

# Navigating Workplace Envy

Yes, it's a thing and strategies to reign it in



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# Take a moment...

Recall the last time you:

- Read a recently published paper on a study similar to one that you are currently working on
- Saw on LinkedIn that your classmate from training was recently promoted
- Heard an interview with your colleague on a nationally syndicated news program regarding

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## How did the previous scenarios make you feel?



# At our best

- Sincerely happy
- Offer congratulations
- Secure
- Confident
- Focused and motivated on our own projects



# At other times



*Feel familiar?*



# Objectives

- Define workplace envy
- Recognize productive and counter-productive behaviors resulting from envy
- Apply strategies to control counter-productive behaviors resulting from envy

# What is envy?

- “Envy is **pain** at the **good fortune of others.**”- Aristotle
- “The **distress** people feel when **others get** what they want”
- “The **painful** emotion experienced when one **lacks** and desires **others’** superior qualities, achievements, and possessions”
- “**Pain** stemming from an unfavorable/upward social **comparison** in an area that is **desired**”
- “We are more likely to feel envious when people who are **like us accomplished** something we didn’t”

Menon, Tanya and Thompson, Leigh. Envy at Work. Harvard Business Review April 2010

Duffy MK, Lee K, Adair EA. 2021. Workplace Envy. Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior 8:19–44.

Li, Meng. Managing Envy in the Workplace. Lead Read Today—OSU Fisher College of Business Blog May 12 2021

# Concepts of envy in the literature

## Dual construct

- 2 distinct emotions defined by action tendencies
  - *Benign envy*- constructive, self-focused
  - *Malicious envy*- destructive, other focused
- Unique emotional experiences and motivations

## Unitary Construct

- Form of social pain
- Can result in either constructive or destructive action tendencies
- Resulting action tendencies depend on the emotional experience and characteristics of envier



# On Envy in Academia

- Perfect breeding ground for workplace envy
- Intense competition
  - Positions, awards, grants, etc.
- Innate peer-to-peer comparison
  - Peer-review process for manuscripts
  - Individual accomplishments judged relative to peers for promotion
- The dependence on timing and luck can promote envy

# The social function of workplace envy

- Highlights the gap in one's standing relative to others by signaling a problematic discrepancy
- 2 behavioral responses:
  - Leveling down—diminishes the target's advantages
  - Leveling up—improves the envier's advantages

# Framework for behavioral consequences of envy

		Organization	
		Constructive	Destructive
Envied Target	Engaged	Seek advice from envied target	Bad-mouthing envied target
	Disengaged	Self-focused goal pursuit	Reducing help toward envied others

# Framework for behavioral consequences of envy

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# Managing workplace envy

Perspective of:

- Envier
- Envied target
- Team leader

# **As envier**

1. Admit the feeling
2. Pinpoint what makes you envious
3. Focus on yourself

# Envier—1) Admit the feeling



- Often not discussed
  - Socially unacceptable, undignified, unprofessional
  - Concealed, denied
- Envy is universal and exists widely in the workplace at all levels
- Acknowledging the feeling is 1<sup>st</sup> step to mitigate potential destructive behaviors
- Repressed envy resurfaces, usually stronger

## **Envier—2) Pinpoint what makes you envious**

- Recognize the circumstances/qualities in others that trigger your envy
- Do those feels reveal what you are insecure about lacking?
- Focus on improving yourself in the areas you've learned you care most about



## Self-Assessment: Are You Falling into the Envy Trap?

In our research, we use the following exercise to help people recognize patterns of thought that lead to negative thinking:

Think about a person in your organization who is at a similar level and with whom you often compare yourself. Think about one of this person's recent accomplishments. Describe it. Then answer the questions below.

- 1. Did you congratulate this person?** Yes (0), No (1)
- 2. How did the news of his or her achievement make you feel?** Happy (0), Neutral (1), Vaguely disturbed (2)
- 3. Did you worry that superiors might devalue your own achievements as a result?** Yes (1), No (0)
- 4. When was the last time you gave public credit or kudos to this person?** Last time he or she had a success (0), Don't remember (1), Never (2)
- 5. Do you sometimes catch yourself obsessing over how much status this person has?** Yes (1), No (0)
- 6. Imagine that this person suffers an embarrassing public failure or professional loss. Does this make you feel sad, indifferent, or happy?** Sad (0), Indifferent (1), Happy (2)
- 7. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.** False (0), True (1)
- 8. I have never intensely disliked anyone.** False (0), True (1)
- 9. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.** True (0), False (1)

### What the Scores Reveal

First, tabulate your scores for questions 1–6.

**7–9** Congratulations on having the self-awareness to admit your envy!

**4–6** You have moderate envy.

**2–3** You have low envy.

**0–1** You have reached *mudita* (joy for others' good fortune)! Or you are in denial.

**To help differentiate mudita from denial, now tabulate your scores for questions 7–9.**

These questions come from the [Crowne-Marlowe social desirability scale](#), which measures your tendency to convey a self-image that conforms to social expectations.

**2–3** You might want to think deeply about whether your responses on this survey accurately reflect your behavior.

**0–1** You're comfortable admitting to behaviors that don't conform to social ideals, and a low score on items 1–6 is likely to truly indicate that you are managing your envy effectively.

# Envier—3) Focus on yourself

- Instead of comparing yourself to a rival, measure your present self against your past self
- Practice self-affirmation by reminding yourself of your own strengths and successes

# Winning isn't easy

- Envy also harms the envied!
- Studies indicate that the target of envy often perceives the envy particularly in highly collaborative settings
- Distancing and disparaging are 2 common manifestations of envy
  - The envied target can be made to feel isolated
  - The envied target may suffer slights from the envier

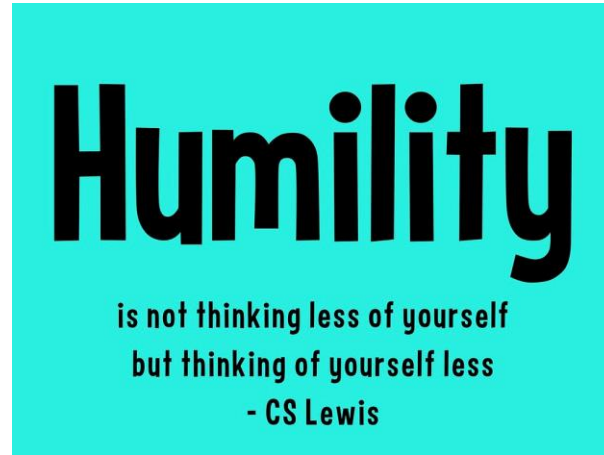


# **As envied target**

1. Show humility
2. Be open
3. Give back

# As envied—1) Show humility

- Do NOT diminish self
- Acknowledge the accomplishments of others



# As envied—2) Be open

- Be open about your successes **and failures**
- Sharing failures offers useful information that helps observers learn about the process that could help them achieve similar successes.
- Demonstrates effort exerted by envied target to overcome obstacles

Alkon, Amy. Minimize malicious Envy from Co-workers. Psychology Today Feb 23 2020

Duffy MK, Lee K, Adair EA. 2021. Workplace Envy. Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior 8:19–44.

Hosking, Angela. Professional Ghosting: What You Need to Learn About Workplace Envy. Forbes Nov 13 2019

# As envied—3) Give back

- Consider ways to support others
- Amplify the successes of others
- Consider mentoring junior colleagues



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# **As team leader**

1. Share power
2. Share resources
3. Balance the scale



# As team leader—1) Share power

- Share glory/credit with successful team members
- Promote/reward team members with responsibility



# As team leader—2) Share resources

- Make what is scarce plentiful
- Tamps down competition for attention/time/resources



# As team leader—3) Balance the scale

- Cultivate a sense of fairness and justice
- Clearly communicate why someone is rewarded/promoted and how others can also 'win'
- Swiftly correct injustices



# Managing workplace envy

- As envier
  - Focus on self
- As envied target
  - Humility
- As team leader
  - Ensuring justice

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## Which of the following best describes your experience with workplace envy?



# Breakout session

## Instructions:

- Time allotted: 10 min
- Groups of >3 participants
- Each group will work through 1 scenario listed below
  - Turn on video and microphone
  - Read the scenario
  - Discuss the questions provided for each scenario
  - Designate a “Group spokesperson” to record breakout group comments and present to larger group

# Breakout Scenario 1

- You and your colleague, Dr. A have been collaborating to create a new journal club for trainees in your department. The first year of your program is a huge success. Trainees gave excellent feedback and felt the program improved their educational experience. Other faculty members also welcomed the improvements seen in trainee's engagement. Given your success, your department chair has selected you to be assistant director of the training program. You are thrilled at the new opportunity and reach out to Dr. A to brainstorm some new ideas. However, you are surprised to find that Dr. A has not returned your emails or calls. You assume Dr. A is busy, but a few weeks later, Dr. A sends you an email indicating that they no longer wish to continue working together on the journal club.

# Breakout Scenario 1

- What do you think is going on with your colleague, Dr. A?
- Should you reach out to Dr. A again? If so, what would you say?
- Are there other roles you can you play in this situation?



# Breakout Scenario 2

- You and your colleague, Dr. B have been collaborating to create a new journal club for trainees in your department. The first year of your program is a huge success. Trainees gave excellent feedback and felt the program improved their educational experience. Other faculty members also welcomed the improvements seen in trainee's engagement. Given your success, your department chair has selected your colleague, Dr. B to be assistant director of the training program. You are of course happy for Dr. B, but also disappointed that you were not selected, after all the journal club was your idea! Now, Dr. B wants to pick you brain for more ideas. You decide that in order to stand out in the department and ensure that your ideas are not misappropriated, you will pursue new projects on your own. You ignore Dr. B's requests to collaborate and email them to resign from future work on the Journal club.

# Breakout Scenario 2

- What you think of your colleague, Dr. B's behavior?
- Do you think your actions and response to Dr. B are appropriate? Is there anything you could you do differently?
- What additional options are available to you in this situation?

# Breakout Scenario 3

- Two junior faculty in your department, Dr. A and Dr. B, have been collaborating to create a new journal club for trainees. The first year of their program is a huge success. Trainees gave excellent feedback and felt the program improved their educational experience. Other faculty members also welcomed the improvements seen in trainee's engagement. Given the success of the program and as chair of the department, you select Dr. B to be assistant director of the training program. After all, Dr. B spearheaded the program by presenting idea to the monthly faculty meeting. Dr. B has also enthusiastically expressed their interest in taking on more leadership roles. A few months, you notice that Dr. A is longer assisting with the journal club and seems to be more reclusive. You feel justified that Dr. B was the best choice for the role given Dr. A's change in demeanor.
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# Breakout Scenario 3

- Was your choice of an assistant program director justified?
- What could you have done differently during the selection process?
- You notice that Dr. A is no longer working with Dr. B. Should you reach out to Dr. A and Dr. B? If so, what would you say?
- What are the potential effects of a situation like this impact on the department?



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# Additional Resources

- Managing Envy in the Workplace <https://fisher.osu.edu/blogs/leadreadtoday/managing-envy-workplace>
- Minimize Malicious Envy from Co-Workers <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/science-made-practical/202002/minimize-malicious-envy-co-workers>
- Move Past Your Jealous Feelings at Work <https://www.wsj.com/articles/move-past-your-jealous-feelings-at-work-11624838400>
- Envy at Work <https://hbr.org/2010/04/envy-at-work>
- On Academic Envy. [https://www.chronicle.com/article/on-academic-envy?bc\\_nonce=jhpxpacrloxajs939dd9q&cid=reg\\_wall\\_signup](https://www.chronicle.com/article/on-academic-envy?bc_nonce=jhpxpacrloxajs939dd9q&cid=reg_wall_signup)
- How to Keep Envy from Destroying your Workplace. <http://equilibrialeadership.com/blog/how-to-keep-envy-from-destroying-your-workplace/>
- Duffy MK, Lee K, Adair EA. 2021. Workplace Envy. Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior 8:19–44 <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012420-055746>
- Li M, Xu X, Kwan HK. 2021. The antecedents and consequences of workplace envy: A meta-analytic review. Asia Pac J Manag <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-021-09772-y>.
- D'Arms, Justin, "Envy", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/envy/>.