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The Envy Premium in Product Evaluation

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Consumers are willing to pay a premium for products that elicit their envy. The more people compared themselves to a superior other, the higher the envy premium was. Yet, the emotion envy and not the upward comparison drove the final effects. The envy premium only emerged for a desirable product that the superior other owned (iPhone) when people experienced benign envy. Benign envy is elicited when the other's superior position is deserved, and malicious envy when it is undeserved. When people experienced malicious envy, the envy premium emerged for a desirable product that the superior other did not own (BlackBerry). This shows how benign envy places a premium on keeping up, and malicious envy on moving away from, superior others.

A colleague considered buying an iPhone for some time. Because it was more expensive than other phones, she kept deferring the purchase. Yet, when a friend bought an iPhone, she bought one too, the next day. The higher price of the iPhone lost its meaning when envy kicked in.

Consumers often want what other consumers have. Economists have described this social influence under various names, such as the bandwagon effect (Leibenstein 1950) and "keeping-up-with-the-Joneses" (Frank 1999). Such terms describe that consumers' preferences depend on other people's possessions, but they do not explain why this occurs. A preference for products and services that others already possess is likely to have multiple determinants. We propose here that a primary motivation is envy. Envy is an emotion that "occurs when a person lacks another's superior quality,

achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it" (Parrott and Smith 1993, 906).

The idea behind a phenomenon like keeping-up-with-the-Joneses is that people compare their situation to that of others, realize that they are worse off, and take action to resolve this. However, making such an upward comparison does not seem a sufficient condition to take action: people regularly see others who are better off than themselves, without this having an influence on their feelings and behavior. We argue here that a prerequisite for these effects to occur is that the comparisons give rise to envy.

Envy is a negative emotion associated with a desire to reduce the gap between oneself and the superior other (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2007; Smith and Kim 2007). Envy is typically thought to be malicious and destructive in nature. Schoeck (1969, 140) defined envy as "the consuming desire that no one should have anything, the destruction of pleasure in and for others, without deriving any sort of advantage from this." Consumer envy is seen as one of the negative unintended consequences of mass advertising that may lead to pulling other people down, thus harming the social fabric of society (Pollay 1986). Envy, as one of the components of trait materialism, has indeed been documented to negatively affect subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Belk 1985).

This destructive, bleak portrait of envy is at odds with the common idea in economics that envy is the engine of economic growth, by increasing consumers' achievement motivation and raising their purchasing and spending rates (Corneo and Jeanne 1997, 2001a, 2001b). As a case in point, the advertising agency Young and Rubicam (2009) promises

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to boost the “envy potential” of their clients’ products, claiming that this would make them sell better. In the current article, we focus on this more productive, bright portrait of envy that is aimed at improving the position of the envious person. Let us first discuss relevant envy theory and then propose a solution for the paradox that envy appears destructive and constructive at the same time.

ENVY THEORY

Envy is not the result of all upward comparisons to another person, but primarily from those with people that are superior in a domain that is important to oneself (Bers and Rodin 1984). Social comparisons are more likely to be made with people who are initially similar (Festinger 1954), and indeed the more similar another person is, the more intense the envy is expected to be if that person is better off (Elster 1991; Salovey and Rodin 1984). Envy is typically thought to contain a destructive motivation to harm the envied person and is seen as something to be avoided (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2007; Smith and Kim 2007). Indeed, most of the major religions explicitly condemn envy: the Talmud (Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 4:2) describes sages who prayed, “Let me not be envious of others, and let others not be envious of me.” Envy is forbidden in the Ten Commandments in the Judeo-Christian tradition (Exod. 20:17): “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any things that is thy neighbour’s.” It is one of the seven deadly sins in Catholic philosophy (attributed to Pope Gregory I). Muhammed (in Abu Daud) stated, “Keep yourselves far from envy, because it eats up and takes away good actions, like the fire that eats up and burns wood.” The conviction that envy is hostile and malicious appears to be a recurring theme with a long history.

The harmfulness of envy, for both the envied and the envious, is well established in different fields of study (Beckman et al. 2002; Duffy and Shaw 2000; Hoelzl and Loewenstein 2005; Parks, Rumble, and Posey 2002; Vecchio 2005; Zizzo 2002; Zizzo and Oswald 2001). Zizzo, for example, found that participants who were envious of another were willing to destroy some of their own money, if that would lead to the destruction of even more money from the person they envied. Schoeck (1969) argued in an early review on envy that the fear of being envied by others prevents people from striving for excellence, thereby hindering the progress of societies as a whole (see also Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters, forthcoming). Overall, these theories and empirical findings paint a grim picture of envy and its destructive implications.

As argued earlier, envy may not only be that gloomy. Philosophers have argued that envy can also motivate economic strivings and propel people to work harder in order to earn the coveted goods owned by others (Aristotle 1954; Epstein 2003; Kant 1780/1997; Neu 1980). More recently, Belk (2008, 213) portrayed consumer envy as a mildly positive form of envy that “more likely leads to emulation than immolation.” He sees consumer envy as a constructive de-

sire to acquire the coveted good and contrasts it from “envy proper” (the destructive type of envy aimed at degrading the other person).

This brighter side of envy has only recently received empirical attention. Cohen-Charash (2009) found that although experiencing envy in the workplace had negative consequences for well-being, it also led to a desire to improve one’s own position. Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters (2009) found empirical support for two distinct types of envy, in research conducted in the Netherlands, the United States, and Spain. They found that benign and malicious envy can be distinguished on the basis of their experiential content, that is, the feelings, thoughts, action tendencies, actions, and motivations that compose the entire experience of the emotion (Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz 1994). The envy types differed on this entire experiential content, but the differences in motivations are most important. Maliciously envious people feel frustrated and try to level the difference with the superior others by pulling those others down. Benignly envious people also feel frustrated, but they try to level the difference by moving themselves up. It is important to note here that both types of envy are not associated with a motivation to be like the other, but rather they motivate behavior to solve the inequality by increasing one’s own (benign envy) or decreasing the other’s relative standing (malicious envy). Although both types of envy were found to be equally intense and equally negative, they are qualitatively different experiences and trigger different motivations. The key appraisal that determines whether benign or malicious envy is elicited is the perceived deserv- ingness of the other person’s advantage. If the other’s advantage is deserved, people feel benignly envious, and if it is not deserved, they feel maliciously envious (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2010a).

Benign and malicious envy were also found to be clearly different from the related emotions admiration and resentment (Van de Ven et al. 2009, 2010b). Among the various differences between the experience of admiration and benign envy, three stood out most. First, admiration is a pleasant experience, while the frustrating experience of benign envy clearly is not. Second, participants who had recalled an instance of benign envy reported that, as a consequence, they had become motivated to improve their own situation, while those who recalled experiences of admiration had not. Third, a content analysis of the episodes of benign envy and admiration that participants had reported revealed that stories about benign envy usually contained explicit comparisons, whereas those of admiration hardly ever contained such comparisons. For example, a typical benign envy story read, “My friend got a better grade than I did,” while a typical admiration story read, “I admired a swimmer at the last Olympics who was only 14 years old.” This latter dimension—whether or not explicit comparisons to the other person were made—differentiated malicious envy from resentment. Only when recalling an episode of malicious envy did participants compare themselves to the other person in their story, while they hardly ever did for resentment. An-

other difference between resentment and malicious envy is that resentment is elicited if the other is to blame for the undeserved situation, whereas malicious envy is likely to arise when the undeserved advantage of the other is due to situational factors. Taken together, this shows that benign and malicious envy differ in experiential content from each other, but also from related other positive and negative emotions.

We build on the distinction between benign and malicious envy to provide insight into the various ways in which envy may motivate the behavior of consumers. We believe that the solution to the paradox that envy can both lead to destructive behavior and stimulate economic growth lies in the phenomenology of the distinct envy types. Because only benign envy is associated with a motivation to improve, we speculate that only consumers who are benignly envious of another consumer are willing to pay more for the envy-eliciting product.

THE ENVY PREMIUM

If benign envy is associated with a motivation to improve oneself and to move up, it is likely that a benignly envious person is willing to pay more for the product possessed by the superior comparison other. By obtaining the product, one moves up to the same level as the envied person, thus nullifying the frustration of being outperformed by the other. We term this increased willingness to pay (WTP) the “envy premium.” The colleague in our opening example who bought an iPhone when a friend had bought one, acknowledged that she was benignly envious, which made her overcome her initial reservations regarding the price of the product.

Earlier research in the consumer domain indeed found that when people recall an experience in which another person had something more attractive than they had themselves, self-reported envy and the desire for that product were related (Ackerman, MacInnis, and Folkes 2000). However, the correlational approach of that research precluded pinpointing the causal mechanisms. Instead of reflecting our idea that envy increases the desire for a product, the reported finding may have resulted from desired goods being envied more. The latter explanation is consistent with research that envy is more intense if the domain of comparison is important to a person (Bers and Rodin 1984; Salovey and Rodin 1985; Tesser and Smith 1980).

An objective of the present research is to examine whether envy actually increases the desire for a product by experimentally inducing envy, and by testing which type of envy can do so. We predicted an increased WTP (envy premium) only in the case of benign envy, not in the case of malicious envy. Malicious envy is associated with a desire to pull down the other person, and there is no reason to expect that this would increase the WTP for the envy-eliciting product. We return to the specific effects of malicious envy in experiment 3, but first focus on establishing the envy premium for benign envy. We tested the envy premium hypothesis:

H1: Benign envy increases the willingness to pay for a desirable product.

This hypothesis was tested in experiments 1–3. Experiment 1 manipulated and measured the tendency of participants to compare with others, and tested whether this influenced their WTP for something that a superior person had. We predicted that the more people compared themselves to this person, the more they would be willing to pay for it, but that this effect would be driven by their (benign) envy. In experiment 2, we asked participants to imagine being benignly envious toward someone with an attractive product, to imagine being maliciously envious toward that person, or to imagine that they really liked a product that someone owned (as a control condition) to test whether that influenced their WTP for the attractive product. Finally, in experiment 3, we used a manipulation designed to directly induce either benign or malicious envy in participants, via a video of a fellow student who talked about an attractive product that he owned. We manipulated whether product ownership was deserved (benign envy) or undeserved (malicious envy). Although the perceived value of a desirable product should not be influenced by whether ownership by the other person was deserved or not (if consumers would focus on the product only), we predicted that it actually would be because perceived deservingness determines the type of envy that is elicited.

EXPERIMENT 1

The goal of this experiment was to test whether consumers who compare themselves more to a superior other would be willing to pay more for something that this other person had, and whether the effect was driven by (benign) envy. Consumers compare themselves most to those who are similar (Festinger 1954; Suls, Martin, and Wheeler 2002). We confronted participants with either a similar or a dissimilar other person, and expected effects on benign envy and the WTP mainly when they were confronted with the similar other. Furthermore, we added a condition in which we explicitly asked participants to compare themselves to the dissimilar other. In that condition, we thus created a comparison and therefore expected the same results as in the condition where participants were confronted with a similar other. Finally, we also measured the participant’s general tendency to compare to others, by means of the INCOM scale (Gibbons and Buunk 1999). We expected stronger effects for people who generally compare themselves to others, because they should also be inclined to be more benignly envious. The superior position of the other was always deserved, to elicit the benign type of envy.

Method

Participants (157 students at Tilburg University, 126 female, $M_{\text{age}} = 20$ years, $SD = 2.40$) took part in a series of experiments in exchange for course credit, of which ours was part. They were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Participants learned about an organization (StageBank.nl) that arranges desirable internships for students. In a “control” condition, the participants ($n = 39$)

learned about a highly attractive internship they arranged. In the three experimental conditions, they were confronted with a high-achieving student who obtained the attractive internship via the organization. This student was described either as similar to them (“similar other” condition, $n = 40$), as a student who was different from them (“dissimilar other” condition, $n = 39$), or as a student who was different—but we explicitly asked students to compare themselves to this student (“dissimilar other forced comparison” condition, $n = 39$). The similar other condition is provided as appendix A.

In the similar other condition, the person described in the story was always of the same gender as the participant, had a typical background for a psychology student, and studied at the same university. In the dissimilar other condition, the psychology student had an uncommon background for a typical psychology student (had first finished a degree in business engineering), was older than the typical student (30 years), was from a different university, and always differed in gender from the participant. We expected that these differences would make it less likely that participants would compare themselves to this other person and would therefore not become envious. In the dissimilar other forced comparison situation, we explicitly asked students to first think about the similarities that existed with this other student. By doing so, we forced them to compare themselves to this other person, which made it likely again that they would envy this person. Finally, the control condition served as a baseline for what people were willing to pay for the services of StageBank.nl. All references to another student were removed from the description of the situation, and the highly attractive internship at the hospital was described as a typical internship that StageBank.nl could arrange (with all the positive aspects that were presented in the other conditions).

After reading this information, participants answered several questions. The main dependent variable was whether the participant would be willing to pay for the services that StageBank.nl provides (yes/no), and if so, how much they would be willing to pay. Next, they indicated how important an internship was to them (1 = not at all; 7 = extremely so). After this, they completed questions related to the person described in the story. Since the control condition did not include another person, those participants did not receive these questions. Participants indicated how similar they thought they were compared to the other person, whether they were benignly envious (*benijden* in Dutch), whether they were maliciously envious (*afgunst* in Dutch), and whether they admired (*bewonderen* in Dutch) the other person. Finally, we asked them how deserving they had found it that the person in the story obtained the internship (all on 7-point scales, from 1 = not at all, to 7 = very much so). At the end of the whole session (with unrelated studies in between), the participant’s disposition to compare to other people was assessed by means of the 11 questions of the INCOM scale, all with 5-point agree-disagree response scales ($\alpha = .83$; Gibbons and Buunk 1999). A representative item from this scale is: “If I want to find out how well I

have done something, I compare what I have done with how others have done.”

Results and Discussion

The results are summarized in table 1. First of all, participants generally found an internship to be very important to them ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 0.98$), which is significantly higher than the midpoint of the importance scale ($t(156) = 20.35$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = .73$). There were no differences between conditions on how important participants found an internship to be. This suggests that all participants would potentially be interested in the services that StageBank.nl provides. Our manipulation of similarity was successful, as the participants in the similar other condition found the student described in the story to be more similar to them than the participants in both dissimilar other conditions.

The superior student was always described such that the internship was deserved, and participants indeed indicated that they thought this was the case in all conditions ($M = 6.36$, $SD = 0.62$), which is significantly higher than the midpoint of the deservingness scale ($t(118) = 41.26$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = .94$). This makes it likely that if envy was elicited, it would be the benign type of envy and not the malicious type. Consistent with this is that the intensity of malicious envy was low, while the intensities of benign envy and admiration were high. More important, no differences existed between conditions for malicious envy and admiration, but there were clear differences for benign envy. As predicted, participants in the similar other condition were more benignly envious of the person than those in the dissimilar other condition. Moreover, when participants were explicitly asked to compare themselves to the dissimilar other in the dissimilar other forced comparison condition, they became more benignly envious as well. This indicates that when comparisons do not automatically arise, but are triggered by external circumstances, the typical envious response arises as well.

We also observed the predicted effects on the crucial dependent variable: how much participants were willing to pay for the services of StageBank.nl. Analyses were conducted on the log-transformed WTP measure because it is positively skewed, but untransformed scores are used to describe the results for ease of presentation. Table 1 shows that in the similar other condition and the dissimilar other forced comparison condition, more participants wanted to pay for the services of StageBank.nl than those in both the dissimilar other and control conditions. The amount they were willing to pay also clearly differed between conditions.

We expected that the more participants compared themselves to others, the more they would be willing to pay for the services of StageBank.nl, but that this effect would exist because of benign envy (a mediational process). Both our manipulation and the INCOM measure were expected to affect whether participants made a comparison, so both were entered as independent variables (IVs) in the model. Note that the control condition was left out of this mediation model, as no benign envy was measured in that condition.

TABLE 1
RESULTS OF EXPERIMENT 1

Condition	Similar other		Dissimilar other		Dissimilar other—forced comparison		Control		Statistics		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Test	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Is an internship important to you?	5.58	(.90)	5.67	(1.01)	5.44	(1.10)	5.69	(.92)	$F(3, 153) = .54$	.655	.01
Is it deserved that the other has this internship?	6.52	(.55)	6.28	(.61)	6.28	(.69)			$F(2, 115) = 2.05$	.133	.03
Are you similar to described person?	4.52 ^a	(1.45)	3.59 ^b	(1.31)	3.87 ^b	(1.36)			$F(2, 115) = 4.81$	.010	.08
Are you benignly envious of the person who had the internship?	4.20 ^a	(1.95)	3.28 ^b	(1.52)	4.46 ^a	(1.68)			$F(2, 115) = 5.01$	.008	.08
Are you maliciously envious of the other who had the internship?	2.78	(1.49)	2.46	(1.45)	2.51	(1.23)			$F(2, 115) = .57$	.565	.01
Do you admire the other who had the internship?	5.68	(1.29)	5.51	(.85)	5.33	(1.28)			$F(2, 115) = .86$	.428	.02
Percentage willing to pay for StageBank.nl	85% ^a		64% ^b		87% ^a		62% ^b		$\chi^2(3, 157) = 11.30$	.010	NA
Amount willing to pay for StageBank.nl	€166 ^a	(441)	€27 ^b	(35)	€91 ^a	(127)	€45 ^b	(61)	$F(3, 153) = 5.72$	.001	.10
Social comparison orientation	3.84	(.47)	3.60	(.50)	3.83	(.59)	3.82	(.61)	$F(3, 153) = 1.68$	.174	.03

NOTE.—Means with different superscripts differ between conditions at $p < .05$. Analysis on WTP was done after log-transformation to normalize the distribution. Two participants in the “Similar other” condition were willing to pay €2,000. Dropping these cases did not change the results substantially, so they were retained.

Both the INCOM ($F(1, 114) = 5.30, p = .023, \eta_p^2 = .04$) and the manipulation ($F(2, 114) = 5.46, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .09$) affected the WTP. This confirmed that in conditions where comparisons were more likely to be made, the WTP was higher. Furthermore, the higher the participants’ dispositional tendency to compare themselves to others was, the higher their WTP was. Our general hypothesis was that these effects on WTP arise because of benign envy. Indeed, both the INCOM ($r(118) = .24, p = .010$) and the manipulation ($F(2, 114) = 3.73, p = .027, \eta_p^2 = .06$) affected the benign envy, confirming that the IVs have an effect on the proposed mediator. This supports that people who compare themselves to others more became more benignly envious. If we added benign envy as a mediator to the model described above (testing the effect of the manipulation and the INCOM on the WTP), the effect of benign envy on WTP is a strong one ($F(1, 114) = 16.43, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$). As predicted, the effect of the INCOM on WTP became insignificant: it dropped from $F(1, 114) = 5.30, p = .023, \eta_p^2 = .04$, to $F(1, 113) = 2.65, p = .106, \eta_p^2 = .02$. Furthermore, the effect of the manipulation also became (just) insignificant, from $F(2, 114) = 5.46, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .09$, to $F(2, 113) = 2.93, p = .058, \eta_p^2 = .05$, when benign envy was added as a covariate. Testing the mediation via the bootstrapping procedure of Preacher and Hayes (2008) confirmed that the effects both of the INCOM and of the manipulation on the WTP were mediated by benign envy at $p < .05$. This indicates that people who compare themselves to others (either generally or as a consequence of our manipulation) were more likely to become (benignly)

envious and therefore willing to pay more for the desirable product that a superior other had.

A question that might arise is whether the envious are willing to pay more for the services because they want to have what the other person has (as we predicted), or because they want to be like the other person. If this latter process would account for the results, it seems logical to expect a positive relationship between admiration and the WTP for the services of StageBank.nl, because admiration might be most likely to activate a desire to be like the other person. However, this alternative explanation is not supported by the data. Admiration was not significantly related to the WTP (if anything, it tended to be negatively related; $\beta = -.15, p = .097$), making it unlikely that people were more interested in the services of StageBank.nl because they wanted to be like the other person.

Participants who became benignly envious because a superior other experienced a desirable outcome of a service were willing to pay more for that service. The more they compared themselves to the other (as measured by their dispositional tendency to do so or manipulated through similarity or explicit instruction), the more they became benignly envious, which in turn raised their WTP.

In the next experiments, we manipulated envy more directly and focused on the effects of envy type. We also extend the current findings by using a product as the envy stimulus, instead of a service. Furthermore, envy in experiment 1 could have been elicited by the desirable service but also by the superior academic achievements of the comparison other, which we wanted to rule out in the next ex-

periments. There, we used the Apple iPhone as the envy-eliciting product.

EXPERIMENT 2

In experiment 2, the emotions were induced by asking participants to imagine being in a situation in which a fellow student owned an iPhone. Focusing on fellow students as the upward comparison target helped to again create a sense of similarity to the target, making envy more likely.

Method

Ninety participants (26 females, $M_{age} = 20$ years, $SD = 2.08$) took part in this experiment. They were randomly assigned to a benign envy condition, a malicious envy condition, or a control condition, with 30 participants per condition.

Participants read a short story with a color picture of the iPhone at the top, showing some of its features (touch-sensitive color screen, Internet, GPS, MP3 player). The participants were asked to imagine being in a situation in which they were working on a study-related task with some fellow students. One of the persons in the group already owned an iPhone and was showing the possibilities of the phone to the other group members. The participants were asked to imagine feeling jealous and some admiration for the fellow student (benign envy condition), to imagine feeling jealous and begrudging (the malicious envy condition), or just to imagine that they really liked the product (control condition). This manipulation was based on differences in the experiential content of benign and malicious envy (Van de Ven et al. 2009). The benign envy scenario and questions are shown in appendix B.

In line with previous research (Foster 1972; Neu 1980; Parrott and Smith 1993; Salovey and Rodin 1989; Schoeck 1969), we asked participants to imagine being somewhat jealous, as the word “jealousy” is colloquially used to indicate envy in the Netherlands and many other countries. Theoretically, jealousy is fear of losing something to another person (typically, a relationship partner), while envy exists if someone else is better off than oneself. The word “jealousy” is, however, commonly used to indicate envy (but not the other way around; Smith, Kim, and Parrott 1988). Also, people generally do not like to admit that they are envious, and the connotations of jealousy are somewhat less negative (Foster 1972; Neu 1980). We expected that participants would have less difficulty (and reactance against) imagining the situation when described in terms of jealousy. Finally, using the word “jealousy” as a base for envy with specific qualifications to steer the imagined situation toward either benign or malicious envy helps to show that any effects that we might find are not limited to the Dutch language, which has different words for benign and malicious envy (which we used in experiments 1 and 3).

After reading the scenario, participants indicated how much they liked to have the iPhone and how much effort they were willing to put into obtaining one (combined into

an “attractive to self” measure, $r(90) = .60, p < .001$). We expected those in the benign envy condition to find the product to be more attractive than those in the control and the malicious envy conditions. To explore whether the benignly envious only like the product more themselves, or whether they would also think that others would like the product more, we also asked participants to indicate how much they thought others would like to have the iPhone, and how much effort they thought others would be willing to put into obtaining one (combined into an “attractive to others” measure, $r(90) = .72, p < .001$). In this way, we could explore whether envy only signals to oneself that the product is liked, or whether it generalizes to an overall expectancy that others would like the product more as well. Finally, participants indicated the maximum price they were willing to pay for an iPhone, which we expected to be highest in the benign envy condition.

Results and Discussion

A 3×2 ANOVA with the manipulation (control vs. malicious envy vs. benign envy) as a between-subjects variable and the attractiveness to self and to others as a within-subjects variable revealed a main effect for the attractiveness to oneself and to others ($M_{Self} = 4.71, SD = 2.01; M_{Others} = 6.19, SD = 1.28; F(1, 87) = 57.79, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .40$). Thus, participants generally thought that others found an iPhone more attractive than they did themselves. More important, we observed a significant interaction effect ($F(2, 87) = 5.34, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .11$). As table 2 shows, participants in the benign envy condition found the iPhone to be more attractive than those in the control and malicious envy condition. Participants did not think others would find an iPhone more attractive in the benign envy condition; there were no differences on that measure between conditions. Furthermore, participants in the benign envy condition indeed indicated that they would be willing to pay more for an iPhone than the participants in both other conditions. Compared to the control condition, the benignly envious participants were willing to pay €60 more for an iPhone, an envy premium of 48%. These findings support hypothesis

TABLE 2

ATTRACTIVENESS RATINGS OF THE IPHONE FOR SELF AND OTHER, AND WTP IN EXPERIMENT 2

Condition	Self		Others		WTP	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Control	4.28 ^a	(2.22)	6.27	(1.39)	126 ^a	(79)
Malicious envy	4.35 ^a	(1.86)	6.23	(1.40)	145 ^a	(80)
Benign envy	5.50 ^b	(1.76)	6.07	(1.06)	187 ^b	(82)
Statistics	$F(2, 87) = 3.67$		$F(2, 87) = .17$		$F(2, 87) = 4.47$	
	$p = .030$		$p = .843$		$p = .014$	
	$\eta_p^2 = .08$		$\eta_p^2 = .00$		$\eta_p^2 = .09$	

NOTE.—Means with a different superscript differ between conditions at $p < .05$, tested with LSD post hoc comparisons. Attractiveness rating scales range from 0 (not attractive) to 9 (very attractive). WTP in euro.

1, showing that benign but not malicious envy increases the perceived attractiveness of a product and the WTP for it. To conclude, we find that people are willing to pay more for a product if they are benignly envious, not if they are maliciously envious.

MALICIOUS ENVY

In the final experiment, we examined the influence of benign envy on the WTP for attractive products once more, but now also studied the consequences of malicious envy in more detail. When someone is envious of another person who undeservedly owns an attractive product, the likely response is malicious envy. This type of envy triggers a motivation to pull the envied person down (Parks et al. 2002; Van de Ven et al. 2009; Zizzo and Oswald 2001). However, the experience of envy does signal to the person experiencing it that the domain in which one is outperformed is important (Salovey and Rodin 1984). Therefore, action tendencies aimed at removing the feeling of being outperformed are likely to arise. Whereas earlier research on (malicious) envy mainly zoomed in on its destructive (social and well-being) consequences, social comparison theories suggest an alternative response to feeling maliciously envious. That is, in addition to or instead of pulling down the other, consumers may turn to social differentiation to cope with malicious envy.

Social differentiation occurs when people who are outperformed in one domain seek out an alternative domain in which they can outperform the previously superior person (Lemaine 1974). For example, hockey players at the bottom of their league knew that the other teams were better than they were, but they also considered these other teams to play "dirty" (Lalonde 1992). Comparing themselves on this domain of ethical sportsmanship allowed them to feel better than the others, even though the other teams clearly had the better hockey players. People who were worse off than another person and were given another opportunity to compare themselves to this other, indeed chose to do so on a dimension in which they were superior (Wood, Giordano-Beech, and Ducharme 1999). In the literature on social identities, a similar process to social differentiation is described as "social creativity" (Tajfel and Turner 1979): people who were part of a group that had negative characteristics in comparison to another group rated their in-group as more favorable on other dimensions (Jackson et al. 1996).

A finding of Van de Ven et al. (2009) hints at the possibility that malicious envy might activate attempts at social differentiation. Participants who recalled an experience of malicious envy indicated that they "did not want to be near the other." Although it was interpreted in a physical way (that people did not want to be around the person whom they envied), this feeling could also reflect a more general desire to distance oneself from the other person. Whether this is actually the case is unclear, however. There is a growing literature on distancing from dissociative reference groups (White and Dahl 2006, 2007) and the need to be unique in valued groups (Tian, Bearden, and Hunter 2001).

Research indeed shows that people sometimes use consumption to differentiate themselves from others (Berger and Heath 2007), but no research exists that tests whether and which emotions might play a role in this.

How would social differentiation following malicious envy affect the preferences of consumers? Consider a person who is maliciously envious of someone showing off an iPhone. A typical response could be: "Yes, an iPhone looks pretty and is fun, but that is not what is important for a cell phone. A cell phone should be practical and reliable." At the same time, however, the experience of envy does suggest to the person that there is some frustration because the envied other has something that the envious person lacks. The focus on this gap arising from an experience of malicious envy might not increase the desire for the envy-eliciting product, as benign envy does, but it might increase the desire for a similar but at the same time clearly differentiated product. Envy signals that the product category is important. Being maliciously envious of the person with the iPhone might actually increase the interest for another cell phone, for example, a phone perceived to be more practical and reliable, such as a BlackBerry. Buying such a related but different product would clearly differentiate the envious consumer from the envied consumer and thereby resolve the frustration of being inferior. A benignly envious person would not be willing to pay more for such a product, as the emotion signals that it is the envied product that is attractive. Because the action tendency is already aimed at getting the envied product for oneself, no need for differentiation exists. This led to the following hypothesis that we tested in experiment 3:

- H2:** Malicious envy will not increase the willingness to pay for the product that elicited the envy; however, it will increase the willingness to pay for a related, but different, product.

EXPERIMENT 3

The goal of this experiment was to replicate our previous findings that benign envy increases the WTP for a product, and to extend the research by testing whether malicious envy increases the WTP for products that allow oneself to differentiate oneself from the envied person. A different manipulation was designed to elicit envy in the participants. We videotaped a fellow student (a confederate) who was talking enthusiastically about his new iPhone, and participants watched this video presumably as part of a study on consumer experiences with cell phones.

A key difference in the eliciting situation for benign and malicious envy is the deservingness of the situation. If the advantage of the envied other is perceived to be deserved, benign envy is likely to result, while if the advantage is perceived not to be deserved, it is more likely that malicious envy will result, as we indicated before. In the benign envy condition, the confederate in the video deservedly owned an iPhone; in the malicious envy condition, this was rather

undeserved. Besides asking for the WTP for an iPhone, we presented the participants with a picture and a little information on a BlackBerry 8820. Both phones are “smart-phones” with extensive features. The BlackBerry was presented as an option similar to the iPhone but was also clearly different in a way. We expected to replicate the earlier finding that being benignly envious toward someone with an iPhone would lead to a higher WTP for the iPhone but did not predict such an effect for the BlackBerry. Instead, we predicted that participants who were maliciously envious toward the person with the iPhone would have a higher WTP for the BlackBerry, as expressed in hypothesis 2.

Pretest

We first pretested whether the BlackBerry was indeed viewed as a product that allowed for social differentiation. Sixty-nine students rated the iPhone versus the BlackBerry on hedonic aspects (“Do you think the iPhone or the BlackBerry looks prettier?” and “Do you think the applications of the iPhone or the BlackBerry are more fun?”) and on functional aspects (“Do you think the iPhone or the BlackBerry is more practical?” and “Do you think the iPhone or the BlackBerry is more reliable?”). All questions were answered on 7-point scales with both phones presented as endpoints (scored from -3 for the iPhone to $+3$ for the BlackBerry). The two hedonic aspects ($r(69) = .55, p < .001$), and the two functional aspects ($r(69) = .61, p < .001$) were combined into separate measures. The resulting evaluations of the hedonic and functional evaluations of the phones were unrelated to each other ($r(69) = -.12, p = .304$). Participants generally preferred the iPhone on the hedonic dimension ($M = -1.68, SD = 1.35$, which differs from the neutral midpoint of the scale, $t(68) = 10.36, p < .001, r^2 = .61$) and the BlackBerry on the functional dimension ($M = 0.74, SD = 1.65$, which also differs from the midpoint of the scale, $t(68) = 3.71, p < .001, r^2 = .17$). This suggests that although both phones clearly fall into the same product category, they differ on important attributes and thus allow social differentiation.

Method

Eighty participants (51 females, $M_{\text{age}} = 22$ years, $SD = 4.80$) took part in a study on “consumer experiences with cell phones.” Participants were randomly assigned to a benign envy ($n = 27$), a malicious envy ($n = 27$), or a control condition ($n = 26$). Five more participants were excluded from the analysis, as they owned either an iPhone or a BlackBerry.

Participants were asked to watch a video of another student who would tell something about his new cell phone. They would then be asked a number of questions, after which they would be videotaped themselves while telling something about their own cell phone. This latter event did not actually occur, because participants were debriefed after they had watched the video and answered the questions.

In the control condition, participants saw a video clip of

42 seconds of the fellow student (a confederate) responding to questions about the options of his iPhone. In the benign and malicious envy conditions, we inserted an additional 15 seconds before the clip shown in the control condition. In those extra 15 seconds, the fellow student responded to a question concerning how he had acquired his phone. In the benign envy condition, the confederate in the video responded that he had worked hard to earn the money to buy the iPhone, making its possession more deserved and thus likely to elicit benign envy. In the malicious envy condition, the fellow student replied that “this was one of those things my father usually buys for me,” making its possession less deserved and thus likely to elicit malicious envy. Participants in all the conditions were told that the retail price of an iPhone is typically about €400. Although the control condition could potentially also elicit envy, we expected that envy would be most painful when the information regarding the acquisition of the phone was added, because the comparison to the other becomes more salient (Smith 2000; Tesser 1991)

After seeing this video, participants answered a number of questions on consumption and cell phone use. Among these were the dependent variables of our study. First, participants indicated the maximum amount of money they would be willing to pay for a number of products: an iPhone, a BlackBerry 8820, a 4GB USB memory stick, and a weekend in Barcelona including flight and hotel. These were presented in a random order to the participant. We expected the benignly envious to be willing to pay more for the iPhone, and the maliciously envious to be willing to pay more for the BlackBerry. The USB stick and weekend to Barcelona were added to test whether benign envy only leads to an increased desire for the envied product, and malicious envy only to an increased desire for a similar-but-differentiated good as the one that elicited the envy, or that the envy types might activate a more general desire and therefore lead to an increase in willingness to pay for other attractive products as well.

Finally, participants indicated whether they thought it was deserved that the other person had the iPhone (1 = very undeserved; 7 = very deserved), how much benign envy they experienced toward the person in the video, how much malicious envy they experienced toward him, and how much they liked the other person (all on scales from 1 = not at all to 7 = very much so).

Results and Discussion

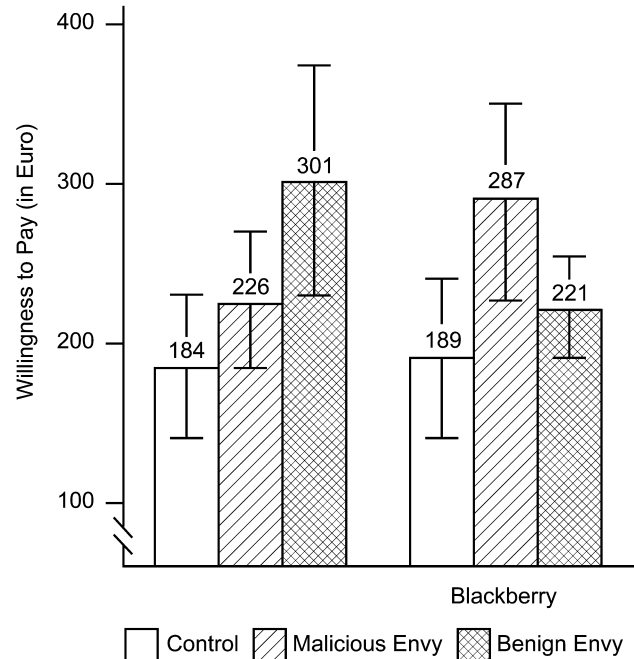
The manipulation was effective (see table 3). Participants in the malicious envy condition found the advantage of the other more undeserved than those in the control and benign envy conditions. The perceived deservingness in the benign envy was marginally higher than in the control condition (LSD [least significant difference] post hoc, $p = .079$). More important, those in the malicious envy condition experienced more malicious envy than those in both the other conditions, and those in the benign envy condition experienced benign envy the most.

Figure 1 presents the WTP for the iPhone and BlackBerry per condition. A 3 × 2 mixed-model ANOVA, with the manipulation as the independent variable and the WTP for the iPhone and BlackBerry as a within-subjects dependent variable, found the predicted interaction effect ($F(2, 77) = 11.47, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$). Closer examination reveals that for the WTP for the iPhone, the pattern of results from experiment 2 was replicated ($F(2, 77) = 4.69, p = .012, \eta_p^2 = .11$). Participants in the benign envy condition were willing to pay €117 more than those in the control condition (an envy premium of 64%, LSD post hoc, $p = .003$) and €75 more than those in the malicious envy condition (LSD post hoc, $p = .055$). Second, and importantly, the hypothesized differences between conditions for the WTP for the BlackBerry also emerged ($F(2, 59) = 4.15, p = .019, \eta_p^2 = .10$). Participants in the malicious envy condition were willing to pay €98 more for a BlackBerry than those in the control condition (LSD post hoc, $p = .006$) and €66 more than those in the benign envy condition (LSD post hoc, $p = .060$). This supports hypothesis 2.

Participants in the benign envy condition were indeed more benignly envious and willing to pay more for an iPhone. To test whether this increased WTP for the iPhone is also caused by the benign envy, we tested for mediation. Mediation analysis using the bootstrapping procedure of Preacher and Hayes (2008) confirmed that the effect of the manipulation on the WTP for the iPhone is mediated by benign envy. The effect that participants in the benign envy condition were willing to pay more for the iPhone compared to the other conditions ($B = 117.41, p = .003$) became much less strong ($B = 68.40, p = .071$) when the direct effect of benign envy ($B = 44.21, p < .001$) and malicious envy were added ($B = -1.08, p = .930$). This mediation by benign envy was significant at $p < .05$.

A similar analysis was conducted to test the mediational effect of malicious envy on the WTP for the BlackBerry. The effect that participants in the malicious envy condition compared to the other conditions were willing to pay more for the BlackBerry ($B = 98.42, p = .006$) became less strong ($B = 73.86, p = .035$) when the direct effect of benign envy ($B = 15.95, p = .134$) and malicious envy were added ($B = 26.79, p = .019$). This mediation by malicious envy was significant at $p < .05$.

FIGURE 1
WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR AN iPhone AND BLACKBERRY PER EMOTION CONDITION IN EXPERIMENT 3



NOTE.—Error bars represent 95% confidence interval.

We had several additional questions to use as control variables (see table 3). First of all, there were no between-condition differences in how much participants liked the person in the video who had talked about his iPhone. This implies that the between-condition effects on the WTP for the iPhone and BlackBerry could not have been caused by our manipulation influencing how likeable the person in the video was. Finally, we checked whether the manipulation had an effect on what participants were willing to pay for goods unrelated to the envy-eliciting episode. As we had

TABLE 3

MANIPULATION CHECKS PER CONDITION OF EXPERIMENT 3

Dependent variables	Control		Benign envy		Malicious envy		Statistics		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F(2, 77)	p	η_p^2
Deservingness	4.54 ^a	(1.24)	5.19 ^a	(1.21)	3.07 ^b	(1.49)	18.08	.001	.32
Malicious envy	1.88 ^b	(1.31)	2.04 ^b	(1.22)	2.89 ^a	(1.50)	4.30	.017	.10
Benign envy	1.96 ^b	(1.34)	3.07 ^a	(1.73)	1.81 ^b	(1.18)	6.18	.003	.14
Liking of other	4.27	(1.37)	4.56	(1.01)	4.00	(1.39)	1.30	.279	.03
WTP for USB stick	23	(17)	24	(23)	22	(14)	.83	.920	.00
WTP for weekend	256	(148)	247	(123)	290	(164)	.63	.533	.02

NOTE.—Means with a different superscript differ between conditions at $p < .05$, tested with LSD post hoc comparisons. Response scales range from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much so). WTP in euro.

expected, no differences between conditions were found for a USB stick and a weekend to Barcelona. Benign envy thus only led to an increased desire for the envied product, while malicious envy only led to an increased desire for a similar but clearly different product from the envied one.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

There are two answers to the question of how envy increases product value. First, consistent across three experiments, it was found that benign envy makes people willing to pay more for the envy-eliciting product. Benign envy is a frustrating experience caused by comparing oneself to another person who has obtained something desirable (an internship service and an iPhone in our experiments) and deserved it. The resulting experience of benign envy triggers action tendencies aimed at reducing this gap between oneself and the other by trying to attain the coveted good for oneself as well, and this raises the willingness to pay for that product.

Second, participants who were maliciously envious (which is triggered if people think the advantaged position of another is not deserved) did not want to pay more for the envy-eliciting product, but they were willing to pay more for another product from the same category (a BlackBerry if envious of an iPhone in our experiment 3). This process of social differentiation allows people to stop comparing themselves to another person in the domain in which they are outperformed and look for another domain in which they can again outperform the other person. By obtaining a product that differentiates oneself from the envied person (the more utilitarian BlackBerry compared to the hedonic iPhone in our experiment), this tendency is acted upon. Initially, we had expected that the maliciously envious might also show a lower preference for the good that had elicited the envy (leading to a lower WTP for an iPhone in experiments 2 and 3). This prediction was based on research on distancing and divergence that consumers who want to separate themselves from others can do so by avoiding or devaluing certain options (Berger and Heath 2007; White and Dahl 2006). The experiments, however, did not support this initial idea.

If people are indeed willing to pay more (and buy more) when they are envious, envy acts as an economic lubricant. The more desirable possessions other people have, the more envious other people might become and therefore buy more as well. These new possessions might in turn make other people envious. Such a continuing cycle, with envy as the “emotional multiplier,” could indeed stimulate economic growth. Although a cycle of increasing consumption unquestionably has negative effects as well (Belk 1985; Csikszentmihalyi 2000; De Botton 2004; Frank 1999; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003), understanding how a negatively valenced emotion such as envy can have positive effects on economic growth is of obvious importance. The stimulating role from benign envy for the economy is a rather straightforward prediction based on our findings, but the impact of malicious envy on the economy seems more difficult to predict. Although malicious envy leads to a higher WTP for products

that allow for social differentiation and could thus also be considered a positive factor for the economy, a large body of work exists that suggests that this type of envy also leads to other behaviors that might be harmful to the economy. For example, maliciously envious participants were willing to pay some money if that led to the destruction of more money from the envied other (Zizzo 2002).

In addition, the current research also puts forward envy as a plausible mechanism underlying phenomena like *keeping-up-with-the-Joneses* (the idea that people want to have what relevant others have). *Keeping-up-with-the-Joneses* is the descriptive finding that people compare themselves to relevant others and base their needs and wants on what they lack compared to those others, instead of merely looking at their own preferences (Frank 1999). If a neighbor owns a better lawn mower that makes his grass appear greener, a benignly envious person might be compelled to keep up with the neighbor by buying one. Frank hypothesized that the more similar people are to the Joneses, the more they want to keep up with them. This is consistent with the literature on envy that finds that envy is more intense if one is originally more similar to the envied other (Salovey and Rodin 1984).

The envy explanation also helps to make novel predictions on phenomena like *keeping-up-with-the-Joneses*. The current findings show that the deservingness of the situation is a key aspect in determining whether people are influenced by the possessions of others. If ownership of a desirable possession by others is deserved, people are likely to become benignly envious and to want the product more as a result. If it is undeserved, people are more likely to become maliciously envious and to focus their attention on other, related products. Therefore, factors that raise the deservingness of owning the desirable product might contribute to increased product sales via increased levels of benign envy. We speculate that the effort that the other person put into obtaining the desirable possession not only raises the deservingness of ownership but also contributes to liking the other person. It is interesting to note that a situation that is undeserved even if the envied person had no control over it (e.g., if the envious person is shorted by a third person, while the envied is not) is still likely to result in malicious envy and the motivations it activates.

Envy is an emotion that is “transmutive” in nature (Smith 2004); that is, it easily develops into different states or emotions over time. Because the object of envy is likely to be encountered often (a neighbor on a fancy lawn mower), envy regularly reoccurs. If the emotion of benign envy cannot be nullified (e.g., if a similar product cannot be obtained for oneself), the recurrent negative feeling might activate other coping responses besides trying harder to attain the coveted good. For example, if the situation is reappraised as being undeserved over time, malicious envy is likely to emerge. Malicious envy can lead to two paths. The first is the destructive path found before (Parks et al. 2002; Smith et al. 1994; Zizzo 2002; Zizzo and Oswald 2001). In the extreme, one might sabotage the neighbor’s lawn by letting the dog

go at it or gossip to others about the environmental downsides of frequent lawn mowing. The current research, however, suggests another possible response to malicious envy, namely, to find alternative options to reach a similar goal. While maliciously envious of a neighbor's lawn mower, the person might be tempted to hire a gardener to take care of one's own garden to improve its greenness, or switch from a grassy lawn to a classic Japanese garden. Other likely transmutations of envy suggested by Smith are admiration (if the situation is reappraised as a truly exceptional accomplishment of the neighbor) or depressive feelings (if the person really starts to blame his own shortcomings).

Which Products Are Likely to Elicit Envy?

Now that we established that envy has important effects on consumers, an interesting question that remains is which products are actually probable to elicit envy. Two likely necessary preconditions for products to elicit envy are found in research on reference group effects and conspicuous consumption (Bearden and Etzel 1982). Conspicuous consumption and reference group effects were more likely for luxurious goods than for necessities, as some exclusivity is necessary. Furthermore, the products should obviously be visible or audible (in case of the lawn mower): goods that are not noticed cannot be envied either. As the Young and Rubicam (2009, 12) ad agency mentions, envy-eliciting products ideally (*a*) get noticed by everyone, (*b*) are not everyday items, (*c*) are polarizing, and (*d*) are somewhat mysterious.

Making something more expensive increases its exclusivity and its potential to elicit envy. Increasing the price of a product might therefore not only provide a better profit margin, but could also boost sales as the lower availability increases its desirability by triggering envy, if comparable others already own it deservedly. Another direction that follows from the visibility precondition for envy is that distinctive product designs or strong brand logos contribute to the envy potential of products. Of course, if ownership of the products becomes too widespread, their envy appeal drops.

Besides the product itself, other aspects of consumer experiences can also trigger envy. For example, people who recalled an experience in which a friend paid less for a similar product also recalled having been more envious (Ackerman and Perner 2004). When other people are given preferential treatment over oneself, satisfaction will be depressed (Goodwin and Ross 1992), and envy seems likely. It would be interesting to investigate the role that envy plays in such preferential service and retail treatments. Airlines seem to catch up on this by giving preferential treatment to frequent flyers, by allowing frequent flyers to visibly jump the queue, regularly rewarding them with upgrades to business class seats, and providing luxury waiting areas. If this preferential treatment occurs in full view of other passengers, it is likely to elicit envy in them, which might subsequently increase their interest in the frequent flyer program. Note that our findings suggest that this would only work if the preferential treatment is considered to be de-

served; if not, it might backfire, and consumers might switch airlines to cope with their feelings of malicious envy.

Limitations of the Current Research

Several limitations of the current work may stimulate further research. First, we only asked participants what they would be willing to pay for a product that they envied, without their decision having any real consequences for buying the product. So, although we find strong envy premiums (typically around 50%), it remains unclear whether these effects will be equally strong when consumers really expect to pay these prices. Future research may examine what happens when the rubber hits the road and people need to follow up on their WTP. Second, in one of the studies, we used the word "jealousy" to manipulate envy. The reason was twofold: first, people typically use the word "jealousy" when they actually refer to envy (Smith et al. 1988). Second, although in the Dutch language two words exist for the different types of envy, this is not the case in other languages such as English (Van de Ven et al. 2009). The semantic issues surrounding envy make studying this powerful emotion less straightforward than we would have liked it to be.

CONCLUSION

The current research demonstrates that people who experience benign envy are willing to pay more for desirable products or services that someone else has. However, when people experience malicious envy, they are not willing to pay more for these products. Instead, they have an increased desire for alternative products, to differentiate themselves from the envied other. A key difference in determining whether benign or malicious envy is elicited is the deserv-ingness of the situation; when the consumers that already own the envy-eliciting product are perceived to deserve it, benign envy is more likely, and the sales of the envy-eliciting product may increase. When those consumers are perceived to not deserve it, malicious envy is more likely, and the sales of competing products may actually increase. When trying to harness the power of envy, it is important to be cognizant of these distinct effects of benign and malicious envy.

APPENDIX A

INFORMATION PROVIDED IN THE SIMILAR OTHER CONDITION IN EXPERIMENT 1

The university wants to know how students look at possible internships toward the end of their studies. We will describe a typical situation of a successful student, after which we will ask you some questions on internships.

Mireille (age 22) is a student in psychology at this university who is currently finishing her final year. She always

obtained very good grades and has been very motivated during her study. When not studying, she has been active in various organizations, for example, by organizing the introduction week for freshmen at this university.

Recently, she competed in the National Student Competition, organized by the business magazine *Intermediair*. In a series of assessments, she scored very well, and as a prize, she won an internship of her choice that was arranged by the organization StageBank.nl.

Mireille chose an internship at St. Elizabeth Hospital in this town, where she can apply the knowledge she gained during her studies in psychology. The hospital is an inspiring environment in which she can work with highly qualified psychologists and get a good education. At the same time, it helps to build her network and increases her chances of finding a future job. She also receives €400 a month as internship remuneration. This is a typical internship that StageBank.nl can arrange for students.

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