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Abstract

This paper presents a theory about degrees of revenge and proposes creative, libidinal, and contained ways in which to express this otherwise destructive desire. A review of the literature on revenge first underlines its inherent ubiquity, self-preservative, and adaptive propensities. The exploration of the topic draws from cultural, social/judicial, and clinical texts to elucidate the interplay of creative and destructive elements in revenge. I have used the Structural Model developed by Freud to elucidate and sharpen the argument about revenge.

We live in times when revenge is in the air. The gruesome events of 9/11, shootings at schools and universities as well as daily news reports, all remind us of the incredible power of acts of revenge. In the wrong hands, the Internet becomes a weapon for publicly exercising and displaying acts of revenge, occasionally resulting in disaster and suicides, especially among teens and young adults.

The 9/11 attack highlighted the disparate beliefs held by individuals, cultures, and societies about revenge. Ideas and perceptions on the topic vary widely, depending on where one lives and how one has been acculturated. One man's terrorist (in one culture) is another man's freedom fighter (in another culture).

In some regions, revenge is almost never even mentioned (so odious is it in those cultures), whereas in others one may be expected to perform brutal acts of revenge or face being an outcast (perhaps even a dead one). For example, in Corsica or southern Greece, a man was often reminded of his duty to vengeance by a glass of *rakia* that was passed to him in public from behind. If he ignored this tacit accusation of cowardice, refusing to kill, to avenge his own kinsmen, he would be shunned by the society at large.

Albanians have a canon of revenge that dates back to the 15th century, and to this day Blood Feud Committees exist in Albania. Jane Goldberg's (2004) article on revenge detailed current cultural codification of revenge in Siberia and Greece and amongst the Bedouins, who have a saying, "If a man takes revenge after 40 years, he was in a hurry." Needless to say, this proverb speaks volumes about the power of this desire, illustrating its decades-long durability in peoples' memories and the patience people exhibit as they

wait to exact their revenge.

I will explore perspectives on revenge, ranging from their overt cultural manifestations to some of the endogenous feelings within each of us. I will also present literature on social/judicial concerns and emotional/developmental considerations regarding revenge. Where I have not found ideas on the topic, I will present some hypotheses from my Freudian and neo-Freudian perspective.

This paper addresses the following questions: Is revenge an emotion? If so, is it a universal emotion? What is its function? When and how does revenge take shape developmentally? What is the range of expression of revenge as a result of maturational and cultural determinants? And finally, can Eros trump Thanatos so that revenge is rendered creative and constructive rather than destructive?

The very definitions of revenge in our culture reflect differing value-laden attitudes towards revenge. The two predominant positions appear to be (a) a focus on revenge as an ego stabilizing and self-preservative response and (b) a focus on the destructive capacities of revenge, which may be accompanied by an argument for the need to forgive.

An example of the latter perspectives comes from Erich Fromm (1973), who defined revenge as “a spontaneous form of aggression; an explosion of destructive impulses that are activated by special circumstances usually perceived as threatening to survival” (p. 272). He said that revenge is a spontaneous reaction to perceived, unjustified suffering inflicted on an individual or group, and that its “innate” intensity makes it incredibly destructive.

Fromm argued that this form of aggression is different from normal defensive aggression in the following two ways: (a) it is an act performed in cold blood, after the damage has been done, and is, therefore, not a defense against immediate danger; (b) it is of great intensity, often crude, vicious, and insatiable.

Marongiu and Newman (1987) differed from Fromm in the following ways: they saw his definition as imprecise, not fitting all cases of revenge, and moreover, they posited that though Fromm recognized that revenge is a feeling exhibited the world over, he also called it “abnormal aggression,” which is a contradiction in terms.

This paper will use the position of Marongiu and Newman (1987) to frame the argument. Drive theory, which asserts that aggression is normal and that revenge is therefore, by extension, also normal, will serve as the theoretical basis of the argument. The function of this particular form of aggression, revenge, and the wide range of its expression, will be noted.

I will demonstrate later in the paper, via the literature review and through a case vignette, that vengeance is not always “an act performed in cold blood” nor is it an act that necessarily takes place “after the damage is done,” as Fromm claimed. I will explore whether injustice or a feeling of danger experienced at one point in time can remain with a person long after the injury and can constitute the driving force for later acts of vengeance and/or other acts of self-protection and self-preservation.

There are many reasons why an event may, indeed, continue to have a life of its own, manifesting as a desire for vengeance in the psyche of an individual or within a group long after the wounding has taken place. From a drive theory point of view Breuer

and Freud had the following to say about revenge, respectively:

The instinct of revenge, which is so powerful in the natural man and is disguised rather than repressed by civilization, is nothing whatever but the excitation of a reflex that has not been released. To defend oneself against injury in a fight and, in doing so, to injure one's opponent is the adequate and preformed psychological reflex. If it has been carried out insufficiently or not at all, it is constantly released again by recollection, and the 'instinct of revenge' comes into being as an irrational volitional impulse, just as do all other 'instincts'. (Breuer, 1893-1895/1959, pp. 205-206, footnote 1)

Moreover, the motive of revenge and retaliation, which was in the foreground at the earlier stage, is still present at the later one. And as a rule it is precisely those neurotic children whose parents once punished them for sexual misbehaviour who now take revenge on them by means of fantasies of this kind. (Freud, 1909/2003, p. 39)

Two modern analysts, Jane Goldberg and June Bernstein, trained in the psychoanalytic tradition of Hyman Spotnitz, renowned for his research and work with pre-Oedipal states, made note of the revenge that children are known to feel and express toward their parents. In other words, they both maintained that these feelings are ongoing long after the original incident and that contrary to Fromm, this tendency within human nature is normal.

Goldberg (2004) made the following observation regarding children and revenge:

All children, invariably, want revenge against their parents, for good

reasons and bad. Feelings of wanting revenge begin in childhood, and all children are susceptible to them. In their dreams at night and in their daydreams, play, and fantasy, children plot all manner of schemes to retaliate against their parents. (p. 7)

Bernstein (2004) addressed the feelings of revenge that result from the resentment accumulated as people grow up:

Human beings could regard the inevitable loss of the bliss of infancy, the need to work, to bear children, and to tolerate all of the evils that accompany growing up as unavoidable consequences of maturation and development. But do we? Absolutely not! The expulsion from the Garden of Eden is an unfair punishment. We never planned to grow up, just as we don't plan to grow old and die, and the fact that we are given no choice arouses our opposition and need to get even. (pp. 37-38)

Goldberg (2004) added the following regarding the reactivation of feelings of revenge from childhood that may later be expressed as a parent:

The most common expression of revenge is when parents treat their own children as they themselves were treated. They are able, at long last, to extract a long-deferred revenge for the indignities and suffering they endured while they were at the mercy of their own parents' parenting. Parents rarely recognize the hate in their behavior. (p. 8)

In writing about revenge in females, Lucy Holmes (2004) discussed the pleasure that can be derived from revenge and what she termed "constructive retribution" (p. 49),

both positive outcomes of a potentially dangerous desire:

Getting even, if done correctly, is one of life's greatest pleasures. An important goal for any analysis is to help the patient get even in ways that give her pleasure and don't land her in jail or in the back ward of a psychiatric hospital. Although all human beings savor revenge, most, unfortunately, seek it with unconscious and primitive methods that cause them as much suffering as the objects they are out to get. Beginning analysis can often be the first step toward constructive retribution, but as we know, it is an arduous, often painful process that requires courage and fortitude. The best revenge takes time and patience, but in psychoanalysis we begin the first time we come into the analyst's office to report the crime. (p. 49).

In the coming sections I will further expand and elucidate the reasons for the use of "unconscious and primitive methods," which do indeed cause much suffering, from both societal and emotional/developmental points of view.

Societal/Judicial Concerns

Nico Frijda (1994), in "The Lex Talionis: On Vengeance," stated:

Desire for vengeance certainly is one of the most potent of human passions. It has been one of the major preoccupations in the world literature. (p. 263)

Vengeance is not an emotion. But the desire for revenge, the urge to retaliate, most certainly is. It is, I think, a mere coincidence that no word for this emotion exists in current English. As a matter of fact, the English language has exactly the right word for it, but it has gone out of usage: Wrath. . . . The desire [for revenge]

is an emotion, in that it has all the usual features of one: It is a state of impulse, of involuntary action readiness, generated by an appraisal, often accompanied by bodily excitement, and with every aspect of control precedence: preoccupation, single-minded goal pursuit, neglect of extraneous information, and interference with other activities. (p. 265)

Frijda (1994) further defined revenge as

an act designed to harm someone else, or some social group, in response to feeling that oneself has been harmed by that person or group, whereby the act of harming that person or group is *not* [emphasis in original] designed to repair the harm, to stop it from occurring or continuing in the immediate confrontation or to produce material gain. (pp. 265-266)

He continued, “Vengeance may even be harmful to the individual, to the point of being self-destructive, and this too he or she knows” (1994, p. 266), citing in this instance Euripides’s Medea, who destroyed all that she loved in the name of vengeance. Other features of revenge, according to Frijda, are its persistence over time and the remarkably violent nature of revenge fantasies (p. 268).

Contrary to what Frijda said about vengeance’s being an act that is *not* designed to stop the harm that motivated the vengeful response, Marongiu and Newman (1987) wrote that it *can be* and *is* used, clearly not to repair, but rather to deter future harmful repetitions of an act, and that moreover, this approach is known to work in some situations. Yet on the flip side, they, too, pointed out that in feuding cultures, people often lose track of the “debt” and the cycle of vengeance can, and at times does, become

interminable.

Some systems of law and order were designed for the sole purpose of containing and curtailing acts of revenge. The Mosaic law “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (considered severe by most cultures today) was in fact one of the earliest attempts to contain retaliatory feelings: taking more than one eye for an eye was determined to be excessive, unjust, and punishable. We are reminded by Marongiu and Newman (1987), that at the core of society, an ongoing tension exists between reciprocity (e.g., acts of revenge), on the one hand, and the maintenance of social order and its demand for obedience, on the other.

Cultural/Historical and Literary Themes

Seton (2001) argued that revenge is “a behavioral norm . . . deeply rooted and profoundly important to human life” (p. 77). He noted two aspects of revenge: the automatic assumption that retribution will, in some form, follow a transgression and its ubiquity in human thought and throughout the chronicles of humankind. . . . In good part, revenge contributes warp and woof to the world’s history, to the plots of drama and literature, and to the role of government, law and religion. (p. 78)

Here is a brief look at how revenge was depicted in two literary texts, *The Odyssey* and *Hamlet*. Ancient Greek mythology brought us characters who struggle to balance hatred and a desire for revenge with more “civilized” or less destructive behavior. In Homer’s tale, Ulysses must think through his situation and employ cunning to escape the Cyclops. Ulysses outsmarted the Cyclops first through the use of words and then by preying on the Cyclops’s vulnerabilities. The myth illustrated how delayed gratification,

careful assessment of the situation, and planning a strategy exemplify the use of higher-order ego functions and symbolization. Tellingly, as Ulysses flees the Cyclops, we also see an example of the risk to self that are inherent in acts of revenge. Ulysses could not resist the psychological satisfaction of cursing at the Cyclops, thus exposing himself to rocks which the giant hurled blindly in the direction of his voice.

Hamlet is another example of contained revenge delivered in a calculated way. Shakespeare depicted an evolution in Western culture and thought in that murder ceases to be automatically avenged and externalized. We see in this example, the use of symbolic thinking, a function of the ego, rather than the raw, unmediated impulses of the id and superego. We can now take a closer look at why and how revenge works in the human psyche.

Emotional/Developmental Considerations

To better understand the desire for revenge, we will consider amongst others, Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Melanie Klein, Harold Searles, and modern analysts June Bernstein, Jane Goldberg, Lucy Holmes, and Jacob Kestens. Looking firstly at the issue of identity, what it is and how it develops over time, gives us some insight into revenge. When an act is perceived by an individual to be unjust, it follows that the identity of that person has been somewhat or greatly affected. In Seton's (2001) discussion of *Childhood and Society*, he wrote that for Erikson,

One's identity was at all times a biopsychosocial phenomenon: it was never unrelated to the biological person and the social surround. . . . By the end of the second year, in addition to individuation, something closer to revenge and more

clearly in the service of ‘getting back,’ is detectable in acts of intransigence, deliberate misbehavior, tantrums and/or spite. (p. 81)

He noted that in late adolescence, the “means of revenge can become vastly more complicated . . . when actualizing and authenticating one’s sense of self is an on-going and often exigent need” (p. 82). “Because identities run the full gamut of stability from rock-firm to jury-rigged, people vary greatly in their susceptibility to affronts and their readiness to respond vindictively” (p. 83).

Seton (2001) also observed, “For individuals suffering psychosis or for those who have become disorganized by severe trauma or depression, revenge is rarely present” (p. 82). It seems, therefore, that there needs to be a measure of libido and aggression intact within the individual and a desire to return to a prior libidinal level of self-concept or identity in order to seek revenge. It seems, too, that once crushed beyond a certain point, the ability to seek restoration of those libidinal feelings for oneself is either temporarily or permanently inaccessible.

Melanie Klein (1946/1975a) illuminated what can be done to restore the self when there *is* still access to libidinal and aggressive impulses:

While the oral libido still has the lead, libidinal and aggressive impulses and phantasies from other sources come to the fore and lead to a confluence of oral, urethral and anal desires, both libidinal and aggressive. . . . The phantasied onslaughts on the mother follow two main lines: one is the predominantly oral impulse to suck dry, bite up, scoop out and rob the mother’s body of its good contents. . . . The other line of attack derives from the anal and urethral impulses

and implies expelling dangerous substances (excrements) out of the self and into the mother. . . . These excrements and bad parts of the self are meant not only to injure but also to control and to take possession of the object. (pp. 7-8)

The two impulses described by Klein are evidenced in acts of revenge. “Taking from” the other in order to replenish the self as well as “putting into the other” or projecting bad parts from the self onto the other, seem likely in acts of revenge and may function independently or in tandem with one another.

Klein (1958/1975b), distinguishing herself from Freud, described projection as originating from a deflection outward of the death instinct. Freud understood this to be a way in which the ego overcomes anxiety by ridding itself of danger and badness. When an individual feels injured to the point of desiring revenge, it seems that the death instinct has been mobilized, and there follows a desire to rid oneself of bad feelings, deposit them elsewhere, and take back some libidinal substance from the object in question or from other objects (p. 238, footnote 1).

Various modern analysts seem reconciled to the inevitability and important purpose served by revenge in psychic health. The very title of Goldberg’s (2001) article, “Fantasies of Revenge and the Stabilization of the Ego: Acts of Revenge and the Ascension of Thanatos,” denotes an appreciation for the paradoxical role of the death drive expressed through the desire for revenge. Her focus on the role of fantasy is particularly illuminating:

When our desire for revenge remains on the level of a fantasy, it actually serves several constructive psychological functions. For example, the desire for revenge,

directed toward another, can serve as an internal gyroscope. Vengefulness maintains the balance of the destructive drive by directing it away from the self. In this, a desire for revenge is self-protective and stabilizing to the psyche. It marks the beginning of movement away from narcissistic self-involvement by allowing another person existence enough for blame. When someone has been wronged, a psychologically healthy response is to direct rage at the wrongdoer rather than turn it against the self. Wanting revenge is part of the healing process of hurt and anger. (pp. 5-6)

Fantasy therefore plays a critical role in working with, and mastering, feelings of revenge. Being able to fantasize the ways in which one might redress and avenge hurtful acts is a great outlet and discharge for aggression: a way of acting *without* acting. Conversely, the *inability* to imagine and fantasize is very problematic and may lead to action in order to release aggression and get relief.

Goldberg (2004) described one way in which fantasy stabilizes the ego:

Fantasies of revenge maintain a bond with the person toward whom the revenge is directed. . . . If the feelings of separation or grief are too painful to be tolerated, holding onto the hate is a way of holding onto the relationship with the person. (p. 6)

She added that plotting revenge may serve to forestall suicidal behavior at times when grief and loss were too intense to bear.

Searles (1956/1965) identified the role of revenge when it comes to repression of grief and separation-anxiety. He explained:

It enables the person to avoid or postpone the experiencing of both these affects, because he has not really *given up* [italics in original] the other person towards whom his vengefulness is directed: that is, his preoccupation with vengeful fantasies about that person serves, in effect, as a way of psychologically *holding on to* [italics in original] him. (p. 177)

Lastly, and on a different note, Jacob Kesten (1955) demonstrated how the self-destructive tendencies associated with revenge can be turned to advantage. He presented the treatment of a 10-year-old boy who reacted to his parents' demand for academic excellence with resentment, anger, rage, revenge, and hate. During the boy's treatment, Kesten, a modern analyst, used the negative attitudes stemming from unconscious resentment within the child to do something constructive and pleasurable for the child himself. As Kesten puts it, "He [the child] became more interested in defeating the therapist by learning, than in defeating his parents by *not* [emphasis added] learning" (p. 67).

Regarding assessment and working with revenge, analyst Mary Sherrill Durham (2001) offered different approaches for two different character types, the Exploited-Repressive patient, who primarily uses repression as the major defense and requires help in expressing feelings of outrage at how he or she has been treated, and the Vindictive Character, who primarily uses dissociation. These patients show formidable resistance to treatment and the formation of a therapeutic alliance.

In addition to identifying the character types, Durham discussed ways of working with the negative transference resistances of these patients. The Exploited-Repressive

patient is able to form a positive transference with the analyst, whereas the Vindictive Character acts out his or her history of hurt and humiliation by attacking and devaluing the therapist through the use of treatment destructive behaviors.

Examples of these character types are reflected in different sorts of acts of revenge that a therapist may encounter. They range from a person's leaving the telephone off the hook in the home of his betraying lover after calling a speaking clock service in Japan (incurring her significant expense) to Lorena Bobbitt's horrifying attack on her husband when she cut off his penis in reaction to his betrayal.

In the first case, the call to Tokyo is an act of revenge that declares to the betrayer, "I am angry, you have treated me badly and your behavior is going to cost you!" It is not an attack on the physical person; rather, it is an act that sends a message by nonviolent means.

The reality distortion evident in Ms. Bobbitt's act demonstrates an inability to symbolize, resulting in a literal, concrete attack. We see collusion occurring between the id's impulse to act and the superego's black-and-white conviction that she was right while her husband was wrong. Consequently she believed her act was justified, while his was not. This case is an example of the violence that may erupt when symbolization of feelings fails to occur. Ms. Bobbitt's id impulses and superego were *not* tempered by her ego, and her rage could, therefore, be quelled only by an act committed in cold blood.

In both cases a message was delivered and a debt was exacted. That which psychically motivates acts of revenge and the ways in which it ultimately gets expressed, can vary tremendously. The disparity in these acts is also apparent in how people, and the

culture in general, react.

In the first case most people, even if they would not do so themselves, can understand the man who punished his partner by calling the speaking clock service in Tokyo. Some people might even identify with him, justifying his behavior along the lines of “She treated him poorly. She lied, cheated and caused harm. I would be mad too. She deserved it”. Yet, in the case of Ms. Bobbitt, the vast majority of people were horrified. Society reacted with shock and disapproval, viewing her act as brutal and excessive. Although we can sympathize with her plight, and we too can (and do) fantasize about committing brutal acts when we are harmed, the vast majority of people adhere to strong cultural prohibitions against such acts.

As clinicians we know that our clients express their dissatisfaction, disappointment, and anger or rage at times via acts of revenge directed at us. Common expressions of un verbalized feelings include missed appointments, unpaid bills, and undermining our ability to provide help. The rare, more severe and dramatic cases involve harassment, stalking, threats, and even acts of murder.

Again, where possible, these un verbalized acts present rich opportunities for exploration within the treatment, potentially shedding light on interpersonal dynamics and other issues. In cases of psychotic expressions of feelings of revenge, it is at times prudent and self-protective to hospitalize the client, if possible, or terminate the treatment, and, where necessary, go outside of the therapeutic frame to include police and the law.

Lastly, there are a number of papers on revenge that focus on forgiveness and/or

the insatiable nature of revenge. Cycles of revenge are exceedingly destructive, and, indeed, forgiveness can offer a way of terminating the cycle. Additionally, an individual may feel better about him- or herself for forgiving the victimizer and, to the degree that the reality based ego has been used to that end rather than the punitive superego, the act of forgiveness can be healing and/or strengthening.

I wish to assert that there *can* be degrees of vengeance and that revenge *can* be a conscious choice rather than an unconscious compulsion. I hope the following case vignette will serve to demonstrate what a single, contained, and limited act of revenge can look like and how it can be sufficient to satisfy a once-violated, now-perpetrating individual.

Case Vignette

This is a composite case to protect the identity of clients. The client, Adam, was going through a protracted divorce process during which his wife purposely found a way to tie up most of their assets that were held in her name. While she had access to their monies, he and their two young children had been left short of resources, an act he experienced as painfully unjust, vengeful, and humiliating. It made the divorce process especially difficult when it came to paying his lawyer thousands of dollars for his services as the lawyer did not accept credit cards. Adam was also left with inadequate funds to cover daily expenses for his daughters and himself.

When presented with this predicament, the father of two decided to help himself to monies from an inheritance held in a joint account that either he or his wife could use independently of the other. He did so without his wife's knowledge on the assumption she

would not notice. The young father realized that should she discover his act, she would be furious with his decision, and he prepared himself for her ire that would surely “cost him dearly.” Being independently wealthy, she certainly had the resources to insure that he would suffer.

Adam initially figured that the divorce might be settled by the time his wife discovered the transaction and that, by then, his divorce settlement would provide him with the money he needed to put back what he had taken from their joint monies. However, as time went on and his own feelings of outrage and revenge surfaced and strengthened in response to her actions, he felt justified in taking and *not* returning the money. These would be his rightful dues for the stress that he and his daughters had suffered as a result of her anger and sadism. When mistreated and hurt, *he* evidently resorted to anger and sadism, too.

Had apologies been offered in this case by both parties and had the hurt feelings been redressed, a decrease in, or even a disappearance of, feelings of revenge would probably have followed. Unfortunately, in this particular instance, the mother was gratifying herself by acting on her id impulses rather than using her superego and her ego to curb those impulses. The client therefore felt that his solution “evened the playing field” and that he was quietly able to “give her some of her own medicine.” He had employed his cunning to care for himself and his daughters at a time when his wife had tried to wield all the power. He felt neither a need nor an urge to go any further with his sadistic and vengeful desires, rather, he felt quite satisfied.

Her successful attempt to cause him hardship had been returned in kind, in secret,

a necessary feature of this act of revenge, as he strove to avoid a punitive and vindictive reaction on her part. He was in fact *not* “perpetuating the cycle of revenge”; rather, he was concealing it so as *not* to provoke a response and further develop the cycle.

Adam felt no moral dilemma or feelings of guilt about what he had done. He felt that should his wife ever find out about his act of revenge that he would (with reluctance) be ready to return the funds. He felt strengthened by both his thoughts and his actions, which were mediated during his treatment by his healthy ego and his benign superego.

My countertransference to this case was positive, and I found myself wanting to support this client in his efforts to regain his emotional equilibrium. At the same time, I also found myself enjoying my own sadistic urges towards his ex-wife as much as he did. I believe that clients can sense that I am comfortable with these feelings within myself, and they can, in turn, become more comfortable with their own aggressive urges and enjoy using them for their own benefit. Had I focused on forgiveness at a time when my client was exploring feelings and reactions to mistreatment and hurt, I fear that the treatment would have become bogged down or derailed, precluding or foreclosing an investigation of feelings like aggression and revenge.

Discussion

This case supports the theory that revenge is a normal response to an injustice. It illustrates that revenge is an attempt to, or a way to, restore feelings of equilibrium within a relationship as well as feelings of self-worth or identity within an individual.

We can see from this case how the ego can regain, or simply gain, strength as a result of employing both strategy and skill in the execution of an act of revenge. The

client in this case felt strengthened by his act and expressed a restored sense of agency and control that he had lost for a period. It shows, too, that a limited expression of the desire for revenge can be both integrating and gratifying to the psyche and that it is not always necessary to use excessive amounts of aggression to get the desired effect.

This case shows that when it could, in fact, be dangerous for an individual to use public or social mechanisms to address an injustice (due to fears of reprisal or punishment), a contained and planned act of revenge can address an injustice without threatening to undermine both the moral and social fabric of society. The act succeeds in this instance precisely because it is under the sway of the ego. An act of revenge can therefore, I believe, be truly creative if aggression is used for positive ends rather than for purely destructive means.

Conclusion

The desire for revenge, along with some of the accompanying primitive feelings that are generated in relation to this desire, can be unwieldy and disturbing. As clinicians we might notice in our countertransference a desire or an inclination to distance ourselves from the client due to the intensity or overstimulation engendered by revenge. We could also register feelings of disgust about the topic and/or the client as well as other negative feelings.

By presenting explanations of the underlying psychodynamics of revenge, its function and examples of how it can be skillfully expressed, I hope that a deeper appreciation and value for this much maligned aspect of human nature will be engendered. As with anything the client brings into the treatment, the desire for revenge

is a window into the hurt and suffering of the patient. It is an opportunity for exploring any number of issues that might include resistances to maturation or unconscious motivations that arise within and outside the therapeutic relationship. How this exploration unfolds with the clinician can, and does, I believe, make all the difference in how the patient's revenge will ultimately get played out.

To my mind of thinking, and in my experience, it seems possible for revenge to be both creative and effective, and it is my hope that these ideas will assist both clinicians and clients alike to work with—and through—this potentially very dangerous yet equally libidinous desire. It is said that the best revenge is to live a good life, and this becomes all the more possible when we have strong, healthy, permeable, and creative egos.

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