The understandings of revenge through discussions with University students

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Declaration:

“I declare this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution”

(Elise May McKenna)
Abstract:
The goal of this study was to examine how revenge is understood by a sample of university students using a grounded theory approach. Desires and acts of revenge were found to be more prevalent in interpersonal relationships than stranger to stranger. Revenge was also shown to be a behaviour made through a costs benefit analysis to the victim rather than an act of irrationality. In addition to this, the understanding and concepts of revenge by the students were at times to be influenced by how the media had portrayed it to them. Lastly, it was shown that acts of revenge were used in all different groups of victims and types of harms through indirect and direct behaviours.
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## Table of Contents

Declaration: .......................................................................................................................... ii
Abstract: ................................................................................................................................. iii
Acknowledgments: ................................................................................................................ iv

1. Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Overview .......................................................................................................................... 1
   1.2 Definitions & Descriptions ............................................................................................. 2
   1.3 Revenge & Morality ......................................................................................................... 5
   1.4 Revenge and negative repercussions .............................................................................. 8
   1.5 Revenge is goal orientated ............................................................................................. 10
   1.6 Revenge & the media ....................................................................................................... 14
   1.7 Victimisation .................................................................................................................. 17
   1.8 Passive Revenge ............................................................................................................. 20
   1.9 Revenge in the court room ............................................................................................. 23
   1.10 Aims & Objectives ....................................................................................................... 28

2. Research Methodology- Grounded Theory procedure ......................................................... 29
   2.1 Participants ...................................................................................................................... 30
   2.2 Procedure ....................................................................................................................... 32
   2.3 Ethics .................................................................................................................................. 35

3. Results .................................................................................................................................. 37
   3.1 Analysis ............................................................................................................................ 37
   3.2 Themes in revenge ........................................................................................................... 38
   3.2.1 “I wanna hurt them the same way that they hurt me’
        Revenge is an action that causes similar harm ............................................................ 38
   3.2.2 “You may as well dig two graves”
        Revenge is Immoral ........................................................................................................ 42
   3.2.3 “It could ruin your life”
        Revenge poses risks and costs .................................................................................... 47
   3.2.4 “Crap she doesn’t stand for that – I better not hurt her”
        Revenge is goal orientated............................................................................................ 50
   3.2.5 “Some people take family really seriously. So wronging the family is wronging them”
        Seeing loved ones hurt increased a person’s likeliness to commit revenge ................... 55
   3.2.6 “In movies, they’re like over the top, cunning, crazy”
        The impact of fictional media and the ideas of revenge .............................................. 59
   3.2.7 “Starve them from any relationship”
        Subtle revenge and other indirect acts to cope with desires of revenge ............................ 62
   3.2.8 “You would just want them to suffer in the hands of Police”
        Involving legal authorities to obtain justice .................................................................... 67

4.1 Discussion ............................................................................................................................ 69
   4.1.2 Revenge is causing equal harm .................................................................................. 69
   4.1.3 Revenge is immoral .................................................................................................... 71
4.1.4 Revenge poses risks and costs to the victims relationships...........................................74
4.1.5 Revenge is driven by a rational thought process ..........................................................76
4.1.6 The ideas of revenge are influenced by the media......................................................79
4.1.7 Committing revenge on behalf of a harmed loved one ..............................................81
4.1.8 Subtle Revenge.............................................................................................................83
4.1.9 Legal Revenge.............................................................................................................86
4.1.10 Limitations................................................................................................................89
5.1 Conclusion .......................................................................................................................91
1. Introduction

1.1 Overview
In the current study, I have focused on exploring how revenge is understood by university students. Understanding revenge has been explored through an array of different groups and circumstances of harm such as victims of violent crime\(^1\), child soldiers\(^2\), consumers\(^3\), workplace conflict\(^4\) and intimate relationships\(^5\). The purpose of this study was to contribute to this expanding knowledge of understanding how revenge is interpreted by different groups.

A grounded theory methodology was used for this study. This approach acts in contrary to other research techniques where the investigator will initially read a body of literature on the subject and from there produce a set of theories which will then be tested\(^6\). In grounded theory, the investigator approaches the research topic with an open-mind on what they will discover. The purpose of this approach is to ensure the initial data collected by the investigator is sourced only from their participants, and not influenced or drawn from previous literature or knowledge\(^7\).

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\(^1\) Ulrich Orth, Leo Montada & Andreas Maercker. ‘Feelings of Revenge, retaliation motive and post-traumatic stress reactions in crime victims’ *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 21, no. 2 (2006): 229
\(^2\) Christophe Bayer, Fionna Klasen & Hubertus Adam. ‘Association of trauma and PTSD symptoms with openness to reconciliation and feelings of revenge among former Ugandan and Congolese child soldiers’ *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 298, no. 5 (2007)
\(^3\) Nada Nasr Bechwati & Maureen Morrin ‘Outraged customers: Getting even at the expense of getting a good deal’ *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 13, no.4 (2003)


The literature review was treated like the secondary source of data and was influenced by the grounded theories I identified in my original data.  

This paper will begin with a discussion of the literature which was reviewed in light of the themes I identified through my data collection. The review’s purpose was to investigate what other scholars and research had found through observing people’s understandings of revenge. It was hoped that the empirical review would test and develop the theories I had found in my data. I will then outline the Aims and Objectives of my study as well as explain the purpose of using a grounded theory approach to conduct my investigations. Following this, there will be an outline of the procedures which were used to source the participants, collect the respected data and analyse it to identify the themes. Each theme will be separately considered before I finish the paper discussing how the data I collected fits into the evolving body of knowledge on revenge.

1.2 Definitions & Descriptions

There is an ongoing debate among scholars regarding the definition of revenge. In many studies scholars have identified revenge to be a natural and rational human response to a perceived harm. Whilst others believe it to be an irrational act where the attempt of retaliation will come at some cost or risk to oneself.

There is, however, a common understanding that revenge is motivated by a perceived harm from the victim and that the response back at the offender is

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10 John Elster ‘Norms of Revenge’ Ethics 100 (1990), 862
revenge. In Fitness’ study, the stimulus behind this negative reaction to harm is argued to derive from the power imbalance that is allegedly felt when a person is wronged by another. The victim’s perspective is that through their violation they have become inferior and powerless to the offender. Fitness’ results demonstrated that the only remedy to release this negative feeling is for the victim to respond and re-shift the discrepancy of power between both parties. This theory of disparity in power is also evident in Planalp, Hafen and Adkins research. They suggest that revenge assists in balancing the score between the involved parties because now pain is shared by both.

This idea that revenge is perceived to restore the discrepancies between the parties was also linked to why victims justified committing it. In Orth’s study he found that victims validated revenge if the sole aim was to regain the losses caused by the initial harm – for example, an eye for an eye rather than a one up. He linked this concept to an old Latin term *Lex Talionis* – which centres on the norm of reciprocity in which the punishment during a feud must resemble the offence that initially caused it. Orth’s results showed that his victims would only commit and justify their pay-back when they perceived it to be equal to their original harm. These same victims also never identified themselves as evil like their offender when they believed their pay back was equal. In addition to this, they all reported their post-revenge emotions to be satisfying because they felt ‘even’ and once again aligned

15 Orth, ‘Does perpetrator punishment satisfy victims’ feelings of revenge?, 62
with the same power as their perpetrator after committing revenge. This desire to inflict equal harm is also featured in early biblical writings. In Exodus, it is written that if serious injury is perpetrated on you that you have a right to take back what you have lost.

Miller hypothesised that the victim is driven to keep the retaliation equal rather than excessive because human behaviour is influenced by personal goals. His study showed that conflict and revenge were more prevalent in interpersonal relationships because of the greater reliance of trust and expectations. Because of this, excessive harm was understood to not be in the victim’s best interests as it would be detrimental to the future productiveness of the valued relationship.

In contrast, Gollwitzer, Meder and Schmitt argue that the desire to reciprocate a similar harm derives from the victim’s conflict that ‘he walks in pleasure and I in suffering’. They theorised that the victim will only find peace when their offender has suffered to an equal degree—calling this ‘comparative suffering’ which advocates that victims only achieve satisfaction when they commit a perceived identical harm onto their offender. They also suggest that the victim’s desire for satisfaction is not related to witnessing equal suffering but rather that the control of being able to personally commit what they think is equal is satisfying. When the offender receives the exact harm it is assumed by the victim that there is now a

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16 Orth ‘Does perpetrator punishment satisfy victims’ feelings of revenge?, 63
18 Dale T Miller ‘Disrespect and the experience of injustice’ Annual Review of Psychology 52 (2001), 527-553
19 Miller ‘Disrespect and the experience of injustice’ 540
mutual understanding and respect between the parties. The victim feels back in control and the equal harm limits the chances of victims feeling guilty or fearing future reciprocation22. A New Zealand Research project studying the satisfaction levels for victims also demonstrated similar results. A majority of their victims reported to feel high levels of gratification when they were aware their offender understood how the harm had impacted them23.

1.3 Revenge & Morality
There are conflicting views on the relationship between morality and revenge in society. Evidence of this dates back to early biblical scriptures discussing how revenge was viewed by God, laws and the people. In Exodus the law stated ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’24, however, in Matthew it was preached ‘you have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also’25. This similar attitude appears to have followed through into modern society, as we are encouraged by laws and public attitudes to rely upon the criminal justice system to seek justice and inflict punishment on behalf of us when we are wronged26. There are a variety of hypotheses that have attempted to explain why revenge has grown to be immoral.

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22 Gollwitzer, Meder & Schmitt, 'What gives victims satisfaction when they seek revenge?: 374
26 Eisenstat, ‘Revenge, Justice & Law: Recognising victims desire for vengeance as a justification for punishment’ 23
Seabright and Schminke argue that the link between morality and revenge derives from the understanding that immoral actions involve a thought process that lacks rational reasoning and revenge is thought to be driven only by high emotions thus an irrational behaviour\textsuperscript{27}. This is consistent with Elster’s that revenge is a behaviour which lacks attention and is fuelled by unreasonableness\textsuperscript{28}. Fitness also argued this, hypothesising that humans are goal-orientated beings and everything we do is assessed through a cost benefit analysis. Irrational thoughts are not known to involve a timely thought out process where our best interests can be efficiently weighed out before a decision. Fitness also suggested that much of our goal attainment come from our success in the formulation and maintenance of strong relationships with others. The reliance and trust contained in these relationships also facilitates the vulnerability to betrayal and hurt which may ultimately lead to revenge. Fitness theorises that this is where revenge and immorality are thought to be associated, as it is not in our best interests to commit behaviours that could risk the goals in our life – such as the continuity of valued relationships\textsuperscript{29}.

In contrast, other scholars dispute that the relationship between revenge and morality encourages violence. Seabright and Schminke’s found that their participants understood revenge to be immoral because it went against good ethics as it promoted the witnessing of deliberate suffering and cruelty\textsuperscript{30}. The results in Stillwell, Baumeister and Del Priore supported this, establishing how revenge was capable of creating further misery for the parties involved. Their research identified

\textsuperscript{28} Elster, “Norms of Revenge” 8
\textsuperscript{29} Fitness “Interpersonal Rejection” 2
\textsuperscript{30} Seabright & Schminke, “Immoral Imagination and Revenge in Organizations’ 20
that there was always a substantial discrepancy between the perception of harm initially caused as well as the fairness in the payback when it came to the victim and offender. Baumeister expanded this research with Stillwell and labelled this as the ‘Magnitude Gap’. They hypothesised that revenge encouraged ongoing feuds because every vengeful act increased in violence and ultimately broadened the discrepancy between the parties. Basically as one felt rebalanced and satisfied, the other would feel suffering and a desire to retaliate. Eisenstat maintained this theme in his study advocating that revenge would always be immoral because it only resulted in further violence. He based this argument upon two assumptions on revenge and its repercussions. Firstly, revenge is immoral because it is motivated solely on hatred and that any desire grounded in hatred is immoral. Secondly, when a victim is motivated by revenge they will only want to inflict the most severe pay-back which will result in an over-excessive amount of harm encouraging further pay-back. Through these assumptions, Eisenstat argued that personal revenge is immoral – not revenge itself. Eisenstat referred to many examples of God punishing man for breaching his rules in the Bible and related this to the present role of our criminal justice system. The justice system we support regularly hands down punishment that provides suffering and distress of offenders such as fines,
incarceration and in some countries even the death penalty⁶. On that basis, Eisenstat argued that personal revenge is only immoral because if every individual was responsible for administering their own punishment in order to receive justice for a past hurt there would be chaos.

1.4 Revenge and negative repercussions

There is a wide range of literature that discusses the risks that revenge can cause for victims. Some studies have revealed the negative psychological consequence of revenge. In Barr-Zisowitz’ research it was demonstrated that all of his vengeful participants who had initially justified pay-back expressed feeling far worse emotionally after revenge. This was similar to the results of Yoshimura’s study who investigated the emotions of victims post-revenge. All of his participants who admitted to committing revenge reported the two strongest emotions felt shortly after the pay-back to be either remorse or guilt. Mongeau, Hale & Alles’s study found similar outcomes for their victims but they also endeavoured to investigate why revenge brought on further distress and psychological issues. Their conclusions were that victims attained guilt from their vengeful actions because deep-down they knew it was inconsistent with their morals and this made them feel like they

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⁶ Eisenstat ‘Revenge, Justice & Law: Recognising victims desire for vengeance as a justification for punishment” 27
⁷ Elster “Norms of Revenge”, 862
⁹ Steven Yoshimura ‘Goals and emotional outcomes of revenge activities in interpersonal relationships’ Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 24, no. 1 (2007), 95
had failed to live up to their expectations. This feeling of failure then acted as a catalyst to other negative emotions such as depression and a low-life satisfaction.

Other scholars suggest that victims report feeling regret rather than satisfaction post-revenge because it can potentially ruin relationships. Jones, Kugler and Adams showed that victims regretted pay-back when it had jeopardised their relationship with others. This was also consistent in research by Vangelisti & Sprague who identified a link between people who reported feeling remorseful after revenge and the ones who admitted to still caring for their offender. Schumann & Ross hypothesised that because humans were social animals and survived off group life, revenge was not in the best interests of any one as it impeded any productivity for relationships. To them, revenge encourages prolonged tit for tat payback and it is assumed that during these feuds, neither party will be receiving any of the benefits that the relationship could in fact provide. Research also indicates that revenge could in fact risk relationships not even involved in the conflict. For example Mckinley, Woody & Bells found that vengeance can compromise the victim’s integrity, social standing and personal safety. This was consistent with Kim, Smith and Brigham’s paper. They advocated that society holds social norms that consider

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40 Paul A Mongeau, Jerold  L Hale.& Marmy Alles.'An experimental investigation of accounts and attributions following sexual infidelity' Communication Monographs 61, no. 4(1994), 326-34


44 Karina Schumann & Michael Ross.'The benefits, costs and paradox of revenge' Social and Personality Psychology Compass 4, no.12 (2010),1196

45 Amy L Cota-Mckinley, William D Woody & Paul A Bell 'Vengeance: Effects of Gender, Age and Religious Background' Aggressive Behaviour 27 (2001), 343
revenge to be a backward thinking behaviour and identify prosperous individuals to be associated with acting in a manner that is motivated by forward thinking goals.

To individuals who hold these values, when they see another commit revenge it signifies to them two assumptions about that person. First, that they make poor decisions and second is that they do not behave in a self-interested manner. It is these impressions which can ultimately impact the amount of respect and positive reputation you receive from others as well as whether you are an appropriate candidate to formulate a productive relationship with.

In conclusion, these empirical studies understand revenge to be more costly to the victim than the wrongdoer.

1.5 Revenge is goal orientated

For some scholars, their studies on victims, their harms and how they retaliated suggests that revenge may in fact be a more thought out process than people understand it to be. In Fitness’ paper, she discussed the link between her victims reporting to feel initially betrayed when they were harmed and choosing to commit revenge. Fitness defined betrayal to be ‘an act that disappoints the hopes or expectations that another has’\(^{47}\). On the basis of that definition she then argued that people were more likely to be betrayed in relationships than by strangers where there was likely to be little or no trust involved. It was this vulnerability for likely harm in relationships which was the basis for her theory that there was a link between established relationships and the increased rate of desires for revenge.

\(^{46}\) Sung Hee Kim, Richard H Smith & Nancy L Brigham ‘Effects of power imbalance and the presence of third parties on reactions to harm: upward and downward revenge’ \textit{Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin} 24 no.4 (1998), 358

\(^{47}\) Fitness “Interpersonal Rejection”, 2
Fitness suggested that high expectations were found in relationships because humans formed them with people that either shared similar goals and interests or could provide them with the support they needed to personally fulfil them. Fitness further argued that when relationships begin, so does the formation of a hidden contract detailing the rules and expectations of the partnership. When a partner chooses to violate these rules it disrupts the exchange of resources and goal attainment for the other. This was also consistently discussed in Hawley, Little and Card’s research as they highlighted the importance of people connecting with others as these partnerships could potentially provide safety, support and resource abundance. Shackelford and Buss’ research looked at the prevalence of betrayal in valued relationships. Their results demonstrated that because humans were social animals it was a critical survival tool that when connecting to these groups they knew who to trust to avoid disloyalty.

In addition to this, scholars contend that revenge is goal orientated because the actions which follow are chosen on a cost benefit analysis made by the victim. Fitness hypothesised that when a harm is registered in a relationship it signifies that there is no longer value on the person or the affiliation. It is in that moment where it is suggested that the victim adopts the thought process of what does this situation mean for my goals, needs and concerns? This was also evident in Lazarus’ work. His results had suggested that because victims were committing

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48 Fitness “Interpersonal Rejection, 3
49 Patricia H. Hawley, Todd D Little & Noel A. Card ‘The allure of a mean friend: Relationship Quality and process of aggressive adolescent with pro-social skills’ International Journal of Behavioural Development 31, no.2 (2007),179
50 Todd Shackelford & David Buss ‘Betrayal in mateships, friendships, and coalitions’ Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 22, no. 11(1996), 1153
51 Fitness “Interpersonal Rejection”, 2
revenge shortly after their perceived violation of their relational expectations it was a bid to regain those losses – therefore goal-orientated. Shackelford and Buss’ demonstrated that vengeful behaviour was motivated by goals. Their participants consistently reported to consider how to respond to their harm by evaluating whether the relationship they had with their wrongdoer was worth holding onto. This was demonstrated clearly in one study when their results found that the attractive female participants were twice more likely to behave in a manner that jeopardised the relationship. Their logic behind the vengeful actions was based on the rationale that it would not be detrimental for them to risk the future of the relationship as they were confident future positive relational prospects would present themselves. Through these findings, the scholars labelled this costs benefit behaviour as the theory of ‘accommodation’. In contrast, studies have also been able to capture instances where the costs benefit analysis has predicted further losses for the victim which has driven their choice to avoid retaliation. In Kim, Smith and Brigham’s study they found victims of lower power were less likely to commit revenge against a person of higher power. These victims reported refraining from revenge due to the higher costs they assumed they would receive if the wrongdoer retaliated. In Diamond’s study, individuals who had been insulted were given an opportunity to administer shocks to their insulter. Participants who were aware that the insulter would have the opportunity to get even were less likely to be


53 Shackelford & Buss, ‘Betrayal in mateships, friendships, and coalitions’, 346


55 Kim, Smith & Brigham ‘Effects of power imbalance and the presence of third parties on reactions to harm: upward and downward revenge’ 353
retaliatory\textsuperscript{56}. This indicates that regardless of whether a victim chooses to retaliate or not, a weigh up of the benefits and detriments to their future goals is often adopted.

The view that the victim’s assessment that retaliation can offer prosperous individual and social advantages is not a new phenomenon. Miller argues that from an evolutionary perspective, human’s survival substantially depends on our social status. The more we are respected and accepted in the public and our social groups the less likely we are to be harmed\textsuperscript{57}. Chagnon explored the power of revenge and social status in South American tribes. Tribes that were known to swiftly retaliate to being wronged were identified as strong and were feared and respected by other groups. It was also discovered that these tribal members generated a higher reproductive and lower mortality rate compared to the weaker groups\textsuperscript{58}. The finding that it is beneficial for individuals to be associated with large amounts of valuable resources or power is also observed in westernized culture. One study looking at what qualities women sought out in potential male partners found that the most ideal trait was high financial wealth as it showed they were a stable partner\textsuperscript{59}. Ultimately it is in people’s best interests to be identified as someone not worth taking advantage of. Previous research hypothesises that people will cooperate with others depending on whether it is in their best interests to or not. For example, individuals will endeavour to associate and gravitate towards rich

\textsuperscript{56} Steven R Diamond ‘The effect of fear on the aggressive responses of anger aroused and revenge motivated subjects’ Journal of Psychology 95, no.2 (1977), 185-188.
\textsuperscript{57} Dale T Miller ‘Disrespect and the Experience of Injustice’ Annual Review of Psychology 52(1993), 530
\textsuperscript{59} Paul Eastwick, Laura B Luchier, Eli J Finkel & Lucy L. Hunt. ‘The Predictive Validity of Ideal Partner Preferences: A Review and Meta-Analysis’ Psychological Bulletin (2013), 11
partners as wealth is related to power, health and success. The relationship between resource control and perceived popularity was demonstrated in Hawley, Little and Card’s research where it was found that group members always granted higher status to socially dominant people. According to McCullough, there were 3 goals that revenge could achieve for an individual. Firstly, people who were assumed by others to retaliate against harm were less likely to be harmed in the first instance. Secondly, if harm did occur and they retaliated they were less likely to be wronged in the future. Thirdly, revenge could encourage cooperation between two parties because through the transgression and retaliation there would now be a mutual understanding of the expectations in the relationship.

In conclusion, revenge has the possibility of deterring future goal obstructed harms because there is a realisation that free-riding or taking advantage of the benefits in the relationship will not be accepted.

1.6 Revenge & the media
In westernized culture, revenge is still widely considered to be a behaviour which inhibits our ability to make rational choices that are in our best interests. These attitudes are reflected in the establishment of our laws but also in the types of media we are exposed too. Movies and television shows feature character and plotlines where revenge is portrayed as dramatic, psychotic and unproductive often

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60 Ed Deiner & Robert Biswas-Diener ‘Will money increase subjective wellbeing? A literature review and guide to needed research’ Social Indicators Research, 57, no.2 (2001), 120
61 Hawley, Little & Card, The allure of a mean friend: Relationship Quality and process of aggressive adolescent with pro-social skills: 177
62 Michael E McCullough, Beyond Revenge: The evolution of the forgiveness instinct (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 21-23
63 Elster “Norms of Revenge”, 862
resulting in disastrous outcomes\(^{64}\). Clover’s work on how movies represent revenge based plotlines shows how easy it has been for viewers to associate revenge with fictional circumstances of harm and repercussions of revenge. Clover used the examples of films such as “Carrie”\(^{65}\) and “I Spit on Your Grave”\(^{66}\) to demonstrate how unrealistic many movies are when it comes to telling a story of revenge. In order to increase the likeliness of viewer’s engagement, elaborated situations are formulated where viewers are subjected to the victim suffering violence such as rape, horrendous humiliation and torture. In I Spit on Your Grave, the victim’s journey of planning revenge takes up the majority of the movie consequently influencing the viewers to believe that the plotting of revenge is an obsessive long winded process. Once the revenge starts to take place, the viewer is subjected to seeing how unstable the victim is whilst also observing her commit violent pay back that is over-proportional to her original harm. In Carrie, the victim is exposed to bullying and humiliation before using her telekinetic power to set her high school prom on fire thus killing many of her peers\(^{67}\).

Due to revenge being portrayed in the spotlight as disastrous, scholars hypothesise that this is bound to influence the viewer’s ideas of what revenge in fact is. Cantor and Wilson’s suggested that the way violence is portrayed in the media had led to society having unhealthy and unrealistic ideas of aggressive behaviour. In their study, participants understood revenge to be made up of behaviours that involved

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\(^{64}\) Carol J Clover “Men, women, and chainsaws: Gender in the modern horror film” (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3

\(^{65}\) Carrie. DVD. Directed by Brian De Palma with performances by Sissy Spacek, John Travolta and Piper Laurie. United States: United Artists, 1976

\(^{66}\) I spit on your grave. DVD. Directed by Meir Zarchi with performances by Camille Keaton, Eron Tabor and Richard Pace. United States: Cinemagic, 1978

killing and physical violence because of the types of media they had watched. Boon & Yoshimura demonstrated that sources of information from the media had communicated a false sense of set social norms surrounding revenge. The way the fictional characters relationships worked, the types of wrong doings which occurred and how revenge impacted their lives were accepted as reality. They believed these misconceptions of authenticity had led to a great impact on people’s beliefs on what was a normal and appropriate reaction to perceived harms. This was also consistent in Huessman and Taylor’s study which looked at how media exposure played a role in the formulation of cognitive scripts in the early stages of a person’s life. They found that the media’s role was seen to be just as influential as family members, peers and the community when it came to shaping how their participants interpreted relationships, suitable behaviours and feelings. Although this study focused on young children it did suggest that as the child matures, these early beliefs can become permanent and follow through to adult-life. This means regardless of the viewer’s age, what the media presents will likely formulate their understanding of revenge and in doing so guide their behaviour and reactions to harms. Bandura looked at the reasons why the media can influence our choices on how we choose to behave when we are harmed. He explained the phenomenon with social cognitive theory- where people learn to differentiate between behaviours that produce rewards and punishment. He showed that because

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69 Susan D. Boon & Stephen M. Yoshimura ‘Pluralistic ignorance in revenge attitudes and behaviours in interpersonal relationships’ *Personal Relationships* 2, no.2 (2014), 268
71 Huesman & Taylor, “The role of media violence in violent behaviour”, 10
viewers linked revenge with mental instability and over-proportional harm - revenge was likely to punish rather than reward them. In addition to this, viewers will perceive any behaviour that is not aligned with physical violence as not vengeful.

On this basis it is argued that fictional media only portrays revenge as negative behaviour in order to engage viewers. However, in doing so has misconstrued the line that separates the norms of revenge from imagination.

1.7 Victimisation
Across the studies of victims who have identified being personally harmed by others, there is a consensus that they feel victimised due to their powerlessness and inability to protect their ego and expectations. Baumeister perceived this feeling of powerlessness to be at its strongest amongst victims who classified themselves as valuable and important. He argued that when these individuals are harmed it brings upon negative perceptions that there has been a threat to their ego and they have failed to defend themselves. Fitness argued that our ego, values and beliefs make up the relational scripts we have with people around us. These scripts contain the perception we have of ourselves, of others and how we wish to be treated. When another commits a wrong doing onto us these scripts are disrupted, we have been treated in a way we did not think we merited and it implies we may not be as highly regarded as we thought we were. Fitness believes that it’s these scripts that act as a guideline for how our interactions should play out and assist us in identifying when these are not being followed or have been disrupted.

74 Fitness, “Betrayal, Rejection, Revenge and Forgiveness: An Interpersonal Script Approach”, 2
breached. Hetts, Sakuma and Pelham showed a link between high self-esteem and confidence and the prevalence to react more defensively in negative circumstances. These findings are also thought to assist in understanding why these people reacted in a similar defensive manner when people they were in relationships with had been treated inconsistently with their expectations. Jones, Pelham, Mirenberg and Jetts suggested these relational scripts also contained the value that we have of the people we are in relationships with. Their participants reported stronger feelings of hurt were brought on when someone they identified to care about had been harmed compared to if it had just been them. An example of this type of behaviour was captured in Crombag, Waagenar & Coppens study when they looked at America’s reaction to the 9/11 terrorist attack. Their results showed that 90% participants had the desire for retaliation even though they were not primary victims. It was suggested that this attitude for revenge derived from the participants collectively associating themselves as a nation of people and that individuals in their group had been wrongly attacked.

In contrast, other scholars contend that the reason people feel victimised when others around them have been hurt is because there is evidence to show that third party victimisation can in fact occur. Spungen looked at the impact that harm had on the lives of the people who were in relationships with the primary victim. Spungen labelled this group of people as co-victims. His results demonstrated that

75 John J Hetts, Michiko Sakuma & Brett W Pelham 'Two roads to positive regard: Implicit and explicit self-evaluation and culture' Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 35, no. 6 (1999)
just like victims, co-victims reported to feel out of control, weak and powerless. Co-victims regularly felt guilty for being unable to protect their loved ones and this impacted on other relationships they had. Many struggled to express affection, have any interest in communicating with others or returning to everyday life roles\textsuperscript{78}. This was also similar Fisher & Lab\textapos;s results when they looked at exploring the impact that homicide had on the deceased victims loved ones. These secondary victims conveyed many forms of harm they had felt as a result of losing a loved one. Eight out of the 12 participants described having relationship changes with people once they had been “harmed”. Participants disclosed that these changes were probably due to the fact they were unable to put any effort into these associations anymore. Many admitted to rejecting, withdrawing and refusing to communicate with people that they had once been in relationships with\textsuperscript{79}. Participants also reported substantial financial losses as a result of their loved ones being killed\textsuperscript{80}. Secondary victims were unable to return to everyday life responsibilities such as being an employee, a parent, friend or a lover – all roles that would have once involved interpersonal exchanges with another\textsuperscript{81}. The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime also captured this third party victimisation when they conducted a survey on secondary victims. The findings showed that in regards to homicide, when an individual is murdered the relationships and interactions around them will always be negatively impacted. The surviving people they have left


\textsuperscript{80} Hawley, Little & Card, ‘The allure of a mean friend: Relationship Quality and process of aggressive adolescent with pro-social skills’, 87

\textsuperscript{81} Hawley, Little & Card, ‘The allure of a mean friend: Relationship Quality and process of aggressive adolescent with pro-social skills’, 1
behind can no longer rely upon them financially or emotionally. Some participants described taking on additional responsibilities because of the loss – widows had to take on two jobs to pay the mortgage or fathers had to quit their jobs and sell the family home to look after children. These studies identify that through the initial harm occurring there were possibly other syndicates other than the primary and secondary victims which may have dealt with harm and resource disruption as well.

1.8 Passive Revenge

People on a day to day basis will feel an array of different emotions and many studies advocate the importance of regulating these in a manner that is socially tolerable. According to Breuer and Freud it is necessary that humans learn to regulate and release negative emotions because if one refrains from venting they will eventually explode into an aggressive rage of hysteria. Freud referred to this as Emotional Catharsis and theorised that this regulation of feelings is masked into different conscious and unconscious daily behaviours that we choose to make when we are faced with harm. This theory supports the argument that having a target for revenge may be a behaviour that is able to alleviate the emotional distress victims as well as prevent the possibility of a more destructive choice of action later on. Hornberger’s research supported this theory as it captured the levels of aggression victims reported to feel after choosing to release their negative emotions but through non-vengeful activities not directed at their offender. Participants were split into groups; the ones who were instructed to indirectly vent their anger by

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pounding nails and thinking about their wrongdoer and the harm were more aggressive than the distracted group\textsuperscript{85}. There is also evidence which contradicts catharsis theory. Geen & Quanty demonstrated that venting frustrations or aggression in a non-physical way whilst thinking or being motivated about their provocateur made people even angrier\textsuperscript{86}. Bushman conducted a study on students who were criticised and insulted by another student in regards to an essay they had written\textsuperscript{87}. One group were shown a photo of the ‘harm doer’ and asked to think about the person whilst venting their aggression into a punching bag. The second group were the distraction group and they were told to think about their harm and punch the bag but think about getting fit. The last group were not told to hit the punching bag and were asked to sit quietly. The levels of aggression in each group were measured by the participants getting to blast its ‘harm doer’ with loud music. The results found that the participants who punched the bag and thought of the person who insulted them had generated the most aggression whilst the group who did nothing were the least angry. It was, however, interesting to discover that the participants who were told to use the aggressive thoughts they had towards the offender as a drive to ‘improve’ themselves also yielded back higher levels of aggression. These results suggest that non-vengeful actions and goals which do not directly involve the wrongdoer but are driven by aggression towards them, do not decrease hostility and may actually increase desires to retaliate, thus contradicting

\textsuperscript{85} R.H Hornberger. ‘The differential reduction of aggressive responses as a function of interpolated activities.’ \textit{American Psychologist}, 14 (1959), 354


\textsuperscript{87} Brad J. Bushman ‘Does venting anger feed or extinguish the flame? Catharsis, Rumination. Distraction, Anger and Aggressive Responding’ \textit{Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 28}, no. 6 (2002), 730
the catharsis theory. Never-the-less, the studies generally support the notion that aggrieved individuals seek to take some form of revenge as a means of dealing with their negative emotions.

Studies looking at ways in which individuals deal with hurt have found outcomes consistent with Freud’s theory that there are particular subtle behaviours victims use in order to regulate aggression. According to Wilson & Daly – 20% of homicides in the United States were linked to revenge\(^88\) but for every one of these attacks there was even more frequent passive and covert retribution occurring between friends, family members and work employees\(^89\). In Bies & Tripp’s study on workplace revenge, participants had admitted to retaliating to their offender co-worker through elusive behaviours such as avoidance, proving their offender wrong, endeavouring to get a promotion to get ahead of them or purposely attempting to ruin their chances if they were applying\(^90\). Gregoire, Laufer & Tripp found revenge was prevalent amongst customers who felt wronged by companies that had provided them with poor service. Customers reported to use vengeful tactics such as exiting the partnerships, suing or complaining about the company to others in hope of discouraging future customers\(^91\). Yoshimura and Boon looked at victims who had been hurt in interpersonal relationships. Participants reported several ways in which they chose to passively behave in order to commit revenge.

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\(^{88}\) Margo Wilson & Martin Daly. ‘Competitiveness, risk taking, and violence: the young male syndrome’ *Ethology and Socio-biology*, 6 (1985) 69


\(^{91}\) Yany Gregoire, Daniel Laufer & Thomas M Tripp ‘A Comprehensive model of direct and indirect revenge: understanding the effects of perceived greed and customer power’ *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 38, no.6 (2010), 2
on their loved ones. The most favoured activities included purposely ignoring and avoiding their offender or ending the relationship. This was then followed by disclosing secrets and slandering them to others. Other popular choices included going to the gym to improve their physical appearance and starting new relationships to flaunt them. Lastly, victims reported removing resources, damaging property or purposely sabotaging their goals. In one instance a participant admitted to punishing a loved one by turning off their alarm for work and deliberately not waking them up\(^92\). Further research conducted by Bies & Tripp on revenge in interpersonal relationships discovered these types of pay-back were prevalent because they mirrored how the victim originally felt and targeted an area that would provide the restoration of fairness. By deliberately not supporting them or withholding resources, the benefits the perpetrator had once received from the avenger was now limited or non-existent thus there was no longer an imbalance in the relationship\(^93\).

In conclusion, these studies indicate that aggrieved individuals take steps to release the negative feelings they attain when harmed. It is also evident that this can be achieved through passive and indirect behaviours aimed at punishing the wrongdoer.

### 1.9 Revenge in the court room

To avoid individuals seeking their own justice, society has encouraged the use of external agencies to act on behalf of us to assess injustices and administer


punishment. The implementation of fair grievance procedures in the workplace and the justice system in society have provided victims the opportunity for external bodies to address their desires for justice. Many victims in society have reported to use these external agencies when seeking to pursue better treatment, protection and compensation from others who have wronged them. A legal dispute, just like relational conflict is circulated around the quarrelling of the interpretations of expectations in the relationship between the parties. An unbiased third party decision maker is appointed to listen to both versions assessing whose argument is authoritative and administering punishment or remedy to the losing party. Many studies have tried to understand why some victims choose to use the legal system to seek justice and whether it is able to provide similar goals and outcome like revenge. Scholars hypothesise that just like revenge, seeking justice through the legal system can impose similar costs to the offender and benefits for the victim.

In David and Choi’s study on political prisoners, there were consistent high levels of satisfaction reported for victims who had gone through the court system and been awarded financial compensation. Diener & Biswas-Diener suggested that the link between monetary awards and satisfaction derived from society’s views that associate wealth with resource abundance and control. They hypothesised that when a victim’s financial status improves it empowers them and signals to others that they are capable of looking after themselves which will ultimately benefit

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94 Malcom M. Feeley ‘Two models of the criminal justice system: An organisational perspective’ *Law & Society Review*, 7 no.3 (1973) 407
95 Sally Engle Merry, *Getting Justice and Getting Even: Legal Consciousness among working-class Americans*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 14
96 Merry, “Getting Justice and Getting Even: Legal Consciousness among working-class Americans”, 6
98 Diener & Biswas-Diener, “Will money increase subjective wellbeing? A literature review and guide to needed research”, 120
future relationship offers as people gravitate towards them. These findings of satisfaction were also evident in studies that looked at injustices in the workplace. Aquino, Bies & Tripp’s participants reported to have lower desires to personally retaliate if they knew there were fair grievance procedures being implemented which would provide them with remedies and punish their offender. In a study on victim’s motivations to go through the criminal justice system, it was discovered that in a number of way the court outcomes provided them with justice and empowerment. Firstly, victims prioritised a person of a high status or importance listening to their injustice and affirming that they were wronged. Secondly, 29% of the victims wanted their grievance heard in court because they believed their offender had taken something away from them so they wanted the court to take something important away from the offender. Thirdly, 41% wanted money so that they could regain their power and dignity into society. Victims highlighted that by receiving financial remedies they could reach for their goals, feel safe, help their family and be in control.

Research has also identified that as the victim becomes empowered without directly inflicting vengeful behaviour, the offender is dealt with a number of punishments that cause similar harms to revenge. Studies looking at the negative consequences that are imposed on an offender when they are ordered to pay fines

101 Feldhusen, Hankivsky & Greaves, “Therapeutic Consequences of Civil Actions for Damages and Compensation Claims by Victims of Sexual Abuse” 77
102 Feldhusen, Hankivsky & Greaves, “Therapeutic Consequences of Civil Actions for Damages and Compensation Claims by Victims of Sexual Abuse” 78
103 Feldhusen, Hankivsky & Greaves, “Therapeutic Consequences of Civil Actions for Damages and Compensation Claims by Victims of Sexual Abuse” 79-84
or forfeit resources to the victim have revealed that many result in high debt which impacts every aspect of their work and family life\textsuperscript{104}. Investigations conducted by Nagrecha, Katzenstein & Davis found that payment of penalties can disrupt the offender’s relationships in a number of ways. Offenders dealt with by the criminal justice system have detailed no longer being able to provide support and resources they once could to their loved ones. In addition to this, some admitted to becoming over-reliant in their partnerships which caused imbalances and relational conflict as they violated the expectations of the relationship\textsuperscript{105}. Incarceration is also a regular form of punishment used when individuals have been found to have caused an injustice to another. Literature over the years has discussed how harmful this type of penalty is to humans due to our nature of being such social animals. Haney’s research on prisoners found that although crime was a damage of people and relationships - imprisonment caused the exact same violations\textsuperscript{106}. Incarceration alienates people from their social groups and hinders their ability to form and maintain their relational scripts with others\textsuperscript{107}. Edin’s study showed that incarceration for the offender had resulted in relational breakdowns as the inability for them to provide support and resources placed strain on marital and family bonds\textsuperscript{108}. Prisoners in her study reported to have no assets to offer to make them attractive for future social prospects which also caused a number of psychological


\textsuperscript{105} Mitali.Nagrecha, Mary Fainsod Katzenstein & Estelle Davis. \textit{First person accounts of criminal justice debt: when all else fails- fining the family} (Brooklyn: Center for Community Alternatives, 2013) 20


issues. The incarcerated men she studied recorded having low self-worth, struggled to trust people, were anxious and had lost social skills as a result of social distancing\textsuperscript{109}. In addition to this, other studies looking at the negative impacts of incarceration have found that the environment itself forces individuals to be constantly reminded that they have no personal value, self-liberty or social status whilst they are in prison\textsuperscript{110}. Once released these individuals struggle to regain that independence or their past social role – many choose to withdraw from society disabling any opportunities to re-join group life, create goals and achieve them\textsuperscript{111}. Studies have also looked at the social respectability that ex-convicts receive once they are released back to their social groups. Data has shown that there is a strong relationship between criminal convictions and a low unemployment rate which will ultimately impact on an individual’s capacity to earn money and contribute to society\textsuperscript{112}. Research on young male prisoners has also found that their criminal history and low employment possibilities further stigmatises their ability to be seen as a positive potential partner to other females\textsuperscript{113}.

Ultimately, involving the justice system to provide justice on behalf of us has the ability to impose similar costs and benefits to the victim and offender that revenge has been known to do.

\hspace{0.5cm} \textsuperscript{109} Edin, How Low-Income Single Mothers Talk About Marriage, 26 \\
\hspace{0.5cm} \textsuperscript{110} Zehr, “Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice” 86 \\
\hspace{0.5cm} \textsuperscript{111} Haney, “The psychological impact of incarceration: implications for post-prison adjustment” \\
\hspace{0.5cm} \textsuperscript{112} Bruce Western “The impacts of incarceration on wage mobility and inequality” American Sociological Review 67 (1999), 526 \\
\hspace{0.5cm} \textsuperscript{113} Edin,”How Low-Income Single Mothers Talk About Marriage”, 6-7
1.10 Aims & Objectives

The purpose of this study was to undertake a qualitative analysis on how revenge is understood in a sample of university students who had not been seriously or violently harmed. The literature review assisted in identifying whether the themes in the data representing the student’s understandings were consistent or inconsistent with what other scholars had discovered. Due to the grounded theory methodology the review was not undertaken until after the gathering of data.

There are two explanations to why this topic was chosen to be undertaken in a grounded theory approach. Firstly, this data collection would add to an already established body of research which has explored how revenge is understood by different groups of people and their harms. After collecting the data and identifying the themes it was hoped that by comparing it to the literature that it would provide a further understanding on whether the seriousness of the harm influenced desires and prevalence of revenge. For example, did harms that were considered violent and of a serious nature yield stronger desires for revenge than less serious harms.

Secondly, through studying how revenge is understood by students who may not have been seriously harmed to a point that warranted revenge, it could provide an insight on what types of behaviours were commonly considered and used when reacting to harm. This awareness of different responses to a perceived harm could also deliver an understanding on whether they achieve similar aims to vengeful behaviour such as imposing costs on the wrongdoer and benefits for the victim.

As this study aims to identify the components of revenge understood by students, there will also be an emphasis on analysing how these ideas were articulated and whether there were influential factors that played a role in the formulated
concepts. Due to this objective a grounded theory approach was the most appropriate methodology to be implemented.

2. Research Methodology - Grounded Theory procedure

Grounded theory is a method that seeks to collect data and organise it through coding so that an analysis can be undertaken and regular themes identified. Grounded theory diverges from traditional research techniques where the investigator will read through existing literature and begin the collection of data with pre-determined ideas on the types of results they will identify. Grounded theory researchers do, however, require an initial research topic or question to focus upon before gathering their data. As opposed to other research methods, it is important that the question or topic chosen is open-ended and not answered in a yes or no format hence why my research focuses on understanding the components of revenge through university students. Through using a grounded theory approach to study revenge it is anticipated that the themes will be discovered, developed and substantiated though my data collection and the exploration of literature already pertaining to revenge.

In grounded theory the first stage is the gathering of the data. For this study I commenced my research conducting a number of single interviews with a group of university students using set questions based around the topic of revenge. In

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115 Ian Dey, Qualitative Data Analysis – a user friendly guide for social scientists (London: Routledge, 1993), 30
117 Anselm Strauss & Juliet M. Corbin, “Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria” Qualitative Sociology 13, (1990), 23
accordance with the theory, theoretical sensitivity was achieved by not researching any existent literature on revenge before the interviews. By not examining other studies I was able to compile my interview questions without being influenced by past research. Interviews were conducted until saturation was achieved through the students’ responses. Saturation is when a researcher finds that constant and regular words, ideas or themes are being retrieved rather than new information.

I approached the research using the full version of grounded theory as opposed to the abbreviated type. This model required me to collect the data from the interviews with the participants, analyse these transcripts through coding and categorise the consistent ideas. From there, the main themes I identified were explored through the already established literature discussing revenge and its concepts. The objective behind this is to assist in broadening my understanding of the concepts of revenge on a wider scale by comparing and contrasting my findings to other studies. I continued analysing and coding the themes and ideas within my data and the literature until saturation was once again reached and clear relationships and dissimilarities were identified.

2.1 Participants
To begin with, all participants were asked to confirm that they had never been harmed in a serious or violent nature. It was the consensus when initially planning my research design that ‘serious’ or ‘violent’ harm was classified to be any physical hurt or violations which would be normally dealt with by the criminal justice

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118 Strauss & Corbin, “Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria”, 192
119 Naresh. R Pandit, “The creation of theory: a recent application of the grounded theory method” 7
Following this, they were briefed on the purpose of the study and advised that their responses would be recorded. All participants consented to being identified by their first name and demographic data was collected.

There were 15 respondents (10 female, 5 male), with a mean age of 24.73, ranging from 19 to 48 years old. All participants resided in Western Australia. The harms referred to by the students were not of a physical and illegal nature therefore had not been through the criminal justice system. The types of harms included malicious rumours, being let down by a significant loved one, being excluded from a group or being made to feel humiliated. These harms were mainly committed in the participants various social groups. The ‘wrong doer’ was reported to either be someone in the students family, friendship group, work unit or was a previous or present lover. Only one participant identified not knowing their wrongdoer. For participants who struggled to identify any past harms when questioned, they reflected on situations that had been exposed to them through the media such as movies, television shows and articles they had read. A majority of the harms had occurred recently with the earliest being a week prior to the interviews. Some participants recalled incidences of harm from back when they had been at high school but given the young age of the participants the events had occurred within a two to three year span. Because these participants harms were all relational, many participants were still associating or in contact with their wrong doer. For the individuals who were no longer in contact with their wrong doer they admitted to ending the relationship themselves or going out of their way to avoid them.
2.2 Procedure
Participants were recruited through an advertisement placed at a local gym asking for any university students who would like to assist in a research project on revenge. The requirements were included on the advertisement stating that participants had to be of 18 years and older, studying at university, any gender and that they could not be a victim of crime. My email address was included as the point of contact for interested participants. Interviews were then organised and conducted face to face at a local café across from the gym where the advertisement had been placed.

In accordance to grounded theory, my study was seeking to uncover the causes and socially shared meanings of revenge through students. It was then my aim to compare my data to the established field of literature that had looked at revenge and victims to identify any inconsistencies or similar findings. I carried out my data collection with each student using a semi structured interviewing technique\(^\text{121}\). This procedure maintains a structured set of questions based around the topic but allows flexibility for the investigator to ask open-ended questions and not always in the same order. According to Kvale this way of interviewing is beneficial because in qualitative research the task is to be attuned and flexible with each of your participants individually\(^\text{122}\). This would assist further on during the analysis of the data when comparisons and emerging patterns were needing to be identified\(^\text{123}\).

Existing literature on effective interviewing also argues that the investigator’s

\(^\text{121}\) Mark Mason, “Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews” *Qualitative Social Research*, 11, no.3 (2010), 3

\(^\text{122}\) Steiner Kvale “Dominance Through Interviews and Dialogues” *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12 (1996), 127

method should aspire to attain as much of the respondent’s descriptions of the life event as they can to successfully interpret its meaning\(^\text{124}\). By not following a generic path of interviewing for each person there are more opportunities to discover the significance around a participant’s responses as it encourages elaborated responses rather than only yes and no replies\(^\text{125}\). This was relevant to my research because due to the personal nature of the topics being discussed it was important to adapt to each participant especially when it came to clarifying questions\(^\text{126}\).

The interview consisted of 13 questions based around revenge:

1. How would you define revenge?

2. What components do you think make up revenge?

3. What feelings do you think would be involved if someone wanted to commit revenge?

4. What thoughts do you think would be involved if someone wanted to commit revenge?

5. What behaviours or actions would be involved if someone wanted to commit revenge?

6. What would be the results for the avenger once they had committed revenge?

7. What would be the results for the receiver of the revenge?

8. Some people believe revenge is negative and unhealthy whilst others think it is positive and healthy, what do you think?

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\(^{124}\text{Kvale, “Dominance Through Interviews and Dialogues”, 5-6}\)

\(^{125}\text{Angelica Orb, Laurel Eisenhauer & Dianne Wynaden “Ethics in Qualitative Research” Journal of Nursing Scholarship 33, no.1 (2001) 93-96}\)

\(^{126}\text{Glaser & Strauss “The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research”}\)
9. Could revenge ever be a proportional response?

10. What factors are likely to increase feelings, thoughts and behaviours of revenge?

11. What factors are likely to decrease feelings, thoughts and behaviours of revenge?

12. What would trigger desires for revenge more, a loved one being hurt or yourself?

13. Is there anything about revenge that you feel I have not touched on and would like to discuss?

The structures of the questions were asked in a manner similar to a funnelling technique. The broad ideas such as global descriptions and ideas of revenge commenced the discussions whilst the more specific questions encouraging detailed references to past experiences were kept towards the end. The questions based on past reflections were aimed to uncover what influenced this group's desire to retaliate or not and also understand what types of non-violent harms occurred and how were they personally resolved. In accordance to the grounded theory literature, the interviews continued until saturation was achieved which was after the 15th participant was interviewed. Charmaz advocated that saturation was a vital part of the grounded theory approach. It was his argument

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that it aided the theories to be evident to the researcher early on in the data collection but also during its contrast to the literature review.\footnote{128}{Kathy Charmaz “Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis” (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 48}

2.3 Ethics
As this study sought to examine real people, their behaviours, experiences and meanings behind it, it is classified as a Qualitative Research project.\footnote{129}{Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln, ed. Handbook of Qualitative Research (Sage: California, 2000), 1} With this type of research comes the necessity of acknowledging the importance of adhering to the principles which guide ethical data collection. After consultation with the Human Research Ethics Committee at Murdoch University in December 2014 it was identified that this project would not likely be dealing with grieving participants or asking questions that could easily cause distress. Protocols, however, were put in place in to ensure that if negative reactions did amount from the interviews there was support services available. Firstly, I made sure that the recruitment advertisement advised that the participants were not to be victims of crime or serious harm. Secondly, it was discussed with the Ethics Committee and my supervisor that it was important before meeting with the participants that I identified that Murdoch had free counselling services if they were required.

When the participants were given a brief overview of the research objectives I also notified them that their responses would be recorded via my phone and later on typed into transcripts. The data would then be stored electronically on a secured hard drive locked in a drawer for five years in accordance with University policy. At the end of the interview, participants were debriefed and asked if there were

\footnote{128}{Kathy Charmaz “Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis” (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 48}
\footnote{129}{Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln, ed. Handbook of Qualitative Research (Sage: California, 2000), 1}
any questions they had or believed I had not examined which was relevant to revenge. They were also provided with my contact details as a means to encourage them to notify me if any time in the future their participation in this study had brought on distress.
3. Results

3.1 Analysis

In grounded theory, the next step is the analysing of the data. For this research, as the data was collected through interviews it was formatted into written transcripts\textsuperscript{130}. The transcripts amounted to 83 pages and 2197 lines not including titles and questions. The analysis is where I was required to sort categories, ask thought-provoking questions and make evaluations from the unorganised raw data contained in the transcripts\textsuperscript{131}. Walker and Myrick advocate that coding is an essential tool for identifying consistent themes and categories because it organises and reduces the data\textsuperscript{132}. From the beginning, word-by-word, line-by-line, question-by-question coding allowed me to begin identifying key words and ideas that would develop my categories\textsuperscript{133}. There are many different coding methods and I chose to use Glaser’s substantive coding method\textsuperscript{134}. This process required me to summarise the general topic of each response using one or two keywords the participants had used. From there I grouped all of the participant’s responses into each question so that I could identify similar and comparative themes. For example, all of the participants responses discussing what would be the results for the avenger were clustered together so that I could easily compare and contrast all key ideas and words discovered during the coding stage. I continued this method, going back and forth with all of the questions and responses until clear relationships and

\textsuperscript{130} Donald E Polkinghoine “Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research” \textit{Journal of Counselling Psychology} 52, no. 2 (2005), 138

\textsuperscript{131} Naresh. R Pandit, “The creation of theory: a recent application of the grounded theory method” 13


\textsuperscript{133} Charmaz “Coding in Grounded Theory Practice” 54

\textsuperscript{134} Barney G Glaser “Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in methodology of grounded theory” (California: Sociological Press, 1978), 55
differences were identified\textsuperscript{135}. When saturation had been reached for each question and its responses, the consistent ideas were then grouped into further sub-categories. I then compared these to the other categories to assess if any could be linked. By comparing the different categories I was able to identify that there was evident relationships and consistency intertwined in the responses regardless of if they were addressed by the same question and could potentially assist in explaining the different phenomenon’s.

Through this, I identified eight themes that captured directly how students understood revenge. In accordance to efficient presentation of grounded theory results only the most relevant quotes have been included in this paper\textsuperscript{136}.

3.2 Themes in revenge
3.2.1 “I wanna hurt them the same way that they hurt me’
Revenge is an action that causes similar harm

Each interview begun with the participants reflecting on how they defined revenge. A consistent theme throughout each response was that revenge was described as an act which involved deliberately retaliating back at someone who had hurt you. It was also the consensus that it was always the infliction of a similar amount of harm. Following this, participants were then asked to describe all of the emotions a victim would be feeling. It was consistent throughout the responses that all of the feelings

\textsuperscript{135} Janice M Morse ‘The significance of saturation’ The Qualitative Health Research, 5, no.2 (1995),147
\textsuperscript{136} Claire Anderson, ”Presenting and evaluating qualitative research” American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 74, no. 8 (2010), 141
would be negative such as powerless, inferior, betrayed and imbalanced to the wrongdoer:

A feeling of feeling inferior in the situation so obviously the person whose done the wrong against you obviously has something over you in a mental capacity. I think you feel inferior and I think in order to feel superior or better about yourself you have to get back at them. You want to get that balance back (Liam)

Participants believed that revenge was a process that began as an emotional reaction but would transform to a physical one depending on what thoughts ran through the victims head. It was a common understanding that whether victims chose to commit revenge or not, every individual would have at some point adopted a thought process to assess how they were feeling and what they wanted to do. This consistent viewpoint suggested that rather than revenge be a thoughtless choice it was in fact driven by a somewhat thought out process:

I guess you would be going back through the event and kind of summing up what harm they caused you before you can exact revenge on someone else or even during the act you would be consistently reflecting on what damage they did to you so that you want to harm them. I’d be trying to weigh it up. I find revenge is more premeditated, you’d have to really plan it and think about it (Hayley)
Deliberating on how to inflict the exact type of harm to ensure the wrongdoer felt similar to how they felt was reported by the participants to be a common thought a victim would have:

You’re sad that it happened to you so you wanna force it back onto them...like you want them to be sad (Claire)

Someone has taken something from you, you want them to feel how you felt (Donna)

They have had a part of their wellbeing taken away from them and they may feel that the way to get that back would be to get revenge on that person to let them know you felt (Ben)

Thinking of ways to make that person feel how you felt. They would be thinking about their whole experience of being hurt. They would be going through what happened to them and planning to put that feeling of negative emotional feelings on that other person (Liam)

3 of the females, Donna, Claire and Claire M expanded on what other thoughts would follow when the initial drive was to make the wrongdoer’s pain equal to theirs.

I wanna hurt them the same way that they hurt me...you start thinking about what’s the best way that I can make them feel like how I feel. So you want to target something close to them like say they’ve hurt your family...you wanna find something else that will hurt them in a similar way (Claire)
If it was something physical, I think you would react in a similar manner. Like say they beat you up or something you would probably want to beat them up in return. Where as if it was something like fraud you would just want them to suffer in the hands of the police (Donna)

I would try and choose to hurt them in the same way that they hurt me so that they can realise- that was a wrong thing to do and that’s what it feels like. So for example if they humiliated me socially or slept with my partner I would be finding out if they had a partner or doing something similar to them. I would be thinking what’s important to them (Claire M)

It would be delving into their life, with your revenge you’re going to be thinking what’s important to someone else. So you’re obviously going to think about them, look into their past or personal environment, around their work or financial capacity (Hayley)

The significance to commit a similar amount of pain was thought to achieve two main objectives. First, it was understand that once the wrongdoer realised how harmful they had been to the victim this would act as a deterrence to future conflict:

So the result is that, that other person now knows what they have actually done, how it made me feel and they haven’t gotten away with it (Casey)

Second, the victim would not feel regret or guilt for deliberately harming another because it was perceived as equal and only motivated to rebalance the inequity caused by the conflict:
Your original action of revenge is justified because what they did to you upset your perspective of the balance (Archie)

3.2.2 “You may as well dig two graves” Revenge is Immoral

Within the data, a majority of participants remarked that revenge was negative and unhealthy. When participants explained the reasons why, it was a consistent theme identified that vengeful behaviour was immoral and disrupted the objectives of a civilised society. Firstly, revenge was understood to turn good people into bad people as it was broadly accepted that good people held values and beliefs that did not encourage the deliberate suffering of another. Participants argued that by committing revenge these good people would have been just as bad as the wrong doer and this realisation would have procured feelings far worse than accepting the harm and moving on.

As the participants further expanded on these rationalisations it was evident that they identified themselves as the good people in society:

Because if you’re going to exact revenge you may as well dig two graves. One for the person you’re going to exact revenge on and one for yourself and I always completely believe that because it’s harming yourself...because say you’re one of those good people in society and by exacting revenge you’re going against your nature and morals and values (Hayley)

I would end up feeling guilty if I had committed revenge as it would make me just as bad as the person (Donna)
The main one would be to your own identity because you have committed an act against how you view yourself & it goes against your moral. Then I feel like that is very negative and just because you’ve gotten even, in the long term you would be questioning who you are as a person because you have gone and done something that you didn’t think you would do or wasn’t aligned with your beliefs. (Claire M)

I know that it’s morally wrong. Common sense tells you that it isn’t right to physical hurt anyone. I think this is a whole combination of factors..laws. I have been brought up by my parents to know that physical violence isn’t right for a number of reasons (Liam)

Because I would never lower myself to that standard. I’m not that kind of person who hurts people on purpose. I’m sure I’ve hurt people accidentally but yeah my morals I guess come into play and I know I’d never be able to hurt someone (Ann)

I would be really angry at myself because I have degraded myself to hurt them. I have gone against my morals, you have a perception of yourself as being really kind, mature and able to discuss things and you would feel embarrassed, degraded and annoyed at them and yourself for making you do that (Claire M)

As predicted in keeping with this theme, participants agreed that individuals who chose to commit revenge were the ones who did not value their morals as highly,
lived in areas where criminality was common, suffered cognitive dissonance and had nothing to lose in regards to repercussions:

I suppose more freedom in laws, if we didn’t have such a judgmental society suppose I lived in the slums I would have less morals on what is right and wrong. Mental illness I think, yeah just having a psychotic or voices in your head (Claire)

Laws or depending on how high your social status was. Like if you didn’t want a criminal record (Ainsley)

You would have to be a little unbalanced at the time. You would be crazy. Something would have flicked in your head to do it (Ann)

Secondly, many participants discussed the issues that would arise once the revenge had been extracted. When asked to respond on whether they thought revenge could ever be a proportionate act, it was a consistent standpoint that the act of revenge would never be proportional to both parties. Satisfaction would never be achieved by the victim because they would never truly know how much harm they had caused and the wrongdoer would likely register the payback as unjustly and in turn react causing a vicious cycle.

Well it is all perceived so you can’t really compare and say well this upset me then the other person says this upset me. Our levels of being upset could be completely different but that’s just personally how you perceive it and you are never going. It’s never going to be proportional like say this person had done something like slept with my boyfriend and then I went oh
okay I will go sleep with their boyfriend. It’s probably going to hurt me a lot more because Rick and I are engaged and pretty serious whilst the other couple may have an open relationship and be like I don’t care if you sleep with my partner anyways. So just because I am doing the same act back doesn’t necessarily mean it will hurt the same (Claire M)

You’re never going to get that balance again (Archie)

I don’t think it’s ever proportional. It’s either the same or worse. I think there is many cases where you would never obtain the satisfaction you were hoping for. You don’t after you have committed revenge whether that person has taken that life lesson on board and you certainly can’t measure their hurt or pain than compare it to your own (Ainsley)

You also can’t measure out how much you hurt someone, it’s not an equation. We all don’t come out of the same cut. What hurts another might not impact another (Jess)

I think that it is usually...like most people...well I would. If I wanted to commit revenge I would do it proportionally with how much I perceived that I was hurt (Claire)

No, I don’t reckon. Because you never really know if you’re hurting them as much. Because you aren’t them so it’s never equal (Stephanie)

I think it should be if you are going to take revenge but like I said before you don’t always know what is going through someone else’s mind so what they think is harmless – and what they did to you was harmless then you go
commit revenge they might think you have over-reacted. You also don’t know how much they will hurt from it and you can’t go and compare that to your hurt. Just because you say a mean comment to someone, it might not be a big deal to you but if they have self-esteem issues then it’s going to hurt more. I think the intention is for it to be proportional but I think it is hard to take this much and inflict only a certain amount of hurt on someone. (Kate)

It was also acknowledged that this inability to know how much harm to inflict onto another would most likely lead to an over-excessive amount, leading the wrongdoer to take on the role as victim and continue the cycle of revenge:

Because you’ve had a situation where you think this person is doing some sort of wrong but they don’t realise this so you’ve got like twenty percent blame on this person or one hundred percent blame on this. This person commits the act and now this person feels fine and now it’s balanced out so everything is at zero but they now blame this person for whatever percent maybe it’s a ninety or ten they blame them a little bit. They’re still trying to get a balance so they’re thinking they need to drop them down to the same level so that they’re a fifty fifty but you’re not going to get that because you’re never going to get to that point where they both sit down and go ‘oh I think that’s enough revenging’ (Archie)

It is not one good turn deserving another. It is a bad thing happening and then a bad retaliation occurring (Ann)
I think if people are going to get revenge it would just continue in a circle like once you get revenge they’ll want revenge (Donna)

They would then want justice, it may turn into a vicious cycle that just continues and things get heavier and worse as things go on (Liam)

3.2.3 “It could ruin your life”
Revenge poses risks and costs
Participants were asked to describe what kind of results they assumed the avenger would receive if they had chosen to go through with their desires and commit revenge against their wrongdoer. A common outlook was that revenge would never be in the best interests of the victim as it would only further harm the victim as it destroyed valued relationships, their respect or would intensify the already established negative emotions.

First, participants referred to hypothetical situations where the victim chose to break laws and physically lash out at the wrongdoer

If you get caught – criminal charges. It could ruin your life especially if you were a top student at university and then you end up in jail...you could lose your job (Jess)

Actually getting in trouble for what you’re doing – parents right down to the law. For example if I hit Luke technically that’s assault (Casey)

Depending on what kind of revenge you are taking you could end up in jail or you could end up potentially killing someone (Donna)
Could end up in prison, especially if they have gone and hurt someone especially if they have acted irrationally (Kate)

You now have a criminal record and that could impact you for years.

On where you want to go travelling and what jobs you want to apply for (Claire M)

The discussions of being incarcerated or obtaining a criminal record then initiated the negative psychological issues the participants believed the victim would attain:

Like if you’ve committed a crime you could go to jail and that will foster even more feelings of resentment and revenge (Ben)

If she reported the assault to Police as well it would be humiliating (Claire M)

All participants that referred to past experiences of committing revenge on people they had been in relationships with acknowledged that they all felt guilty after the act:

Once they hear the effect they might feel guilty..cause they can emphasise because they’ve been their once (Claire)

Internal shame..they’d be looking back at themselves before they did it asking if that’s the type of person they wanna be....they would feel the same as the criminal who did the harm to them, so they’ll feel shame..guilt (Hayley)
Participants also reported that the thought of repercussions, such as how the wrongdoer would react brought on anxiety as they either waited for further retaliation or suspected other people they trusted to betray them:

Nervous..for if the revenge doesn’t go to plan and could back fire..they could say worse things about me (Casey)

You will have trust issues thinking back to other times where people you thought loved you have broken you and you think that anyone new in your life would do the same. You become cynical (Jess)

It may just turn into a vicious cycle that just continues and things get heavier and worse (Liam)

The possible breakdowns of the relationships in the victim’s lives that were involved and not, was also a constant factor to justify why revenge was detrimental to the victim:

They end up losing friends or family cause I don’t think many people would agree with the notion of revenge..it could just drive people away (Donna)

It could make things worse..whether it would cause a lot of tension or negative things around other people or your social group (Ben)

A lot of loss in terms of friendship, once you commit revenge you can say goodbye to that relationship (Jess)
Two participants who referred to personal past harms even admitted that the possibility of relational breakdowns in their private or work life had directly influenced their choice to refrain from committing revenge:

You don’t want to be seen by others to be actually acting in a negative way against somebody who may have harmed you because it’s better to become the bigger person and to move forward (Andrew)

If it’s the girls in my group, I also think about how is this going to not only affect me as a person but everyone around us – like when you have a group of friends (Casey)

Mainly wanting to remain civil for the other people around me. I didn’t want people to judge me. I thought of the repercussions if I acted upon my thoughts. So social circles and circumstances. If something happens in the work environment you have no choice but to remain civil because you don’t want your boss finding out of you being reported to H R (Ainsley)

3.2.4 “Crap she doesn’t stand for that – I better not hurt her”  
Revenge is goal orientated

Within the data, the closeness of the relationship between the wrongdoer and victim was interrelated to how severe the harm was but also whether revenge was an appropriate response. Participants identified that inflicting harm on a relationship they valued would be more difficult compared to strangers:
I think also who hurt me would make a massive difference. For example if it was someone I cared about let’s say it was Rick. Because I care about him so much even if he hurt me I would still think I wouldn’t want to hurt him because if you love someone you don’t want to hurt them. If he cheated on me, I wouldn’t want to cheat on him because I wouldn’t want him to feel the way that I feel (Clare M)

If it is family you are just going to get over it. You have strong feelings of love for them so just deal with it (Ainsley)

However, it was also reported that the severest harm and desires for revenge they had ever felt had been the betrayal of trust and this had only occurred within conflict between loved ones rather than strangers:

I have very little tolerance for lying because that’s a breach of trust and I have a problem with that out of everything..any sort of relationship (Archie)

The relationship you have between the person. If it’s somebody close to you, who you trust. They’ve broken your trust and you feel like an idiot for trusting them. It would be a big factor (Ben)

Depending on the relationship – if you were good friends and they hurt you, you would be sad (Liam)

Who wouldn’t get upset if someone hurt you, who you thought was a friend (Jess)

Sadness would come in. As would betrayal (Joseph)
One participant explained the disconnection strangers have which limits the opportunity for severe harm when discussing the hypothetical scenario of her fiancé hurting her in the worst possible way – infidelity:

The girl I have hit has no commitment to me, Rick does – so I shouldn’t be taking it out on her I should be taking it out on him. If it was someone I didn’t care about as much it wouldn’t affect me as much (Claire M)

As participants disclosed their past dealings with relational conflict it was evident that all decisions to perpetrate revenge or not had been based on a cost benefit analysis:

Well if its someone I am close too like my boyfriend or sister and I have to spend every day with them it’s probably best I forget about it, wait for them to apologise or go confront them and say ‘you hurt my feelings’ rather than let it escalate and become more and more antagonistic (Kate)

I also think whose gonna take my side? Or am I going to lose more than one friend here? Then I also think what do they have on me? So I am thinking about the repercussions ‘cool I know this thing about her and I can tell everyone but what does she know about me? I don’t want everyone to know that. You have to weigh it all up. (Casey)

I’d be trying to weigh it up. Think about the repercussions and how it’s going to harm them (Hayley)

How will my actions impact other people? Especially if it’s in a friendship group. Do you want to lose relationships after you commit revenge? (Jess)
During discussions about the cost benefit analysis, although revenge was consistently referred to as detrimental in regards to relational conflict and wanting to continue the relationship. Participants did, however, recognize that there were circumstances where their balancing of the positives and negatives did result in revenge being more profitable to them:

If my sister brings something up so I bring up something and she realises it doesn’t feel very good she might go ‘well maybe I shouldn’t have embarrassed her because now I know how it feels. So it would assist in relationships because now they know how it feels (Kate)

When they do find out what I have done to them or people have seen my response to people hurting me that they sit there and go ‘crap she doesn’t stand for that – I better not hurt her’. So ultimately people now know not to do that to me because I won’t stand for it. So the result is that, that other person now knows what they have actually done, how it made me feel and that they haven’t gotten away with it (Casey)

In other circumstances, the revenge could not only be beneficial to the present conflictual relationship but also deter others witnessing the retaliation to commit future harm:

It is also natural to want to show everyone else that you aren’t a pushover. I mean they have just seen me get humiliated I have to do something to reinforce my ego. It is human nature for people to assess weak and strong people. It comes back to that whole animal thing, the weakest die or gets
eaten and you need to be able to pump yourself up. It’s all about self-image (Ainsley)

If the initial hurt was done publicly it eggs me onto something. Sometimes you commit revenge to prove to everyone else that you’re not a pushover. You’re not even embarrassed about what happened to you – you’re embarrassed it was done publicly. Automatically when human see another person get hurt they are seen as weak and you feel like the only way for that person to look strong is to respond. I can’t show weakness so you almost do it for a spectacle for everyone else to see (Casey)

You don’t want to make people think you are a doormat (Jess)

In another circumstance, choosing to commit revenge could also alleviate the negative self-respect that a victim would have attained from being wronged:

You had that respect for yourself to not let someone walk all over you.
You’re not going to cave in to somebody. You’re going to stand up for yourself and your beliefs (Ainsley)

If you place yourself onto a high pedestal you want to remain there so you fight back to people bringing you down (Casey)
3.2.5 “Some people take family really seriously. So wronging the family is wronging them.” Seeing loved ones hurt increased a person’s likeliness to commit revenge

Participants admitted throughout their interview that it would be unlikely that they would ever be able to wholly justify committing direct or serious revenge onto another who had wronged them. However, when they discussed past experiences or hypothetical scenarios of people they loved being harmed it was a shared view that this event would lead them to disregard their morals and commit revenge.

All 15 participants at one stage of the interview expressed that revenge would be appropriate, justified and likely if one of their loved ones had been hurt. The first evidence of this theme was discovered early on in the interviews, when some participants included retaliating on behalf of another as part of their definition of revenge:

Some kind of act in response or retaliation to something being done to yourself or done to another person whether it be physical, emotional, psychological, negative act towards somebody that’s been caused to either yourself or someone you know (Joseph)

A physical act of malice towards someone who has wronged you or somebody important to you (Ben)

The act of taking some sort of action against someone for an action they have done to you or someone that you care about (Ann)
Revenge is the act of retribution for what you perceive is a wrong that has been committed against either yourself or another person (Archie)

Whilst others described it in their feelings and thoughts associated with revenge:

When you see an injustice happened you are thinking how could this possibly happen? The frustration comes out of why has this happened to me, my son or dad. Why has this terrible thing happened to someone I know (Archie)

If something happened to someone in my family it would provoke different feelings if that same thing happened to me. If it happened to me I would look at the philosophy that an eye for an eye makes the world go blind so my revenge would be to move on and be a better person. But if it happened to my sister I would probably want to beat that person up or get physical revenge because it would provoke more anger and rage (Donna)

Okay so your morals might be to protect a family member or friend and someone’s hurt them. You may feel so strongly towards the pain that they feel that they need to rebalance the world or something (Claire)

If it’s someone you love or care for, you would only have the most severest emotions of revenge (Joseph)
I would end up feeling guilty if I had committed revenge as it would make me just as bad as the person but that being said if someone attacked someone in my family I would probably feel good know they were suffering in some way (Donna)

The theme was, however, more noticeable when it came to responding on what factors were likely to increase vengeful thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Family members and loved ones were listed as the main justification they would have to inflicting pain onto another:

- Depending on what type of person you are and which family member was hurt. For example if it was someone innocent that would not normally hurt anyone, like my grandad I think I would be really upset for him. If I was harmed I might have been able to handle it and not make it into a big conflict but if it’s someone you love, you view them as vulnerable and you don’t think they deserve anything like that. So I definitely think a family member being wronged heightens my risk to commit revenge (Jess)

Some people take family really seriously, so wronging the family is wronging them. I would take stronger revenge if someone hurt my sister. I think that there are some people that you could feel great revenge for. I think lovers and family you can feel a sense of justification. You don’t know how they feel, you’re worried and so you over-dramatize everything (Archie)
Family members, I would rather take on that hurt or pain rather than see them upset. It seems like it is easier to go through it all by yourself than sit back and watch someone else go through it (Ainsley)

Someone hurting my family member aggravates my intentions to commit revenge. If I love them I am more inclined to commit revenge. If I love them I am more inclined to commit revenge because they deserve it, you don’t want to see them hurt and you feel protective (Kate)

In one instance, a participant described the powerful victimisation that can occur for individuals who have witnessed or are aware that their loved one has been harmed:

I think when it gets to the point where it starts hurting people who had no involvement in the relationship. People forget you can inflict pain on one person but impact other people. For example, say a certain person has a mother and father who is in actual fact his step father but his mother conceals this from her son. Then a close person who knows the secret exposes the son and tells him he is a bastard and has no father. The mother is obviously going to get emotionally impacted by that, as will the step-father and any of the other siblings who may not have known either. That person probably aimed that pain at the son but the exposure impacted everyone else around him as well (Liam)
3.2.6 ‘In movies, they're like over the top, cunning, crazy’
The impact of fictional media and the ideas of revenge

Throughout the interviews, all of the participants disclosed never personally committing serious direct acts of revenge on others due to their values and fear of the repercussions. When participants were unable to relate to a question or had no past experience to reflect on many began to express their responses referring to fictional media they had been exposed too:

I have never really plotted revenge. If I think back to movies on revenge I don't think it's proportional (Ainsley)

I haven’t had anything happen to me. I don’t think about getting revenge. In movies they’re cunning, over the top, crazy. I guess just a lot of aggression. They are spending a lot of time fantasising on what they want to do and planning it (Kate)

Further, in another question on what increased the likeliness of someone committing revenge. The choices fictional characters had made in movies or stories in regards to revenge was also considered to encourage participants to behave in a vengeful manner:

Watching TV shows that trigger ideas, for example if you were linking it to your own experiences or even listening to music that triggers your thoughts (Jess)
I read a short story called Vendetta and the purpose is to show an old lady who wants revenge on someone who killed her son. At the end she was very happy and satisfied (Archie)

In another instance, the influence of fictional media a participant had seen was a direct reason to why she would never commit revenge:

I’m thinking about that revenge show and it is obvious she has been plotting that for many years and how I sort of see revenge, she is obviously not stable at all. Revenge is holding a grudge, it hurts innocent people, and they don’t hold good moral fibre or are of sound mind (Ann)

The students responses indicate that their understanding of what behaviours and repercussions are associated with revenge are ones that cause the most serious destruction to all parties involved. The replies clearly describe avengers as irrational, suffering from psychological abnormalities and that payback is always excessive and violent. Interestingly, there was a major discrepancy of the understandings of revenge when it came to participants who could reflect on past conflict and revenge compared to ones who could not and chose to use examples of fiction.

Participants who were able to reflect on their own experiences of past hurts, described most of their interactions with vengeful desires to be during relational conflict with people they knew. In contrast, when no past experiences could be related to the question the participant’s understandings of revenge were completely different to the other participant’s identifications. This was evident in a
number of responses throughout the interviews. Revenge was described as violent, physical and committed between strangers therefore victims were pushed to study the wrongdoer in order to extract their payback.

Revenge is a lot of thinking and planning. Looking into their past or their personal environment. Going around their work, their occupation and their financial capacity situation (Hayley)

They might be trying to get close to them..they have a long term revenge plan (Kate)

Spying..sussing out the person and what they are about (Claire)

Revenge is an eye for an eye, if it’s a scale but then you get to the ‘well they killed my brother so I’m going to kill their brother’. Then we get to the extreme. But then there’s torture on top of that so I guess even more extreme would be making them suffer till their last breath (Archie)

Beating them up or seeing someone else beat them up (Donna)

These comments suggest that these understandings of revenge are based mostly on how the media portray revenge scenarios such as the victim and wrongdoer not being known to each other. This is evident in how many of participants responses are referring to overdramatized circumstances where the victim’s revenge is a long-winded process of secretly studying the wrongdoer so that the most successful payback can be implemented.
3.2.7 ‘Starve them from any relationship”
Subtle revenge and other indirect acts to cope with desires of revenge

As participants discussed the negatives of retribution, there was a common understanding that personal harm and injustice was always going to be an unavoidable experience for people. It was made clear that as long as people continue to instil trust into others, formulate relationships and have a high ego – there will always be vulnerability that someone will at some point disappoint their expectations. Participants consistently associated negative feelings with an individual being harmed suggesting that regardless of whether a victim chooses to commit revenge or not – victims all go through the first stage of negative emotions.

It was this common understanding that led participants to disclose behaviours that they had adopted to assist in releasing these undesirable feelings. It was thought that these behaviours were socially tolerable because they stayed within their morals or did not impose further risks to themselves. Some participants described these behaviours to be their own personal ‘subtle revenge’ and believed it assisted in lowering their desires to commit more serious acts if they refrained from responding at all:

You could satisfy your urge by doing subtle and sneaky revenge like rearranging their chair or desk items at work. Stuff that cannot be associated back to you (Kate)

In some instances, participants described ‘bettering themselves’ as an indirect form of revenge:
You would want to be better than them and so that feeling of betterment is a personal revenge against another person even though they’ve done nothing to them (Andrew)

Karma revenge is healthy, where you continue to better yourself (Ainsley)

Whilst others described a more passive-aggressive form of punishment such as avoiding or refusing to communicate:

Cutting of communication with them and ignoring them. Spitefulness and rudeness. For example acting short or moody with them deliberately (Liam)

Just standoffish actions and behaviours (Kate)

An action would be avoidance (Ainsley)

In addition to this, some believed completely ending the relationship was the best form of revenge without planning or directly inflicting harm:

Try and act very professional, if I have a question relating to work I will talk to them and act nice. But I wouldn’t strike up a conversation with them or speak to them out of work. I guess that is a form of revenge. I don’t want to act like everything is okay, you want them to know that, that’s it and you are done with them. There will always be a line of separation. Starve them from any friendship and make it very clear (Ainsley)

The best revenge would be leaving them (Stephanie)

Discontinuing the relationship with someone. For example say if you were mutual friends and they borrow your tennis racket to play tennis every week
and then after that they do that harm to you, you decline lending to them again. Its subtle revenge (Liam)

Liam further explained how this was a type of revenge:

Well you’ve taken that relationship away from them. They can’t talk to you now and it’s obviously a bad time for them as well but you feel you’re getting a sense of revenge back at them. You’re denying them that relationship or possessions or entry to social events. Just not inviting them to something is a form of revenge (Liam)

Participants also referred to subtle pay-back which would isolate the wrongdoer and impede their ability to benefit from other relationships:

It’s not a crime but like let’s say someone says something unkind about you and then you decide to not invite them to your party (Kate)

Doing something to someone they love like hurting them. Say if they have a wife or girlfriend. Like making up lies (Liam)

Like a situation would be ‘this person is being a massive dick what could I do, I could turn that person against them, I could point out to this person that they’ve been doing this or whatever. In high school I could be sitting there right next to people thinking ‘oh my god I need to cut them off from all of their friends because they’re stopping me from making friendships’. Which is still revenge in some way. It’s still retribution in some kind of form of what I perceived as wrong. It’s not like I’m plotting to kill people in high
school. They are things like they’re having a party and not inviting me so oh my god I’ve got to have a party and not invite them (Archie)

You could take revenge in the terms of still trying to be their friend, you know like keep your enemies closer and secretly turn everyone against them (Jess)

I have just said something like they aren’t a nice person or slipping out a secret they may have told me earlier on when they trusted me. Something that will put everyone else off of them. I like subtle revenge, it’s like planting a seed (Stephanie)

Participants also regularly reported that another indirect form of revenge was doing nothing at all as they believed the wrongdoer would eventually get what they deserved:

Well you might not need to do anything like say you’ve maybe withheld something maybe like an essential piece of information or something (Hayley)

Coincidental revenge – like karma. You haven’t done anything and you just let it resolve itself (Stephanie)

You’ve got it coming, I suppose karma is well you’ve done something wrong in one way but the world or universe will hit you in another way. I suppose that would be a type of revenge. Well this one would be more of a distance revenge I mean someone accidentally knocks you off of your seat when you’re out and they don’t say sorry and you didn’t do anything about it, you
just get back on your chair and ignore it. But then later on that day
that person who knocked you off, they get punched in the face by someone else randomly (Claire M)

I believe in karma, when the universe takes care of it- but not when the other person does (Ann)

Only one participant who reported to engage in these behaviours identified that these actions were a replacement to revenge and not vengeful at all:

I think revenge is negative and unhealthy. I think sometimes it’s just better to let go and move on. I think the best revenge is success so I would rather feel better knowing that I have done better with my life than they have with theirs rather than making them feel bad about what they did to me (Donna)

The participant, however, later on during the interview reported feeling satisfied when she knew her wrongdoer had been harmed in some way:

I think it’s best for you to just let go or let the police handle it. Maybe if you found out that it had happened to someone else and they had gotten revenge. So you didn’t have to get the revenge but you know that someone else has got revenge against that person and I think that would make you feel like justice is done and they’ve suffered enough for you to not worry about it (Donna)

In conclusion it could be suggested that the choice to not commit direct revenge is not based upon good morality but more on the fear of further repercussions. This is based upon two observations. Firstly, indirect revenge was a regular favoured
response to their harm because it was understood by the students to impose risks on the wrongdoer without being directly obvious. Secondly, none of them reported feeling distressed when they knew their wrongdoer had been harmed by them or another.

3.2.8 “You would just want them to suffer in the hands of Police”  
Involving legal authorities to obtain justice

Within the data, participants also discussed the choice of involving legal authorities such as the Police or the courts system to obtain justice on behalf of them. Some participants referred to this action to be a form of revenge:

Some might think it’s better to take the high road or take it to authorities and let them sort it out. The court process is revenge in its own way. You are just getting someone else to do it for you (Kate)

Legal revenge, allowing the courts to put someone in jail (Stephanie)

Another example:

An insurance company scams off of you twenty five thousand dollars, you find out and you sue them which is a type of revenge. You get compensated with one hundred thousand dollars for your troubles. That’s still a type of revenge I think where someone has done bad by you but you have got justice. Legal justice is still revenge (Liam)
In contrast, but still remaining with the legal involvement theme others alleged it was a substitute to committing revenge:

I think it’s best for you to just let go or let the Police handle it or whatever. If it was fraud or something you would just want them to suffer in the hands of Police (Donna)

This theme of the participants consistently believing that targeting their wrongdoers valued resources was a powerful way to inflict harm was also evident early on in the interview. Some participants discussed it when they were initially asked to describe what the associated thoughts would be for victims seeking revenge:

Do I wanna mess with their head or do you wanna hurt them physically or financially (Hayley)

In other examples, participants mentioned this during their discussions of types of vengeful behaviours:

Destroying their possessions (Liam)

Going around their work, their occupation, their financial capacity situation (Hayley)

In one response, a participant detailed to what degree involving the Police or legal authorities would be to achieving a destructive type of harm to their wrongdoer:

So say you damaged an offender financially he has a family or kids relying upon that money or a wife and you would harm them in the process (Liam)
4.1 Discussion
The research produced eight themes. Each theme will be discussed to assess whether it is consistent or inconsistent with already established literature.

4.1.2 Revenge is causing equal harm
In the data, participants identified that revenge was associated with many negative feelings and thoughts of inferiority, powerlessness and betrayals of trust. They also believed that revenge could only be justified and satisfying if the retaliation was of equal hurt to what they had initially experienced.

The related feelings participants understood revenge to be driven by was also consistently reported in the literature that examined pre-revenge feelings. In Miler’s research, betrayal was the strongest emotion felt before revenge and these victims also only reported to inflict equal harm to their wrongdoers. Miller suggested that the link between these two findings was due to all of the victims having established relationships with their wrongdoers. In Fitness’ paper, she too identified a connection between vengeful desires and the perception of inequality between the victim and offender. Her participants conveyed a similar understanding to what my data found, where it was consistently stated that the motivation behind their revenge was to rebalance the power differences.

The understanding that revenge could only be justified and satisfying when it was equal was consistent with Orth. Orth had the opinion that it was important the act of revenge held onto the ‘norm of reciprocity’ – which was that it had to resemble

137 Miller, ‘Disrespect and the experience of injustice’ 540
138 Fitness, “Betrayal, Rejection, Revenge and forgiveness: An interpersonal script approach”, 7
the original offence otherwise it could potentially be seen as an isolated harm\textsuperscript{139}.

His research also demonstrated that just like my participants, his victims could only justify, obtain satisfaction and not identify themselves as evil like their wrongdoer when the payback was equal\textsuperscript{140}.

In the current study victims reported they no longer felt inferior if they inflicted revenge equal to the harm they had received. It was frequently explained that because it was not excessive - the wrongdoer would understand, accept it and equity will be restored. Participants also believed that the mutual understanding created through the wrongdoer’s acceptance of the victim’s retaliation would facilitate a deterrence of future harm between the two parties and also to others. This was also a frequent finding in Planalp, Hafan and Adkins data as their victims reported that because pain was shared by both parties the scores were now even\textsuperscript{141}. These results were also in accordance to Gollwitzer, Meder and Schmitt’s research. They discovered the theory of ‘comparative suffering’ where the victim’s desire for equality was not based on witnessing suffering but rather that the control of being able to personally commit what they thought was equal was satisfying\textsuperscript{142}. It was understood that through comparative suffering there was a mutual understanding between the aggrieved parties which reduced the chances of remorse in encouraging an ongoing feud\textsuperscript{143}. This was also consistent to the findings in the New Zealand research project which identified a link between victim’s

\textsuperscript{139} Orth, “Does perpetrator punishment satisfy victim’s feelings of revenge? 62
\textsuperscript{140} Orth, “Does perpetrator punishment satisfy victim’s feelings of revenge? 63
\textsuperscript{141} Planalp, Hafan and Adkins “Messages of shame and guilt” 21
\textsuperscript{142} Gollwitzer, Meder & Schmitt, “What gives satisfaction when they seek revenge? 364
\textsuperscript{143} Gollwitzer, Meder & Schmitt, “What gives satisfaction when they seek revenge? 374
reporting high satisfaction levels when they were aware that their offender knew how much their harm had impacted them\textsuperscript{144}.

The consistency between my data and the literature contributes to supporting previous theories about revenge. First, that conflict is more prevalent in relationships rather than strangers. Second, the need for revenge consists of the goal to only be equal to the original harm because it is not desired by the victim to jeopardise the relationship or begin an ongoing feud. Third, that because acts of revenge appear to be driven by this equality goal it may in fact be a behaviour comprising of rationality rather than irrationality.

4.1.3 Revenge is immoral
A majority of the participants when asked if revenge was a healthy or unhealthy choice, perceived it to be negative and unhealthy. Going against their morals, predicted further retaliation and the inability for revenge to ever be proportional were repeatedly referred to as the main reasons why revenge would always lead to more losses for them.

In regards to morals, it was specifically noted that good people held morals that did not encourage the harming of people on purpose and that by going against these the victim would only inflict additional harm onto themselves. Participants predicted that when a victim chooses to commit revenge they forgo their good guy status, degrade themselves to the level of their wrongdoer and would only feel remorse. The idea that revenge does not align with good morals was also an

\textsuperscript{144} Ministry of Justice Research Team New Zealand. Victim satisfaction with restorative justice: a summary of findings.
evident theme in Seabright and Schminke’s research. They categorised revenge as an immoral behaviour because both were known to involve a thought process where little to no contemplation of future ramifications were adopted. They also supported the idea that revenge would only lower the victim’s standards of being a good person because it solely involved deliberately making another suffer\textsuperscript{145}. In Fitness’ paper, revenge and the disregard of good morals was also a consistent theme. According to Fitness, humans were goal orientated and social animals. Because of this, it was argued that decent morals would be based around productively working with others and making decisions in favour of their best interests. In contrast, revenge was thought to involve an irrational thought process of behaving in a manner that aims to deliberately hurt another and encourage an ongoing feud\textsuperscript{146}. Ultimately, when comparing the consistent ideas of what revenge and good morals are understood to consist of, it is clear why revenge is seen as immoral.

When discussing how revenge de-railed the good morals for people to remain in productive relationships and fulfil their goals, it was consistently reported that it would always aggravate conflict rather than defuse. Participants believed revenge encouraged ongoing feuds because it would never achieve proportionality or a rebalance between the victim and wrongdoer. Firstly, participants stated that as a victim you would never be able to measure how much harm another had inflicted onto you and then replicate that exact harm onto someone else. Secondly, it was identified that the victim would never be able to understand how much harm the

\textsuperscript{145} Seabright & Schminke, “Immoral imagination and revenge in organisations” 20
\textsuperscript{146} Fitness, “Interpersonal revenge” 2
wrongdoer would have felt from the revenge to assess if the exact harm was achieved. Thirdly, the original harm alleged by the victim and the pay-back inflicted on the wrongdoer would always be understood differently depending on each person’s perception. It was widely accepted that the victim would always over-exaggerate the original harm whilst the wrongdoer would most probably downplay the seriousness of it. This was also consistent in Stillwell, Baumesister and Del Priore’s studies which introduced the theory ‘Magnitude Gap’ to explain the relationship between ongoing feuds and revenge. Their research confirmed that there would always be a discrepancy between the victim and the wrongdoer and this imbalance of unfairness would always encourage ongoing retaliation between both parties\(^\text{147}\). Participants also consistently understood this discrepancy to result in victims inflicting an over-excessive amount of revenge onto the wrongdoer facilitating an ongoing feud between the parties. This was also the case for other studies that had previously looked at the negative implications of revenge. The victims in Eisenstat’s research demonstrated being in a high emotional state when planning their revenge and this had influenced their payback to be the severest option resulting in over-excessive harm\(^\text{148}\).

In conclusion, the consensus amongst my data and the literature is that revenge is immoral because it occurs more frequently in relationships and inhibits the productivity of them. This is thought to be detrimental to the victim and wrongdoer because relationships facilitate the attainment of personal goals and revenge will only encourage further harm. These findings contribute to the objectives of the

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\(^\text{147}\) Stilwell & Baumeister, “The construction of victim and perpetrator memories: Accuracy and distortion in role based accounts’ 1163

\(^\text{148}\) Eisenstat, “Revenge, Justice & Law: Recognising victims desire for vengeance as a justification for punishment’ 29
study which was to explore how students understood revenge and whether it was consistent or inconsistent to what other scholars had found.

4.1.4 Revenge poses risks and costs to the victims relationships
Revenge was consistently understood to involve further detrimental harm to the victim rather than just the wrongdoer. The main negative repercussion discussed was that vengeful behaviour had the ability to jeopardise the important relationships in the victim’s life. Firstly, revenge was thought to lead to victims breaking the law which would ultimately place restrictions on their employment opportunities, ability to travel as well as their social respectability to others around them. This was also consistent in McKinley, Woody and Bell’s research which had demonstrated that their victims had reported to have destroyed their integrity and social standing through choices to commit revenge149.

Participants who had identified to have personally never chosen to commit revenge believed the primary reason was the fact that their past harms had always been relational. It was reiterated that the benefits of these relationships were prioritised to be more important than any pay-back which had the possibility to jeopardise these future bonds. This theme was also supported in the participant’s responses when they were discussing what they perceived would be the results for the victim if they chose to commit revenge. It was consistently reported that revenge would eventually destroy the relationship between the parties, leaving the victim to feel guilt and shame. These negative post-revenge feelings were also prevalent in the

149 McKinley, Woody & Bell, “Vengeance: Effects of Gender, Age, and Religious Background” 343
literature review as in both of Barr-Zisowitz\textsuperscript{150} and Yoshimura’s studies\textsuperscript{151} the strongest reported emotion felt after revenge for their victims was remorse. It was also confirmed in Jones, Kugler and Adam’s study\textsuperscript{152} as well as Vangelisti and Sprague’s after both of their results were able to demonstrate a clear link between victims who felt guilt and regret and the ones who also still cared for their wrongdoer\textsuperscript{153}. In Mongeau, Hale and Alles, depression and a low-life satisfaction was linked directly to acts of revenge against loved ones\textsuperscript{154}.

The participants’ understandings that revenge was not ideal in interpersonal conflict was also consistent with the research conducted by Ross and Schumann as they looked at what interpersonal revenge did to the productivity of relationships. Their data revealed that revenge inhibited the value of the relationship as it only encouraged an ongoing feud where neither party was capable of receiving any of the benefits that the partnership had once provided\textsuperscript{155}.

In addition to this, my participants consistently brought up that the negative judgement they assumed they would receive from others if they committed revenge was also a main deterrent. Participants alleged that by committing revenge, people around them who did not agree with the notion of revenge could judge them negatively and this could drive them away or breakdown their relationship. The findings here were also broadly consistent with the study that Kim, Smith and Brigham conducted. Their data showed that generally people

\textsuperscript{150} Barr-Zisowitz, “Sadness- is there such thing? 77
\textsuperscript{151} Yoshimura, ‘Goals and emotional outcomes of revenge activities in interpersonal relationships’ 95
\textsuperscript{152} Jones, Kugler & Adams “You always hurt the ones you love: guilt and transgressions against relationship partners’ 114-139
\textsuperscript{153} Vangelisti and Sprague, ‘Guilt and hurt: similarities, distinctions and conversational strategies’ 133-138
\textsuperscript{154} Mongeau, Hale & Alles, “An experimental investigation of accounts and attributions following sexual infidelity” 326-334
\textsuperscript{155} Schumann and Ross, ‘The benefits, costs and paradox of revenge’ 1196
viewed revenge as a negative behaviour and that anyone who chose to commit it lacked self-interest. It was also agreed that this judgement could influence how people respected the avenger and in turn limit the value people had in continuing or initiating a relationship with them.\textsuperscript{156}

The significance of my results being similar to other scholar’s findings demonstrates that revenge is perceived to be negative because it is more prevalent between parties who rely upon the continuation of the partnership. In addition, the choice to commit revenge does not only involve a reflection on how it will impact the current relationship involved in the conflict. My data and previous studies have demonstrated that revenge can also be influenced by the preservation of non-related relationships which can be negatively impacted by the avenger’s choice to retaliate. Ultimately revenge is assumed to control the future of our relationships therefore are significantly considered when making the choice or not to retaliate.

4.1.5 Revenge is driven by a rational thought process
Participants all identified that a majority of their past experiences of harm had involved the betrayal of trust or relational expectations. Participants also reported that the severity of their harm depended on the closeness of the relationship they had with their wrongdoer. For example, loved ones and family members were recalled to be the people in the participant’s lives who were most capable of hurting them. These remarks and corresponding ideas that harm was more prevalent in relationships was also consistent in Fitness’ research. Fitness theorised

\textsuperscript{156} Kim, Smith & Brigham, “Effects of power imbalance and the presence of third parties on reactions to harm: upward and downward revenge” 358
that harm was more dominant in relationships because people were social animals and relied heavily upon the productivity of these interactions for resources, support and goal attainment. When these relational expectations were violated or obstructed this was registered as a harm to the victim and that revenge was then driven by the goal to regain those losses.157

My research also showed that rather than choices of revenge be driven by irrational thoughts, the decision to commit revenge or not was in fact based upon a judgement process that weighed up the risks and benefits. Participants reported that their main thoughts on whether to initiate pay-back were based around whether they wanted to maintain a future relationship with the wrongdoer or how they would be perceived by others. If the revenge was observed to result in more negative repercussions such as the ending of valued relationships or further retaliation then participants disclosed to refraining from choosing revenge. However, if there were more profitable outcomes to amount from payback for the victim, such as a new found cooperation between the feuding parties, deterrent of future harm or a rebalance of power then it was likely revenge would be expected.

This thought process was also common in Lazarus’ work as he theorised that when one partner chooses to disrupt the relationship, it signifies to the other that there is no longer value in their association which leads them to evaluate what this means for their needs and goals.158 In Diener & Biswas-Diener, their research had established the concept that individuals strategically cooperated with others

157 Fitness, ‘Betrayal, Rejection, Revenge and Forgiveness: An interpersonal script approach’ 7

158 Lazarus, ‘Stress, coping, health: A situation-behavior approach: Theory, methods, applications’ S-9
depending on their best interests or not\textsuperscript{159}. This was also established in Hawley, Little & Card’s findings where victims were less likely to commit revenge when they described the relationship they had with their wrongdoer to provide them with valuable resources and support\textsuperscript{160}. Two studies from the literature review went on to confirm the theme that revenge was a behaviour motivated by the victim’s goals. In Shackleford & Buss’ research their sample of victims demonstrated that revenge was more prevalent amongst victims who had assessed that they would profit more from ending the relationship rather than keeping the peace\textsuperscript{161}. Whilst Diamond’s study revealed that when victims were aware that their wrongdoer would have the opportunity to retaliate after their revenge they were more likely to refrain from committing it in the first place\textsuperscript{162}.

The potential benefits of revenge which the participants believed increased their chances of committing revenge were also consistently demonstrated throughout the literature. In Chagnon’s study, swift retaliation in tribal conflict was shown to provide dominance to the victims. This was argued to lead to lower probabilities of future harm and higher chances of respectability amongst their social groups\textsuperscript{163}. In Miller’s research he too contended that from an evolutionary perspective, humans survived depending on their social status amongst others\textsuperscript{164}. This was also broadly consistent in McCullough’s paper as he hypothesised that victims made the decision to retaliate based upon the fact that revenge could achieve three main objectives:

\textsuperscript{159} Diener & Biswas-Diener, ‘Will money increase subjective wellbeing? A literature review and guide to needed research’ 120

\textsuperscript{160} Hawley, Little & Card, “The allure of a mean friend: Relationship Quality and process of aggressive adolescent with pro-social skills” 179

\textsuperscript{161} Shackleford & Buss ‘Betrayal in mateships, friendships, and coalitions’ 1153

\textsuperscript{162} Diamond, ‘The effect of fear on the aggressive responses of anger aroused and revenge motivated subjects’ 185

\textsuperscript{163} Chagnon, ‘Life histories, Blood Revenge and Warfare in Tribal Population’ 989

\textsuperscript{164} Miller, “Disrespect and the Experience of Injustice” 530
that would limit any future goal obstruction\textsuperscript{165}. These findings aligned with my data contributes to the body of research that has demonstrated that revenge is a range of behaviours that are driven by a weigh up of costs and benefits rather than a thoughtless process. In addition, both my data and previous studies have been able to demonstrate that in some instances revenge can in fact provide benefits and be in the best interests for the victim.

4.1.6 The ideas of revenge are influenced by the media

In the data, many of the participant’s responses and understandings of revenge were made up of their past exposures of what the media had shown revenge to be like. To these participants revenge was detailed to consist of violent acts, over proportionate to the original harm, time consuming and led to further negative repercussions for the victim. Vengeful behaviour was also identified to transpire between two parties who were strangers to another rather than relational. This was suggested through the participant’s explanations that revenge would involve the victim having to spy on their wrongdoer in order to get information on how to hurt them successfully. It was these understandings of revenge which influenced the participant’s views that revenge was always inappropriate and why they had and never would justify committing it if ever harmed. These interpretations of revenge were also supported in the literature. Clover’s research had studied the over-exaggerative ways that the media demonstrated vengeful plotlines in order to engage its viewers. Clover discussed how unrealistic revenge had been portrayed in movies resulting in it being associated with acts primarily based upon physical

\textsuperscript{165} McCullough, ‘Beyond Revenge: The evolution of the forgiveness instinct’ 21-23
violence, death, obsession and an unstable victim\textsuperscript{166}. In both Cantor and Wilson’s\textsuperscript{167} and Boon and Yoshimura’s\textsuperscript{168} findings, their participants had all failed to recognise that the characters and storylines they had watched in the media were based on fictional ideas. Huesmann & Taylors study went on further to support how influential the media was to societies’ understandings of revenge. In their research, it was demonstrated that what a child watched on the television was just as powerful as the influence their family members, peers and society had when it came to shaping how to appropriately behave and what to expect from relationships. These results would also explain why my participants influenced by the media did not perceive that revenge could come in other forms that were less violent. Bandura’s study explained this phenomenon to be linked with social cognitive theory. He argued that when people constantly see a behaviour resulting in punishment rather than rewards they are less likely to choose to do it\textsuperscript{169}. This could also explain why participants who viewed revenge through the media were less likely to commit revenge or perceive their reactions to be vengeful because it was not aligned with the revenge they had seen in the media. These findings are significant to my research because it assists in understanding why revenge is identified by many groups of victims and members of society to be a negative choice of action.

\textsuperscript{166} Clover, ‘Men, women and chainsaws; Gender in the modern horror film’ 3
\textsuperscript{167} Cantor & Wilson Media and Violence: Intervention strategies for reducing aggression’ 366
\textsuperscript{168} Boon & Yoshimura, “Pluralistic ignorance in revenge attitudes and behaviours in interpersonal relationships” 268
\textsuperscript{169} Bandura, “Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective” 24-25
4.1.7 Committing revenge on behalf of a harmed loved one

Although many of the participants identified never committing revenge or wanting too, all of the 15 participants at some stage of the interview expressed that revenge would be justified if it came to protecting a loved one who had been harmed. Some participants included the retaliation on behalf of a hurt loved one as part of their global definition of revenge. Whilst others mentioned it when disclosing what was the most likely factor which would increase their chances of going against their morals and deliberately harming another. There were two consistent justifications made for committing retaliation on behalf of a loved one. First, some reported to display similar or stronger feelings of hurt than when they had been wronged when it was discovered a loved one had been mistreated. All participants registered a loved one being hurt as a personal harm to themselves. These findings were similar in Jones, Pelham, Mirenberg and Jetts study as all of their participants had reported stronger feelings of hurt when a loved had been harmed compared too if it had just been them. This was also consistent to the research conducted by Fitness and Baumeister who argued that each person has relational scripts on the expectations of their relationships, and what they deserve from others. This is furthermore understood to include scripts on how we think others around us should be treated hence when we interpret someone has been mistreated in accordance to our expectations we also feel violated. The literature review also contained studies that were able to demonstrate examples of this third party

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\[170\] Jones, Pelham, Mirenberg & Jetts 'Name letter preferences are not merely mere exposure: Implicit egotism as self-regulation' 170-177

\[171\] Fitness, 'Betrayal, Rejection, Revenge and forgiveness: An interpersonal script approach, 2

\[172\] Baumeister, Evil: Inside human violence and cruelty’ 2
victimisation. In both the Canadian Research\textsuperscript{173} and Fisher and Lab’s study, their sample of victims had reported feeling directly harmed as a result of their loved ones being hurt. Fisher and Lab labelled these third party victims as secondary victims and discovered that people who had lost a loved one to homicide were reporting similar victimisation to what direct victims had previously recorded. For example many of the surviving family members to the homicide victim reported withdrawing from relationships, suffering financially and being unable to return to everyday life\textsuperscript{174}.

Second, my participants justified their desire to commit revenge on behalf of a loved one on the basis that it made them feel frustrated for failing to protect them. These findings were also consistent to the participant’s responses in Crombag, Wagenaar & Coppen’s study. They found that their American participants although not directly harmed by the 9/11 terrorist attacks identified themselves collectively as a nation and that because America had been attacked – they had been attacked. When asked to discuss their desires for revenge against the attacks, 90% wanted to retaliate on behalf of their country and the victims\textsuperscript{175}. In addition to this, Spungen’s sample of victims also demonstrated themselves as co-victims to their loved ones harm because they felt out of control, weak and guilty for being unable to initially protect them from the harm\textsuperscript{176}. The established body of research aids in understanding why my data consistently found that participants were more emotionally driven to commit revenge on behalf of harmed loved ones than when they had been personally harmed. In addition to this, my data and the literature

\textsuperscript{173} Canadian Resource Centre for Victim of Crime “Homicide Survivors- Dealing with Grief”
\textsuperscript{174} Fisher & Lab, ‘Secondary Victims of Homicide’ 51
\textsuperscript{175} Crombag, Wagenaar & Coppen, ‘Crashing memories and the problem of source monitoring’ 99
\textsuperscript{176} Spungen, ‘Homicide: The Hidden Victims’ 19-20
demonstrates three concepts about revenge. First, that revenge is desired more frequently when it interrupts the goals and relationships of individuals. This is significant to one of the objectives of the study which was to assess if harms considered of a violent nature yielded stronger desires of revenge. My data shows that harm does not need to be of a physical or violent nature to attract strong desires for retaliation. Second, that the choice to commit revenge is influenced by the goals, costs and benefits of the avenger. Third, that harm can be ongoing and impact other relationships in the victim’s life which can result in more victims seeking revenge.

4.1.8 Subtle Revenge

There was a common understanding that personal harm was unavoidable because people regularly instil trust into relationships. Ultimately this reliance on others leaves vulnerability to disappointment when these expectations are broken. Participants reported that in past experiences they had dealt with personal harms through particular indirect acts. It was acknowledged that these passive acts were similar to revenge in the way it satisfied their desires to retaliate against their wrongdoer, release any built up of negative emotions but avoid the negative consequences associated with it. These actions conducted by the participant’s supports the ‘emotional catharsis’ theory discussed by Freud which speculates that humans control the levels of negative feelings they attain from harm through different behaviours\(^\text{177}\). My participants believed these behaviours avoided negative consequences such as retaliation because the payback could either not be traced back to them or was not deemed over-excessive to encourage a feud.

\(^{177}\) Breuer & Freud, ‘Studies on hysteria’ 5
For participants who reflected on past harms in relational conflict it was constantly discussed that they had chosen to punish their wrong doer by avoiding them, withholding resources they once provided, not inviting them to events or ending the relationship completely. Many also reported to deliberately try turn other people against their wrongdoer by disclosing secrets or untrue things about them. Participants also classified not doing anything at all as a form of revenge. Harm coming to their wrongdoer in the form of karma or coincidence was identified to be just as satisfying regardless of the fact they were not directly responsible for it.

Only one participant disagreed that these were acts of revenge. She believed that because she never committed these actions with the aim to make her wrongdoer feel bad it was not considered vengeful. This was later on contradicted when she reported to feel satisfied and a decreased desire to commit revenge when she knew her wrongdoer had been harmed by another. It was therefore unanimous that every participant had reported to engage in some sort of vengeful activity when they had perceived to have been harmed. These subtle acts were also consistently shown to be used by other groups of victims within the literature review. In the workplace, victims punished their wrongdoer through acts of avoidance, embarrassing them in front of colleagues or endeavouring to get a promotion to feel superior over them. Customer revenge was found to involve similar behaviours such as exiting the partnership, suing the company for financial awards or bad-mouthing them to others to discourage future consumers.

In relational conflict, Yoshimura and Boon’s victims reported alike retaliatory

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178 Tripp, Bies & Aquino, “A vigilante model of justice: revenge and reconciliation, forgiveness and avoidance” 23
179 Greogoire, Laufer & Tripp, “A comprehensive model of direct and indirect revenge: understanding the effects of perceived greed and customer power” 2
behaviours they had used to punish wrongdoer loved ones. Many admitted to deliberately ignoring or ending the relationship, disclosing secrets or making up lies. Some confessed to pushing themselves to lose weight or begin new relationships in order to flaunt their new improved self to their wrongdoer\textsuperscript{180}. These behaviours were also regular in Bies and Tripp’s study. They hypothesised that these types of relational retaliation were prevalent because they mirrored how the victim originally felt. For example, acts were based around the aim to make the wrongdoer feel betrayed, unsupported and restricted in benefiting from the relationship\textsuperscript{181}.

‘Betterment’ revenge was regularly mentioned by my participants as a popular choice of pay-back. This involved the victim using the negative energy from their harm to focus on becoming better than their wrongdoer. Satisfaction was provided through a number of ways. Firstly, they were exerting their aggression through behaviours that would wholly benefit them such as going to the gym, improving their looks or getting good grades. Secondly, there was a possibility that this betterment would be acknowledged by the wrongdoer and would in turn make them regret not seeing value in them and exacerbate the pain caused by the loss of the relationship. These behaviours were also featured within the literature, however, scholars found the latter in regards to benefits for the victims. In both Bushman\textsuperscript{182} and Geen and Quanty’s\textsuperscript{183} studies it was discovered that the groups of

\textsuperscript{180} Boon & Yoshimura, ‘Pluralistic ignorance in revenge attitudes and behavior in interpersonal relationships’ 258-271
\textsuperscript{181} Bies & Tripp, “Getting Even” and the need for revenge” 205
\textsuperscript{182} Bushman, “Does venting anger feed or extinguish the flame? Catharsis, rumination, distraction, anger and aggressive responding” 730
\textsuperscript{183} Geen and Quanty, ‘The catharsis of aggression: An evaluation of a hypothesis’ 18
victims who were told to think about their harm whilst releasing their negative energy towards the wrongdoer or “improving” themselves generated higher aggressive levels. My data has shown that regardless of the severity of harm, vengeful types of behaviour are frequently used by all individuals who are reacting to perceived harms. The results have also contributed to the body of literature in the review that have already discovered that there are consistent types of subtle and indirect revenge that individuals use to deal with conflict with another.

4.1.9 Legal Revenge
In my data, participants understood involving legal authorities such as the police as an opportunity to seek justice and punish the wrongdoer without having to be wholly responsible for it. Participants described the different outcomes that the criminal justice system could provide in order for justice to be obtained on behalf of the victim. This was also the broadly discussed in the literature as Feeley’s paper argued how external agencies had been implemented into society as a means for victims to be discouraged from administering their own punishment onto their wrongdoers. In some responses, participants acknowledged that by including legal authorities into their conflict with another it was a form of revenge because of the similar benefits and costs it delivered. This was also the case in Merry’s study as she had found all of her victims who had chosen to involve legal authorities had done it on

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184 Feeley, ‘Two modes of the criminal justice system: an organisational perspective’ 407
the understanding that it would provide them better treatment, protection and compensation.185

My participants who argued the relationship between revenge and legal authorities also consistently justified it on the basis that both had the ability to take away important resources from the wrongdoer. To them, removing resources was reported to be one of the strongest and most successful means of harming their wrongdoer. The types of resources discussed to yield the greatest harm if they were taken away from the wrongdoer included ones that could jeopardise their relationships and financial status. This understanding that there was a link between revenge and the legal system was also consistently demonstrated in the literature. Diener and Biswas-Diener showed that the power of the courts to impose financial costs on the wrongdoer and award them to the victim had satisfied victims and made them feel empowered.186 This empowerment was thought to be linked to the global view in society that a person’s social status and the relationships around them improve depending on their resources and ability to control them. Ultimately, these court outcomes are similar to revenge in the way that it has the capacity to regain the losses for the victim whilst destroying the wrongdoer’s resources.

There were also studies within the literature which showed other groups of victims shared similar views to my participants that the legal system could provide alike costs and benefits to revenge. In David and Choi’s study, victims reported to feel highly satisfied when their harms had been acknowledged and financial benefits

185 Merry, ‘Getting Justice and Getting Even: Legal Consciousness among working-class Americans’ 14
186 Diener & Biswas-Diener, ‘Will money increase subjective wellbeing? A literature review and guide to needed research’ 120
were awarded to them\textsuperscript{187}. In Aquino, Bies and Tripp’s research, fair grievance procedures had lowered desires for revenge because victims predicted once administered these processes would provide justice and punishment on behalf of them\textsuperscript{188}. Feldhusen, Hankivsky and Greaves study showed their victims were driven to involve the court of law because of the similar opportunities it provided in regards to empowerment, justice and punishment for their wrongdoer\textsuperscript{189}.

First, victims believed they would feel empowered if their harm was acknowledged by a high authority. Second, their original harms made them feel as if things had been taken away from them and understood the court to have the power to take important things away from their wrongdoer. Third, almost half of the victims thought that being rewarded with costs would regain their power, dignity and facilitate their goal attainment\textsuperscript{190}.

Some studies were also able to demonstrate how similar in negative consequences both revenge and the court system were able to inflict onto the wrongdoer.

In Nagrecha, Katzenstein and Davis, offenders ordered to pay costs to their victims reported attaining debt and losing valuable resources which adversely impacted their relationships\textsuperscript{191}. Edin found that just like revenge, incarceration alienated the target from their groups, hindered the ability for them to obtain or provide resources to their relationships and ultimately destroyed them\textsuperscript{192}. Zehr’s research

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\textsuperscript{187} David & Choi, ‘Getting Even or Getting Equal? Retributive Desires and Transitional Justice’ 187  \\
\textsuperscript{188} Aquino, Tripp & Bies, ‘Getting Even or Moving on? Power, Procedural Justice and Types of Offense as Predictors of Revenge, Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Avoidance in Organisations’ 655  \\
\textsuperscript{189} Feldhusen, Hankivsky & Greaves, “Therapeutic consequences of civil actions for damages and compensation claims by victims of sexual abuse” 77  \\
\textsuperscript{190} Feldhusen, Hankivsky & Greaves, “Therapeutic consequences of civil actions for damages and compensation claims by victims of sexual abuse” 78-81  \\
\textsuperscript{191} Nagrecha, Katzenstein & Davis, “First person accounts of criminal justice debt: when all else fails – fining the family” 20  \\
\textsuperscript{192} Edin, ‘How low-income single mothers talk about marriage” 26
\end{flushright}
demonstrated cases where prisoners reported to feel no personal value and a low social status\textsuperscript{193}. Even after these offenders had been released, the punishment appeared to continue. For example, in Haney’s study offenders had struggled to regain independence, return to their social roles and formulate relationships\textsuperscript{194}. This was also consistent in Western’s research where the stigmatisation of being dealt with by the legal system had impeded the offender’s chances of maintaining and forming valuable relationships, obtaining a job and contributing to society\textsuperscript{195}.

Ultimately, the consensus within my data and the literature was that involving legal authorities to obtain justice on behalf of us is an act of revenge based on two similarities. First, it is instigated by the victim through related desires such as satisfaction, regaining losses, justice and seeing the offender pay. Second, it yields results, costs and benefits similar to what revenge is understood to provide.

### 4.1.10 Limitations

There are four key limitations relating to this study. First, the sample only covers university student’s understandings of revenge. This limits the ability to make too many conclusions on how revenge is understood globally by all victims.

For example, the age group was younger with only one person being over the age of 40. This meant that the life experiences and vulnerability to types of harm could have been minimal compared to others who were older and had lived longer.

There sample also contained more females than males which limits the ability to comment on whether these males’ responses represent the general understanding

\textsuperscript{193} Zehr, ‘Changing Lenses: A new focus for Crime and Justice” 83

\textsuperscript{194} Haney, ‘The psychological impact of incarceration: implications for post-prison adjustment’

\textsuperscript{195} Western, “The impacts of incarceration on wage mobility and inequality” 526
of all male university students’ concepts of revenge. Second, using a grounded theory approach to the collection of data caused the sample numbers to be small. In grounded theory, once saturation is reached the investigator is instructed to stop gathering data. As I focused primarily on a collective group of university students, it could be suggested that saturation point would have been reached much earlier because the group may have shared similar life experiences due to alike age, socioeconomic status and culture. Third, the interviews were all face-to-face and this can lead to a number of issues in regards to the types of responses I received. Participants could have been worried about their privacy or due to shyness and topic sensitivity be reluctant to share such personal experiences to a stranger. In addition to this, ‘Social Desirability’ bias is prone in these interviews. This is where respondents have the tendency to answer questions in a way that will be seen favourably to others. Fourth, although I attempted to control my topic by using set questions, in some instances I had to paraphrase questions so that my participants could further understand what I was asking. Therefore it was difficult at times to code the data during the analysis when responses to questions were not always asked in the exact way or answered within the same question.
5.1 Conclusion
In attempting to look at how revenge is understood by a group of university students who were not harmed in a violent or serious nature, this study has found that desires for revenge are still prevalent regardless of the severity of harm or established relationship between the parties. In principle, revenge can be understood as different defensive and goal driven behaviours used by victims and directed at their wrongdoer. In addition, revenge was described to come in a range of different acts, some passive aggressive and covert whilst others direct and blatant. The findings here are consistent with the established literature on revenge that describes it to be a response to harm decided on a costs benefit assessment of the victim’s goals that can be indirect or direct retaliatory behaviours and is used frequently in relational conflict.