

## RETALIATION AS A MEANS OF RESTORING EQUITY<sup>1</sup>

ELLEN BERSCHEID, DAVID BOYE

*University of Minnesota*

AND ELAINE WALSTER

*University of Wisconsin*

Previous research has shown that when a harm-doer is faced with the suffering of his victim he will attempt to eliminate the inequity he has created by compensating the victim. When this is not possible, he will restore psychological equity by justifying the victim's suffering. It was suggested that equity can be restored by still another method: the victim can "get even" with the harm-doer by retaliating against him. It was proposed that when compensation is impossible, a harm-doer will derogate a victim who is powerless to retaliate but will not derogate a victim from whom he anticipates retaliation. *Ss* who had not harmed the victim were not expected to respond in the same way. This hypothesis was confirmed.

Some recent interest in social psychology has focused on the reactions of a harm-doer to his deed. It is known that if a harm-doer is given the opportunity, he will often exert considerable effort to compensate his victim (i.e., Berkowitz, 1962; Berscheid & Walster, 1967; Berscheid, Walster, & Barclay, in preparation; Freedman, Wallington, & Bless, 1967; Walster & Prestholdt, 1966). Recent evidence, however, indicates that certain conditions may attenuate the harm-doer's tendency to compensate his victim. For example, if the perpetrator is publicly committed to the harmful act, he tends to avoid compensating his victim (Walster & Prestholdt, 1966). If available compensation cannot completely restore equity, the perpetrator will tend not to compensate (Berscheid & Walster, 1967). And, finally, if a delay is enforced before the perpetrator is allowed to compensate, his reluctance to make a less than totally adequate compensation increases (Berscheid et al., in preparation).

Laboratory experiments indicate that if the harm-doer doesn't compensate his victim, either because proper channels are not open (Davidson, 1964; Davis & Jones, 1956; Glass, 1964) or because he chooses to with-

hold compensation (Walster & Prestholdt, 1966), he will then distort his perceptions in such a way as to justify his actions. Usually one justifies the harm he has done by derogating his victim, but one may also justify his behavior in other ways. He may minimize the harm he has done or he may deny responsibility for the harm (Brock & Buss, 1962, 1964; Sykes & Matza, 1957). It appears that the harm-doer will attempt to eliminate, at least in his own mind, the inequity that he has created, either by compensating his victim or by justifying his act.

Removal of inequity through justification rather than compensation is potentially dangerous. Not only does the harm-doer end up with a distorted and unreal assessment of his actions, but he may commit further acts based on these distortions (Berscheid, Boye, & Darley, 1967). When the harm-doer's response to his act is justification, the victim is likely to be left in sad straits. Not only has he been hurt, but as a result of justification of the harmful act the probability that the harm-doer will hurt him again has increased.

Obviously, from the victim's point of view, it is desirable to have equity restored before the perpetrator is forced to justify what he has done. Unfortunately for the victim, compensation—the most desirable and constructive means of equity restoration—is entirely under the control of the harm-doer. And, it is often the case that the harm-doer is

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either unwilling or unable to compensate. Under such circumstances, is there a means of restoring equity which is under the victim's control? The phrase "getting even" suggests that, in our culture at least, there may be. It is possible that the victim's immediate retaliation against the harm-doer may "even up" the inequity of the harm-doing situation and thus arrest the harm-doer's tendency to justify his harmful act.

The idea that retaliation restores equity to an inequitable relationship is a common one: retaliation far antedates compensation as a technique for establishing just relations between individuals. According to legal theorists (See Fry et al., 1959; Schafer, 1960), Hammurabi's Code (approximately 2250 B. C.) relied entirely on retaliation to establish justice. Not until Republican Roman Law (450-449 B. C.) was compensation conceived as a suitable means for restoring equitable relations between individuals.

At the present time, Negro militants often stress the importance of actual retaliation and the fear of anticipated retaliation, in producing equitable relationships between racial groups. Some militants have argued that widespread actual violence is necessary to restore the Negro to full citizenship. They talk of the "white devil," his guilt and subsequent denial of racial injustices, and the equity-establishing potential of actual violence. Other spokesmen for this position, for example James Baldwin, have argued that it is important for individuals to *anticipate* retaliation for their wrong doing. Baldwin (1963) stated:

Neither civilized reason nor Christian love would cause any of those people to treat you as they presumably wanted to be treated; only the *fear* of your power to retaliate would cause them to do that, or to seem to do it, which was (and is) good enough [p. 35].

The experiment reported in this paper was designed to investigate the effect that the *anticipation* of the victim's retaliation has on a harm-doer's tendency to justify his act through derogation of the victim. It was hypothesized that if the harm-doer believes that his victim will retaliate against him in kind, he will expect that his relationship with

the victim will shortly be an equitable one and, thus, the harm-doer will have no need to restore psychological equity to the relationship by derogating the victim.

### Overview

In order to test this hypothesis, it was necessary that half of the subjects harm another individual (by administering electric shock) and half simply observe the harm-doing. Secondly, it was necessary to lead half of the harm-doers and half of the observers to expect that the victim would be able to shock them at the conclusion of the experiment, and to lead the remainder to believe that he would be shocking someone else.

In accord with previous studies, harm-doers who did not expect retaliation were expected to derogate the victim. Harm-doers who expected retaliation were not expected to derogate the victim. Subjects who did not themselves harm the victim served as a control group. It was not anticipated that control subjects would feel more positively toward someone who would soon shock them than toward someone who would not. In brief, subjects' responsibility for harm-doing and subjects' expectations of being punished by the victim were expected to interact in affecting the subjects' liking for the victim.

### METHOD

Forty-eight male students from nine Minnesota high schools participated in the experiment. Subjects were paid \$4 for their participation.

When the five boys (four subjects and one confederate) who were scheduled for each session arrived, the experimenter provided a rationale for the experiment. At length he explained the three "purposes" of the research: (a) to study the effects of stress on verbal performance; (b) to try out the new research technique, designed to remove experimental bias, of having subjects run the experiment themselves; (c) to compare physiological and observational measures of stress. (Machines were said to provide the physiological measures; subjects were asked to provide the observational evaluations.) The experimenter elaborated on the importance of his research until he felt the subjects were interested and engrossed in it.

The experimenter then suggested that a "reader" (the victim) be chosen. Though selection of a reader was said to be random, in actuality the confederate was always chosen to read experimental material while being subjected to stress.

While the subjects watched and listened, the confederate was given his instructions. He was told that his task was to read, as clearly and distinctly as possible, 10 paragraphs from an article. He was instructed to pause at the beginning of each paragraph so that one of the subjects (the "trainer") could induce stress by administering one of five levels of electric shock to him. The others would observe him through a one-way mirror and would evaluate his reading performance. The confederate was told that he would never know which of the four boys was administering the electric shock.

All subjects, with the exception of the confederate, were then led into an adjoining room. This room contained a four-cubicle conformity apparatus with opaque screens between each cubicle. This arrangement made it impossible for the boys to know what the other boys were doing. The apparatus faced a one-way mirror, through which one could look into the room where the confederate was seated. Since the subjects' room was dimly lit, it was clear that although the subjects could clearly see the confederate, he could not see them.

Each cubicle was equipped with a five-choice response panel. The five levers were labeled "moderate," "somewhat strong," "strong," "very strong," and "severe." With this equipment it was possible for any of the harm-doers to choose any of five shock levels, for the experimenter to monitor these choices from a control room to make sure the subjects were administering the chosen shock levels, and for the experimenter to give feedback to control subjects as to the choice the harm-doer had made. Subjects were also provided with headphones over which they could hear either the experimenter or the victim.

The subjects then observed the confederate being seated in the adjoining room. The victim's room contained an array of electrical devices, including an Esterline Ampmeter, a large GSR indicator, several shock generators, timers, and so on. As soon as the victim was seated, an experimental assistant dressed in a white coat strapped some "physiological measuring devices" to the victim's head and arms. A microphone was put around his neck. A head-piece with a number of wires and electrodes dangling from it and with a small light bulb protruding from the front was attached to his head. (The light bulb lit up when the victim was receiving electric shock.) After the equipment was attached, the experimental assistant checked the victim's heart rate and pulse, and obtained other physiological information.

The experimenter told the subjects that one of them would be randomly chosen as the "trainer" (the harm-doer). The trainer's task was to map out a schedule of 10 shock intensities and then to deliver these shocks to the reader. While the victim was receiving shock, the subjects were to observe the level of shock the reader received (this level would be indicated on their control panels) and to observe its effect on his performance. No one (including the confederate) would know who had been the trainer and who had been observers.

Actually, *two* subjects, one on either end of the apparatus, were led to believe that they had been randomly chosen as the sole trainer. The two subjects in the center of the apparatus were led to believe that they were one of three observers. (Thus, one subject was run in each of the four experimental conditions during each experimental session.)

At this point, the experimenter went into an adjoining room where he remained for the rest of the experiment. Through their headphones, subjects then heard the experimenter instruct the harm-doer to map out a schedule of shocks. The experimenter emphasized that unless a wide variety of shocks was used it would be difficult to see much change in the reader's performance. Harm-doers were asked to write down the shocks that they would deliver and the order in which they would deliver them on a piece of paper.

After the harm-doers had devised their shock schedules, subjects were told that there would be a second session.<sup>2</sup> They were informed that in the second session the current reader would devise and administer the shock schedule, and one of the current subjects would be the reader. The reader during the second session was presumably also to be chosen by random processes. In actuality, one harm-doer and one observer were led to believe that they would be the second reader (and the second victim). The experimenter then indicated that the first session could begin.

It will be recalled that two subjects believed that they, and they alone, were administering shock to the reader. This posed some problems. It was inevitable that the harm-doers would administer their shocks at slightly different times, even though they were both administering them "when the victim paused for a paragraph." To forestall the suspicion that would have arisen had the victim responded at an inappropriate time to the harm-doer's shock, an explanation for any possible delay in response was provided. The experimenter explained that because of the electrical wiring it would take a moment for the shock to get to the reader. Everyone would know when the reader was being shocked, however, because the light bulb attached to the band on the reader's head would light up. During the shock trials, then, the experimenter would simply wait until both harm-doers had administered shock to the reader before lighting the bulb on the reader's head which indicated that the shock had finally arrived. The light also served a second purpose in that it gave the confederate the clue to respond as if he had received electric shock. When the bulb was

<sup>2</sup> The reader will note that at this point each subject knew whether he was the harm-doer or simply an observer. Subjects did not yet know, however, that there was a possibility that the victim would be able to shock them. The authors wanted all harm-doers to decide which shock levels to administer *before* they were exposed to the retaliation information, so that their choice of shock levels would not be affected by the retaliation manipulation.

lit, the confederate breathed heavily, moved around in an agitated way in his chair, and his reading appeared markedly disrupted.

Subjects could check on how much shock was being administered by looking at a light on their panel board which indicated the amount the victim was currently receiving. The particular shock magnitude indicated on a subject's panel was determined in the following way: Each observed was assigned as a partner to the harm-doer next to him. Whatever shock level the harm-doer administered to the confederate was flashed on the harm-doer's and the yoked observer's board immediately before the confederate's headlight flashed on. The stress procedure continued for 10 trials.

At the end of the first session the experimenter reminded the subjects that one of them, the subject who had been randomly chosen previously, would be the second reader. Before that second session began, however, all subjects were asked to rate the first reader's performance. This rating questionnaire included eight questions, ostensibly designed to give the experimenter some idea of how the victim had responded to stress. Actually three of these questions constituted the dependent measure and were designed to determine how much subjects in various conditions liked the reader. Subjects were asked: "Was your impression of the speaker favorable or unfavorable?" "Did the speaker have a likable personality?" "From what you have seen of him so far, how much do you like the speaker personally?" Subjects could respond on an 18-point scale which varied from 0, indicating that the subject liked the confederate very much, to 17, indicating that the subject disliked him very much.

As is typically done in experiments dealing with the psychology of justification, the authors tried to block off all modes of justification save one—derogation (cf. Berscheid et al., in press). They also attempted to make it easy for subjects to utilize the derogation mode of justification. The victim was made to appear overweight and unattractive; unlike the other boys, he was not at all friendly with the others while they waited together before the experiment; he appeared to be somewhat unintelligent when reading the paragraphs.

Despite these efforts, it was possible, of course, for subjects to use justifications other than derogation. To assess whether or not subjects were in fact engaging in other types of justification, several additional items were included on the questionnaire: (a) "How much discomfort did shock cause the speaker?" It is possible that subjects could restore equity by minimizing the victim's suffering. The authors attempted to make this type of distortion difficult by labeling the degree of the victim's discomfort and having subjects actually observe his reactions. (b) "How important was the experiment?" It is probably easier to defend hurting another in the interest of an important scientific experiment than in connection with a trivial one. The authors attempted to make this type of distortion difficult by having the experimenter emphasize the

experiment's importance in his introduction. (c) "Do you feel there is anything wrong with participating in experiments in which people are shocked?" Harm-doers could deny that they had done anything to feel guilty about. The authors attempted to make this type of distortion difficult by stressing in the preliminary instructions the subject's sole responsibility for his decision to harm the other and for his choice of the magnitude of shocks to be delivered, and by giving him repeated opportunities to leave during the experiment.<sup>3</sup>

Filler questions asked if the experiment had been conducted in a manner fair to the subject himself and how intelligent the speaker appeared to be. Immediately after all subjects had completed their questionnaires, the experimenter asked who was to be shocked next. All subjects in the retaliation conditions anticipated being the next reader. At this point subjects were debriefed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was predicted that the subject's responsibility for harming the victim and his anticipation of being punished would interact in affecting liking for the victim: it was expected that a harm-doer would derogate his victim more when the victim was powerless to retaliate than when retaliation was likely; and that control subjects, who had done no harm, would not react to the anticipation of retaliation in the same way.

Since all four conditions were run in each of 11 different groups, analysis of the data required that each group be treated as one observation and the responses of each member of the group as a separate dependent variable. Thus, the design for the analysis is one cell with 11 observations and four dependent measures on each observation. To test whether various linear combinations of the four dependent measures were equal to 0, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted. The particular linear combinations chosen for analysis were identical to those which would test hypotheses conventionally tested by main effects or interactions in univariate analysis of variance.<sup>4</sup>

Looking at the data (See Table 1), it can be seen that the hypothesis appears to be

<sup>3</sup> One group of four subjects was discarded from the analysis because one subject refused to continue shocking the speaker. (This group yielded results similar to the other 11 groups.)

<sup>4</sup> The authors would like to thank G. William Walster for his help in analyzing the data.

TABLE 1

LIKING FOR THE CONFEDERATE AND OTHER JUSTIFICATION MEASURES FOR SUBJECTS IN THE VARIOUS CONDITIONS

Condition	Derogation of victim <sup>a</sup>	Additional justifications <sup>b</sup>			Fairness of this experiment to you <sup>c</sup>
		Minimization of suffering	Aggrandizement of project	Denial of wrongdoing	
Harm-doer—Retaliation expected	6.1	2.1	11.8	11.2	13.09
Harm-doer—No retaliation expected	6.8	1.3	8.9	6.9	14.68
Observer—Retaliation expected	7.3	2.1	11.9	10.6	8.73
Observer—No retaliation expected	6.1	3.6	11.4	8.9	13.82
<i>F</i> tests					
Harm-doer vs. observer	.79	1.59	3.24	.24	2.68
Retaliation vs. no retaliation	.26	.38	3.04	4.59	9.22*
Interaction	5.19*	4.39	.70	.45	1.67

<sup>a</sup> The higher the number, the less the subject likes the victim.

<sup>b</sup> The higher the number the more the subject is justifying having harmed the victim (minimizing his suffering, aggrandizing the importance of the project, and denying that there is anything wrong with administering shock in an experiment).

<sup>c</sup> The higher the number, the fairer the subject feels the experiment was.

\*  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 1/10$ .

confirmed. When one has himself harmed the victim, he likes the victim more (or derogates him less) when he expects retaliation than when he does not. The relationship between retaliation and liking is reversed for control subjects: those who expect to be hurt by the victim in the future like him less than those who do not expect to be hurt. The predicted interaction is significant at the .05 level of confidence ( $F = 5.19$ ,  $df = 1/10$ ).

The reader will recall the authors attempted to maximize the probability that all subjects would use only the derogation mode of justification. It is possible, however, that subjects used other justification techniques despite efforts to block these other modes and to enhance the probability that the derogation mode be used. If the data revealed between-conditions differences in the use of justification techniques other than derogation, an alternative explanation of the results would be possible. It could be argued that retaliation, instead of eliminating the harm-doer's need to restore equity to his relationship through the use of a justification technique, may have had (for some unspecified reason) a different effect: anticipated retaliation may have made the harm-doer less likely to derogate the victim but more likely to restore equity by utilizing some other justification technique.

The data, however, provide little support

for such an alternative. If the correct explanation for this data is that harm-doers who expect retaliation (H-R subjects) still experience dissonance but reduce it by use of some mode of justification other than derogation, one would expect H-R subjects to be especially predisposed to score high on these alternative modes when compared to control subjects. There is no evidence for this. In no case is a significant interaction secured for alternative measures of justification ( $F$ s = 4.39, .70, and .45,  $df = 1/10$ ).<sup>5</sup>

The additional justification data are puzzling in one respect: Presumably harm-doers who do not anticipate retaliation (H-NR subjects) should have a more inequitable relationship with the victim (and have more dissonance to reduce) than do other subjects. Since the authors attempted to make it easy for subjects to reduce dissonance by derogating the victim and difficult for them to justify their behavior by utilizing other distortions, one would expect H-NR subjects to derogate the victim more than do O-NR subjects (which they do) and to score at

<sup>5</sup> In the case of "Minimization of harm," which almost reaches significance, the interaction is not produced by the propensity of H-R subjects to justify the victim's suffering by minimizing it; H-R subjects estimate his suffering exactly as do the comparable observers (O-R subjects). The obtained interaction is due to the fact that, more than any other group, O-NR subjects estimate that the victim has suffered little.

least as high on the additional justification measures as do O-NR subjects (which they do not.) On all three of the additional justification measures H-NR subjects receive lower justification scores than do other subjects. However, H-NR subjects do not score significantly lower than do other subjects. The interaction  $F$ s for the three additional justification measures are nonsignificant, regardless of whether they are examined singly or combined into a total index. However, the fact that H-NR subjects consistently tend to secure lower scores on these three measures is puzzling and decreases the confidence that all of the variance to be accounted for in this experiment can be explained.

### *Main Effects*

The authors' hypothesis concerned the possible interaction of two variables: (a) whether or not the subject shocked the victim, and (b) whether or not the subject expected to be shocked by the victim. In the previous section the data and the interaction  $F$ s which could confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis were considered. In addition to interacting with each other it is also possible that the two independent variables, in and of themselves, might have had a strong impact on the dependent variable. For example, one might expect that Anticipation of Punishment would have a strong impact on an individual's ratings. The subject who anticipates being shocked is probably frightened. (Since the victim does not know who shocked him, both the observer and the harm-doer who anticipated shock have equal reason to be afraid, and so their possible reactions will be considered jointly.) Fear, regardless of whether or not the anticipated punishment will restore equity, might affect a subject's ratings.

Two different types of reactions sound possible:

1. *Self-deceptive reactions.* The subject who anticipates being shocked might wish to assure himself (at least until the shock comes) that he has little to fear. Several distortions would help to maintain an optimistic outlook: He could convince himself that the victim is a good person, who has no reason

to be angry, and who will shock him only mildly. Such a desire to perceive coming events as pleasant could produce main effects of the following type: H-R and O-R subjects may rate the victim more highly, his suffering as less intense, the project as more important, and deny that they have done anything wrong, to a greater extent than do H-NR and O-NR subjects.

2. *Angry, resentful reactions.* One might make a plausible argument for predicting a main effect in the opposite direction. The frightening discovery that they are going to be shocked might make subjects angry and resentful. H-R and O-R subjects thus may react aggressively to everyone and everything they are asked to rate. If anger does breed aggressive reactions, one might expect the following main effects: H-R and O-R subjects might dislike the victim for what he is about to do to them and might express hostility toward the experiment by rating it as worthless and unfair. In addition, once they realize that they will be shocked, the victim's experiences might become more salient, and the amount of discomfort caused by the shocks might thus be magnified.

Examining the data on main effects: In no case did harm-doing have a significant effect on the subjects' ratings. Anticipation of punishment had one effect that approached significance and one significant effect on subjects' ratings: (a) Subjects who anticipated punishment tended to deny that they had done wrong to a greater extent than did subjects who did not expect shock. The difference was not significant, however; (b) subjects who were about to be punished felt the experimental procedure which had singled them out for shock was more unfair to them than did subjects who had escaped punishment. From an examination of the means, it appears that it is the O-R subjects who felt the experiment was most unjust. The O-R subjects rate the experiment as much less fair than do O-NR subjects ( $D_M = 5.09$ ). H-R subjects rate the procedure as only slightly less fair than do H-NR subjects. ( $D_M = 1.59$ .) The O-R subjects are not significantly more critical of the experiment than are other subjects, however. The interaction  $F$  is definitely nonsignificant.

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