

How Do People Respond to Threatened Social Status? Moderators of Benign versus Malicious
Envy.

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Abstract

Envy can motivate to strive for self-improvement, but can also lead to hostile behavior. These diverging outcomes of upward comparisons reflect two kinds of envy: benign envy, motivating to level oneself up, and malicious envy, motivating to level others down. We argue that these pathways of envious responding relate to the pursuit of prestige and dominance as two ways of achieving social status and posit that they can clarify determinants of benign versus malicious envy. We review evidence on envy moderators on the dispositional level related to reactions in the face of status threat, such as basic motivational tendencies and grandiose narcissism. Furthermore, we describe how status-related moderators on the social level, such as perceived pride in the superior other, may shape envious responding. We outline how a social-functional approach to envy—conceptualized as a status-related emotion—can contribute to a more complete understanding of the diversity of envious behavior.

Keywords: social comparison, social status, social hierarchies, social emotions, social-functional approach, benign and malicious envy, authentic and hubristic pride, narcissism

It is uncontroversial that people can react in strong ways when they fall short of the superior standards set by others. Indeed, envy, the painful emotion that may result in such situations, is often considered to be a primary motivator for human behavior (Foster, 1972; Rawls, 1971; Schoeck, 1969; Smith & Kim, 2007; Tocqueville, 1840). The socially harmful consequences of envy may be a reason for why it is such a detested and socially controlled emotion (Clanton, 2006). Nevertheless, the behavioral outcomes of envy are far from uniform. Even though envy may drive people to antagonize and aggress against superior others, it may also intensify effort for higher performance in ways that are directed at improving one's own outcome without hostility. Recent research (Crusius & Lange, 2014; Falcon, 2015; Lange & Crusius, 2015a, 2015b; Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2009, 2011a, 2011b) has tied these diverging manifestations to two qualitatively distinct forms of envious responding: malicious and benign envy. A crucial question concerns the factors that determine whether one or the other dominates invidious responses. What predicts whether people will feel and act with benign or with malicious envy? Here, we examine possible moderators at the personal and at the social level of analysis. Our premise in doing so is that benign and malicious envy are fundamental reactions to status threat. We posit that to understand envy, it is important to investigate how people deal with situations in which upward social comparisons question their social status.

Benign and Malicious Envy as Distinct Emotional Reactions to Status Threat

People have an ubiquitous tendency to think about and evaluate their own outcomes relative to those of others (Corcoran, Crusius, & Mussweiler, 2011). By definition, such social comparisons—if they point to own shortcomings—are the outset of every episode of envy. Even so, some dimensions of social comparisons seem to have a particularly strong potential to evoke envy. For example, when DelPriore, Hill, and Buss (2012) asked U.S. university students to

describe situations in which they envied someone, they reported several common themes. Large proportions of them felt envy because their counterparts were more attractive, had greater access to financial resources, owned luxury products, or achieved greater success in their careers as students, athletes, or professionals. Highly similar results have been found for younger adolescents (Poelker, Gibbons, Hughes, & Powlishta, in press) and German university students (Crusius & Lange, 2014; Rentzsch & Gross, 2015). The content of these incidents of envy is in line with research showing that envy occurs for comparison dimensions that are self-relevant (e.g., Salovey & Rodin, 1984; Silver & Sabini, 1978; for a review, see Smith & Kim, 2007).

In what way are these comparison dimensions so highly self-relevant? Arguably, a common denominator of them is that they reflect value, importance, and influence in society—in the envier’s eyes, but also, and maybe even more importantly, in the eyes of others. In fact, it has been shown that individuals’ self-worth with respect to certain attributes more strongly relates to how others value these attributes rather than how individuals’ themselves do so (Santor & Walker, 1999). In another study, envy was particularly likely and led to more hostile tendencies, when the comparison domain was particularly competitive, and thus, arguably more status-relevant (Rentzsch, Schröder-Abé, & Schütz, 2015). Therefore, envy seems especially likely for attributes that observers respect, admire, and perceive as allowing control over important resources, or—put more abstractly—attributes that define and confer social status¹. Notably, such a view bears resemblance to a Lacanian conceptualization of envy. According to this psychoanalytic approach, envy takes place in and is shaped by a triangle of the envier, the envied, and the gaze of the omnipresent “Big Other”, who constantly needs to be impressed so that the envier becomes validated (Vidaillet, 2007, Vidaillet, this volume).

Here we argue that, from an evolutionary point of view, envy's purpose may be to regulate status. Being superior in status-relevant domains such as those mentioned above, yields important social benefits. These benefits should have contributed to survival and reproduction throughout our evolutionary past (for a review, see Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015). For instance, physical attractiveness promotes mating success, talent and achievements accrue admiration, and financial resources bring about power. Hence, superiority in these domains gives rise to respect and influence—two key dimension of social status (Cheng, Tracy, Foulsham, Kingstone, & Henrich, 2013; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Social status itself is associated with a wide range of positive consequences. For instance, high status leads to increased well-being (Anderson, Kraus, Galinsky, & Keltner, 2012b) and ascriptions of competence even in the absence of objective criteria for skills and knowledge (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). For these reasons, people should not only have a fundamental motive to achieve status (Anderson et al., 2015), they should also be equipped with emotions that help them in attaining this goal (Steckler & Tracy, 2014). In this sense, envy may be adaptive because it alerts the individual of personal shortcomings in status-relevant domains and spurs corrective action (Hill & Buss, 2008; Hill, DelPriore, & Vaughan, 2011; Steckler & Tracy, 2014).

In addition to being an alarm signal, envy may—in essence—achieve its purported motivational function in two ways. Enviars can either try to attain (or surpass) the status of the superior other, or they can try to reduce it, either by inflicting actual harm on the envied person or, by (at least mentally) derogating the other. Recent research suggests that these diverging pathways of responses to being outperformed reflect two qualitatively distinct forms of envy². Both are marked by high levels of frustration (Crusius & Lange, 2014; Lange & Crusius, 2015b) but contain different motivational elements: *benign envy* entails the motivation to move upwards,

whereas *malicious envy* entails hostility and the motivation to harm or disparage the other (for a more detailed introduction see Sterling, Van de Ven, & Smith, this volume). In several languages (such as Dutch, German, Arabic, or Russian), these forms of envy are marked by distinct words that connote their differences (Crusius & Lange, 2014; Van de Ven et al., 2009). However, they can also be reliably distinguished as two different taxa of emotional experiences in languages that have only one word for envy (such as English or Spanish; Falcon, 2015; Van de Ven et al., 2009). Furthermore, in line with a functional account of benign and malicious envy, the two forms are associated with divergent patterns of early attention allocation, either on means for improvement for benign envy, or on the envied person (rather than their superior attribute or outcome) for malicious envy (Crusius & Lange, 2014). Finally, this dual conceptualization of envy maps onto two diverging strands of motivational and behavioral correlates of envy. On the one hand, envy has been associated with a range of outcomes characterizing benign envy, such as increased desire and approach motivation (Crusius & Mussweiler, 2012), higher effort, and improved performance (Lange & Crusius, 2015a, 2015b; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004; Van de Ven et al., 2011a). On the other hand, envy has been associated with outcomes indicating malicious tendencies, such as hostility toward and derogation of superior others (Salovey & Rodin, 1984), uncooperative behavior and social undermining tendencies (Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, 2012; Parks, Rumble, & Posey, 2002), or *schadenfreude*—the pleasure at the misfortune of others (Smith et al., 1996; Van de Ven et al., 2015).

A crucial question remains, namely what are the determinants of benign and malicious envy? (For research regarding moderators that intensify a particular envy form once it has evolved see Duffy & Yu, this volume; for the moderating role of culture on envy in general, see Wen, Tai, & Wang, this volume.) Based on our conceptualization of benign and malicious envy

as functional responses whose pivotal aim is to deal with status threat, we will derive several predictions about potential moderators at the dispositional and the social level of analysis. As research about the elicitation of benign versus malicious envy is still in its infancy, many of these predictions still await empirical scrutiny. (For a detailed model about the more immediate factors that influence how benign and malicious envy episodes may unfold in time, refer to Hoogland, Thielke, and Smith, this volume.)

The Role of Control and Deservingness Appraisals

What may determine whether the one or the other is evoked in a given situation? A crucial starting point are the distinct appraisals that underlie benign and malicious envy. Even though both forms of envy share several features in that they are based on upward social comparisons with similar others, occur in domains of high-self relevance, and result in high levels of frustration (Crusius & Lange, 2014; Lange & Crusius, 2015b), benign and malicious envy are associated with markedly different appraisal patterns. One important difference concerns *personal control*, that is, the perceived ability to improve one's own lot relative to the other person in the future. Appraisals of high personal control increase the likelihood of benign envy relative to malicious envy. A second important difference between benign and malicious envy concerns the perceived *deservingness* of the superior outcome of the envied. Appraisals of low deservingness increase the likelihood of malicious relative to benign envy (Crusius & Lange, 2014; Lange & Crusius, 2015a; Lange, Crusius, & Hagemeyer, in press; Van de Ven et al., 2009, 2011b; Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2012)³.

Consequently, variables affecting subjective appraisals of personal control and deservingness during threatening social comparisons should influence whether benign or malicious envy determine behavior. On a broader level, the notion that envy is fundamentally

about how people deal with status disadvantages suggests that these appraisals and their ensuing emotional reactions should be related to how people construe and interpret status differences and the ways in which they aim to attain status.

Benign and Malicious Envy as Emotional Underpinnings of the Pursuit of Prestige and Dominance

According to a prominent model of the evolution of social rank, status rests on two coexisting pillars, prestige and dominance (Cheng et al., 2013; Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). This model posits that status based on *prestige* is conferred to people who are perceived to be competent, skilled, and successful in achieving their goals. Status based on *dominance* is achieved by coercive tactics such as inducing fear and intimidation or engaging in aggressive behavior.

Most important for the present purposes, the model holds that a prestige-based strategy should be most beneficial to confident individuals who have the skills and the capacity to level themselves up. In contrast, a dominance-based strategy should be most beneficial to individuals who have more to gain from coercion because they possess the physical properties to control others. Furthermore, the pursuit of prestige has been theorized to be adaptive in environments in which gains can be reached via rank-based emulation of superior others. In such environments, emulative effort is an effective means to move upwards in the hierarchy, which is perceived to be based on merit, legitimacy, and principles of fairness, and which rewards sharing information about how people can climb the social ladder. In contrast, dominance is thought to be adaptive in environments in which rank is based on zero-sum type social conflict about valuable resources, but not on merit and the sharing of information (Cheng et al., 2013, 2010; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001).

We argue that the factors that determine whether pursuing status via prestige or dominance is more beneficial correspond to benign and malicious envy's diverging appraisal patterns. A perception of high personal control and high deservingness of others' successes should indicate a situation in which status can be best attained via prestige. A perception of low personal control and low deservingness should, in contrast, indicate a situation in which status can be best attained via dominance. From this perspective, we speculate that benign envy and malicious envy may be emotional processes whose purpose is to contribute to the regulation of social status based on prestige versus dominance, respectively.

Given this reasoning, we can try to identify moderating variables that shift people's tendency to react with benign or malicious envy to status threat by pinpointing factors that influence their diverging appraisals of personal control and perceived deservingness of the outcome of the other person. Put differently, we can examine factors that alter people's construal of status differences and how they therefore attempt to attain and defend their own status.

Dispositional Moderators of Benign versus Malicious Envy

One strategy to identify moderators of benign versus malicious envy as responses to status threat is to apply a research approach on interindividual differences. Even though envy is usually understood as a universal, culturally shared emotion that everyone may experience at least occasionally (Smith & Kim, 2007), some people appear to be more prone to experience envy than others. In line with this hypothesis, several lines of research have shown that people have a stable tendency to react with envy to superior others. The most widely used scale to measure such a proneness for envy is the Dispositional Envy Scale (DES, Smith, Parrott, Diener, Hoyle, & Kim, 1999). Along with other scales such as the York Enviousness Scale (Gold, 1996) or the envy subscale of Veselka, Giammarco, and Vernon's (2014) Vices and Virtues Scale, it

conceptualizes dispositional envy as a unidimensional trait. Its rationale and its correlates make clear that the DES taps into hostile elements of envious responding. Specifically, as it was aimed at measuring the antisocial ‘envy proper’ (Smith & Kim, 2007), it contains items that measure perceptions of injustice and resentment. In a similar vein, Gold’s and Veselka et al.’s envy scales entail items that involve begrudging feelings against superior others. Furthermore, all these scales correlate with anger and hostile tendencies. Thus, these envy scales have focused on the malicious side of the envious personality.

Furthermore, another recently developed envy scale focuses on individuals’ inclination to engage in frustrating upward comparisons, explicitly excluding envy’s motivational component (Rentzsch & Gross, 2015). Given this unitary conceptualization, this scale may tap into the benign as well as the malicious variants of envious dispositions, without differentially predicting them.

Measuring Dispositional Benign and Malicious Envy

Given that state envy can be disentangled into two forms that are highly similar in some respects but bear strikingly diverging outcomes, such a distinction may be a fruitful in investigating dispositional envy as well. To aid this undertaking, we developed the Benign and Malicious Envy Scale (BeMaS) with the aim to assess stable inclinations to react with benign or malicious envy to upward social comparisons (Lange & Crusius, 2015b; for a similar approach to measure interindividual differences in benign and malicious envy in organizations, see Sterling, Van de Ven, & Smith, this volume), thereby complementing the previous scales.

To do so, we constructed a set of items with the intention to tap only into the distinguishing characteristics of both forms of envy—the thoughts, feelings, and motivational tendencies that should be unique emotional components of each form. For example, for the

malicious envy subscale, participants indicate their agreement to items such as “Envious feelings cause me to dislike the other person” or “I wish that superior people lose their advantage.” The benign envy subscale includes items such as “Envy of others motivates me to accomplish my goals,” or “When I envy others, I focus on how I can become equally successful in the future.”

We conducted several studies to establish the psychometric quality and the validity of the BeMaS. In particular, the subscales have good reliability, confirmatory factor analyses confirmed that a two-dimensional model had a better fit to the data than a unidimensional model, and a re-test study showed that responses to the subscales were stable (Lange & Crusius, 2015b, Study 1 and Supplementary Materials). Several findings suggest that the subscales have convergent and discriminant validity. Specifically, the benign and malicious envy scales are only slightly positively correlated with each other across studies. Nevertheless, social comparison orientation (INCOM, Gibbons & Buunk, 1999) predicted both benign and malicious envy. As expected, the more people were inclined to compare with others, the more prone they were to react with benign and malicious envy (Lange & Crusius, 2015b, Study 3). In line with their respective conceptualizations, only the malicious, but not the benign subscale of the BeMaS correlated with the DES.

Finally, we investigated whether the BeMaS predicts benign and malicious envy at the episodic level. To do so, we exposed participants to an highly successful comparison standard (Lange & Crusius, 2015b, Study 2). The comparison standard was presented by means of an interview in which several informational cues kept it ambiguous whether this success was controllable and deserved (because it resulted from effort) or not (because there were lucky circumstances). Confirming their shared affective core, both dispositional benign and malicious envy (inconspicuously measured in a previous session several weeks before) predicted

frustration in response to the upward comparison standard. Furthermore, and most crucially, dispositional benign envy predicted state benign envy (but not state malicious envy) in reaction to the upward comparison standard. In contrast, dispositional malicious envy predicted state malicious envy (but not state benign envy). Taken together, these data suggest that people differ in their proneness to experience benign as well as malicious envy, and that the BeMaS may be a useful tool to examine both common and diverging moderators of these traits and their behavioral outcomes.

Motivational Predictors of Benign and Malicious Envy at the Trait Level

As suggested above, treating benign and malicious envy as diverging emotional pathways toward status mediated by appraisals of personal control and perceived deservingness allows to examine several moderating variables affecting these processes. One important class of variables relates to motivational dispositions about achievements. In its core, the achievement motive is concerned with the attainment of important goals set by certain standards of excellence (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953). For status-relevant domains, these standards are intrinsically defined in a social way—for example by the higher achievements set by other people.

Importantly, people can strive for achievements in distinct ways, and they differ chronically in their inclination to do so (Atkinson, 1957). Dispositional *hope for success* results in the motivation to approach toward upward goals. In contrast, dispositional *fear of failure* results in the motivation to avoid failures to reach them. These motivational tendencies fit the diverging appraisals of benign and malicious envy. In particular, the more optimistic hope for success should be related to appraisals of control, which lead to benign envy (Van de Ven et al., 2012). In contrast, fear of failure should be related to appraisals of low control, which lead to

malicious envy (Van de Ven et al., 2012). In line with this reasoning, we found that chronic hope for success was linked to dispositional benign envy, and chronic fear of failure was linked to dispositional malicious envy (Lange & Crusius, 2015b, Study 3).

Such relationships can also be investigated on a domain-specific level. To do so, we asked a sample of professionals to complete measures of the chronic goal orientation they have with regard to work-related achievement goals (Baranik, Barron, & Finney, 2007). Work-related approach goals as well as avoidance goals were positively linked with participants' inclination to compare with others as measured by the INCOM (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). However, having approach goals uniquely predicted dispositional benign envy, whereas avoidance goals uniquely predicted dispositional malicious envy (Crusius, Lange, & Corcoran, 2015). In another study, we again measured work-related achievement goals, but asked participants to report a recent episode of envy they had experienced at work. In line with the evidence on the dispositional level, work-related approach goals uniquely predicted envy episodes that were rated to be more benign, whereas work-related avoidance goals uniquely predicted envy episodes that were rated to be more malicious by the participants (Crusius et al., 2015).

Finally, we collected data on how dispositional benign and malicious envy are related to goal setting by athletes (Lange & Crusius, 2015b). We approached marathon and half-marathon runners a day before they entered the competition and asked them to complete the BeMaS and to indicate their goal for their race (i.e., the time intended to finish). Recording their race number allowed us to download their actual finishing time after the race. During marathon training, most athletes should be confronted with faster runners. We hypothesized that the hope for success that characterizes benign envy should lead to higher approach goals. In line with this reasoning, dispositional benign envy was associated with higher goals for the race. These higher goals

mediated the positive relationship of dispositional benign envy and race performance. In contrast, and also in line with our reasoning, dispositional malicious envy was associated with a reduced likelihood to report any goal for the race, which may be indicative of goal avoidance.

Taken together, these findings suggest that broad motivational inclinations as well as domain-specific motivational tendencies predict the proneness to experience benign or malicious envy. Having a more optimistic, approach focus to goal attainment is associated with an increased likelihood to experience benign envy, whereas a more pessimistic, avoidant focus on goal attainment is associated with an increased likelihood to experience malicious envy. These findings dovetail with evidence that optimism moderates the effects of social comparison on performance (Gibbons, Blanton, Gerrard, Buunk, & Eggleston, 2000). Furthermore, they are in line with the finding that activating an incremental framework of personality (implying that traits can change, see Dweck, 1999) as opposed to activating an entity framework of personality (implying that traits do not change) increases benign envy (Van de Ven et al., 2011a).

In addition, these findings invite speculation about closely related beliefs and core self-evaluative tendencies that influence the way in which people interpret and pursue personal goals (e.g., Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002). For example, whether people chronically attribute their own (and also others') failures and successes in goal pursuit to internal or external reasons, as well as generalized beliefs in self-efficacy should affect whether people tend to respond with benign or malicious envy to superiors comparison standards. This should happen to the extent that these variables determine how people appraise personal control and perceived deservingness of the superior outcomes of others. As a further example, depression, which predicts both dispositional (Smith et al., 1999) as well as episodic envy (Appel, Crusius, & Gerlach, 2015)

may be expected to foster malicious rather than benign envy, as it involves perceptions of low personal control (for a discussion, see Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2015).

Chronic Need for Status: The Case of Grandiose Narcissism

If envy is an emotion whose purpose is to regulate social status, another way to shed light on the dispositional moderators of envious responding is to consider people with an enhanced desire for status. This desire is particularly strong in people characterized by high levels of grandiose narcissism. Narcissists not only have a firm belief in their own superiority, they are also strongly preoccupied with their own successes, and feel entitled to a better treatment than others (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Thus, high status may be their greatest concern.

Such an excessive concern for superior status implies that narcissists should be particularly sensitive to social comparison information, because superiority is dependent on comparisons with others. Indeed, narcissism is associated with a stronger inclination for social comparison (Bogart, Benotsch, & Pavlovic, 2004). Furthermore, narcissists are particularly concerned with praise that informs them about their superiority, more strongly than with factual performance feedback, (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Morf, Torchetti, & Schürch, 2012) which is in line with their constant concern for self-validation and status maintenance (Back et al., 2013; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001).

Even though narcissists believe that they are superior to others, life does not prevent that others will outperform them from time to time. In addition, narcissists' concern for comparative information should render such upward social comparisons particularly salient to them. Given their need for status, such threatening comparisons should be particularly motivating for narcissists. This envious dynamic has often been assumed to contribute to narcissists' tendency to lash out against others (Kernberg, 1975). Indeed, when a rival outperforms them, narcissists

engage in hostility against others and derogate them (Morf & Rhodewalt, 1993; South, Oltmanns, & Turkheimer, 2003). These antisocial behaviors come with severe social costs by causing ascriptions of aggressiveness and low trustworthiness (Back et al., 2013; Paulhus, 1998). However, narcissists not only try to maintain and gain status by antagonizing others. They also engage in assertive self-enhancement strategies that lead to high social attractiveness, admiration by others, popularity (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010; Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008) and the ascription of competence by their peers (Back et al., 2013; Paulhus, 1998). Recently, Back and colleagues (Back et al., 2013) have tied these paradoxical outcomes to two correlated but distinct facets characterizing grandiose narcissism at the trait level. *Narcissistic admiration* involves grandiose fantasies, striving for uniqueness, and charming behaviors, which are connected to the ascription of social potency by others. In contrast, *narcissistic rivalry* involves striving for supremacy, active devaluation, and aggressiveness towards others, which are connected to a proneness for social conflict.

These diverging strategies to achieve social status match the distinct motivational outcomes of benign and malicious envy. The self-enhancement strategies of narcissistic admiration are similar to the upward-directed motivational tendencies of benign envy. In contrast, the antisocial strategies of narcissistic rivalry are similar to the hostility of malicious envy. Furthermore, the facets of benign and malicious envy appear to share chronic motivational foundations. Back et al. (2013) posit that hope for success fuels narcissistic admiration, and that fear of failure fuels narcissistic rivalry. Based on this model of narcissism, we theorize that benign and malicious envy are distinct emotional pathways that can elucidate the complex behavioral and social outcomes of narcissism.

In addition, disentangling these processes may explain why there has been no empirical evidence for the connection of envy and grandiose narcissism. Even though it is widely believed that envy is a crucial part of narcissism (e.g., Kernberg, 1975; Pincus et al., 2009), this relation could not be shown in previous research. If anything, only vulnerable narcissism has been linked to envy (e.g., Krizan & Johar, 2012). The surprising absence of this relationship may be due to the fact that the most frequently used measure of narcissism, the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988) taps into narcissistic admiration more strongly than into narcissistic rivalry (Back et al., 2013). However, the DES, the most widely used measure of dispositional envy, reflects only dispositional malicious envy (Lange & Crusius, 2015b). If, as we hypothesize, narcissistic admiration is linked specifically to benign envy, and narcissistic rivalry is linked to malicious envy, previous research could not identify these links.

We tested these hypotheses in a series of studies (Lange et al., in press), whose results suggest that the specific forms of narcissism and envy are part of related yet distinct personality patterns. In particular, one study showed that narcissistic admiration and rivalry as well as dispositional benign and malicious envy relate to the propensity to compare with others. Narcissists were more prone to engage in social comparisons, which is the precondition for envy. Furthermore, narcissistic admiration and dispositional benign envy shared hope for success as a motivational impetus. In contrast, narcissistic rivalry and dispositional malicious envy shared fear of failure as a motivational impetus. In another study, narcissistic admiration predicted episodic benign envy in response to a superior comparison standard, whereas narcissistic rivalry predicted malicious envy toward this standard. In line with a social-functional account of envy, these relationships were explained by corresponding appraisals of personal control (which were

positively related to narcissistic admiration) and deservingness (which were negatively related to narcissistic rivalry).

A final study supported the notion that the behavioral outcomes of benign and malicious envy may mediate the contradicting social effects of envy. In particular, this study again showed evidence for the distinct pathways from narcissistic admiration to dispositional benign envy and from narcissistic rivalry to dispositional malicious envy. Most importantly, these pathways predicted the peer-reported frequency of corresponding behavioral outcomes. Peers observed that individuals characterized by narcissistic admiration would more often yield prestige-related social outcomes, such as being complimented by others and being perceived as ambitious. In contrast, according to peer perceptions, individuals characterized by narcissistic rivalry more frequently expressed *schadenfreude* and engaged in gossip. In other words, their peers perceived them to be more prone to derogate others. Benign versus malicious envy mediated these links, respectively. Taken together, this evidence suggests that the specific forms of the narcissistic personality (that match prestige- and dominance-based routes to status) predict whether people respond with benign or malicious envy to threatening comparisons. In addition, these envious responses seem to carry important social outcomes.

Other Forms of Chronic Status Threat

In addition to shedding light on the role of envy in how narcissists strive to fulfill their insatiable need for status, these findings imply that benign or malicious envy may also result from other forms of chronic status threat. For example, chronically low status has been associated with the endorsement of honor beliefs, which are linked to more self-protective, violent strategies to defend one's own status (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996; Henry, 2009). The more stable and essentialist view of identity, the belief in honor seems to entail,

should undermine appraisals of personal control. That is why the endorsement of honor beliefs should foster malicious envy. Chronic status threat may also produce specific forms of envy in interaction with situational variables. For example, recent evidence suggests that the fear of downward mobility of high-status individuals can increase subjective appraisals of unfairness when an authority introduces objectively fair measures to reduce inequality (Burleigh & Meegan, 2013). According to the present analysis, such a situation should also increase the likelihood of malicious envy upon encountering upward social comparison standards.

In summary, these findings highlight that conceptualizing envy as a response to status threat allows identifying dispositional moderators of benign and malicious envy. We now turn to the social variables that may shift envious responding to either of the two forms.

Social Level of Analysis

Envy is essentially a social emotion. By definition, it follows from unflattering comparisons in a dyad of an envier and an envied person (Heider, 1958; Parrott & Smith, 1993; Smith & Kim, 2007). In addition to being defined by a social relation, social variables have been hypothesized and shown to shape envious responses in several ways on interindividual, group, and societal levels. For example, much evidence suggests that interpersonal similarity contributes to the intensity of envy (e.g., Salovey & Rodin, 1984; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004; for a review, see Smith & Kim, 2007). Furthermore, intergroup competitiveness and status differences decrease an outgroup's warmth and increase their competence thereby fostering envy (Caprariello, Cuddy, & Fiske, 2009). Social identification with one's group dampens envy-driven social undermining against ingroup members (Duffy et al., 2012). Finally, diverging self-construals in Eastern and Western cultures shape envious inclinations (Wen, Tai, & Wang, this volume). Thus, the social nature of envy can only hardly be underestimated. However, little is

known about the social variables affecting whether envy is modulated toward its benign or malicious form. To investigate this question, we outline a social-functional approach to envy that allows deriving a number of specific hypotheses.

A Social-Functional Approach to Envy

As described above, we conceptualize envy as a functional emotion signaling the need to address perceived differences in social status conferred to the self and others. A high position in the social hierarchy is associated with respect, admiration, and intimidation on the side of observers, leading to important evolutionary benefits. Benign envy may serve the goal to reach similar status in the future, whereas malicious envy would serve the goal to harm the status of competitors. Hence, envy's function might be the maintenance and establishment of hierarchical structures, a central *social function* of emotions (Fischer & Manstead, 2008; Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Manstead & Fischer, 2001; Parkinson & Manstead, 2015).

Social-functional approaches see emotions as responses to social signals. Furthermore, they analyze emotions as elicitors of corresponding functional reactions in observers (Van Kleef, 2009; Van Kleef, Van Doorn, Heerdink, & Koning, 2011). For instance, embarrassment displays convey commitment and a propensity for prosociality, fostering trust and affiliation in observers (Feinberg, Willer, & Keltner, 2012). If envy is indeed a social-functional response to status differences, any emotional display of high status or social variable distinctively affecting the emotional ramifications of status hierarchies should evoke and affect envy more strongly than the mere information of having a worse outcome than another person has. Based on this notion, we discuss social, status-related variables that may modulate envy toward its benign or malicious manifestation.

The Envied Person's Pride

The envied person is an essential social element in every envy episode. A social-functional approach predicts that a status display of the envied person should enhance envious responses above and beyond superior outcomes per se. A status signal to observers is pride (Martens, Tracy, & Shariff, 2012; Shariff & Tracy, 2009; Tracy, Shariff, Zhao, & Henrich, 2013). In fact, pride and status are so intrinsically entrenched that pride displays convey status even when contextual information contradicts this assessment (e.g., when pride is displayed by a homeless person; Shariff, Tracy, & Markusoff, 2012). Therefore, superior individuals' pride displays should spur envy. We investigated this prediction in a series of studies (Lange & Crusius, 2015a) in which we exposed participants to proud counterparts in ostensible or scenario-based competitions. Pride displays increased envy compared to emotionally neutral displays or embarrassment (an emotion that conveys low status; Shariff & Tracy, 2009). Crucially, in all cases, the objective achievement of the superior person was equally outstanding. Thus pride—as a social signal of status—additively fosters envy.

Moreover, pride also has two forms (Tracy & Robins, 2007) that relate to the distinct pathways to social status outlined above. In *authentic pride*, the person attributes success to effort, whereas in *hubristic pride*, the person attributes success to talent. The pride forms differ in the information they convey to observers (Cheng et al., 2013, 2010). Authentic pride is likable and conveys prestige. Liking fosters appraisals of high deservingness (Feather, 1999) and prestige suggests that the individual is willing to share skill and know-how (Cheng et al., 2013), arguably increasing perceptions of personal control. For these reasons, we predicted that authentic pride spurs benign envy. Hubristic pride is less likable and conveys dominance. Disliking fosters appraisals of low deservingness (Feather, 1999) and dominance suggests that

the individual aggressively defends a fixed status hierarchy (Cheng et al., 2013), arguably undermining perceptions of personal control. Therefore, we predicted that hubristic pride increases malicious envy. In a series of studies we either measured perceived authentic and hubristic pride in recalled envy episodes or manipulated the pride forms via videos, pictures with disambiguating attribution information, or verbally. These studies indeed showed the hypothesized distinct effects of authentic and hubristic pride on benign and malicious envy. These relations were mediated by differences in liking and perceptions of prestige and dominance and manifested in corresponding benign and malicious motivational inclinations and actual envy-driven behavior (Lange & Crusius, 2015a).

Even though these data show that authentic pride increases effort and that hubristic pride increases malicious behavior, it would be interesting to investigate whether and how envious achieve their social goals in the long term. For instance, dominance displays like hubristic pride foster *schadenfreude* on the side of the maliciously envious person if the dominant competitor suffers (Boecker & Lange, 2015). When envious express this happiness publicly, it might serve as a social signal to others that the superior person has lost dominance. In fact, in scenario studies, *schadenfreude* expressions in front of a superior person and others reduced the conferral of dominance to the hubristically proud person. However, when *schadenfreude* was expressed in front of others but not to the superior person, dominance conferral was unaffected (Boecker & Lange, 2015). *Schadenfreude* displays themselves may thus convey that an inferior individual no longer fears the superior person, thereby leveling status differences in an expression of dominance.

We argue that benign envy should translate into observable performance benefits (Lange & Crusius, 2015a, 2015b; Van de Ven et al., 2011a), ultimately increasing status.

However, recent research also suggests that benignly envious individuals may sometimes conceal their self-improvement tendencies in public. This is the case because they fear social devaluation for acting on a norm-diverging emotion (Youn & Goldsmith, 2015). As status is conferred only by observers, benignly envious behavior could sometimes fail to enhance the envier's status, at least in the short term. If that is correct, benign envy might instead increase status particularly in the long term, when signals of prestige become consolidated and apparent outside of the immediate emotional context. Thus, future research should investigate the effectiveness of envy-driven behavior in response to pride displays over time.

The effect of pride displays on the modulation of envy toward its benign and malicious form is the only social variable that has been investigated so far. Other implications of a social-functional account of envy still await empirical scrutiny.

Power Hierarchies

One area of research that may inform the search for moderators of benign and malicious envy is research on power in social hierarchies (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Power is defined as asymmetric control over resources (which may—in the current conceptualization—be seen as an instrument to exert dominance). Power leads to a stronger focus on the self and increased distance to other people in the hierarchy. This stabilizes power differences between group members (for a review see Smith & Magee, 2015). In contrast, status in the form of prestige relates to an other-focus when securing a higher position in the social hierarchy. As long as observers confer prestige, they can also take it away. Thus, hierarchies based on power or prestige differ crucially with respect to the mutability they convey. Perceptions of mutability in prestige-based hierarchies propel upward mobility—competitive behavior directed at increasing personal status (Hays & Bendersky, 2015). These efforts might be an effect of benign envy, as

mutability should enhance appraisals of personal control (Van de Ven et al., 2012). Furthermore, power hierarchies should increase malicious envy as powerful individuals treat others more unjustly (Blader & Chen, 2012). In sum, everything else being equal, we predict that power hierarchies promote malicious envy.

Non-Emotional Status Cues

As alluded to above, a social functional approach predicts that status cues communicated by others should affect the intensity and the form of envy. Recent research has applied a social-perceptual approach (Brunswik, 1956) to identify such cues. This research has investigated how prestigious and dominant individuals convey their status and which cues observers utilize to infer either prestige or dominance in others. For instance, prestigious individuals speak with higher vocal pitch, greater loudness, and greater loudness variability, and observers use these cues to infer high prestige (Ko, Sadler, & Galinsky, 2015). In addition, people infer prestige when others show extreme confidence (Anderson, Brion, Moore, & Kennedy, 2012a), are extraverted (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001), use a socially attractive verbal style (e.g., seeking approval, appearing self-deprecating, or using humor), or demonstrate confident bodily displays (Cheng, 2013). In contrast, dominant individuals speak more frequently and give input in group discussions early on (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). In addition, observers infer dominance when others use an intimidating and entitled verbal style (e.g., appearing overbearing, humiliating others, or forcefully pushing one's ideas), expansive and aggressive bodily displays, or lower vocal pitch (Cheng, 2013). Thus, certain cues in status hierarchies shape their structure by signaling prestige or dominance. These should modulate envious inclinations towards their benign or malicious manifestation.

Group-Based Pride and Envy

A social-functional approach suggests that envy can also be elicited at the group level (see Mackie, Silver, & Smith, 2004, for a review on group-based emotions). In parallel to the relationship of pride and envy on the personal level, the specific form of group-based pride should also determine group-based envy. An important example may be national pride in the form of nationalism or patriotism. Although the two are positively correlated to a moderate extent, people differ whether they endorse patriotism—the love for one’s country and close attachment to it—or nationalism—perceptions of a country’s superiority and supremacy (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Crucially, patriotic beliefs are fostered through intragroup comparisons with the goal to improve own standing (Mummendey, Klink, & Brown, 2001). In contrast, nationalistic beliefs are fostered through intergroup comparisons with the goal to outperform other nations (Mummendey et al., 2001). They increase outgroup derogation strategies such as infracommunitarianism (Viki & Calitri, 2008). Moreover, emphasizing the naturalistic origin of a country (essentialism) after an identity threat increases nationalistic tendencies and diminishes the acceptance of cultural diversity (Li & Brewer, 2004). This pattern of results suggests that patriotism entails self-promotional concerns that resemble the pursuit of prestige-based status. On the contrary, nationalism seems to entail self-protective concerns with the goal of supremacy over other countries, resembling the pursuit of dominance-based status. Therefore, applying a social-functional model of envy and pride as status-regulating emotions, we predict that perceiving patriotism fosters benign envy and that perceiving nationalism fosters malicious envy on the group level.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have applied a social-functional approach to envy. We have conceptualized envy as being fundamentally an emotion driving people to respond to status threat. In the form of benign envy, it may prompt behavior in pursuit of status based on prestige. In the form of malicious envy, it may prompt behavior in the pursuit of status based on dominance. In our view, such a conceptualization may help to answer the crucial question of what determines whether people will react with benign or malicious envy when they are confronted with a superior comparison standard. We have reviewed initial evidence for such factors on the dispositional as well as the social level but many questions remain to be explored. We are optimistic that focusing on how envy can be adaptive in how people regulate social hierarchies can yield many insights in future research.

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Footnotes

¹ In this chapter, we use the term status in an inclusive sense, referring to differences in people's rank in the social hierarchy (Cheng, Tracy, Foulsham, Kingstone, & Henrich, 2013; Steckler & Tracy, 2014).

² This dual account of envy follows the conceptualization that emotions can be distinguished via differences in appraisal patterns, feelings, motivations, action tendencies and behavioral outcomes (Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990; Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2009), for a more detailed discussion, see Sterling, Van de Ven, Smith, this volume). In the case of envy, some researchers (Cohen-Charash, this volume; Tai, Narayanan, & McAllister, 2012) exclude motivational and behavioral aspects from the definition of envy, preferring a more outcome-agnostic conceptualization. Note that the focal question of this chapter (Which moderating variables determine benign and malicious envy and their respective outcomes?) is, at least in part, independent from this debate.

³ See Hoogland et al., this volume, for a more complete descriptions of the appraisals of benign and malicious envy and how they can be distinguished from the positive emotion admiration and from resentment, which is based on appraisals of objective rather than subjective injustice (also see Leach, 2008; Smith, Parrott, Ozer, & Moniz, 1994; Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2012).