

Envy and Social Comparison

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Dutch education faced a serious problem in 2007. The expectancy was that 10 years later 75% of the teacher population would have quit or retired from their jobs. This was a major problem, as not many young people were interested in becoming a teacher. A dramatic shortage of teachers was imminent. One cause for the lack of enthusiasm for becoming a teacher was the relatively low salary of high school teachers. It already started low, but especially the growth in the first few years of the 2000s lagged compared to what peers in other sectors could make. In 2008 the government introduced a plan that allowed the salary of the younger teachers to grow more quickly than it had in the past (but the salary at the end of a teacher's career would remain the same). This proposal, however, was never accepted. The reason for this was that the older teachers (with the back-up of the unions) wanted to be compensated, because the young generation would progress in salary more quickly than they had when they were young. The compensation that older teachers wanted made the proposal so expensive that the government could not implement it anymore (Reijn, 2008). Why did older teachers need a compensation for the faster growth in salary that new teachers would get when they started? The plan would not hurt the older teachers in any way it seemed. So why oppose this plan? Could it be that the older teachers were envious? It seems that the older teachers felt frustration that the new generation of teachers would progress more quickly than they had. To us, this is an example of the effect that envy can have on people and society, as in this case it seems that envy in the old teachers blocked the introduction of a plan that would have helped to prevent a shortage in teachers and as such would have been advantageous for society.

In the current chapter we provide an overview of the psychology of envy: what it is and what it does. We do this with a special focus on its relationship with social comparisons. Envy is omnipresent in the sense that it is experienced around the world (Foster, 1972; Schoeck, 1969). This universality of

envy is also apparent by the fact that many major religions describe how one can and should deal with envy. In the Christian and Jewish tradition, “thou shall not covet” is one of the Ten Commandments; in Islam *hassad* is undesirable envy that prevents true faith; and in Buddhism envy is seen as a poison of the mind. Envy has thus long been considered an important and unwanted feeling across the world. In order to understand this attitude toward envy, we first need to address the question of what exactly envy is.

What Is Envy?

Aristotle (350 BC/1954) defined envy as the pain caused by the good fortune of others. In his definition Aristotle did not include a crucial component of envy: Kant (1780/1997) argued that a comparison of oneself to the *superior* person lies at the core of envy. Envy is thus not the pain that arises when others do well, but rather it is the pain that arises when others do *better* than oneself. Envy is upward looking; it contains a focus on both what the other person has and what one lacks oneself. This is also found in the most commonly used definition of envy in psychology (Parrott & Smith, 1993): “Envy arises when a person lacks another’s superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it” (p. 906).

Envy is commonly equated to jealousy, but in emotion theory they are considered to be different experiences. Jealousy arises when a person has something but is afraid of losing it to another person (Neu, 1980). Jealousy thus has the fear of a loss as its core; in the prototypical case one fears losing a romantic partner to someone else. Envy has at its core a social comparison in which one lacks something desirable that the other person has. Upward social comparison is thus the trigger of envy. Although some initially argued that these experiences were rather similar (Salovey & Rodin, 1986, 1989), later research did find clear differences (Parrott & Smith, 1993; Smith, Kim, & Parrott, 1988). The mix-up of the two in colloquial language use does occur often, though. For example, Smith et al. found that the word *jealousy* was often used to indicate envy. Another example is the work of Zeelenberg and Pieters (2004), who studied people’s emotional reactions to their neighbors winning the lottery and found that people indicated to feel regret over not playing themselves. Moreover, they also mentioned feeling both envy and jealousy toward the winners of the lottery. Interestingly, despite the confusion between these emotions and the misuse of jealousy to indicate envy,

Smith et al. also found that misuse in the other direction is rare. The word *envy* is hardly ever used to indicate an experience of jealousy.

The Function of Envy

Envy is an emotion. Emotions are evolved mechanisms that help an organism to cope with important challenges that arise in the environment (Cosmides & Tooby, 2000) and to prioritize behavioral responses that deal with those challenges (Frijda, 1988; Zeelenberg, Nelissen, Breugelmans & Pieters, 2008). For example, anger arises when someone perceives that someone (or something) is deliberately blocking his or her goal progress. The anger results in behavior to stand up for oneself and agitate against that which blocks one's progress. These behaviors are part and parcel of the emotional experience and provide insight into its function. In the words of Averill (1982), "the desire to gain revenge on, or to get back at the instigator of anger can almost be taken as a definition of anger" (p. 178). If all emotions have a function, what then is the function of envy?

How does the concern for relative status relate to envy? Envy is found to arise when someone feels that his or her relative status is threatened (Smith & Kim, 2007). Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters (2009) argue that the motivational goal of envy is to level the difference with the target of the upward social comparison. Envy may thus help a person to obtain what the other has and prevent one from looking pale in comparison. Envy is part of the evolved set of innate mechanisms that helps individuals monitor whether they succeed in obtaining and keeping a good relative position (Hill & Buss, 2008). Consistent with this idea is that research shows that people are more envious in areas that have evolutionary benefits. For example, males tend to be more envious of wealth, while females are more envious of beauty (Salovey & Rodin, 1991). These gender differences map onto ideas of what is important for each gender from an evolutionary fitness perspective.

Benign and Malicious Envy

Although past work has long considered there to be a possibility that there are actually two types of envy, malicious and benign (Parrott, 1991; Smith & Kim, 2007, for an overview), empirical research is relatively recent. Starting

with the observation that some languages appear to have two words for envy, Van de Ven et al. (2009) tested people's experiences of envy. For example, in Dutch the words *afgunst* and *benijden* both translate into "envy." But when people recall one of these experiences and we compared the responses to questions about how that experience felt, *afgunst* and *benijden* appeared to be different experiences (for a replication in German, see Crusius & Lange, 2014). Both types of envy are negative, frustrating feelings that arise when someone else does better than oneself (the pain at the good fortune of others), but they also clearly differ, mainly in the action tendencies that are triggered. Whereas malicious envy (*afgunst*) triggers destructive action tendencies aimed at pulling down the other, benign envy (*benijden*) triggers more constructive action tendencies aimed at improving one's own position.

Van de Ven et al. (2009) then tested whether the distinction in these envy subtypes also existed in countries that have only one word for envy (the United States and Spain). Participants recalled an instance of envy (or *envidia*) and responded to questions about how that experience had felt to them. Results confirmed that despite everyone recalling an experience of envy, participants recalled either an experience that closely resembled the Dutch experience of *afgunst* (malicious envy) or that of *benijden* (benign envy; see Falcon, 2015, for a replication).

Note that there is some debate on whether envy should be seen as having subtypes. Tai, Narayanan, and McAllister (2012) and Cohen-Charash and Larson (2016, 2017) argue that there is only one envy but that the motivation it leads to depends on situational characteristics. Van de Ven and colleagues (2015, 2016) tried to integrate these viewpoints by seeing a general form of envy as the higher order, umbrella term that encompasses the two subtypes. As noted, Van de Ven et al. (2009) argue that envy motivates behavior that levels the difference with the target of the upward social comparison; benign envy does so by leveling up oneself, malicious envy by pulling down the other. In other words, it just depends on the level at which one zooms into the experience; at a higher level of abstraction emotions are conceptualized, for which one can zoom into the class of negative emotions, with envy being a specific emotion in this class of negative emotions, and if one zooms in even further, the subtypes of envy exist.

Cohen-Charash and Larson (2017) argue that making a distinction does not help envy theory. First, they argue that the subtypes theory is less parsimonious than seeing envy as one uniform experience is. We disagree: where the subtypes approach argues that an appraisal of the situation determines

which subtype of envy is experienced (that in turn affects behavior), the general envy approach argues that the behavior that results from envy depends on the situational circumstances. Neither one is therefore more parsimonious; they just differ in where situational factors affect the experience. A second main point of criticism is related to measurement, and that is that researchers do not consistently use the same measures for the envy subtypes. We agree that this could be improved upon but see this as a larger issue in emotion research (including the research on envy as a uniform construct). A third point is that Cohen-Charash and Larson argue that other possible behavioral consequences are possible and that the subtypes approach neglects these. As we discuss later, we agree that other consequences aside from the main motivations that are part of benign and malicious envy have not been studied but also do not think they are part of envy but rather are responses *to* envy. In other words, people might regulate their emotional experience of envy by, for example, distracting themselves but think these other reactions *to* envy are not part of the experience itself but can better be understood via theories on emotion regulation or emotion reappraisal.

In our view, both theories (a uniform view of envy and the subtypes view) can easily coexist, by seeing envy as the overarching construct that has two subtypes (benign and malicious envy). So why do we favor making the distinction? First, making a distinction in subtypes of envy is based on emotion theory as emotions with different antecedents that lead to different motivations can be classified as different (types of) emotions (Frijda, 1988; Roseman, Antoniou, & Jose, 1994).

A second reason for making the distinction is that, by not making the distinction, some scholars operationalize envy as general envy, some as benign envy, and some as malicious envy. If all three of these experiences would be labeled as envy, the confusion arises that caused the problems in the research in the envy-schadenfreude link. An example of why this distinction is important can be found in the literature on schadenfreude (the joy over the misfortune of others). Research seems to be contradictory regarding whether envy is related to schadenfreude: some research concluded that envy caused schadenfreude (e.g., Smith et al, 1996), while other work concluded that it did not (e.g., Feather & Sherman, 2002). Van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Goslinga, Nieweg, and Gallucci (2006) noted that this was because researchers were not clear in how they operationalized envy: those who found an effect of envy on schadenfreude used hostility-related questions in their envy measure, while research that did not find an effect used more self-improvement envy items.

Van de Ven et al. (2015) predicted and found that it would thus be malicious envy that would be related to *schadenfreude* but not benign envy.

A third reason for making the distinction is that it is also unclear why the English language solution of using one word for envy should be the starting point, rather than the Dutch or German language that differentiates the two types. The subtypes view of envy allows all these theories to coexist: (general) envy as the pain arising after comparing oneself to the good fortune of another, and, if one zooms in on the experience, the subtypes benign and malicious envy can be distinguished.

A final reason is that making the distinction fits the empirical data best. As Van de Ven et al. (2009) initially found, even in languages where one word exists, when people recall an experience of envy, we see these distinct patterns that suggest they experienced one of the subtypes. Even in the work that forms the base for a uniform view of envy for Cohen-Charash (2009), the measure of “uniform” envy contains two *unrelated* components, one containing items like desire for what another person has (essentially tapping benign envy) and the other one containing items on feeling a grudge toward the envied person (essentially tapping malicious envy). For a broader discussion on why it is useful to distinguish the subtypes of envy, see Van de Ven (2016). We next provide an overview of the antecedents that trigger envy, before turning to the consequences of envy.

Antecedents of Envy

In the following section we focus on the key antecedents that lead to envy. When are people likely to be envious? Who are likely to be envious?

Upward Comparison

At the core of envy lies the upward social comparison (Salovey & Rodin, 1984; Smith, 2000). A core idea in the emotion literature is that how intense an emotion is depends on the perceived relevance and importance of the situation (Frijda, 1988). This is also consistent with findings on social comparisons: people compare themselves more in important domains and comparisons for more important domains trigger stronger reactions (Festinger, 1954). Research on emotions has shown that it is important not

only to look at valence and intensity of the emotional experience but, to be able to predict behavior, to look at specific effects of emotions (Van der Pligt, Zeelenberg, Van Dijk, De Vries, & Richard, 1998). Whether a social comparison triggers positive or negative feelings has been investigated in social comparison research quite often (Brickman & Bulman, 1977; Buunk et al., 1990), but more specific emotions resulting from social comparisons did not receive much attention in empirical research.

Smith (2000) is a notable exception. He created a theoretical model that positioned emotions along three dimensions. Envy is classified as an upward contrastive emotion with low perceived control: when a person compares him- or herself to a superior other and feels that obtaining the benefit is difficult, the person feels inferior. This frustration due to inferiority caused by the comparison is key: if one only focuses on the good accomplishment of the other (without that comparison reflecting poorly on oneself), admiration is more likely. Admiration can arise when another has an excellent performance but typically does not contain an upward social comparison in which one realizes that (or is hurt because) one is inferior to the other (Van de Ven et al., 2009). For example, where Van de Ven et al. found that virtually all of the recalled episodes of envy contained an explicit comparison (“my classmate got an 8 for the exam, while I only had a 6”), recalled episodes of admiration were typically only about the accomplishment of someone else without a mention of one’s own position (“my roommate made it to the varsity team”). Of course, when one sees an admirable performance such as an athlete winning an Olympic competition, there is implicitly the comparison that the athlete can do things that oneself cannot. However, as Gilbert, Giesler, and Morris (1995) find, in such cases the initial and spontaneous comparison is often quickly unmade. The other is so much better in a domain that is perhaps also not really important to me, so a comparison is not elicited. This leads to the pattern confirmed in Van de Ven et al. (2009): when recalling instances of envy, people make a direct comparison (the other did better than I did), while for admiration the focus is solely on the accomplishment of the other (the other did great).

We see (upward) social comparisons as the cognitive process that precedes the affective state of envy. Social comparison is here the antecedent process and can trigger many emotions such as envy, dissatisfaction, and regret (Boles & Messick, 1995), resentment and frustration (Feather, 2008), and positive emotions such as pride (Van Osch, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2018) and admiration (Van de Ven, 2017). Smith’s (2000) theoretical model helps

to predict specific emotions from social comparison. Envy arises from *upward* social comparisons, where there is little control for self-improvement and where there is a dual focus on both the other and the self. Based on the subtypes approach, we agree that this fits for *malicious* envy but not for benign envy (as we explain later).

The relation between social comparison and envy resembles that between upward counterfactual thinking and regret. A counterfactual is a comparison of the current state with what it could have been (Roese, 1997). People feel regret when they generate counterfactual thoughts in which decisions turned out better (Zeelenberg et al., 1998). Counterfactual thinking is thus the cognitive antecedent of the affective reaction regret. This cognitive/affective distinction also resembles a difference in social comparisons and envy. The dispositional tendency to make social comparisons to others, as measured by the Iowa-Netherlands Social Comparison Orientation (INCOM; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999), is the more cognitive component with items like "I often compare myself with others with respect to what I have accomplished in life." Dispositional envy, as measured by the Dispositional Envy Scale (DES; Smith, Parrott, Diener, Hoyle, & Kim, 1999), is more affective with items like "I feel envy every day."¹ In emotion terms, the upward social comparison is seen as the cognitive appraisal of a situation, which is the antecedent of the affective experience envy (Smith, 2000). Zeelenberg and Pieters (2007) found that dispositional envy was indeed predicted by the INCOM and also by dispositional shame and self-esteem.

The effects of upward social comparisons extend to anticipations of envy. Research by Hoelzl and Loewenstein (2005) shows that nicely. They had participants play a 100-ball bingo game in which participants paid \$0.10 in each round to draw a ball. Drawn balls were not replaced, and when a winning ball was drawn the participant would win \$7. Participants were more persistent (played more rounds) when they knew that the next participant would continue with their bingo cage, instead of starting with a new cage

¹ As a further illustration of seeing social comparisons as the more cognitive construct and envy as the more affective, the research of Seuntjens, Zeelenberg, Van de Ven, and Breugelmans (2015) had related these constructs to materialism and greed. Materialism is more cognitive (reflecting the importance one attaches to possessions; Belk, 1985); greed is more affective (the insatiable desire to always want more; Seuntjens et al., 2015). Seuntjens et al. found that the INCOM relates most strongly to materialism, while the DES relates most to greed. Note that the DES as the dispositional tendency to be envious mainly contains items about the hostile, malicious type of envy. Furthermore, the INCOM is broader than the DES, as the DES is always about upward social comparisons while the INCOM can also be about making downward social comparisons.

with 100 balls. They did so because it would be so painful if the next participant would win with “their” bingo cage. It seems that envy was anticipated, and participants played longer to avoid this from happening.

Domain Importance

The social comparison literature is also clear in that comparisons in more important domains have stronger effects (Festinger, 1954). This mimics again what we know about emotions: emotions are felt when our concerns are threatened or satisfied, and the more important the concern is, the more intense the emotion will be (Frijda, 1988). There is some research that finds an effect of domain importance on the intensity of envy (Bers & Rodin, 1984; Salovey & Rodin, 1984, 1991; Tesser & Smith, 1980). For example, Bers and Rodin found that younger children tend to become envious every time another child is better off, while older children only become envious if the other child is better off in a domain that is important. The reason is that these younger children cannot yet distinguish between important and nonimportant situations: everything is important to them. As we explained before, Salovey and Rodin (1991) found that males and females are more envious in domains that are important from an evolutionary perspective (wealth and status for males, attractiveness for females).

Target Similarity

People are mainly envious of others who are initially similar to them (Salovey & Rodin, 1984). This again closely follows research from the social comparison literature that finds that people compare themselves more to those thought to be more similar (Festinger, 1954; Tesser, 1991; Tesser & Smith, 1980). This idea has a long history. Aristotle (350 BC/1954) already argued that we are especially envious of those close in time, place, age, or reputation. Bacon (1597) eloquently stated “Envy is ever joined with the comparing of a man’s self: and where there is no comparison, no envy; and therefore kings are not envied but by kings.” This idea also has empirical support. For example, Schaubroeck and Lam (2004) found that people who were rejected for a promotion themselves were more envious of the person who did get

the promotion when that other person was considered to be more similar to themselves. All of these concepts can likely be traced back to the relevance of the comparison other (see Festinger, 1954): Is their performance of relevance to how we should evaluate our own performance?

Another related factor is that this effect of similar (and relevant) others on envy is the counterfactual nature of envy (Ben-Ze'ev, 1992; Elster, 1991). For envy, the counterfactual comparison is social. In other words, the more a person feels "it could have been me" when someone else is better off, the more envious he or she feels (Van de Ven & Zeelenberg, 2015). If my old neighborhood friend is now much more successful than I am, it is easier to think "it could have been me" and become envious. After all, I had the same upbringing, primary school, and so on, which makes the better position the other person is in a much more painful social comparison. This is also consistent with the concept of "related attributes" (Goethals & Darley, 1977), the idea that we prefer to compare to those similar to us (with whom we have shared attributes) because their position is more informative for us. In the case of envy, seeing someone with related attributes outperform oneself leads to more intense envy, possibly via these easier to generate counterfactuals.

Antecedents of Benign and Malicious Envy

The antecedents discussed so far are important for both benign and malicious envy (Van de Ven et al., 2009). But what determines whether the envy will be of the benign or the malicious type? In emotion theory, the antecedents that give rise to an emotion are called appraisals (Roseman et al., 1994). Appraisals are the cognitive evaluations of a situation, and specific combinations of appraisals can give rise to specific emotions. For example, both regret and disappointment arise after one perceives a situation to be bad for oneself, but regret arises when one blames oneself for the bad outcome, while disappointment arises when one blames external factors (Van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2002). So what appraisals differentiate benign envy from malicious envy? Several factors have been identified.

First, two appraisals (that are also seen as core appraisals; Feather, McKee, & Bekker, 2011; Roseman et al., 1996) that differ are deservedness and perceived control (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2012). When the superior

position of the target of the upward social comparison is perceived as undeserved, malicious envy becomes more likely (relative to benign envy). This also fits with prior work that found that injustice or perceptions of unfairness were important antecedents of envy, as measured in its malicious form (Smith, Parrot, Ozer, & Moniz, 1994).

When situations are more deserved, the second appraisal that was found to distinguish malicious and benign envy was the perception that one has control over obtaining the object of the social comparison: more perceived control elicits more benign envy. Note that this differs from the model of Smith (2000) on when specific emotions result from social comparison. He indicated that envy is an emotion resulting from upward social comparisons where there is little control over achieving the outcome oneself. This appears true for malicious envy but not for benign envy.

Research also found that people experience more benign (relative to malicious) envy when they have a strong tie to the target of the upward comparison (Lin & Utz, 2015; Park & Yang, 2015). For example, Lin and Utz found that when people indicate that the bond with the person they envied was a close relationship, they were more likely to feel benign envy (instead of malicious envy) for something the other posted on Facebook. Another antecedent that differs between benign and malicious envy is the type of pride displayed by upward comparison target (Lange & Crusius, 2015b). When upward comparison targets display hubristic pride (being arrogant, smug), malicious envy was more likely to occur, while when targets displayed authentic pride (being accomplished, confident), benign envy became more likely. In both cases, the effects might occur via deservedness: for an upward comparison target that we like, we might think it is more deserved if he or she gets something nice. Similarly, for those whose accomplishments are seen as authentic, their advantage is more likely to be perceived as being deserved. This way, these other antecedents might actually have an effect via perceived deservedness.

Another potential antecedent is the focus of attention. In general, the focus in envy lies on what the other has that one misses oneself. As Smith (2000) had already indicated, envy has a dual focus on both the other person and oneself (see also Van de Ven et al., 2009). However, recent empirical work suggests that the exact role of what people focus on is a bit more nuanced. Crusius and Lange (2014) found that the benignly envious people focus their attention relatively more on the *object* of envy, while maliciously envious

people focus their attention more on the target *person*. Note that these authors suggest that this difference in focus *causes* the difference in benign and malicious envy, but it might actually also be a *consequence* of it. Further research could clarify this. This research also raises the possibility that this difference in focus might also be important for studying assimilation and contrast effects resulting from social comparison: perhaps a stronger focus on the object makes assimilative responses more likely, while a stronger focus on the person makes contrastive responses more likely.

Who Is Likely to Be Envious?

Research on the DES (Smith et al., 1999) found that those who are more neurotic and those with a lower self-esteem are more likely to experience envy. Perhaps these people tend to ruminate more over the upward social comparison, making the experience more affectively negative and thereby increasing envy. Furthermore, those who are more likely to make social comparisons in general (as measured via the INCOM; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999; see also Chapter 4 in this volume) are more likely to be envious (see Smith et al., 1999), so personality traits that are related to the INCOM are also likely to be related to the dispositional tendency to be envious.

Regarding the envy types, research found that narcissism's relationship with envy depends on the type of narcissism and the type of envy. Narcissistic admiration (the desire to be admired) led to a hope for success, and when others do better people tend to experience benign envy (Lange, Crusius, & Birkmayer, 2016). Narcissistic rivalry (the desire to outdo others), in contrast, leads to a fear of failure, which in turn makes malicious envy more likely. Also, in another typology of narcissism, it appears to be vulnerable narcissists (again those who fear failure) who are more maliciously envious (Krizan & Johar, 2012).

To summarize, envy arises after an upward comparison. As is the case in social comparison, the comparison is more likely and/or has stronger effects when it is in a relevant domain, with others who are thought to be similar to us, and when the comparison or counterfactual thought is easier to make. Perceived deservedness, perceived control, liking the other, and the focus of attention during the comparison all seem important in determining whether the envy will be of the malicious or the benign type.

Consequences of Envy

As with any emotion, envy has clear action tendencies that help the organism deal with the situation that gave rise to the emotion. In general, positive emotions signal that things are going well and that one can enjoy the current situation and explore one's surrounding; negative emotions indicate that there is a problem and action is needed to deal with it (Frijda, 1988). For envy the problem is, as we discussed before, the threat to relative status. The action tendencies are then to remove this threat by pulling the superior person down from his or her position (malicious envy) or by moving up oneself (benign envy). We discuss these two main consequences of envy in the next subsections. We follow this with other possible consequences of envy, based on emotion theory.

Consequences of Malicious Envy

Initial work on envy has mainly focused on the negative consequences it would lead to. Envy was found to contain hostile feelings toward the envied (Smith et al., 1994). Envy can be so intense that people also hurt others at their own expense: the envious were found to be willing to give up some of their own money, if that allowed them to destroy even more money from the person they envied (Zizzo & Oswald, 2001). Participants did not want to cooperate with those who were already better off, even if that also meant a worse outcome for themselves (Parks, Rumble, & Posey, 2002). Malicious envy also hurts social relationships. Employees of a bank were found to dislike colleagues who received a promotion, and the dislike was fueled by envy (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004). Envy made people gossip more about the envied (Wert & Salovey, 2004). Malicious envy is thought to have these destructive effects in society. Aly (2014) argues that envy of the success of the Jews fueled their persecution in Nazi Germany. Schoeck (1969) sees malicious envy as an important force that prevents the development of poor countries. The idea is that when people fear the envy of others (see also the penultimate section of this chapter), they try not to stand out in a positive way. This in turn hinders progress in society.

The negative motivation of malicious envy can also take a different form, in which people try to differentiate themselves from the people they envy. This closely resembles the idea of social differentiation in the social comparison

literature (Lemaine, 1974). As the maliciously envious dislike experiencing their envy, they might attempt to change the domain of comparison to one in which the frustrating upward social comparison no longer exists. A clear example of social differentiation was found in the consumer domain (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2011a), where consumers who were maliciously envious of another consumer who owned an iPhone (that is relatively more playful and frivolous) increased their preference for a BlackBerry (that is relatively more professional) in an attempt to change the domain of the upward comparison. This can also take more drastic forms, as for example Vecchio (2005) found that those (maliciously) envious at work were more likely to want to leave the organization they worked for (possibly in an attempt to avoid the upward social comparison to the envied coworker). Consistent with this is also the work of Duffy and Shaw (2000) who found that in groups in which members were (maliciously) envious of a group member performed worse, possibly because they started to focus their attention on other things.

Consequences of Benign Envy

Besides these well-documented negative and destructive consequences of envy, recent research also found more positive effects of envy (Cohen-Charash, 2009; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004). These findings are among others in organizational psychology. Employees who were envious of their colleagues also became more motivated to do better themselves. Aside from these effects on general motivational tendencies that were hypothesized (and found) to be part of the benign type of envy (Van de Ven, 2009), research also found more specific effects on motivation. For example, students who were benignly envious of a fellow student who outperformed them planned to spend more time studying the next semester (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2011b), and those who were benignly envious of someone who owned an attractive phone indicated a higher willingness to pay (Van de Ven et al., 2011a).

Aside from these motivations and intentions, research has documented instances of actual self-improvement resulting from benign envy as well. The benignly envious worked longer on a task and actually performed better on a task that required creativity and intelligence (Van de Ven et al., 2011b). Marathon runners with a dispositional tendency to be benignly envious set more difficult goals for themselves and ran a faster race (Lange & Crusius,

2015a). There is thus clear support for the idea that benign envy not only creates the action tendency to improve oneself but also triggers actual behavior to do so.

The idea that benign envy motivates also fits with past work in the social comparison literature that suggests that some frustration is needed for an upward comparison to really motivate self-improvement (Johnson, 2012). Initially, Van de Ven et al. (2011b) indeed found that only benign envy (that includes such a frustration) motivated self-improvement, while the pleasant feeling of admiration did not. However, more recent work found that admiration does also inspire and can lead to self-improvement (Schindler, Paech, & Löwenbrück, 2015; Van de Ven, 2017). The key difference seems that benign envy motivates people to improve themselves at that moment, while admiration inspires more long-term growth and makes individuals rethink what is important (Blatz, Lange, & Crusius, 2016). This fits the core ideas of emotion theory, that negative emotions help an individual to deal with concrete problems that need to be dealt with now, while positive emotions signal that things go well and one can explore future opportunities (Fredrickson, 2001).

Other Possible Consequences

Obviously, like with any emotion, one does not always need to act on the action tendencies associated with an emotion. When feeling angry, one might want to smack someone or something, but social norms and willpower can often prevent one from doing so. The same holds for envy: the action tendencies are not always acted upon. Furthermore, Cohen-Charash and Larson (2017) argue that the subtypes view of envy focuses only on the motivation to do better and the motivation to damage the position of the superior other and that envy can lead to other behavior as well. In the subtypes view of envy, we agree that these motivations are indeed *part of* the envious experience, as action tendencies form an integral part of an emotion and are therefore also the most important behavioral consequences of envy. We do agree that there are likely other ways to cope with envy, just like there are other ways one can cope with anger than by giving in to its primary motivation to take offensive action toward the object of anger. Just because people can cope with anger in various ways does not detract from the fact that aggression and taking offensive action against that which causes the anger is a key part of the anger

experience. Next we explain how emotion regulation and reappraisal might affect the envious experience and behavior resulting after feeling envy.

For example, work on emotion reappraisal (Gross, 1998) indicated that by reappraising a situation, the felt emotion (and accompanying action tendencies) can be changed. When a colleague gets an undeserved promotion, this can initially trigger malicious envy. But by rethinking whether it is really undeserved (she does work hard, she did really well on that last project, etc.), the perception can change to seeing the promotion as being deserved, which transforms the experience from malicious envy into benign envy. Feelings of envy can also be reduced by attempts to see the domain of comparison as less important (“I do not want to make a promotion anyway”) or to reduce the perceived similarity to the comparison target (“I am more a specialist; she is more a generalist and that is probably what they need”). Basically, changing anything in the perception that is a likely antecedent of envy is likely to change the experience of envy (including subsequent action tendencies). Gross’s model of emotion regulation provides many more possible ways regarding how people cope with emotion, ranging from refocusing their attention (distracting) to using humor. But, at the core, envy will have action tendencies aimed at restoring the status balance to its default response (as the key action tendencies that are part of this emotion all help to do this; Van de Ven et al., 2009). Note that, in this way, even malicious envy can be beneficial to the individual; if a person really feels that it is undeserved that a colleague received a promotion, malicious envy might help him or her to pull down the person from his or her unfairly held position, thereby restoring his or her relative status again.

Longer Term Effects of Envy

Envy, as any emotion, is a rather fleeting experience. A specific set of appraisals of a situation trigger the emotion, but after a short while it fades again. With a repeated exposure to an upward social comparison target, the experience of envy is likely to evolve over time (Hoogland, Thielke, & Smith, 2016; Smith, 2004). A reason why a prolonged experience of envy makes it likely that the experience evolves into a different experience is that, if envy cannot be resolved, it loses its functional benefits. For example, a motivation to improve oneself resulting from benign envy that is not fulfilled is useless. When confronted with a superior target for a longer time (the colleague who

was promoted instead), various changes can take place depending on the change in appraisal of the situation. For example, when one stops comparing one's own position, the envy might turn into admiration when the other does well or resentment when he or she does badly.

An interesting question is how envy changes when one becomes older. Henniger and Harris (2015) found that younger people tend to be more envious than older people. It is unclear still whether this effect exists because people become gradually less envious when they become older or whether this is a generational effect (that people from this generation tend to be more envious). What is clear is that, when people become older, they become envious for different things. This again reflects the effect of the importance of the domain of comparison, as for example scholastic success, looks, and romantic success becomes less important with increasing age.

Other long-term effects of envy might be inferred from its relationship to other personality traits or general life outcomes. As we discussed earlier, the DES measures individual differences in the tendency to experience envy (from the subtypes view of envy, it actually seems to measure the malicious type of envy more; see also Lange & Crusius, 2015). As part of their scale validation, Smith et al. (1999) found that the more envious people tend to be, the more likely they are to be depressed and the lower their well-being. More research into such long-term consequences, with special emphasis on establishing causality, would be welcome. From a subtypes view of envy, using the scales to measure dispositional benign and malicious envy developed by Lange and Crusius (2015a) would then allow additionally valuable insights (for scales assessing dispositional benign and malicious envy in work settings, see Sterling, Van de Ven, & Smith, 2016).

The Fear of Being Envied: Being the Target of an Upward Comparison

If we reverse the lens, envy research can also shed light on how people respond to being the target of an upward comparison. The anthropologist Foster (1972) documented examples from various cultures on how people respond to being envied. He argued that to ward off the possible negative consequences of envy, the better off would first try to hide their advantage (in other words, prevent the social comparison). If that would not work or would not be possible, the better off would downplay their advantage

(in other words, reduce the magnitude of the upward comparison). If that again would not work, they would appease the envious by providing them with a sop (making the others slightly better off to reduce the magnitude of the upward comparison). Finally, if all these strategies did not work they would engage in true sharing of their advantage, creating equality to prevent others from making an upward comparison. His ideas were supported with anecdotes from various cultures, but these steps (and whether they indeed are attempted in this order) have to the best of our knowledge not been tested empirically.

The core of this idea, that people do not like to be envied and thus do not like to be the target of an upward comparison, is also the base of the STTUC model by Exline and Lobel (1999, see also Chapter 11 in this book). Based on the social comparison literature (e.g., Brickman & Bulman, 1977), Exline and Lobel created an elegant framework that helps to predict when people feel bad when doing better than others. To summarize the STTUC model, people feel bad about outperforming others when the better off think that (a) another person makes an upward comparison, (b) the person who is better off feels threatened by this comparison because of possible negative responses it could trigger in others, and (c) the person who is better off cares about the relationship with the one making the upward comparison or worries that it has a negative effect on his or her own situation. Given that envy results from an upward comparison, (a) it is characterized by feelings of inferiority and frustration, (b) it can lead to very destructive effects, and (c) it is clear that when people think they are being envied, this likely matches the triggers of the STTUC model.

Based on Foster's (1972) idea that people fear being envied and the STUCC model, Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters (2010) predicted that people would not like being maliciously envied but would not mind as much if they were benignly envied. The reason is that although benign envy is still a frustrating experience for the person who feels it, it does not lead to destructive behavior toward the envied nor is it likely to hurt the relationship with the envied person. This is indeed what Van de Ven et al. found: when participants had undeservedly won 5 euro, they expected to be maliciously envied by another participant who did not win anything. As a result, they were more likely to help that other participant. For example, in one study the other participant was actually a confederate who knocked over a box with pens, and participants who thought the confederate was likely maliciously envious were more likely to help pick up these pens. When participants held

a deserved advantage, they expected the confederate to be benignly envious and were less likely to help them pick up the pens. Consistent with this is work by Rodriguez-Mosquera, Parrott, and Hurtado de Mendoza (2010), who found that people favor situations in which others covet what they have (which resembles more benign envy) but fear being (maliciously) envied. Other related findings more directly test the role of deservingness in the STTUC model (Koch & Totten, 2015) and the role of being envied in the consumer domain (Romani, Grappi, & Bagozzi, 2016).

Conclusion

Envy is an emotion that can arise from upward social comparisons. At its broadest level, envy is the pain at the good fortune of others. Emotions bring about goals, and for envy the goal is to reduce the gap between oneself and the superior other person. Envy has two subtypes: benign and malicious envy. For benign envy, reducing the gap with the other will be done by improving one's own position. For malicious envy, reducing this gap will be done by pulling the superior other down. The social comparison literature has provided valuable insights that have helped to make predictions on the antecedents of envy. Similarly, we are confident that the envy literature can also provide inspiration for research on social comparisons.

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