

# How belief in pure evil relates to perceptions and punishments of gun violence perpetrators

November 7 2017

---

The professional journal *Personality and Individual Differences* published an article co-authored by a Penn State Abington student and his faculty research partner.

Dominic Vasturia, senior in biology, and Russ Webster, assistant professor of psychology, developed "Demons with firepower: How belief in pure evil relates to perceptions and punishments of gun violence perpetrators" during a two-year undergraduate research collaboration.

Webster's research on the concept of pure evil dates back to 2011 when he developed a course, "The Psychology of Evil," as a [doctoral student](#). He taught the course twice at Abington.

"To our knowledge, we are actually the first researchers to successfully measure people's perceptions of whether pure evil actually exists. We are merely interested in how people's perceptions of human nature relates to how people approach the world," he said.

"This project provided me with invaluable experience, working both independently and with other researchers. Not many students have the opportunity to receive this first-hand experience of devising, carrying out a scientific study, and analyzing the data on a topic I was interested in and helped form," Vasturia said, calling Webster "a wonderful mentor."

Vasturia and Webster presented this research at the Association for Psychological Science conference in Chicago last year as well as at other professional meetings. The pair is working on publishing another paper based on their work for Vasturia's undergraduate research, known as the ACURA program at Abington.

Vasturia is applying to graduate school in neurobiology for the fall 2018 semester. Webster said undergraduate research is invaluable toward achieving that goal.

"Having conference presentations and a publication as an undergraduate is very attractive to any graduate program as it demonstrates advanced skills in communication and critical thinking," he said.

**More information:** Dominic Vasturia et al. Demons with firepower: How belief in pure evil relates to perceptions and punishments of gun violence perpetrators, *Personality and Individual Differences* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.paid.2017.09.037](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.09.037)

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: How belief in pure evil relates to perceptions and punishments of gun violence perpetrators (2017, November 7) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-11-belief-pure-evil-perceptions-gun.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.