A.O.W 6.**:  Due: Monday**

**Directions**

1. Chunk the article into manageable (2 paragraphs max.) pieces. Number them. Don’t forget title/opening!
2. Choose at least three words you are not familiar with or that are important and define them.
3. Show evidence of a close reading.  Talk to the text below each numbered chunk. Ask questions and/or comments that demonstrate interacting with the text. You may also include any confusion you have. Put your comments or questions in **bold**!
4. Complete the attached graphic organizer to analyze author’s craft.

[**The Complicated Psychology of Revenge**](http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/publications/observer/2011/october-11/the-complicated-psychology-of-revenge.html)

By [**Eric Jaffe**](http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/?s=Eric+Jaffe)

A few years ago a group of Swiss researchers scanned the brains of people who had been wronged during an economic exchange game. These people had trusted their partners to split a pot of money with them, only to find that the partners had chosen to keep the loot for themselves. The researchers then gave the people a chance to punish their greedy partners, and for a full minute, as the victim’s contemplated revenge, the activity in their brains was recorded. The decision caused a rush of neural activity in the caudate nucleus, an area of the brain known to process rewards (in previous work, the caudate has delighted in cocaine and nicotine use). The findings, published in a 2004 issue of *Science*, gave physiological confirmation to what the scorned have been saying for years: Revenge is sweet.

A thirst for vengeance is nothing if not timeless. But while the idea of revenge is no doubt delectable — the very phrase “just desserts” promises a treat — much of its sugar is confined to the coating. The actual execution of revenge carries a bitter cost of time, emotional and physical energy, and even lives. That minute before revenge is savory, as the authors of the *Science* study recognized; but what about the days and weeks that follow?

In the past few years, psychological scientists have discovered many ways in which the practice of revenge fails to fulfill its sweet expectations. Behavioral scientists have observed that instead of quenching hostility, revenge can prolong the unpleasantness of the original offense and that merely bringing harm upon an offender is not enough to satisfy a person’s vengeful spirit. They have also found that instead of delivering justice, revenge often creates only a cycle of retaliation, in part because one person’s moral equilibrium rarely aligns with another’s. The upshot of these insights is a better sense of why the pursuit of revenge has persisted through the ages, despite tasting a lot more sour than advertised.

**Keeping Wounds Green**

Many early psychological views toward revenge were based on the larger concept of emotional catharsis( purification). This idea, still widely held in the popular culture, suggests that venting aggression ultimately purges it from the body. But empirical research failed to validate the theory of catharsis, and some recent work contradicts it entirely. In a 2002 paper in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, APS Fellow Brad Bushman of The Ohio State University reported higher levels of aggression in people who had supposedly vented their anger than in those who had done nothing at all.

If cathartic activity fails to dissolve hostility in general, what is to say revenge will dissolve the anger caused by one offense in particular? That doubt laid the foundation for a recent series of tests led by Kevin Carlsmith of Colgate, who conducted the research with APS Fellows and Charter Members Timothy Wilson of the University of Virginia and Daniel Gilbert of Harvard. Wilson and Gilbert have often found that people make powerful mistakes when predicting how they will feel about something in the future; with Carlsmith, they asked whether people could be wrong about the expected emotional benefits of revenge as well. Perhaps revenge is sweet, or perhaps the words of Francis Bacon are more accurate: “A man that studied revenge, keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal, and do well.”

For the study, Carlsmith and his collaborators placed participants into groups of four and gave each a dollar, which they could either invest in a group pot or keep for themselves. To entice investment, the researchers promised to add a 40 percent dividend to the group total before redistributing the boosted pot among all four members. This created a classic experimental dilemma: what’s best for the group is for all four members to donate their dollar, but what’s best for the individual is to keep the dollar and *also* receive one quarter of the final pot distribution, which grows through the investments of the others — in other words, as the researchers put it, to be a “free rider.”

At the end of the trial, participants discovered that one member — secretly controlled by the researchers — had acted as a free rider. Some of the participants, called “non-punishers,” learned about this moral violation but were given no chance to do anything about it. Others, known as “punishers,” were given the chance to avenge the selfish behavior by reducing the earnings of the offender. (The decision to punish carried a small fee, to simulate the personal cost of revenge.) Both punishers and non-punishers rated their feelings immediately after the game, as well as 10 minutes later. A final group, dubbed “forecasters,” had no power to punish but recorded how they expected to feel if they could.

The findings were exactly as Francis Bacon had imagined: Punishers actually felt worse than forecasters predicted they would have felt had they been given the chance to be punishers. Punishers even felt worse than non-punishers, despite getting the chance to take their revenge. Ten minutes after the game, punishers continued to brood on the free rider significantly more than the others did — an “increased rumination” that prevented them from moving on, the researchers surmised. All told, Carlsmith and company concluded in a 2008 issue of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, people erroneously believe revenge will make them feel better and help them gain closure, when in actuality punishers ruminate on their deed and feel worse than those who cannot avenge a wrong.

“I think uncertainty prolongs and enhances emotional experiences, and one of the things that avengers do unintentionally is to prolong the unpleasant encounter,” Carlsmith says. “Those who don’t have a chance to take revenge are forced, in a sense, to move on and focus on something different. And they feel happier.”

**Delivering a Message**

That most people fail to feel good after revenge does not mean revenge can never feel good. The hunt for this pleasant side of retribution has driven the recent work of German psychological scientist Mario Gollwitzer. “I think that taking revenge has generally a low chance of being successful or satisfying for the avenger,” says Gollwitzer. “I was interested in those instances in which revenge can be ‘sweet,’ and I wondered what it exactly is that makes revenge sweet for the avenger.” In the service of that interest, Gollwitzer has designed some beautifully elaborate experiments; after all, he says, it takes “careful calibration” to provoke a strong response from participants while remaining inside the ethical boundaries of institutional review boards. (How much more might  we learn about revenge, one can’t help but think, if researchers were allowed to murder a participant’s father and marry the mother?)

Gollwitzer has explored two theories for why revenge could be satisfying. The first is known as “comparative suffering,” which is the idea that simply seeing an offender suffer restores an emotional balance to the universe. If this were the case, then victims of wrongdoing who learn of an offender’s misfortune should feel equally satisfied whether or not they were personally responsible for that misfortune. The second theory — the “understanding hypothesis” — holds that an offender’s suffering is not enough, on its own, to achieve truly satisfactory revenge. Instead, the avenger must be assured that the offender has made a direct connection between the retaliation and the initial behavior.

The findings suggest that revenge can succeed only when an offender understands why the act of vengeance has occurred. Among participants who chose to avenge the selfish action, those who received a message of understanding reported much more satisfaction than did those who received an indignant response. In fact, the only time avengers felt more satisfaction than participants who took no revenge at all was when they received an indication of understanding. Put another way, unacknowledged revenge felt no better than none at all. Successful revenge is therefore about more than payback, the authors conclude in the April 2011 issue of the *European Journal of Social Psychology*; it is about delivering a message.

“The finding that it is the offender’s recognizing of his wrongdoing that makes revenge sweet seems to suggest that — from the avenger’s perspective — revenge entails a message,” Gollwitzer says. “If the message is not delivered, it cannot reestablish justice.”

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 **(inform? persuade?)**

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**4. The author establishes a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ tone through the following techniques (refer to**

**technique list, but make it specific) a. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, b.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and c.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.**