Bringing You Down Versus Bringing Me Up: What Underlies Malicious and Benign Envy?
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Introduction

Background
• Van de Ven et al. (2009) contradicted the entirely negative connotation of envy by establishing two faces of the emotion:
  - Malicious envy, in which people want to bring their envy target down by derogating them in some way
  - Benign envy, in which people want to improve themselves to obtain a comparable advantage to their envy target
• Previous research supporting the existence of the two faces of envy has focused on the defining characteristics of the emotions and behaviors associated with them
  - However, it is not yet clear what antecedents lead a person to experience malicious versus benign envy

Study 1

Purpose
• Examine explicit and implicit self-esteem as individual differences that predispose people to experience malicious versus benign envy

Method

Participants
• 119 University at Buffalo undergraduates (68 women)

Procedure
• Participants were attached to physiological sensors and sat for a 5-minute resting baseline period
• Participants were randomly assigned to two manipulations:
  - Contrast vs. Assimilation Effects
    - Downward Comparison
      -Participants were exposed to a manipulation of social comparison:
        - Upward vs. Downward Social Comparison
          - Contrast Assimilation

Dependent Variables
• Explicit SE - conscious and self-reportable
• Implicit SE - unconscious and not self-reportable

Analytical Strategy
- Multiple regression analyses were used to assess the relationship between explicit SE, implicit SE, and indicators of malicious and benign envy

Results

Rating of Envy Target (Malicious Envy Indicator)
- Consistent with predictions, participants with discrepant high SE exhibited indicators of malicious envy after an upward comparison
- Partially supporting predictions (hypothesized interactions reached significance but simple effects did not), participants with congruent high SE tended to exhibit indicators of benign envy after an upward comparison
- As expected, the three-way interaction was significant ($p = .001$), as was the two-way interaction between condition and implicit SE within high SE ($p = .003$)
- Consistent with predictions, participants with discrepant high SE exposed to upward comparison rated the target more negatively relative to (1) when they were exposed to downward comparison ($p = .05$) and (2) congruent high SE exposed to upward comparison ($p = .082$)

Task Persistence (Attempting to Improve Oneself)
- As expected, the three-way interaction was significant ($p = .002$), as was the two-way interaction between condition and implicit SE within high SE ($p = .029$)
- Although not significant, participants with congruent high SE exposed to upward comparison tended to persist longer relative to (1) downward comparison ($p = .104$) and (2) discrepant high SE ($p = .214$)

Summary
- Consistent with predictions, participants with discrepant high SE exhibited indicators of malicious envy after an upward comparison
- Partially supporting predictions (hypothesized interactions reached significance but simple effects did not), participants with congruent high SE tended to exhibit indicators of benign envy after an upward comparison

Study 2

Purpose
• Examine the social comparison processes of contrast and assimilation as the underlying psychological mechanisms of malicious and benign envy, respectively

Method

Participants
• 109 University at Buffalo undergraduates (71 women)

Procedure
• Participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1960) online outside of the lab to measure explicit SE
• Upon arrival to the lab, participants completed the Name-Letter task (Nuttin, 1985) to measure implicit SE
• Participants were exposed to a manipulation of social comparison:
  - Upward vs. Downward Social Comparison (matched for gender)
    - Read a fake article about a peer who either received a prestigious internship (upward) or was denied a prestigious internship (downward)

Dependent Variables
• Participants then completed measures of malicious and benign envy
  - Rating of the envy target and a difficult anagram task to assess task persistence

Hypotheses
• Discrepant high SE: exhibit malicious envy after upward comparison
• Congruent high SE: exhibit benign envy after upward comparison

Analysis
- As expected, the three-way interaction was significant ($p = .001$), as was the two-way interaction between condition and implicit SE within high SE ($p = .001$)
- Consistent with predictions, participants with discrepant high SE exposed to upward comparison rated the target more negatively relative to (1) when they were exposed to downward comparison ($p = .03$) and (2) congruent high SE exposed to upward comparison ($p = .082$)

Task Persistence (Attempting to Improve Oneself)
- As expected, the three-way interaction was significant ($p = .002$), as was the two-way interaction between condition and implicit SE within high SE ($p = .029$)
- Although not significant, participants with congruent high SE exposed to upward comparison tended to persist longer relative to (1) downward comparison ($p = .104$) and (2) discrepant high SE ($p = .214$)

Summary
- Consistent with predictions, participants with discrepant high SE exhibited indicators of malicious envy after an upward comparison
- Partially supporting predictions (hypothesized interactions reached significance but simple effects did not), participants with congruent high SE tended to exhibit indicators of benign envy after an upward comparison

Conclusion
• Altogether, Study 1 and Study 2 attempt to uncover what leads to malicious versus benign envy. This research extends the current research on malicious and benign envy by focusing on the antecedents of the emotions, rather than simply associated characteristics.

Future research in this area could investigate:
- The role of physical attributes in malicious and benign envy
- Additional antecedents of malicious and benign envy, such as promotion vs. prevention-focused mindsets