



## Lecture

Universität Hamburg, Fakultät für Psychologie und Bewegungswissenschaft  
Arbeitsbereich Pädagogische Psychologie und Motivation  
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## Revenge, Aggression and Justice

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**20. Mai 2021**

**18.15 Uhr – 19.45 Uhr**

**Online via Zoom**

In this talk, I will elaborate on a specific (mostly aggressive) reaction to (perceived) injustice: revenge. Outside psychology, revenge has been defined as an affect-driven, hostile, and impulsive reaction, an “instinct for retribution” (Justice P. Stewart) or a “psychological malfunction” (K. Horney). Within psychology, revenge is defined as “what individuals do with the desire to get even for a perceived harm” (Tripp & Bies, 1997). But the question is: what does “getting even” mean exactly? Under what circumstances do victims experience a sense of justice by taking revenge against the perpetrator? We explored these questions in a series of studies, which I will describe in this talk. In a nutshell, our findings show that revenge aims at sending a message to the perpetrator: “Don’t mess with me”, and that avengers experience a sense of justice only when this message is received and understood by the perpetrator. In more recent studies, we explored the communicative function of revenge (1) in more complex social settings (i.e., displaced revenge), (2) in the context of revenge fantasies and (3) in relation to more benign reactions to perceived injustice (i.e., forgiveness). Together, our findings do not only contribute to a better conceptual understanding of aggressive responses to injustice; our research program has also practical implications for promoting peaceful (i.e., non-aggressive) solutions to injustice conflicts.

### Publications

1. Gollwitzer, M., & Okimoto, T. (in press). Downstream consequences of post-transgression responses: a motive-attribution framework. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*.
2. Gollwitzer, M., Skitka, L. J., Wisneski, D., Sjöström, A., Liberman, P., Nazir, S. J., & Bushman, B. J. (2014). Vicarious revenge and the death of Osama bin Laden. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40, 604-616.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167214521466>
3. Funk, F., McGeer, V., & Gollwitzer, M. (2014). Get the message: punishment is satisfying if the transgressor responds to its communicative intent. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40, 986-997.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167214533130>

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