

People new to power more likely to be vengeful

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New research has shown that people who are not accustomed to holding power are more likely to be vengeful when placed in charge. Experienced power-holders, on the other hand, were found to be more tolerant of perceived wrongdoing.

The research, co-led by Dr Mario Weick of the University of Kent, and Dr Peter Strelan, of the University of Adelaide, Australia, explored for the first time the relationship between power and revenge.

The research concluded that revenge and other acts of aggression are more likely to be enacted by individuals who are new to holding power and feel more vulnerable to threats, relative to those who feel more self-assured and experienced in their exercise of power.

The researchers base their conclusions on a series of four experimental studies conducted in the UK and Australia and involving close to 500 participants drawn from student populations and the general public. Across all four studies, participants responded to different transgressions such as plagiarism, negligence, gossiping, and a drunken violent offence.

Crucially, some participants were exposed to power before the researchers measured participants' inclination to seek revenge against the perpetrator. Other participants were not exposed to power, or experienced an episode of powerlessness, depending on the study.

In all four studies, after being exposed to power individuals not

accustomed to having power sought more revenge than self-assured individuals who tend to exercise power more frequently. However, no difference in vengefulness was found in the group of participants who were not exposed to power, or who experienced a brief episode of powerlessness.

Dr Weick, of Kent's School of Psychology, said: 'Our results provide a firm indication of the relationship between power and revenge. Power is not simply good or bad; it affects different people in different ways. Our studies highlight some of the negative effects power can have on people who are less accustomed to being in charge.

'For those more accustomed to power, on the other hand, the consequences are actually quite positive as far as people's [revenge](#) tendencies are concerned.'

Interestingly, the researchers also showed that it is not only the ability to impact others that can bring out different inclinations to retaliate in people. Body posture was also shown to have an effect. In one study, one group of participants stood upright with an expansive body posture, while another group of participants sat crouched on the floor. In another study, participants either made a fist, or an open palm, whilst reading about transgressions.

Dr Weick said: 'Both the expanded [body posture](#) and the fist-gesture instilled a sense of power in participants and led to greater vengeance in people who are less accustomed to [power](#), compared to more self-assured participants. These differences did not emerge when participants sat crouched on the floor or made an open-palm gesture.'

Dr Strelan said: 'Our finding may also hold relevance for our understanding of how social hierarchies are formed and maintained. Fear of retaliation could be one reason that prevents people at the bottom of

hierarchies from acquiring powerful positions.'

More information: The paper, titled Power and revenge, is published in the *British Journal of Social Psychology*.

Provided by University of Kent

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