

HOW TO UNDERSTAND ENVY AND JEALOUSY

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Envy is derived from the Latin *invidia* (insatiable desire). Aristotle defined envy as an emotional pain at the sight of another's good fortune, stirred by "those who have what we ought to have." It occurs when a person lacks another person's achievement, possession, quality, or skill, and either desires to have it or wishes that the other person not have it (Parrot & Smith, 1993). It is a type of mental greed or sense of entitlement. Envy is a more specific, narrower, and personalized form of greed. That is, whereas greed is a strong desire for possessions, envy is a strong desire for the possessions or success of another person. In this sense, envy is more personalized whereas greed can be depersonalized.

The roots of envy include low self-esteem, especially from very early unmet childhood needs in which one feels inherently not good enough, lacking, or unworthy. An envious person may thus "compare and despair" and find themselves wanting and falling short. In this sense, envy is a type of self-resentment that is projected onto others. To quote a line from *Courage to Change*, "Envy is nothing more than a hostile form of self-pity" (1992, p. 170).

In Chapter 6 of *The Conquest of Happiness*, Bertrand Russell (1930) considered envy to be the most potent form of unhappiness. The sin of covetousness can include both *envy* (wanting what someone else has) and *jealousy* (anxiety that someone will take what I have). Envy is when I have resentment toward a person because he has what I want. Jealousy is when I have resentment toward another person because he wants what I have. Whereas jealousy involves three people, envy requires only two. ¹

Current examples of envy and jealousy:

- ☒ (noun) resentful longing aroused by another person's luck, opportunities, or possessions
- ☒ (verb) desire to have a quality, possession, or other attribute belonging to someone else
- ☒ resenting a hard-working peer who earns a bonus, pay increase, or royalty income
- ☒ schadenfreude, or the experience of pleasure or self-satisfaction that comes from learning of the troubles or failures of another person
- ☒ engaging in professional gossip by listening to a peer talk negatively about someone who is not present at the same time and place of the discussion
- ☒ attributing a colleague's honest success in an endeavor to dishonest practices
- ☒ engaging in slander (oral or verbal) or libel (written or posted comments) about another person
- ☑ lodging complaints against others rather than speaking to them directly

Historical examples of envy and jealousy: ²

- ☒ Cain was envious of Abel, whose sacrifice was favored by God (Genesis 4: 3-8).
- ☒ Jacob was envious of Esau, whose birthright was his as Isaac's firstborn (Genesis 25: 31-33).
- ☒ King Saul was envious of David's military conquests and popularity (1 Samuel 18: 6-9).

Gratitude (from the Latin *gratiam*) or **kindness** (from the Latin *humanitas*) can overcome envy. Gratitude is an antidote for the poison of envy. Gratitude not only combats the vice of envy, but practicing gratitude is also one of the keys to abundant living. Along with the virtue of humility, practicing gratitude diminishes a sense of entitlement, shifting our focus from what we think we deserve to a focus on what we already have. Gratitude is required for there to be generosity. Appreciation and gratitude is evidenced in the old adage to “count your blessings.”

Kindness has little or nothing to do with being “nice” but it has everything to do with the Three Cs of being caring, concerned, and compassionate toward others. In the *Book of Wisdom*, kindness is related to Justice.

Speaking of justice, when we feel grateful for someone’s kindness toward us, we are more likely to engage in an act of kindness in return. Our gratitude can have a positive reciprocal effect on the actions of others. In other words, by expressing our gratitude for their kindness, we make it more likely that they will show kindness to others. It is the justice of *mercy*—a gift given by someone acting with compassion to someone who is suffering. Mercy is the gift of compassion toward those in distress, especially when it is within our power to harm or punish them.

Current examples of gratitude and kindness:

- ☑ being kind
- ☑ being thankful
- ☑ being thoughtful
- ☑ practicing gratitude
- ☑ showing compassion
- ☑ being grateful for what I have
- ☑ expressing appreciation to others
- ☑ showing empathy and compassion
- ☑ keeping a gratitude diary or journal
- ☑ writing letters of appreciation to others
- ☑ being aware of good things that I have that I did not earn (grace)
- ☑ being aware of bad things that I do not have to bear (aka, “negative grace”)
- ☑ being fair and impartial with others (justice)

Historical examples of gratitude and kindness:

- ☑ Abraham was kind to the three strangers (Genesis 18:1-8).
- ☑ King David spared Mephibosheth, the son of David’s friend Jonathan, from being killed (2 Samuel 21:7)
- ☑ Rahab hides the Israelite spies, thus saving their lives (Joshua 24:17-19).
- ☑ The Samaritan who took pity on the man who had been robbed and left for half dead (Luke 10:30-35).

Class Diagrams

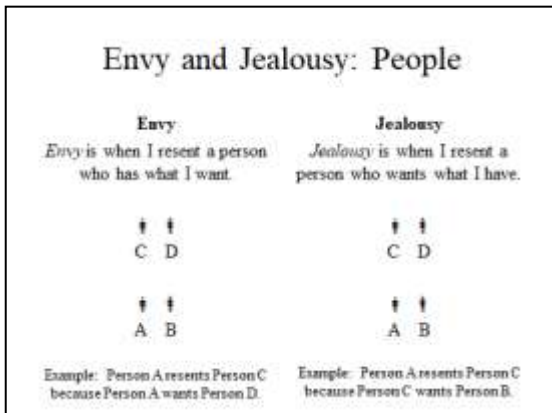


Figure 1. Envy and Jealousy: People

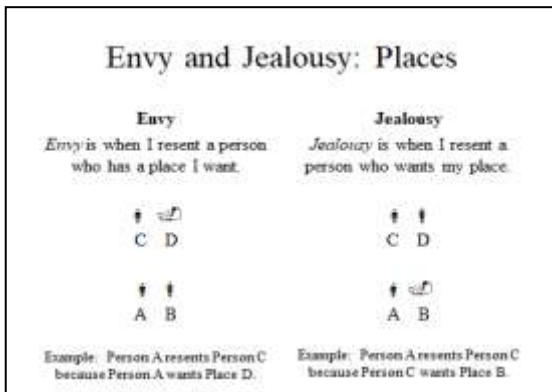


Figure 2. Envy and Jealousy: Places

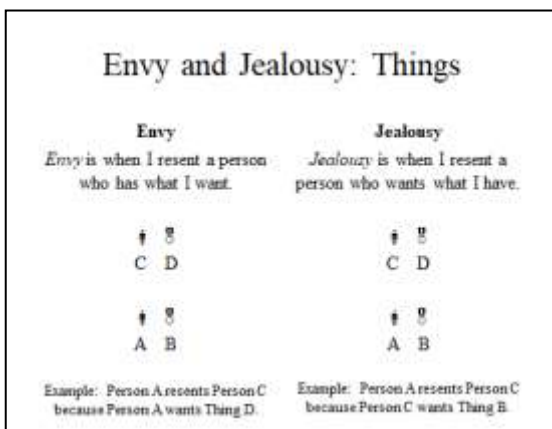


Figure 3. Envy and Jealousy: Things

Examples

Example 1: People

Envy: Bill is envious of Bob because Bill wants Bob’s beautiful wife, smart children, and friendly dog. Bill’s envy is a form of resentment and a hostile form of self-pity.

Jealousy: Bill is jealous of Bob because Bob wants Bill’s beautiful wife, smart children, and friendly dog. Bob’s envy of Bill’s resources may be a hostile form of self-pity. Bill’s jealousy of Bob may be a form of anxiety, fear, and resentment.

Example 2: Places

Envy: Bill is envious of Bob because Bill wants Bob’s spacious home, mountain cabin, and beach house. Bill’s envy is a form of resentment and a hostile form of self-pity.

Jealousy: Bill is jealous of Bob because Bob wants Bill’s spacious home, mountain cabin, and beach house. Bob’s envy of Bill’s resources may be a hostile form of self-pity. Bill’s jealousy of Bob may be a form of anxiety, fear, and resentment.

Example 3: Things

Envy: Bill is envious of Bob because Bill wants Bob’s bank accounts, businesses, and boats. Bill’s envy is a form of resentment and a hostile form of self-pity.

Jealousy: Bill is jealous of Bob because Bob wants Bill’s bank accounts, businesses, and boats. Bob’s jealousy is a form of resentment and hostile self-pity. Bill’s jealousy of Bob may be a form of anxiety, fear, and resentment.

Notes

1. From a cognitive-behavioral perspective, the prototype covert self-statements:

Envy: “I want what you have and I resent you for having it.”

Jealousy: “I fear that you want what I have and I resent you for wanting it.”

2. The article was shared with biblical scholar and science teacher Rebekah Gallew on 12-19-2023. A summary of our discussion, including some of her specific comments, is contained below.

Examples of Envy and Jealousy in the Tanakh

- ☑ Sar’ai was envious of Hagar when Hagar became pregnant (Genesis 16:4-5).
- ☑ Rachel was envious of Leah (Genesis 30:1) when Rachel saw that she bore no children. Rachel wanted Leah’s fertility.
- ☑ Joseph’s brothers were jealous of Joseph, because their father loved Joseph more than any of them (Genesis 37:4).
- ☑ Potiphar’s wife was jealous of Joseph, because Potiphar’s put him in charge of the household (Genesis 39:4-10).
- ☑ King Saul was envious of David’s military conquests and popularity (1 Samuel 18:6-9). Saul was resentful of David.
- ☑ Four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal were envious of Elijah (1 Kings 18:22-40). They wanted the power that Elijah demonstrated when he ignited the fire.
- ☑ Queen Jezebel was jealous of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-2). Jezebel was jealous that Elijah would take the special position that she had in Ahab’s court.

Examples of Envy and Jealousy in the Gospels

- ☑ The Pharisees were jealous of Jesus (Mark 10:33, Matthew 20:18-19, Luke 18:31-33), and John 11:47-53, John 18:14, John 7:1).
- ☑ Paul of Tarsus was jealous of Mary Magdalene—to whom the resurrected Christ appeared—and wrote her out of the story completely (1 Corinthians 15:5).

Commentary

Additional commentary on envy and jealousy was provided by Rebekah Gallew on 12-19-2023.

Envy is a hyper-fixation on unsatisfied needs that is amplified by desperation and an almost addictive quality where achievement loses its positivity and any unmet want can be amplified to life or death. Grounding, perspective, and self-awareness are the aspects of gratitude that make it such an effective antidote to envy.

Jealousy has a fear component that can lead to violent crimes. Envy lacks the fear [of jealousy] but maintains the intensity, which can lead to extreme but nonviolent actions such as theft by taking. Envy also indicates a refusal to emphasize, whereas jealousy stems from projection of “selfish empathy.

Examples

Other examples were discussed during the discussion with Rebekah Gallew on 12-19-2023. These examples are much less realistic to take or protect, but they are very common subjects of anxiety and fear.

Example 4: Social / Skills

Envy: Bill is envious of Bob because Bill wants Bob’s charisma, wholesome friends, and carpentry skills.

Jealousy: Bill is jealous of Bob because Bill is afraid that Bob wants Bill’s friends, charisma, and carpentry skills.

References

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- Doverspike, W. F. (2021). *How to understand the seven deadly sins*. http://drwilliamdoverspike.com/files/how_to_understand_the_seven_deadly_sins.pdf
“How to understand envy and jealousy” has been taken from pages 5, 6, and 11 of “How to understand the seven deadly sins” with some additional information added.
- Parrott, W. G., & Smith, R. H. (1993). Distinguishing the experiences of envy and jealousy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64 (6), 906–920.
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