the task (including the task itself and the feedback) you just completed, rate how pleasant or unpleasant you found the task to be.
- How pleasant or unpleasant would it be to perform this task and receive honest/dishonest feedback rather than receiving dishonest/honest feedback?
- Followed by a thorough debriefing
RESULTS

◆ N = 93

◆ 32 Males, 61 Females

◆ 1.1% American Indian or Alaska Native, 7.4% Asian or Pacific Islander, 14.9% Hispanic, 16.0% African-American, 54.3% White, 5.3% Other

◆ Age
  ◆ M = 21.18, SD = 5.399
Independent samples t-test

Participants in the false feedback condition rated their task as being significantly more unpleasant ($M=3.56$, $SD=.990$) than those in the honest feedback condition ($M=1.93$, $SD=.648$), $t(84)=8.934$, $p<.01$. 

Manipulation Check

- Honest Feedback
- False Feedback
Results

- Logistic Regression

- 8.5% of those in the false condition selected that the next participant be in the false condition, while 50% in the honest condition put the next participant in the false condition, Wald test $= 11.55, p<.01$. 
Logistic regression
Wald test = 3.32, \( p = 0.07 \)
Negative emotion appears to influence those in the honest feedback condition, but not those in the false feedback condition.
Our hypothesis was not supported by our results.
Those who were in the false feedback condition were not more likely to assign the next participant to the false feedback condition.

There was a significant difference on condition selection for the next participant between conditions.
There was a significant difference in the number of people put in the false feedback condition by the honest condition and the false condition.

Negative emotion seems to impact the selection made by participants in the honest feedback condition.
Participants in the honest feedback condition with a high negative score on the PANAS were more likely to put the next participant in the false feedback condition.
**FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

- Pro-Social Behavior
- Empathy
- ??


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