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RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRANSFORMATIVE VENGEANCE: UNVEILING THE INTRICACIES OF REVENGE AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE WITHIN FAMILY DYNAMICS

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Abstract

Background: The present study is looking at how young adults comprehend and execute revenge against their parents. Despite convincing evidence that the combination of profound emotional attachment and high degrees of interdependence with competitiveness and power struggles almost invariably leads in an enhanced ability to harm and be harmed, the question of revenge has received little attention among family academics.

Aim: The goal of this study was to contribute to the growing body of research about how different groups perceive, execute, and experience vengeance.

Method and material: For this study, the transcript of 4 semi-structured video interviews was analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The IPA identified three superordinate themes (1) Revenge as a catalyst for change (2) From comparative suffering to mutual understanding (3) Towards a more adaptive homeostasis.

Result: The findings challenge traditional views of revenge as solely punitive, highlighting its strategic role as a mechanism for change inside family dynamics. The study also emphasizes the interplay between emotion and cognition in revenge decisions. Several motivations were identified, assert autonomy, competence, and improve emotional connections within the family. The findings also suggest that revenge seeks to establish communication through comparative suffering.

Conclusion: In summary, this study finds revenge to be a multifaceted emotional response, capable of serving as a strategic tool for instigating positive change. The findings provide new insights into revenge, demonstrating its potential as a catalyst for transformation within family dynamics.

Keywords: Revenge, young adults, parents, comparative suffering, transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

In the entangled web of human emotions and responses, revenge emerges as a fascinating construct, representing a reaction to perceived harm or violation. Its essence lies in its duality; one dimension conceptualises it as a triggered response, born from a sense of wrongdoing,[1,2] while the other paints it as a cycle of reciprocity, reflecting an eye-for-an-eye principle[3,4]. Beyond this binary, however, revenge unravels as a complex dance of perception and interpretation, wherein the actual offence often becomes overshadowed by the individual's interpretation of it. This intricate interplay between emotion and cognition, coupled with the influence of societal and familial structures, turns revenge into a compelling field of exploration. The present study, employing an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), aims to investigate these intriguing phenomena within the family context, focusing particularly on adolescent retaliation against parents. Through a deep dive into the subjective experiences of these young individuals, this study aims to illuminate the role and implications of revenge within the familial sphere, thereby providing a richer understanding of this complex human response.

To begin with, the spark that ignites the quest for vengeance is typically lit by a perceived transgression[5]. Within this framework, victims, seared by a sense of wrongdoing, experience a profound sense of unfairness6. Such perceived injustices often intertwine with a sense of powerlessness or an inability to react immediately in response to the offending act, thereby breeding aspirations for future retribution[3]. This process is illuminated within Smith and Lazarus's Cognitive Appraisal Theory[7], which suggests individuals evaluate situations based on their impact on personal well-being (primary appraisal), their capability to manage the situation (secondary appraisal)[8] and its alignment with personal values and objectives[9]. A negative evaluation can stoke feelings of injustice and stimulate vengeful urges[10,11], even among preschool-aged children[12].

Yet, revenge is not simply a matter of rational, cognitive pathways. It's a tempest, an emotional whirlwind in which responses such as anger[13] intertwine with cognitive processes to guide judgments and decisions.[14,9] Anger can amplify punitive tendencies while simultaneously impairing cognitive processing, engendering more heuristic-based judgments that intensify blame attribution and retributive desires[15]. The confluence of cognitive and emotional processes[16] presents revenge in dual perspective - a deliberative, 'cold' process[3,17] and an impassioned, 'hot' process where emotional motives might eclipse rational cognition.[18,11]

Revenge, serving as a foundational platform for numerous motives and functions, often emerges as an attempt to restore equity in suffering, also known as comparative suffering hypothesis[19]. The aggrieved party aims to inflict a similar degree of suffering on the offender as endured by them and can be instrumental in restoring some emotional equilibrium. Supporting this notion, Eder et al. [20] discovered that individuals seeking vengeance perceive their objective as accomplished when the offender has experienced suffering to an extent equivalent to that endured by the victim. Alternatively, the comparative suffering hypothesis has been suggested as a potential tactic to attain higher-level goals[4].

The intentional act of causing harm to others highlights an individual's capacity to exert control, leaving the victim defenceless and unable to retaliate. As a result, revenge can serve as an empowering mechanism, aiming to restore balance and regain personal power[19]. Episodic personal power refers to the extent to which individuals perceive their ability to influence others[21]. This proactive pursuit of vengeance and assertion of control can be personally empowering. Empowerment, both as a process and an outcome, involves individuals gaining and exercising influence[22]. This perspective finds support in empirical research, which suggests a correlation between revenge and empowerment.[22]

Delving into the communication dynamics surrounding revenge, the retaliator and the offender engage in a dialogue underscored by the act of retaliation itself. Boon & Yoshimura[23] argued for a communication-centric approach to revenge, suggesting the primary goal of revenge is to convey a message to the offender regarding the acceptability of their initial behaviour. In a broader societal context, revenge can signal the retaliator's will and capacity to reciprocate harm, thereby preventing future violations.[19] According to Gollwitzer and Denzer[4], revenge

is only considered satisfying when the wrongdoer recognises that retaliation was carried out specifically in response to and as a result of their previous unjust actions. At a minimum, the intention behind the message is to deliberately inflict some form of emotional pain upon the person believed to be responsible[22, 25]. While revenge can lead to both detrimental and beneficial outcomes[23] numerous studies[24,25,26] have highlighted its role in regulating social interactions. This multifaceted interplay reflects the complexity of revenge, weaving it intimately with the emotional, cognitive and communicative aspects of social engagements.

The concept of revenge, intricate and multifaceted, assumes an enhanced complexity when viewed through the lens of familial structures. Despite a comprehensive understanding of how close emotional bonds, interdependence, competitiveness, and power struggles within a family can create fertile ground for harm, the unique role of revenge remains largely untapped in family studies[27,28]. It is important to remember that just as parent-child interactions are characterised by closeness, intimacy, and care, they are also frequently imbued with negative emotions such as resentment, anger, and disillusionment[29]. Furthermore, these seemingly dichotomous sets of emotions are not mutually exclusive. Parents and children often experience ambivalence, a simultaneous experience of positive and negative feelings, due to conflicting desires for independence and closeness[30]. This internal emotional conflict becomes particularly salient during adolescence, a period marked by escalating tension and conflict between parents and children[31,32.] However, as Segal[33] suggested, ambivalence is an achievement rather than a problem, though only when it is acknowledged and not repressed.

This intricate balancing act forms the backdrop against which the Self-Determination Theory[34,35,36] operates. The theory asserts that autonomy, competence, and relatedness – three fundamental psychological needs – profoundly influence human motivation and well-being. During adolescence, the quest for autonomy and individuality might clash with the inherent need for familial relatedness. The family, and more specifically, the quality of parental relationships, decisively impact whether these needs are met or undermined[37]. For instance, perceived parental psychological control has been shown to negatively affect the satisfaction of adolescence's needs[38]. As a result, maladaptive behaviours such as aggression[39] and revenge motivation[40] may surface. Importantly, individual goals may not always align with those at the family level, introducing the possibility for revenge to be wielded positively or negatively, depending on the broader familial context and the individual's objectives.

Within the emotionally charged arena of familial relationships, revenge may serve as an adaptive response for adolescents to rectify perceived injustices. Such an adaptive response is deeply embedded within the theoretical construct of Family Systems Theory, which views the family as a homeostatic system striving to maintain balance amidst internal and external changes[41,42]. Here, revenge may be viewed as a potential catalyst or positive feedback provoking change and disrupting the prevailing equilibrium in a family. In turn, this disruption might necessitate a comprehensive re-evaluation of the existing family dynamics[43], leading potentially to adaptive or maladaptive homeostasis within the family[44]. Therefore, viewing revenge merely as a destructive response behaviour might oversimplify its role within the family system.

Rationale

The intent is to offer a more nuanced view of revenge within the family structure and to deepen the understanding of the role that revenge plays in navigating family dynamics and its potential outcomes as interpreted by participants themselves. The IPA methodology, with its emphasis on understanding participants' subjective experiences and interpretations[45], is an apt fit for this research since it facilitates a thorough exploration of how participants interpret their own actions and emotions in the context of revenge against their parents.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

To accommodate the preferences of the participants, online platforms like Zoom or Skype were used for conducting interviews, offering flexibility and convenience. The main data collection method involved carrying out semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, enabling the interviews to adapt to

the participants' unique experiences while thoroughly exploring important aspects of the research topic[46]. A set of 10 open-ended questions and prompts was created based on the study's topics and relevant literature.

Sample

Four participants aged between 18 and 25 years old (Mage=20) participated in the research. This study used a careful method of selecting participants called purposive sampling to analyse their experiences using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In order to be included, participants had to meet three criteria: (1) be between 18-25 years old, (2) have experienced feelings of revenge towards their parents, and (3) be willing and able to talk about these feelings and experiences. Participants with prior diagnosis were excluded from the study. This was done to focus on typical emotional experiences rather than mental health disorders like Oppositional Defiant Disorder or Conduct Disorder, as these conditions could potentially affect how participants interpreted their feelings of revenge. It's important to note that the exclusion criterion was not meant to stigmatize or marginalize individuals with mental health diagnoses, but rather to ensure that the research findings accurately represented the experiences of the target population. Participants were enlisted by utilizing professional networks, online forums, and advertisements.

Analytic approach

This study employed Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a qualitative research approach to thoroughly investigate the lived experiences of the study participants. IPA was chosen due to its emphasis on uncovering the personal meanings and interpretations that individuals attach to their experiences, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the phenomena under study[47]. IPA is grounded in theoretical perspectives such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, the concept of double hermeneutic and ideography (46). Phenomenology highlights the significance of examining individuals; subjective experiences and their unique perspectives on the world[47] Hermeneutics recognises the vital role of researchers in interpreting and deriving meanings from participants' experiences[48.] To gain a deep understanding from the 'inside perspective,' IPA stipulates the need for a dual interpretation process also known as 'double hermeneutics'. As such, while IPA understands that the researcher's interaction with the participant's text involves an interpretive aspect, it adopts an epistemological standpoint, believing that it can delve into an individual's mental realm[48] . Lastly, idiography emphasizes the detailed examination of individual cases, which leads to a nuanced understanding of the phenomena within their specific contexts[45].

Material

The study utilized various materials to ensure comprehensive coverage of all necessary aspects. To facilitate convenient data collection, interviews with the participants were recorded using a mobile phone with the assistance of an audio recording app. Remote methods, such as personal computers and audio-visual communication tools, were employed to facilitate interactions with the participants. This included conducting interviews via video calls or utilising online platforms. Additionally, a personal computer was used for the transcription of the interviews. Consent and debrief forms were also included. A set of 10 questions was used to target the core objectives of the study.

Procedure

Participants received a written invitation along with an information sheet. The information sheet provided a comprehensive overview of the study's purpose, the participants' rights to withdraw at any time, and detailed information about the interview process structure. To ensure ethical considerations were met, participants were required to complete a written consent form before the interview. The interviews ranged in length from 30 to 45 minutes. After the interview, participants were sincerely thanked for their valuable participation and were provided with a written debrief sheet which outlined the study's objectives. To protect the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, transcripts underwent an accuracy check and were anonymised to remove any identifying information. Each transcript was assigned a special participant code, facilitating the subsequent data analysis process and ensuring the ease of organising and comparing the collected data.

Ethics

The ethical treatment of participants in this study was of utmost importance, as it adhered to the rigorous guidelines outlined by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the British

Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct. Participants' well-being and informed consent were prioritised, with comprehensive information provided to participants regarding the study's objectives and procedures. Written consent was obtained from each participant. Confidentiality was safeguarded through meticulous anonymization of participant identities, secure data storage, and strict control over access to information. Participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without facing any negative consequences, highlighting the voluntary nature of their participation. The ethical framework of the University of Derby endorsed the study, and participants were well-informed about the research's objectives, their right to withdraw within a two-week window after the study's completion, and the careful removal of their data. Importantly, participants were assured that their names would be replaced with personally selected pseudonyms during the analysis phase, ensuring the utmost confidentiality of their identity and personal information.

Reflexivity

The concept of reflexive research has gained widespread acceptance in qualitative research[49]. It emphasises the researcher's need to be self-aware and consciously recognise, acknowledge, and contemplate their own experiences, assumptions, and ideas. Within the framework of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), researcher reflexivity is considered essential and should be practiced throughout the entire project[45]. In my own four-month research endeavour, I maintained a research journal to record my evolving involvement with the research subject and data, while reflecting on the connections that emerged between my personal background and the phenomenon under investigation. I've had to consider how my upbringing, my psychology background, and my personality could all affect the research process. By acknowledging these factors and taking steps to manage them, I've strived to ensure this study is a fair and accurate reflection of the participants' experiences.

RESULTS

The analysis of the data aimed to explore how young adults perceive and conceptualise revenge against their parents, unveiled four superordinate themes (1) Revenge as a catalyst for change (2) From comparative suffering to mutual understanding (3) Towards a more adaptive homeostasis (4) Redefining the self. In this study, only the first three superordinate themes will be briefly examined. These themes provide insights into the individuals' motivations, desires, and the potential impact of revenge on the family system.

"**Revenge as a catalyst for change"**

This theme captures the individual's frustration, cognitive appraisal, and strategic approach to seeking change within their family dynamics, through revenge.

"*I tried talking to my parents about it, that you know this thing that you have going on is not normal and that you guys need help , but they never seemed to listen or change…so I took my distance from it. But seeing my brother getting affected by all this, it brought it all to the surface. Anger, disappointment all of it…And that's when I started to think about how I could make them understand the pain they were causing, hoping something would change"* (Nina)

Despite Nina's attempts to communicate her concerns to her parents, she is consistently met with indifference. Over time, Nina withdraws from the situation, acknowledging it as her parents' autonomous choice to sustain their destructive behaviours. Nina's awareness of the situation seems to have significantly contributed to her emotional experience and eventual consideration of revenge[7]. It is within this secondary appraisal where revenge begins to manifest as a viable catalyst for change[8]. Faced with the ineffectiveness of direct communication, Nina contemplates revenge as a calculated attempt to incite reaction – not an act of malice but an instrument designed to illustrate the pain they are causing, potentially provoking a transformation in her parents' behaviour. Her contemplation of revenge does not seem to be an impulsive emotional response but a deliberate strategy to effect change which constitutes a transformative catalyst for change. This innovative conceptualisation challenges the traditional view of revenge as a purely emotional reaction[18].

"*Nobody was doing anything about it. Everybody knew there was a problem… My father was just being a dad I guess, absent. So I was getting fed up . I mean having a mother 24/7 controlling everything that you do is not ideal. So I said this can't continue, I am suffocating here. I didn't care if she would cry play the victim , I*

just said to myself she needs to understand that she is not acting normal and that if she didn't start to loosen her grip on my life, things would get pretty ugly for all of them" (Lydia)

Surrounded by familial indifference and her mother's manipulation, Lydia feels entrapped and powerless. As a result, she finds herself contemplating retribution, aiming to disrupt the dysfunctional family equilibrium despite the potential for ensuing conflict and emotional turbulence. This emergence of Lydia's determination to confront the family system is a sign of her growing frustration and desire for change. The underlying motivations for her revenge appear to be rooted in her quest for a healthier family atmosphere and her conviction that an upheaval of the status quo will incite positive change. Undoubtedly, emotions such as anger, disappointment, and feelings of neglect have a significant role in driving Lydia towards this course of action[14]. The family's apathy and the absence of her father, not only perpetuate the family's detrimental dynamics4[4], but also contribute to Lydia's sense of isolation, amplifying her emotional strain.

"**From comparative suffering to mutual understanding"**

This theme captures the interplay between autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the act of revenge, emphasising their desire for change, understanding, and emotional connection with the family.

I really wanted her to experience the exact same anxiety. It was fun in the begging but I can't say I enjoyed her moaning and the crying like a baby[when she couldn't find her personal belongings]… So I said now that she knows how it feels I have to end it.. I told her everything, what I did, how I needed for things to be from now on. She cried and played the victim which made me even angrier though I knew it would happen but I made her have no other choice but to accept how things were gonna be from now on, and that the crying and moaning will not have much of an affect any more" (Lydia)

On one hand Lydia's actions seem as an effort to dominate through "comparative suffering" which suggests that the sense of justice arises from evaluating suffering between the avenger and the offender[19]. This viewpoint could interpret Lydia's manipulation of her mother's emotions as an effort to make her feel the same distress that she experiences, aiming to equalise their emotional states. However, a broader understanding may be reflected, by suggesting that Lydia's actions stem not only from a desire to make her mother feel the same pain, but also from a deeper yearning for her to understand and acknowledge her personal struggles and need for personal autonomy[36]. It seems undeniable that the dynamic between Lydia and her mother is fraught with tension while this tension doesn't detract from the quest for understanding. Instead, it adds another layer to their complex relationship, intensifying Lydia's need for validation and communication. This communication-focused approach to revenge, emphasised by Boon et al.,[22] posits that the primary purpose of a revenge act is to communicate a message to the offender about their behaviour. Transitioning towards the climax, one could argue that Lydia's open confrontation with her mother, divulging her manipulation and laying out her expectations, might be seen as a moment of triumph rather than an expression of relatedness. However, viewing this interaction through the lens of Self Determination Theory Relatedness[35], it suggests a desperate attempt for connection. Lydia's anger at her mother playing the victim can be read as a cry for an equal, honest relationship, emphasising the theme of emotional authenticity over dominance.

"I *wanted to make them feel uncomfortable in front of their friends in order to make them understand how it feels like for us. I would often question the point of it all, should I do it, should I not? But I had to do it, for me first of all. I had to change first in order for them to try"* (Nina)

Nina's decision to expose her parents' relationship to their friends can be understood as an exertion of competence, one of the three essential psychological needs according to Self-Determination Theory[36]. She feels that her parents' behaviour is wrong and damaging, and she's effectively taking a stand against it. By creating a scenario where her parents are forced to confront the discomfort and embarrassment their actions have caused, she is demonstrating her ability to influence her environment and assert control over the situation, which is also known as episodic personal power[21]. Empowerment, both as a process and an outcome, involves individuals gaining and exercising influence[22]. Nina's story highlights the significance of individual transformation in facilitating broader social change, and

serves as a reminder of the inextricable link between personal and collective development. Finally, her actions also reflect her deep need for relatedness. Her actions are not merely actions of retribution, but an attempt to generate empathy and understanding. By mirroring her emotional discomfort, she hopes to break the communication barriers and initiate a dialogue. This longing for a sense of emotional understanding and connectedness within her family unit underlines her intrinsic need for relatedness, as highlighted in the Self-Determination Theory[36].

"**Towards a more adaptive homeostasis"**

This theme highlights the potential of revenge to disrupt and transform stagnant or oppressive family dynamics, leading to personal growth and to the establishment of a more adaptive homeostasis. It showcases the interplay between personal emotions, relational dynamics, and the potential for positive change within the family system.

"*Of course change didn't happen overnight, school grades remained important and all that but they learned to back off eventually. We certainly have learned to negotiate better since then"* (Cosima)

Cosima suggests that revenge served as a catalyst for change in the existing family dynamics. The transformation occurred gradually, indicating a process of negotiation and adjustment within the family structure. This aligns with the broader literature on revenge, which often depicts retaliation as a mechanism for modulating social interactions[23,24,25.] Although some elements from the prior homeostasis, such as an emphasis on school progress, were retained, a novel respect for her autonomy and personal space emerged. This adjustment could be viewed as a development of a more adaptive homeostasis where expectations are tempered with individual needs and boundaries[44]. Her act of revenge appears to have forged new channels for dialogue and negotiation, leading to interactions within the family that were marked by greater respect and consideration. It could be argued that revenge served as a positive feedback within the family, which indicates the presence of an active shift away from ground rules, roles, and norms of the system[43]

"*She [mother] didn't become a completely different person. Would be nice but no. But she has certainly distanced herself enough to allow me to breath… Which was the point"* (Lydia)

The extract reveals an emotional and complex narrative surrounding Lydia's experience with her mother. The act of revenge seems to be a pivotal point in their relationship dynamics. From Lydia's perspective, this act has instigated a change, creating a distance between her and her mother, which she describes as allowing her "to breath". This 'breathing space' can be seen as a metaphor for psychological space or freedom, indicating a shift from a previously stifling or overwhelming environment to one that is more manageable and comfortable. This shift represents a new, more adaptive homeostasis for Lydia, where she is able to exist without feeling suffocated by her mother's influence. However, the statement "*would be nice but no*" reflects a degree of resignation and acceptance, suggesting that Lydia may have hoped for a more amicable resolution, or a different transformation of her mother. This highlights the complex and often ambivalent feelings involved in familial relationships[29] even when changes lead to a more positive homeostasis. However, as Segal[33] suggested, ambivalence is a achievement rather than a problem, though only when it is acknowledged and not repressed.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the subjective experiences of individuals who have engaged in revengeful actions against their parents. The intent was an in-depth understanding regarding revenge within the family structure and its role in navigating family dynamics. According to the findings, a redefined approach of revenge emerges that diverges from its usual connotation of malicious intent and frames it as a transformative agent driven by frustration, disappointment, and a strong desire for change.

The emotional experiences of the participants influence their cognitive appraisals of their circumstances. This interaction between emotion and cognition aligns with Smith and Lazarus[7] cognitive appraisal theory according to which, cognitive appraisal processes, divided into primary (judgment about the situation) and secondary (judgment about the resources and options available) appraisals, determine emotional reactions and the subsequent choice of coping strategies[8.] For the participants, the primary appraisal is the identification of their families' behaviour as harmful, while the secondary appraisals indicates that

direct communication has failed to induce change. This failure prompts the contemplation of revenge as a last resort, hoping that it will shake up the detrimental family equilibrium.

These narratives also draw attention to the family systems theory, which posits that families are systems seeking homeostasis[41]. This dynamic equilibrium, even if dysfunctional, is often resistant to change[42]. Participants initially adopt coping strategies to maintain the existing family equilibrium either by distancing themselves or by accepting the situation. However, their continued emotional distress and concern for their well-being eventually leads them to revenge, in order to disrupt this homeostasis.

A noteworthy aspect of these narratives is the strategic approach to revenge, framing it not as an impulsive, destructive act but as a strategy aimed at instigating transformation. This approach challenges traditional notions of revenge, usually perceived as a purely emotional reaction[18]. However, recent research has increasingly recognised the role of cognitive processes, such as strategic decision-making, in revenge scenarios[17].

Moreover, the analysis reflects the Self-Determination Theory[34,35,36] which underscores the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in human motivation. The act of revenge, in these narratives, serves as an avenue to assert autonomy and demonstrate competence. The adolescents' desire for revenge against perceived excessive parental control or infringements on their independence, agrees with Choe & Read's[40] findings on the correlation between perceived parental control and revenge motivation. Further, these retaliatory actions strive to improve emotional connections within the family, serving their need for relatedness. Their revenge strategies, while primarily aimed at asserting autonomy and competence, also strive to facilitate improved relationships and emotional understanding.

The "comparative suffering" hypothesis proposed by Frijda[19] adds a layer of complexity to their motivations. According to the Comparative Suffering, revenge is motivated by the desire to inflict suffering equivalent to one's own. This is manifested in the participants' attempts to level the emotional playing field by inflicting comparable pain on their parents. However all accounts move beyond the mere balancing of emotional pain since it served as a foundation for the ensuing communication process[4,23] This reflects their strong desire even through shared discomfort and comparative suffering.

The participants' narratives also provide insights into the role of revenge in family dynamics. Revenge serves as a catalyst for change and facilitates a shift towards adaptive homeostasis. It disrupts oppressive equilibrium, leading to a more balanced and autonomous environment. Revenge creates breathing space, allowing for personal autonomy and emotional liberation. The participants' stories highlight revenge as a tool to instigate change within perceived dysfunctional family systems, which is in line with broader literature that highlights revenge as a regulating social interactions mechanism[24,25,26.] Thus, these findings shed light on the multifaceted nature of revenge and its potential to transform family dynamics where conventional communication has failed or has been perceived as insufficient.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings challenge traditional views of revenge as purely punitive, highlighting its potential role as a strategic mechanism for change, especially when traditional communication channels fail. This cognitive appraisal perspective of revenge painting revenge as a potential instrument for fostering awareness, understanding, and even positive change within a family setting. Revenge is portrayed as a calculated act, serving multiple functions – asserting autonomy, demonstrating competence, and even enhancing relatedness. Moreover, a complex interplay between a desire for emotional balance and the necessity of communication is emphasised. This complexity indicates that revenge is more than merely inflicting equivalent suffering; it also serves as a communicative tool to express emotional distress. Finally, the analysis highlights the multifaceted nature of revenge and its potential transformational influence on family dynamics. It's important to recognise that such shifts can be gradual and fraught with ongoing conflict due to the complex nature of family relationships. However, revenge, viewed through this lens, provides an unconventional, yet potentially powerful avenue for asserting individual autonomy, disrupting oppressive equilibrium, and instigating a change in perceived dysfunctional family systems. These insights lay the groundwork

for further exploration of revenge as a complex, strategic, and a potential transformative emotional response.

Acknowledgments

Conflicts of interest

All authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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