

Envy and Its Consequences: Why It Is Useful to Distinguish between Benign and Malicious Envy

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Abstract

Envy is the pain that arises from the good fortune of others. Recent research identified two subtypes of envy, benign and malicious envy. Malicious envy is the envy subtype with action tendencies aimed to pull down the envied person from their superior position. Benign envy is also a frustrating experience, but activates action tendencies aimed at improving oneself. This article provides an overview of the empirical support for making this distinction in envy subtypes. It then discusses the benefits of a subtype approach to envy, with the main advantages of distinguishing benign and malicious envy being that it (a) provides researchers with the language to be clear in how they conceptualize envy and (b) allows novel predictions. A next section provides a response to some criticism on making this distinction. Finally, I conclude with a section on how envy in general, and benign and malicious envy in particular, could be measured.

Envy is the pain at the good fortune of others (Aristotle, 350 BC). It is a common emotion that is experienced around the world (Foster, 1972). Envy has long been condemned as being sinful. A prime example of this is that “thou shall not envy” is one of the Ten Commandments in the Jewish/Christian tradition (making the same shortlist as “thou shall not kill”). Although Aristotle already made a distinction between a more positive (*zēlos*) and a more negative (*phthonos*) form of envy (see Sanders, 2014), this distinction in subtypes of envy has only recently received empirical attention. In the current paper, I give an overview of what envy is, explain why I think there are two types of envy, why it is useful to distinguish them, respond to criticism on making such a distinction, and discuss how the envy types can be measured.

Envy

A good definition of envy is that it is an emotion which “occurs when a person lacks another’s superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it” (Parrott & Smith, 1993, p. 906). Envy is often referred to with the word jealousy, but the formal difference is that envy arises when someone else is better off, while jealousy actually arises when one fears losing something important to another person (prototypically a romantic partner; see Parrott & Smith for details). I only provide a brief overview of envy here and refer readers to other sources on envy for a broader overview (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2007; Schoeck, 1969; Smith & Kim, 2007; Smith, 2008).

The definition of envy makes two things very clear. First, there has to be an upward social comparison: Someone needs to feel that someone else is better off for envy to occur. Literature on social comparisons has therefore been useful in identifying antecedents of envy. People engage in social comparisons mainly with those who are perceived to be similar as oneself (Festinger, 1954). In other words, someone more easily compares oneself to a friend who wins a prestigious prize if she graduated in the same field, because that makes her more similar. Indeed, research also found that envy is stronger for people who are initially similar to us

(Salovey & Rodin, 1984). Furthermore, Festinger (1954) theorized that people compare themselves more in domains that are important to their self-view, and indeed a threat to one's self-view the frequency in which one engages in social comparisons is also related to the frequency with which one experiences envy (Lange & Crusius, 2015a; Smith, Parrott, Diener, Hoyle, & Kim, 1999; White, Langer, Yariv, & Welch, 2015). Finally, the comparative nature of envy is also shown in its relation to counterfactual thinking; the comparison of how a situation is to what it could have been. The more someone thinks "it could have been me" when someone else is better off, the more envious they become (van de Ven & Zeelenberg, 2015). It is thus clear that envy depends on a social comparison.

The second important point is that envy is an emotion. Emotions are responses to events that are important to oneself and they ready a body for action to deal with that event (Frijda, 1986). In other words, someone perceives that something happens (an appraisal; Roseman, Antoniou, & Jose, 1996) that signals a concern or opportunity to him or her. This gives rise to the experience of the emotion, which consists of a blend of feelings, thoughts, and action tendencies, that help someone deal with the concern or opportunity (Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994). A negative emotion, such as envy, signals that there is a threat to important goals and they ready an organism to deal with this. Envy arises from a threat to one's self-view, caused by someone else being better off. The emotion envy triggers action tendencies aimed at resolving this threat. As the definition of Parrott and Smith (1993) suggests, envy can lead to both a desire to have what the other has and a wish that the other loses the advantage. Both help to deal with the threat to one's self-view, either by improving one's own position or by pulling down the other from their superior position. And this is where a distinction between benign and malicious envy comes into play.

Benign and Malicious Envy

When studying in the U.S., I noticed that people mentioned being envious of another person. I thought this is odd because being *afgunstig*, the main Dutch word for envy, is so negative that as a Dutch person I could not imagine people freely admitting to feel it. But I also realized that the Dutch language has a second word that translates into envy, which is *benijden*. This latter word has a more positive connotation to it (although it still signals a negative experience). This observation brought the idea that there might be two subtypes of envy. This was certainly not a novel idea, it turned out, as Aristotle (350 BC) already made such a distinction. Others had also speculated on the possibility that different types of envy exist (e.g., Rawls, 1971; Parrott, 1991). However, ideas on subtypes differed and had not been empirically tested. Many scholars thought that only the destructive type of envy was "envy proper"; a more emulative form of envy was thought to be more akin to admiration (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2007; Smith & Kim, 2007).

The theoretical base for making a distinction between the two envy types is a functional approach to emotions (Cosmides & Tooby, 2000). This functional approach follows from the work of Arnold (1960), who defined emotions as felt action tendencies, and Frijda (1986), who argued that changes in action readiness are the distinguishing feature of emotions. To summarize, the functional approach to emotions implies that very distinct action tendencies, such as pulling down the other person and attempting to improve one's own position, are unlikely to be caused by the same emotion.

The distinction in two envy types is also grounded in appraisal theory (Roseman et al., 1996), which states that specific emotions are caused by a specific mix of "appraisal components," perceptions on the situation at hand. Emotions with different appraisals are considered distinct emotions. For example, disappointment and regret are both caused when one perceives an

outcome to be worse than expected, but regret arises when one blames oneself and disappointment arises when one blames the circumstances (Van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2002). We expected that a different combination of appraisals of the situation would lead to benign and malicious envy, as it seemed unlikely that the same situations would lead to such different action tendencies.

To explore our idea, we first asked Dutch participants to recall a prior experience of *afgunst* (malicious envy), *benijden* (benign envy), admiration, or resentment (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2009; Study 1). Participants then indicated how they felt and behaved in that situation. It was clear that the two different Dutch words that translate to envy reflected different types of envy, as shown by differences across the full emotional experience (the feelings, thoughts, and actions it elicited). The most striking difference was indeed that benign envy led to a motivation to improve, while malicious envy led to a motivation to pull down the other.

Van de Ven et al. (2009) also found that malicious envy differed from resentment, with resentment being purely focused on the other person, while malicious envy had a dual focus on both the other and oneself (see also Smith, 2000). This dual focus in malicious envy led to feelings of inferiority that are not part of resentment. Benign envy clearly differed from admiration as well, also because admiration focused solely on the other and did not lead to inferior feelings. Admiration and benign envy mainly differed in the valence of the emotion: Benign envy is a frustrating and negative emotion to feel, while admiration is a positive and pleasant emotion to experience. Finally, Van de Ven (forthcoming) found that the experience of benign envy and admiration (in Dutch) only correlated .17, clearly suggesting that they are not the same experience.

Dutch appeared not to be the only language with two words for envy, as scholars indicated to us that their language has two words for the subtypes as well (for example, *imrenme* and *haste* in Turkish, *zazdrość* and *zawiść* in Polish, and phonetically *i t-chaa* and *ri t-yaa* in Thai). Indeed, this initial study has been replicated in German (*beniden* and *misgönnen*; Crusius & Lange, 2014). Other languages use phrases to refer to the envy types, for example, in Russian, *white* and *black* envy are used to distinguish a benign and malicious form of envy. Many languages therefore appear to distinguish a benign and a malicious form of envy. This of course requires further testing across these languages to be sure of this, but that many languages found a use for such a distinction is telling.

In a second and third study of our initial work (Van de Ven et al., 2009), we tested whether the envy types also existed in English and Spanish, languages with only one word for envy. Participants recalled and wrote down an experience of envy (or *envidia*), after which they answered questions tapping into the emotional experience. For example, in the Spanish sample, they indicated whether they felt inspired by the person they envied and whether they hoped that the other would fail in something. A latent class analysis was performed on these responses to test the underlying structure of these responses. Such an analysis can identify subtypes of related cases. In other words, is envy best seen as one emotion in which all these questions go together, or does a distinction between two (or more) categories of typical responses fit the data better? The results suggested that distinguishing two categories fitted the data best, and these mapped nicely onto benign and malicious envy. This study was also replicated using a taxometric analysis (Falcon, 2015). To summarize, also in languages where only one word exists for envy participants differentiate benign from maliciously envious experiences.

Following these initial studies, several studies have been conducted that find the motivational power of benign envy. Although there was already quite some support for the idea that (malicious) envy led to negative behavior, there was hardly any work testing for possible positive consequences of envy (for notable exceptions, see Cohen-Charash, 2009; Schaubroeck & Lam,

2004). But after our work identifying benign envy, we, for example, found that students who were benignly envious of another student (compared to those who were maliciously envious of another student and a control group), planned to spend more hours on their study in a next semester, worked longer at puzzles, and performed better at those puzzles (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2011b).

To summarize, two subtypes of envy exist that can reliably be distinguished both in languages that actually have two words for envy and languages that have only one word for it. A good definition is that “benign and malicious envy are both unpleasant and frustrating experiences that arise from a realization that one lacks another’s superior quality, achievement or possession, but benign envy results in a motivation to gain the coveted object for oneself as well, whereas malicious envy results in a wish for the other to lose it” (Van de Ven et al., 2009, p. 426). It is important to point out that benign envy is still a negative emotion that is frustrating to experience. When I talk about the positive consequences of benign envy, I refer to the more positive motivation that can follow from it, and not the pleasantness of the experience itself. I also do not wish to make the normative claim that it is good to experience benign envy, although I do think it is better to be benignly envious than to be maliciously envious.

When do people become maliciously or benignly envious?

Recall that we had two important theoretical reasons for making a distinction between benign and malicious envy. The first followed Arnold’s (1960) idea that emotions are felt action tendencies, and the finding that benign and malicious envy clearly differ in their action tendencies supports making a distinction between subtypes of envy. The second was that specific emotions are caused by a specific set of appraisals. So far, several antecedents have been identified that differentially elicit benign or malicious envy, which further supports distinguishing the envy subtypes. After all, appraisal theory (Roseman et al., 1996) suggests that if a different set of appraisals trigger an emotion, they are best seen as different emotions. Below, I summarize the findings on appraisals that differentially elicit benign and malicious envy.

Two appraisals that are seen as “core appraisals” have been identified that trigger benign or malicious envy. These are the perception of deservedness and perceived control over the situation (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2012). The more undeserved a situation is in which the other is better off, the more malicious envy occurs. When situations are deserved, more perceived control over obtaining the desired object is triggers more benign envy. Other antecedents that differentially elicit the envy types have recently been found as well. I do think, however, that these might likely refer back to these initial findings on deservedness and perceived control over the situation.

First, if people have a more positive and stronger bond with another person, benign envy is more likely to occur than malicious envy is. Research on Facebook use found that with greater “tie strength,” people experience more benign envy when the other was better off (Lin & Utz, 2015). This was not the case for general envy or malicious envy, which were independent of such tie strength. Similar to this is that people experienced more (benign) envy if friends received an unexpected upgrade for a flight (Park & Jang, 2015). My prediction is that when people are friends to others and have a greater “tie strength,” the more likely they are to feel that the other deserves the positive outcomes they get.

Another antecedent that differentially elicits benign or malicious envy is the type of pride displayed by the person who was better off (Lange & Crusius, 2015b). When people displayed hubristic pride (being arrogant and smug) over a good performance, malicious envy was more likely to occur, while when people displayed authentic pride (being accomplished and confident), benign envy was more likely. Factors such as liking the other, prestige, and

perceived dominance are found to be important in these types of pride, and I think they would again likely influence the perceived deservedness of whether the other is better off.

A final likely antecedent is the focus of attention in the social comparison. Crusius and Lange (2014) found that the benignly envious people focus more on the object of their envy (what the other person has that makes them better off), while the maliciously envious focus their attention more on the envied person. It is not fully clear whether the focus on the object or person is an *antecedent* or a *consequence* of benign and malicious envy. Although Crusius and Lange investigated it as a consequence of the envy types, I think it could also be a likely antecedent of them. This might again also relate to perceptions of deservedness and control potential: When the other is undeservedly better off, you likely focus more on the other, while if you perceive to be in control over the situation, you likely focus more on the object.

To summarize, we have so far discussed that there are languages where there are two words that reflect different envy types, that in languages with only one word for envy, people do (unconsciously) make that distinction, and that different situations lead to the different envy types. Note that I also do not wish to make the claim that we should always distinguish benign and malicious envy. I think it depends on the level of analysis that one wants to look at this emotion. At the highest level, envy is a negative emotion, and negative emotions arise to deal with an important problem in one's environment (Fredrickson, 2001). Zooming in to a more detailed level, to what I would call *general envy*, envy is the pain at the good fortune of others. At the most detailed level, a functional account of emotions and appraisal theory suggests distinguishing benign and malicious envy. Such a hierarchical view is common in language: A chair is part of the category furniture, just as an armchair and stool are part of the category chairs. Distinguishing armchairs from stools is useful, as they serve different functions and are used in different situations. This follows the same reasoning why I think it is so useful to distinguish benign and malicious envy.

Why It Is Useful to Distinguish between Subtypes of Envy

Envy subtypes help to clarify what envy is

A first reason why separating the envy types is useful is that envy has been defined in so many different ways in past research. Making the distinction in the subtypes helps researchers to be explicit in how they conceptualize envy. Some scholars might in the past have unknowingly operationalized envy as either benign or malicious envy, which can create confusion about empirical results. An example of such confusion is research on whether envy led to *schadenfreude*, the joy at the misfortune of another person. Empirical findings on this relationship were mixed, with some research finding that being envious of someone led to more *schadenfreude* when the other suffered a misfortune (e.g., Smith et al., 1996; Van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Goslinga, Nieweg, & Gallucci, 2006), while other research found no such relationship (e.g., Feather & Sherman, 2002; Hareli & Weiner, 2002). Van Dijk et al. (2006) already noted that research that found a relationship between envy and *schadenfreude* used an envy measure that contained items on whether one felt hostile towards the other, while work that did not find an effect of envy on *schadenfreude* used items related to a desire to gain what the other had in the envy measure. Following up on this idea, we indeed found that malicious envy is related to *schadenfreude* (over and above feelings of resentment, dislike, inferiority, etc.), while benign envy is not (Van de Ven et al., 2015). It appears that previous scholars used different conceptualizations of envy that therefore seemed to yield contrasting findings. If authors could have used this distinction to be explicit in whether they saw envy as the benign or malicious subtype, this apparent discrepancy in the literature would not have existed.

Envy subtypes help to broaden our perspective on the possible consequences

A second positive aspect of distinguishing subtypes is that it makes it explicit that envy can have both positive and negative consequences. The empirical literature on envy has so far largely focused on its negative consequences (see the overview of Smith & Kim, 2007), with research on more positive consequences being scarce. Aside from some notable exceptions in the organizational psychology literature (Cohen-Charash, 2009; Schaubroeck & Lahm, 2004), little research was done that tested more positive consequences of envy. The typical connotation of envy is a negative one, and it is therefore not surprising that scholars mainly investigated the possible negative effects. The current distinction helps scholars to actively think about what envy is and does and to also consider more positive possible consequences.

Since the introduction of the distinction in benign and malicious envy, quite some work shows the value of investigating possible positive consequences of (benign) envy. Aside from our work (Van de Ven et al., 2011b) that found that the benignly envious worked longer on tasks, performed better, and planned to study more, effects of benign envy has been studied in various settings. For example, long-distance runners who were benignly envious of others set more difficult goals for themselves and actually ran a faster race (Lange & Crusius, 2015a). Another example is that employees who were benignly envious of colleagues increased their work effort (Sterling, Van de Ven, & Smith, forthcoming). More attention to the possible positive consequences seems fruitful.

Note that in economics, envy has actually long been seen as a motivator that drives the economy (Veblen, 2006). When others have something desirable, experiencing envy is thought to lead to increased production, so as to earn more money to be able to buy it. This seems to reflect a view of envy as benign envy. Belk (2011) wrote an important article on how envy has become a stronger driving force of consumption in recent years, which fits well with observations in economics that consumers try to keep up with the consumption level of their neighbors (Frank, 1999). Recent empirical findings indeed show this effect of (benign) envy on consumption. Crusius and Mussweiler (2012) found that people became willing to pay more for chocolate when they had seen others receive the chocolate first. Van de Ven, Zeelenberg and Pieters (2011a) found that people wanted to pay more for an attractive phone someone else owned out of envy. Inspired by envy theory, Evers, Van de Ven, and Weeda (2015) found that computer game players dislike other players who buy in-game advantages with real money (instead of earning them through normal gameplay), and also feel tempted to buy such an advantage themselves. It seems that benign envy has a clear impact on consumption and is an important motivator of economic behavior.

Where fields like sociology (Schoeck, 1969), anthropology (Foster, 1972), and psychology (Smith, 2008) typically focus on malicious envy and largely ignore benign envy, it seems that the field of economics does the opposite. Wrenn (2001) argues that economics might actually benefit from thinking about possible negative consequence of (malicious) envy. A notable exception is the work of Zizzo and Oswald who found that people are willing to give up some of their own money to “burn” money from those who are better off. As Wrenn argues, considering the possible negative effects of malicious envy on macro-economics is still lacking.

Envy subtypes help to create novel predictions

The final, and perhaps most important reason to distinguish benign and malicious envy, is that it helps to make novel predictions and raises novel questions on the causes and consequences of envy. Let me give a few examples of where I think a better understanding can be reached by investigating the effects of benign and malicious envy further.

Envy and admiration. Our initial studies on benign envy also suggested that people needed the frustration of benign envy to motivate them, as admiring the better off did not motivate people to do better themselves (see also Johnson, 2012, for a similar finding in the social comparison literature). However, Schindler, Paech, and Löwenbrück (2015) recently investigated the consequences of admiration and found that admiration did contain a motivation to do better. Given these contrasting findings, I conducted two studies to test how benign envy and admiration related to each other and the motivation to improve (Van de Ven, forthcoming). Those studies showed that both benign envy and admiration independently activate a motivation to improve. Although benign envy and admiration differ so much across the full emotional experience (with the most notable difference being that benign envy is a negative emotion and admiration is a positive one), both activate a motivation to improve. It seems likely that *how* they motivate someone to improve differs. Further research could clarify how these motivations might differ (e.g., perhaps admiration leads to more long-term inspiration, while benign envy to more to short-term attention and motivation), which might help to provide new insights on how people become motivated by the good performance of others.

Envy and stereotypes. The Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) is an important framework in how people form stereotypes of groups of people. It organizes stereotypes along two dimensions: warmth and competence. Groups that are perceived as cold and competent are thought to be envied subgroups. It is often assumed that people will show undermining behavior towards those envied groups (Harris, Cikara, & Fiske, 2008). The work on benign and malicious envy suggests that this might further depend on the perceived deservedness of the advantage those groups has and the perceived control one has over obtaining the desired outcomes with one's own group. Perhaps envied outgroups can also stimulate people to improve their own situation.

The fear of envy. The distinction in benign and malicious envy also helped to make predictions in how people respond when they are better off than others and think that they might be envied by others. The anthropologist Foster (1972) noted that people across the world try to avoid being the target of envy, as they fear the possible negative responses of the envious (see also Exline & Lobel, 1999; Rodriguez Mosquera, Parrott & Hurtado de Mendoza, 2010). Based on this, we predicted that people would fear being maliciously envied, but not being benignly envied (as that does not trigger negative responses). Indeed, we found that participants in a lab experiment who undeservedly received 5 euro behaved more prosocially to another participant, in an attempt to ward off malicious envy (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2010). Those who were more deservedly better off did not behave more prosocially as they did not have to fear the benign envy of the other. Looking further into these interpersonal effects of envy would likely yield important insights in how people deal with being envied or how they try to prevent it.

Criticism of Distinguishing between Benign and Malicious Envy

In the main reviews that were published prior to our work that distinguished benign from malicious envy, the general idea was that benign envy was a form of 'envy sanitized'. Benign envy lacks the ill will towards the envied other, and it was therefore thought to miss a core ingredient of 'envy proper' (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2007; Smith & Kim, 2007). Our empirical finding that many people who recall an instance of envy actually recall an envy type without ill will towards the other clearly suggests otherwise.

Following the conceptualization of benign and malicious envy, I've encountered various forms of criticism on making the distinction in subtypes. Some of that criticism is diametrically opposite. For example, for a paper we had submitted, one reviewer thought that only malicious envy is envy proper, as (s)he thought that benign envy was not really envy but something more like admiration or longing. Another reviewer of the same manuscript thought that benign envy was the true form of envy, and (s)he thought that malicious envy was not really envy but something more like resentment or injustice. This is not new in the field of envy, as such discussions also exist on what envy is at the general level: for example, where some see inferiority as the key defining aspect of (general) envy (Tai, Narayanan, McAllister, 2012), others argue that envy should be separated from inferiority (Leach, 2008). The existence of different views on envy is valuable as it helps to create new theories on envy. But at the moment, the situation is such that scholars define envy in completely different ways: One group describes envy as benign envy, another group describes envy as malicious envy, and a third group describes envy as the pain over the good fortune of others; but all three are referred to as envy. I think that introducing different terms for these concepts (benign envy, malicious envy, and general envy) provides the language that helps scholars to be precise in what they refer to.

Cohen-Charash and Larson (forthcoming) agree that there are too many different conceptualizations of envy and that these differences make it difficult for researchers to build upon prior research. However, they, together with Tai et al. (2012), argue that adding a distinction between benign and malicious envy only makes it worse. These scholars follow Aristotle's (350 BC) definition of envy as the pain over the good fortune of others. In their view, the goal of envy is to eliminate the pain of envy. They argue that including the action tendencies to move up (benign envy) or pull down (malicious envy) actually obscures what envy really is and does. They argue that separating a benign and a malicious form of envy might help to describe what people do, without explaining *why* certain behavior occurs. Tai et al. (p. 107) even state that "confounding what envy *is* with what it *does* verges on the tautological". I respectfully disagree with this view and think there are two reasons why distinguishing subtypes of envy is important.

First, for emotion theorists, it is clear that action tendencies are an integral part of an emotion (Arnold, 1960; Frijda, 1986). Both Tai et al. (2012) and Cohen-Charash and Larson (forthcoming) think that the action tendencies of envy should not be seen as part of the emotional experience, but argue that the actions that follow from envy depend on the situation. I do not understand why this view (behavior following envy depends on the situation) would be a theoretically superior idea to the typical view in emotion theory that an appraisal of a situation leads to a certain emotion and that an emotion by definition includes action tendencies.

Second, I think that our main disagreement lies in the level of detail at which one looks at the emotion of envy. Based on appraisal theory and the functional account of emotions that see emotions as felt action tendencies, we think that a distinction between benign and malicious envy is warranted as they have different action tendencies and different appraisals that led to them. But at a higher level, I agree with Cohen-Charash and Larson (forthcoming) and Tai et al. (2012) that envy is the pain at the good fortune of others as both types of envy have the same ultimate goal (to reduce the difference with the other person). For some research, I think it is useful to focus on this higher level of general envy: If one wants to figure out how people *feel* after a threatening upward social comparison, it could be sufficient to look at this general envy Cohen-Charash and Larson and Tai et al. refer to. However, when one wants to look at how people behave in those circumstances, the detailed level of envy subtypes is needed.

Envy is thus both one experience and one that has two subtypes. I do think that having English, with only one word for envy, as the lingua franca of science made scholars focus first and foremost on this general envy. To us, there seems no reason to prefer either a general envy

view or the more detailed subtypes view of envy as “the truth” about envy: There are quite some languages that use one word for envy (as English and Spanish, for example, do), but also many that use two words (as Dutch, Turkish, and Thai, for example, do). But at the very least, a theoretical perspective based on both appraisal theory and a functional approach to emotions suggests that distinguishing subtypes makes sense.

Note that an important caveat is that I of course do not wish to argue that action tendencies are always acted upon: When you are maliciously envious of a person who is well-liked by others, you are not likely to openly act upon the action tendency to pull down the other due to the risk of ruining your own reputation. When you are angry, you sometimes feel like you want to physically hurt the other person, but thankfully you do not always act upon that impulse. I therefore also agree with Tai et al. (2012) and Cohen-Charash and Larson (forthcoming) that there will be situational moderators that determine whether an action tendency will actually result in action, but that does not mean the action tendency was not there (nor does it invalidate the idea that subtypes of envy might exist).

Measuring Envy

An important question for researchers is how to measure envy best. This is made more difficult due to the fact that some languages have two words for envy (reflecting the envy types), while other languages have only one word that signals general envy.

Measuring envy in languages that have two words for envy

To measure general envy in a language that does not have a word for general envy, a combination of a question on frustration (signaling the pain of the invidious comparison) and jealousy (a word most often used in colloquial language to indicate what scholars would call envy) seems a good combination. I realize that using jealousy as a word is not ideal, as jealousy and envy formally refer to different experiences. However, Parrott and Smith (1993) already found that an item on jealousy correlated very strongly ($r = .67$) with an envy measure. Van de Ven (forthcoming) also found that an item on jealousy correlated strongly ($r = .77$) with an item on envy. Of course, when one wants to disentangle effects of envy and jealousy, this measure would not be suited, but in other cases, this two-item measure of jealousy and frustration forms a good and reliable measure that follows people's normal use of the word.

For the envy subtypes, the actual words for these envy types can of course be used to measure benign and malicious envy in languages in which two separate words exist for them. For example, in Dutch, one could ask for *benijden* and *afgunst* to tap into these envy types (e.g., “Ik benijd de ander” [I feel benignly envious]). For a multiple item measure, a question on benign envy can be combined with the action tendencies associated with benign and malicious envy, as found in Van de Ven (forthcoming). For example, for benign envy questions like “I wanted to have X as well” (with X being the object of the upward social comparison) could be added, for malicious envy questions like “I wanted the other to not have X anymore”.

Note that in languages with two words for envy, it is recommended to first validate whether the words in that language indeed reflect the envy types, as has been found to be the case in the Netherlands (Van de Ven et al., 2009) and Germany (*beneiden* and *misgönnen*; see Crusius & Lange, 2014). This can, for example, easily be done via the method described in Van de Ven (forthcoming), which tests how those envy words relate to each other, to general envy, and to the action tendencies to move up and to pull down. It is important to first verify whether the words of a specific language thought to reflect benign and malicious envy indeed map onto the benign/malicious envy distinction as discussed here.

Measuring envy in languages that have only one word for envy

In languages that have one word for envy, a question on envy itself (are you a little envious?) could of course be used for a measure for general envy. I typically add “a little” before asking for envy, as this makes it easier for people to admit and results in more variation on the measure. If a multiple item measure is desired, the question on envy can be supplemented with a question on experienced frustration and jealousy to form a reliable three-item scale for general envy (see Van de Ven, forthcoming).

A possible option to reliably measure the envy subtypes in languages that have only one word for envy is to combine the general envy questions described in the previous paragraph, with questions on the action tendencies for either benign envy (to move up oneself) or malicious envy (to pull down the other) (see Van de Ven, forthcoming). Note that doing so would not allow measuring benign and malicious envy simultaneously, as the general envy questions would overlap in the measures (and could therefore, for example, not jointly be entered as independent variables in a regression analysis). When one wants to simultaneously measure benign and malicious envy in a language with one word for envy, the measure of Van de Ven et al. (2015; Study 3) could be used. This measure first describes the two types of envy that exist, after which a respondent indicates how much of each type they experience.

Dispositional benign and malicious envy

Until now, envy has been defined as an emotion, which is a temporary experience triggered by situational circumstances. Besides such episodic envy, researchers have found quite some use for a dispositional envy scale (the DES; see Smith et al., 1999) that measures individual differences in the tendency to experience envy (a personality trait). Smith et al. find that some people appear to experience envy more often than others do. Note that the DES was developed when there was little focus on the distinction between benign and malicious envy, and the DES actually appears to mainly measure the dispositional tendency to experience malicious envy. Lange and Crusius (2015a) recently developed a valid and useful scale that separately measures dispositional benign and malicious envy, showing differences on how often people tend to experience these envy types in their lives. Similarly, Sterling et al. (forthcoming) developed a scale for dispositional benign and malicious envy specifically geared towards organizational settings. Scales such as these can help to get a better understanding of how benign and malicious envy relate to other variables of interest or how the tendency to experience these emotions regularly affects people's work or daily life.

Conclusion

To conclude, there is a clear support for the idea that envy has two subtypes. Hopefully, the research on these subtypes helps scholars to come up with novel ideas on when envy arises and when (and why) envy will trigger certain behavior. At the very least, scholarly work on envy would benefit if researchers make it clear whether the envy in their theoretical model is the higher-order general level of envy or one of the subtypes of benign or malicious envy.

Short Biography

Niels van de Ven is an Assistant Professor in social psychology at Tilburg University. He holds a BA degree in Business Engineering and a PhD degree in Social Psychology. His research largely focuses on the causes and consequences of envy and inequality in its broader sense. His current work extends this by, for example, looking at effects on microtransactions in computer games and combining the literature on envy and inequality. Other recent work deals with testing

the effects of emotions (regret and envy) or motives (greed, curiosity, and temptations) on (financial) decision-making. www.nielsvandeven.nl

Note

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