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THE TWO SIDES OF ENVY: UNDERSTANDING OF BENIGN AND MALICIOUS ENVY IN RUSSIAN STUDENTS

Annotation. This article is devoted to the research of envy on the basis of the research of young scholars of Kuban State University, attended by N=119 respondents aged from 17-18 years old (F=31, M=27) to 23-24 years old (F=32, M=29). We propose to extend earlier conceptualizations of envy by distinguishing the two forms that constitute emotional pathways in responding to status threats. According to this perspective, benign envy is a reaction to a loss of prestige leading to behaviors directed at regaining status. Therefore, people who are inclined to experience benign envy make more positive impressions on others, improve their performance, and, ultimately, reach better well-being. Thus, we argue that dispositional benign envy may contribute to societal flourishing. In
contrast, malicious envy is a reaction to dominant others leading to behaviors directing at harming their status.

**Keywords:** envy, benign envy, malicious envy, research, people, age, prevalence.

1. Introduction

Envy is an unusual emotion. Although most people experience envy every once in a while, it is unusual for a person to admit feeling envious or any possible influence that envy may have on one’s behavior. Yet, envy has been found to have profound effects on the people experiencing it and the people who are the targets of it. Envy stems from the desire to achieve the elements that we lack in our lives. These may be the qualities, achievements, or possessions of another person we desire, or even wish to be lacking (Parrot and Smith, 1993). People experiencing envy are often tormented by this highly unpleasant emotion and are ashamed of their feelings (Silver, Sabini, 1978b). People who are afraid of being the target of envy often hide their good fortune and even actively avoid too much success (Schoeck, 1969). Hence, envy has a strong influence on people’s behavior (Baruch College, Graduate Center 2009). This sense of lacking is often accompanied by other negative affective components. For instance, hostility has long been identified as an underlying component of envy (Silver and Sabini, 1978; Smith and Kim, 1997).

Envy was divided into two components - harmful and benign. The emotion of benign envy focuses on an object or attribute as the source of its desire and includes feelings of aspiration to achieve that object or attribute for itself. Malicious envy has a much more negative valence: it focuses on a particular person and includes malevolence towards the person (Ven, Zeelenberg, Pieters, 2009). People were more likely to direct their attention toward an envied target when experiencing malignant envy, ultimately resulting in a reduction in their overall performance. However, those experiencing benign envy were more likely to focus on the task at hand. Students who exhibit high levels of benign envy as a
personality trait had a propensity to set higher goals for themselves, and thus tended to perform better academically relative to their counterparts who were higher in levels of malicious envy (Sawada, Fujii, 2016).

Similarly, benign and malicious envy was studied in other countries. In Germany, for instance, researchers came to the conclusion that the social nature of the status predicts that dispositional benign and malicious envy should also be determined by social variables and ultimately also affect social outcomes (Lange, Lisa Blatz, Jan Crusius, 2016).

Benign and malicious envy can be as malevolent as they are functional. In short, benign envy involves subtle social manipulation, whereas malicious envy can extend to blatant aggression. Elucidating the dark side of envy challenges a simple moral distinction of its two forms and directs future research toward its complex role in social interactions (Jens Lange, Delroy L. Paulhus, Jan Crusius, 2017).

Research in the USA have shown that the results of the correlation of malicious envy and gratitude are largely related to all model covariates in opposite ways. This means that both projects have a unique relationship with factors that can be considered central to an experience of envy, such as self-esteem, hostility, influence, and courtesy. Moreover, benign envy did not share any of these relationships, indicating that it was, in fact, an emotional experience distinct from angry envy (Anna Maria C. Behler, 2017).

Research in the Netherlands have identified two subtypes of envy, benign and evil envy. Evil envy is a subtype of envy with the action of tendencies to press the envious person from their excellent position. Benevolent envy also causes disappointment, but intensifies actions aimed at improving oneself (N. van de Ven, 2016).

2. Materials and Methods

At the beginning of the study we hypothesized that envy depends on age. To investigate the issue of benign and malicious envy we applied the Russian version
of the questionnaire (BeMaS; Lange, Crusius, 2015, Russian Translation by T.Volkodav, 2017) measuring both forms of envy with five elements for each. The scale consists of ten self-report items, such as “Envy ing others motivates me to accomplish my goals” and “I feel ill will towards people I envy”. All items are rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). This research was conducted on two age groups of students aged 17-18 years old and 23-24 years old respectively.

The research involved 119 respondents: group 1 - N=58 students (F=31, M=27); group 2 – N=61 students (F=32, M=29).

Table 1. (BeMaS) Benign and Malicious Envy Scale, Lange, Crusius, 2015, Russian Translation by T. Volkodav, 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response scale: 1-6 (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree).</th>
<th>Шкала ответов: 1-6 (1 = категорически не согласен, 6 = полностью согласен).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When I envy others, I focus on how I can become equally successful in the future.</td>
<td>1. Когда я завидую другим, я сосредотачиваясь на том, как мне стать таким же успешным в будущем.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I wish that superior people lose their advantage.</td>
<td>2. Я хочу, чтобы люди, которые в чем-то превосходят меня, лишились своих преимуществ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If I notice that another person is better than me, I try to improve myself.</td>
<td>3. Если я замечаю, что другой человек превосходит меня в чем-то, я стараюсь стать лучше.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Envy ing others motivates me to accomplish my goals.</td>
<td>4. Зависть к чужим успехам мотивирует меня к достижению своих целей.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If other people have something that I want for myself, I wish to take it away from them.</td>
<td>5. Если у других людей есть что-то, что я хочу для себя, я хочу это у них отнять.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I feel ill will toward people I envy.</td>
<td>6. Я негативно отношусь к людям, которым я завидую.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I strive to reach other people’s superior achievements.</td>
<td>7. Я стремлюсь к тем же вершинам, что достигли другие люди.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Envious feelings cause me to dislike the other person.</td>
<td>8. Чувство зависти мешает мне хорошо относиться к другому человеку.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. If someone has superior qualities, achievements, or possessions, I try to attain them for myself.</td>
<td>9. Если кто-то обладает лучшими качествами, достижениями или материальными благами, я пытаюсь достичь того же для себя.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Seeing other people’s achievements makes me resent them.</td>
<td>10. Когда я вижу достижения других, я злюсь.</td>
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</table>
3. Results

The analysis of the results of the questionnaire revealed benign envy in respondents aged 17-18 years old and 23-24 years old. The results of question №4 “Envy others motivates me to accomplish my goals” showed that 57.4% of women aged 24-23 years had malicious envy. Similarly, the results of question №1 “When I envy others, I focus on how I can become equally successful in the future” revealed 50% of benign and 50% of malicious envy in men aged 17-18 years old. The analysis of the rest of the responses revealed benign envy.

4. Conclusions

In aggregate, this research does not support the hypothesis that envy depends on age. The research revealed that most respondents have benign envy. However, the analysis showed that the only significant increase in the indicators was that in question №4 “Envy others motivates me to accomplish my goals”, which showed that 57.4% of women aged 24-23 years old had evil envy. The results of our research showed that age is slightly correlated with envy. At the moment, the current study is not sufficient, therefore, a further research is needed.

References


